



EXPLORING SELVARATNUM'S MEMOIR ASSUME NOTHING THROUGH THE LENS OF ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This paper explores into the insightful analysis of Tanya Selvaratnam's fascinating text, "Assume Nothing," employing Judith Butler's Language and Power Theory as a critical framework. The primary focus lies within in depth analysis of the layers of verbal, physical, intimate, and emotional violence embedded within the text. The textual analysis draws attention to how language, in both overt and subtle forms, becomes a vehicle for the execution and continuation of violence against women. The article not only serves as a critical analysis of "Assume Nothing" but also as an affecting exploration of the extensive societal issues it captures. It identifies and acknowledges the author's efforts in giving voice to untold stories, contributing to the continuing discourse on women's experiences of violence. This research article provides valuable insights into the complex interaction of language and power, elucidating the ways in which these dynamics express in the experiences of women as portrayed in "Assume Nothing." In this way, the study aims to contribute to an impactful understanding of the challenges women face, offering a platform for discourse and paving the path for meaningful change in societal attitudes towards gender-based violence.

Keywords: Violence, Discrimination, Power, Language, Gender, Abuse

INTRODUCTION

In the rich tapestry of literature, certain narratives go beyond the act of reading words and prompt us to embark on a transformative journey. Selvaratnam's memoir, "Assume Nothing," is one such narrative, offering readers a close look into the intricate layers of the human experience, entangled in the shadows of abuse and violence. This exploration not only unveils personal stories but also encourages us to critically examine societal norms and power dynamics that mold our lives. In navigating this intellectual voyage, we turn to the profound theories of Judith Butler, whose perspectives on language and power serve as a valuable framework for deciphering the complexities embedded in Selvaratnam's narrative. Selvaratnam's memoir is at its

core a story that goes beyond personal anecdotes, interweaving a rich tapestry of emotions, challenges, and resilience. Focused on the themes of abuse and violence, "Assume Nothing" serves as a potent instrument to analyze how societal structures impact individual lives. The narrative navigates the intricacies of identity, urging readers to confront the harsh realities of a world where abusive behaviors are often normalized.

In this context, the memoir draws on Judith Butler's theories of performativity and the role of language in shaping identity, offering valuable insights for unraveling the intricate layers of the story. At the core of Butler's framework is the idea that language goes beyond mere communication; it wields significant influence in shaping our perceptions of ourselves and others. In Selvaratnam's "Assume Nothing," the use of language is a nuanced exploration of power dynamics, showcasing the author's struggle to regain control in the face of abuse. Butler's insights help us examine how language, as a performative act, not only mirrors but also reinforces societal norms, especially those related to gender and power. While navigating the memoir, we are prompted to scrutinize how language constructs and perpetuates the very systems that contribute to the cycle of abuse.

Selvaratnam's story provides a powerful backdrop for the resonance of Butler's theories. The memoir prompts readers to reflect on how societal expectations impact individual lives and underscores the role of language in reinforcing these norms. Butler's examination of gender performativity gains significance when considering how societal standards influence not just actions but also the identities of individuals trapped in cycles of abuse. From this perspective, "Assume Nothing" is not merely a personal account but a critique of society, urging readers to confront the language that molds their perception of power and vulnerability. Issues regarding women are never completely debated. In the general public, it has been constructed that "ideal" women are women who can take care of the family with the focus only limited to the domestic area. Holmes (2007: 2) explained that sex is a biological difference between men and women. Meanwhile, gender is a social difference made between being feminine and masculine. These gender differences can trigger injustice which results in acts of violence. As we delve into the content of "Assume Nothing" with Judith Butler's theories as our guiding principles, we encounter a complex and layered narrative that goes beyond personal narratives to offer a profound exploration of the interplay between language, power dynamics, and instances of mistreatment. Selvaratnam's memoir serves as a lens through which we not only explore the individual narratives contained in its pages but also scrutinize the broader societal frameworks that sustain recurring cycles of violence. This intellectual journey challenges us to reassess our preconceptions and prejudices, compelling us to reflect on the potential for transformation found at the crossroads of literature, theory, and the real-life experiences of those who bravely share their stories.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In Selvaratnam's memoir "Assume Nothing," a powerful exploration of abuse and violence unfolds, revealing the hidden aspects often shrouded in silence. The narrative intricately navigates through the dynamics of power, manipulation, and the profound impact of both emotional and physical abuse on the author's life. Through a lens of vulnerability and resilience, Selvaratnam courageously addresses the societal structures that perpetuate such mistreatment,

urging a critical examination of how personal narratives intersect with broader systemic problems. The memoir's depiction of abuse becomes a poignant catalyst for discussions on the pressing need for awareness, empathy, and societal change regarding these deeply ingrained yet frequently overlooked issues.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The intention behind examining Selvaratnam's memoir, "Assume Nothing," from the perspective of abuse and violence is to delve into the author's firsthand account as a survivor and analyze the profound effects of abusive relationships on an individual's mental and emotional well-being. Through a close examination of the memoir, the study seeks to unravel the intricate dynamics of power, manipulation, and trauma, providing insight into the author's resilience and highlighting the broader societal repercussions of such experiences. This exploration aims to promote awareness, empathy, and a more profound comprehension of the complexities surrounding abuse, contributing to discussions on both healing and prevention

SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE

Examining Selvaratnam's memoir "Assume Nothing" from the perspective of abuse and violence offers a deep understanding of how trauma can have enduring effects on individuals. The memoir not only reveals personal stories but also serves as a powerful commentary on broader societal issues such as power dynamics, gender norms, and resilience. The value of this exploration is seen in its ability to cultivate empathy, generate awareness, and initiate crucial discussions about the intricate nature of abuse. Moreover, the significance of the research goes beyond an individual's account, providing a platform to analyze systemic trends and advocate for societal changes to disrupt the cycle of violence.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To elucidate the concept of gender based violence in personal as well as in professional areas of life
- To explore the in-depth impact of verbal abuse using linguistic theory

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways prevailing issue to gender based violence is addressed in the novella Assume Nothing?
2. How does language play an integral role in creating social constructs and promote abuse towards women specially?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender-based violence encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm inflicted upon individuals, with a tendency to disproportionately impact women and girls, owing to their gender or societal norms and expectations surrounding gender roles. It spans various abusive forms like domestic violence, sexual harassment, human trafficking, and others. The roots of this violence lie in unequal power dynamics and gender-based discrimination, presenting itself as a widespread and global challenge. Social issues encompass a range of negative

behaviors, including cyberbullying, threats, control, intimidation, monitoring, harassment, insults, criticism, stalking, financial exploitation, outing, doxing, impersonation, unsolicited sexual advances, verbal or written assault, physical aggression like slapping, hitting, and shoving, property destruction, trafficking, slavery, torture, and murder. Sexual misconduct involves forced sexual touching, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexually degrading acts, unsolicited sexual advances, image-based sexual exploitation, forced intercourse, forced prostitution, rape, and reproductive coercion.

In the current research, the focus is on elucidating Judith Butler's perspectives and concepts regarding sex, gender, and sexuality. The exploration commences with Butler's standpoint on the differentiation between sex and gender. The research delves into explicating the theory of gender performativity and provides a succinct discussion on the interconnection between gender performativity and sexuality. The comprehensive examination of these three themes collectively constructs a broad understanding of Judith Butler's notions concerning gender. The researcher employs Butler's theoretical framework as a cohesive basis for the analysis of Tanya Selvaratnum's "Assume Nothing."

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity revolves around the understanding of gender as a social and cultural construct, distinct from biological sex. Gender, in this context, is not viewed as an inherent or fixed trait but as something that is performed and reinforced through repeated social behaviors and expressions. Butler writes that "gender is the social significance that sex assumes within a given culture" (Butler 5). When discussing 'gender,' it is commonly associated with the concept of sex, either as a separate entity from biological sex or as a continuum of it. However, Butler's theory challenges the traditional binary understanding of gender and emphasizes the performative nature of gender identity, suggesting that individuals enact and embody gender through their actions, expressions, and interactions within society. She tends to view the concept of identity as the performance of a repetitive set of acts that women and men come to express "in agentic but constrained terms" (Lloyd, 2007, p. 56).

On the topic of gender-based violence (GBV), it is a global reality that hinders the full realization of women's rights. GBV is defined as any harm or damage inflicted against an individual's will, negatively impacting their physical or mental well-being, development, and identity due to their gender. Violence against women (VAW), as articulated by The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children, is a subset of gender-based violence, encompassing any act of violence directed specifically at women due to their gender. In essence, both terms highlight the pervasive issue of violence linked to gender, with VAW specifically addressing acts targeting women based on their gender identity. In relation to the problem of violence,

The elimination of violence against women and children is defined as any manifestation of gender-based violence leading to physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, including the threat of such acts, intimidation, or deprivation of freedom (United Nations, 2013). Women globally endure various forms of abuse inflicted by men, causing significant trauma Vetten, (2014) . Extensive research reveals a disturbing and consistent pattern of brutality, particularly directed at women and children (Karim & Baxter, 2016). Unjust stereotypes, which are typically

negative, contribute to gender injustice. One such stereotype arises from gender perspectives and often targets women, perpetuating discrimination (Rokhmansyah, 2016: 20).

Aligning with this perspective, Dzuhayatin (Purwo, 2000) outlines characteristics associated with women's stereotypes, including being emotional, gentle, non-independent, and passive, in contrast to the male identity characterized by rationality, aggressiveness, independence, and explorativeness. Concurrently, Noorkasiani, Heryati, and Ismail (2007) identify various forms of injustice resulting from gender discrimination, such as women's marginalization, subordination, stereotypical perceptions, increased workload, and instances of violence. Broadly speaking, gender-based violence encompasses all manifestations of violence stemming from gender disparities (Soul City Institute for Social Justice, 2016: 2; Ellsberg and Heise, 2005: 11; Fakhri, 2007: 17). For instance, if someone harms another person due to their gender or sexual orientation, it qualifies as gender-based violence. Ramazoglu (Hollows 2010: 8) contends that various patriarchal ideologies, whether implicit or explicit, serve as frameworks explaining the establishment and perpetuation of male dominance across social, ideological, sexual, political, and economic dimensions.

Walby (2014) outlines two forms of patriarchy: private patriarchy and public patriarchy. Private patriarchy operates within household dynamics, involving the direct control of women in relatively private spaces like homes. Within this framework, men in roles such as husbands or fathers are seen as oppressors who derive individual and direct advantages from the subjugation of women. On the other hand, public patriarchy extends beyond household structures, though households may still play a significant role in perpetuating patriarchal norms. According to Hollows (2010: 4) in general feminism is considered as a form of politics that aims to intervene and change the unequal power relations between men and women. Feminism as a political theory or a political practice (political movement) that strives to liberate all women: colored women, poor women, lesbians, elderly women, and also economically heterosexual white women Chodorow in Sunarto,(2009). People are born with a certain biological sex, but their gender is constructed by their environment and throughout someone's life (Stone 142).Meanwhile, according to Fakhri (2007), gender violence encompasses various types and manifestations of crime. These include the rape of women, including within the confines of marriage (marital rape), physical assaults within the household (domestic violence), acts of torture leading to genital mutilation, engagement in prostitution, involvement in violent pornography, coercion in family planning through forced sterilization (enforced sterilization), molestation, sexual harassment, and emotional harassment. Regarding the issue of violence, Soloratof and Pande (2014), in their book titled "Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia," expound that "Intimate partner violence stands out as one of the most extensively acknowledged and thoroughly researched forms of violence against women and girls." "Intimate partner violence is widely recognized, with a predominant focus on violence against women and girls. Ritzer, as cited in Sunarto (2009: 34-35), delineates the feminist movement into three waves: the first wave spanning the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, the second wave from the late 1960s to the present, and the emergence of the third wave in the 1980s. Within feminist discourse, various schools present diverse arguments regarding the causes of women's oppression. Tong (1998: 48-49) elaborates on liberal feminists' aim to liberate women from restrictive gender roles, challenging societal norms that relegate women to inferior positions in

academia, forums, and markets. Liberal feminists contend that patriarchal structures conflate sex and gender, limiting women to roles associated with feminine traits."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research methodology. According to Blaxter (1997), qualitative data refers to information that is gathered and analyzed in a non-numeric format. In this investigation, the current scholars employed qualitative research, a method involving a descriptive analysis that delineates intrinsic elements such as characters, characterizations, plot, conflict, background or setting, symbols, irony, and extrinsic elements like gender, language, and power theory. These aspects are examined within the context of the data derived from Tanya Selvaratnam's novel, "Assume Nothing." To gather the necessary data for this inquiry, the researchers undertook a comprehensive literature review, utilizing supporting books as primary reference materials. Additionally, they sourced information and references from relevant journals accessed through internet media.

The concept of gender encompasses psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, establishing distinctions between men and women as they undertake specific masculine and feminine roles within society (Haralambos and HolborninSunarto, 2009: 33). In Hollows' work (2010: 4), it is elucidated that culturally shaped masculine and feminine gender roles are subjects of discussion and are often linked to biological distinctions between men and women. This association can sometimes portray these gender roles as intrinsic to the biological nature of males and females rather than being cultural constructs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Judith Butler, a renowned gender theorist, delves into the nuanced connection between language and power in her scholarship. At the core of her theory is the notion that language doesn't merely mirror prevailing power arrangements but plays an active role in their formation and perpetuation. Aligned with poststructuralist perspectives, Butler underscores how linguistic conventions play a pivotal role in shaping gender identities and societal structures. Her influential contributions, notably in "Gender Trouble," have significantly shaped the discourse on the intersection of language, identity, and power dynamics. The text delves into the profound impact of language and discourse on various facets of society, literature, and philosophy, with a specific focus on their role in shaping gendered identities. It underscores the conventionalized associations between linguistic elements and their meanings, which contribute to the cohesion of society. Speech is positioned as a crucial system in post-modern interpretations, regarded as a record in collective memory that actively participates in the construction of culture. The influence of Judith Butler is apparent, as she draws on Austinian speech acts and introduces the concept of 'performativity' to revolutionize our understanding of 'sex.' According to Butler, language plays a pivotal role in the attribution and articulation of sexual identity, where performativity serves as symbolic acts reflecting broader social transformations. The distinctive viewpoint of Butler and other post-structuralists emphasizes the intricate connection between language and gendered identities, shaping both speech and literature through a lens that is feminized in nature

This text delves into the profound impact of language and discourse on society, literature, and philosophy, highlighting their pivotal role in the formation of gendered identities. It underscores the conventionalized connection between symbols and their meanings, contributing to societal cohesion. Speech is regarded as a vital system in post-modern interpretations, where it is perceived as etched in collective memory, influencing cultural construction. The influence of Judith Butler is discernible, as she draws on Austinian speech acts and introduces 'performativity' to reshape the understanding of 'sex.' According to Butler, language plays a crucial role in attributing and shaping sexual identity, with performativity representing symbolic acts mirroring societal shifts. The distinct viewpoint of Butler and other post-structuralists emphasizes the interplay between language and gendered identities, molding speech and literature through a lens that is influenced by femininity.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This analysis is based on the direct textual analysis of the text. Butler's theory will be used in this regard and that will provide the critical insights into the narratives provided by the author throughout the text.

1. *I talked with him about the physical and sexual violence, he made it seem like a game, even though I told him it didn't feel good and I didn't like it*

In exploring Selvaratnam's memoir, "Assume Nothing," through the lens of abuse and violence, the depicted conversation about physical and sexual violence becomes a crucial point of analysis within Judith Butler's framework of language and power. Butler's theory emphasizes the performative nature of gender and the ways language shapes and reinforces power dynamics. In the given lines, the individual's attempt to communicate their discomfort and displeasure with the experience of violence is met with a dismissive response, framing the disturbing acts as a "game." This reduction of serious and harmful actions to the level of a game illustrates how language is employed to delegitimize the victim's experience and maintain the status quo of power.

Furthermore, Butler's theory delves into the idea of performativity, where gender identity is not an inherent trait but rather a repeated set of actions that contribute to its construction. In the context of the memoir, the normalization and trivialization of violence through language play a significant role in reinforcing a power structure that enables abuse. The perpetrator's framing of violence as a game not only downplays its severity but also functions as a linguistic mechanism to exert dominance and control. The individual's attempt to articulate their discomfort challenges the prescribed gender roles and disrupts the performative script, highlighting the inherent power struggles embedded in language and its role in perpetuating abusive dynamics.

2. *I felt yet again that he was treating me like a yo-yo, pushing me away and then pulling me back.*

The portrayal of feeling like a "yo-yo," being pushed away and then pulled back, reflects a power struggle within the relationship. Butler would argue that these actions are performative acts that contribute to the reinforcement of unequal power dynamics. The language used in the text suggests a cyclical pattern, where the abuser exerts control by manipulating emotions and perceptions. This aligns with Butler's idea that language not only communicates power but actively produces and maintains it.

Furthermore, the repetition of this behavior implies a normalization of the power dynamic, reinforcing it as a consistent and accepted part of the relationship. Butler's theory would highlight how language, in this case, becomes a tool for the perpetuation of abuse, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. The victim, in this scenario, may internalize these patterns, contributing to the construction of their identity within the abusive context.

3. *A few times, he put his hands around my throat and tried to choke me. When I tried to move his hands. He ordered me to let go. I would say, "Hey, that hurts. "I would tell him to stop. But he didn't respond to my protests. Each time, he looked at me as if he were possessed, and then the moment quickly passed. I felt as if I had vertigo. I was scared.*

According to Butler, language plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining power structures.

The abuser's use of physical force, as described in the passage, can be seen as a manifestation of a power dynamic that extends beyond the physical realm. The act of putting hands around the narrator's throat and ignoring their protests illustrates a form of linguistic violence where the abuser uses their body as a tool to exert dominance. Butler's theory emphasizes how language is not only verbal but extends to non-verbal expressions, gestures, and bodily actions. In this context, the abuser's refusal to respond to protests becomes a silencing mechanism, reinforcing their control over the narrator through physical intimidation.

Furthermore, the description of the abuser looking at the narrator "as if he were possessed" suggests a dissociation from moral accountability or empathy, aligning with Butler's exploration of how power can be exercised through the denial of recognition and the dehumanization of the other. The narrator's sense of fear and vertigo underscores the psychological impact of such power dynamics, where language and actions converge to create an environment of terror and helplessness.

4. *Demeaning behavior in the workplace has its own negative psychological repercussions. Such behavior in the home, in a romantic situation, is suffocating*

In examining the provided lines through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of language and power, it is crucial to acknowledge the interconnectedness of language, power dynamics, and the construction of social realities. Butler, a prominent figure in gender theory, emphasizes the performative nature of gender identity and asserts that language plays a pivotal role in shaping our understanding of ourselves and others. The workplace, as a microcosm of society, mirrors the power structures present in broader contexts. Demeaning behavior in this setting not only perpetuates hierarchical power imbalances but also enacts a form of linguistic violence. Butler's theory underscores that language is not neutral; it is a tool through which power is exercised and reinforced. In the workplace, the negative psychological repercussions of such behavior are a manifestation of the power dynamics embedded in the language used, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and subjugation.

Expanding the analysis to the domestic sphere, particularly within romantic relationships, Butler's theory becomes a lens through which to understand the suffocating nature of abusive behavior. In intimate relationships, language becomes a potent instrument of power, shaping the narrative of the relationship and influencing the perceived roles and worth of individuals

involved. Demeaning language within the confines of a romantic setting is not merely verbal abuse; it is a manifestation of power relations that permeate the private sphere. Butler's framework prompts us to scrutinize the ways in which language is employed to construct and maintain power dynamics within personal relationships. The suffocating impact mentioned in the context of romantic situations reflects the psychological toll of linguistic violence, where words become a means of control, eroding the agency and autonomy of individuals. Thus, Butler's theory invites a critical examination of the intersections between language, power, and the lived experiences of abuse, providing a theoretical framework to analyze the dynamics presented in Selvatratnum's memoir.

5. *He would slap me until I agreed to call him "Master" or "Daddy." He recounted his fantasies of finding me somewhere far away to be his slave, his "browngirl."*

In analyzing the provided passage through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of language and power, it is essential to consider how linguistic acts play a pivotal role in the construction and perpetuation of power dynamics. Butler's work, particularly in "Gender Trouble," emphasizes the performative nature of language, where words and expressions not only reflect existing power structures but also actively contribute to their maintenance. The passage illustrates a disturbing power dynamic wherein the individual seeks to enforce control through language, compelling the narrator to adopt specific terms like "Master" or "Daddy." This imposition of linguistic terms is an example of performative speech acts that reinforce and normalize the power dynamics within the relationship.

Furthermore, Butler's theory highlights the connection between language and the construction of identity. In this case, the use of terms like "browngirl" reflects not only an exercise of power but also an attempt to shape and define the narrator's identity within the confines of the oppressor's fantasies. The act of naming and categorizing the individual according to racial and gendered terms serves as a mechanism to assert dominance and reinforce hierarchies. Butler's theory suggests that the performative nature of language contributes to the ongoing production and regulation of social norms, in this instance manifesting in the oppressive and dehumanizing language used to control and subordinate the narrator.

6. *He criticized my scars and wanted me to get them removed by a plastic surgeon. I was disgusted that he wanted me to call him "Daddy" and referred to me as his daughter when he himself had a daughter. That was why, when he gave me a choice of calling him "Master" or "Daddy," I picked "Master." But that resulted in more of the slave fantasies he inflicted on me*

In the context of language and power, Butler argues that language is not just a tool for communication but is performative in shaping and constituting our identities. In the given passage, the power dynamics are evident through the imposition of specific terms such as "Daddy" and "Master." The choice presented to the narrator between these titles is a manifestation of the power the other person wields over them. The act of naming and labeling, as seen in the choice of titles, becomes a tool of control and domination. By rejecting the term "Daddy" and choosing "Master," the narrator attempts to navigate the power dynamics, but

unfortunately, this choice results in the reinforcement of the abusive fantasies imposed upon them.

Moreover, Butler's theory emphasizes the performativity of gender roles and how societal norms contribute to the construction of identities. The inappropriate use of familial terms like "daughter" and the request for the removal of scars by a plastic surgeon further exemplify the manipulation of societal norms within this abusive relationship. The imposition of conventional gender roles and expectations becomes a tool for reinforcing the power imbalance, where the abuser attempts to dictate not only the language used but also the physical appearance of the victim.

7. *With me, Eric said I had "wild" hair and unsightly scars, and he wanted me to be his slave. Publicly, he was a friend and ally to communities of color; he was a big supporter and fan of jazz artists. But in the bedroom, he wanted to be "Master" and slap around his "slave."*

In analyzing the given passage through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of language and power, it is essential to consider the performative nature of gender and the ways in which power dynamics are enacted through language. Butler argues that gender identity is not inherent but rather constructed through repeated performances of gender norms. In the context of the passage, Eric's contrasting public persona as a friend and ally to communities of color, coupled with his private desires for dominance, underscores the performative nature of identity. His public support for jazz artists and communities of color serves as a particular performance that conceals his contrasting, and potentially harmful, private actions.

Furthermore, Butler's theory emphasizes the role of language in constituting subjectivity and reproducing power structures. Eric's use of terms like "Master" and "slave" in the bedroom reflects the performative power of language to shape and enforce particular roles and hierarchies. The dual nature of his language, oscillating between allyship in public and dominating language in private, highlights the ways in which power operates through discourse. The unsightly scars mentioned in the passage may also be seen as symbolic, representing the wounds inflicted by societal expectations and power dynamics. Through Butler's lens, the passage invites a critical examination of how language and performance intersect to perpetuate power imbalances and contribute to the normalization of abusive behaviors.

8. *On some occasions, he said if we broke up he would have to kill me. Sometimes he would pose it as a question*

In the poignant exploration of Selvaratnam's memoir, "Assume Nothing," the harrowing recounting of threats within the context of a romantic relationship unveils a disturbing facet of abuse and power dynamics. The ominous declaration that "if we broke up he would have to kill me," reflects a chilling assertion of dominance and control, showcasing the intersection of language and power within the confines of intimate relationships. Judith Butler's theory provides a lens through which to understand the insidious nature of such statements, illustrating how language operates as a powerful tool in the perpetuation and normalization of violence. The declaration, couched as a potential question, further underscores the manipulative nature of the

abuser, manipulating language to both assert dominance and, simultaneously, evade accountability.

Within the framework of Butler's theory, the language employed in such threats becomes a mechanism for reinforcing gendered power structures and maintaining control over the victim. The abuser exploits the power dynamics inherent in language, using threats as a means to perpetuate a system of dominance. This manipulation of language serves to not only instill fear but also to establish a coercive atmosphere where the victim is psychologically subjugated. The memoir becomes a powerful testament to the role of language in shaping and perpetuating abusive relationships, inviting readers to critically examine how language can be wielded as a weapon to maintain power imbalances within the intimate sphere. Through this analysis, Selvaratnam's narrative becomes a lens through which to scrutinize the pervasive connections between language, power, and abuse, offering valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play within toxic relationships.

9. *I missed my life downtown, the ease of contact with my support network of friends and collaborators, but he didn't want me out of his sight. On one occasion, I was at a film event in Tribeca. It was pouring rain, and I was near my place. I left him a message that I was sorry, but I was going to stay downtown. When I was a few blocks away from my house, he phoned, shouting at me, "I can't trust you!" A friend who was walking beside me looked alarmed. She could hear his angry tone through the phone. I felt embarrassed that she was witnessing the exchange*

In the given passages, the tension between the narrator's desire for autonomy and the partner's controlling behavior is palpable, reflecting the complex dynamics of power and control within the relationship. The partner's reluctance to let the narrator be downtown, coupled with the explosive reaction when she decides to stay, highlights a troubling manifestation of possessiveness and mistrust. This controlling behavior is a hallmark of abusive relationships, and it becomes a lens through which one can analyze Selvaratnam's memoir, "Assume Nothing," in the context of abuse and violence.

The phone call scene vividly captures the partner's attempt to exert dominance and control over the narrator. The exclamation, "I can't trust you!" reveals not only a lack of trust but also an attempt to manipulate the narrative and cast the narrator as untrustworthy. Through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of language and power, this moment can be seen as a performative act where the partner seeks to establish and reinforce a particular narrative that justifies his controlling behavior. The public nature of the confrontation, witnessed by a friend, adds an extra layer of humiliation for the narrator, illustrating how power dynamics within relationships can extend beyond the private sphere. By applying Butler's theories, one can delve into the ways language is used not only as a means of communication but as a tool for the exercise and justification of power in abusive relationships.

10. *He manipulated me by giving me things and then taking them away. Because he wanted me in his space, he offered me the guest room to use as my own. But he wouldn't let me put a desk in it so that I could have a study. I worked on the living room couch or at the dining table, until he got annoyed that I was working in those areas. Eventually he said I*

could use his office, which he never used himself. But the Wi-Fi didn't work there because the room was far from the router.

In examining the narrative through the lens of abuse and power dynamics, the described manipulation within the given context aligns with Judith Butler's theory of language and power. The perpetrator strategically employed a tactic of giving and taking away, utilizing material resources to exert control and dominance over the victim. By initially offering the guest room and then restricting its use for specific activities, such as the installation of a desk for personal study, the manipulator established a dynamic where the victim's autonomy and agency were undermined.

Furthermore, the narrative reveals a deliberate restriction of physical space for the victim's professional and personal endeavors. This control extended to the workspace, as the victim's attempts to work in communal areas were met with annoyance, demonstrating a systematic exertion of authority. The eventual permission to use the perpetrator's office served as another layer of manipulation, as the Wi-Fi issue further limited the victim's ability to fully utilize the space. This power play not only constrained the victim's physical environment but also disrupted their capacity to work and thrive independently. Butler's framework helps illuminate the nuanced ways in which language, in both spoken and unspoken forms, is wielded to perpetuate power imbalances in abusive relationships, as seen in the calculated actions of the manipulator in this narrative.

11. It's mind-boggling that Eric could pass laws to help women in the abstract while harming real women in his own life.

In the complex narrative of Selvaratnam's memoir, "Assume Nothing," the paradoxical nature of Eric's legislative actions and personal conduct towards women unveils a stark dissonance between public advocacy and private transgressions. On the one hand, Eric may be perceived as a champion of women's rights, utilizing his position to enact laws intended to uplift women in the abstract realm of policy-making. However, the dichotomy emerges as his actions within his own life run counter to the very principles he purportedly endorses. This incongruity underscores a troubling intersection of power, gender dynamics, and the dissonance between public image and private behavior.

Delving into this complex web of contradictions, Judith Butler's theory of language and power provides a compelling lens through which to analyze the inherent tension. Butler's framework emphasizes the performative nature of gender and power, suggesting that language and discourse play a pivotal role in the construction and perpetuation of societal norms. In the case of Eric, the disconnect between his legislative actions and personal conduct highlights the performative aspects of his engagement with women's issues. Butler's theory encourages a nuanced exploration of the ways in which language and power intersect, shaping both public narratives and private realities. This analysis invites a deeper examination of the implications of such dissonance, shedding light on the intricate dynamics at play in the intersection of political advocacy, personal conduct, and the enduring struggle for gender equity.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, gender based violence is the prevailing issue in all areas of life whether its personal or professional. In *Assume Nothing*, the author has provided a detailed description of intimate violence, brutal misogynist behaviours, patriarchal power dynamics and manipulative tactics. Judith Butler's theory of language and power has served as a tool of analysis and has provided minute details about violence took place at various instances in the text. Selvartnam has shown her craftsmanship in conveying the real essence of what she might have imagined to convey through her writing. Eric's character portrayal has given a thorough description of violent and misogynist man. This research served its purpose by conducting in depth analysis of gender based violence in personal and professional lives of women and also has analyzed the text to point out abuse whether it was verbal, emotional or physical. The findings emphasize the urgent need to address the frightening prevalence of such violences in the lives of women, transcending the boundaries between personal and professional domains.

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