

3-17-2008

## A Constant Struggle: Renegotiating Identity in the Aftermath of Rape

Jo Aine Clarke  
*University of South Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

---

### Scholar Commons Citation

Clarke, Jo Aine, "A Constant Struggle: Renegotiating Identity in the Aftermath of Rape" (2008). *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/181>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usf.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usf.edu).

A Constant Struggle: Renegotiating Identity in the Aftermath of Rape

by

Jo Aine Clarke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Women's Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Marilyn Myerson, Ph.D.  
Sara Crawley, Ph.D.  
Gurleen Grewal, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
March 17, 2008

Keywords: freedom, healing, ptsd, spirituality, survivor

© Copyright 2008, Jo Aine Clarke

## Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been completed without the assistance of many:

Thank you to Marilyn for everything you have been, and done, for me through my time as a graduate student: for always listening, for believing I had something to say even before I did, for all the hugs and encouragement.

Thank you to my wonderful committee members, Gurleen and Sara, for traveling with me as “I want to write about me” slowly became this final product. It is because of your example, faith and guidance that I was able to share so much of myself in this work.

Thank you to all the other survivors I have met and talked to in pursuit of this work: this is for all of us.

Thank you to Brian for helping me find the strength to tell the truth, and for the ultimate knowledge that every voice deserves to be heard.

Thank you to my family for always encouraging me to do what is right for me, even when you don't always agree or understand.

Last, I want to thank John Paul for knowing and accepting this is a part of me. Thank you for holding my hand, loving me, reminding me countless times that I could do this and helping me to understand why I needed to. I love you.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Chapter One .....	1
The Beginning.....	1
Echoes.....	3
Truth .....	4
Research Question .....	7
Method.....	8
Personal Narrative and Feminist Perspective .....	9
Chapter Two .....	12
Telling.....	12
Anger .....	14
Ideas and Identifications .....	15
Chapter Three .....	19
A Long Road.....	19
Notes on Rape: A Content Analysis .....	19
Details .....	26
Stories and Lies.....	30
Aftermath .....	31
Road to Recovery.....	34
Growth and Spirituality.....	36
Chapter Four .....	40
Awakening .....	40
Freedom .....	42
Self and Society .....	44
Individual Truths.....	46
Power .....	49
Cause and Affect.....	49
Regret .....	50
Hindsight.....	51
Reflections .....	52
Healing Work.....	56
References .....	61

Appendix A .....	65
Rape: A Survivor's Guide.....	66

## A Constant Struggle: Renegotiating Identity in the Aftermath of Rape

Jo Aine Clarke

### ABSTRACT

The academic study of rape has historically ignored the recovery experience of the person being raped. Beyond medical and physical effects, and the possibility of legal prosecution, little attention has been paid. Existing research loses sight of the survivor's experience, ignoring the fact that a rape affects every aspect of life. The trauma is not only physical, but also impinges on the emotional, intellectual and interpersonal spheres. Rape can be, and often is, a life-threatening experience: one that needs to be faced and dealt with before there can be any sort of productive future. While it has been demonstrated that rape strips away a sense of safety and well-being, very little work has addressed how this can be regained, especially from feminist perspectives. A rape renders every aspect of identity subject to destruction and must be renegotiated and rebuilt if one is to survive. Survivor is the right term—there is no other word to describe it.

The feminist canon has struggled for decades to open a discourse into the division between the sexes, critiquing the notion that masculinity equals aggression and proclaiming the falsity of the notion that men are genetically programmed to dominate. Despite this, stereotypes remain. In part because of this, feminist researchers and

theorists who address the topic of rape have been preoccupied with increasing public education and awareness. Women's perspectives of rape have been neglected.

The act of identity renegotiation involves three steps: understanding the event, accepting the trauma, and recovering one's identity by adapting what was to define what is. As feminist thought recognizes that there is no one definitive characteristic meant by "woman", this project by no means claims to include every survivor's path, but instead offers an overview of what might be involved. What I hope to accomplish through this project is illustrating how the process of renegotiation crosses into every sphere of identity: that is emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and psycho-social.

## Chapter One

### *The Beginning*

*That morning, as was usual, my father had gone to his office and my mother and sister had gone to church. I had asked if I could stay home, and after the usual argument, my mother finally agreed. Having only the three basic television channels meant there really wasn't anything worth watching and as it was summer I thought it might be nice to go the park...I honestly don't remember walking home, although I do have vivid memories of standing in the shower and scrubbing the blood and broken skin off and letting the hot water run until all the cuts had stopped bleeding. By the time my family got home, I was in my usual place, reading in my bedroom.*

With the exception of feminist writings, the academic study of rape<sup>1</sup> has historically ignored the recovery experience of the person being raped.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the medical and physical effects, and the possibility of legal prosecution, little attention has been paid to what happens to the survivor in the aftermath of the experience. This was certainly the case in the early 1990s when I was raped: beyond some basic medical tests and a few perfunctory questions about the timeline of events (presumably to establish the events as rape), neither the police nor the health examiners displayed an interest in my thoughts or feelings about the experience. More than a decade has passed since I was raped, and although I make no claims to speak for anyone else, I am well aware that the

path of my own healing did not end, but instead began, after that cursory health examination. With the advent, growth and ever-increasing accessibility of the internet, it is proving easier to find the resources to provide information and assistance to rape victims, although a search-engine (such as Google) query for “rape” will still result primarily in issues such as false accusations, dismissed suits, and medical complications. Beyond some basic data as to the prevalence of rape and speculation on the percentage of unreported incidents, there is little to be found in terms of the aftermath of a rape experience.<sup>3</sup> Only with persistence will the search eventually yield research and writings that take into account the survivor’s feelings and responses to having been raped. Of these, few look at the survivors’ stories in their own words, instead encasing the experience in medical or academic terminology that strips both the immediacy and reality of the crime while at the same time destroying the therapeutic efficacy of finding one’s voice. Rarely does the idea appear that a rape is not your fault, that others have been similarly violated and have had comparable thoughts, issues and reactions; that it is indeed possible to regain a semblance of normalcy and trust in your life.<sup>4</sup> While there is some writing to be found on the subject of rape and its aftermath, if one knows which scholarly terms to use and which professional journals to look in, none of it is easily accessible or even designed for the very people who need it most- those who have survived the experience and are looking for affirmation, understanding and assistance. This pattern of neglect, I believe, loses sight of the survivor’s experience by almost entirely dismissing it as irrelevant and ignores the indisputable fact that a rape affects every aspect of a person’s life. To illustrate this point I have included pieces of my own story, which merely began with the rape itself, an event that somehow persists in shaping

the ways in which I reach out, react and respond to people, things and events in my life. The focus needs to be placed not on the problem of rape, but on the problems caused by rape- that is, on the woman's perspective<sup>5</sup> detailing the prevalence of post traumatic stress disorder, emotional difficulties, various sexual dysfunctions and other consequences that may result from a rape experience.

### *Echoes*

*It was a nice day. I can still see in my memory the way the sunlight glinted off the leaves, still hear my panicked and too-fast breathing, still feel the scrape of the gravel as it dug into my back and neck and legs. What I repeated to myself nonstop on the way home was, "it's ok, it's ok, it's ok". Fifteen years have passed and I still have occasional panic attacks brought on by infinitesimal triggers if I'm not prepared or expecting their presence. At those times I find myself unable to do anything but lock myself away from the world and wait until my ears stop ringing, my back and neck muscles relax, my breathing slows to normal and I can convince myself this is just an echo.*

The trauma of rape does not end with the physical act but instead impinges on the emotional, intellectual and interpersonal spheres, interfering with everything from peace of mind to the ability to interact with others.<sup>6</sup> Rape can be, and often is, a life-threatening experience<sup>7</sup> and one that needs to be faced and dealt with before it is possible to move on to any sort of productive future. While it has been demonstrated that a rape strips away a sense of safety and well-being<sup>8</sup>, very little work has addressed how this very necessary feeling of security can be regained, and in particular very little feminist

work addresses this issue. In an extensive (and lengthy) search on the internet, in library, legal and health journal databases, and feminist literature, I found it difficult to find any work to date that has specifically treated the long and arduous process of reframing an identity in the aftermath of such a trauma.<sup>9</sup> A rape renders every aspect of personhood, of identity, subject to destruction and thus one's whole self must be both renegotiated and rebuilt in order to survive in more than body. Seeing the victim of a rape as remaining in a perpetual state of victimhood results from the continuing focus of rape as a primarily legal concern, and reveals the prejudice and bias through which rape victims are viewed. These attitudes must be changed, through improving the quality and quantity of social services offered and increasing awareness as to the crime itself and its aftermath. Calling someone who has lived through a rape a victim takes away their agency. Survivor is a much more appropriate term.

#### *My Truth*

*I'm relatively open about it now. Although I don't necessarily advertise it, I see no reason to hide. Why should I be ashamed? After all, I'm lucky. I survived. More than that though, I've become a strong, independent, motivated person who fights for both what I want and what I believe. It doesn't bother me if people disagree with my opinions because I'm firm in my convictions and confident in my abilities. It wasn't always this way though- for many years I hid, and lied, and stayed quiet. The journey to what I think of as freedom has not been easy and there are still times I become mired in fear. But then*

*I remember: I am a survivor.*

The feminist canon has struggled for decades to reveal the innumerable ways in which societies have historically defined women through sexist practices in order to open a discourse into the consequences of this divisive sexism and how these oppressions can be rectified and equality can be arrived at. Feminists critique the notion that masculinity equals aggression and have repeatedly demonstrated the falsity of the notion that men are genetically programmed to dominate women. Despite this, centuries-old stereotypes about women, sex and rape remain largely unchanged.<sup>10</sup> The confusion thus created has historically placed the legal burden on the survivor to prove a rape truly happened rather than, as in most other legal matters, upon the defendant to prove that it did not. In the matter of rape, “innocent until proven guilty” means “false until proven true”. In part because of this, most feminist researchers and theorists who have addressed the topic of rape have been preoccupied with increasing public education and awareness of its crime status. Women’s perspectives of rape have routinely been neglected in order to address the medical or legal aspects resulting from the act itself.<sup>11</sup>

Through the inclusion of a survivor-centered approach to this subject, I hope to arrive at a more thorough understanding of the personal experience of the rape survivor, and to be able to elucidate the principal steps taken in the often time-consuming process of identity renegotiation. The act of identity renegotiation involves three steps: understanding the event, accepting the trauma, and recovering one’s identity by integrating what was in order to define what is.<sup>12</sup> Although rape happens across lines of age, race, ethnicity and gender, in the interest of adequately addressing the subject I have confined my project to adult women. My emphasis is on the woman’s role in recovering her concept of self and renegotiating her identity in the aftermath of a rape, adapting as a

survivor and incorporating the knowledge of being raped into one's life in such a way that enables the woman to move on and continue with her life. I am offering a new exploration of the issue of rape, from a feminist perspective- that is, with a goal towards achieving a level of equal treatment for rape survivors with victims and survivors of other types of crimes (burglary or kidnapping, for example), which as a rule do not carry the implications of blame, contempt and social ostracizing that typically accompany rape. This approach recognizes that the process of renegotiation may look different in each individual who undertakes it. As feminist thought recognizes that there is no one definitive and no universal characteristic meant by "woman"<sup>13</sup>, this project by no means claims to include every rape survivor's path towards renegotiation. I acknowledge that each woman is different in terms of comfort with, and definition of, body and appearance, roles and lifestyles, gender and sexual orientation, social and cultural heritage, and a sense of security of self in light of feedback from others which entails self-acceptance, self-esteem, personal stability and integration.

For years, studies have been repeatedly demonstrating the complex association between a healthy self-concept and the ability to establish successful intimacies with others.<sup>14</sup> That is, it is necessary to have a certain measure of self-esteem, in terms of one's self, in order to form successful bonds with others. Maintaining a good self-concept and making interpersonal connections is a continual task through one's life. What I am doing through this project is illustrating how the process of renegotiation crosses into every sphere of identity: that is, emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and psycho-social.

## Research Question

In many ways, feminism teaches that discovering one's identity is a continual process carried out through an examination of self, others, and the structure of the world, and that this questioning is an integral part of life and personhood.<sup>15</sup> Sensitive to the connections between experiences, social placement and relations, feminism at its core seeks to establish the validity of its ways of looking at the world, and as such, the catalog of feminist work is ever expanding to incorporate new and alternate ideas and perspectives. While the subject of rape has been repeatedly addressed by psychology, sociology, and certainly feminism, the goal of my project is to present a different view of the subject itself by incorporating the survivor's experience. Through this project, I want to bring a feminist perspective to the effects of rape by exploring the ways in which the process of identity renegotiation is played out from the perspective of the individual who has experienced it and the ways in which these changing identities are affected by the trauma of rape. My specific concern with the issue of identity renegotiation following a rape is rooted in the experiences women have as they attempt to create and construct meaning in order to establish their own views as to the experience and their lives in the aftermath. How is the concept of self affected by the trauma of rape?

The study of self-concept leads one to the idea of spirituality, which I identify as the path towards achieving an understanding of the significance of life and choices as one part of a much larger entity: an awareness of connection with the self, others, nature and the realm of the spirit not necessarily tied up in the tenets of organized religion. The definition I am presenting was arrived at through the process of reading *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* by Joanna Macy and Molly Young

Brown as well as the “Message from the Dalai Lama” that precedes the text of that book. The book focuses on realizing the interconnectedness of the universe, and how understanding and accepting the intricacy of that relationship is crucial to attaining peace in one’s life. What role does spirituality play in the process of identity renegotiation? In many ways, it is the spirit that helps to make us individuals, shapes our distinctive identities and how we approach life. When I use the term spirit, I am referring to that essential piece of ourselves that enables us to create and maintain emotional connections. How are these identities and relationships disrupted by a rape, and in what manner can those links be reestablished?

### Method

I begin my project with a literature review of materials on rape; a content analysis of current pamphlets on rape; and an overview of some feminist work on identity: what is meant by the term, factors that affect it and the ways in which it can be established. This provides the framework from which to center a critical review of the current feminist literature on the topic of rape and what it has omitted. I deconstruct accepted feminist ideas of what is entailed in the recovery process and the ways in which the medical profession has defined and limited it by their focusing mainly on the physical aspects. Specifically, I explore the topic of spirituality, the many different forms in which it may appear, how it adapts itself and affects life in this age of technological advancements and the role it plays in the process of identity renegotiation. Spirituality is not merely religion or faith: it is instead the core of how a person lives.<sup>16</sup>

By interrogating contemporary dialogues and attitudes toward rape and those who survive it, through an examination of contemporary literature, I consider the steps necessary to reshaping public perceptions in terms of societal approaches to the topic. How do spirituality, psychological health and well-being, and perceptions of self and community all converge to influence the process of recovery and identity renegotiation? In what manner does the trauma of rape affect one's self-concept and relationships to others? Through these research questions, I hope to generate a different method of treating and discussing rape, its victims and survivors.

### Personal Narrative and Feminist Perspective

In order to better provide a firm ground for the theory presented, and following the idea that “an explicit goal of feminist research is to build theories from lived experiences”,<sup>17</sup> I have chosen to include pieces of my own rape story. While there is most certainly an element of personal empowerment in this act, the true motive for the presence of my narrative is to provide a space in which others might be able to find their own voices, to tell their own stories, in order that the overwhelming cultural prevalence of holding survivors responsible for their rape experiences might be brought to light and eradicated. There are societal pressures from every corner to stay quiet, to hide the trauma and the rape itself, and this only encourages the survivor to identify with the label of victim.

Winnie Tomm (1995) points out that the widespread abuse of women is linked to a lack of social privilege, which in turn reinforces existing prejudices about women and guides expectations of what constitutes acceptable behavior. The resulting global

discrimination<sup>18</sup> perpetuates the existence of violence along the lines of sex and gendered power relations. In time these forms of abuse become so common as to be rendered invisible in the happenings of everyday social interactions. As can be readily seen with politics, but is just as true in terms of sexual hierarchies, the consensus most often reflects the interest of the powerful rather than representing the majority in terms of numbers.<sup>19</sup> This apparent need for public agreement is perhaps one explanation for why religion holds such sway while spirituality remains so widely discredited; spirituality is more often understood to be a belief specific to each individual. Those in power have frequently relied on religious arguments to both explain and strengthen political choices and bolster support for campaigns. This line of reasoning requires those who share in the religion of the candidate to offer public support or open themselves to questions of whether they are indeed “true” members of the religion in question. If there is, as Tomm claims, a connection between autonomy and freedom, then perhaps the feminist drive towards a collective awakening to the plethora of injustices is required in order to achieve freedom on a global scale, for all of us. Before one can rectify any of the many social inequities at work in our present culture it is perhaps first necessary to achieve a degree of “objectivity”. Objectivity is an elusive concept, however, for where the idea of self requires one to possess the ability to distinguish between oneself and others, this more often than not becomes a situation of “us” against “them”.<sup>20</sup> Notions of self are always embedded in knowledge and experience; without this grounding, there would be little chance of being able to differentiate between the self and others. It is precisely this difference in perspectives that leads to recognizing injustice, and provides an impetus to effect change. Perhaps this paper may encourage others to alter their own perspectives,

as mine have continued to change as I have come to see that reality is not a given, but is instead constructed through one's experiences, reflecting the Buddhist idea that each of us is responsible for our own knowledge.

## Chapter Two

### *Telling*

*That morning I was thirteen years old, small, skinny, quiet. By the afternoon I was ancient, bruised, broken, and so tired.*

Given the continued persistence of instances of rape in the United States<sup>21</sup>, it becomes increasingly important to look at all the factors involved. In this way, we include the victim's perspective, which becomes pivotal in the endeavor to understand that the rape itself is often only the beginning of a process of healing and growth. The experience of rape is a complicated and incredibly difficult journey; while there may be similarities, it is in the end a singular event. Though the instance of the assault sets these events in motion, the journey then progresses through psychological and social responses, and may eventually result in an individual understanding of the trauma and recovery. Before presenting an accurate picture of the rape victim's experience, it is crucial that a clear understanding of previous work be established. My thesis seeks to achieve that understanding through a review of the literature that has to date explored the issues of rape, the social and psychological responses, and the process of recovery. Although the term victim is used throughout academic and social circles when speaking of rape survivors, there is a conscious attempt to avoid the victim ideology because of the way in which it downgrades women's sexual identity and autonomy (Burr, 2001). Therefore, for

the purposes of this work, I will be utilizing the terms victim-survivor and survivor, rather than victim, as the purpose of this work is to bring autonomy to the forefront, through an examination of the journey towards healing.<sup>22</sup> Also, while I acknowledge that men, women and children can be raped, as the act of rape is generally an expression of power and control<sup>23</sup>, the social context of rape lends itself to the reference of the victim-survivor as female.

By their very nature, traumatic events such as rape involve a violation of personal integrity, both physically and psychologically, shaking self-esteem and removing confidence in one's ability to control her surroundings (Smith and Kelly, 2001). Responses to rape, as a traumatic event, are by their very nature traumatic and it is therefore important to understand the nature of trauma in general and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) in particular. A myriad of factors influence the extent to which one is affected by individual and institutional responses to the rape. These include the nature of the assault, the level of violence, prior victimization, past mental illness or psychological treatments, social support and whether or not the victim-survivor is believed to be telling the truth about the assault or is blamed for causing it, as well as any number of other stressors that may be experienced during the same life period (Smith and Kelly, 2001). The victim-survivor does not just respond to the physical trauma, but also the psychological trauma, caused by the rape. Reactions such as anger, aggression, guilt, fear, anxiety, shame, doubt, depression, as well as any number of psychopathological conditions are common (Resick, 1993). Rape can also have an effect on social functioning, sometimes causing in turn varying levels of social and sexual dysfunction (O'Sullivan, 2003).

There is some indication that certain factors may influence the extent to which these reactions may impact life.<sup>24</sup> These factors include social support received<sup>25</sup>, participation in the justice system<sup>26</sup>, self-appraisals<sup>27</sup> and psychological problems and issues experienced prior to the assault. The final part of the journey is recovery, alternately described as the psychological work required. Here also is a dependence on a variety of factors which may both assist and hinder in the recovery process<sup>28</sup>, including demographic variables, prior victimization, nature of the assault, relationship to the rapist(s), social support, and the meaning personally assigned to the rape experience. My thesis argues that spiritual work and healing is just as pivotal to this idea of recovery, albeit the spiritual aspect remains a somewhat neglected area in terms of existing literature.

### *Anger*

*After I said it out loud, that I had been raped and hurt and had an abortion to end a pregnancy I felt wrong continuing, both under the circumstances and at my age, the priest said, "I absolve you of your sins". It was then that I realized I was angry. Instead of saying thank you and leaving feeling clean, as my teachers always said was the purpose of confession, I said, "what sins?" He told me that by confessing, I was acknowledging that I had committed a sin. I left the church then, and have not returned since, at least not spiritually. An adult forgets what it is like to be a child, to have a whole-hearted belief in the conviction that you are safe, that others will take care of you and give you the answers you need. I have not forgotten; I lost it<sup>29</sup> that day in church. I*

*gained something else though when I realized I would have to help myself, and that I could.*

Each rape survivor will have a specific, individual way of dealing with and recovering from the trauma (Smith and Kelly, 2001) in order to come to terms with the reality of the rape experience. While there are known and accepted patterns of responses, any subsequent path to recovery will be specific to the individual, and in light of this, it is first necessary to view each victim-survivor as a singular entity and thus begin a specific journey towards healing. This requires the acknowledgement that each rape is a vastly individual experience, regardless of any patterns in expected behaviors or responses. It is the victim-survivor's perception of the event that will determine the manner in which she reacts in the aftermath and a number of factors have been reported to influence the response, including relationship to the rapist(s), degree of violence involved, and social and cultural influences (Neville, et al., 2004).

#### Ideas and Identifications

How a rape survivor defines the experience is crucial to determining her response behaviors. Does she recognize the event as a rape, as a crime to be reported; will she tell anyone or ask for help? Many statistical surveys of rape will show that it remains one of the least reported crimes<sup>30</sup>, for a variety of reasons including fear of retaliation or retribution, lack of faith in the legal system, fears about the medical exam accompanying the reporting, as well as lack of access to police and health resources, fear of not being believed and being pegged as either a liar or somehow responsible for the event itself. It

has been remarked upon not a few times by lawyers involved in rape trials, for example, that the idea of the rape is itself a lie (Angelucci and Sacks, 2004), while the highly publicized trials of William Kennedy Smith in 1992, Kobe Bryant in 2004, and the members of the Duke Lacrosse team in 2007 all at one time or another made reference to the lack of physical evidence as proof that what happened may have been sex, but was not rape. In the words of Kennedy Smith's lead defense attorney, Roy E. Black, as reported in an article in the *Washington Post*, if the accuser had really been raped "she would have run over hot coals to get away. Her decision was 'yes'. This is right out of a romance novel." (Jordan, December 12, 1991)

The academic observation of rape and its aftermath began in earnest with the 1975 publication of Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, in which the author repeatedly asserts that rape is not about sex but is instead about power; rape provides another way of subjugating women through the exercise of superiority in terms of male physical power and strength. "Data are furnished not only to illuminate the desolation of the victim in terms of the fear and self-loathing engendered by the acts of rape but also the rejection of raped women by their husbands and families."<sup>31</sup> Also playing a pivotal role in bringing attention to a crime that had heretofore been dismissed despite being present from the earliest recordings of history is Burgess and Holmstrom's groundbreaking research studying both the immediate and long-term effects of rape from the standpoint of the victim-survivor, which led to the identification of RTS in 1974. Described as a variant form of PTSD, RTS occurs as a result of forcible, or attempted forcible, rape and occurs through two phases that can disrupt the sexual, social and physical aspects of one's life (Pettrak and Hedge, 2002).

Identifying RTS led to research which demonstrates the manner in which the victim-survivor's attitude and behavior before the rape can affect the way in which she responds; if the victim-survivor is seen as in any way responsible for the rape experience, this has a profound impact on the way in which others respond which in turn affect how the victim-survivor reacts to the incident. No other type of crime blames the victim-survivor for her participation, save those that are gendered (Mardorossian, 2002); always the question becomes about the "victim's" behavior, rather than the perpetrator's. Is it so difficult to see the mark this leaves on the victim-survivor and the difficulty it presents when attempting to make the journey from victim to survivor? Viewing oneself as a victim, rather than a survivor, of rape may frustrate attempts at recovery (Hengehold, 2000). Once admitted publicly, rape most often becomes a question of the woman's credibility, and if the matter proceeds to the court system it is difficult to untangle the trauma of the rape itself from the trauma of participating in a legal system (see "Preventing the Second Rape" citation 5) that oversimplifies matters by stripping all individuality and personhood away in the search for right and wrong. The very structure of a trial does this as it forces the rape survivor to tell her experience as a simple event with no feeling or emotion allowed, and it has been repeatedly found that this has a marked effect on the amount of recovery time (Hengehold, 2000).

Although there have been studies conducted which show a correlation between the idea of wanting to prosecute and the reporting of greater self-esteem in how those women viewed themselves in relation to their rape experience compared to those who did not, the experience of reporting a rape can certainly prove to be quite traumatic and a source of secondary victimization, as the person in question not only must face her rapist

but publicly discuss the events of the rape itself. Likewise, people with supportive social relationships and families have been found to experience lower levels of trauma; conversely poor spousal or family support has been associated with an increase in symptoms. The attempt to make sense of the rape experience is done in part to ascribe positive meaning, a coping strategy designed to assist in regaining one's feeling of control and meaning in a life that has been entirely disrupted, both by the rape experience itself and the aftermath. "It is only by remembering and narrating the past...that one forms a background from which a freely imagined- and desired- future can emerge."<sup>32</sup>

## Chapter Three

### *A Long Road*

*I believe that it is a fact of life that the more you want something, the harder it may be to get it. Having found myself living my life in a haze of fear, pain and numbness, I decided the first step to becoming whole again was going to be admitting the whole truth of what had happened, and hopefully be able to use that as an impetus to move forward. So I sat down to write my story.*

In point of fact, many victim-survivors are discouraged from prosecuting and often report feeling re-victimized by the legal personnel (Campbell and Raja, 2005). Devoid of emotion and subject to the suspicion of the defense lawyers, judge and jury, and community, it is little wonder that guilt and self-blame are such common responses to a rape (Koss, 2000). This phenomenon, which Brison labels a “cultural complicity”<sup>33</sup>, most certainly would have an effect on how one responds, how she is perceived and how she does, or does not, recover from the experience.

#### Notes on Rape: A Content Analysis

In an attempt to provide an overview of available pamphlets and handouts for dealing with rape, I chose seven examples as indicative of national, state and local efforts towards educating the public about the subject. All the resources used were obtained through the Victim’s Advocacy Program at the University of South Florida or the Crisis

Center of Tampa Bay, and were readily available. Only one national leaflet was selected, not because information is not available on a countrywide scale, but because these brochures most typically direct readers towards utilizing local resources.<sup>34</sup> The areas I reviewed were: intended audience, language, what information was included, and how the information was presented. Even though I specifically focused on female survivors, for purposes of content analysis, I will be addressing how each of these samples define rape victim-survivors.

The national example, a publication entitled “Sexual Assault Victimization”, is offered by the National Center for Victims of Crime and supported by the Office for Victims of Crime and the U.S. Department of Justice. An unassuming, plain peach sheet of paper is folded in thirds like a brochure and resembling, more than anything else, a generic product guide, is illustrated with a few open hands, presumably meant to convey a sense of openness and willingness to offer assistance. Written in part directly to the survivor, making use of a generic “you”, this flyer uses the term “victim”, although “survivor” is mentioned one time, with the idea of spiritual healing alluded to in passing. Broken up into question-headed paragraphs, this pamphlet goes out of its way to address the idea of males being raped and sexually assaulted then highlights services offered, what to do if you are raped, facts about sexual assault and further resources for information and assistance.

Of the four models I reviewed which are offered by the state of Florida, two were published by Florida’s Department of Health and two by the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence. The first of the Department of Health publications is a booklet called “after sexual assault: a guide for help”. The cover, done in contrasting colors of purple

and lime green, immediately attracts the eye, although the inside pages are simple and unadorned. The intended audience here is survivors, or people who know survivors, of sexual assault. Although the word “victim” is used once, the writers clearly address the supposedly genderless reader, with an awkward mention that boys and men can be assaulted and raped.

After this brief introduction, the idea of “Emotional Recovery” is laid out in four steps, with an emphasis on the need to deal with the events and one’s feelings about the assault, and that assistance from a trained counselor, one’s friends and family is crucial in order that “you can begin to regain your inner strength and confidence.” The next section walks the reader through the legal system, discussing the medical exam, police interview, court procedures and costs and crisis counseling. The last part is a list of Florida resources divided into basic and state university hotlines, advocacy groups, counselors and community education with the address, phone number, and county served.

The other booklet offered by Florida’s Department of Health, and sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is labeled a “sexual violence survival guide”, giving “options available to victims of sexual assault crimes”, and declaring “There is help. Take action.” The front cover is done in bright pastels and features a sketch of a pensive, ethnic-appearing woman gazing at a vase of flowers. Both gently attractive and attention-grabbing, this design sets the stage for a primarily female readership by subliminally sending the idea that it is women who are raped, although it does succeed in the sense of capturing a sense of sadness while at the same time implying agency.

Here again there is no specific gender cited, but the rapist is treated as male and the survivor as female by virtue of the details listed in the section on evidence. The audience is meant to be “you or a friend, family, or loved one” of the person who has been assaulted. Breaking the information down into steps of what to do, choices available, the evidence exam and possible refusal, available help, prosecuting and civil charges, and financial assistance, the booklet ends with a recognition of emotional responses and a list of victim’s rights.

The next example, “How to Help a Victim: Rape” is published by the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence, and presents a picture of a crowd of people encompassing different ages, genders and ethnicities with an illustration somewhat resembling a rising sun coming up to meet the photo. Gender is at no time mentioned at all, as the pamphlet is written for the “friend of” someone who has been through a rape, incest, statutory assault, harassment, assault, or any situation in which there was “nonconsent”. Although “survivor” is mentioned once, it is “victim” which consistently appears in the presentation of information. Definitions and examples of the different forms of sexual assault are given, the importance of understanding the variety of individual reactions, your own response to the situation, what is needed for a victim to become a survivor, how you can help, and finally what victims might be feeling.

The other offering by the Council is a bit different in its approach, seemingly designed toward a younger audience by its bright colors, graphics, and use of pictures of college-aged women (and one man). The cover addresses the use of drugs in certain instances of rape, asking “is there something in your drink you don’t know about?” and urging the reader to “be aware of predator ‘club’ drugs”. Men are mentioned, but the

“you” and “victim” used here is explicitly directed towards women. Three drugs found to be used are named and their uses and effects explained before tips are given on how to protect yourself, what to do if you think you’ve been drugged and raped, how to find help, and how drugs may aid in a rape situation.

Of the two pamphlets obtained through the University of South Florida (USF), the first is a somewhat outdated (1996, revised 2000) publication on “Sexual Violence” that, as seen before, mentions men as potential victims despite being obviously intended for, and directed at, women. This intention seems relatively apparent as the colors used are pink and lavender and the picture on the front is a young woman hiding her face in her hands, gives the impression of shame and perhaps fear. The “victim” audience is given definitions of what constitutes sexual violence and harassment, facts about rape, what to watch for and why to talk about sex and limits, how to avoid stranger rape, what to do in order to protect yourself and then what to do should you be harassed, attacked or raped, before concluding with some facts about drugs and rape.

USF’s Advocacy Program published a small brochure in the school colors with an image on the cover that appears to be a man and female holding each other and creating the shape of a heart. Designed for “providing help to survivors and victims of violence and abuse”, it mentions both gender pronouns and goes out of its way to mention that both boyfriends and girlfriends can be the ones committing these crimes. Although the words “recovery” and “survivor” are mentioned, the repeated use of “victim” overshadows both. The information is broken down into a number of subheadings which include a victim’s bill of rights, natural responses along the lines of emotion, behavior,

physical and thoughts, with an emphasis on the resources offered through the school and in the local community.

While all of these examples are clearly intended to help those who have been raped, they display the same societal shortcomings that this paper attempts to delineate: that is, the use of the word victim rather than survivor, the limited availability of information which reinforces the lack of introducing and actively promoting a public discourse about the topic of rape, and the baseless and culturally embedded belief that to be raped is to have done something wrong. This can easily be seen in the language used in these examples through the emphasis that is placed on responding to the public discourse by telling the reader that they have not done anything wrong; that they are the victims. Someone who has been raped and has the courage to look for help is not likely to be in a state of mind adequate to inferring intended meanings, but instead is more likely to take them at face value and come away with the idea that it is her job to seek out help if she wants it.

The findings arrived at through my use of content analysis illustrate the goal of utilizing this method of research: to isolate themes found within any given product-themes that manifest and reproduce the beliefs and discourses of the society in which it was produced.<sup>35</sup> More than this, a content analysis strives to identify the intended message(s) of the authors in creating the material being studied.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, it is perhaps possible to identify the ways in which the product might be amended and improved upon to better, or more accurately, meet the needs it set out to fulfill.

A better offering might include personal statements to illustrate that others have lived through similar experiences and survived, a list of common emotional and physical

reactions and how to deal with such, and a phone number or address to utilize if you want to talk about what happened without any sense of pressure or obligation to report the rape itself to authorities without your consent.

The attempt to bring public awareness to the ongoing issue of rape has gradually moved towards recognizing the severity of the trauma inflicted at the same time that survivors are telling their stories to illustrate that, while healing and recovery are possible, the crime of rape spills over into all of society, affecting the ways in which we conduct ourselves and communicate with each other. RAINN, an organization dedicated to providing information and fighting the continued existence of rape and sexual assault, is rarely heard from in the mainstream media despite having a national spokesperson, public service announcements and billboards, and multiple campaigns to raise community awareness across the country. The National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, celebrated in April, typically passes without any knowledge<sup>37</sup> despite events and functions dedicated to raising the issue into the collective consciousness, as do the myriad of other, smaller campaigns carried out on the national, state and local levels.

Taken as a group, the sample brochures reviewed above appear to want to avoid characterizing rape victims as women only, choosing instead to address an audience devoid of any identity. As rape is a traumatic event that most often has the effect of destroying one's sense of self through the loss of control over body and choice, the language used serves to reinforce the idea of that loss, and although it is unintentionally done, serves as an act of added and unnecessary cruelty. While each sample attempts, whether through direct or indirect means, to establish that rape affects the survivor's life, none go further than the immediate. Not one offers any words of encouragement or

testimony that simply because you were raped, your life does not have to stop. A welcome addition might be quotes from actual survivors which demonstrate the idea of recovery, healing, and the possibility of a return to some degree of normalcy. Not only would this provide a much needed unification for the various elements included in each, but would also lend a powerful voice to a group of people who, by virtue of the prevalent social discourse, have none.

### *Details*

*My memories of before and after the rape are somewhat hazy, like watching a really old movie where the tape is fraying and the edges are becoming fuzzy as the colors bleed into each other. I remember wanting to ask my dad to take a bike ride when he got home- it was a nice day and there was a pretty good bike trail that wound around the outskirts of the woods. I was thinking how nice and quiet it was, and watching the light shine through the trees. Suddenly I was yanked backwards, spun around and shoved so that I fell. There were a lot of them, or it seemed like it, and one had a baseball bat. He hit me with it, hard, in the stomach, and told me to be quiet. They were wearing what looked like old dark pantyhose over their faces so that their features were blurred, and they were all out of breath as if they had been running. One tore my shorts off and then shoved the bat up me. When I screamed, he pulled it out and hit me on the head and shoulders with it and told me to shut up or he'd hit me again. They took turns then, and what I remember is the way the gravel was digging into my back and listening to the rhythmic noises it made as they penetrated me over and over. I don't know how long it went on, but when it was over I was pulled to my feet and pushed up against a tree. I got hit again*

*with the bat, in the shoulder this time, and one put his hand around my neck. As he choked me, he leaned in really close to me and whispered in my ear, "I know who you are. Keep your mouth shut or we'll get your sister and then you." Then he said my name, as though to prove they knew me, let go, and they disappeared.*

During the rape experience, the victim-survivor's focus may well be on physical survival and include some element of self-protection, which may take the shape of shock, confusion, numbness, withdrawal or terror (Kaysen et al., 2005). While some may physically resist and fight against the rapist, others may dissociate and play dead. Other tactics include attempted escape, verbal resistance, faking illness and lying, fainting or focusing on some element or thought to make it through the experience. There is some indication that victim-survivors who developed PTSD were more likely to have perceived the threat of serious injury during the rape experience than those who showed no signs of developing the disorder, as serious injuries more closely fit the parameters of a life-threatening event that is said to trigger the disorder (Ullman and Filipas, 2001).

Green (cited in Carlson, 1997) describes seven dimensions to trauma that define the experience as such: threats to life and limb; severe physical harm or injury; receipt of intentional injury or harm; exposure to the grotesque; violent or sudden loss of a loved one; learning of exposure to a noxious agent; and causing death or severe harm to another. These dimensions are considered to encompass most experiences considered potentially traumatic, although a rape may not fit into this list as read verbatim. Carlson proposes three elements that have the potential to render any experience traumatic. These include perceiving the event as negative, sudden, and including a lack of controllability.

While there are many accounts of post-rape behaviors, including physical, emotional and mental responses, there are also more culture-bound interpretations that speak to the “traditional values” that we hear so much about during election years. An example of this view can be found in the work of Thornhill and Palmer (2000). Displaying a markedly sexist approach in their ideas about rape, sexuality, and reproduction, the authors go further by identifying the psychological trauma of sexual assault as an adaptation that assists in guarding against circumstances that might reproduce sexually reproductive success. Thornhill and Palmer argue that during the trauma one is motivated to undergo behavioral changes intended to prevent further pain or trauma and therefore ensuring less threat to sexual productivity. This claim is supported with data showing that young women suffered greater post-rape distress than did children or women past child-bearing age. This idea- that rape is done in order to reproduce- ignores the fact that prepubescent girls, men, boys and women past child-bearing age are also raped. Thornhill and Palmer have also been criticized (Ward and Siegert, 2002; Vega, 2001) for their evolutionist assertions, including the idea that reproductive loss is at the root of the higher level of traumatic response.

While the idea that rape has threatened women’s reproductive success throughout evolution by interfering with “the ability to choose the offspring’s father” and thereby thwarting women’s interest (Thornhill and Palmer, 2002) disregards more than three decades of research into the effects of rape, the root idea that the degree of trauma is elevated by lack of choice is very significant. We can conceptualize this as one possible explanation as to why PTSD is so much more prevalent in the aftermath of rape than other types of crime (PTSD Alliance, 2001), precisely because of our culture’s continued

insistence on blaming the “victim” just as much as, if not more than, the perpetrator. Thornhill and Palmer also say very little about environment, societal constructs, or the many and varied behavioral tactics taken by women in order to avoid rape and prevent conception. I would argue any human interaction, sexual or otherwise, owes more to social structures, behaviors, culture, human development and learning than it does to biological phenomena.

In a culture that has somehow come to equate sex with identity<sup>38</sup>, a matter of clear interpersonal violence is thus once again relegated to socialized definitions of sexuality and gender. Three decades of research and discussion of rape and there remains a marked lack of publicly available feminist writing on the subject, despite groundbreaking works such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women*<sup>39</sup> and the previously mentioned *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. While feminist works such as these have repeatedly shown how popular culture insists on falsely depicting women, much of the most easily accessible writing on the subject of rape has been done by such media friendly conservatives as Katie Roiphe. She can be seen as interpreting women only through conventional gender scripts- and from this perspective is merely repeating existing gender stereotypes and perpetuating rape myths, which Hamlin (2001) identifies as widely held, inaccurate beliefs often reinforced when surrounding circumstances, situations and characteristics of individuals involved in the rape are applied without due concern. These myths include the idea that rape is just spontaneous, impulsive sex; that only women, or women who dress or act in a certain manner, can be raped; women often exaggerate or make up stories of having been raped; and that rape is an interracial crime.

## Stories and Lies

A visit to the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics<sup>40</sup> systematically refutes each and every one of these, and other, myths about rape. For instance, crime statistics show less than 2% of reported rapes are found to be false accusations. The idea that rape is merely unwanted sex has been refuted time and time again; most rapists are shown to have access to a sexual partner, and the motivation is power and control. The related myth of rape being an impulsive act has likewise been shown to be false, as most rapes are carefully planned and if not caught, the rapist will attack again, typically in the same area and in the same manner.

Hamlin cites a variety of historical reasons for the existence of such myths including learned and accepted societal behaviors, gender role expectations and the fundamental power structure of a patriarchal society. The core of patriarchy is the idea that the power belongs to the father, and then the husband; at no point is a woman in a position to speak for herself. A man's family was, for much of history, legally seen as property. The dictates for gender<sup>41</sup> which at the root require that women be "seen and not heard" are still to be found in the structure of society. It is a simple fact that Western society has traditionally agreed with Aristotle's assertion of women as inferior (Frize, 2005) and it is the "male" qualities of logic and reason that are valued while emotions are categorized as "female" and thus perceived as both weak and passive, terms which hold negative connotations according to the patriarchal ideal. Following the persistence of this schema, it is perhaps less difficult to understand the continued presence of rape myths in our contemporary society. These myths, ingrained as they have become in the thinking of even the most enlightened among us, often have a marked effect on how the survivor

herself thinks of the event, whether she will tell anyone, the legal path of prosecuting the rapist, and even how rape research is conducted and approached.

These myths also tend to lead people to think of rape in terms of sexuality rather than the act of violence it truly is. This has the unfortunate side effect of supplying the rapist with a ready made excuse for his actions, that it is in some ways a natural compulsion that must be obeyed, or an action which can be traced to a recognized mental disorder, and thus is given a way to escape any and all responsibility for the crime itself by stripping the act of criminal intent and instead making it sexual in nature. This sort of thinking in turn leads to secondary victimization<sup>42</sup> involving behaviors and attitudes that are blaming, insensitive and traumatic to the rape survivor, which hurts just as much (on a psychological level), if not more than the rape itself. The most common venue for these attitudes, as per the above example, is through interaction with the justice system and medical reporting, both of which tend to take a rather stark view of the events regardless of the actual elements surrounding the specific rape in question.

### *Aftermath*

*My only clear thought was that I needed to get home before my parents and clean myself up. I've thought more than once since then how lucky I was that it happened when it did; my parents seemed to put my subsequent mood swings, instabilities and temper tantrums down to puberty. Although in hindsight the PTSD symptoms I was exhibiting seem obvious, you would have to know what to look for in order to recognize the signs. The afternoon I had the abortion, I just told my mother that my stomach hurt and went to bed. I went through periods where I would hide in my bedroom reading and refuse to talk or*

*interact with anyone, and then suddenly I would chatter nonstop until my voice got hoarse and scratchy. Some days I would scream if anyone touched me and sometimes I was so overly affectionate that my mother talked with me about being inappropriate. I don't even think I recognized what happened to me as real, or a crime, until I got to college. Somehow I managed to make myself believe it hadn't truly happened, until one day there was something in the local paper about a girl being raped and suddenly it hit me: that's what it was.*

Burgess and Holmstrom found that responses to rape fell into two distinct categories: controlled or expressive. That is, outwardly composed, subdued and apparently calm or crying, shaking, tense and avoidant, etc. Most women reported numbness and shock. Their 1974 *Rape Trauma Syndrome* was a study of 146 participants identifying the acute reaction phase and the reorganization phase as characteristic responses to rape. The acute phase was marked by disorganization, the first and shorter period of initial impact evoking shock and disbelief. Two to three weeks after the rape saw the advent of the reorganization phase, marked by motor activity, nightmares and phobic behaviors. Other post-rape behaviors have been found to include intrusive thoughts, flashback and nightmare, disruption in relationships, fear, problems with social and work relationships, sexual functioning and satisfaction, anxiety, memory deficits, depression, family issues and PTSD.

Traumatic events also have an impact on psychological and social functioning and have been known to produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory. Reactions include fear, anxiety, anger, aggression,

guilt, shame and doubt, depression, psychopathology, social withdrawal and disturbance in sexual functioning. Psychological reactions found to be prevalent in rape victims include fear, anger and depression as well as disruptions in self-image and confidence. The trauma of the rape may result in social withdrawal, disruption in one's ability to trust both self and others, avoiding any reminders of the rape on both a conscious and subconscious level, shame, guilt, and the sense of inferiority and helplessness that accompanies memories of the rape experience.

Each victim-survivor reacts differently; while some women have mild or short-term reactions, others can be in effect devastated by a rape experience. Variables that may help identify those who might react more severely include: participation in the justice system, social support (such as family or partner), cognitive appraisals and pre-rape functioning (ex: psychological problems and similar preexisting conditions). Along with the disruption, however, comes the possibility that the shattered elements of the victim-survivor's life may be reconstructed in new ways and patterns as she makes the transition to survival. Rape is an experience that can both challenge and destroy a woman's identity, assumptions about the world and how one operates in it, destroying that sense of safety and invulnerability in which most people untouched by pain, crime, death, etc. operate. Recovery is based on the mutual empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections.<sup>43</sup> This recovery does not take place in isolation, instead requiring a context of relationships and experiences in which to occur.

This idea is found at the root of Brison's *Aftermath*. Using her own experience of surviving a rape and attempted murder to explore trauma and its effects, the author provides a philosophical analysis of the work required in order to reemerge as a fully

healthy and truly functional member of society. By placing the focus on the notion of the self and the ways in which a traumatic event may destroy those beliefs necessary to everyday life, and in order to recover, one must admit and share the experience. Speaking of the rape allows the victim-survivor to change the meaning of the trauma, and by incorporating the event into one's narrative, some degree of control over the event might be regained as the process of reconstructing one's self-identity is begun.

### Road to Recovery

There is a multidimensional definition to recovery, involving a specific set of steps in which to recover one's sense of self and autonomy (Harvey, 1996). Following this model, recovery is achieved when the rape victim becomes capable of again having a successful intimate relationship. Smith and Kelly (2001), working within a feminist standpoint, have criticized Harvey's model because it lacks the survivor's own perspective of the recovery experience. They believe that it should be the survivor's role to define what constitutes her recovery and that this definition depends on where she is on the individual journey towards healing. There is no one universal account of suffering, trauma, or healing. One's world is shaped by experience, and each person's reaction to those experiences will be different as context of time, space and other variables play a role in determining response. Despite this valid criticism, which restores the victim-survivor's agency by giving significance her own account of the rape, much of the recovery process research instead complements Harvey's model.

Gilboa-Schechtman and Foa (2001) report that recovery after a rape is a slower process than recovery from non-sexual assaults. While their assertion that a rape

experience gives rise to more severe reactions than other types of assault is backed by other research, they are at a loss to explain the slower recovery time. They do explain that emotional engagement with the trauma is a necessary condition for successful processing of that trauma, but they never clearly delineate what is required for emotional engagement or how it might be measured. The addition of a feminist lens here would enhance these findings by the accompanying inclusion of the recognition of the power of voice; that is the idea that one must accept the event and be willing to incorporate that knowledge into both one's self-identity and everyday life.

Herman (1996) describes recovery from trauma in three stages. The first stage being to establish safety; this is marked by the survivor's naming the problem and restoring some measure of self-control. Reconstructing the story of the trauma comes next through remembering and mourning by retelling the events, transforming one's memories of the experience and mourning the losses engendered by the rape. Restoration of connection between survivor and community is the final stage. This is accomplished by the development of a new sense of self, regaining the ability to successfully relate to others and finding a new way of viewing the world. This model notes that the trauma is never fully resolved, but instead somehow integrates itself into the memory of the survivor. Herman is on the way towards a feminist space but neglects the idea that as sexuality is simply one facet of personhood, a rape does not have to define one's entire identity. Finding a new way of viewing the world does not have to mean ignoring the truth of what happened, but instead learning about one's self through the experience and integrating that knowledge into everyday life.

Smith and Kelly (2001) also provide a three-staged process of recovery, although theirs is distinctly feminist in its approach as the authors recognize the importance of achieving a degree of personal acceptance through the road to understanding others. Before this can happen however, the survivor must first be willing to risk “coming out” and Smith and Kelly describe the journey as an inward, and continuously moving, spiral, acknowledging that the survivor has to revisit feelings such as fear, anger, helplessness, etc. This begins with reaching out; the focus here is on external needs and desires. The next stage is reframing the rape. The third level consists of redefining the self, through self-love, forgiveness of self and rapist and finding inner peace, and finally reaching some place of internal understanding of the event.

Factors known to influence any of these models of recovery<sup>44</sup> include prior life stress, the nature of the rape experience, the relationship between victim and rapist(s), responses to the rape by general public, police, health workers, friends and family, social network, subsequent victimization, and the meaning ascribed to the rape experience, among others. Also playing a role is the idea of social contexts and how these play out in terms of gender and power constructs. Social support has been found to be associated with better adjustments after the rape (Frazier and Burnett, 1994).

### Growth and Spirituality

Finding positive meaning in the rape can be seen as a coping strategy, and Frazier and Burnett identify ways to do this, including finding side benefits; comparing oneself to others in worse situations; imagining the situation could have been worse; forgetting the negative aspects of the situation; redefining one’s goal following a trauma so that

important goals are no longer blocked. As Linley and Joseph (2004) point out, “positive changes following adversity have long been recognized in philosophy, literature and religion...following chronic illness, heart attacks, breast cancer, bone marrow transplants, HIV and AIDS, rape and sexual assault, military combat...” These positive changes are labeled as adversarial growth, resulting as they do from adversity and providing hope that the trauma in question can be overcome. Linley and Joseph cite several studies which support this idea of posttraumatic growth across the dimensions of relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change and life appreciation. Frazier et al.’s work *Posttraumatic Growth: Finding Meaning Through Trauma* explicates that the trauma must first be acknowledged and dealt with before these positive changes can be seen. This study found that control over the recovery process was strongly correlated with posttraumatic growth; common positive changes included increased empathy and assertiveness, changes in life philosophy and spirituality. This is an example of feminist work, respecting that each individual is different and will approach and experience life according to those individualities. In this way, spirituality and feminism are naturally related as both rely on the individual to chart out the meaning of events rather than accepting a predetermined and rigidly constructed social picture.

While I expand on this later, an elementary definition of spirituality might be the path an individual takes towards understanding one’s self, one’s surroundings, and the relationship between them. Religion is the form spirituality has most often taken, as the former allows for a structured form that can then be expanded to allow the inclusion of many people, rather than a specific and necessarily individual journey. The main problem with organized religions is that they are exclusionary and limiting (Maytorena

and Summer, 2002). Despite the inherent differences between the two, they have, along with posttraumatic growth, been connected through a number of empirical studies. Shaw, Joseph and Linley's review of these works produced three main findings: religion and spirituality are usually beneficial in dealing with the aftermath of trauma; traumatic experiences can lead to a deepening of religion or spirituality; positive questioning and participation in these veins are often associated with posttraumatic growth. This is in line with many religions' views that suffering is often necessary to personal development. The authors speculate as to the distinction between the two being an important element of future research in this area, as "the shattering of specific religious beliefs may be replaced with the acceptance of a broader and more flexible spirituality".

A growing number of academic research has been focused on understanding the meaning, and parameters, of recovery from the perception of the victim; both in the way recovery proceeds and in which factors contribute to that recovery. Smith and Kelly (2001) identified three distinct, albeit inter-related, themes in the recovery process: reaching out, reframing the rape, and redefining the self. "Experientially, it is difficult to determine where one theme ends and another begins" (343) and as such Smith and Kelly describe the journey towards recovery as an inward moving spiral, noting that the healing process is progressive and impels one to look inward for answers rather than expecting them from some external source. This highly individual process begins with the decision to reach out to others, enabling the rape victim to receive both support and the acknowledgement that the journey to recovery does not have to be faced alone. Reframing the rape consisted of attempting to make sense of the events and finding some positive aspect, or purpose, to the rape. The third step, redefining self, "involves not only

the regaining of what one has lost as a result of being raped, but the ability for increased personal growth” (346).

## Chapter Four

### *Awakening*

*I don't remember the exact moment when I decided that I'd had enough of lying to myself, pretending the events of my rape had not happened, and refusing to acknowledge the truth, even to myself. Since the rape, and probably before, I had always looked at the violation of my body as some kind of death, as though I no longer had value as a person. What I do remember is the feeling of recognition that went through me like an electric shock when I came across the writings of Anais Nin. Her words seemed to leap off the page and speak right to me. I saw for the first time the further damage I was inflicting by hiding from myself, and began to understand that that which was gone forever- my innocence, virginity, sense of blind trust- was only a small part of my total identity. The two quotes that I have treasured most are these: "And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom" and "The personal life deeply lived always expands into truths beyond itself." I thought to myself, my day has come.*

The spiritual self is constantly changing as it develops and grows in accordance with one's learning- of the self, others, the world, and so on. This introspection is a form of survival: recognizing there is a meaning to existence that transcends one's immediate circumstances and using this knowledge as a means to renew, comfort, heal and inspire

both the self and others. It follows that spirituality is something that is chosen, an individual entity born of a revelation, nurtured and fed by the person as it seeps into every aspect of that life. It is found deep within oneself, and can be recognized and attended to, or ignored and denied. At the most basic level, one's spirituality is a particular way of living, relating to others and the world, and because this is so very personal, it cannot as a rule be found in any social grouping or identity, which all religions are to some extent. As yogi William Irwin Thompson said, "Religion is not identical with spirituality; rather religion is the form spirituality takes in civilization..."<sup>45</sup>

As such, spirituality may sometimes be considered synonymous with religion, and while there are certainly parallels and like elements, I posit that spirituality is something both greater and at the same time more individualized than religion. Many of the world's organized religions adhere to a system of core beliefs: detailed rules of behavior meant to be upheld by anyone claiming membership in said religion, and often the act of questioning or acting against those beliefs may be seen as an offense of that religion. Spirituality, on the other hand, is greater in scope and yet inextricably more private, a personal idea that is to some extent impossible to define, as it means something different to each individual. As Winnie Tomm asserts on page 7 of her book *Bodied Mindfulness: Women's Spirits, Bodies, and Places*, "There is not a universal form of spirituality, nor is there a common human nature that is independent of the localized living conditions." While one person may equate their spirituality with a religion, the next may shun all organized dogma and the public face of all religious faiths. It is the very act of questioning what we are that encourages the individual to find those answers through a personal search for a connection to the very energy of life.

## *Freedom*

*I started drinking, a lot, and experimented a little with drugs. I liked the way they made everything calm and unimportant, but I hated not being in control, so I stopped. One of the electives at my college was kickboxing and, always irrationally terrified of the darkness and being alone, when a friend suggested taking the class together it seemed like a good idea. I loved feeling empowered and able to take care of myself and started looking for other ways to reproduce that feeling. I found yoga and meditation and threw myself into both with a zeal previously reserved for reading. Yoga was a gift that let me touch my body and get to know myself again, without the fear and self-loathing I had come to feel was permanent. Meditation was amazing; I could think and focus my mind on something besides the ever-present pain and fear. Except there was more pain and fear in my life- an abusive relationship turned into a pattern. I seemed to be attracted to big men; tall, strong, aggressive and with tempers. The first time I got hit, I remember being shocked, confused, and upset. Like so many other abuse victims though, at least in the beginning, I believed him when he apologized and swore it would never happen again. Two years later I finally realized something that has carried me through the struggle to finally heal and be free. I'm the one who is in charge of me, and I deserve to be what I want, where I want, and most of all, who I want.*

One's spiritual awakening can be said to take the form of a journey, most often unique to the person and as such follows no certain trajectory towards its objective. Describing this journey is much like the allegory of the cave that appears in Plato's *The Republic*, perhaps as good an explanation of the process of spiritual development as can

be found. A prisoner has been always chained and immobile, staring at a wall and attempting to define the shapes that appear there, when suddenly he is freed and makes his way outside. Seeing the sun for the first time, he realizes the truth of the matter and returns to the cave enlightened, and attempts to tell the other prisoners that what they are seeing is shadows which are not real and only seem to exist because of the effects of the sun. This revelation is greeted with disbelief, as it negates everything they have known their entire lives, and so the original prisoner is treated with disdain and becomes entirely discredited. So it is with spirituality; one has to experience the revelation personally in order to truly be able to understand and believe. The truth is there to be seen, but in order to recognize it one must first learn to look. After all, how can you explain substance to someone who has only known shadows?

The idea of the self as a whole<sup>46</sup> is an idea which is seemingly impossible in Western consciousness<sup>47</sup> that works so hard to keep the body separate from the spirit and considers science to be supreme, denying anything else.<sup>48</sup> For example, Western medicine is only beginning to recognize that faith may be said to play an integral role in healing. Many U.S. medical schools are starting to offer courses that look at how religion<sup>49</sup> and medicine interact with each other, having taken research such as that done by Dr. Harold G. Koenig, the co-director at the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health at Duke University's Medical Center into account. One of Dr. Koenig's studies found subjects who attended church once a week during the previous year significantly less likely to be admitted to the hospital than non-church participants, and while Dr. Koenig stresses that religion is certainly not a cure, he points to the repeated finding that people who have faith as an integral piece of their lives often live longer and enjoy better

health over-all. Although it to some extent broadens (or perhaps simply restates?) the study's findings, it is perhaps not so much of a leap to put forward the idea that improving one's spiritual health works to further one's ability to cope with any manner of events that may occur throughout the course of life experiences, whether ordinary or traumatic in nature.

### Self and Society

It is an inescapable fact that we live in a culture that prides itself on fast fixes and easy answers<sup>50</sup>. A casual search of the internet, magazine, or late-night infomercials produces injections claiming to make your skin look younger, supplements promising to change the look of your body, instant online dating services that will help you find your perfect match<sup>51</sup>, and pills marketed to cure everything from obesity to erectile dysfunction. Living in the midst of an "information age", where answers appear instantaneously to any question we may posit, has resulted in the idea of healing as a time- and effort- intensive project becoming somewhat foreign to our collective consciousness. In many respects it would seem that we have become reluctant to invest any amount of either time or effort than appears absolutely necessary. In terms of post-rape trauma however, there is little choice; personal effort- mental, physical, emotional, etc.- must be made if any sort of healing is to be effected. As we have already seen, RAINN asserts that there is a rape or sexual assault every two minutes, and the World Health Organization found that rape victims are 6 times as likely to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Taken together, this indicates that each rape survivor must find their way to recovery, whether this means learning to live with either PTSD or RTS

or merely finding a way to cope with the knowledge of the rape itself. While each rape survivor must define for herself what recovery looks like, there are three distinct phases. These are: reaching out, reframing the rape, and redefining the self (taken from "Journey of Recovery", *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, May 2001).

While reaching out and reframing the rape are somewhat self-explanatory, the idea of redefining the self is more complex. Adhering to the scope of this paper, as the idea of one's self evolves, bonds are formed and knowledge is gained while personal strength becomes more of a focal point, in turn allowing for greater depth and possibilities to be realized. This prompts an awakening that one is responsible for personal conduct: just because "evil" is done to you, it does not necessarily follow that you have to sink into similar patterns of behavior, rather you can rise above and become more than just the sum of those experiences.

Reality, however, is rarely simple. Life is difficult, with complications and problems at every turn. This goes some way to explain the presence of religion, which scholars and theorists ranging from Plato to Marx to Weber have been attempting to define for as long as the idea itself has existed<sup>52</sup>. The word "religion" itself comes from the Latin "religare", meaning "to bind together", and the American Heritage Dictionary defines religion as "a set of beliefs, values and practices based on the teachings of a spiritual leader". This idea, that many given religions are the result of circumscribed schools of thought, supports my previous claim that religion is merely one component of spirituality, which helps to explain the presence of so many differing faiths, which so often seem to be at odds. Certainly there are an abundance of belief systems to be found, and each, to varying degrees, insists that it can provide you with the best, or perhaps the

only, answers which humanity so desperately seeks.<sup>53</sup> The current popularity of Scientology is an excellent example of this- it promises to give answers, truths about self and others, the world, and life<sup>54</sup>. Whether or not it truly provides these is somewhat immaterial; a void may exist in everyday life between what is and what we are able to provide logical and/or rational explanations for and anyone or anything offering a solution, whether through a religion, diet pill, dating service, etc. is most likely going to find an audience. Is it really possible to find answers and engineer change through buying into an advertising slogan?<sup>55</sup> It has been observed more than once that our society<sup>56</sup> is one that does not want to have to work in order to produce results. Any effort to arrive at a clear-cut solution to several fundamental questions<sup>57</sup> life presents is going to be faced with a troubling idea- if there were truly a definitive answer, it seems to follow that it would be clearly recognizable to anyone looking for it, or willing to see it at any rate.

### Individual Truths

This is where spirituality comes into being- there are no easy answers, and perhaps no universal truths. Spirituality instead recognizes that it is the individual search for these same answers that is of the utmost importance; that is, it is the asking which is the essential piece.<sup>58</sup> As the Dalai Lama said, "...no one can achieve spirituality on your behalf. It has to be done by the individual." To me, spirituality is the idea that there is something greater than the self, and that is the knowledge of the self as a piece of a bigger puzzle. Each of us must find her, or his, own way to this greater truth, whether in a specific religion or simply in one's self, because in the end, it is a personal knowledge.

Spirituality can provide a sense of meaning to our existence and experiences by helping give shape to a personal network of beliefs and ethics which determines how we relate to others, the world, and the events, both large and small, that occur throughout our lives. In terms of healing, this spiritual growth is accompanied by the power to change negative self-associations into positive self image, confidence and expression. This is directed not towards the abstract idea of the sacred<sup>59</sup>, but channeled into finding the sacred within the self. What is important here is that a spiritual journey offers the idea of change, of adapting, wherein ideas shift as one acquires a different vision of life, of the self, and of what is truly important. These spiritual observations may most likely lead to a reformation of one's identity that reflects gained insight and knowledge, of the world and the self, and adapting one's previous held ideas to incorporate the new information. The idea of the self as a whole, going back to George Herbert Mead's claim of the unification of "I" and "me"<sup>60</sup>, is one which is seemingly impossible in the current Western consciousness that works so hard to keep spirit and body separate, a reflection of a much larger outdated and inept system.

The fact remains that, despite the real and stated commitments to multiculturalism in democratic societies, at the grassroots level, the existence of a socio-cultural binary of "us" and "them" or "we" and "they" is very much a reality and can scarcely be denied. This is true not only in Western societies but also within multicultural countries such as India. But this socio-cultural binary is not a given; it is created historically during processes of nation formation when majorities and minorities are manufactured.<sup>61</sup>

Although still very much socially present, this binary model is a poor representative of reality: gay versus straight, male versus female, democrat versus republican- it is rarely, if ever, that simple because by forcing people to fit themselves within these rigid either-

or categories, the system fails to recognize all the diversity that exists. If there were only two viable choices to be had, does it not follow that theories would most probably give way to answers? Instead there are innumerable options of religions, spiritual schools of thought, philosophies and reasoning, and as more questions are asked, more answers are forwarded as possibilities. Insistence is placed on finding the answers rather than making an effort to understand the reason behind the questions themselves.<sup>62</sup> Is this why human, or at least Western, culture remains so determined to be healed rather than accepting that healing is a process<sup>63</sup>, an on-going and ever evolving process of becoming? Each of us has to discover what has shaped our own self in order to be able to recognize the context within which we live and operate. Spiritual centeredness is recognizing and accepting the whole being<sup>64</sup>, at peace with itself and its surroundings.

This idea of centeredness involves work and sacrifice, for it means letting go of the anger and hate that so often arises in the aftermath of sexual trauma. This means admitting what happened, saying out loud “I was raped” and then realizing you are indeed more than the sum of your parts. In her book, *At the Root of this Longing*, Carol Lee Flinders addresses this concept of honest contemplation; that, in order to turn the focus inward, one’s self-protective defenses must first be lowered. Gandhi claims that strength comes from within<sup>65</sup>, and the Dalai Lama has repeatedly noted that it is only by facing our problems that we can overcome them.<sup>66</sup> In order to find one’s authentic self, you must first find your voice, and to that purpose, tell your story, whether to someone else or simply yourself. It does not matter if it is read, only that the truth is out there.

## *Power*

*In my own experience, this involved taking back my night, and by so doing, perhaps one day I will no longer be afraid of it. By repeatedly challenging myself to do this, I have continued to grow and evolve and found immeasurable strength in myself, as well as previously unknown connections to others.*

## Cause and Affect

Healing after rape is a difficult path wherein each day becomes a journey that you have to re-travel over and over. Something as simple as locking a door turns into an endless repetition of compulsive behavior as you search for any means to regain a semblance of control. As noted above, studies have repeatedly shown the traumatic impact of rape, pointing out that it can continue to affect a woman for years, perhaps the rest of her life. A growing number of articles and theorists are beginning to forward the idea that the recovery process can in point of fact actually result in positive outcomes, including increased self-worth and meaning to one's life (Thompson). As such, any event has the potential to deepen your awareness of the self, but it takes courage to admit fear and weakness and vulnerability.

In line with our cultural drive for easy, instantaneous answers, there has grown an "addiction" industry. Addiction has come to involve more than heroin and alcohol: the realm of recognized addictions now spans the gamut from porn to the internet. This identification, often of any manner of behavior seen as negative, is in some way a response to the previously mentioned cultural tendency towards a search for easy answers. Whatever name you give it, whether addiction, compulsion, or habit, it

becomes a part of you and trying to stop it and heal seems like volunteering to remove a part of yourself.

### *Regret*

*For myself, this has become the constant presence of “if only”, and it was the slow and gradual realization that I might well lose myself entirely that finally forced me to face and accept the changes that had been done, both by and to me, and try to find a way to cope with the guilt I felt and move on.*

Only with acceptance can you truly address the issue. In a world where perception is quite often mistaken for reality<sup>67</sup>, self-discovery is difficult because it necessitates entering the unknown and giving up the semblance of control. Despite the difficulty, the field of posttraumatic growth actually shows that reports of growth actually outnumber negative psychiatric disorders, although it should be noted that continuing distress and growth most often coexist (Cadell et al., 2003). Pain, as well as joy, has always been recognized as part of life; the one constant presence, from the trauma of birth through the discomfort of illness, to the emotional upheaval of adolescence to the recognition of the aging process and the slow acceptance of death’s finality.

This idea of “growing pains” is not new and connects back to the idea of redemptive suffering that is the hallmark of most of the world’s major religions. The paradox of finding strength through vulnerability is perhaps not so difficult to understand.

## *Hindsight*

*My own rape experience left me with the inescapable knowledge that I could in no way control life, something that has manifested itself in any number of obsessive-compulsive tendencies to control whatever I can, as I can never recover my childhood “innocence”- whatever that term truly means. However, I also gained the knowledge that I am a survivor and have a clear and very firm belief in my ability to deal with whatever might come my way. While coming to this realization was by no means easy, it did allow me to grasp a more fundamental awareness of myself and my place in the world. Having had to deal with this rape experience and the accompanying trauma has given me a certain perspective on the relative importance of things. I am, for instance, more able to identify and relate to people and their own concerns, something that I feel has enabled me to develop deeper and more meaningful relationships in my own life. I am also, strangely enough, more apt to consider myself a stable and adaptive person; having lived through and survived something no one can deny the trauma of, I am less likely to fall apart in other traumatic situations. I fight for what I believe in, secure in the idea that if I work for what I want and deserve, then whether or not I attain those goals is somewhat irrelevant. I also have a clearer picture of what is and is not truly important to me.*

These realizations, while my own, seem to be common results of posttraumatic growth and often accompany an increased spiritual awareness. Growing up is a long and arduous course that does not begin or end at any age; some changes are slow, while others seemingly occur overnight, but many of these changes are happening to everyone at the same time (if at a different pace) and there are emotional resources to be found in

friends, family and media to look to for understanding and guidance. As innocence fades, knowledge grows and the desire for independence allows one to develop their own personality and discover who they are in their own time as they navigate childhood. A traumatic event interrupts this phased learning process; instead of a gradual development, a child is instead caught unawares as “innocence” and trust are ripped away without warning. There is a certain benefit to be found even in this tragic loss however. While one might lose Erikson’s basic trust<sup>68</sup> in this sort of trauma, they may also be able to find previously untapped reserves of strength and belief in themselves. That is not to deny the reality of the suffering caused by a rape, or any other trauma for that matter, but instead to place the focus on the ability to control the recovery process and perhaps gain something from the experience, even as one cannot recover what has been lost.

### *Reflections*

*So much has been written about rape and its aftermath, and so much work has yet to be done. We live in a world that too often blames women victims for the crimes. Someone who was beaten by a spouse should have left the relationship; someone who was raped should not have been dressed like that. Why? Is it easier than accepting that bad things happen? That maybe evil does exist? Or is it simply a way of explaining away the crime and creating an illusion of safety- if you do this, this, and this, and don't do that, then you'll be ok. I refuse to live my life in fear, not anymore, and I do try not to take chances, but I really believe that turning a blind eye only exacerbates the problems we face. The twelve-step program that alcoholics and drug addicts turn to says that admitting the problem is the first step. In a culture that is sinking into apathy about so many things, I*

*believe this is true. Rape needs to be seen as a problem for all of us, not something you spend your life hoping you won't have to deal with personally. Despite my apparent openness about my own experiences, and the relative ease with which I can now talk about it, I am aware of people's responses. No matter how quickly stifled, the initial response of many is disbelief followed by judgement, not of the crime but of me. That is why I am speaking out. For I am not a victim, but a survivor, and I refuse to let anyone take that away from me.*

As I have illustrated, the trauma of rape only begins with the act itself and affects every aspect of one's life, across the spheres of emotion, intellect and communication. Repeatedly proven to take away one's sense of safety and trust, little work to date has been done to illustrate that this can be rebuilt, and how. Feminism has grounded itself in the assertion that women and men are equal and should therefore be treated as such and yet rape, a sexual crime that can be perpetrated on anyone, male or female, continues to be perceived as something that happens only to women and remains one of the few crimes in which the victim is blamed as much, if not more than, the perpetrator(s). As such, many of the feminist writers who have addressed the subject of rape have focused solely on establishing the criminality of the act itself, rather than giving voice to the women who have themselves survived the crime. The intention of this project was to illustrate that the events and reactions after the rape, including the reactions of the survivor, family and friends, and any involvement by the legal system, are perhaps more crucial to the idea of healing than the physical rape itself. The trauma of rape does not end until and unless the survivor chooses to take control of herself and her life.

RAINN's website offers statistics that in the past fourteen years, the occurrence of rape and sexual assault has fallen by more than 69% and yet it remains a fact that every two and a half minutes in America someone is sexually assaulted. What does this say about our culture? I have attempted to show here how much of a problem rape still is, for everyone. Whether or not you yourself have been raped, your life has certainly been affected by its societal presence. As Carole Sheffield pointed out in "Sexual Terrorism" (1994), sexual violence is so pervasive as to be virtually unrecognizable despite being present in everything from news programs to popular music to automobile advertisements. The power of fear is staggering- it defines where you go, what you wear and say and do, who you interact with and who you avoid, the hours in which you feel safe outside your home. Once something becomes a routine, embedded in the social consciousness, it is very nearly impossible to eliminate. Certainly there are organizations, centers, advocates, and citizens working to bring the subject of rape into a public discourse, so why does it remain a taboo subject in an age where anything and everything is said or done on television or the internet and is immediately accessible for public consumption? Despite the fact that rape is an act of power and control, with research repeatedly illustrating how it affects every aspect of life, from choices to behaviors<sup>69</sup>, public thought continues to label rape as primarily sexual in nature. A rape can take away one's security, support system, ability to trust in others and the world, and even one's sense of self. The effort to regain one's confidence, one's agency, is hard enough without having to deal with the perpetual label of victim that renders this process almost impossible.

One of the core foundations of feminist thought is that each person has merit and value as an individual. Despite nearly a century of work towards the goal of achieving equality, the collective public consciousness continues to treat everyone who has survived the crime of rape in the same way, as though they themselves have somehow done something wrong and should be permanently labeled as damaged, defective, or destroyed.<sup>70</sup> It has been the intention of this project to show how a survivor can demonstrate the ignorance and falsity of this assumption and take back the identity and agency that were perhaps lost through the rape experience.

By framing my work in a survivor-centered lens, I have endeavored to add something new to the existing literature by providing a personal picture of the aftermath of rape in terms of the survivor rather than the crime itself. The idea of identity renegotiation is not new but has previously neglected in the picture of rape recovery in favor of bringing attention to the severity of the crime. A highly individualized process, identity renegotiation involves accepting the events, incorporating the knowledge of same, and finding a way to move on with one's life. There is no one identity for woman, and there is no one experience of rape. As such, there can be no specific path to recovery; it is a personal endeavor that looks different in each survivor. I maintain, however, that in order to effect true healing in this manner, spirituality must be present and play a specific role. I have defined spirituality as an awareness of the connection of all things. This is an awareness that functions as the core of each individual; whether this core is recognized is somewhat immaterial. As I make the claim that a rape affects every aspect of one's identity, one's core becomes a pivotal piece in the path towards wholeness.

## *Healing Work*

*For so long I was afraid that my own core had been broken, shattered, completely destroyed. Terrified of what happened, of people finding out, of what I did, of who I was, I lied. To my family, my friends, even myself. Gradually I came to see that by hiding from what had happened, I was letting the event of the rape control my life. What was the point of struggling to survive if every minute was lived in fear? Having watched as the life of a person close to me was slowly ruined by terror and regret, and seeing firsthand the pain caused by that person's choice to give up, I decided I wasn't going to do that to the people in my life. I wanted to live, and no matter the cost, the chance to become a whole person was an opportunity I couldn't miss. This meant facing the truth of the rape and everything that came after, being honest with myself and trusting others with my story. Choosing to live with the truth is a daily struggle and while I am not always successful, I continue to try to heal.*

Thinking of one's self as a victim can be seen as an addictive behavior pattern. As with any addiction it is first necessary to recognize the problem before control can be regained. While there are innumerable paths towards healing, I can only speak to my own situation. First I had to say, out loud, to myself, "I was raped". Only after that was I able to find the strength to trust myself, and others, with this knowledge. Gradually I came to see how entirely I had allowed the rape, by refusing to acknowledge the truth of the experience, to take over my existence, coloring how I approached both people and situations and even determining the ways I thought, behaved and communicated. Even more difficult to reach was realizing "I survived". For a long while I was not sure that I

had, but as I slowly began to let myself experience life again, I found myself craving those interactions I had shut myself off to for so long. Letting people in, to know me and my experiences, gave me the strength to face myself and my own truth and allowed me to understand that although the rape itself may have taken away my agency at that moment, it ultimately gave me the gift of strength. Survival for me has meant working to find the strength to recognize and accept what I cannot control while striving to understand I can determine my own behavior.

---

<sup>1</sup> “One condition omitted from DSM-IV is rape. Unless there is evidence of sadistic fantasies and behaviors as determinants of a rape, a case would not qualify as a paraphilia in DSM-IV nomenclature. Abel and Rouleau (1990) criticized the exclusion of rape from DSM because they believe that rapists display ‘recurrent, repetitive, and compulsive urges and fantasies to commit rapes’ (p.18). The authors of the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for paraphilias apparently avoided introducing paraphilic rape out of concern that it might be used in court as a defense against prosecution.” *The Psychology of Sexual Orientation, Behavior, and Identity: A Handbook*. Eds. Louis Diamant, Richard D. McAnulty. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. 243. [Paraphilia is the term that replaced sexual deviation in the DSM.]

<sup>2</sup> For example, it is most often the court system or the medical field, and not the woman who has been raped, that determines whether recovery and/or healing have occurred. Reference Smith, *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, May 2001.

<sup>3</sup> The argument I am attempting to make is to note the lack of access to any materials without first conducting an in-depth search for said; an activity that would likely not appeal to someone who has just survived a rape experience and is looking for help or information.

<sup>4</sup> This assertion refers to the search results for the term “rape”; I mention this partly because the idea of “it’s not your fault” has become, and rightly so, a companion to many rape survival pamphlets and help centers—yet there is nothing to back up this assertion.

<sup>5</sup> While I acknowledge that men and children may also be raped, this work labels the rape survivor as a woman, the reasons for which I will address later in the paper.

<sup>6</sup> An excellent source for information on the range of post-rape effects is Ann Wolbert Burgess’ *Rape and Sexual Assault II*.

<sup>7</sup> Psychiatric illness, depression, acts of violence towards self and others, alcohol and drug dependency, and drastic personality changes are just a few common and potentially life-threatening effects.

<sup>8</sup> Most often this issue is raised and discussed in terms of community safety, rather than the survivor’s potentially destroyed sense of security in every environment. Maureen M. Underwood and Nancy Fiedler. “The Crisis of Rape: A Community Response” *Community Mental Health Journal*, September 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Many works discuss the aftermath of rape and many other works speak to the subject of identity, but I found only one that treats both; Susan J. Brison’s *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*.

<sup>10</sup> One of the more popular myths is that of the false accusation, most recently seen in the much publicized rape case brought against NBA star Kobe Bryant. Eugene J. Kanin. “False Rape Allegations” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, February 1994.

<sup>11</sup> The courts often hesitate, or openly refuse, to hear extended testimony from the survivor on the basis of the information being irrelevant in terms of the case. Patricia Smith. “Rape and Equal Protection” *Hypatia*, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> See Susan J. Brison’s *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholson, Linda. “Interpreting Gender.” *Journal of Women and Society*, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Pat O’Connor. “Young People’s Construction of the Self: Late Modern Elements and Gender Differences.” *Sociology*, February 2006.

<sup>15</sup> This theme can be seen in the works of Nancy Chodorow, Anne Fausto-Sterling and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others.

<sup>16</sup> Justin B. Poll and Timothy B. Smith. “The Spiritual Self: Toward a Conceptualization of Spiritual Identity Development.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, June 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Tomm, Winnie. *Bodied Mindfulness: Women’s Spirits, Bodies, and Places*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> For a clearer picture of this phenomenon, one is referred to the history of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July, 2007. The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women’s equal access to political and public life as well as education, health and employment...States parties agree to take all appropriate measures so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms...[and] against all forms of traffic in...and exploitation of women.”

[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw)

---

<sup>19</sup> “Only those who have a vested interest in the status quo, in the powerful remaining powerful, require certitude about their righteousness and their warrant to ‘direct’ and ‘administer’ everything.”

Tong, Rosemarie and Nancy Williams, “Feminist Ethics”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2006 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2006/entries/feminism-ethics/>>.

<sup>20</sup> A clear illustration of this point can be found in Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (1988), pp.575-599.

<sup>21</sup> Although rape certainly qualifies as a global issue, this paper cannot make any claim as to happenings in other parts of the world.

<sup>22</sup> I am in no way denying the state of victimization involved in the act of rape, but rather making the point that it need not be a permanent label.

<sup>23</sup> In the introduction to *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller states that rape “is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation.”

<sup>24</sup> Ullman, Sarah E. et al. “Structural Models of the Relations of Assault Severity, Social Support, Avoidance Coping, Self-Blame, and PTSD Among Sexual Assault Survivors”. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Yap, Marie B.H. and Grant J. Devilly. “The Role of Perceived Social Support in Crime Victimization”. *Clinical Psychology Review*, March 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, R. and S.M. Wasco, C.E. Ahrens, T. Sefl, H.E. Barnes. “Preventing the “Second Rape: Rape Survivors’ Experiences With Community Service Providers”. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Bandura, Albert and Charles C. Benight. “Social Cognitive Theory of Posttraumatic Recovery: the Role of Perceived Self-Efficacy”. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, October 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Neville, Helen A. and Mary J. Heppner. “Contextualizing rape: Reviewing Sequelae and Proposing a Culturally Inclusive Ecological Model of Sexual Assault Recovery”. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> My faith in the church, myself, and the idea of sense and order as much as my ability to believe that the world is a safe place, or that other people are worthy of my trust.

<sup>30</sup> RAINN estimates that up to 59% of rapes go unreported. <http://www.rainn.org/statistics>

<sup>31</sup> Crovitz, Elaine. “Review Essay”. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, February 1977.

<sup>32</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, p99.

<sup>33</sup> Writing about the biblical story of the Levite, Brison claims it illustrates “the extent of our cultural complicity in the refusal to see trauma from the victim’s perspective,” p55.

<sup>34</sup> I make no claim here about whether or not the Florida resources I examine are typical, but rather the idea that if one cares to look, it would most likely be on the local level, and these examples are the most readily available.

<sup>35</sup> Reinharz, S. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. (pp145)

<sup>36</sup> “the themes extracted from the data represent the discourse of those who created the products...” Leavy, Patricia. “Feminist Content Analysis and Representative Characters”. *The Qualitative Report*, May 2000.

<sup>37</sup> A search done through the months of March, April and May from 2002 to 2007 and looking at the major publications of *Time*, *Newsweek* and *USA Today* turned up nothing of note about this recurring campaign.

<sup>38</sup> Gauntlett, David. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Published in 1973 by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>

<sup>41</sup> Heilman, Madeline E. “Bias in the Evaluation of Women Leaders. Description and Prescription: How Gender Stereotypes Prevent Women’s Ascent Up the Organizational Ladder”. *Journal of Social Issues*, Winter 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, Rebecca and Sheela Raja. “Secondary Victimization of Rape Victims: Insights from Mental Health Professionals Who Treat Survivors of Violence”. *Violence and Victims*, V.14 (3), 1999.

<sup>43</sup> As Brison states, “In order to recover, a trauma survivor needs to be able to control herself, control her environment (within reasonable limits), and be reconnected with humanity” p60.

<sup>44</sup> As identified in the works of Neville, Koss, Frazier, Wasco, etc.

- 
- <sup>45</sup> *The Time Falling Bodies Take To Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981. 103.
- <sup>46</sup> Forwarded by prominent sociologist George Meade, who argued in 1934's *Mind, Self and Society* that there is a distinction to be made between what he termed the "I" and the "me", with the self being the combination of these two.
- <sup>47</sup> Holmes, Edmond. *The Creed of Buddha*. New York: J. Lane, 1919. 206.
- <sup>48</sup> Lorber, Judith. "Seeing Is Believing: Biology as Ideology." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 4, December 1993.
- <sup>49</sup> Although I use the term religion here in accordance with the titles of these courses, I refer to it as a smaller piece of the greater entity known as spirituality.
- <sup>50</sup> Forwarded by sociologist Philip Slater in 1970's *The Pursuit of Loneliness*.
- <sup>51</sup> PerfectMatch.com
- <sup>52</sup> These also include more recent religious scholars, philosophers, psychiatrists, sociologists and anthropologists such as James Frazer, Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud
- <sup>53</sup> A brief overview of the world's more popular (in terms of numbers of practicing members) religions can be found at [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org), a website maintained by a group known as the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance.
- <sup>54</sup> "The Fundamentals of Scientology", [www.theta.com](http://www.theta.com), Church of Scientology International, 1999-2004
- <sup>55</sup> Chanda, Ipshita. "Displaying the Modern Woman: Feminism in the Labyrinths of Media Culture." *Social Scientist*, Vol. 28, No. 3/4, March-April 2000.
- <sup>56</sup> Admittedly these observations are by and large speaking of Western society, but as such technologies spread, it follows that so will this tendency towards quick fixes and easy answers.
- <sup>57</sup> Some of the more common questions in this vein include: why are we here, where did we come from, why is there misery and suffering in the world, how can I escape death, etc.
- <sup>58</sup> Tanyi, Ruth A. "Towards Clarification of the Meaning of Spirituality." *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 39, No. 5, September 2002.
- <sup>59</sup> I refer here to the idea of sacred, not in religious terms, but rather as the idea of an untouchable and ultimate truth.
- <sup>60</sup> This idea is found in *Mind, Self and Society*, where Mead claims one becomes conscious of the self only after learning about and experiencing different societal norms and roles.
- <sup>61</sup> Sonwalkar, Prasun. "Out of sight, out of mind?: the non-reporting of small wars and insurgencies." *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*. Eds. Barbie Zelizer, Stuart Allan. London: Routledge, 2004. 208.
- <sup>62</sup> "acquiring is always secondary, and instrumental to the act of inquiring. It is seeking, a quest, for something that is not at hand...All thinking is research, and all research is native, original, with him who carries it on, even if everyone else in the world is sure of what he is still looking for." John Dewey. *Democracy and Education*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2005. Chapter 11.
- <sup>63</sup> So that we might continue to follow Descartes' notion of the separation between mind and body?
- <sup>64</sup> "This oneness of body and mind is the single ultimate principle." Nichiren Daishonin, *Gosho Zenshu*, 708.
- <sup>65</sup> Gandhi, M. K. *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*. New York: Dover Publications, 2001. 293.
- <sup>66</sup> His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. "A Human Approach To World Peace". Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1984.
- <sup>67</sup> Television and literary characters become friends, celebrities (whether in truth or merely name) are followed relentlessly and their every action scrutinized with a familiarity that dispenses with any thought of privacy or respect.
- <sup>68</sup> Children who form secure attachments with loving and sensitive care givers are given a general sense that the world is both predictable and reliable- this is a rephrasing of "Trust vs. Mistrust", which is the first of Erikson's eight stages of development.
- <sup>69</sup> "Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory." Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*, p34. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- <sup>70</sup> Gamble, Nancy C. and Lee Madigan. *The Second Rape: Society's Continued Betrayal of the Victim*. MacMillan, 1991.

## References

- Angelucci, Marc E. and Glenn Sacks. "Research Shows False Accusations of Rape Common." *NewsWithViews*. 18 Sep. 2004. 10 Oct. 2004.  
<<http://www.newswithviews.com/Sacks/glenn12.htm>>
- Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era*. Simon and Schuster, 2005.
- Brisson, Susan J. *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. United States Department of Justice. [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs)
- Burgess, Ann Wolbert. *Rape and Sexual Assault II*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1998.
- Burgess, Ann Wolbert and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom. "Rape Trauma Syndrome." *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Sep. 1974, 131(9): 981-986.
- Burr, J. "Women Have It. Men Want It. What is It? Constructions of Sexuality in Rape Discourse." *Psychology, Evolution and Gender*, June, 2001, 3(1):103-105.
- Cadell, Susan, Cheryl Regehr and David Hemsworth. "Factors Contributing to Posttraumatic Growth: A Proposed Structural Equation Model." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 2003, 73(3): 279-287.
- Campbell, R. and S. Raja. "The Sexual Assault and Secondary Victimization of Female Veterans: Help-Seeking Experiences with Military and Civilian Social Systems." *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, March 2005, 29(1): 97-106.
- Carlson, Eve B. *Trauma Assessments: A Clinician's Guide*. New York: Guilford Press, 1997.
- Crovitz, Elaine. "Review Essay." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Feb. 1977.
- Fiedler, Nancy and Maureen M. Underwood. "The Crisis of Rape: A Community Response." *Community Mental Health Journal*, Sep. 1983.

- Filipas, Henrietta H. and Sarah E. Ullman. "Predictors of PTSD Symptom Severity and Social Reactions in Sexual Assault Victims." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, April 2001, 14(2): 369-389.
- Flinders, Carol Lee. *At the Root of this Longing: Reconciling a Spiritual Hunger and a Feminist Thirst*. New York: Harper Collins, May 1999.
- Florida. Department of Health. "Sexual Violence Survival Guide." 4 Sep. 2007. <[http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Family/svpp/materials/guide\\_en.pdf](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Family/svpp/materials/guide_en.pdf)>
- Florida Council Against Sexual Violence. "How To Help A Victim." 10 Sep. 2007. <[http://www.fcasv.org/2005\\_Web/Publications/help.htm](http://www.fcasv.org/2005_Web/Publications/help.htm)>
- Frazier, P.A. and J.W. Burnett. "Immediate Coping Strategies Among Rape Victims." *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 1994, 72: 633-639.
- Frize, Monique. "Women in Leadership: Value of Women's Contributions in Science, Engineering, and Technology." *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series*, 2005, 126.
- Gilboa-Schechtman, Eva and Edna B. Foa. "Patterns of Recovery from Trauma: The Use of Intraindividual Analysis." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Aug. 2001, 110(3): 392-400.
- Griffith, Tom, trans. *The Republic: by Plato*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Harvey, Mary R. "An Ecological View of Psychological Trauma and Trauma Recovery." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Jan. 1996, 9(1): 3-23.
- Hedge, Barbara and Jenny Petrak, Eds. *The Trauma of Sexual Assault: Treatment, Prevention and Practice*. Wiley, 2002.
- Hengehold, Laura. "Remapping the Event: Institutional Discourses and the Trauma of Rape." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 26(1): 189-214.
- Herman, J. L., et al. "Dissociation, Somatization and Affect Dysregulation: The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma." *American Journal of Psychiatry*, July 1996, 153: 83-93.
- Kanin, Eugene J. "False Rape Allegations." *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Feb. 1994.
- Kaysen, Debra. "Peritraumatic Responses and Their Relationship to Perceptions of Threat in Female Crime Victims." *Violence Against Women*, 2005, 11(12): 1515-1535.

- Kelly, Lillian M. and Marilyn E. Smith. "The Journey of Recovery After a Rape Experience." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, May 2001, 22(4): 337-352.
- Koenig, Harold G., Michael E. McCullough and David B. Larson. *Handbook of Religion and Health*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Koss, Mary P. "Restoring Rape Survivors: Justice, Advocacy, and a Call to Action." *Violence and Exploitation Against Women and Girls*, Nov. 2006, 1087: 206-234.
- Linley, P. Alex and Stephen Joseph. "Positive Change Following Trauma and Adversity: A Review." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Feb. 2004, 17(1): 11-21.
- Macy, Joanna and Brown, Molly Young. *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 1998.
- Mardorossian, Carine M. "Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape." *Gender Studies*, 2004, 3: 243-275.
- Maytorena, Myriam and Zsuzsana Summer. *Spirituality True Odysseys*. Booklocker.com, 2002.
- National Victim Center. National Center for Victims of Crime. "Sexual Assault Victimization." 1998. 11 Sep. 2007.  
<<http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbName=DocumentViewer&DocumentAction=ViewProperties&DocumentID=32369&UrlToReturn=http%3a%2f%2fwww.ncvc.org%2fncvc%2fmain.aspx%3fdbName%3dAdvancedSearch>>
- Neville, Helen A., et al. "General and Culturally Specific Factors Influencing Black and White Rape Survivors' Self-Esteem." *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, March 2004, 28(1): 83-94.
- Nicholson, Linda. "Interpreting Gender." *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. Eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman. Cambridge University Press, 1995: 39-67.
- O'Connor, Pat. "Young People's Construction of the Self: Late Modern Elements and Gender Differences." *Sociology*, February 2006.
- O'Sullivan, Lauren. "Rape: The Journey from Victim to Survivor: A Critical Literature Survey." Rand Afrikaans University: December, 2003.
- Poll, Justin B. and Timothy B. Smith. "The Spiritual Self: Toward a Conceptualization of Spiritual Identity Development." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, June 2003, 31(2): 129.

- PTSD Alliance. "Patient Education Booklet." 2001.
- Resick, Patricia A. "The Psychological Impact of Rape." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, June 1993, 8(2): 223-255.
- Shaw, Annick, Stephen Joseph and P. Alex Linley. "Religion, Spirituality, and Posttraumatic Growth: A Systematic Review." *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, March 2005, 8(1): 1-11.
- Sheffield, Carole. "Sexual Terrorism." *Women, A Feminist Perspective*. Jo Freeman, Ed. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1994.
- Siegert, R. and T. Ward. "Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Child Sexual Abuse: A Theory Knitting Perspective." *Psychology, Crime, & Law*, Dec. 2002, 8(4): 319-351.
- Smith, Patricia. "Rape and Equal Protection." *Hypatia*, 2004, 19(2).
- Smith, M. E. and L. M. Kelly. "The Journey of Recovery After a Rape Experience." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, June 2001, 22(4): 337-352.
- Thompson, William Irwin. *The Time Falling Bodies Take To Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996.
- Thornhill and Palmer. *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*. MIT Press, 2000.
- Tomm, Winnie. *Bodied Mindfulness: Women's Spirits, Bodies, and Places*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995.
- Tong, Rosemarie and Nancy Williams. "Feminist Ethics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Winter 2006 edition.  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2006/entries/feminism-ethics/>.
- University of South Florida. "Sexual Violence." 1996, updated 2000.
- University of South Florida Advocacy Program. "Providing Help to Survivors and Victims of Violence and Abuse."
- Vega, Jason A. Wheeler. "Naturalism and Feminism: Conflicting Explanations of Rape in a Wider Context." *Sexualities, Evolution and Gender*, June 2001, 3(1): 47-85.

## Appendix A

# RAPE

## A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE



YOU ARE NOT ALONE . THERE IS HOPE

## Speaking Out

*"Silence will not protect you." --Audrey*

*"I never knew there were so many other people who understood." --Padma*

*"Maybe he didn't care and maybe he planned it. All I know is, he's the one who should feel ashamed." --Megan*

*"Others have unfortunately been there too. You need support." --Nayeli*

*"For so long, I shut down the need to rage and cry. I made a choice not to stay a victim." --Jileane*

*"Healing is a process. Pieces of my life are slowly coming together. I am different, but I accept that." --Hana*

*"I will carry the knowledge of rape with me forever. I don't need to carry silence and shame as well." --Sam*

*"I wanted to feel safe, not terrorized. And then I realized that my jailer had changed faces. I was the one keeping myself locked up." --Adilah*

*"I'm different now. The world is different now. I have more fear, but I have more support too." --Laura*

*"It's hard for me to trust anyone else, but I do trust myself now." --Jamie*

*"I will carry this with me forever, but I refuse to let it break me." --Aine*

### Facts about Rape

- **Rape is never your fault.** Rape is always a crime. Any attempt at forced sexual penetration, with a body part or an object, is rape. This includes vaginal, anal and oral penetration.
- **Rape can happen to women, men and children.** It does not matter if you are young or old, black, white or brown, gay, straight or bisexual.
- **You are not alone.** Every two and a half minutes, someone in America is sexually assaulted. More than half of these go unreported.
- **Rapists are not always strangers.** More than two-thirds of rapes are committed by acquaintances, friends, partners or family members.

### After a Rape

- Find a safe place. Ask someone you trust to stay with you, or call 1-800-656-HOPE, a free and confidential hotline. Remember that what happened is not your fault, and that you need to do what is best for you.
- Reporting the rape is your choice. If you do decide to call the police, it is your right to have a friend, family member or advocate with you.
- If you choose to report the rape, do not wash or brush your teeth. Try to remember everything you can about the rapist(s) and the attack itself. Ask for a rape kit at the hospital. All of these actions will help in order to preserve evidence.
- If you choose not to report the rape, it is still important to get medical attention to determine the risk of STIs/STDs and possible pregnancy.
- It is never too late to ask for help. The trauma of rape is not only physical, but affects every part of your life. Give

yourself time to understand and accept what happened.  
Healing is a process, not a cure.

### Emotional Responses

- Immediate reactions include shame, anger, denial, fear, guilt, disbelief, sadness, self-blame, confusion and helplessness.
- These are all normal feelings. There is no one way to feel after a rape.
- **Rape changes your life.** As time goes on, long-term reactions may develop. These can include fear of being alone or the dark, depression and thoughts of suicide, trust issues, flashbacks, drug and alcohol abuse and abrupt, often drastic changes in behavior and personality.
- **Remember that you are a survivor, not a victim. It is ok to ask for help. You are not alone. There is hope.**

### Rape-Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Many people who survive a rape experience develop this disorder, also called Rape Trauma Syndrome. There are four major symptoms.
  1. Re-living the trauma. This often involves recurring nightmares, intrusive memories, and flashbacks of the rape.
  2. Social withdrawal, or psychic numbing, is basically shutting down emotionally to the point of not having any feelings at all.
  3. Avoiding any situations, thoughts or feelings that recall the events of the rape.
  4. Increased physiological arousal including exaggerated startle response, sleep disorders, hyper-vigilance and difficulty concentrating.

### Reactions of Others

- Most people, upon hearing that you have been raped, will be unsure how to respond. While they may want to help, unless they have been through a similar experience, they will likely not be able to understand your feelings or know how to act.
- People in your life may try to encourage you to forget what happened and move on, commenting that "it could have been worse". They may ask where you were, what you were wearing, or what you did. When this happens, try to remember that it is human nature to try and find reasons for things and events for which there are no explanations.

### More Information

- Rape Abuse and Incest National Network.  
2000 L Street NW  
Suite 406  
Washington, DC 20036  
**Counseling and Information** 1-800-656-HOPE  
[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
- The National Center for Victims of Crime  
2000 M Street NW  
Suite 480  
Washington, DC 20036  
**Referral to Local Services** 1-800-FYI-CALL  
[www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org)
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center  
123 North Enola Drive  
Enola, PA 17025  
**Referral to Local Services** 1-877-739-3895  
[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)