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Sites of Power

Documentary Ethics and Representations of Child Abuse

A thesis

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of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

New Zealand has one of the highest child abuse rates in the developed world. Discourses about child abuse are stigmatised, and this stigma thrives in silence. Documentary films provide a unique site of power in which child abuse discourse can be represented to challenge such stigma and promote social change. The existing literature surrounding documentary ethics and representations of child abuse is minimal despite the centrality of ethics to documentary practices. Documentarians may use a range of representational strategies to represent such discourses, which may help negotiate ethical concerns or present additional ethical concerns in relation to the participants, audience and filmmakers.

This thesis has three objectives: to determine the discourses about child abuse represented in the documentaries *Tarnation*, *Daughter Rite* and *Breaking Silence*, to identify the representational strategies used and to identify the associated ethical concerns. In order to examine these discourses and representational strategies, the methods of critical discourse analysis and affect analysis are applied through the analytical framework of Bill Nichols' documentary modes. The identification of the discourses and representational strategies has allowed for the identification of the associated ethical concerns. The results show that discourses about the cyclical nature of abuse are present in the documentaries, and that there is ethical tension between the autobiographical filmmaker's impulse to tell their truths and the potential exploitation of participants. This thesis concludes that there is a need for academic exploration around the therapeutic outcomes of autobiographical documentary filmmaking.

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First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Lisa Perrott for her unwavering support, patience, compassion and empathy throughout the entire conceptualisation and construction of this thesis. You have inspired me in many ways throughout my time at Waikato, and I will forever be grateful that you have been a part of my fight to break the cycle of childhood abuse. Thank you for everything.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge my sisters, Anastasia Hore and Lita Cameron. Thank you for supporting and loving me unconditionally. I love you both to the moon and back.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Laura Green and Sue Harker. Thank you endlessly for everything you have done to get me here. I would be lost without you both.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the hundreds of thousands of children in Aotearoa New Zealand who have endured and who are enduring abuse, neglect and trauma; to the children who are failed by their parents, guardians, caregivers and protectors daily; to the children who are silenced.

Equally, I dedicate this thesis to child abuse, neglect and trauma survivors who are breaking the cycle of abuse; to the rebels and the changemakers. I see you, and I thank you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The following chapter begins with an outline of how I have come to conceptualise my research focuses, contextualising and justifying my study. The horrific state of New Zealand's child abuse statistics and the stigma surrounding this, combined with the abuse I experienced during my upbringing has led me to explore the representation of child abuse. I justify my decisions to analyse the discourses in documentary films specifically, and to identify the representational strategies used and the associated ethical concerns. I introduce my research outcomes: to provide suggestions of discourses that could be represented in future documentaries about child abuse, to provide suggestions of possible representational strategies to do so and to provide suggestions about how the related ethical concerns could be negotiated. It is anticipated that academics, documentarians and child abuse survivors will benefit from this research.

1.1 Childhood abuse and stigmatising discourse

My conceptualisation of and the need for this thesis has its roots in my own experiences of childhood abuse, neglect and trauma. Until I was eighteen years old, I endured extensive psychological and physical trauma at the hands of those who were supposed to love and protect me the most; my biological parents. The abuse was often covert, concealed from anyone outside of our immediate family. Combined with the threats I received from my biological parents, the stigma surrounding the words 'child abuse' terrified me into silence. I did not want to tell anyone because I knew Child Youth and Family (now known as Oranga Tamariki) would take me away from my five siblings. All I knew would be ripped away, and I believed that being in 'the system' would be far more harmful than being at home. But my most thought consuming fear was that others would perceive me as a carbon copy of my

parents, where their behaviour defined mine and dictated the life I would lead. This discourse made me terrified of being vulnerable, embarrassed by the situation, and ashamed that I was one of the many children in New Zealand who were forced to grow up in a matter of minutes just to survive.

As a teenager I was always conscious of just how neglected abused children were by the protective systems in place because I was one of the neglected. I can vividly remember calling the police as young as five years old, crying for help because my biological parents were in a screaming match and physically abusing one another. My five-year-old mind knew that it was only a matter of time before my siblings and I would be on the receiving end of their abuse. Over the years, the police who showed up (often hours later) did little to nothing to protect my siblings and I. Admittedly, my biological mother would often lie to the police about what was really happening to protect herself and my biological father, so there was little the police could actually do. However, considering the extensive criminal history of my father, the multiple house raids, arrests, police visits and complaints from neighbours, I could never understand why authorities failed to intervene. Naturally, I was beyond furious at the police for failing my siblings and I, at my biological parents for the pain they caused, and at the state of New Zealand's children. It was during these years of angst that I made it my life mission to break the cycle of childhood trauma, rebelling against the idea that my parents, their crimes, their own trauma and the trauma that they inflicted defined me. The discourse of 'breaking the cycle of child abuse' has derived from the idea that child abuse is cyclical in nature and often intergenerational. This means that those who have been abused as children are likely to abuse their own children or those around them, thus repeating the cycle. Referring to this cyclical nature, my biological mother would often blame her own father and his abusive parenting for the way she treated me, implying that I would end up having the

same abusive behavioural patterns. Despite this, I knew my existence was not defined by theirs, because I had developed such a tenacious sense of self and felt empathy deeply for those around me; traits that neither parent of mine displayed. I also decided that to break the cycle within my family through my existence, I had to break the silence surrounding child abuse; within my household and beyond it. Interrupting the silence around child abuse is vital as discourses are powerful and have the potential to be a site of change at personal, interpersonal and societal levels (Hot Docs, 2018; The Fledgling Fund, 2009).

Stigma surrounding child abuse in New Zealand is alive and thriving. Prevalence of such stigma created an environment where I did not feel safe or comfortable discussing my trauma, let alone reaching out for help. More importantly, stigmatising discourse surrounding child abuse has contributed to New Zealand having one of the highest child abuse and neglect rates in all of the world's developed nations (UNICEF, 2017). Although the UNICEF report is approximately three years old, in the most recent child wellbeing report conducted by UNICEF (2020a), New Zealand ranked 35th out of 41 developed nations in terms of child wellbeing outcomes which supports the high child abuse and neglect rates identified by UNICEF (2018). The prevalence of domestic violence in New Zealand is worth identifying because where there is domestic violence, there is usually child abuse (Murphy et al., 2013). New Zealand has a long history of producing some of the highest domestic violence rates in all of the world's developed nations (OECD, 2013). According to findings of *The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey* conducted by The Ministry of Justice (2020), close to one in six adult New Zealanders, approximately 16%, have experienced intimate partner violence at some stage of their lives.

The implications of child abuse on the survivors themselves are horrific and often deadly. Mental illness, self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are among the plethora of implications, often effecting survivors across their lifetime. Unsurprisingly, New Zealand's youth suicide rate is currently the "second worst in the developed world at 14.9 deaths per 100,000 adolescents" (UNICEF, 2020b, para. 5). UNICEF (2020b) also state that New Zealand's youth suicide rate is "more than twice the average among the 41 OECD countries surveyed (6.5 deaths per 100,000 adolescents)" (para. 5). Although youth suicide is influenced by a plethora of factors, studies within New Zealand and beyond have identified experiencing child abuse and/or domestic violence as risk factors for becoming suicidal and attempting suicide. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies from the past decade was conducted by Zatti et al. (2017). The longitudinal studies analysed by Zatti et al. (2017) include two studies conducted in New Zealand by Fergusson et al. (2008; 2013). Zatti et al. (2017) concludes that "physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and witnessing domestic violence during childhood are risk factors for later SA [suicide attempts]" (p. 355). Suicidal ideation and attempts can follow survivors of child abuse right up until the end stages of their lives. In their study examining the influence of childhood abuse types on suicide risk of the elderly, Jardim et al. (2018) concludes that a strong link exists between the risk of suicide and childhood abuse within the elderly. These studies suggest that the effects of childhood abuse are not only severe, but often lifelong, requiring ongoing help from mental health professionals and ongoing dedication to healing. However, the findings of all of the reports mentioned do not represent a true picture of how widespread domestic violence, child abuse and suicide truly are in New Zealand. This is due to a number of reasons that are explained and referenced by the Chief Science Advisor to the Justice Sector, Ian Lambie (2018), in his report titled *Every 4 minutes: A discussion paper on preventing family violence in New Zealand*. Firstly, academic Pauline Gulliver and Associate Professor Janet Fanslow (2012, as

cited in Lambie, 2018) state that there is no agency in New Zealand dedicated to collecting data surrounding family violence, ensuring its reliability and consistency. Existing data of police call-outs to domestic violence incidents and of child-welfare notifications are generally used to draw conclusions about the prevalence of child abuse. This data is estimated to be under-representations of the violence that occurs, as approximately 76% of domestic violence incidents are never reported to authorities (Ministry of Justice, 2015). Children are not in a position to speak out when they are being abused by their guardians because they are dependent on them and are often threatened by them into silence. This is also usually the case with victims of interpartner violence. Research is also conducted with the general public to account for the experiences of those who are not in the child-welfare system or who have not made reports to authorities. The issue with data sourced through surveys such as the *NZ Crime and Safety Survey* is that, despite the anonymity of participants, many respondents who have faced child abuse or domestic violence will not speak about it; due to fear of being found out by their abuser and the stigma that exists around these social issues. Furthermore, children can not be included as potential participants in general population studies; adult survivors of childhood abuse can provide data surrounding their experiences, but it will not actually be representative of the state of New Zealand's children at the time that the data is collected. These limitations of the existing studies of child abuse and domestic violence in New Zealand makes for a difficult assessment on how prevalent these social issues really are and why. This has led me to believe that rates of domestic violence and child abuse in New Zealand is even higher than what current data suggests.

1.2 The power of documentary, discourse and ethics

Throughout my undergraduate studies, I have come to understand that some mediums are more personally, interpersonally and societally influential than others, and some play a powerful role in representing certain discourses as factual, legitimate and dominant.

Documentaries share a privileged relationship with the ‘truth’, making them one of the most influential sites for discourses to flourish and be perceived by viewers as uncontested facts. They can encourage positive social action but also risk influencing negative social responses by representing discourses in problematic ways. Filmmakers may present discourses, whether harmful or not, through certain audio-visual representational strategies, thus giving rise to ethical implications. These strategies may include employing various codes and conventions of Nichol’s ‘modes of representation’, such as manipulation of footage, evidentiary editing and use of archival footage. Nichol’s modes will be further explored as part of the theoretical underpinnings of this study in chapter 2. Due to the unique power of the documentary genre and the extensive range of ethically charged representational strategies that may be applied within documentary filmmaking, ethical consideration must be at the centre of all documentaries. When undertaking research about documentary films, ethical consideration must be given to the filmmakers themselves and to the audience members. However, ethical consideration is especially important when participants are involved; there is the potential for participants to be exploited through the filmmaker’s representation of them (using representational strategies) and the potential for the filmmaker to represent harmful, stigmatising discourses that may conflict with the beliefs of the participants. Furthermore, when documentarians work with survivors of childhood abuse, neglect and trauma, additional ethical issues present themselves or existing issues become more complex to navigate. These concerns can be alleviated through the employment of specific representational strategies. For example, when representing discourse surrounding childhood abuse, it is not unusual for

participants to want to have their identities concealed due to pre-existing tensions in their life; discussing their trauma may cause the participant harm from their abuser, or even put the participant at risk of experiencing re-traumatisation. However, these stories about trauma and abuse are needed to combat stigma and promote social change, therefore, documentarians may use a representational strategy, such as constructing fictional scenes with composite characters, to keep the identities of the participants hidden. This allows audiences to still gain insight into important discourse while reducing the potential of causing the participant harm. This strategy may create new ethical concerns in relation to the audience and their expectation of receiving unfiltered truth if they feel they have been deceived by the constructed footage; it is much like a double-edged-sword in the sense that, in negotiating one ethical concern in relation to the participant, audience or filmmaker, another may arise.

1.3 Research questions and outcomes

This research project is informed by my own experience of surviving child abuse and the stigma attached to it, my awareness of the powerful nature of the documentary genre and discourse, and the belief that ethics should be at the heart of documentaries, especially when the subject matter involves child abuse and trauma. These personal, discursive and conceptual facets have led me to develop the following research questions:

- What discourses surrounding child abuse, neglect and trauma have been represented in documentaries?
- What representational strategies have been employed to represent these discourses, and what effects does this have on the participants, audience and filmmakers?

- What ethical concerns do these representational strategies and discourses raise and/or address?
- What alternative strategies could be employed in the representation of child abuse discourse in documentary film?

The aim of this qualitative research is to apply the methods of critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) and affect analysis across three documentary films about child abuse; *Tarnation*, *Daughter Rite* and *Breaking Silence*. Applying these methods will allow me to identify the range of discourses presented, how they are represented, and the ethical concerns associated. Meeting these objectives will then allow me to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these existing representations of child abuse in relation to documentary ethics, and whether or not these representations have helped reconcile ethical issues, have aggravated them or if they have created new ethical concerns. These findings will inform the final outcome of this thesis, which addresses gaps found surrounding the discourse communicated in relation to childhood trauma and suggests alternative approaches to the representation of child abuse in documentary films.

1.3.1 Addressing the literature gaps

This thesis will contribute to addressing various gaps within the literature surrounding documentary practices, ethics and childhood trauma. Ethics in documentary filmmaking is a constantly expanding field of study due to its significance in documentary practices; there is a need to continuously address this area as ethical issues and concerns look different for every filmmaker, participant and audience member. There is, however, a lack of scholarly research in the area of ethics and documentary filmmaking in relation to the representations of

discourse surrounding child abuse, trauma and neglect. Furthermore, there is minimal research surrounding representations of child abuse in autobiographical documentaries, and the ethical concerns associated with reflexive filmmaking. This is possibly due to stigma and the taboo status of the topic. Providing filmmakers and scholars with detailed discourse and affect analyses will contribute to addressing these gaps, consequently evoking further questions and theorisation of scholars which will lead to enrichment and widening of the breadth of research material on these topics.

1.3.2 The benefits for documentarians, scholars and survivors

Documentary scholars and filmmakers will benefit from this research as they can use the findings as a guide when navigating ethical concerns within the documentaries they are analysing or producing, especially if the subject matter involves childhood abuse. Producing more scholarly research surrounding childhood trauma, documentary practices, representation and ethics means that more documentarians will likely feel equipped enough to create documentaries of this nature. In an academic setting in the context of New Zealand, university students pursuing higher research degrees with hopes to engage in documentary filmmaking around sensitive, stigmatised subjects such as child abuse will feel more equipped and informed to do so following an increase in literature around such topics. With more tools to help with the navigation of ethical concerns, ethics committees may also be more informed when assessing the merits and pitfalls of proposed research into this field. Production companies may also become more inclined to fund these documentaries that play an important role in giving voices to abuse survivors. The creation of more child abuse documentaries may lead to an opening of discourse and thoughtfulness about acts of

representation, with the potential of evoking positive social change, whether by independent filmmakers or by production companies.

It is important to note here that, despite the challenges associated with ethics in documentaries, the creation of more documentaries will not be without eager audiences. Scholar Leah Anderst (2017) argues that the world is in the middle of a “documentary boom” (p. 255) as the production and consumption of autobiographical/documentaries are growing in popularity. Thom Powers, a programmer for the Toronto International Film Festival agrees with Anderst, stating that we are in “an undeniable golden age for documentary filmmaking” (as cited in del Barco, 2019, para. 11). The advent of Netflix and other streaming platforms has facilitated this documentary boom, giving users access to a wide range of documentaries. Netflix has also shown a significant growth in documentaries and docu-series surrounding personal and family trauma, abuse and neglect. The documentary genre has become more mainstream and is continuously rising in popularity - on both visual and audio streaming platforms. Now, more than ever, vulnerability and stories about trauma are being heard, watched and discussed in media and social discourse. Despite the sensitive and stigmatising nature of discourse around child abuse, there are audiences for these documentaries, waiting to listen to and learn from real life experiences of childhood trauma. We can not know how to tell these stories in ways that minimise harm without examining what and how discourses have been represented in these documentaries, and the ethical issues associated.

Not only will documentary filmmakers and media studies scholars benefit from this thesis, but clinical psychologists who are researching the areas of child abuse and trauma recovery could use the findings to theorise the therapeutic outcomes of documentary filmmaking.

Individuals striving to become trauma informed, or who are interested in the complexities of childhood trauma and how abuse can affect survivors well into adulthood, will also likely find this research of interest. This project may also provide comfort to child abuse survivors who come across it.

1.4 Summary

Following this introduction, this thesis will be divided into four additional chapters. Chapter 2: Representation and Documentary outlines part of the theoretical underpinnings of this research, such as my use of the Circuit of Culture with a specific focus on the cultural site of representation (where meaning is constructed). This chapter also outlines my use of the documentary modes of representation as an analytical framework to conduct the analyses of the documentaries. Simultaneously, chapter 2 provides a review of the existing literature of these topics. Chapter 3: (Autobiographical) Documentary Ethics outlines the theoretical underpinnings in relation to ethics and discusses the existing literature within the field. Chapter 3 also provides an overview of autobiographical documentary ethics and the potentially therapeutic outcomes of autobiographical documentary filmmaking. Chapter 4: Methodology explains the methodological approach of this study and justifies why I have chosen to use Norman Fairclough's social approach to CDA in conjunction with affect analysis. Chapter 4: Methodology also addresses the critiques and limitations of the qualitative design. Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion presents the findings of this study, which include the identification of discourses surrounding the cyclical affects of abuse, the documentary codes and conventions used to represent the discourses, and the ethical concerns associated with the discourses and the strategies in relation to the participants, viewers and

filmmakers. Chapter 6: Conclusion presents my suggestions of how child abuse may be represented in future documentaries.

Chapter Two: Representation and Documentary

2.1 Introduction

At the heart of this thesis is the concept of representation, which has been developed within the field of cultural studies by the theoretical framework of the Circuit of Culture (du Gay et al., 1997). This model suggests that meaning is generated through language within five interconnected cultural sites; representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. To explain and justify why the Circuit of Culture is the most suitable theoretical framework to apply to this study, with a specific focus on the site of representation, I will firstly acknowledge the theories of communication that were dominant prior to the conceptualisation of the Circuit of Culture. While providing a review of the literature and identifying the limitations of these theories, I will explain why they are not appropriate for my study and why the Circuit of Culture is the most applicable framework due to its emphasis on the theory of articulation. Following this, I will briefly introduce the diagram I have conceptualised based upon the theories of articulation and the Circuit of Culture to explain why I have positioned representation as the main site of inquiry for this project. I will then further justify the application of the Circuit of Culture with representation at the centre by delving into its relevance to documentary theory and practices; specifically exploring Nichols' definition of documentary and typology of documentary modes in relation to strategies of representation.

2.2 The Shannon-Weaver model of communication

Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's (1949) model of the communication process was the dominantly used theory in the fields of communications and cultural studies prior to the

1970's. According to scholar Stephen Petrina (2010), Shannon and Weaver “simplified the communication process into a model of information transmission” (p. 1), arguing that communication is a series of isolated events where the ‘sender’ of a message encodes it to give meaning, sends the message through a medium, and the receiver consumes it (see Figure 1: Shannon-Weaver model of communication). Among scholars such as Debra Gillespie and Rachel Schiffman (2018), the linearity of this sender/receiver relationship is critiqued by cultural theorist Stuart Hall. Hall (1973) argues that the flow of information from the source to the destination is not a straightforward, linear process, and that the initial meaning determined during the stage of production never stays fixed as Shannon and Weaver suggest. I agree with these criticisms as the Shannon-Weaver model demonstrates an outdated, rigid understanding of how communicative events are generated and understood, positioning audience members as passive consumers rather than active participants in the construction of meaning. Positioning viewers in this way denies the possibility for ethical issues to present themselves in relation to each audience member’s unique interpretation of the text. It implies that if viewers are decoding meaning in the same way, then the ethical concerns of the text will be the same, thus they can be negotiated in the same ways. Applying this theory within my study would be problematic as it fails to consider the importance of the historical context in the construction of meaning, and how theorists have come to understand culture and meaning following the cultural turn of the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s. The cultural turn influenced social science scholars to perceive the concept of culture as crucial to our understanding of “social processes, social identities, and social change and conflict” (Rose, 2016, p. 2). According to Hall, culture is not a:

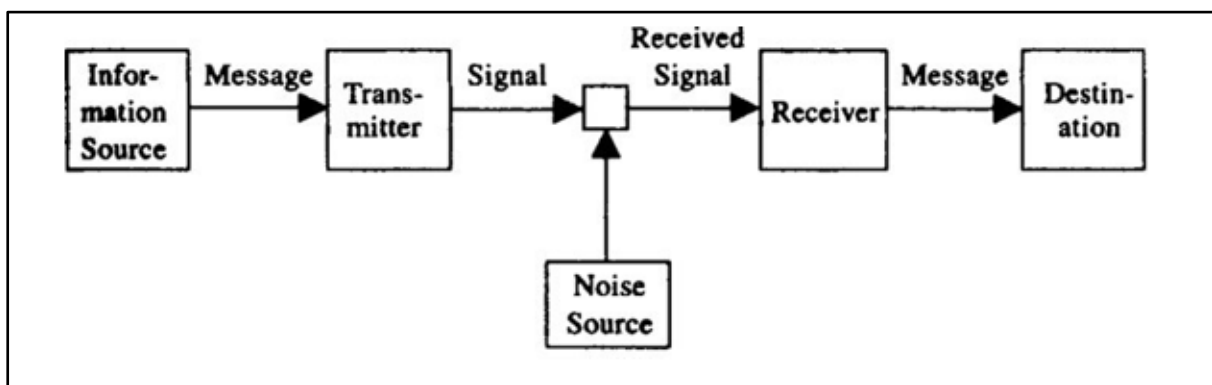
set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics – as a *process*, a set of *practices*. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ - between the members of society

or a group ... Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways.

(1997, p. 2)

These 'meanings' are produced and exchanged through the medium of language and are reliant on our shared access to it (Hall, 1997; 2013).

Figure 1: Shannon-Weaver model of communication



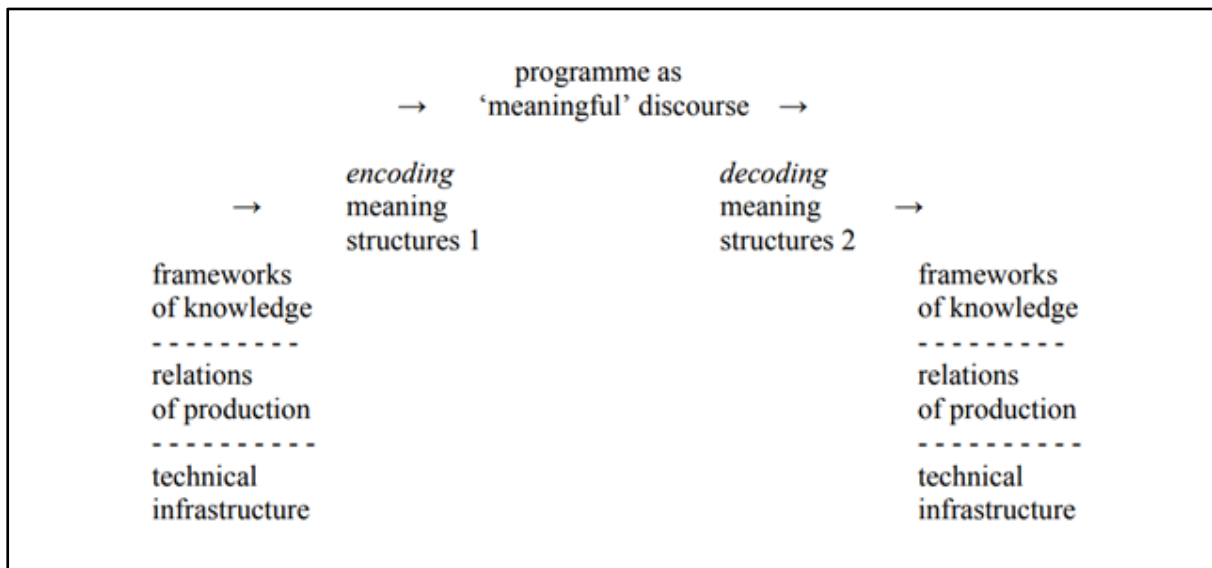
Source: Shannon & Weaver, 1949.

2.3 The Encoding/Decoding model of communication

In response to the linearity of the Shannon-Weaver model and the paradigm shift across communication and cultural studies, Hall (1973) developed the Encoding/Decoding model of communication, consisting of four consecutive stages where communication moves through; production, circulation, use and reproduction (see Figure 2: Encoding/Decoding model of communication). Hall (1973) theorised that meanings are encoded firstly by the producer, creating 'meaning structures 1'. This message is then decoded by the consumer, creating 'meaning structures 2'. Hall (1973) also theorised that there are three possible audience positions in which a message may be decoded from: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. The dominant-hegemonic position is where the audience member interprets the meaning of a text in the way that the creator intended to be decoded. A negotiated position

refers to the audience member interpreting meaning in a mixed way, sharing aspects of both the dominant-hegemonic and oppositional readings. Finally, an audience member may take up an oppositional reading, decoding a text in the opposite way of how the producer of the text intended. In a review of Hall's Encoding/Decoding model, scholar Sven Ross (2011) describes the formulation of these positions as "the typography" (p. 1), noting that Hall's use of ideological processes to frame this model is often considered its most revolutionary aspect. I agree with Ross (2011), unlike Shannon and Weaver's theory of communication, Hall's Encoding/Decoding model emphasises the power media consumers possess, positioning consumers as active participants in the interpretation of meanings (Aligwe et al., 2018). It also highlights that there can not be a single, intrinsic understanding of a text because the model positions the construction of meaning as context-bound, articulated by the encoder and decoder through their own differing frameworks of knowledge. 'Frameworks of knowledge' refers to the ideologies and metanarratives held by the encoder and decoder and their socio-cultural, economic and political experiences which shape their beliefs. The relations of production (the underpinning social relationships of power structures) and the technical infrastructure (how and through what medium the communicative act is presented) also influence how a message is encoded and decoded (Hall, 1973). However, the encoder's and decoder's understanding of the relations of production and the technical infrastructure of the text are also dependent on their own frameworks of knowledge.

Figure 2: Encoding/Decoding model of communication



Source: Hall, 1980.

2.3.1 Critiques and limitations

Despite the Encoding/Decoding model recognising audience power, it has received criticism for placing such an emphasis on the influence of socio-economic class in an audience member's interpretation of meaning. This was critiqued by sociologist David Morley, the first scholar to test the Encoding/Decoding model in a study titled *The Nationwide Project*, conducted by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies between 1975 and 1979. Both Morley and media studies Professor Charlotte Brunson were the primary researchers of this project, with the first part of the study published by Brunson in 1978 in her book titled *Everyday Television – Nationwide*. In 1980, Morley published his findings, titled *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding*. Morley then went on to publish a journal article and book chapter in 1981, noting that, like Hall, one of the biggest limitations of the study is that it largely focuses on class at the expense of other factors such as age, sex and race. In 1999, Morley and Brunson combined their previous findings in *The Nationwide Television Studies*. Recognised by academic Shaun Moores (1993) as the first empirical and

ethnographic study surrounding audience reception, Morley (1980; 1981; 1992) gathered participants from a range of socio-economic, educational and occupational backgrounds and observed their responses to a video clip created by officials about the budget for the year. Morley's (1980; 1981; 1992) aim was to see how participants would 'read' the text and what ideological position they would take; dominant-hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional. The study only magnified the cracks in the Encoding/Decoding model, specifically surrounding the lack of consideration given by Hall regarding the textual determinism of meaning in communication. Morley (1980; 1981; 1992) found that groups with the same class position presented interpretations that contradicted one another, concluding that meaning can not just be relative to the socio-cultural background of the reader. Rather, meaning is constructed in relation to the constraints presented by the encoded, preferred meaning of the text, and in relation to one's class and social experiences (Morley, 1980; 1981; 1992).

In a re-analysis of Morley's work, cultural studies scholar Sujeong Kim emphasises Morley's finding that "the difference in decodings *between* the groups from the different categories is far greater than the level of difference and variation *within* the groups" (Morley, 1980, as cited in Kim, 2004, p. 85). This counters scholars such as Graeme Turner (1990) who have misinterpreted Morley's finding to mean that there is no correlation between an audience's social position and the ideological position they take up when decoding a text. Even though there are conflicting decodings within group members, Kim (2004) argues that there is enough evidence in Morley's data to suggest that social class does in fact influence how texts are decoded; scholars have just failed to interpret the data properly.

Another major limitation of the Encoding/Decoding model, according to media studies scholar Sven Ross (2011), is that Hall assumes that an encoded meaning is always encoded within a dominant-hegemonic position. Ross (2011) theorises that the reason for this may be that Hall specifically created the model to apply to television news, which often perpetuates discourse surrounding the dominant-hegemonic ideology; therefore, it would make sense to position the encoded meaning within the dominant-hegemonic ideology. The model would become problematic however when applying it to anything other than television news, especially if the text defies dominant ideologies.

Academic Virginia Nightingale (1996) argues that this model also fails to consider that what is dominant and what is not is culturally bound, fuelling the limitation. As this thesis is concerned with discourse surrounding a stigmatised group, those who have experienced child abuse and trauma, it would be a disservice to use this model. To apply this model, I would have to assume that the discourses presented are positioned within dominant-hegemonic ideologies. This is not the case for any of the films I have analysed. I would have to position the documentaries within one of these ideological positions, I would argue they are most aligned with the oppositional ideology. Assuming they are concerned with the dominant ideology, and hypothetically, if I agreed with the discourses presented in these films, using this model would lead me to argue that I agree with the dominant ideology, despite the films actually representing oppositional positions. Hypothetically, if I disagreed with the discourses represented in the films, I would be led to argue that I agree with oppositional ideology, when in actuality it would be indicative of a dominant-hegemonic perspective. The aforementioned points support the argument that Hall's Encoding/Decoding model is inappropriate to apply to this study.

While I am critical of the Encoding/Decoding model, I would like to note that Hall (1994) never perceived this model to be fully realised and complete; he expected that it would garner criticism and have limitations stating that:

I don't think it has the theoretical rigor, the internal logical and conceptual consistency for that. ... It suggests an approach; it opens up new questions. It maps the terrain. But it's a model which has to be worked with and developed and changed. (p. 255)

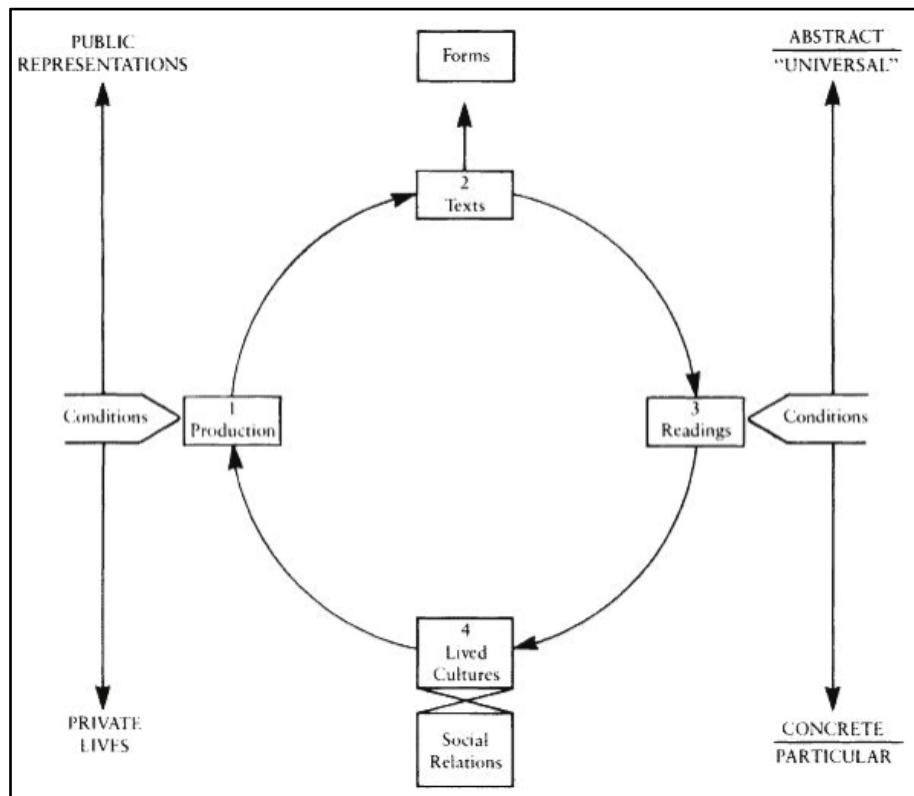
Despite its limitations, this model did bring new questions among theorists and academics to the forefront of communication studies, paving the way for audience reception studies through its acknowledgment of the audience's role in the construction of meaning.

Predominantly due to the limitations I have discussed, the Encoding/Decoding model has been retheorised by various scholars over the past several decades. Of the most influential, Richard Johnson (1986) proposed a model of cultural analysis that requires the reflexive analysis of multiple aspects of the cultural product (see Figure 3: Embryonic version of the Circuit of CultureFigure 3). These aspects are represented in the boxes within the model: the production of the text, the text form, how the text is read or interpreted and the socio-cultural relations that influence how a text is interpreted. Johnson (1986) argued that:

it may be more transformative to rethink each moment in the light of the others, importing objects and methods of study usually developed in relation to one moment into the next. The moments, though separable, are not in fact discrete. (p. 74)

Put simply, the analyst is expected to move reflexively between the aspects to draw conclusions because they all influence one another and often exist under different social, cultural, economic and political conditions. The emphasis is on the interconnected nature of these facets. Johnson’s model is now considered the “embryonic” version of the Circuit of Culture (Leve, 2012, p. 2). I will be applying the Circuit of Culture within this thesis.

Figure 3: Embryonic version of the Circuit of Culture



Source: Johnson, 1986.

2.4 The Circuit of Culture

Paul du Gay et al. (1997) theorised that within texts, meaning is constructed, given and produced within five cultural sites that all work in tandem, much like a circuit (see Figure 4: The Circuit of Culture). While these sites are briefly explained below, later in this section I

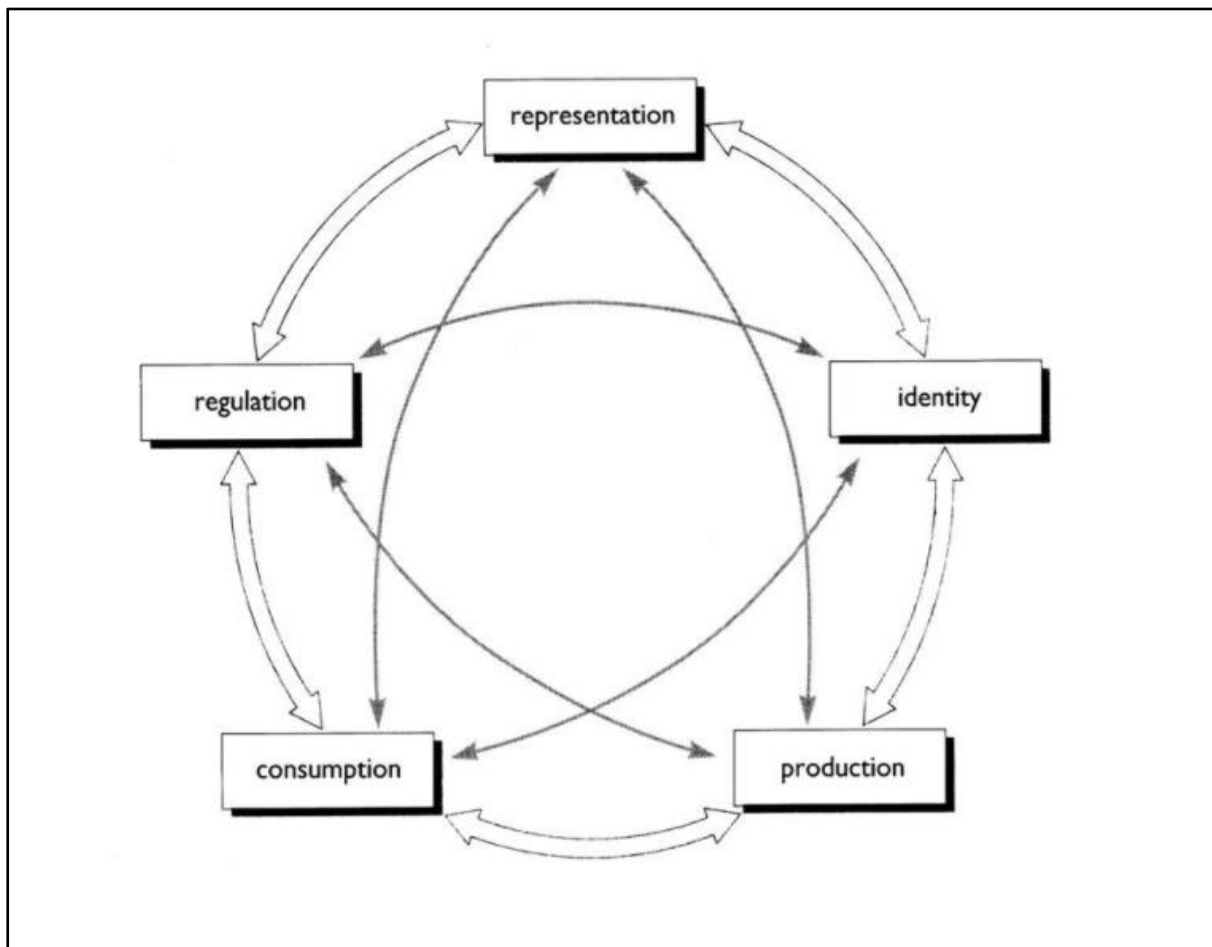
delve deeper into the site of representation due to its significance to this study and its objectives. The site of **production** is concerned with the circumstances in which language has been created; by who, where, when, under what circumstances and with what intention(s). It is also concerned with how language is marketed and distributed to the consumer, influencing the meanings made. Documentary films for example, are institutional in the sense that they are often produced by certain organisations with the intention to perpetuate certain ideologies about the historical world (Nichols, 2017). Yet, they also often involve a team of practitioners who have their own agenda; there is often an existing tension between the representational needs of an organisation/producer and the aesthetic and representational wants of the documentary filmmaker. Closely related to production and this aforementioned tension is **regulation**, concerning the formal and informal rules that may or may not have been enforced, by who and why. With documentary film, formal rules may include government laws and regulations, such as having to put the film through an audience rating system before it is legally allowed to air on television. Informal rules may include the cultural normalities and expectations of a society and the ethical codes of conduct that documentarians generally follow when working with participants, especially when dealing with topics surrounding trauma. Although the ethical codes of conduct such as ‘protect the vulnerable’ are not legally required to be followed, a documentarian may morally feel inclined to follow them. **Consumption** is concerned with the audience or consumers of the language, who the intended consumers are, who actually consumes it and why, if there is a financial cost involved to do so and how the language is received by audience members. The way in which a text is consumed, through different mediums and through a lens of various socio-cultural, political and economic conditions, will shape the meanings interpreted. Cultural studies scholar Chris Barker (2002) adds that while the meanings produced at the level of production are available to be interpreted at the site of consumption, neither site

determines the meanings made at another. The site of **identity** is described by Hall and du Gay as “the way in which different groups and types of people (from producers to consumers) associate and are associated with discourses made around the artefact” (1996, as cited in Mora et al., 2019, p. 72). Scholar Philip Grey (2004) defines identity simply, stating that it is “the process or set of practices involved in establishing, through the marking of sameness and difference, who ‘I’ am in relation to ‘you’, and who ‘we’ are in relation to ‘them’” (p. 27). Identities are “always in process” and never fixed because they are influenced by the other four sites (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 123). Identity is strongly linked to the consumption of texts. Autonomous consumption allows one to express and explore their identity, their beliefs and the ideologies they uphold through the discourses represented in texts (Bourdieu, 1984). These discourses may or may not align with the beliefs of the consumer. What is important is that the consumer can be critical of the discourses and can position their own beliefs in relation to them. Identity is closely linked to the site of representation. According to du Gay et al., language may construct “identities through representation, by representing them in a certain way” (1997, p. 39). Rather than reflecting the identities that already exist, representations tell us the “identities we can become – and how” (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 39).

The cultural site of **representation** is concerned with how something is represented; these representations are created through language. Hall (1997) describes representations as “the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (p. 17). It is important to note here that I am not only referring to language as just written or spoken words, but in the same sense that du Gay et al. (1997) uses it. Language refers to any “system of representation” (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 13) including but not limited to writing, speech, drawing, photography, filmmaking and body language. Body language includes gesture, pose

and facial expression, which can be understood as sign systems that become codified through repeated use and reiteration via mediated sites. Signs, symbols and codes are used within language to create representations and exchange meaning. Within the realm of documentary film, a range of representational codes and conventions are often applied by filmmakers to present certain discourses or to negotiate ethical issues. The application of these representational strategies may present ethical concerns in themselves. These codes and conventions of documentary filmmaking all fit into what Nichols calls documentary “modes of representation” (2010, p. 124). In conjunction with the Circuit of Culture, I apply Nichols’ theoretical framework when analysing the documentaries as it provides a succinct way in which the documentaries can be deconstructed in order to understand the discourses, representational strategies and the associated ethical concerns. Nichols’ documentary modes and the associated critiques will be further explained and explored following the discussion about the Circuit of Culture.

Figure 4: The Circuit of Culture



Source: du Gay et al., 1997.

2.4.1 Articulation theory

The interconnected nature of the Circuit of Culture allows the researcher to make 'articulations' between the circuit elements, described by du Gay et al. (1997) as:

the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time; rather it is a linkage whose conditions of existence or emergence need to be located in the contingencies of circumstance. (p. 3)

Hall adds that this process of making articulations "is called 'articulation' because meaning has to be expressed, but it is always expressed in a specific historical moment, within a

specific discourse(s)...Meaning is therefore a social production; the world has to be made to mean” (as cited in Storey, 1996, p. 4). This theory, which is central to the application of du Gay et al.’s model, benefits my research design as it allows me to begin my analyses (see chapter 4: Methodology) at any point of the model while still encouraging myself to move reflexively from one site to another to draw informed, conclusions about meaning; “the value of this approach is that while each of the moments, in articulation, is necessary to the circuit as a whole, no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated” (Hall, 1980, p. 52). As the two-way arrows on the diagram suggest, I am not restricted with a static one-way analysis of language as I would be if I applied Shannon and Weaver’s theory of communication or if I applied Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model.

2.4.2 Critiques, limitations and representation at the centre

Although du Gay et al. suggests that one must analyse all five sites to “gain a full understanding of any cultural text or artefact” (1997, p. 2), I do not believe that it is possible to conceive all meanings within a text. No matter how thoroughly and reflexively I may analyse the documentaries, I will never uncover all potential meanings and discourses because I am limited by my own scope. What I conclude will never be identical to someone else’s findings, even if the same theoretical model is applied. Furthermore, meaning has “no fixed point of origin” (du Gay et al., 2013, p. 8) or end, due to it being embedded within culture – it is impossible to untangle – so it is unreasonable of du Gay et al. to suggest a “full understanding” is even possible. I do believe that considering the influence of all cultural sites will allow for an informed, articulated understanding of a text’s meanings, but never a complete understanding. The conclusions I draw will only prompt further inquiry as “interpretations are always followed by other interpretations” (Hall, 1997, p. 42).

du Gay et al. (1997) also emphasises that not one point on the circuit is intrinsically more important than another, which implies that equal consideration should be given to all facets. However, representation is at the centre of this thesis and the analysis process for reasons that are explained below. This does not mean that I will simply abandon considering the influence of the other four sites in the production of meaning; it would be ill-considered to do so as the complexities of each site are intertwined with one another (du Gay et al., 1997). This means that the consideration of one site will prompt the consideration of the other sites because they implicate one another. Rather, I will centre my analysis around the site of representation while considering how consumption, regulation, identity and production inform each other and the represented discourses, representational strategies used and the associated ethical concerns. As this thesis is concerned with the representation of child abuse discourses in documentary films and the associated ethical concerns, it is fitting that I give particular attention to and begin my analyses at the site of representation. While it could be argued that representation is a cornerstone within media studies in general, I believe that representation and the meanings generated from it are particularly relevant to the genre of documentaries as they are a median of power and influence.

Documentary texts, no matter their context, are intrinsically in themselves representations of the historical world; they “claim a privileged relationship with the truth about the material with which they concern themselves” (Bonner, 2013, p. 60). Nichols adds that most “documentary films address the historical world itself rather than construct an imaginary or fictional world. They (...) invite engagement with their representation of the historical world (...) by emotional or persuasive means” (p. 99). When thinking of the word ‘documentary’, we immediately think of the connotations attached; that documentaries represent reality, the

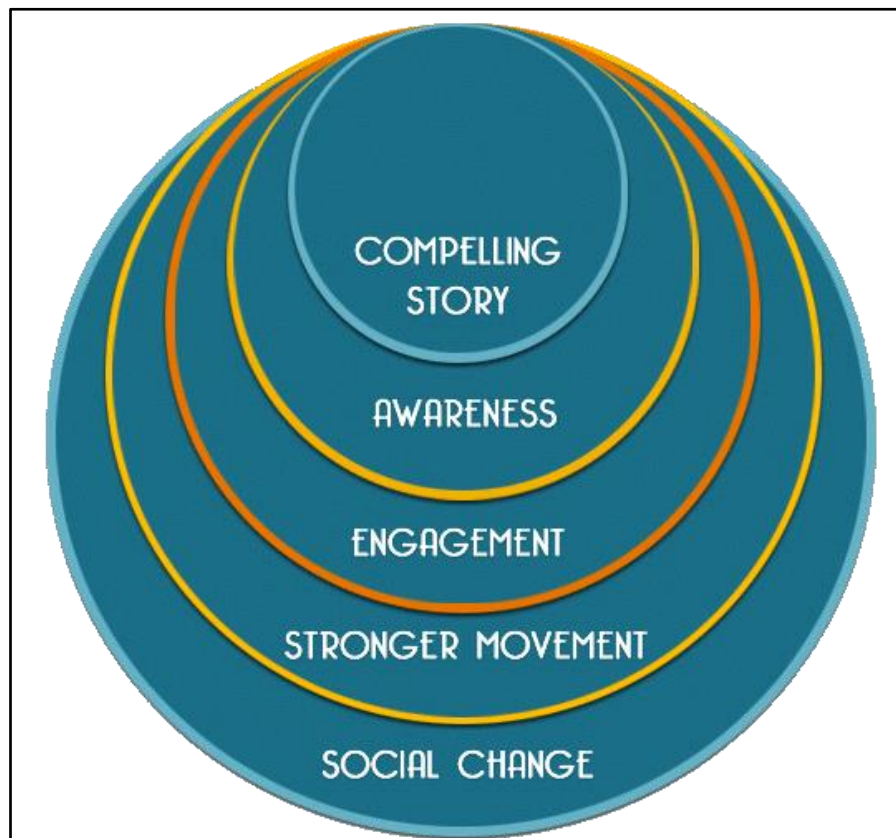
truth, real stories and real people, and are constructed by and with the involvement of experts. These connotations and the power associated, means that the discourses within documentaries are often taken at face value, leaving viewers with the impression that they have just viewed a mirror image of the historical world. This is problematic if the discourses are misrepresented or stigmatising, creating ethical issues for all involved in the creation and consumption of the documentary.

While the power that the documentary genre holds can be used controversially, it can also be used as a vehicle for positive social change and impact. In Hot Doc's (2018) report, *Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling*, the term 'impact' is used as a synonym for social and cultural 'change' in which I have adopted. Social change is defined by Hot Docs as including a "perceivable shift in behaviours, beliefs, and values within a group, system or community, as well as legislative or policy shifts in a government, organisation or institution" (2018, p. 4). There has been much debate around whether or not documentaries can actually do this, but Hot Docs presents a strong argument that is supported by evidence from case studies. Hot Docs (2018) conclude that promoting change is possible to do with the use of documentary films and their associated campaign strategies. Hot Docs refers to a theoretical model created by The Fledgling Fund, the Creative Media Dimension of Impact, to make the claim that social change promoted by documentary films may occur over time, moving from individual impact to societal. This model (see Figure 5: Creative media dimensions of impact) consists of five 'dimensions' in which impact may occur, beginning at the individual **compelling story** dimension of impact. This dimension refers to the documentary's quality and whether or not the viewer is invested with the discourses presented. If a documentary does not evoke a sense of empathy through the authentic illumination of the human experience, then it is unlikely to stimulate passionate advocacy

for the issue represented. Representational strategies are particularly relevant here as they are used to present stories in compelling ways, illustrating “complex problems in ways that statistics can not” (The Fledgling Fund, 2009, p. 16). The next dimension of impact is individual **awareness** which refers to the ability of the documentary to promote awareness around an issue. Audience size and diversity are the indicators used to measure the reach of the awareness. Following the awareness dimension of impact is the individual **engagement** dimension, referring to the action that may be provoked from the awareness of viewers. This may be in the form of facilitating dialogues or participating in campaigns. **Stronger movement** is the fourth dimension of impact. The stronger movement dimension refers to how a documentary film may “strengthen the work of key advocacy organizations that have strong commitment to the issues raised in the film either by energizing, building or growing active participation in that movement, or perhaps by spurring collaboration among key organizations” (The Fledgling Fund, 2009, p. 16). Within this dimension, the focus of personal, individual impact shifts to societal impact, bringing about **social change**, the final dimension of impact. The Fledgling Fund measures social change in relation to local, state, national and international policy or legislative change, behaviour change and a shift in public dialogue about a particular issue. While documentaries have the potential to provoke impact at both personal and societal levels, it is “not something that can be foreseen or created according to a formula” (Hot Docs, 2014, p. 26). There are strategies that documentarians can apply to increase the possibility of societal impact, such as maintaining a compelling storyline through the use of representational strategies or involving social activists. Yet, “even the best strategy, combined with a beautiful, compelling film, cannot guarantee impact and change. Social change involves good luck, good timing, traction of ideas in the broader culture and more than a little magic and zeitgeist” (Hot Docs, 2014, p. 26). What is most important here in relation to this thesis is that, despite its difficulty to quantifiably measure,

documentaries, as a median of power and influence, do possess the potential for social change. Social change may be sparked by the individual levels of impact, which may be provoked by the documentary representations.

Figure 5: Creative media dimensions of impact

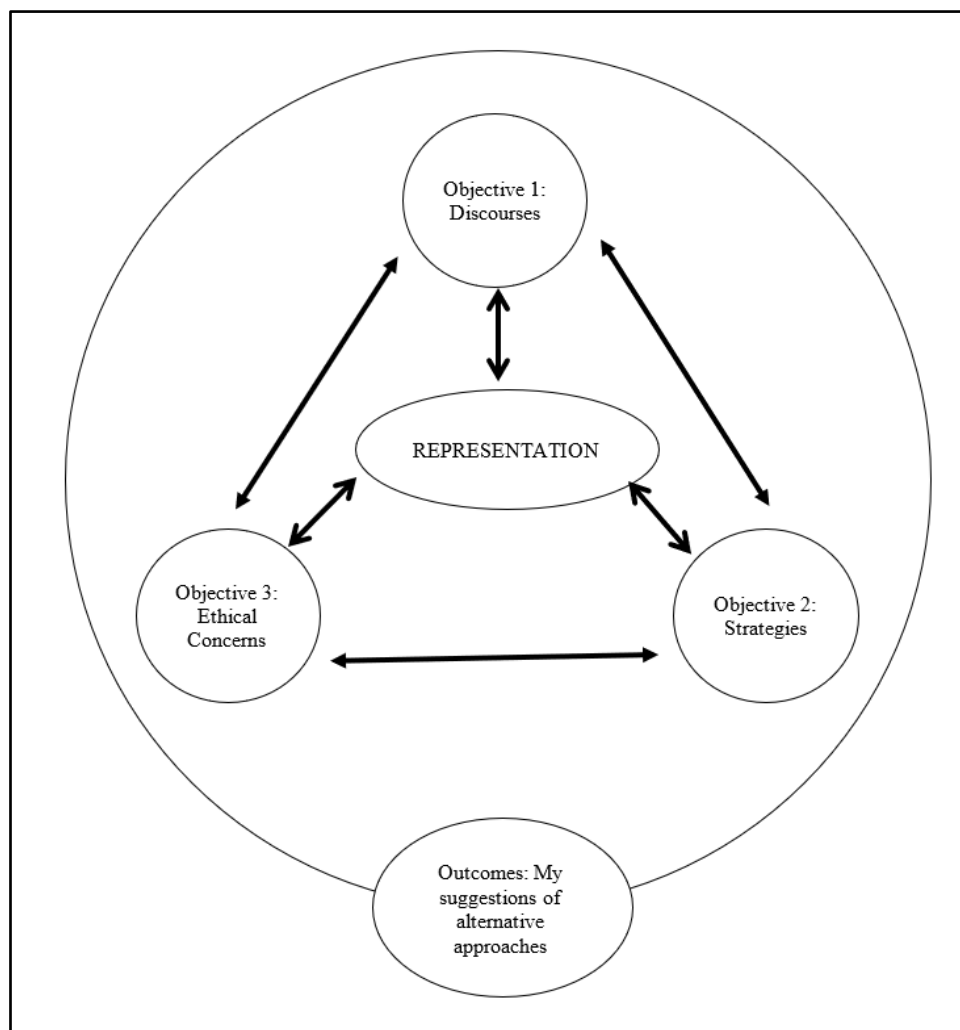


Source: The Fledgling Fund, 2009.

Secondly, representation must be at the forefront of this thesis as my research objectives are all interrelated through the site of representation. Framed by the Circuit of Culture and the theory of articulation, I have created a diagram to visually represent this interconnected relationship (see Figure 6: Research objectives and outcomes). As suggested by the two-way arrows in the diagram, meeting each objective of my research is dependent on the reciprocal unpacking and reliance of the other objectives. For example, to investigate how discourses surrounding child abuse are represented and what representational strategies have been

applied (Objective two), I firstly need to know what specific discourses are present (Objective one). However, because discourses are represented in a multitude of ways, through dialogue and speech, through bodily gesture and pose, through visual and aural representational strategies, and through the codes and conventions of documentary modes, I need to consider the encoding or visual and aural discourses. Furthermore, the identification of ethical concerns (Objective three) and my concluding suggestions (Objective four) require context from the conclusions I form surrounding the first two objectives; ethical issues may arise from the discourses presented and from the representational strategies used by documentarians.

Figure 6: Research objectives and outcomes



As the diagram suggests, the other four sites still work in tandem with the site of representation to construct meaning, influencing the representations made within the documentaries, supporting the conclusions I draw. I will still be considering these sites and positioning my conclusions in relation to the production, consumption and audience response of the documentaries, the identities presented within documentaries and the regulation of the documentaries. Representation, however, is the most common thread between my research objectives. This diagram suggests that, not only do I need to use the articulation process to interpret meaning across all five cultural sites, I also need to use the articulation process to answer my research questions. This requires reflexively moving between gathering data for each objective and drawing conclusions for each objective, while representation stays the common thread throughout.

2.5 What is a ‘documentary’?

Before discussing the representational strategies of documentary filmmaking, I must begin with a brief exploration of what a documentary is due to the contested nature of its definition. According to Nichols (1991), a fixed, rigid definition of documentary has never existed due to the ever-changing nature of institutions, filmmakers, films, and audiences. Nichols (1991) states that the consistent theoretical debate about what a documentary is has often influenced scholars, students and filmmakers to revert back to John Grierson’s (1933) simplistic definition of documentary film as “the creative treatment of actuality” (p. 8). Conceptualised by Grierson in 1933, what is appealing about applying this definition is its arbitrary nature, allowing for the inclusion of all films involving a non-fictional aspect or ‘actuality’ of some kind. But it is this arbitrary aspect that makes this definition problematic because it does not account for the influence that institutions, documentarians, participants and audiences have

on the construction and definition of a documentary. Consequently, key tensions between these four communities are unaccounted for; between the audiences right to know, the creative vision of the filmmakers and of the producers (which often conflict with one another) and the ethical concerns surrounding participants, filmmakers and audiences.

The evolving nature of documentaries means that documentary films must be theorised as sharing a “braid of family resemblances” (Plantinga, 1997, p. 17), rather than attempting to define such a complex text with five words or by providing a strict criterion in which a text must meet. Various scholars have risen to the challenge of categorising the elements of documentaries, all with slightly different approaches. Across both editions of his book *Documentary: a History of the Non-Fiction Film* (1974; 1993), Erik Barnouw groups documentary films by their social function and the historical periods in which they were created. Screenwriting scholar and Professor Evan Cameron (1974) critiques Barnouw’s theory for being too focused on the social context of the filmmakers. Cameron (1974) sums up the result of Barnouw’s theory, stating that “the result is something of a victory for accuracy over comprehensiveness” (p. 2). This means that, while Barnouw is meticulous in his theorisation of how documentary came to be, he leaves little consideration for the documentary’s design; the audio-visual ways of representing the historical world. Thus, this theory is not appropriate to apply within my study as it does not provide an analytical framework in which I can use to identify representational strategies.

2.6 Bill Nichols’ 4-part definition

While Nichols acknowledges that documentary is a “fuzzy concept” (2001, p. 21), he has identified four common characteristics of documentary films. What is unique about Nichols’

theory is that it can be applied across films to group them as documentaries, while still acknowledging the complex, ever-changing nature of the genre due to the influence of institutions, practitioners and audiences. Within this definition, Nichols presents a typology of documentary modes that I have used as a theoretical framework when applying discourse and affect analysis to the documentaries. The rationale for this will be expanded upon below.

The first tenet of Nichols' 4-part definition is that documentaries are institutional, stating that "documentaries are what the organizations and institutions that produce them make" (2017, p. 12). If a viewer knows that an established filmmaker, organisation or production company creates documentaries and labels a text as a documentary, that viewer is likely to accept the label without questioning it. Documentaries are also institutional in the sense that they "impose an institutional way of seeing and speaking" (Nichols, 2017, p. 12). This means that documentarians are often aesthetically and creatively limited in the representations that they make due to the ideological and representational needs of the institutions.

Secondly, documentaries involve a "community of practitioners" (Nichols, 2010, p. 13) who, like institutions, influence the construction of a documentary. According to Nichols (2010), documentarians firstly share the role of representing the historical world, instead of creating new worlds. They "speak a common language" (Nichols, 2010, p. 20), meaning that they use specific jargon to communicate, but also share common ethical and aesthetic concerns surrounding filmmaking. This often causes tension between institutions and practitioners if there is disagreement about how ethical and aesthetic concerns should be negotiated or if they can be negotiated at all. Nichols (2017) also defines documentaries in relation to a "corpus of texts" which refers to the "diversity of the films that make up the documentary tradition" (p.

14). Nichols explains this by stating that, for a film to belong to the documentary genre, it must display various codes and conventions that mirror those applied in texts that have already been defined as documentaries. Nichols groups these codes and conventions into different documentary 'modes' which I have explained below.

2.6.1 Documentary Modes of Representation

In 1991, Nichols developed a typology of documentary modes, which has since been recognised by documentary scholar Stella Bruzzi (2006) as “the most influential and widely used” (p. 3) theory in documentary studies. This typology groups specific cinematic techniques and codes and conventions into six different ‘documentary modes’. These are categorised as expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative and poetic, and each mode is distinguished by the particular ways of representing the historical world, including a range of distinct purposes. Essentially, they are modes of representation that have:

come into prominence at a given time and place, but they persist and become more pervasive than movements. Each mode may arise partly as a response to perceived limitations in previous modes, partly as a response to technological possibilities, and partly as a response to a changing social context. (Nichols, 2001, p. 34)

Representations of the historical world, whether truthful or not, all possess some form of indexicality, a direct link between a visual image and the historical aspect it refers to (Nichols, 2001). Indexical bonds can be weak or strong, and the indexical bond associated with each documentary mode differs in strength.

2.6.1.1 Expository

The expository mode can be considered as the ‘classic’ documentary type. Rising at the very beginning of the documentary tradition in the 1920’s, the documentaries of the expository mode emphasise spoken word to advance an argument in relation to the historical world. This argument is usually presented utilising a “voice-of-God” narration to authoritatively do so (Nichols, 2017, p. 121). This is where the speaker of the narration is heard but not seen, and is often reflective of a “professionally trained, richly toned male voice” (Nichols, 2017, p. 124). Not only does this voice-of-God narration give credibility to what is being represented on screen, it also implies a sense of objectivity, despite the fact that documentaries are often presented with some kind of subjectivity. Nichols describes the emphasis on the narrating voice in expository documentaries as a “reversal of the traditional emphasis in film” as the images become secondary to support, “illustrate, illuminate, evoke, or act in counterpoint to what is said” (2017, p. 122). Adopting an evidentiary editing style also maintains the argument being put forward by the narration or title cards on screen. Evidentiary editing “may sacrifice spatial and temporal continuity to rope in images from far-flung places” (Nichols, 2017, p. 123). What Nichols is referring to here is the tendency for expository documentaries to include images from the world that do not appear to have immediate relevance to the documentary topic or subjects in order to help shape the arguments within the text. This is also a convention of the poetic mode, but with differing effects.

2.6.1.2 Reflexive

The reflexive mode depends on the filmmaker’s engagement with the audience, directly addressing the audience in relation to the topic of the documentary and the issues that often centre around production. It is as if the documentarian is ‘reflecting’ upon the process of

representing, making the audience aware of their presence and influence on the documentary's production. Reflexive documentaries often include observational, and participatory footage, sometimes of the filmmaker themselves, asking audience members to “*see documentary* for what it is: a construct or representation” rather than “*seeing through documentaries*” (Nichols, 2017, p. 125) and taking them at face value. In doing so, the reflexive mode forces the viewers to question the assumptions and expectations that they have about documentary films, particularly in relation to authenticity and accuracy. Realism is a style that is constructed through evidentiary and continuity editing, often associated with the expository mode.

2.6.1.3 Observational

Documentaries of the observational mode strive to reveal the truth through uninterrupted filming of a situation or subjects. The filmmaker literally ‘observes’ this situation or interaction unfold in front of them, without interfering or being reflexive in the way of making their presence known to the audience. The observational mode is described by Nichols (2017) as “fly on the wall” filmmaking because it utilises codes and conventions of direct cinema (p. 137). These conventions include handheld shots (which were possible due to the invention of portable cameras in the 1950’s), long takes, tracking shots and diegetic sound. The footage is often edited together in its raw form, without the inclusion of music, voice-overs or intertitles. While these codes and conventions strengthen the realism of the film, they also bring with them ethical concerns. Nichols (2017) wonders if the act of observing others is “voyeuristic” in the sense the participant’s lives are being looked at through a “keyhole” (p. 133) for the world to see. This runs the risk of situating participants in an uncomfortable position if the observation takes priority over the documentarian actually

engaging with the participant (Nichols, 2017). These ethical concerns raise the following questions: when is it the filmmaker's ethical responsibility to intervene? Is it ever the responsibility for the filmmaker to do so? These ethical concerns are especially relevant when the documentary deals with sensitive subject matter such as child abuse or the participants are put in traumatic situations where they are at an increased risk of experiencing harm.

2.6.1.4 Participatory

In reaction to the observational mode, the participatory mode of representation encourages the interaction between the filmmaker and participants to collaboratively shape the direction of the film. The filmmaker is positioned as a 'participant' of their own documentary who is seen and/or heard at some point of the film (Nichols, 2017). The audience may hear the documentarian ask the participant a question and watch the participant candidly answer it. Documentaries of other modes usually omit the interview questions being asked and go straight to representing the answers of the participants, without giving the audience an indication of how the filmmaker may have elicited responses or prompted further discussion. The participatory mode allows the documentarian to become a "social actor (almost) like any other (almost like any other because the filmmaker retains the camera, and with it a degree of potential power and control over events)" (Nichols, 2017, p. 139-140).

2.6.1.5 Poetic

Arising from avant-garde experimentation, the poetic documentary mode is classified by modernist characteristics such as fragmentation, emotionalism and ambiguity (Nichols, 2010). The filmmaker's concerns are focused more on the form of the film than on the participants and actors (Nichols, 2010). The filmmaker's vision takes priority over

“demonstrating the camera’s ability to record what it saw faithfully and accurately” (Nichols, 2010, p. 129). Documentaries of the poetic mode often present time and space discontinuously, using temporal and spatial juxtapositions to do so (Nichols, 2017). Such abstract representations may lead to a weak indexical bond between what is being visually represented on screen and the historical world.

2.6.1.6 Performative

Nichols argues that the “performative documentary underscores the complexity of our knowledge of the world by emphasising its subjective and affective dimensions” (p. 149). This may be achieved by drawing on acting to bring the emotional intensities of the presented situation to the viewers. This acting is to “embody the experience and knowledge of the documentarian. Bruzzi (2006) disagrees with Nichol’s use of the term, arguing that all documentaries are “performative acts, inherently fluid and unstable and informed by issues of performance and performativity” (p. 2). Bruzzi refers to Judith Butler and her work on gender performativity to make this argument, concluding that “the ethos behind the modern performative documentary is to present subjects in such a way as to accentuate the fact that the camera and crew are inevitable intrusions that alter any situation, they enter” (p. 190).

Finally, documentaries and their fluidity involve audiences who have assumptions and expectations about what a documentary should be. Nichols (2017) states that “the sense that a film is a documentary lies in the mind of the beholder as much as it lies in the film’s context or structure” (p. 23). Common audience assumptions include that documentaries are about reality, real people and they represent truthful stories (Nichols, 2017).

2.6.2 Applying Nichols' theory, critiques and limitations

I have applied Nichols' documentary mode theory within this study because it provides a unique framework in which the documentaries may be analysed through discourse and affect analysis. Applying this framework allowed me to identify the representational strategies and consider the strengths and weaknesses of each mode, their codes and conventions and thus the representations made. Another aspect of Nichols' theory of documentary modes that makes it most suitable for my study is that the modes do not represent a rigid set of codes and conventions that a documentary must meet. Rather, documentaries may slip in and out of modes as filmmakers utilise a hybridity of mode specific codes and conventions. Nichols has actually been critiqued by documentary theorist Stella Bruzzi (2006) for being too reductive in the sense that his model represents "a family tree that seeks to explain the evolution of documentary along linear, progressive lines" (p. 3), as if the "expository documentary is attributed to 1930s, the observational documentary to the 1960s, and so on through to the performative documentary, attributed to the 1980s-90s" (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 3). Scholar Michael Chanan (2007) has also criticised Nichols for the same reasons. Bruzzi raises a reasonable concern that at the time, catalysed a productive dialogue amongst documentary theorists. Bruzzi encouraged Nichols to re-conceptualise his theory, which led to Nichols' emphasising the flexibility of the model in re-publications of his work. Nichols states that the documentary mode theory does not try to bound modes exactly in relation to specific historical periods, rather, "differing documentary modes may seem to provide a history of documentary film, but they do so imperfectly" (2010, p. 159). The modes "overlap and intermingle" (Nichols, 2001, p. 34), but of course their origins are going to be associated with specific time periods due to the fact that technological advancements have made applying representational strategies possible or easier; just like the invention of the portable camera in the 1960's, which facilitated a growth in documentarians adopting fly-on-the wall editing techniques of

the observational mode that rose to prominence in the 60's. While I agree with Nichols, Bruzzi's concerns are still important to consider. By critiquing Nichols' approach, Bruzzi, provides an alternative perspective to the discussions surrounding documentary theory, where Nichols' voice has, for many years, held a place of dominance. Bruzzi challenges the dominance of the male voice in documentary studies, interjecting a fresh, female breath of air into this area of scholarship.

2.7 Documentary, representational strategies and trauma

Applying representational strategies can be vital to the creation of documentaries about child abuse and trauma. Representational strategies can make representing the unrepresentable possible. This refers to the idea that representational strategies can enable "the representation of subjective states of mind" (Roe, 2013, p. 25), which may not have been possible without the application of certain strategies. For example, a documentarian may use stop-motion animation to bring to life a child's drawing to represent their state of mind. Wright (2007) argues that the creations of children are usually manifested by their own experiences, thoughts, body and emotions. When children create through drawing, colouring, painting or whatever it may be, it helps the child comprehend their own feelings, and it helps others to understand the child's thoughts and emotions. Children often use "signs to create meaning and to represent reality within the medium of drawing-telling" (Wright, 2007, p. 37). Such signs may include "produced images e.g people and objects which might also include written letters, words, numbers, symbols (flags) and graphic devices (e.g whoosh lines behind a car)" (Wright, 2007, p. 37). Animating these signs can suggest that a child's hand is involved in the processes of the stop motion, evoking a sense of intimacy in the audience to bring about "emotional resonance" (Wright, 2007, p. 8). Roe (2013) explains how displaying animation

in this way not only brings upon awareness, but also “understanding and compassion from the audience for a subject position potentially far removed from its own” (p. 25).

Additionally, representational strategies can be vital for the creation of documentaries about child abuse as they may help reconcile ethical concerns associated with the film and the discourses presented. Due to the stigma that comes with discussing child abuse, a participant may be reluctant to do so. Concealing their identity from the audience may be the only way that a participant will agree to discuss such important yet stigmatised discourses on screen. To achieve anonymity, a documentarian may manipulate the footage from the participant interview, blurring out their face and distorting their voice. Applying these representational strategies allows the documentarian to present discourses about child abuse while maintaining their ethical obligations to the participant. However, representational strategies can also create concerns for the audience, especially in relation to their expectation of receiving the ‘truth’. Maintaining the anonymity of participants can give the audience the impression that the representations on screen are fabricated. The participant could be a hired actor and the audience members would not know. Concealing the facial expressions of a participant may add to the audiences’ doubt as it removes a sense of intimacy and disconnects the audience from the experience of the participant. This is where applying a representational strategy like animation would be useful. Animating the participants in an unrecognisable way, yet still allowing their emotions to be seen, may bring a sense of intimacy to the documentary that otherwise would have been lost.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the theories of communication that were dominant before the conceptualisation of the Circuit of Culture, and I have explained why these theories are not appropriate to apply to my research. I have introduced the Circuit of Culture and justified why this theory is suitable to apply to my study in conjunction with the documentary modes of representation. I have referred to my own diagram to explain the interrelatedness of my research objectives, requiring the process of articulation to meet each one. I conclude this chapter by arguing that the application of representational strategies can be vital to the representation of child abuse and trauma due to ethical concerns that are may be associated with such stigmatising discourse and the involvement of participants. The literature surrounding documentary ethics will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: (Autobiographical) Documentary, Ethics and Trauma

3.1 Introduction

Ethical consideration must be at the centre of all documentary filmmaking. In this chapter, I will explain why this is, and highlight the historical lack of literature surrounding documentary ethics. Following this, I will explain that there is a constant call from scholars for more academic literature in this field as a result of the ever-changing nature of documentaries. Additionally, I will theorise that the world has potentially undergone a socio-cultural paradigm shift into an ‘era of accountability’, further influencing an interest in documentary ethics scholarship. I will then argue that documentaries are context bound, which means that negotiating ethical concerns must be situational in relation to the participants, the audience and the filmmakers. The second half of this chapter acknowledges the criticisms surrounding autobiography, including the notion that autobiography should not belong in the cinematic realm and that autobiography is simply an act of confession for women. I argue against both of these claims. I conclude this chapter by arguing that autobiographical documentaries can present additional ethical concerns or further complicate existing concerns, yet they can also present therapeutic outcomes for the reflexive filmmaker and the participants when discussing child abuse.

3.2 The centrality of ethics

In Nichol’s (2010) novel *Introduction to Documentary*, he argues that ethical consideration must be central to documentary filmmaking as documentaries are a site of rhetoric, representing the historical world in three ways. Firstly, documentaries provide audiences with

a depiction of some aspect of the world that “bears a recognizable familiarity” (2010, p. 2) to what they have experienced before in real life. Viewing or hearing something that one believes to be part of the ‘real’ world acts as a “basis for belief” in relation to the representations depicted within a documentary (Nichols, 2010, p. 42). The power inherently held by the photographic image and its indexical bond with the historical world influences viewers to digest the content in documentaries as pure facts – it is as if reality itself is simply being “re-presented” through the lens of a camera (Nichols, 2010, p. 43). The idea that ‘cameras never lie’ has been prevalent since the rise of photography and has transferred over into the realms of moving images. Within documentary practices the camera is often referred to as a “truth serum”, meaning that a viewer may feel like participants are revealing ‘too much’ about themselves, so much so that it may seem involuntary (Marles, 2013, n.p).

Secondly, Nichols argues that documentary films are constructed strategically to represent reality in a distinct way. This strategic construction may also represent the interests of a group of people through adopting a “representative democracy” within the filming process (Nichols, 2010, p. 43). This involves filmmakers electing individuals to represent the interests of a group of people, company or institution. Furthermore, documentarians themselves may adopt the position of a “public representative”, speaking for the interests of others, for the documentary participants and for the agency and/or institution supporting the production of the film (Nichols, 2010, p. 43). Representational strategies may also be employed to further perpetuate the narratives being pushed by the representatives or the documentarians by making them look credible or trustworthy enough for viewers to consume the discourses presented without question.

Thirdly, Nichols (2010) argues that documentaries present representations of real life in ways that are similar to how a lawyer might represent a client, “they make a case for a particular interpretation of the evidence before us” (p. 43-44). Due to the power that the filmmaker holds over the construction of their documentary and the control they possess over the three ways of representing the historical world, there are opportunities for filmmakers to take advantage of their privilege by misrepresenting participants and discourses. Although this is often done unintentionally, documentarians still have the opportunity to represent certain agendas, supported by manipulated ‘evidence’ and information that is out of context and cherry-picked. With rapid technological advancements making digital manipulation easier to produce and financially cheaper to do so, documentarians are more likely to mislead viewers with constructed representations to promote certain agendas through discourse than ever before. It is important to note here that, I am not suggesting that all documentarians are highly deceptive and untrustworthy. Many documentarians believe that they are presenting the ‘truth’ in the representations that they construct, even when misleading the audience. Rather, it has become easier for the documentarians who are deceptive to mislead viewers and promote their agendas. The power, control and privilege inherently held by the filmmaker, combined with the notion of documentary film already being a site of power, presents ethical implications for participants, viewers and the filmmakers. Specific ethical concerns will be discussed further in this chapter.

3.3 A lack of literature

Despite the centrality of ethics within documentary practices, this has been an extremely neglected area of academic discussion for decades. In Brian Winston’s book, *Claiming the real: The documentary film revisited* (1995), he puts this initial lack of interest by academics,

documentarians and viewers down to Grierson's (1933) definition of a documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality" (p. 8). Winston (1995) states that Grierson's definition positions documentary texts as art forms, perpetuating the notion that documentaries are exempt from ethical concerns and that documentarians are excused from considering ethics. It was not until the late 1970's that discourse around documentary codes of ethics and the ethical responsibility of documentarians started to be discussed in scholarly literature (Winston, 2000). Calvin Pryluck (1976) was one of the first scholars to heavily emphasise the need for discourse surrounding documentary ethics through an examination of the ethical concerns associated with direct cinema. Pryluck (1976) argued that "while one can argue about whether we can even know what really happens, inevitably in filming actuality, moments are recorded that the people being photographed might not wish to make widely public," (p. 256). Pryluck balanced this idea by considering the audience's right to know the 'truth' and participant wellbeing, emphasising the importance of the relationship between the filmmaker and participant. In 1991, Nichols recognised an "absence of a substantial body of work on [ethical issues in documentary practices]" (p. 72), despite the small growth in literature that was experienced in the 1970's. In 1995, Winston argued that documentarians, including his academic colleagues and documentarians Robert Flaherty and Grierson, failed to give their participants enough ethical attention; ethics had simply been wiped from the attention of documentarians altogether. Macha Louis Rosenthal (1988), a poet, critic and educator, added that "the relationship of ethical considerations to film practice is one of the most important yet at the same time one of the most neglected topics in the documentary field" (p. 245). In the past 20 years, research surrounding documentary ethics has continued to be described as sparse by scholars such as Kate Nash (2010; 2011) and Willemien Sanders (2010). The consistent acknowledgment by academics regarding the minimal existing research on this topic demonstrates the centrality of ethics to documentary practitioners as

well as those involved as participants. The existing discourses surrounding documentary ethics are complex and there is much debate on how to navigate such ethical issues.

3.3.1 A constant call for more literature

The constantly evolving nature of documentaries is a contributing factor to the call for more research and to the ever-growing interest by scholars in the area of documentary ethics. Pryluck (1976) identified a shift in the nature and definition of documentaries in the 1970's, arguing that the rise of direct cinema brought with it intense ethical concerns and that prior to this they were controllable. However, Pryluck (1976) failed to expand upon what he means by manageable ethical issues, making it quite difficult to understand why he believed that direct cinema brought with it so many ethical issues. I believe that there would have been ethical issues prior to the rise of direct cinema, but because documentary was positioned as an 'art form', they would have been left undiscussed by documentarians. Nevertheless, I believe the main point Pryluck was suggesting here is that as the definition of what a documentary film expands and changes, so does the potential for ethical concerns. I agree with this stance, as I have touched upon in my discussion of the theorisation of documentary modes in chapter 2. Today, it is common for documentarians to adopt various modes of representation, their codes and conventions, and to apply a plethora of audio-visual representational strategies. As documentarians are straying away from only applying codes and conventions from the traditional expository mode, creating hybrid documentaries has become the 'norm'. In fact, I do not believe that any documentary, let alone a documentary made in the 21st century, utilises codes and conventions from just one mode; they are all hybrids in some way or another. Furthermore, the continuous development and emergence of new visual and aural technologies means that it has become easier (and will continue to become easier) for

filmmakers to apply a broad array of representational strategies. This is especially the case for independent documentarians who rarely have enormous production budgets, are often reliant on the use of their own filming and editing equipment, and who are often reliant on the skills and knowledge of a likely small production crew. As the documentary genre is undergoing a period of revitalisation (Anderst, 2017), combined with the ever-changing nature of documentaries and the widespread adoption of various codes and conventions, it is only understandable that there is a constant call for more literature in the field.

3.3.2 An era of accountability

Although academic literature surrounding documentary ethics is still minimal, I believe that the last 20 years has seen an influx of scholars, documentarians, filmmakers, film critics and viewers critically questioning ethics surrounding all kinds of representations across a wide range of texts, including documentary films. This critical attention to ethics has possibly encouraged scholars' recent call for more literature surrounding documentary ethics. Only a couple of decades ago, an 'anything goes' kind of attitude existed in relation to media representations. Only a decade ago, it was easier for filmmakers of all genres to represent racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic and ableist discourse without receiving the huge amount of back-lash from viewers and critics that such discourse would garner today. Viewers would often consume these texts without raising concerns, likely because the representations they saw were normalised. They also did not have access to social media as conveniently as we do now which is where a lot of discourse surrounding representation in the media transpires. Now, this compliant 'anything goes' perspective has undergone a major cultural shift and has been replaced by an accountability culture. For example, recently in June of 2020, Tiny Fey removed multiple episodes of her award-winning sit-com series 30

Rock from streaming platforms. The episodes in question contained representations of blackface, perpetuating racist stereotypes and discourses. When Fey wrote and aired these episodes 9 to 14 years ago, they were considered comical by herself and many viewers. Now, they are considered problematic by viewer's and by Fey herself, who released a public apology soon after removing the episodes. Social movements, such as MeToo and BlackLivesMatter also indicate that the appetite for 'anything goes' has been diminished. As part of the MeToo movement, in 2017 multiple actresses came forward on various social media platforms with sexual assault allegations against film and television producer Harvey Weinstein. As a result, Weinstein was charged and convicted, and it encouraged many other abuse survivors to come forward with their stories of trauma and abuse. Presently in a digital age, social media platforms are being used to amplify oppressed voices, to challenge harmful representations and to seek accountability from those who are responsible for the representations in question; by those in positions of power and by those who are not. While there are various potential political, personal, technological and social explanations for why this paradigm shift is happening now, I can not discuss them all in depth here. They are extremely complex and heavily debated discourses and delving into such discussions would open a can of worms. What is most significant to note here in relation to my study is that representations, within media texts and outside of media texts, are being critiqued and spoken about like never before due to a potential paradigm shift towards a culture of accountability. In turn, this has encouraged scholars to call for more academic studies surrounding the representational ethics of documentary film.

3.3.3 A critique of the existing literature

The existing literature surrounding documentary practices and ethics has been criticised by Nash (2011) for being saturated with the use of textual analysis as a primary research methodology. Nash (2011) recognises the importance of scholars developing a code of ethics for documentary practices, for both filmmakers and educators. However, Nash (2011) claims that textual analysis can not address ethical issues that present themselves beyond the documentary text itself. This means that, while representational strategies and the potential ethical issues associated can be identified through the application of textual analysis, the perspectives of the filmmakers and participants in relation to these concerns are not accounted for. Textual analysis also fails to consider the reception of a text post-release and can not account for the unpredictable ethical issues that may crop up following its release. Consequently, Nash (2011) has called for a shift towards applying more empirical research methods, such as practice-led research to address the ethical dimension of documentary filmmaking and better understand how filmmakers negotiate the ethical concerns they encounter. I agree with Nash's stance that the use of textual analysis is widespread in this area, and that textual analysis limits the researcher from looking beyond the text and their own interpretation of it. These limitations of textual analysis have influenced my decision to apply both discourse analysis and affect analysis to analyse documentaries dealing with child abuse, neglect and trauma. Furthermore, I will be drawing upon interviews and scholarly autoethnographic accounts by some of the reflexive documentary creators to ensure the conclusions I draw are informed by the experiences and perspectives of the filmmakers and the filmmakers as participants.

While I agree that empirical research methods are beneficial in understanding ethics and the documentary filmmaking process, at some universities empirical research is not supported at

master's level as it is believed to best be undertaken at a doctoral level. Research experience is deemed necessary before venturing out to involve participants. I strongly believe that the current focus and methodology of this thesis will be beneficial for the future empirical research that I will conduct. Completing textual analyses now will allow me to go into doctorate research with a critical understanding of the existing information surrounding documentary ethics.

3.4 Documentary as context bound

I agree with Nash regarding the prevalence of textual analysis, but I do not believe that textual analyses are redundant, or that they are not of value when determining potential ethical issues. This is because ethical issues can be generated by the visual and aural representational strategies used by filmmakers; issues that the filmmaker may not realise are present. In 1988, academics and filmmakers John Stuart Katz and Judith Milstein Katz argued that the aesthetics of a documentary will have an impact on ethical issues.

Representational strategies, which may be used to create aesthetic elements of a film, can perpetuate or help reconcile a viewer's affective experience. Participants and viewers have the potential to be affected negatively (and in a range of diverse ways) by these representations, so relying on only the filmmaker's interpretation of the representations made will not account for the experience of the participants or viewers of a documentary. Secondly, the evolving conventions and representational practices exhibited by documentaries means that documentary scholars should be consistently analysing these texts – by applying all kinds of research methods, including textual analysis. Documentarians and scholars of media studies, representation, ethics and trauma, can learn from textual analyses to develop new visual and aural ways of representing. Even if these ways of representing are not 'new' in the

sense that they have never been done before by any filmmaker, I argue that they will be ‘new’ in the sense that they are context bound representations. No documentary will mirror the representations made in another documentary, with or about the same people. Consequently, no ethical concerns will ever be exactly the same or negotiated in exactly the same way, which is why the construction of the documentary text itself must be considered.

The context bound nature of documentaries is also evident throughout existing literature surrounding documentary ethics. Scholars have had contesting beliefs about specific ethical concerns or have had different focuses in their work about documentary ethics because the filmmaking process is different for each documentarian and participant. Documentarian and scholar Craig Gilbert (1982) centred his work around the production of his film, *An American Family* (1973), and his issues with representation and consent. Issues of informed consent have been explored for years, leading some scholars to believe that it is almost impossible to obtain (Gross, Katz & Ruby, 1988; Katz, 2003; Pryluck, 2005; Ruby 2005a; Ruby 2005b; Nichols 1991; Winston 2000). However, Winston (2000) also argues that if a documentary is being created for social and political reasons, the need for informed consent should be waived. Rosenthal (1988) believes that documentary ethics should centre around the participant and how filmmakers “should treat people in films so as to avoid exploiting them and causing unnecessary suffering” (p. 245). Winston (1995) and Maccarone (2010) suggest that power imbalances between the filmmaker and participant should be the focus point of ethical consideration. These differing discourses surrounding documentary ethics demonstrates the wide range of ethical concerns associated with documentary filmmaking, which are dependent on the context in which the documentary is created.

Due to the context bound nature of documentaries, I believe that textual analysis does have a place in the realm of documentary ethics and research – there is something to be said, critiqued and learnt from through the analysis of all documentaries, now more than ever with the influx of documentaries being created, the growth in hybridised documentaries and their ever-expanding accessibility; documentaries can be accessed through various streaming platforms such as Netflix, Neon or Lightbox, through academic databases, by purchasing the (digital or physical) film directly from the filmmaker’s website, or by illegally downloading them.

3.5 Situational ethics: Participants, audiences and filmmakers

The negotiation of ethical concerns must be situational due to the context bound nature of documentaries. Blanket statements about whether or not an aspect of a documentary’s construction is ethical are often redundant; there are no one size fits all rules for being ethical in documentary practices. An empirical report conducted by Professor Patricia Aufderheide et al., (2009) discusses the ethical concerns encountered by 41 documentarians, and the subsequent negotiation of these issues. Aufderheide et al., (2009) states that majority of the documentarians “resolved these conflicts on an ad-hoc basis and argued routinely for situational, case-by-case ethical decisions” (p. 1). While there are no fixed rules or solutions for reconciling ethical issues that can be applied across all documentaries, various scholars have acknowledged areas of concern that documentarians must consider: the participants, the audience and the filmmakers (themselves and their colleagues). In association with these areas of ethical concern, documentarians generally share ethical codes or principles that allow them to “address the imbalance of power that often arises between filmmakers and both their

subjects and their audience” (Nichols, 2006, para. 8). These areas and the correlating ethical codes are outlined below.

Nichols (2006) argues that ethical consideration must be given to the participants, or subjects of the documentary due to the representational power that the documentarian holds. Nichols (2006) states that the power imbalance between the documentarian and subject may be measured by considering how much influence the subject has over their own representation. The less control the subject possesses over their representation, the more vulnerable the subject is to misrepresentation, exploitation, abuse and being “cast into the position of a victim” (para. 13). Additionally, the documentarian’s ethical responsibility towards a subject must extend beyond the film. This involves considering how the representations a documentarian makes may impact the subject’s life outside of the film (Rothwell, 2008). This is of utmost importance when the documentary involves discourse surrounding sensitive subject matter, such as child abuse and trauma. Discussing topics such as the aforementioned may put the participant at risk of being harmed (physically or psychologically) if, for example, their abusers are still involved in their lives and are concerned about their reputations being tarnished.

Secondly, Nichols (2006) argues that ethical consideration must be given to the audience, particularly in relation to the representations made. Viewers of documentaries may hold the expectation that what they are viewing is truthful, or relative to the historical world. This is not always the case as there is always the possibility that a documentarian has misrepresented someone or something, intentionally or unintentionally. Visual images can not be taken at face value because they are able to be “altered both during and after the fact by both

conventional and digital techniques” (Nichols, 2017, p. 29). These two areas of ethical concern identified by Nichols echo arguments made by scholars Larry Gross, Katz and Ruby (1988) in the book they edited, *Image ethics: The moral rights of subjects in photographs, film, and television*. Since the publication of this novel, Gross et al. (2003) have published another book titled *Image Ethics in the Digital Age*, demonstrating the need for constant expansion of research in the area of ethics and digital media (including documentaries). Gross et al. (1988) argues that four areas of ethical responsibility must be considered by documentary filmmakers, including the participants and audience. Documentarians have a responsibility of being transparent with their audience about how a documentary is constructed, and that they should work under the assumption that viewers have a ‘right’ to know. Ruby (as cited in Rosenthal, 1988) adds that "the audience must be made aware of methods, biases, deceptions, artifices and the like in order to understand where the film is coming from" (p. 250-251). Both areas of ethical concern and the debates that surround their negotiation have brought about the following code of ethical conduct: “do nothing that would violate the humanity of your subject and nothing that would compromise the trust of your audience” (Nichols, 2006, para. 10). Although this code is vague, Nichols states that “this vagueness is not accidental” (para. 10). This is because documentaries are context bound, meaning that the negotiation of ethical issues and how this code may be applied will depend on the historical context in which they are situated.

The third area of ethical concern is the responsibility filmmakers must have for themselves and their colleagues; their creative freedom should remain as much as possible throughout the construction of the film (Nichols, 1991; Gross et al., 1988). I believe that this area of ethical concern is just as important as the other two, but there is a lack of literature surrounding how to protect filmmakers from harm. The focus has centred around participants and viewers due

to the powerful position that documentarians are effortlessly in. However, leaving the wellbeing of filmmakers out of the conversation of ethics can cause them harm, especially if they are dealing with sensitive subject matter. A documentarian and scholar, Kym Melzer (2019) argues that more attention must be given to the documentarian by scholars as there is little existing knowledge about how filmmakers can be protected against emotional harm and vicarious trauma. Melzer reflects on her own experience as a filmmaker, stating that she experienced ‘vicarious trauma’ due to the sensitive subject matter that her film discussed; post-traumatic stress disorder. Screen and media studies academic Jan Cattoni (as cited in Melzer, 2019) describes vicarious trauma as trauma and pain that have been “passed on to and shared with the listener” (p. 40). Melzer (2019) argues that “emotions are entangled in filmmaking” (p. 40), yet scholars and documentarians fail to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the filmmaking process and the documentarian’s psyche.

3.6 Autobiographical documentary and ethics

When documentary films about child abuse are autobiographical, further ethical concerns may be raised and existing concerns may be complicated. Before delving into these concerns, I will describe the criticisms of autobiography and justify why I believe that autobiography has a place within the audio-visual realm of documentary film.

3.6.1 The contested nature of autobiography

Originally autobiography took the form of written text, including poetry, novels and memoirs. When autobiography started to become integrated into visual ways of representing, including experimental art films and documentaries, English professor Elizabeth Bruss argued that “there is no real cinematic equivalent for autobiography” (1980, p. 296). Bruss

maintains that autobiography has no place in the realm of the visual because in autobiography, the distinct roles of being an author, narrator and protagonist should be combined and taken on by one individual. Bruss argues that the collaborative filmmaking process disrupts any autobiographical authorship, due to its involvement of separate production stages and the delegation of roles to multiple people. The collaborative process of filmmaking compromises the “unquestionable integrity of the speaking subject” (Bruss, 1980, p. 304) because of the many opportunities that the team of filmmakers will have to alter the discourses being put forward by the autobiographer. I take issue with Bruss’ argument. Presently, filmmaking does not have to involve large groups. In response to Bruss, Professor Tony Dowmunt (2013) admits that filmmaking does usually require the help of creative groups, but avant-garde practices have always managed without; documentaries can be made with the involvement of only a few. To add to Dowmunt’s argument, I believe that independent filmmaking is only increasing with the advancement of new technologies. Filmmakers are becoming more self-reliant, often embodying multiple roles throughout their filmmaking process to avoid having to comply with the wants of production companies. Bruss’ argument is also contradictory as it could also be applied to autobiographical novels that have been published under a contract with organisations. The representations made by the autobiographer may be restricted by the wants and needs of the publishing company. This often leads to negotiation between the publishing company or editor and the autobiographer, shaping the final outcome of the autobiography. Furthermore, ‘ghost writers’ are often employed to write autobiographies, gaining control of the narrative while still crediting the subject of the autobiography as the author. If autobiography can exist in written forms that have undergone manipulation, then autobiographical storytelling has a place within the manipulated, cinematic realm of the audio-visual.

3.6.2 Autobiography as ‘confessional’

Autobiographical texts created by women have been criticised since their emergence in the form of writing as ‘confessional’ rather than political and ‘literary’ as men’s autobiography is often interpreted as. The notion of confessional texts was first voiced in 1959 by Rosenthal. Rosenthal (1959) used the term ‘confessional’ to describe poet Robert Lowell’s poetry collection, *Life Studies*. While Rosenthal’s critique was directed at Lowell, who identified as a man, the term quickly became used to describe the autobiographical work of women. Rosenthal (1967) believed that Sylvia Plath, an iconic autobiographical poet and novelist, was a confessional poet and storyteller because Plath put her own experiences and psychological vulnerability at the centre of her work. Confessional texts and women became widely accepted by critics as synonymous, implying that confessional texts were exclusively created by emotional women for other emotional women. Academic and educator Cathe Shubert (2015) argues that “the hyper-awareness of a woman writer’s biography has always, always garnered more attention than a male writer’s” (para. 3). Critics of autobiographical writing negatively comment almost exclusively on the work of women. (Shubert 2015). Academic and blog editor Latoya Peterson argues that “men write these kinds of pieces all the time. They just aren’t seen in the same, marginalising light...for some reason, the lives of men are inherently [considered] more serious affairs than the lives of women” (as cited in Spencer, 2015, para. 7). Petersen also highlights the fact that anyone other than white, heterosexual men are likely to be labelled confessional, especially women who are not white. Even though women’s autobiography is often labelled as confessional, it is important to note here that not all women will have the same experiences or face the same level of discrimination. Peterson raises this point, arguing that:

This overshare, gross-out phenomenon of “first-person writing” is generally a door that leads to more fame and work *for white women*. It is selling pieces of yourself to

get bylines. This route to publication and a book/movie deal simply is not open for non-white women. Society sees women of color's shameless writing as proof of deviance, not a relatable and fun story to share on social media. (as cited in Spencer, 2015, para. 7)

This derisive and patriarchal trend is still prevalent today, only now the label of confessional autobiography has been plastered across all forms of visual culture that involve autobiographical elements, including documentary film.

This discourse suggests that women's experiences and the autobiographical documentaries created in relation are something to be ashamed of, and that they do not belong in a political space as men's experiences do. Furthermore, autobiographical documentarian and scholar Michelle Citron (2000) argues that labelling an autobiographical text as confessional implies that women should feel guilty for representing their experiences, thoughts and feelings. This leads Citron (2000) to pose the question: "what, precisely, are we [women] guilty of? And who, exactly, pays?" (p. 4). I argue that autobiographical filmmakers who identify as women reap the negative effects of this guilt due to the patriarchal connotations associated with the autobiographical act; that it is a man's world and a women's take on this world is "at best self-indulgent, at worst narcissistic" (Citron, 2000, p. 4). This has the potential to leave women second-guessing their autobiographical impulse to share a part of their life which can manifest into emotional distress. Women's stories are often silenced because of their own self-doubt, which also has its roots in the patriarchal history of autobiography. The label also 'others' minorities, perpetuating white supremacist ideologies by silencing the voices of anyone who does not fit the criteria of being white. I strongly disagree with the use of the

term “confessional” to describe any autobiographical act; by any gender identity for the reasons stated above. I believe that the label merely exists to silence and condescend women, and anyone who is not white. The label shifts focus from topics that provoke uneasiness, such as domestic violence, child abuse, neglect and assault, to a focus that paints women as ‘emotional’ and ‘hysterical’, or to a focus that paints anyone who is not white as inferior. When autobiographers are called ‘confessional’ for speaking on these topics, it perpetuates guilt, shame, and ultimately stigma surrounding the discussion of topics that are already stigmatised and in need of exposure. This is why the making of autobiographical documentaries needs to be seen for what it is, a political act, regardless of gender identity, ethnicity, sexuality and social status.

3.7 Autobiographical ethics and the therapeutic outcomes of autobiography

Autobiographical documentaries generally present further ethical concerns in relation to the filmmaker, participants and audience for several reasons that all relate to the deeply personal nature of these films. Unlike much of the literature surrounding documentary ethics, the discussion surrounding ethics in autobiographical documentary filmmaking has a strong focus around the ethical concerns in relation to the filmmaker. This is because autobiographical documentaries place filmmakers in a reflexive position, becoming both the documentary’s creator and a participant simultaneously. Citron (1999) states that “autobiographical work is connected to pre-existing tensions in a video or filmmaker's life”. (p. 273). These tensions, often involving family members, may raise concerns in relation to what can or should be represented. For example, if the autobiographer themselves or a subject discusses childhood trauma, they may need to consider the members of their family that are tied to their experiences and wonder what their responses may be. The autobiographer also

has a greater responsibility to their participants as they are often family members. Further positioning the autobiographer in an undue position of power, Citron adds that “whatever happens in front of the camera must be lived with, by the artist and her family, for the rest of their lives together” (1999, p. 276). Adding to the arguments that Citron makes, I argue that autobiography can not exist without implicating others in some way, shape or form.

Autobiography is “an interactive genre, entwined in interpersonal relationships”. Even without the involvement of other participants, autobiography will always inadvertently involve the representation of others, through implied discourses, through the spoken discourses and by means of association with the autobiographer. This can make discussing trauma extremely difficult due to the guilt that may be wrapped up in potentially implicating others by speaking about the unspeakable (Roe, 2013) and moving the personal into the political. However, the audiences ‘right to know’ and the creative desires of the autobiographer brings about further ethical tensions. Katz and Katz also argue that the camera may become like a truth ‘serum’ in autobiography, encouraging subjects to say what they want, which may also further ethical concerns in relation to the audience. This is because viewers may feel as if participants are involuntarily revealing too much and may feel discomfort due to how intimate the discourses are. While I understand the concern about participants involuntarily disclosing information, I do not believe that evoking unease within the audience is a concern if such discomfort is derived from the exposure to discourses that are stigmatised.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a review on the literature surrounding documentary ethics. I began this chapter by explaining why ethics are central to documentary practices, drawing on

arguments made by Nichols. I have acknowledged the lack of literature surrounding documentary ethics, despite the constant call from scholars for more academic research to be undertaken in the field. Following this, I have theorised that the reason why scholars are calling for more research is possibly due to a societal paradigm shift towards a more accountable world where representations are being examined like never before.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This thesis strives to address the various gaps in media studies academia surrounding documentary films, discourse about childhood abuse and ethics in relation to documentary filmmaking. Two qualitative methods, discourse analysis and affect analysis have been used in conjunction with the applied theories to uncover what discourses surrounding child abuse, neglect and trauma are present in the documentary texts, how these discourses have been represented (representational strategies) and what ethical concerns are associated with the discourses and the representational strategies. This chapter will explain and justify my qualitative approach, my application of discourse and affect analysis and will discuss the most prominent critiques surrounding these methods and the limitations they present to my research design.

4.2 A qualitative approach

Before delving into the research methods used in this thesis, I would like to make it clear that this research is qualitative in nature, implicating the research design in several ways.

Qualitative research seeks to inductively “make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3), whereas quantitative research seeks to deductively quantify a theory. As applied researcher and academic author Michael Patton (2002) argues, interpreting meanings from data is the essential goal of a qualitative researcher. This notion aligns itself well with the goal of applying du Gay et al.’s (1997) Circuit of Culture framework; to articulate meaning across the five cultural sites.

Due to the interpretive ontological and epistemological positioning of a qualitative study, I have adopted a reflexive approach to this research. Reflexivity requires a “researcher to reflect upon their actions and values during research, whether in producing data or writing accounts” (Seale, 1998, p. 329). Reflexivity encourages the qualitative inquirer to be attentive and involves acknowledging the “cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective” (Patton, 2001, p. 65) which will inevitably influence the research outcomes. I will touch on and reflect upon these biases now. As I have described in chapter One, this thesis has its roots in my own experience of childhood abuse, neglect and trauma. Had this not been my experience, I would likely not possess the intense desire that I have to write this thesis with a specific focus on the representations of child abuse in documentary film. So, while this research project is not autobiographical in the sense that I am examining myself or my own creative work, much of the discourses within documentaries about child abuse, neglect and trauma that I have identified were a part of my experiences of childhood abuse. Consequently, my discussion of these discourses and representational strategies have been shaped by my own experiences, infusing elements of autobiography within my writing. It is also important to note that my identification of these discourses have likely been subconsciously influenced by the discourses I already knew to be present; in New Zealand culture and in my household growing up. It is possible that some quantitative researchers may deem it problematic for a child abuse survivor to conduct research about the representations surrounding childhood abuse. This is because qualitative research is largely critiqued for its subjectivity. However, as scholars argue it is impossible to eradicate bias from qualitative research (Thorne et al., 2015; Mehra, 2002). Qualitative research is often biased in some way or another as it relies on the researcher’s context, approach of analysis and drawing of conclusions. Communications scholar Arthur Bochner (2016) critiques traditional empirical research codes, wondering why researchers often fail to discuss the reason(s) why they are

conducting the research they are, what they are studying, and how personally intertwined they are with their research. The researcher, however, is a “presence” (Bochner, personal communication, 2016) that exists throughout the research project, influencing the research design and conclusions drawn. A researcher can not exist exclusively from the conclusions drawn. Consequently, Bochner argues that it is “an illusion to think we can minimise bias” (Bochner, personal communication, 2016). Extending upon this point, I argue that research about the researcher should never be left out of academic studies. What is important in qualitative research is not reliability, validity or objectivity, it is acknowledging the existence of bias and making it clear to the reader how such biases may influence the outcomes of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). If these personal truths were not disclosed in my research, my own subjectivity and emotionality would be hidden from individuals reading and examining my research and to anyone considering conducting research of a similar nature.

For these reasons, I have made it clear that the origins of my research are grounded in my personal experience of child abuse, despite this honesty magnifying my feeling of vulnerability. As this research is personally and intimately connected to my psyche, I have put myself in a vulnerable position while constructing this thesis. Consequently, as a researcher, as a filmmaker and as someone who has the privilege of being trauma-informed, it is my ethical responsibility to make the implications of this clear to the reader; to further understand the context in which this thesis has been conceptualised and to understand the potential personal risk factors of conducting research of a similar nature. Throughout the eighteen months while writing this thesis, there have been times where I have found myself emotionally overwhelmed; when researching, when writing and when analysing the documentaries. I have shed many tears over this process, some in anger, some in sadness and

some in euphoria. There have been moments where I have felt triggered when writing about the discourses of the cyclical nature of abuse; discourses that were very prevalent in my household growing up and that still haunt me. Yet, contrastingly, there have also been moments where I have felt intensely liberated; there is something very empowering about discussing my trauma (not just in this thesis, but when discussing my research with others and in general) when it has been silenced for so long. I imagine that this would be the case for many childhood abuse survivors in New Zealand because our stoic culture perpetuates this silence and stigma; sometimes it feels easier and safer to not say anything. Despite this project feeling like a double-edged-sword, I have persevered through the heartache in part thanks to anthropologist Ruth Behar, and her philosophy surrounding research connected to the personal. The concluding statement of Behar's autoethnographic novel, *The Vulnerable Observer*, argues that "anthropology [or research] that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore" (1996, p. 177). I have interpreted Behar's claim to mean that, when you conduct research that has personal ties to yourself as I am, you often experience emotional heartache. This heartache may intensify when the personal ties to the research matter involves trauma or abuse. However, despite the heartache, whatever the research topic, it is worth completing for the social change that may be influenced by it- and as I have re-discovered throughout my research, the sense of liberation and catharsis that comes with breaking the silence surrounding stigmatised discourses. Because of this experience, I hope to continue with higher education through an exploration of the therapeutic aspects of (autobiographical) documentary filmmaking, specifically when the topics surround child abuse, neglect and trauma.

4.3 Discourse

The term ‘discourse’ is used across disciplines and in a multitude of ways. Consequently, scholars such as Henry Widdowson (1995) argue that there is much confusion about what ‘discourse’ means and the concepts that concern it. To avoid such conceptual obscurity, I will define my use of discourse before discussing my use of CDA. Broadly speaking, there are two main approaches towards discourse and CDA; that of Teun van Dijk, whose socio-cognitive approach I do not find useful for this study, and that of Norman Fairclough, whose social approach I have applied within my use of the term ‘discourse’ and within my use of CDA. Among other critical linguists, van Dijk refers to the concept of language in a narrow sense, taking the stance that language, in which discourse manifests, “refers to linguistic aspects of wider social practices” (van Dijk, 2006, n.p). In other words, language is anything that is written or verbally spoken. I take issue with stance due to the how narrow the focus is, implying that written and verbal acts are the only forms in which language exists. This notion undermines the theoretical underpinnings of my research, specifically in relation to how meaning is made. As described in chapter 2, du Gay et al. (1997) states that meaning is social, articulated through the five cultural sites, requiring the process of articulation to decode such meanings. If discourses are only produced and found in a written or verbal text, then there would be no need to consider these “interconnected networks of social practices at play” (Wodak and Meyer, 2001, p. 122). Secondly, a linguistic take on language fails to account for other forms of semiosis such as audio-visual images like documentary film. Language such as bodily gesture and pose, verbal signs and non-verbal signifiers would be left out of the conversation. It would not be conducive to apply van Dijk's understanding because the audio-visual representational techniques of filmmaking will not be able to be analysed at all.

For these reasons, I align myself with the social approach to discourse, taken up by scholars such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996), Jan Blommaert (2005), and Fairclough (1992b; 1995; 2001). According to Fairclough (2001), “discourses are diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned - differently positioned social actors ‘see’ and represent social life in different ways, different discourses” (p. 232). Blommaert (2005) adds that discourse concerns and “...comprises all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connections with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments of use” (p. 2-3). Contrastingly, cognitivists believe that discourse is formed through the mental “cognitions of the participants” (van Dijk, 2006, p. 260), the “hierarchically structured networks, possibly organized by a number of fixed categories” of one’s life experiences” (van Dijk, 2006, p. 260). This fixed understanding of discourse reduces it down to something that is only constructed in one’s brain, a position that is at odds with Fairclough’s understanding of discourse as constantly in flux, moving and evolving through semiotic human activities.

4.4 Critical discourse analysis and affect analysis

Aligning myself with the social approach towards discourse has naturally led me to the application of Fairclough’s (1992a; 1992b; 1995; 2001) approach to CDA. Much like Hall theorises meaning as a product of the socio-cultural experiences of humans,

CDA sees discourse — language use in speech and writing — as a form of ‘social practice’. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned.

(Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258)

Continuing this argument, media and communications Professor Lillie Chouliaraki & Fairclough state that:

We see CDA as bringing a variety of theories into dialogue, especially social theories on the one hand and linguistic theories on the other, so that its theory is a shifting synthesis of other theories, though what it itself theorises in particular is the mediation between the social and the linguistic — the ‘order of discourse’, the social structuring of semiotic hybridity (interdiscursivity). The theoretical construction of discourse which CDA tries to operationalize can come from various disciplines, and the concept of ‘operationalisation’ entails working in a transdisciplinary way where the logic of one discipline (for example, sociology) can be ‘put to work’ in the development of another (for example, linguistics). (1999, p. 16)

The first stage of my discourse analysis has incorporated Hall’s suggestion on how to thoroughly conduct a textual analysis; by completing a “preliminary soak” (1979, p.15). This involved watching the three documentaries a few times over to gain a general understanding about the films. Following this, Fairclough’s model of CDA was used to conduct the discourse analyses. Divided into three parts, Fairclough summarises the model in the following way:

I see discourse as a complex of three elements: social practice, discursive practice (text production, distribution and consumption), and text, and the analysis of a specific discourse calls for analysis in each of these three dimensions and their interrelations. The hypothesis is that significant connections exist between features of texts, ways in which texts are put together and interpreted, and the nature of the social practice. (1995, p. 74)

Essentially, this framework presents three interrelated levels of analysis in which I have applied to all three documentaries in conjunction with the relevant theoretical frameworks. The first level of analysis is a ‘text analysis’; the analysis of the documentary texts themselves. This is the site of analysis where I have specifically applied Nichol’s documentary modes of representation to identify the codes and conventions used by the filmmakers and other audio-visual representational strategies used to represent certain discourses. I have also applied affect analysis, which provides analytical skills for examining the range of affects produced by specific representational strategies and also the discourses associated.

Affect analysis “illuminates the embodied processes and reactions of experiences” (Tait, 2016, p. 4). This method is particularly beneficial to apply to the analysis of films as affect is at the core of the audience’s experience (Plantinga & Tan, 2007). Furthermore, documentary films about child abuse and trauma are likely to contain emotionally charged discourses, evoking a range of emotional audience responses that are unique to each viewer. It should also be noted that the affects the filmmaker intended to evoke may not correspond with the affects felt by the viewer due to their own socio-cultural experiences. For example, child abuse survivors may be triggered by discourses, influencing bodily reactions such as trembling, muscle tension, sweating and panic attacks. Child abuse survivors are predisposed to experiencing bodily responses like the aforementioned because trauma manifests physically in the body. The human body has the capacity to physiologically change as a response to child abuse and trauma, as a way to protect the survivor, influencing these reactions (van der Kolk, 2014). Documentarians can not account for trauma responses such as this, no matter how lightly they tread around discourses of child abuse.

Across disciplines, affect analysis is an underdeveloped area of scholarship. According to academic Peta Tait (2016), most discourses surrounding ‘affect’ are theoretical. This means that it has proven difficult to pinpoint how to apply affect analysis within this study.

However, Plantinga does provide an outline of assumptions that should underpin the study of affect analysis in which I have adopted. The assumptions include approaching documentary film as an “intentional orchestration of multiple affects rather than as a text that generates a single, overarching affective or emotional state” (as cited in Plantinga & Tan, 2007, p. 16). Affect is a “potentiality of the text rather than a guaranteed outcome in a spectator” (p. 16). This means that affect is evoked (intentionally and unintentionally by the filmmaker) by the elements of films, such as mood and tone, and the representational strategies used to construct the film. Adopting these assumptions means that I am able to consider affect in relation to the individual codes and conventions used, and as an experience that is unique to each individual.

The second level of Fairclough’s CDA requires interpreting the text analysis in relation to the production, consumption and reception of the texts while the third level of analysis considers all analyses in relation to wider social and historical contexts. This is where I have applied du Gay et al.’s Circuit of Culture model, which actually goes beyond considering the production and consumption of the text and also considers identity and regulation. This second level is where much of the critique lies in relation to this model, which will be discussed further in this chapter alongside other limitations of CDA.

While Fairclough presents this three-part model in a linear fashion, implying that analyses should be conducted in order, the analyses can be conducted in any order, as many times as

needed. This is a major advantage of the model, especially for my research design as the findings of each research focus were reliant on the findings of the others, requiring the process of articulation between my research findings (see chapter 2 for a further explanation of this). I have used this model reflexively, going back and forth between each stage and each documentary as I uncover new discourses, representational strategies and ethical concerns. Admittedly, it did become difficult to disentangle the stages of analysis after some time because I started to make connections across all stages without even realising it. However, I do not see this as limiting my study in any way, as long as all ‘levels’ of analysis are considered.

4.5 Limitations and critiques

A major critique surrounding CDA is that discourse analysts have an agenda and may potentially take on “advocacy roles for groups who suffer from social discrimination” (Meyer, 2001, p. 5). This advocating usually involves the exposition of power relations. Widdowson (2004) argues that the issue with having an agenda is that analysts possess “ready-made interpretations... designed to dispose us to read this text in a particular way” (p. 142). Widdowson continues that these subjective interpretations influence researchers to pay little attention to the actual process of conducting CDA, theorising the results well before the process is complete. I understand Widdowson’s concern that analysts may bypass crucial parts of the analytical process, and why such advocacy does need to be acknowledged. It is important that a researcher is transparent about their motivations and about their subjective leanings. It is also important that researchers have the reflexivity and insight to be able to reflect upon how their subjective leanings might alter their discourse analysis. However, I do take issue with Widdowson implying that there is only room for objectivity when conducting

analyses. Most social science scholarship is grounded in advocacy in some way – it is politically and socially charged, as it should be. In addition, as I have already touched upon earlier in this chapter, qualitative research is generally subjective in nature because the researcher’s context influences the investigation, no matter how much the researcher may attempt to be objective (Malterud, 2011).

Fairclough (1998) criticises his own model, arguing that to apply his model effectively, the researcher must have an extensive knowledge of the surrounding texts of a similar nature. This knowledge can then be used to compare the discourses identified, facilitating the analysis of the texts in question. Theoretically, Fairclough’s argument seems reasonable; the more contextual information the researcher has, the more critically they can form their conclusions. However, it is not always feasible for researchers to examine a wide range of texts in addition to the texts they are applying CDA to. This is especially the case for studies conducted within the realm of tertiary education due to the time constraints that are placed upon research projects and the limited resources available. For example, there were multiple documentaries that I wanted to watch in the hopes to potentially include them in my analysis, but there were very few documentaries surrounding childhood abuse available on the databases that The University of Waikato has access to. However, I believe that facing these limitations is where having personal experience with subject matter may be of significant value. As I have endeavoured to become trauma-informed through my own personal research about the affects of child abuse and its prevalence in New Zealand, I had already critically examined a number of documentaries that presented discourses about child abuse. This provided me with foundational knowledge on what kind of discourses, representational strategies and ethical concerns to expect to identify in this study; I did not go into my analyses ‘blind’.

A major limitation of using CDA to understand the discourses surrounding child abuse in documentary texts is that it can not thoroughly examine audience receptions of the text as the second stage of analysis suggests we should. Widdowson (1998) argues that discourse analysts often fall into “a transmission view of meaning, whereby significance is always and only the reflex of linguistic signification” (p. 142). This inadvertently positions the researcher as a privileged entity who knows all and who expects that their interpretations will transcend across audience members, without actually researching their responses. Limiting the use of CDA only to the realm of textual analysis is problematic for my research design because as I have discussed, audience members construct their own meanings, depending on their context and the frameworks of knowledge in which they are situated. At the risk of falling into the one-dimensional trap of textual determinism, discourse analysts have called for the inclusion of audience reception studies to gauge the interpretations of those who will actually be consuming the texts in question. While theoretically, this approach seems sound, again it comes down to pragmatics. It is not a realistic approach for those conducting research in an educational setting at a master’s level.

4.6 Documentary text selection

To select the documentary texts that I have analysed, I began by following a suggestion put forward by philosopher Gillian Rose (2016). I considered the documentaries about child abuse that were immediately obvious to me from previous research that I had conducted. I had a plethora of films to choose from and unfortunately some of the films that I wanted to analyse I was not able to find access to. Another film that I had planned to consider for analysis, *Stop the Bus*, was scheduled to be released in 2020. However, the release date was

pushed back until 2021 due to various impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), including an ongoing pandemic. Despite these limitations, I was still able to select *Tarnation* and *Daughter Rite* as two of my texts. I chose these two films because they have been created decades apart, which suggests that the representational strategies and discourses may be different. Furthermore, I wanted to include a director who identifies as a woman as documentary practices are dominated by men. The third text, *Breaking Silence*, was selected because it is centred in New Zealand and has recently been released. *Breaking Silence* is also a documentary series, which presents the opportunity for discourses to be represented in a range of ways that are different from *Tarnation* and *Daughter Rite*. These three documentaries, while all containing discourses about child abuse, represent the discourses in different ways and all have different ethical concerns. This has provided me with the opportunity to gather rich data so that I can provide depth to my discussion. While it may seem as if analysing three documentaries is not ‘enough’ to draw conclusions from, focusing on the quality of the discussion rather than the quantity of my responses is a vital component of applying CDA (Rose, 2016).

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained that this research is qualitative and how this may impact the outcomes of my research. Conducting this research has been emotionally challenging due to the personal connection I have with the topics of child abuse, neglect and trauma. I have made this clear to give future researchers insight into the impacts of conducting research about child abuse when it is entangled in your own psyche. I have discussed differing approaches to discourse and CDA and have aligned myself with the approach of Fairclough who views language as a social practice. Adopting this stance means that I have been able to

uncover discourses that are presented through audio-visual representations that would have otherwise been limited if I applied a socio-cognitive approach to discourse. Fairclough's tripartite approach to CDA has also allowed myself to use the process of articulation by moving between each stage of analysis to draw my conclusions. The limitations and critiques of CDA are also discussed. I also explain that CDA has been applied in conjunction with affect analysis as it allows myself to consider the affective responses of the viewers, which is particularly relevant when analysing trauma due to it being an embodied experience. The body remembers, even if your mind does not. To conclude this chapter, I state how I selected the documentary texts and I argue that the approach to CDA relies on the depth of responses, rather than the quantity of responses. This provides a seamless transition into the following chapter which presents a discussion of my findings.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I identify the discourses of child abuse that are represented in the documentaries *Tarnation*, *Daughter Rite* and *Breaking Silence*. I argue that across the documentaries, there are discourses surrounding the cyclical nature of abuse. One specific discourse is that those who are abused as children will grow up to be abusers themselves, repeating abusive behavioural patterns. I also identify three sets of discourse in *Breaking Silence*, the discourses of despair, defiance and hope. I discuss these discourses in relation to the specific documentary codes and conventions, the audio-visual representations used by the filmmakers to convey them, and the potential ethical concerns that are associated.

5.2 *Tarnation*

Created by Jonathan Caouette in 2002, *Tarnation* is an autobiographical documentary that depicts Caouette's chaotic and abusive upbringing and the tumultuous relationship he shares with his Mother, Renee LeBlanc. *Tarnation* follows Caouette throughout his youth as a queer child, to his adulthood, where he navigates dealing with Renee's lithium overdose that was influenced by her troubled mental health. Following an accident during Renee's youth, Renee was treated with electroconvulsive therapy over an extended period of time. This treatment, while recommended by doctors, left Renee with cognitive impairments and contributed to her development of schizophrenia. Consequently, Renee was unable to care for her son efficiently and he was adopted by a foster family. It was at this foster home where Caouette was abused. As a result of this he was taken into the care of his grandparents, Adolf and Rosemary Davis. Throughout *Tarnation*, the audience learns that Caouette experienced

additional traumatic events in relation to his Mother such as: witnessing Renee being raped and beaten, hearing Renee speak about her own abusive childhood, acting as Renee's caregiver and navigating the aftermath of Renee's lithium overdose.

5.2.1 Discourses & representational strategies

Caouette represents the discourse that the affects of child abuse are cyclical, passed down from a parent to their child. This discourse is represented discursively, through the repetitive, representation of another discourse. This discourse is that child abuse leaves the survivor to deal with chaotic feelings, mental derangement and distress. The repetitive representations of this discourse are created by Caouette utilising temporal and spatial juxtapositions throughout the film. The juxtapositions are created through the recontextualization of self-recorded Super8mm home videos from his childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. Caouette uses editing techniques such as rapid jump-cuts, time-lapse, slow-motion and distortion to symbolically represent responses to trauma, such as flashbacks.

To represent the cyclical affects of child abuse, Caouette firstly provides viewers with an uncomfortable yet playful depiction of his mother Renee in the slow-paced opening shot, which is harshly juxtaposed against a fast-paced, distorted title sequence. This allows Caouette to symbolically represent the chaotic, deranged state of Renee's and/or his own mind post-trauma and abuse. Caouette creates temporal juxtapositions within the opening shot, and also creates spatial and temporal juxtapositions in the title sequence through a range of editing techniques. It is Caouette's recycling of his home videos through the repetitive layering of the temporal and spatial juxtapositions that symbolically represent the cyclical affects of abuse.

The opening shot: Temporal juxtapositions

The opening mid-shot (see Figure 7: Renee sings 'This Little Light of Mine') depicts Renee standing in a living room singing an iconic gospel and children's song, 'This Little Light of Mine'. Renee has her dark brown hair casually tied back in a low ponytail while her fringe covers her forehead, and her eyes are concealed by slightly oversized sunglasses. Aware of the camera, Renee looks into the lens as if to address the audience, smiles and raises her right hand up to the height of her neck. As Renee raises her index finger up, as if to point to the ceiling above, she begins to sing:

“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine”.

While singing these lyrics, Renee bends her index finger up and down, gently swaying her shoulders from side to side in a frivolous manner. As Renee finishes singing the second line, she turns to her right-hand side and candidly walks through an open door frame into the kitchen. From behind, the camera tracks her forward movement, passing a fridge on the left side of the kitchen. Renee then stops in front of an oven as she sings:

“Let it shine, let it shine let it shine!”.

Renee turns her head to her left slightly to look into the camera lens and she continues singing the song:

“Oh Jesus was coming one fine day, one fine day! Oh Jesus was coming one fine day!

This opening shot of *Tarnation* presents the audience with no context in which the clip of Renee has been filmed. Consequently, the use of this shot feels like a random inclusion by the filmmaker. Without understanding why, audience members are observing what looks to be a middle-aged woman performing in front of a camera, singing a song with both biblical and childish connotations, while enacting childlike mannerisms, such as waving hand gestures

and the finger wiggling. Even the change of location from the living room to the kitchen in the middle of Renee's performance, in all its randomness, presents itself as childish.

Figure 7: Renee sings 'This Little Light of Mine'



Source: *Tarnation* (Caouette, 2002, 00:00:29).

Playfulness and uneasiness

Renee's childlike performance, combined with Caouette's seemingly random decision to open *Tarnation* with this scene, creates a playful tone that may trigger a sense of lightness for audience members. The fact that this is all filmed in one 33 second shot also establishes a slow pace. This is in part because tracking shots, a convention of the observational documentary mode, allows the audience to feel as if they are part of the experience that they are watching unfold through a screen (Nichols, 2017). In comparison to the rest of *Tarnation's* construction, the audience are given an unusual amount of time to analyse and comprehend what Renee is doing and why. The audience members are not overwhelmed with overstimulation of the brain as they later are due to the chaotic editing style that Caouette

adopts. It is this stillness that allows the sense of playfulness to actually be felt by the viewers. As I will explain further, the majority of the film is fast paced, and edited in a fragmented, non-linear and over-stimulating way. Yet this opening scene gives the audience an opportunity to bask in a moment of gentleness, as if to encourage the audience to have a moment of serenity and a deep breath before the visual and emotional chaos that ensues throughout the remainder of *Tarnation*.

In equal measure, a sense of uneasiness is instilled in audience members for the very same reasons that the opening shot feels playful. Watching a middle-aged woman act in such a childlike way feels amusing at first because it is not something society would expect from an adult. There are numerous social codes that construct norms about how adults should behave in 'adult ways'. When adults fail to abide by these codes, it can evoke a sense of concern. Often, representations of this nature may indicate that the individual is mentally ill, to an unknown extent. The fact that viewers are watching a home video may also trigger feelings of discomfort within the audience. Home videos produce a kind of archival footage which is often used within the observational and expository documentary modes and allow audience members to gain an intimate insight into a once private moment, as if they are observing a situation as it unfolds in real time (Nichols, 2017). Caouette's use of home videos to construct *Tarnation* adds truth value to the film, emphasising that what viewers are watching concerns real life people, who experience real emotions and real struggles of adversity. Not only may this amplify the viewer's concern and compassion for Renee, it may also amplify the viewer's capacity to feel as though they are intruding on Renee's privacy, evoking a sense of unease. The temporal juxtapositions within this opening shot set the mood for the rest of *Tarnation*.

The title sequence: Temporal and spatial juxtapositions

Following the opening shot, the audience is immediately presented with a slow-paced title sequence, lasting from 00:01:04 to 00:03:28. The title sequence begins with a mid-shot of Renee, standing and looking off to the right side of the frame, smiling as her mouth moves to speak to whomever is out of the shot. Caouette has edited this shot with a slow-motion effect, a technique of the poetic documentary mode that slows down the speed of the footage to alter the feel and aesthetic of a scene or entire film. Using this poetic editing technique allows Caouette to establish a slow pace for the sequence and to evoke a dream like state of consciousness for the viewers (Nichols, 2017). Evoking this extreme state provides Caouette with the opportunity to create distinct temporal and spatial juxtapositions with the shots that follow. Caouette quickly cuts to an establishing shot of a roadside, greenery moving swiftly past the camera lens from the left-hand side of the frame to the right (see Figure 9: Road side in the title sequence). The framing of the shot implies that someone is recording through the window of a car while being driven forwards. This spatial juxtaposition immediately pulls the audience out of the moments of mesmerisation evoked by Caouette's use of slow-motion. This shot lasts approximately two seconds before jump-cutting to a shot that is almost exactly identical, only the camera angle is positioned a little lower, framing the edge of the road to be more visible. Within one second Caouette jump-cuts again to a shot that is almost identical to the previous shot, altering the angle of the camera slightly. Milliseconds later, Caouette juxtaposes the greenery briefly by cutting to a shot which appears to depict the back of a seat on a bus (see Figure 10: Inside of a bus). To the right side of the frame is a window where the greenery from the previous shot can be seen. The greenery is blurry, making it difficult to interpret the shapes of the trees. This shot lasts for a fraction of a millisecond, and the jump-cuts to and from this shot are fast enough to make the shot almost imperceptible to the human eye. To the average film viewer, this shot may be perceived as a flash of darkness in between

the shots of the greenery. This only adds to the sense of derangement the viewer may perceive. Again, within a few milliseconds Caouette jump-cuts to another similar shot with a slightly altered camera angle. At 00:01:26, Caouette cuts back to Renee; the same slow-motion editing technique has been used again as Renee turns her head and looks directly into the camera with her hand resting on her lips. This gesture amplifies the intimate feel of *Tarnation*, evoked by the use of recontextualised home videos. Approximately four seconds later, Caouette cuts to mid shot of his Grandfather Adolf, sitting in a chair looking out towards his right-hand side as if he is being interviewed. The framing of the shot is slightly off centre as Adolf is positioned on the right-hand side of the screen. Caouette manipulates this shot with the use of time-lapse to speed up the shot of Adolf. This presents a stark visual juxtaposition of the previous slow-motion shot of Renee. The use of slow-motion to represent Renee amplifies Caouette's use of time-lapse due to the fact that they are two extremes on the spectrum of time. This diametric strategy defamiliarises the viewer's experience of time and motion. Additionally, Caouette's application of this editing technique represents Adolf in an aggressive light. Adolf uses various hand gestures when speaking and increasing the frame rate of the footage distorts his body movements, making them seem very abrupt and aggressive.

Figure 8: Renee looks off to her right-hand side



Source: *Tarnation* (Caouette, 2002, 00:01:10).

Figure 9: Road side in the title sequence



Source: *Tarnation* (Caouette, 2002, 00:01:24).

Figure 10: Inside of a bus



Source: *Tarnation* (Caouette, 2002, 00:01:25).

The opening shot and the title sequence

The slow-paced opening shot, while creating juxtaposing tones of playfulness and uneasiness, is then juxtaposed with the fast-paced title sequence. Caouette creates temporal and spatial juxtapositions within the title sequence to create similar affects. The pace of the opening shot and the pace of the title sequence, however, contrast one another. It is these layers of temporal and visual juxtapositions, created through the recontextualization of home videos and the editing techniques mentioned, that may evoke or trigger a sense of derangement and confusion to the audience members. From the very beginning audience members are thrown into a whirlwind of disturbance and fleeting moments of calmness, which are symbolic representations of Renee's response to trauma, or even Caouette's response to trauma.

Tarnation is autobiographical yet adopts a dual focus on Renee's journey and Caouette's, so it

is difficult to differentiate between who's state of mind and feelings are being represented. However, this difficulty for audience members to untangle who specifically is being represented, symbolically represents the discourse that abuse and its affects are intergenerational and cyclical, intricately affecting Renee and every part of her, including her son. The layers of juxtapositions used by Caouette and the range of tones they evoke, uneasiness, eeriness, and playfulness, are reflective of common psychological responses to trauma and the intensity that is associated with such responses. This is because emotional trauma responses are complex, often evoking "two emotional extremes: feeling too much (overwhelmed) or too little (numb) emotion" (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 63). Emotional trauma responses may range from commonly experienced feelings of fear, shame, anger and sadness to uncommonly experienced feelings of numbness (a lack of ability to experience emotion) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 63). Caouette further represents the deranged effects of trauma through his use of jump-cuts to specifically evoke emotions and bodily sensations that are reminiscent of experiencing flashbacks. For example, Caouette abruptly jump-cuts between slightly altered shots of the greenery, indicating that the subjects of *Tarnation* are jumping forward physically in relation to the space they are occupying, implying a sudden change in space and time. Despite the shots of the scenery being so similar, the abruptness of the cuts are so fast that it feels disorientating and dizzying to watch. The abrupt and disorientating nature of this representation reflects the nature of post-traumatic flashbacks. 'Flashbacks' are a cognitive response to trauma, referring to the "reexperiencing" of a traumatic event like child abuse, as if it were happening again in that moment (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 68). Like the abruptness of these jump-cuts, experiencing flashbacks is characterised as being "very brief", lasting "only a few seconds" and often occur "out of blue", literally 'disorientating' the lives of those who

experience such cognitive trauma responses (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 68). This sense of disorientation is further elicited by Caouette's use of slow-motion and time-lapse when jump-cutting from shots of Renee to Adolf and back again in the opening sequence, defamiliarising the audience's sense of space and time.

From the beginning to the end of *Tarnation*, Caouette's use of layered temporal and spatial juxtapositions are prevalent throughout. There are juxtapositions within and between shots, sequences, and scenes, and they all are created using a matrix of editing techniques such as jump-cuts, slow-motion, and time-lapse. Caouette's repetitive editing style, using these strategies across the entire film, instil similar feelings of disorientation, discomfort and over-stimulation that discursively represent a specific discourse: child abuse and its traumatic affects are cyclical. As briefly described in chapter 1, the cyclical nature of abuse refers to the notion that the abusive behavioural patterns may be passed on from the perpetrator to the survivor, who may go on to repeat similar behaviours. It may also refer to the fact that the affects of trauma may be intergenerational, passed on from a parent to their child. It is the repetition of temporal and spatial juxtapositions, created through the use of recontextualised home videos and Caouette's application of editing techniques such as slow-motion, jump-cuts, that may evoke over-stimulation of the brain. The repetitive sense of confusion and derangement that may be evoked in response to this, is symbolic of how trauma can be cyclical in multiple ways.

5.2.2 Ethical concerns

Of the representational strategies used in *Tarnation*, the recontextualisation of home videos raises ethical concerns in relation to the potential exploitation of the participants. This

concern also aggravates the tensions between the audience's right to 'know', participant safety and Caouette's autobiographical impulse to tell the story of his childhood trauma.

Outside the realm of documentary films, home videos serve to document, maintain memory and materialise cultural memberships (Chalfen, as cited in Buckingham, Willett & Pini, 2011). Generally, home videos are filmed with the intention that the footage will remain private, serving the memories of those who are capturing the footage and those who are represented in the footage. Despite this notion, Caouette recontextualises home videos in *Tarnation*, bringing the traditionally private genre of home videos into documentary film, and thus into the public sphere. This assumption has led me to question the value and ethical issues of the recontextualised home videos in *Tarnation*. If these home videos were filmed under the assumption that they would exist and be exhibited within their private family realm, could they stay there to avoid potential exploitation of the participants?

In documentary theorist Elizabeth Czach's (2006) analysis of *Tarnation*, she explains that within home videos, a privileged relationship exists between the filmmaker and those being filmed. This 'privileged relationship' refers to the notion that having a personal or intimate connection with the people you are filming further situates the filmmaker in a position of power. This poses an ethical concern for many reasons. Caouette experienced this privileged relationship with the subjects in his home footage, primarily with his mother Renee. Not only did Caouette have the power of being behind the camera, deciding who to film, what was worthy of filming, when to film, and how to construct the final cut, he also holds a strong familial bond with Renee, further situating him in a privileged position (Czach, 2006). Due to the intimate nature of their relationship as a son and mother, combined with the notion that

home videos influence a more personal performance from the subjects on screen, Caouette collected footage of Renee that no one else would have been able to. The pre-existing relationship between Caouette and Renee means that Renee likely felt comfortable enough to perform in front of the camera in the most personal, stripped back and intimate ways. But with such comfortability comes the potential for Caouette to exploit Renee to construct the narrative that he wants. An example of this potential exploitation of Renee can be seen following her lithium overdose. Caouette films his mother while she is in a hysterical state, which could be considered an exploitation of Renee due to her deteriorating mental health and cognitive impairments. There are multiple moments in *Tarnation* where Renee states that she does not want to talk anymore, especially not to the camera. Yet, Caouette continues to demand responses from Renee while filming. From a viewer's perspective, it seems as though Caouette is using his position of power to get the 'truth' out of his mother on camera, by any exploitative means necessary. From Caouette's perspective, these representations of Renee in *Tarnation* are not exploiting Renee, he "just happened to be the one who had the camera", and he adds that "it happens to be from my point of view" (Chonin, 2004, para. 10). Caouette maintains that he never intended to use the home footage to create *Tarnation* and that the home footage was not filmed under the assumption that it would be part of a documentary and in the public realm of exhibition. Caouette states:

I didn't know I was making the movie; I've been making the movie for 20 years.

There's the occasional journalist who has said I'm whoring out my mother for my own fame, but I think that's a crock of shit. I'll get accused of exploitation, of narcissism, of exhibitionism, but I don't care. (as cited in McLean, 2005, para. 18)

Caouette's comments are slightly careless for two reasons. Caouette makes the claim that none of the home videos were filmed with the intention to use them to create *Tarnation*. I take issue with this, because there are scenes in *Tarnation* that are from Caouette's early

adulthood that present themselves as performance, rather than truthful events. There are also reflexive moments in *Tarnation* where Caouette blatantly says “I need to finish this stupid documentary”, making the audience aware of the film’s construction (Nichols, 2017). Additionally, Caouette’s bluntness when stating that he does not care about critics' verges on giving the impression that he does not rank ethical behaviour high on his priority list as a documentarian, which is problematic. As explained in chapter 2, ethics is at the heart of documentary filmmaking, but not all documentarians share the same values of ethics. While it could be argued that Caouette’s response initially seems careless, with context I believe that his response appears to be more justified. Due to the pre-existing tensions within Caouette and Renee’s relationship, Caouette has possibly felt stuck in an autobiographical paradox; attempting to navigate how to tell his story without exploiting his mother. As a trauma-informed researcher, I empathise with the difficult situations that Caouette may have experienced when deciding how to represent his childhood trauma and his life as a survivor. It seems understandable that Caouette is blunt here due to the complexities that lie within autobiographically representing, combined with the frustrating nature of his relationship with Renee.

Furthermore, the moments in *Tarnation* where Caouette risks exploiting Renee appear to be honest representations of Caouette’s frustration surrounding his experienced trauma. Considering how horrific Caouette's childhood was, I empathise strongly with the fact that it seems as if he is pleading for answers surrounding how and why he experienced the trauma he did. It is unfortunate that the one person who should be able to give him answers, his mother, does not seem mentally well enough to have these conversations, at least on camera.

Documentarians often try to reconcile this tension between and the potential of exploiting participants by gaining ‘informed consent’ from the participants. It is common for many documentarians to act on the notion that, once a participant consents to being filmed or consents to their presence within the documentary, any and all footage of that subject may be used, in whatever way the filmmaker wishes. This implied that the consent that has been given overrides the possibility of exploitation and appropriation. Caouette maintains that Renee gave consent to have her son’s, and consequently her own, story told through *Tarnation*, stating in an interview that Renee has viewed *Tarnation* multiple times and “loves it” (McLean, 2005, para. 20). Unfortunately, Caouette’s words are not enough evidence to make a claim on whether Renee gave informed consent; we can only theorise while examining the various influences that may have impacted Renee’s ability to consent. As *Tarnation* was eventually picked up by a distribution company, it is possible that some form of consent from the documentary subjects was achieved, most likely through the signing of physical consent forms. However, because Renee is said to have brain damage and schizoaffective disorder, it leads me to question how much ‘informed’ consent Renee was able to give. I do not know the answer to this question, but it is important to note that Renee’s mental state puts her in a vulnerable position that likely influences decision-making skills. If Renee did give Caouette consent, it is possible that her cognitive impairments may have influenced this.

Gross, Katz & Ruby (as cited in Marles, 2013) argue that gaining consent involves more than just asking participants to sign consent and release forms, stating that “consent, informed or otherwise, is not always a meaningful concept in practice, nor even a reliable guide through the ethical mazes confronting documentarians” (p. 202). Again, this is due to the privileged position the filmmaker is in when gaining consent, and the complex matrix of power

imbalances existing between the autobiographical filmmaker and participant. Katz (as cited in Marles, 2013) argues that it is common for potential participants to feel like they can not refuse to participate due to their familial relationship with the filmmaker. They may feel obligated to help. This notion may have also influenced Renee's decision to participate.

I can not make claims about whether or not Caouette's use of home videos are completely ethically sound or not. But I do acknowledge the complexities in the ethical issues associated with autobiographical documentary filmmaking about child abuse. As audience members and researchers, it is crucial to remember that we can never entirely understand a documentarian's approach, nor the existing tension(s) in their life. Therefore, we are challenged to make definite judgements around the ethical soundness of the representations presented in *Tarnation*. Furthermore, Caouette, as a reflexive filmmaker, deserves to have his needs met just as much as any other participant. Too often documentary critics focus on participant ethics and leave the ethics of the filmmaker to the side. When it comes to reflexive autobiographical documentarians representing trauma, careful and trauma-informed consideration must be given to the unique position of power that the documentarian is in.

5.3 *Daughter Rite*

Daughter Rite is an autobiographical documentary created by Michelle Citron in 1980. Although *Daughter Rite* is autobiographical, Citron does not appear in the film. Instead, Citron uses fictional scenes and composite characters to represent her fragmented relationship with her mother. Maggie and Stephanie are the two sisters at the centre of *Daughter Rite*, and the audience follows them as they discuss their relationship with their Mother. Although never explicitly stated that Citron experienced child abuse, it is undeniable that the

experiences discussed by the characters on screen are traumatic, and I would argue they constitute abuse and neglect.

5.3.1 Representational strategies

In this discussion of *Daughter Rite*, I have chosen to focus on the representational strategies and the associated ethical concerns, rather than to undertake a detailed audio-visual analysis. The rationale for this decision is that the representational strategies used, and the associated ethical concerns are the most important aspects of the film. Furthermore, I have chosen to restrict my analysis of *Daughter Rite* to also manage the word limitations for this thesis.

The use of cinema vérité codes and the conventions of the expository documentary mode are present from the very beginning, instilling within the audience an expectation that the subjects represented on screen are real life people within the historical world, with pre-existing relationships and identities. Through the combined use of narration, recontextualised home videos and cinema vérité techniques, the audience may be led to believe that the two children depicted in the home videos are the main subjects of the documentary when they were younger, Maggie and Stephanie. The use of God-like narration also implies that it is either Maggie or Stephanie due to its prevalence from the very beginning of *Daughter Rite*, and the audience expectations associated with authoritative narration. However, Maggie and Stephanie are not real people. They are composite characters, created by Citron. Citron has based her construction of Maggie and Stephanie off of her own experiences with her mother, and the experiences of other women. Citron interviewed 35 women about their relationship with their mothers and used the transcripts to identify discourses surrounding the mother-daughter relationship, to compose the characters and to construct the script for *Daughter Rite*.

This is also how the entity of the narrator was constructed, and actresses were hired to play Maggie and Stephanie and voice the narration. Citron made this representational decision to minimise ethical concerns that came with autobiographical representations but only created further issues for audience members. These ethical issues will be discussed following this discussion about how Citron achieved representing Maggie and Stephanie as ‘real’ through such conventions and the associated expectations of viewers.

The opening of *Daughter Rite* presents a “voice-of-God” like narration (Nichols, 2017, p. 121). Citron’s use of this expository convention instantly provides the audience with a sense of reassurance that the representations to come are truthful depictions of the historical world. This is because narration, spoken by entities that the viewers can not see, implies “ultimate wisdom” and “institutional authority” (Nichols, 2017, p. 121). The narration in *Daughter Rite* acts as an “informing logic” and the “images serve a supporting role” (Nichols, 2017, p. 122), strengthening their indexical bond to the historical world. However, the narration is not ‘God-like’ in the traditional sense, where the tone of the voice is deep and masculine. The narrator is described by scholar Jane Feuer as “speaking in a dull tone as if reading from a diary” (p. 12, 1980). This narration is ‘god-like’ in the sense that it is the first voice viewers hear, indicating the importance of this entity and the authority it has over shaping the narrative.

As this narration opens *Daughter Rite*, Citron recontextualises scenes from home videos of her childhood. The opening shots depict a child and woman, who the audience presumes to be mother and daughter for two reasons. Firstly, as the title of the film suggests, *Daughter Rite* is about a daughter, so understandably there may be the involvement of a mother in the documentary somewhere. Secondly, Citron’s use of narration presents the connection for

viewers due to the expectations that are associated with the use of the expository convention, which may reconcile the viewer's fear about consuming and spreading misinformation.

The strengthening of this indexical bond implies that the narrator is the adult version of the young child in the home video. The assumption that both of these entities are one in the same is further encouraged through Citron's use of cinema vérité codes and conventions when representing the composite characters, Maggie and Stephanie. These codes and conventions are explained below.

Following the opening scene, the audience is introduced to Maggie and Stephanie. Although they are composite characters, Citron's use of cinema vérité techniques to represent Maggie and Stephanie conceal this fact from the audience, presenting them as 'real' people who are being observed by a documentary filmmaker, outside of themselves. At approximately 00:15:00, Maggie and Stephanie make a fruit salad together in a kitchen. This interaction is presented in one continuous take that is seven minutes long. The audience become observers of a mundane task as if it were happening in real time. The camera zooms in and out of each sister's face as they talk, and is quickly readjusted by the documentarian, to ensure either sister is still in the frame when moving around the kitchen. Within this seven-minute window, there are various moments where Stephanie moves out of the frame, and the shot lingers on the blank wall behind her. The documentarian adjusts the focus of the lens before quickly moving the camera to frame the subject once more. Nothing about this take presents itself as constructed, and the diegetic sound used throughout reinforces the fidelity of the representations on screen. The audience can hear the faint rustling of the documentarian as they move the camera to follow the movement of Maggie and Stephanie, Presenting the

relationship using cinema verité codes and conventions as discussed above “represents an extreme “realist” aesthetic in which the profilmic event is allowed to unfold before the camera, unscripted and without preconception on the part of the filmmaker” (Feuer, 1980, para. 11). Using cinema verité techniques gives the constructed scenes authenticity (Williams & Rich, 1981; Rueschmann, 2000), thus potentially influencing first time viewers to assume that the relationship between the sisters, and each sister’s relationship with their mother, is a real representation of actual people and relationships in the historical world. Feuer (1980) also identified that it is “almost impossible on the first viewing not to try to create relationships among the narrative voice, the little girls in the home movie footage, and the adult women in the “documentary” footage”.

5.3.2 Ethical concerns

The use of composite characters and fictional scenes was fuelled by pre-existing tensions between Citron’s autobiographical impulse and her ethical concerns towards her mother’s wellbeing. Citron strived to represent discourse about the tumultuous relationship she shared with her mother, describing her autobiographical impulse as “a driving need to use my life as a case study” (1999, p. 276). Simultaneously, Citron expresses the “ethical discomfort” she experienced at the thought of representing her mother through autobiographical documentary (1999, p. 276). Citron knew that making *Daughter Rite* autobiographical would further intensify the pre-existing tensions she had with her mother, especially if her mother would not approve of the discourses represented. To negotiate the tension between Citron’s autobiographical impulse and the ethical concerns *Daughter Rite* presented to her mother, Citron made the decision to create composite characters and scenes, stating that “fiction was the escape hatch” (Citron, 1999, p. 276). This meant that Citron was able to avoid presenting

Daughter Rite as an autobiographical film, involving her own mother. Instead, Citron was able to tell those who asked, including her family, that the film is “about Mothers and daughters in general, not my Mother and her daughters specifically” (1999, p. 276).

The use of composite characters helped create the “emotional texture” of the film, which is what Citron describes as the truly autobiographical aspect of *Daughter Rite* (1999 p. 278).

Allowing the personal to become political, Citron describes this emotional texture in the following way:

The passive aggressive power struggle that threads through Maggie and Stephanie's relationship resonates off my own family experience. And the daughters' anger towards their mother is an emotion I must own. The film represents only a narrow band of the full feeling spectrum that is my relationship with my mother. Yet a core of my lived experience fuels the fiction in a way similar to that real bit of sand that precipitates the pearl. Though, as with the sand and the pearl, at first glance their relationship isn't self-evident. The fictional form of these broadly defined autobiographical elements situates my personal experience in a larger cultural context and simultaneously lets me off the hook. (1999, p. 13)

The use of composite characters and narratives throughout *Daughter Rite* allowed Citron to use her own subjective life experiences as a case study, while simultaneously allowing her to conceal the fact that her documentary was autobiographical. By doing this, Citron believed that she would protect her mother's feelings while minimising the possibility of further straining her relationship with her mother. It also reconciled many of the anxieties and uncertainties felt by Citron when considering representing her family on screen through the association of her mother's representation.

The tension between Citron's autobiographical impulse and the need to protect her fragile relationship with her mother was reconciled through the use of fiction/cinema verité techniques. However, denying *Daughter Rite's* autobiographical nature may have created another tension for Citron: between maintaining her deception, thus maintaining the pre-existing relationship she has with her mother, and her autobiographical impulse to tell her truths. Two years after the creation of *Daughter Rite*, Citron revealed the autobiographical nature of the film to her mother. This decision has led me to question what kind of psychological strain or emotional stress may have been involved in maintaining this deception during those two years. Deception is often followed by guilt, so there is a high likelihood that Citron suffered some form of emotional anguish while maintaining this lie.

Fiction worked to conceal the autobiographical nature of *Daughter Rite*, but it raised ethical issues with the audience. Citron (1999) states that although fiction allowed her to represent the unrepresentable, her feelings towards her own mother, fiction worked through the deception of the audience. Deceiving the audience of a documentary raises ethical concerns as (in Citron's own words), audiences have a "psychological investment to aesthetic codes and contracts of a film being reliable" (Citron, 1999, p. 284). Confronting an audience's beliefs about documentary codes and their expectations may lead to audience members feeling betrayed. Citron (1999) states that following a screening of *Daughter Rite* to her university students, a student felt betrayed and angry upon finding out that the fictional scenes were constructed and not a truthful representation of actual identities. This student had invested emotional time and empathy into who she thought was a real person, and the breaking of filmic codes led her to feeling like a vulnerable viewer. Furthermore, Citron believes that *Daughter Rite's* emotionally charged discourse around child abuse and neglect,

especially regarding Stephanie being raped by her stepfather, likely contributed to this viewer's feelings of anger due to having been deceived.

5.4 *Breaking Silence*

Funded by New Zealand On Air (henceforth NZOA), *Breaking Silence* (2020) is a New Zealand based documentary series about domestic violence. Directed by Naashon Zalk, the series is comprised of eight episodes, all of which are approximately ten minutes in length. The series follows Simonne Butler, a survivor of domestic violence, who travels to different parts of New Zealand to discuss the ‘abuse cycle’ with survivors from all walks of life.

Breaking Silence presents three groups of discourses about family violence and child abuse: the discourses of despair, of defiance and of hope. The ‘discourses of despair’ refers to the discourses that illuminate the prevalence of domestic violence in New Zealand and the devastating outcomes of family violence and child abuse. These discourses include the notion that domestic abuse rates in New Zealand are the highest in the developed world, and that abuse can be cyclical in a multitude of ways. The ‘discourses of defiance’ refer to the arguments that challenge misconceptions about what family violence is and how it manifests. The ‘discourses of hope’ refer to the discourses that argue that breaking cycles and patterns of abuse are possible, for both survivors and perpetrators. The three groups of discourses both oppose and intersect with one another at various points across the series. These discourses are predominantly represented through the codes and conventions of the expository and the participatory documentary modes.

5.4.1 Discourses of despair

At the beginning of each episode, the viewer is immediately greeted with a discourse of despair. The narrator of *Breaking Silence*, Truda Chadwick, opens each episode with the following line: “New Zealand has the highest rate of domestic abuse per capita in the

developed world. Abuse needs silence to thrive”. The viewers do not see the entity that speaks but hear Chadwick’s voice as its “informing logic” drives forward the narrative of each episode (Nichols, 2017, p. 121). The off-screen presence of Chadwick, combined with the sense of conviction in her voice, is indicative of a “voice-of-God-commentary” (Nichols, 2017, p. 121). Zalk’s use of this expository convention is powerful as it convincingly presents this discourse due to the authoritative and truthful connotations associated with this style of narration. These images that are used by Zalk while this discourse is presented help advance the discourse, becoming secondary sources of information for the audience. Zalk repeats this discourse at the beginning of each episode. Not only does this representational strategy emphasise that domestic violence is a prevalent social issue in New Zealand, but it also allows anyone watching an episode on its own to be drawn in to watching and listening to the documentary.

While there is a sense of professionalism and authority instilled in the audience through Zalk’s use of a God-like narrator, Zalk balances this by centring the episodes around Butler, positioning her as the host of *Breaking Silence*. Both Chadwick and Butler work in tandem to drive the series forward. Much like Chadwick, Butler helps push the narrative of the series forward, but in a more personal, subjective way, defying the traditionally objective nature of the expository mode. While Chadwick provides a sense of authority which may reconcile the viewer’s fears about being deceived, Butler provides a sense of humility to the documentary series. Butler offers a candid explanation of her experience of domestic abuse survival in *Episode 1: Simonne Butler*, sense of humility. While Butler discusses her trauma, Zalk uses a centred mid-shot of Butler, sitting in an oversized armchair as she looks directly into the camera as if to address the audience and to demand the attention of viewers. Throughout the series, this setting is not represented again, implying that Butler is in the comfort of her own

home as she discusses her survival. Such intimacy further strengthens the sense of humility that Butler's presence evokes. Zalk cuts to a close up shot of Butler's hands unscrewing the brush of her mascara. Zalk tracks Butler's hand movement up towards her face as she applies mascara to her lashes, while Chadwick narrates "miraculously, she now has some use of her hands, but the hardest thing to recover from was the cycle of abuse". This is the first moment of many where the discourse, that abuse is cyclical, is referenced in the series. In *Breaking Silence*, the cyclical nature of abuse is referred to in multiple ways, but the ways in which it is discussed all ultimately comes back to the idea that survivors of abuse, both children and adults, may perpetuate the same abusive behavioural patterns of their abuser. The discourse that abused children will grow up to perpetuate this abusive cycle is represented heavily in *Episode 4: Jeremy Eparaima*. Jeremy is first introduced to the audience as he sits on his couch, looking at a photograph of himself as a child. As Zalk cuts to a close-up shot of the black and white photograph, a voice over of Jeremy begins, "I haven't seen this photo for a long, long time.. cause I look quite a happy kid, but I know I wasn't. Brings back memories of that household". Zalk's use of voice over strengthens the indexical bond of the photograph to the historical world. Jeremy goes on to state that he was a perpetrator of domestic violence for 40 years, referring to the abuse he inflicted on his partners and children as a 'curse', implying that his violent tendencies were passed onto him from his parents and that he has passed on the behavioural patterns to his children.

5.4.2 Discourses of defiance

Much of the discourses presented in *Breaking Silence* can be thought of as discourses of defiance simply due to their existence. The representation of discourse surrounding family violence challenges the stigma that is associated with such discourses. As suggested by the

title of the series, the discourses represented allow the silence that conceals these prevalent social issues to be broken. The way in which NZOA has distributed the series also promotes the ‘breaking of silence’. Distribution methods can be thought of as representational strategies in the sense that the platforms used can present certain discourses around who could be consuming the text in question. *Breaking Silence* has been distributed on a New Zealand news website, Stuff, and is free to access. The series has also been posted on additional platforms. Such platforms include the Stuff Facebook page and the Radio New Zealand Facebook page. The series has also been placed onto the Radio New Zealand website, alongside articles written by journalist Lisa Metivier about the participants of each episode. Using various platforms to distribute the series targets a wide range of New Zealanders. *Breaking Silence* is comprised of eight, ten-minute-long episodes, which also encourages consumption by viewers who prefer watching shorter documentaries, or who may not want to commit to watching a feature length film about such triggering subject matter. By targeting a wide range of viewer's, NZOA presents the political discourse that family violence, including child abuse, is everyone’s problem in New Zealand, not just a specific group of people. This is a discourse of defiance because there is a commonly believed discourse in New Zealand that domestic violence and child abuse are ‘Māori problems’ or ‘low socio-economic problems’. These discourses imply that these groups of people should bear the burden of ‘fixing’ family violence while individuals from positions of dominance in New Zealand are not asked to take responsibility. These discourses are misconceptions that further marginalise Māori and those who are from low-socio economic backgrounds. Domestic violence and child abuse disproportionately affects Māori in comparison to pākehā. In 2017, “Māori were more than twice as likely be victims of intimate partner violence as other New Zealanders” (Swarbrick, 2018, n.p.). This not because Māori people are inherently violent, which is a stigmatising discourse that has been promoted about Māori since the

colonisation of New Zealand in the 1800's (Treaty Resource Centre, n.d). Māori are disproportionately affected by family violence for various reasons that all relate to the colonisation of New Zealand and the displacement of Māori culture. Associate professor Leonie Pihama believes that the disparities between Māori and pākehā child abuse rates is largely a result of the historical trauma of colonisation. In an interview with Stuff (2017), Pihama states that:

colonisation impacts on our children through the removal of every part of our cultural framework that enabled us to keep our children safe. And I think that model of the nuclear family, the domestic unit, is actually an unhealthy model for a culture of people who are used to having a collective relationship. (as cited in Kerr, 2016, para. 4)

Pihama continues, stating that "historical trauma caused by colonisation is the root cause of intergenerational issues, particularly child abuse within Māori families," (as cited in Kerr, 2016, para 4.). While Māori are largely affected by family violence, it stems from the trauma of colonisation, which means that family violence is an issue that everyone must work towards minimising. This discourse of defiance is also represented more explicitly in episode 2: *David White*. White declares that "family violence, family harm is not a Māori, low socio-economic problem. It is all our problem."

In episode 2: *David White*, white explains that he and his wife "didn't understand what family violence was" until their daughter was murdered by her husband. White's lack of awareness about the various forms of family violence (including, but not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual spiritual and financial) demonstrates the underrepresentation

of the issue, despite its prevalence. Referring to psychological manipulation, White states that there were so many “little things” that he did not recognise as ‘abuse’ at the time. In *Episode 5: Shakti*, Farida Sultana states that the “less obvious forms of abuse are ignored... people laugh when you say that you are leaving due to psychological abuse”. These discourses are tied closely to another harmful discourse that permeates society in New Zealand, that ‘men who show emotion or speak about their emotions are weak’.

5.4.3 Discourses of hope

The discourses of hope in *Breaking Silence* are represented across the series, symbolically through the mere presence of Butler and the diverse range of participants in the documentary. Butler’s story of domestic abuse survival is one of the most public cases in New Zealand. If New Zealand viewers are not already familiar with Butler’s story from the news coverage about her attack or from her book, *Double Edged Sword*, by the end of episode 1 they will be well versed. As described earlier, Butler instils in the audience a sense of humility through her intimate and harrowing description of the effects of her abuse. Butler also refers to herself and the other participants of the documentary as ‘survivors’ rather than reducing them down to ‘victims’. This discourse of hope, that ‘individuals who have experienced family violence are survivors’ instils a sense of empowerment within the audience that is amplified by the humility that Butler’s presence brings. Through her unwavering vulnerability and strong sense of self as a survivor, Butler is transformed into a symbol of ‘hope’ for viewers watching. Every time Zalk cuts to a shot of Butler, the viewers are reminded that anyone who has experienced abuse is a survivor – not just in a physical sense, but also psychologically as the term “acknowledges their tremendous strengths and coping skills in surviving violence as well as their victimization, pain, and loss” (Proffitt, 1996, p. 29).

Although *Breaking Silence* is largely centred around the experiences of women and domestic violence, Zalk represents a diverse range of individuals who have either experienced domestic violence, child abuse or have been affected by someone else's experience of these issues. These individuals include David White, a father who lost his daughter to domestic violence and now advocates for the end of family violence and Daniella Smith, who runs her own boxing centre to help abusive survivors, an anonymous woman who has experienced financial abuse and a Pacifika family who have experienced domestic violence. By representing a diverse range of people in *Breaking Silence*, Zalk presents the discourse that anyone, regardless of gender identity, ethnicity, political and socio-economic background can experience family violence. Furthermore, the use of the term when referring to survivors of domestic violence may open up a space for the resistance of abuse and provide a means of empowerment.

5.4.4 Ethical concerns

Many of the ethical concerns that I identified when watching and analysing *Breaking Silence* were reconciled through further investigation into the series and the participants. The first ethical concern I had was in relation to the participants of the documentary. Due to how candid each -participant was when speaking about their experiences, I wondered how the public representations of their experiences may affect their lives following the distribution of the documentary. It became apparent while watching the series and while researching the series further, that majority of the participants had already made their stories public. Jeremy Eparaima has been working for the 'Family Violence is Not Ok' campaign since 2011, travelling around New Zealand to share his story about breaking the cycle of abuse. David

White has spent the last ten years advocating against domestic violence, sharing his story about missing the warning signs of violent behaviour that killed his daughter. Having shared their stories publicly prior to the release of *Breaking Silence* does not exempt the participants from potentially feeling exploited or as if they have shared 'too much', but I believe that it would have made experiencing such feelings of exploitation a lot less likely.

Zalk adopts various representational strategies in *Episode 6: Financial Abuse* to conceal the identity of the participant for her own safety. The first strategy employed to do this is the use of a voiceover. Chadwick tells the audience that the woman they are about to be introduced to is named Sarah, and that this is not the participant's real name. Chadwick also states that an actress has been used to voice Sarah. Zalk's decision to inform the audience of his representational decisions may help to reconcile any doubt they have had about the representations in the previous episodes, and in the episodes going forward. Zalk's honesty in Episode 6 implies that he would be honest about any other representations that have been altered in a significant way. Furthermore, Chadwick's almost immediately makes the participant's concealed identity clear to the audience, implying that the filmmakers are not attempting to be deceitful in any way.

Throughout the episode, Zalk blurs the shots of Sarah's face. This technique may limit the personal connection that the audience has with Sarah because her facial expressions are hidden. The face is where emotion flourishes. However, Zalk reconciles this issue by applying a range of other representational strategies. Firstly, Zalk uses various close-up shots of Sarah's body language as she speaks about her story. Zalk depicts Sarah's hands shaking, clutching the tissues in her hands while she discusses the abuse she has experienced. Using

close-ups of Sarah's hand gestures may evoke a sense of intimacy within the audience, intimacy that may have been lost with the application of a constructed voice over and the blurring of footage. Additionally, Butler drives the narrative in *Episode: 6* which helps bring a sense of humility to the story so that viewers may be able to connect with Sarah in a more intimate way. Butler achieves this by interacting intimately with Sarah, embracing her as she enters Sarah's home. Since Zalk can not provide the audience with intimate close-up shots of Sarah's facial expressions, Zalk uses close ups of Butler's facial expressions as Sarah tells her story. These techniques may help minimise the social distance that is put between the audience and Sarah due to the anonymity of her identity.

Chapter Six: Suggestions and concluding thoughts

Throughout this project, it has become apparent that there is a lack of literature dedicated to the wellbeing of the filmmaker, especially in relation to the reflexive autobiographical documentarian. It is too often that autobiographers are reduced down to being ‘confessional’ and self-centred, and their films are positioned as ‘unethical’ due to discussing sensitive subject matter that involves others (through an individual’s direct participation in the documentary or through an individual’s association to the discourses presented). However, viewers, critics, scholars and documentarians themselves must be more empathetic towards the filmmaker when considering the ethical implications of autobiographical filmmaking about child abuse. This is because autobiographical filmmaking has the potential to provide therapeutic outcomes for the autobiographer, which can be vital in the process of learning to live after child abuse, trauma and neglect. In creating *Daughter Rite*, Citron states that her autobiographical act was fuelled by her desire to understand her life “in relation to larger cultural forces, as well as a yearning for a presence in the world” (1999, p. 282). For Citron, it was the use of autobiographical fiction that allowed her unconscious thoughts to speak without realising it at the time of the film’s construction. Reflecting on the process of creating one of the fictional scenes in *Daughter Rite*, Citron states:

The scene hints at a darker desire as well -- my murderous competition with my sister for my mother's affection, a wish I was not consciously aware of at the time. In the fiction, created through the free play of imagination, that which was hidden is made visible. In the words of Adrienne Rich, the film allowed me "to remember what it has been forbidden even to mention." In this fictitious moment the possibility for knowledge, and thus change, opens up before me. (1999, p. 287)

Through autobiographical storytelling, Citron was able to uncover feelings that she never knew she had. Uncovering these personal ‘truths’ presented Citron with the opportunity to compartmentalise them, which has the potential to bring about psychological healing. Furthermore, an interpersonal “space of possibility” also presented itself to Citron, adding to the therapeutic outcomes of creating *Daughter Rite*. Citron presented *Daughter Rite* to her mother a few years after its completion. After viewing the film, Citron’s Mother disclosed a personal truth that she had kept to herself her entire life. Citron’s Mother revealed that she had been sexually abused as a child. This revelation altered the relationship between Citron and her mother for the better as it opened up a place of dialogue between the pair, giving a “new degree of consciousness” (p, 286) to their relationship and individual lives. It could also be argued that viewing representations of child abuse and trauma may also be therapeutic for the audience members who are survivors of child abuse and trauma. Gonzales supports this claim, arguing it is possible to “tell the story of personal madness in a way that allows us as spectators to experience its harrowing beauty, and through this very telling to achieve personal transformation. (2009, p. 68).

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