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Title	Picture Her Story: An arts-based participatory project and practice-based multimodal research thesis on sexual violence against women and girls
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Hampshire College Members

- **Nathalie Arnold** - Current Committee Co-Chair
- **Lili Kim** - Current Committee Co-Chair

Non-Hampshire College Members

- **Elizabeth Mattison** (Hampshire College CYL assistant director) - Current Committee Member

Committee Signatures/Approvals

- Nathalie Arnold signed this document on 04/28/2016 at 12:22PM.
- Lili Kim signed this document on 04/27/2016 at 07:07AM.

A Division III pass form was completed by Lili Kim on 04/27/2016 at 07:08AM.

A Division III pass form was completed by Nathalie Arnold on 04/28/2016 at 12:22PM.

Elizabeth (Ely) Wright Veintimilla's Division III project, "Picture Her Story: An Arts-Based Participatory Project and Practice-Based Multimodal Research Thesis on Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls," is an impressive achievement. It is a two-part interdisciplinary project that included both a thesis based on online surveys, interviews, personal narratives, and scholarship, as well as a photo exhibit by, for, and about sexual violence survivors who participated in Ely's project. Ely's Division III project, from its inception to completion, is truly remarkable. An enormous amount of planning went into the project. With sheer determination to keep experimenting, imagining, and writing till the format and medium of her project felt right to her and did right by her participants, Ely left no detail overlooked. Ely's courage and compassion to tell her truth and to allow other fellow survivors to do the same, in my view, made this Division III study a truly ambitious, thoughtful, and transformative project.

Ely's thesis explores the themes of victim blaming, sex education, sexual assault on college campuses, rape culture, the sexual objectification of women, worldwide rape cases, sexual trauma, sexual healing and empowerment. She

seamlessly weaves scholarship, personal experience, online surveys and interviews to tell compelling stories of sexual violence and survival, not to offer simple solutions, definitions, or redemptions, but always to ask more questions and to complicate what we think we already know and commonly assume about sexual violence and survivors. In this way, Ely critically contributes to the debates around what is consent, who is a survivor, and how and whether one moves beyond the violence.

Ely deserves a lot of praise for all her work to design and set up the online survey. She taught herself how to use many of the online platforms she used to reach people as widely and conveniently as possible. She took great care to formulate questions that would not judge or betray her own or anyone else's biases. She devoted countless hours both meeting in person and communicating online with her participants. Every step of the way, Ely was mindful of providing the forum for the survivors to speak for themselves, or as she puts it, "To put the crafting of narratives in the hands of those who live them."

Although she was writing a lot, and actively, Ely was reluctant to share her work with the committee in the beginning. When she did show us the early sections, these were already of high quality. Her thinking was clear, and she had a good initial sense of how to structure her discussions. Once her committee began responding to her work, she methodically strengthened her ability to work with sources, and clarified her intent on the page; with each deeply revised draft, the work became increasingly sophisticated and well-turned.

Ely was dedicated to portraying and highlighting women's experiences, but she was initially uncertain about the best form or mode in which to write about them. Purely fictional/imagined writing was a struggle for her. Although Ely's prose is strong and well-turned, the ethical questions raised by writing fiction or entirely imagined pieces about women posed an apt challenge. Her creative writing was strongest when it was explicitly based on an exchange or experience she had had. And perhaps she found more purely analytical writing troublesome, too, as it can obscure the lived experiences and persons whose situations come to constitute 'data,' at too great a remove from life itself. Ely opted instead to bring women's own words and stories, and her own written meditations on her own experiences - into direct conversation, on the page, with the work of feminist scholar-activists. This more 'ethnographic' mode, in which Ely moved seamlessly from personal testimony to an analysis of the many ways that misogyny informs women's daily lives, became a signal, very moving aspect of Ely's work - her insistence on juxtaposing real stories, in women's own words, with published work is partly a decision about writing but it is also a moral position.

At every stage of the project, Ely worked with great awareness of the communities involved, and of her complex position within them. Although the project provided opening and support primarily for Five College students and other women in the Pioneer Valley, Ely kept her initial motivating questions about immigrant women in mind, wanting at all times to include her awareness of this larger context in her project and writing.

It was very clear from the beginning that Ely was embarking on an extremely creative and groundbreaking project dealing with a topic of huge importance in our time and culture. The recent campus protests around sexual assault further elevated and spotlighted the critical work that Ely's Division III project dares to do. Ely's planned mattress walk across the campus on the opening day of the photo exhibit received enormous support from students and other members of the Hampshire community. The photo exhibit was a testament to the resilience and courage of Ely and the survivor participants who chose to share publicly their artwork, writing, photos, and other creative expressions. Ely was careful to have counselors on site and provide a quiet space for visitors to connect with the exhibit. The planning and execution of the photo exhibit were flawless.

Ely's work has changed all of us who were fortunate enough to be involved in it. Many of the participants of her surveys and interviews thanked her privately and publicly for providing the opportunity to tell their stories. Ely writes that the goals she kept in mind as she worked on her Division III project were "To provide participants (victims and survivors) with a space for safe self-expression. To increase awareness around the extent that sexual violence occurs within our communities and beyond. To disrupt the silencing of women's voices and stories. To conduct research on sexual violence with a different, multimodal, multimedia approach. To prove that extending textual and oral accounts of sexual violence research to visual methods brings benefits to our understanding of the issue. To put together a feminist project that sees sexual violence as an experience that is not only embedded in gender violence and sexism, but in other forms of oppression as well, including racism, homophobia, transphobia, islamophobia, xenophobia, ageism, and more. To be aware of the responsibility that this kind of project requires, and be available to those who count on [my] support and active listening."

Ely did all that and more with fierce courage, admirable grace, and unflinching honesty. She is a leader, an activist, a feminist, an artist, an advocate, and a scholar who has found her own voice while centering other women's voices.