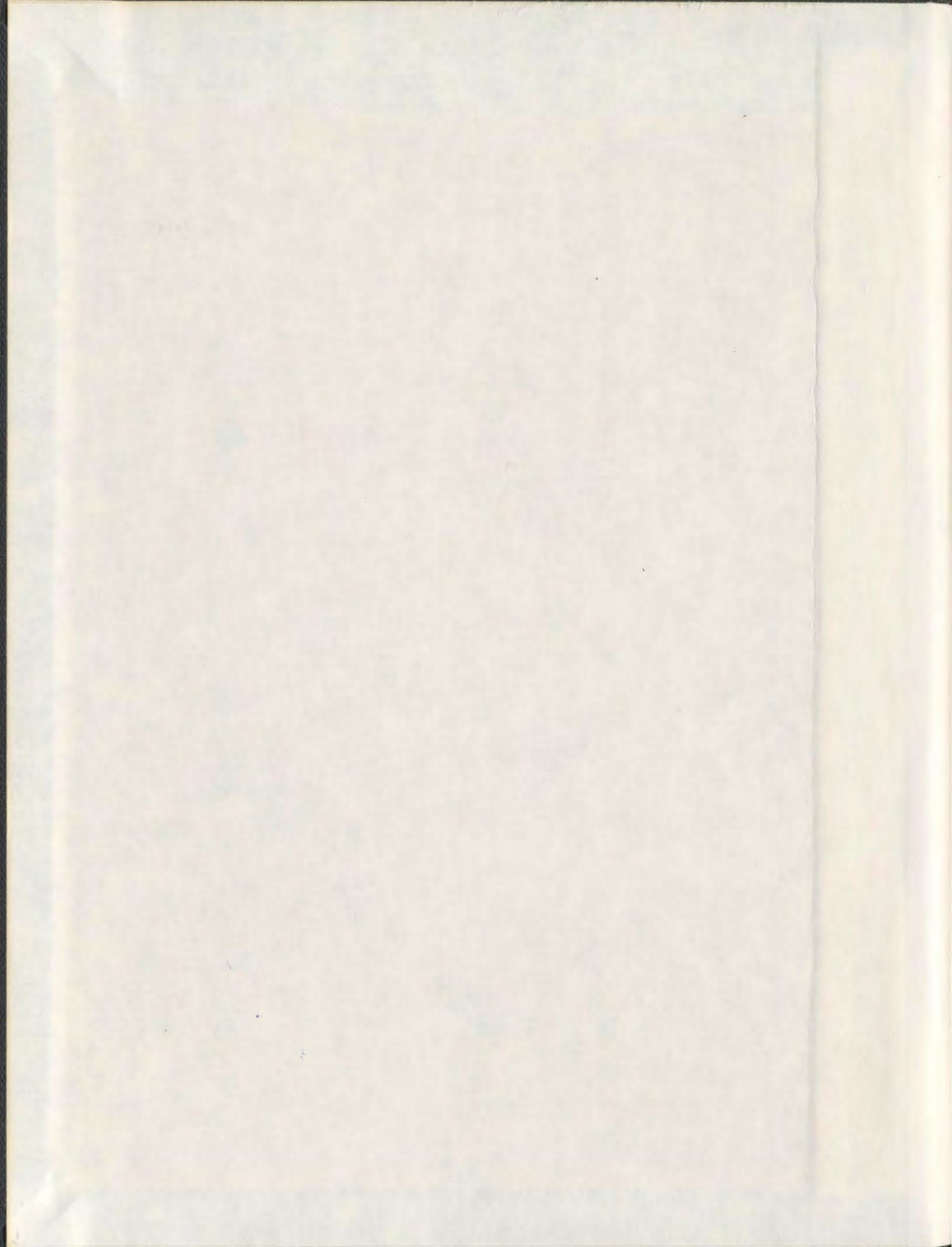
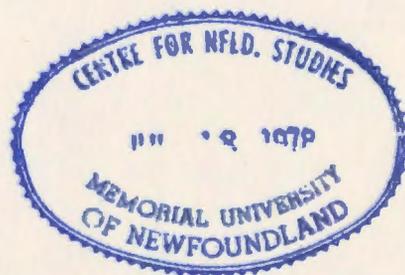


OUT FROM AND BEYOND TRAUMA:  
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF THE PROCESS  
FROM RAPE TO LIVING WELL

SUZANNE MCKENZIE-MOHR



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FROM RAPE TO LIVING WELL**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Most trauma research has addressed only the painful, often devastating effects of traumatic experiences on individuals, and thus has left unexplored the opportunity to move beyond “survival” or “recovery” to positive outcomes. While a small but growing body of research has focused on positive as well as negative changes after trauma, most of these studies use quantitative methods to understand this change and have focused almost exclusively on elements associated with outcomes rather than on the process an individual may progress through toward these outcomes. This investigation is unique in its study of the process into living well after rape, as experienced and understood by a group of adult women. It is meant to be research for, rather than on, women -- in which the research process empowers by focusing on women’s agency, providing new accounts of women’s experience, and attending to both personal and social potential and transformation. Through multiple individual participant-guided interviews, ten women shared their stories. While interviewing women, the inadequacies of dominant scripts to assist in understanding rape itself and to support positive change after rape became evident. Prevailing narratives available to women are influenced deeply by medical, legal, and social framings of women’s lives, resulting in, at best, a focus on the amelioration of negative effects. These influences have challenged and obscured women’s post-rape experiences of progressing toward living well. Following Kathy Charmaz’s constructivist approach to grounded theory, I explore the process participants navigated and strategies they used to transcend limiting discourses and grow toward living well. The interpretations reflect a long, complex, and multi-dimensional process

that involved three phases. While progress tended to be slow, breakthroughs of more significant progress occurred that assisted women in their transition into subsequent phases, often with the assistance of allies. Further, participants described their progress from one phase of the process to the next as secure and irreversible due to fundamental developments in themselves and their understanding of rape. Strategies developed by women to deconstruct and reconstruct rape scripts in order to progress toward living well are discussed, and implications for informal and professional allies are considered.

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## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE QUESTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 THE QUESTION .....	1
1.2 WHY THIS QUESTION: RESEARCHER’S LOCATION AND MOTIVATIONS .....	1
1.3 WHY THIS QUESTION: PLACING TRAUMA THEORY DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT .....	3
1.4 LIMITATIONS OF DOMINANT TRAUMA THEORY DISCOURSE.....	8
1.5 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LITERATURE.....	10
1.5.1 <i>Recovery and Growth after Rape</i> .....	17
1.6 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY .....	20
1.6.1 <i>Limitations of Current Theory and Understanding</i> .....	20
1.6.2 <i>Incidence of Rape</i> .....	22
1.6.3 <i>Impact of Rape in Women’s Lives</i> .....	23
1.6.4 <i>Relevance to Social Work</i> .....	24
1.7 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY’S APPROACH: EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	26
<b>CHAPTER 2: METHOD.....</b>	<b>35</b>
2.1 DESCRIPTION OF AND RATIONALE FOR THE DESIGN .....	35
2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	39
2.2.1 <i>Description of Sampling, Procedures, and Participants</i> .....	39
2.2.2 <i>Data Collection: Interview Schedule</i> .....	41
2.2.3 <i>Data Analysis</i> .....	43
2.2.4 <i>Trustworthiness</i> .....	46
2.2.5 <i>Data Presentation</i> .....	50
2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	51
2.4 CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCHER .....	57
2.4.1 <i>Influence of the Researcher</i> .....	57
2.4.2 <i>Emotional Impact of Research on the Investigator</i> .....	60
2.5 PARTICIPANTS .....	61
2.6 ANALYSIS PROCESS AND PROCEDURES.....	64
<b>CHAPTER 3: FROM RAPE TO LIVING WELL – OVERVIEW &amp; THE INITIAL STRUGGLE ..67</b>	
3.1 PHASES OF THE PROCESS FROM RAPE TO LIVING WELL .....	67
3.2 PHASE I: SURMOUNTING BARRIERS TO NAME AND CLAIM THE RAPE.....	70
3.2.1 <i>From Invalidating Contexts: Dominant Rape Scripts</i> .....	72
3.2.2 <i>Messengers of Dominant Rape Scripts: Others’ Reactions</i> .....	79
3.2.3 <i>Deconstructing Dominant Rape Scripts</i> .....	90
3.2.3.1 <i>Deconstructive Strategies: Gaining Information</i> .....	91
3.2.3.2 <i>Deconstructive Strategies: Considering Contexts</i> .....	95
3.2.4 <i>Accessing Allies to Support Deconstructing of Dominant Rape Script</i> .....	99
3.2.5 <i>Negative Case Analysis: Brianne’s Experience</i> .....	113
<b>CHAPTER 4: RAPE TO LIVING WELL - ACTING AS AGENTS TO EFFECT CHANGE.....126</b>	
4.1 PHASE II: DOING THE HARD WORK .....	126
4.1.1 <i>Taking Charge: Choosing to Take Control of One’s Progress</i> .....	128

4.1.1.1	Reconstructing ‘Rape’: Creating and Exercising New Scripts.....	131
	Creating New Scripts: Developing Complex Descriptions.....	132
	Creating New Scripts: Using Metaphor.....	138
	Exercising the New Scripts: Speaking One’s Own Truth.....	141
4.1.2	<i>Protecting Oneself</i> .....	147
4.1.2.1	Channeling Emotions to “Try On” Strategies.....	147
4.1.2.2	Leaving Problematic Relationships and Gaining Independence.....	153
4.1.3	<i>Sustaining Oneself</i> .....	156
4.1.3.1	Accessing Supports.....	156
4.1.3.2	Drawing Upon Spirituality.....	165
4.2	PHASE III: GROWING IN LIVING WELL.....	171
4.2.1	<i>Taking Charge (Revised)</i> .....	177
4.2.1.1	Deepening One’s Independence and Strength.....	177
4.2.1.2	Taking Action to Assist Others.....	182
4.2.2	<i>Protecting Oneself (Revised)</i> .....	187
4.2.2.1	Entering and Living in Intimate Relationships.....	187
4.2.2.2	Choosing when to Lay Emotions Down.....	192
4.2.3	<i>Sustaining Oneself (Revised)</i> .....	200
4.2.3.1	Honouring Oneself and One’s Choices.....	200
4.2.3.2	Embracing What is Good in Current Life.....	204
	<b>CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY &amp; DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>208</b>
5.1	SUMMARY OF INTERPRETATIONS.....	208
5.2	NAMING AND CLAIMING: DECONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING RAPE SCRIPTS.....	216
5.2.1	<i>Naming that Challenges the Political Apparatus</i> .....	222
5.2.2	<i>Deconstructing and Reconstructing Dominant Rape Scripts</i> .....	225
5.2.3	<i>The Research Endeavor as Deconstructive and Reconstructive Process</i> .....	235
5.3	IMPLICATIONS FOR INFORMAL AND PROFESSIONAL ALLIES.....	238
5.3.1	<i>Making Efforts to Eradicate Contextual Barriers</i> .....	238
5.3.2	<i>Offering Assistance in the Naming and Claiming Process</i> .....	243
5.3.2.1	Facing Challenges of Service Accessibility and Outreach Efforts.....	243
5.3.2.2	Avoiding Pitfalls of Positivist Feminist Assumptions.....	246
5.3.2.3	Considering Narrative Practice Applications.....	247
5.3.3	<i>Attending to Tasks of Living Well</i> .....	249
5.4	LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY & FUTURE DIRECTIONS.....	251
5.5	CONCLUSION .....	255
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>256</b>
	<b>APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER / LETTER TO THE EDITOR.....</b>	<b>276</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER TO BE POSTED IN PUBLIC PLACES.....</b>	<b>278</b>
	<b>APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER/EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE .....</b>	<b>279</b>
	<b>APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT .....</b>	<b>281</b>
	<b>APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIBER’S AGREEMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY FORM .....</b>	<b>283</b>
	<b>APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....</b>	<b>284</b>
	<b>APPENDIX G: DEFINITIONS OF TERMS .....</b>	<b>286</b>
	<b>APPENDIX H: RATIONALE FOR POPULATION .....</b>	<b>288</b>
	<b>APPENDIX I: SCRIPT FOR INITIAL PHONE CONTACT .....</b>	<b>290</b>
	<b>APPENDIX J: RESOURCES FOR WOMEN SCREENED OUT .....</b>	<b>292</b>
	<b>APPENDIX K: PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>294</b>

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A	Information Letter/Letter to the Editor (English and French)	274
Appendix B	Information Letter to be Posted in Public Places	276
Appendix C	Information Letter/Email Invitation to Participate	277
Appendix D	Informed Consent	279
Appendix E	Transcriber's Agreement to Confidentiality Form	281
Appendix F	Interview Guide	282
Appendix G	Definition of Terms	284
Appendix H	Rationale for Population	286
Appendix I	Script for Initial Phone Contact	288
Appendix J	Resources for Women Screened Out	290
Appendix K	Participants	292

## **Chapter 1: The Question and Review of Literature**

### **1.1 The Question**

A promising research area for the profession of social work is the recent exploration of the progression of response to trauma that includes potential for positive outcomes. In this current study I posed the question, What is the process experienced by individuals toward living well after trauma? Specifically, I asked women who had experienced rape as an adult and who described themselves as “living well” at the time of their participation in the study about the process through which they had achieved this transition from trauma to living well.

### **1.2 Why this Question: Researcher’s Location and Motivations**

I have arrived at asking this research question out of 15 years of clinical practice as a social worker. During that time, I worked in a shelter for women fleeing homes where they have faced violence, participated in activism to change laws regarding assaults, worked at a sexual assault crisis centre, acted as an advocate for women who have been assaulted to ensure appropriate health care and legal assistance, worked in a psychiatry unit at a hospital, and practiced for several years in a community counselling centre and in a counselling centre at a university. A common thread woven through these experiences has been the opportunity to work alongside women who have faced numerous forms of violence. I have been deeply moved as I have witnessed the painful effects of such violence. I have also often been inspired by the strengths and capabilities I have observed as women moved to better places in their lives in which they no longer perceived themselves as owned or limited by these experiences. Although having

witnessed the effects of violence in individual women's lives, I view such violence through a feminist lens, recognizing the influence of gendered power structures in our society on women's personal experiences of violence.

My motivation in taking on this piece of research was first and foremost a practical one. I wanted to better understand processes that women move through after trauma toward living well so that I, and other professional helpers, could learn to more effectively assist women who are in the midst of such a process. As well, my hope was that this study might be one way that women who have been raped can access stories from others about their successful processes toward living well, and thus might offer hope and guidance to them as they travel a similar path.

In recent years, more theorists recognize that politics are embedded within all research, since it "generates power for some and can be used to discredit others" (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004). I too recognize this study as unabashedly political. I came to the study with feminist values and an agenda toward improving the lives of women. Rather than working to become neutral, however, as would be recommended by positivist/empirical theorists, along with many other feminist researchers I accepted that I was entering into "passionate scholarship" (DuBois (1983), in Lather, 1988, p.576). This study was meant to focus on potential and transformation (both personal and social), and to theorize about what is possible. It was meant to be research with and for, rather than on, women, in which the research process is used for empowerment "through a focus on women's agency and by providing new accounts of women's experience" (Ussher, 1999, p.110). This work, therefore, was meant to be a form of liberatory inquiry. And yet, in

recognizing my own stance in relation to this area of exploration, I also understood the importance of a commitment to avoid the romantic, uncritical, and uneven handling of the research material (Fine, 1994).

### **1.3 Why this Question: Placing Trauma Theory Development in Context**

Contrary to common understanding that theory development is a process stemming from and being influenced only by logic and science, theoretical understanding of trauma has been shaped strongly by historical events such as wars, accidents, natural disasters, and more recently interpersonal violence and forms of oppression. As well, cultural, political and economic contexts have impacted the study of trauma over the past century and a half (Bloom, 1997; Burstow, 2003; van der Kolk, Weisath, & van der Hart, 1996).

Circumstances surrounding technological advancements such as the development of the railway, for example, have impacted our understanding of trauma. Fairly frequent train accidents in the 1800's, and subsequent descriptions of negative effects described by survivors of these accidents, led to debates in the medical and legal communities regarding whether "railway spine" or "nervous shock" were physical or psychological in origin (O'Brien, 1998), and whether financial compensation being sought was deserved. With these debates came adversarial positions from insurance companies regarding whether the complainant was suffering as a direct result of the accident, or whether pre-existing individual vulnerabilities were to blame for any difficulties (Peterson, Prout, & Schwarz, 1991). Such debates about the root cause of trauma and subsequent rights to compensation for suffering would continue well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Times of war also brought the experiences of trauma to the attention of doctors who treated combat soldiers, particularly since the American Civil War (1861-1875). From that time on, the field of Medicine has had a central influence on trauma theory development. While during the Civil War physicians' emphasis was on seeking out the physiological basis for soldiers' emotional difficulties in response to combat, it was during this time in the late 1800's that Herman Oppenheim, a neurologist, first used the term 'trauma' to describe other than physical wounds, coining the term, "traumatic neurosis" (van der Kolk et al., 1996). The scientific study of trauma was again catalyzed by each of the large scale wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. The ongoing debate regarding whether the origin of traumatic response was organic or psychological in nature continued, and belief in the organic cause of traumatic symptoms was predominant through much of World War I. "Shell shock", for example, was attributed to physiological reactions to atmospheric changes or excess carbon monoxide in battle (Peterson et al., 1991), pressure or chemical effects on the brain upon exposure to explosions (Mott, 1917, as cited in O'Brien, 1998), and organic lesions in the brain resulting from micro-fragments of exploded bombshells (Gersons & Carlier, 1992; Leys, 2000). By the early 1920's, however, the term and its explanations for post-combat difficulties had to be abandoned as soldiers who had never been in the vicinity of explosions were presenting with the symptoms of shell shock (Gersons & Carlier, 1992; Grinker & Spiegel, 1979; O'Brien, 1998).

The invalidation of these theories of shell shock spurred on heated debate regarding whether soldiers' symptoms were due to cowardice and pre-war personal

vulnerability or the physical environment of warfare itself (Leys, 2000; van der Kolk et al., 1996), leading to a shift toward suspected pre-war vulnerability of individual men. Patriotism and social pressures to avoid criticisms of the war itself may well have influenced this attribution of personal vulnerability (van der Kolk et al), which had negative legal and economic implications for veterans, who were often refused compensation.

Without the rationale of an organic cause that had been offered by shell shock during World War I, physicians treating soldiers during World War II found it difficult to distinguish symptoms of war neurosis from cowardice, leading to devastating effects. In the British army alone, approximately 1800 of their own soldiers were charged with cowardice and sentenced to death during the war, 200 of whom were actually executed (van der Kolk et al., 1996).

More than any other event, the Vietnam War catalyzed public concern and scientific investigation in the area of trauma. Unlike veterans of the two World Wars who returned home from their war experiences as heroes, veterans returning from the controversial Vietnam War were “at best ignored and at worst vilified” (O’Brien, 1998, p.12). Such receptions were believed to have exacerbated veterans’ difficulties in readjusting to post-war life, and the media’s subsequent focus on this unfair treatment shifted public attitudes of veterans from antagonists to victims (Summerfield, 2001). It was within this context that the scientific community altered their emphasis away from explaining post-war difficulties as due to pre-trauma vulnerabilities of individual soldiers, and instead focused on the stress of war itself as a cause of post-war problems (Peterson

et al., 1991). This change within the scientific community in turn led to greater compensation packages for Vietnam veterans.

While a focus on the trauma experiences of Caucasian men of Western countries, in particular those of soldiers and veterans of war, dominated trauma research for decades, a couple of exceptions close to the turn of the century chronicled distress experienced by children in response to interpersonal violence (Masson, 1984; Saigh & Bremner, 1999). This research, however, was not well accepted by colleagues and was largely ignored. While vast numbers of women and children were experiencing various forms of interpersonal violence, the topic would not resurface as a relevant focus of scientific inquiry until the mid-1970's. Men's higher social status impacted on researchers' views regarding what experiences were deemed worthy of acknowledgement and scientific interest, and thus for years the plight of women and children was largely ignored or minimized (Freedly & Hobfoll, 1995; Peterson, Prout, & Schwarz, 1991). For instance, as recently as 1980 "the leading textbook of psychiatry still claimed that incest happened to fewer than one in a million women, and that its impact was not particularly damaging" (Kaplan, Friedman, & Sadock, 1980, as cited in van der Kolk, Weisath, & van der Hart, 1996, p.61). In spite of psychiatry's diminishment of women and children's highly stressful experiences, by the mid-1970's influential papers were being published that documented the impact of physical and sexual violence within these populations (for example Burgess & Holstrom, 1974, who first articulated 'rape trauma syndrome'; Herman, 1981; Walker, 1979).

Politics also played a key role in the first classification of “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) in the American Psychiatric Association’s third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III, 1980), whose purpose was to set criteria for traumatic events and categorize their effects (Saigh & Bremner, 1999). This psychiatric classification was originally encouraged both by supporters of Vietnam veterans and feminist advocates as an attempt to validate and de-pathologize experiences of those encountering trauma, and to facilitate access to compensation and health services (O’Brien, 1998; van der Kolk et al., 1996). While some supporters of the PTSD classification suggest that this emphasis on the fundamentally traumatic nature of certain highly stressful events is depathologizing (Dolan, 1991; Morrissette, 1999), critics suggest that this classification is more socially than scientifically constructed (Summerfield, 1999; Summerfield, 2001), and caution that such psychiatric labeling emphasizes pathology and thus stigmatizes individuals (Burstow, 2003; Morrissette, 1999; Ussher, 1999). For example, the DSM-III R’s classification set criteria regarding the types of events that could constitute highly stressful events needed to bring about PTSD. Such events had to be outside the usual range of human experience. Critics of this qualifier note that events that were deemed outside the usual range of human experience reflected only “what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class” (Brown, 1995, p.101). This definition ignores events and ongoing circumstances that amount to an assault on the safety of those who are not included in the dominant class in Western society, such as violence against women, children, men and women of colour in the United States, Aboriginal persons and communities in North America,

lesbian and gay people, people in poverty, and people with disabilities. With social, political and cultural contexts going unrecognized, the PTSD definition has “led to the neglect of contexts where traumatic experience is not the exception but the rule” (Davis, 1999, p.760; see also Gilfus, 1999; Wasco, 2003). It is important to understand the collective trauma of disadvantaged persons, or “insidious trauma” (Root, 1992), as the context for their individual trauma experiences, and the PTSD classification is far too narrow to do so (Wasco, 2003). This diagnostic labeling and diminishment of context locates the difficulty within the individual. While the classification recognizes that an event may cause trauma, it is the individual’s reaction that is emphasized and viewed as problematic. This construction of a “disorder” and its depoliticizing of trauma have dangerous consequences, including the inherent blaming of those who have been victimized (Herman, 1992; Koss & Burkhart, 1989).

Despite concerns and challenges that have been raised regarding such psychiatric classification, medical influence on current trauma theory development remains strong, and the narrow PTSD classification is now being used almost synonymously with the term ‘trauma’ in much of the literature. Clearly, our evolving understanding of trauma cannot be viewed in isolation from the context in which it has developed and from which it continues to grow.

#### **1.4 Limitations of Dominant Trauma Theory Discourse**

Shaped by its historical development, the dominant story of trauma theory remains one that has a number of conceptual limitations. Strongly influenced by psychiatry and psychology, the concept has been individualized, medicalized,

universalized and de-contextualized (Bloom, 1997; Burstow, 2003; Summerfield, 1999). Given the medical profession's focus on pathology, most trauma research has addressed only the painful, often devastating effects of traumatic experiences on individuals, and thus has often left unexplored the opportunity for positive outcomes, growth, and strengths. As well, most research on the topic has been carried out in Western industrialized nations, and has assumed universality of the trauma experience. This imposition of de-contextualized views of trauma marginalizes local voices and ignores cultural influences, leading to both "culture-blind and culture-bound" conceptualizations (McCormick, 1995). Further, while a small but growing body of research has focused on positive as well as negative outcomes after trauma, for the most part this research describes outcomes from the voice of the "expert" researcher based on quantitative studies, and has focused almost exclusively on elements associated with outcomes rather than on the process an individual may progress through toward these outcomes. Finally, except for some significant feminist contributions (such as Brown, 1995; Davis, 1999; Herman, 1992) and recent writings about traumatic experiences of refugees (Atlani & Rousseau, 2000) and historical trauma of indigenous peoples (Duran, Duran, Yellow Horse Brave Heart, & Yellow Horse-Davis, 1998; McCormick, 1995; Nader, K., Dubrow, N., & Stamm, B., 1999; Stamm & Stamm, 1999; Weaver & Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999), the impact of social, cultural and political contexts on the experience of trauma has been most frequently ignored or grossly minimized in the research. The construction of trauma as merely an individual phenomenon distracts attention from potential social and political roots of a problem, forms of oppression, and experiences of

families and communities (Brown, 1995; Burstow, 2003; Davis, 1999). As Bonnie Burstow, a feminist contributor to trauma theory development notes, “PTSD is a grab bag of contextless symptoms, divorced from the complexities of people’s lives and the social structures that give rise to them” (2003, p.1296). For example, medicalizing a woman’s suffering after being raped overlooks the gender-based political nature of the assault (Wood & Roche, 2001).

Western trauma discourse strongly shapes how we understand the effects of violence in people’s lives, and thus can influence how we seek to respond to those who experience violence. Even amongst feminist theorists writing on trauma, most have essentially accepted the psychiatric and diagnostic underpinnings of the concept, and have not fully integrated the political in the experience (Burstow, 2003). This accepted construction of a disorder implies that the goal of helping is the amelioration of “symptoms” (Davis, 1999). As long as our conceptualizations are inadequate, our ability to offer effective assistance will also be significantly restricted, limiting solutions to the medical and psychological realms with a focus on individual recovery rather than addressing individual growth and wellbeing, as well as emancipatory goals toward social change. At this time, we require “a more inclusive, critical theory and practice, appreciating the full variety of traumatic reactions, and responses, as well as of contexts within which they are derived” (Davis, p.771).

### **1.5 Recent Developments in the Literature**

Following the classification of PTSD, questions regarding the complexity of trauma experiences were more closely investigated. A number of researchers asked

the question: Why does everyone who experiences a highly stressful event *not* go on to experience PTSD? Related to this area of inquiry, researchers began to explore the concept of phases, progression, and a range of outcomes after trauma. While most research in this area of study has focused on effects or outcomes of trauma (both immediately after a highly stressful event, and after longer periods of time), much less attention has been paid to the process individuals traverse from the onset of trauma to the outcome. Due to the widespread acceptance of the medicalization of the trauma experience with its construction of a “disorder”, goals of helping tend to focus on “recovery of symptoms.” The process individuals go through to achieve positive or growth outcomes, on the other hand, has received much less attention, although exceptions exist (most notably Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Schaefer & Moos, 1992).

Lack of clarity related to concepts of recovery versus growth following trauma has been noted in the literature (see, for example, Smith & Kelly, 2001), and some theorists have worked to clarify this range of post-trauma outcomes. O’Leary and Ickovics (1995), in particular, postulate that at least four outcomes are possible after significant adversity: succumbing to the initial detrimental effects, survival with some impairment due to the adverse experience, recovery or “resilience” (a return to the pre-adversity level of functioning), and thriving (surpassing the pre-adversity level of functioning in some manner). More studies have focused on a return to pre-trauma functioning than on growth (Tedeschi, 1999), and have used a variety of terms to describe this phenomenon of recovery, including resilience (Grossman, Cook, Kepke, & Koenen,

1999; Grossman & Moore, 1994; McMillen, 1999; Morgan & Janoff-Bulman, 1994), successful or effective coping (Draucker, 1992; Frazier & Burnett, 1994; Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz, & Garwood, 1991), successful adaptation (Jaffe, 1985), adjustment (Frazier & Burnett, 1994; Taylor & Armor, 1996; Taylor, Wood, & Lichtman, 1983), and healing (Grossman et al., 1999). Investigators have also developed and used a variety of terms to describe O'Leary and Ickovics' fourth post-traumatic outcome option, which involves positive outcomes. These terms include posttraumatic growth (Cadell, 2001; Cadell, Regehr, & Hemsworth, 2003; Calhoun, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), thriving (Calhoun, 1998; Dolan, 1998; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995), psychological growth (Dunbar, Mueller, Medina, & Wolf, 1998), and transformation (Park, 1999).

Some authors use various terms interchangeably and do not clearly differentiate between the two more positive potential outcomes – recovery and thriving (Carver, 1998). For example, Elder & Clipp discuss resilience and personal growth interchangeably (1989), while Dunbar and his colleagues describe post-trauma change as “growth”, “adjustment” and “coping” without distinguishing amongst these terms (1998). In these instances, it is unclear whether a recovery or a thriving outcome is being described. In other examples, growth outcomes are described without the use of specific terms, as they had not yet been coined (see, for example, Veronen & Kilpatrick, 1983, who simply describe “functioning better after than before the rape”). Some authors have clearly described elements of growth or thriving but have also included recovery language in their descriptions (see, for example, Park, 1999; Schaefer & Moos, 1992).

And finally, one example in the literature describes both outcomes of recovery and thriving suggesting that individuals experience a preliminary phase of recovery before moving on to a phase of growth that surpasses pre-trauma functioning (Burt & Katz, 1987). One commonality across these various terms is that they have been coined and articulated by investigators or theorists, rather than by those who have lived the experiences.

Before moving on to some key points made within the growth literature, one caution must be highlighted. Most theoretical development of post-traumatic growth and thriving does not come from research, in part because they are relatively new phenomena for discussion in the literature. Rather, most of what has been written about the phenomena has been extrapolated from the recovery/resilience research literature and is anecdotally based on clinical information (Tedeschi, 1999). Further, most of the research that has occurred in the area has a clear positivist base and quantitative methodologies have most often been employed. Scales, for example, have been developed (see Park, Cohen, & Murch's Stress-Related Growth Scale, 1996; and Tedeschi & Calhoun's Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, 1996) in attempts to better measure the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth.

Most recently, some authors have described posttraumatic growth as an ongoing process rather than as a static outcome (Tedeschi, 1999; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), although thriving has been described as the positive outcome achieved after working through the process of threat and challenge (Carver, 1998). Both those who have experienced one-time highly stressful experiences as well as those who experience

chronic trauma experiences report experiencing growth. The phenomenon is understood to be multidimensional, so that growth might be experienced in some aspects of a person's life while not in others. Therefore, posttraumatic growth does not imply the complete absence of some ongoing pain or difficulty as a result of trauma. Theorists in this area of study highlight that it is the struggle with the traumatic experience that is the source of subsequent positive change rather than the traumatic event itself, and thus it cannot be suggested that violent acts and other precursors to trauma are beneficial for people (Tedeschi, 1999; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Positive changes may be gradual or abrupt, but what is common is that in order to usher in positive changes some type of shock and subsequent struggle are necessary. "It appears, in fact, that allowing the trauma to have an impact, rather than avoiding the distressing aspects of it, is critical for posttraumatic growth" (Tedeschi, 1999, p.324). Because posttraumatic growth is intimately tied to this struggle, severity of events and intensity of the struggle seem related to the extent to which growth occurs (McMillen, Smith, & Fisher, 1997; Tedeschi, 1999; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Theorists often connect this growth process to the revision of cognitive schemas, personal identity, priorities for living, and spiritual understanding, and this process tends to "incorporate both affective and intellectual elements of learning from trauma and its aftermath." (Tedeschi, 1999, p.329).

Studies of posttraumatic growth and thriving have remained focused on personal rather than social transformation, although theorists have now begun to make links between personal transformation and positive change within social systems, and mechanisms by which these social transformations occur are being considered (Bloom,

1998b; Tedeschi, 1999). These social transformations often involve social and political action to curb the repetition of trauma, and therefore are crucial elements in responding to oppressive contexts in which trauma occurs.

In exploring thriving or posttraumatic growth outcomes of individuals, studies have found various elements to be reflective of this achievement. For example, Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) describe changes in self, changes in philosophy of life and spiritual/existential beliefs, and changes in relationships that constitute post-traumatic growth. Burt and Katz (1987), on the other hand, highlight different dimensions of growth outcomes, including assertiveness, self worth, control and self-direction. Most literature in this area describes particular techniques or resources used by individuals toward recovery and/or growth such as the role of positive rumination and one's social network (Calhoun, 1998; Grossman, Cook, Kepkep, & Koenen, 1999; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), search for meaning (Grossman et al.; McMillen, 1999; Silver, Boon & Stones, 1983), religious/spiritual beliefs (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, & McMillan, 2000; Park et al., 1996), account making and confiding (Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz, & Garwood, 1991), positive fundamental belief changes (Collins, Taylor, & Skokan, 1990; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Park et al.), the use of positive illusions such as exaggerated perceptions of control (Taylor & Armor, 1996), effective management of intense feelings (Grossman et al.), employment of self-care and self-soothing behaviours (Grossman et al.), perception of benefit after trauma (McMillen; McMillen, Smith & Fisher, 1997), and the use of forms of resistance both to the violence itself and to the negative effects of violence (Burstow, 1992; Wade, 1997). One study has explored the relative usefulness of

techniques toward recovery based on the timing of their application after a traumatic event. Specifically, Frazier & Burnett assessed coping strategies in the immediate post-rape period (1994).

While indicators of growth outcomes as well as elements that support growth have received some attention in the literature, only two teams of theorists have attempted to develop conceptual models of post-trauma progression toward thriving (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Schaefer & Moos, 1992). Based on a review of theory and research from the stress and coping, and crisis literature, Jeanne Schaefer and Rudolf Moos put forward a conceptual framework to understand positive outcomes following crises. They distinguish three broad interrelated categories of stress-related positive outcomes. These include enhanced social resources, enhanced personal resources, and new or improved coping skills. Their framework emphasizes cognitive processes in the achievement of positive outcomes. They posit that environmental and personal systems along with event-related factors influence the types of cognitive appraisal and coping responses used, which can facilitate any of the three types of positive outcomes. A reciprocal feedback loop is also suggested that can occur at any stage of this process toward growth outcomes.

Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) also drew upon ideas of theorists in the field to outline a functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth, and they too highlight cognitive appraisal and similar influential factors on the process. Describing growth as a multidimensional process, they outline influences on the process (individual factors, the type of trauma experience, and the social support contexts), and describe

the possibility of different routes for the varied domains of posttraumatic growth (e.g., routes to changes in major life goals, changes in identity, changes in interpersonal relationships and behaviour, and changes in beliefs.) “The [traumatic] event severely shakes or destroys some of the key elements of the individuals’ important goals and worldview, setting in motion a process of great emotional distress, high levels of rumination, and attempts to engage in behaviour that is designed to reduce distress and discomfort.... ...A sense of looking back, reflection from a safe distance, provides the best opportunity for growth, probably because cognitive processes can be more constructively devoted to the development of growth when they are not disrupted by so much distress.” (p. 232)

Research to understand the process to achieve growth is in its infancy. The two conceptualizations described above are a starting point for future explorations. They, however, assume some generalizability across types of traumatic events, do not adequately address potential contextual variations, and were not developed from the perspectives, or standpoints, of those who have experienced traumatic events. Researchers and practitioners have much to learn from those who have faced traumatic events and nonetheless have managed to achieve positive changes.

### **1.5.1 Recovery and Growth after Rape**

Investigations that have focused specifically on the potential for positive outcomes after the trauma of rape have also noted elements that are helpful toward recovery and/or growth. For example, two studies regarding women who had experienced sexual violence determined that telling others about their rape experience

assisted women's recovery (Draucker & Stern, 2000; Routbort, 1998). Another study, however, found that it was others' reactions to their telling about the rape that was important (Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991). In this study, women who described unsupportive behavior by others regarding their rape described poorer adjustment, while no association was made between supportive behavior of others and post-rape recovery. Although seemingly contradictory, each of these findings may recognize elements of a more complex rape process that includes "victims' strategies to survive the assault, their strategies (e.g., coping, disclosure, and help-seeking) to negotiate their post-assault experiences (e.g., Konradi, 1996), and society's responses to the assault, which often absolve the perpetrator of blame" (Wasco, 2003, p.312). Other research has found that experiences of prior victimization may impact on the types of strategies that women use to recover after rape (Arata, 1999). Wasco again suggests that the intersection of various factors including gender, class, ethnicity, as well as prior victimization experiences "may generate a pattern of harm and recovery that is more intricate than what has been accounted for in most published literature on trauma" (Wasco, p.313).

A much smaller number of studies, two of which were conducted two decades ago, have focused beyond recovery to potential growth outcomes after the trauma of rape (Burt & Katz, 1987; Smith & Kelly, 2001; Thompson, 2000; Veronen & Kilpatrick, 1983). In a set of five studies, Veronen and Kilpatrick used standardized measures to explore women's reactions to rape over time, and set forth four potential models to describe positive changes in the aftermath of rape. They described the experience of

threat and recognition of one's victimization as leading to growth outcomes including:

- Appreciation of life,
- Reassessment of priorities,
- Identification of various needs which leads to higher levels of functioning, and
- Analysis of rape from a feminist perspective which leads to a woman identifying other areas of oppression in her life which leads to making changes to take control in her life.

In another study, using a combination of standardized and newly developed instruments Burt and Katz (1987) mailed out self-administered questionnaires to women who had been raped. Results regarding changes that the women experienced highlight several dimensions of growth outcomes including understanding one's own needs and getting them met; assertiveness, independence and autonomy; self-worth; political awareness; and control and self-direction. The authors suggest that the initial phase of recovery after rape (with a focus on reducing negative effects) may be followed by an "integrative" phase, during which growth and positive change potential exist.

One more recent qualitative study has attempted to explore multiple elements of the pattern toward recovery and growth after rape. In Smith & Kelly's research (2001) that focused on contributors to the recovery and growth of seven women after being raped, three main themes were highlighted - reaching out, reframing the rape, and redefining the self. This study aimed to discover the meaning of recovery from the survivors' experiences. The women described their experiences of recovery in behavioral terms, and recovery as cyclical (often involving the revisiting of feelings). From the

authors' descriptions, it seems that the first two themes involve elements toward recovery (such as getting back to normal routines, talking without crying, having control of obsessive thoughts, being able to move about in her environment, seeing the positives of recovery, gaining new perspective, and no longer needing people to believe what she says about the rape), while the third theme moves beyond recovery to elements of posttraumatic growth (redefining herself not only by regaining what she has lost as a result of being raped, but by developing the ability for increased personal growth). The authors describe this growth phase as being linked to self-love, forgiveness of self and rapist, and inner peace. Discussion regarding the process from rape to growth outcomes was minimal, and some elements of the themes, such as forgiveness, were not critically explored, but this study offers preliminary insights into women's own understandings of recovery and growth after rape.

## **1.6 Rationale for the Study**

### **1.6.1 Limitations of Current Theory and Understanding**

Based on this review of the literature, for the purposes of this study I was specifically interested in exploring two areas that have been largely ignored in the literature: the process individuals move through from trauma to living well; and this process as described and understood by those who have experienced it. Insight into the nature and process of this phenomenon has a distinct practical value, since improved understanding is necessary in order to foster its occurrence. As lead researchers in the field of trauma theory note, "Possibly the most important questions that deserve intense study are these: What are the natural mechanisms that allow

some individuals to face horrendous experiences and to go on? And what can we learn *from them* (my italics) to help others do the same?" (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996, p.xvii).

The purpose of the current study was to explore the processes experienced by women toward living well after rape, an experience that research has shown to frequently result in significantly negative effects (Herman, 1992; Resick, 1993). Specifically, the research asked women who had been raped as adults and who described themselves as "living well" at the time of the research interviews about the process through which they achieved this transition. Experiences of rape and its aftermath clearly occur in, and are influenced by, the broader social and political contexts in which they occur. Therefore, the study of rape offered an opportunity to explore a form of trauma that has clear links beyond the individual to broader issues of power and oppression that may be related to this process.

Feminist research is critical by its very nature, positing that traditional approaches to the study of women's lives are replete with andocentric biases. Women's multifaceted experiences have been largely ignored or pathologized, and mainstream approaches have located problems women have faced almost exclusively within the individual, failing to recognize the impact of power relations in society, and minimizing or ignoring the impact of social and cultural factors in the roots of problems. The bulk of research on trauma is no exception to this critique. Trauma theory development has been strongly influenced by the medical community focusing on the individual victim, utilizing a pathology-based framework, and denying or diminishing the influence of

social, historical, cultural and political contexts on the experience. Trauma and rape research has also been steeped in positivist thinking and quantitative methodology, and theorists have recognized that the field would benefit from greater methodological diversity (Campbell, 2002). Critical theory development based in the lived experience of those who have faced trauma is needed to enrich this complex area of study.

### **1.6.2 Incidence of Rape**

Beyond the limitations of our current understanding of the process after trauma to living well, and of the dominant methods used to build this area of knowledge, rationale for this study was strengthened based on the prevalence of rape. Until the late 1970's almost nothing was known about the incidence and effects of rape in women's lives in North America, as studies of rape had not been undertaken and the issue had been ignored (Gilfus, 1999). Even today, uncovering the incidence of rape can be a challenge. In Canada, most women who are raped do not report this crime. In fact, estimates suggest that only 6% of sexual assaults are reported to authorities (Ontario Women's Directorate, 1995). Therefore, accurately reporting the incidence of rape in our country becomes difficult. Statistics that we do have, however, are disturbing. In 1999 in Canada 23,872 sexual assaults (of which rape is one form) were reported to the police in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2000). Given the strikingly low report rates for sexual assault, this statistic is significant when trying to estimate the true number of sexual assaults experienced by women in Canada on a yearly basis.

Looking further afield to the United States, a large study of college students found that 27.5% of women respondents had been victims of rape or attempted rape since the

age of 14 years (Koss et al., 1987). Seventeen percent of women respondents at another American university described themselves as victims of sexual assault (Finley & Corty, 1993). Further, according to the World Health Organization (1995), in the United States 700,000 women are sexually assaulted every year, and a 1992 report of the U.S. National Victim Center estimates that one of every three American women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime (Wood & Roche, 2001). These estimates and statistics confirm that the incidence of rape in our society is at an alarming level, and therefore studies of the issue are relevant.

### **1.6.3 Impact of Rape in Women's Lives**

Not only does the high incidence of rape bring relevance to this focus of study, but the impact of rape in women's lives further heightens this relevance. Over the past three decades, rape has been well documented as causing significant physical and emotional distress both in its immediate aftermath, in its potential for persistent distress over time, and has been shown to clearly qualify as potentially traumatic in nature (Norris, 1992). Physical health effects include injury, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, as well as short- and long-term somatic complaints such as headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, gynecological problems, sleep disturbance, and hypertension (Campbell, 2002; Golding, 1994; Kimerling & Calhoun, 1994). Various forms of emotional distress are also common after a woman is raped, and may include fear and anxiety, depression, anger, a damaged sense of worth, social withdrawal, difficulties with sexual intimacy, feelings of objectification, and self-blame (Campbell; Herman, 1992; Resick, 1993). While psychological distress has been found often to dissipate within half

a year (Cohen & Roth, 1987; Kilpatrick, Resick, & Veronen, 1981), many women experience chronic effects of the rape that may last for years (Resick). The impact of rape can also extend beyond the primary victim and negatively affect families, loved ones, and full communities (Campbell).

Dominant traditional conceptualizations of trauma, such as PTSD, are “too narrow to accurately capture the complexities of women’s experiences of sexual violence in a gendered society” (Wasco, 2003, p. 309), emphasizing and validating some ‘symptoms’ while disregarding others. For example, while many sexual assaults may include trademark characteristics of trauma such as violence and fear of death, not all rapes do. These rapes, however, can still be highly distressing. The impact of rape must also take into account not just distress stemming directly from the assault, as do traditional conceptualizations, but must also consider the influence of post-assault experiences, such as disclosures and reactions from family, friends, and service providers.

#### **1.6.4 Relevance to Social Work**

This study responded to limitations within the current literature, and explored a social issue that occurs frequently with deleterious effects. This area of inquiry is also relevant to social work, although the profession’s involvement in the development of trauma theory was almost non-existent until the past decade, and since then its limited contribution has focused mainly on outcomes and treatment approaches (Dixon & Thyer, 1997; Graziano, 1992; Langley, 1982; Norman, 2000; Soliman, 1999). Given the prevalence of traumatic experiences (Breslau & Davis, 1992; Elliot & Briere, 1995;

Resnick, Kilpatrick, Dansky, Saunders, & Best, 1993) and the significant numbers of people who seek social workers' assistance related to the negative impact of these experiences, the profession's limited involvement in advancing our understanding of trauma is surprising. Social workers play key roles in a number of fields that on a regular basis serve those who have experienced trauma, such as Child Protection Services, Addiction Services, shelters, hospitals, sexual assault centres, and mental health agencies.

This study is relevant to social work not only because of the prevalence of the issue in the lives of those we serve, but due to its fit with the mandate of social work. Social workers have an ethical obligation to focus their research and scientific inquiry toward benefiting those whom they serve. Those of disadvantaged status in our communities are at greater risk of being exposed to and suffering the effects of trauma (DiGirodamo, 1993, as cited in Chester, 1995; Gilfus, 1999). This "unequal distribution of exposure to traumatic injury" and "differentially distributed vulnerability to traumatic injury" are clear examples of social injustice (Gilfus, pp.1254 & 1249). The profession's commitment to social justice as well as its recognition of the potential role of communities regarding trauma align well with current areas of trauma research. Many types of trauma can occur in part because of unjust systems (e.g., forms of political oppression, the status of women and children, and treatment of Aboriginal communities). In such circumstances, it can be strongly argued that using only a medical model with its focus on responding to deficits and individual victims in order to understand trauma is inadequate (Chester; Nader et al., 1999). Social workers have recently begun to study social and cultural influences on the meaning and effects of trauma, emphasizing the

context within which trauma occurs (Nader et al.; Nicholson & Walters, 1997; Stamm & Stamm, 1999; Weaver & Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999;). For example, stresses and difficulties within North American Aboriginal communities cannot be studied separately from a context that has been interwoven with experiences of discrimination and genocide (Stamm & Stamm). Re-contextualizing trauma experiences may lead to conceptual frameworks very different from our dominant construction of trauma, which “overlooks the stresses imposed by racism, economic domination, or political oppression” (Nader et al., p.xix).

The social work profession is well positioned to contribute to this area of study. The exploration of the progression after trauma toward positive outcomes is a promising research area for social workers, converging well with the profession’s emphasis on wellness and empowerment (Simon, 1994), and strengths (Saleebey, 1997). Further, the profession’s commitment to situate an individual’s experience within a community and cultural context, and to apply critical and feminist analysis to enrich our understandings of experiences, are needed in this area of inquiry (Pennell & Ristock, 1999; Saulnier, 1996; Van den Bergh, 1995). The complex nature and scope of trauma experiences requires an interdisciplinary effort to further our understanding and ultimately provide more effective assistance to those in distress. Social work has the potential for a significant contribution in this effort.

### **1.7 Rationale for the Study’s Approach: Epistemological Considerations**

Epistemology, the philosophical study of knowledge, specifies the requirements for legitimization as knowledge, who can be recognized as a ‘knower’, and what can

actually be known (Harding, 1987). One's epistemology, therefore, strongly influences the methodology and research methods chosen by any researcher. While many researchers proceed with their studies without an understanding of their theoretical paradigm or without articulating this paradigm to make their philosophical assumptions transparent, this is a dangerous practice as research then is based on unexamined and unrecognized theory (Mertens, 1998).

At a fundamental level, researchers of the humanities and social sciences must be clear regarding their understanding of what can be known. Is there an objective reality and 'truth' that researchers can find through careful research design and procedures, or is knowledge socially constructed? This realism-relativism debate has been energetically discussed in current academic circles (see, for example, Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Parker, 1999). While the realist position is based on the acceptance of a 'reality' that exists independent of persons' representations of it (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999), relativists would emphasize the constructed nature of knowledge based on experiences in a particular time and place mediated through language (Hayes & Oppenheim, 1997).

Most current scholars believe that knowledge is never complete, and therefore must always be described as tentative. How this provisional knowledge is acquired, however, is still disputed. The empirical/positivist paradigm has strongly influenced scientists' assumptions regarding the legitimacy of knowledge claims over the past three hundred years. For much of this period, positivist assumptions regarding who can know (an autonomous individual); what can be known (while there are universal truths, humans are limited to what they can know with their senses); and how individuals can know what

they know (through objectivity, autonomy, and representations which are legitimated using our senses) have dominated the sciences (Tanesini, 1999). Traditional empiricists/positivists would not, therefore, include issues of professional values, power, and politics in a discussion of knowledge and scientific inquiry, as value-neutrality is seen as supporting an objective approach, which is believed to be required for knowledge building. Empiricists emphasize the goal of being neutral observers, and caution that “shoulds” which stem from values and politics do not have a place in scientific method (see, for example, York, 1998).

More recently, those with more radical epistemological ideas have critically explored the practices of traditional scientific inquiry, and the assumptions of empiricism have been challenged. Knowledge is instead described as a human construction that can never be confirmed as ultimately true because it cannot escape the influence of historical and cultural location, and the social position of the knower. These epistemologists further contend that knowledge is always, therefore, connected with political interests and involves power (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1998; Nelson, 1990; Smith, 1999).

According to social constructionists<sup>1</sup>, because researchers can never be free of social, cultural and political influences, any grand theory based on assumptions of

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<sup>1</sup> Because both “social constructionism” and “constructivism” are referred to in this document, I wish to distinguish them as concepts rooted in different epistemologies, and in the context of this thesis draw upon Kathy Charmaz’ understanding of each concept. In her work, social constructionism refers to “a theoretical perspective that assumes that people create reality(ies) through individual and collective actions... .Instead of assuming realities in an external world – including global structures and local cultures – social constructionists study what people at a particular time and place take as real, how they construct their views and actions, when different constructions arise, whose constructions become taken as definitive, and how that process ensues” (Charmaz, 2006,

underlying structures and truths must be rejected. Knowledge is instead viewed as only local in nature with multiple equally valid perspectives. Dorothy Smith (1987), however, has challenged this relativist assumption, asking, "Is it not also essential to the most modest possibilities of knowing how things work that a social scientific account can be called into question? And therefore that another version can be on some grounds preferred?" (p.122). For her and other feminist/critical researchers, the social constructionist view of knowledge holds promise but is also problematic. On one hand, social constructionists make transparent and challenge the elements of power in the research endeavor and encourage learning from voices that have been traditionally marginalized. A key dilemma of relativist analyses of social problems for the critical theorist, on the other hand, is the loss of a collective voice in response to social issues due to the distrust of any meta-theory (Ife, 1996; Leonard, 1994; Van den Bergh, 1995). Such a retreat from universal truths to wholesale relativism limits the political claim of marginalized groups to recognize oppression and create space for social transformation. This realism-relativism debate has received much focus within academic circles in recent years (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999), and one's position in this debate strongly influences one's approach to research.

It is at this juncture that the stance of critical realism, a position based in realist ontology while accepting a relativist epistemology, holds potential (Ussher, 1999; Willig,

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p.189). Constructivism, on the other hand, refers to "a social scientific perspective that addresses how realities are made. This perspective assumes people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate... .Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction" (Ibid., p.187).

1999). An objective and material reality is accepted. However the ways in which humans understand this reality is necessarily mediated through discourse, which is always infused with one's social location within a given social, political and historical context (Parker, 1992). Representations of reality are assumed to be inherently characterized and influenced by language, political interests and culture that are embedded in such features as gender or social class (Ussher). Thus, critical realism allows for and supports models for research "where biological, psychosocial and discursive factors can be addressed within a framework that does not privilege one over the other" (Ussher, p.102). Given the complex experience of trauma that involves all of these factors (biomedical, psychosocial and discursive), such an understanding of reality and knowledge is important. Relativism is rejected, but the positivist position that 'reality' can be measured through systematic scientific methods that are objective is also rejected.

Feminist standpoint theory aligns itself well with critical realist assumptions, and can in fact be conceptualized as a sub-type of critical realism, as it accepts the existence of materiality beyond human experience but recognizes that ways of understanding the world are bound by social and historical context (Harding, 1991; Ussher, 1999). According to standpoint theorists, given that knowledge and accepted "truths" have been created within societal power structures, those with little power in our societies have been effectively silenced. Knowledge, however, can be gleaned from awareness of one's experiences from a social location. In particular, standpoint theorists emphasize the potential for 'double knowledge' of those representing marginalized groups (Harding,

1987; Hartsock, 1998; Longino, 1996; Van den Bergh, 1995). As Van den Bergh explains, "Not only are [marginalized groups] aware of what is ostensibly true according to the majority culture's perception of reality, they understand additional truths based on their experiences as minority people" (p.xx). Individuals of a marginalized group may have a particularly important form of knowledge that has gone largely unrecognized in traditional scientific inquiry. Therefore, research based in this epistemology begins from the perspective of those with experiences as members of marginalized groups, and assists in their voices becoming part of knowledge building. "Standpoint epistemologies propose that institutionalized power imbalances give the act of starting off from marginalized lives a critical edge for formulating new questions that can expand everyone's knowledge about institutionalized power and its effects" (Harding, 1998, p.159). As individuals of marginalized groups begin to articulate their own experiences, alternate discourses can be brought forward through the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas. Through this process of deconstructive inquiry, which involves "the uncovering and overturning of the central assumption of a discourse" (Culler, 1982, as cited in Pennell & Ristock, 1999, p.465), researchers may move beyond the dominant group's ideology and its resulting restricted knowledge. Standpoint theorists, therefore, accept research as a political act, as they work to open up new ways of understanding that better reflect the experiences and knowledge gleaned from those living on the margins of society (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Harding, 1991; Maynard, 1994). One goal of such research is that this new understanding can provide opportunities for empowerment and social change.

While from a critical realist perspective, accurate prediction isn't possible given the continuing changing of contexts and the complexity of human experience, researchers can aim to describe, explain and understand people's challenges, the meaning of these challenges to them, factors which may be implicated in both the timing and degree of their difficulties, and ways in which they cope with perceived difficulty (Ussher, 1999). Through deconstructive inquiry and the resulting different story that is being told, researchers move their inquiry from a focus on individual experience to that of socio-political praxis (Pennell & Ristock, 1999).

For instance, the disciplines of medicine and psychology "have been accused of creating theories and therapeutic interventions which potentially damage the health of women through locating problems within the individual, implicitly pathologizing femininity, and ignoring the socially constructed nature of health and illness" (Ussher, 1999, p.100). Specific to trauma theory, contemporary formulations of the concept have been described as "pathologizing, exclusionary, and decontextualizing" (Gilfus, 1999, p.1239). Advantages of the current dominant trauma theory, however, must be acknowledged. Its validation of the psychological injury to the victim and its minimization of blaming the victim for the violence were important changes from prior psychoanalytic interpretations. As well, those surviving violence have found the trauma framework to be empowering as an explanation supported by the scientific community, and also useful in explaining suffering and aftereffects such as flashbacks (Burstow, 2003). The framework has also led to helpful treatment interventions (Gilfus). While these benefits have been important, limitations of this dominant construct are also

evident. For example, dominant trauma theory has become increasingly medicalized (see, for example, van der Kolk, 1987; van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Description of trauma as an individual psychological response that is ultimately diagnosed as psychopathology using a checklist of symptoms can stigmatize victims and fail to recognize their strengths, the source of the injury, or the social context within which the event occurred. Further, a generalized trauma theory that makes links across various extremely stressful experiences may serve to “obscure the uniquely gendered and political aspects of violence against women” (Gilfus, p.1242). In a nutshell, “The social construction of trauma as individual psychopathology once again obscures structures of oppression that perpetuate violence and offers victims only individualistic solutions to what are essentially collective and political problems” (Ibid., p. 1254).

An emphasis on context is of critical importance to researchers exploring issues related to power and oppression. By studying the role of context on personal experience and centering the voices of women who have faced challenges that impact on their health, such as rape, the process of deconstructive inquiry generates alternative stories than the mainstream explanations of their experiences. Through its incorporation of multiple perspectives this process also serves to challenge any totalizing thinking of critical theorists. Commitments to feminism and social justice, however, can “safeguard the deconstruction from sinking into a nihilistic rejection of all values” (Pennell & Ristock, 1999, p.462). It is this balancing act between feminist links and postmodern interruptions that Pennell and Ristock describe as important throughout one’s scholarly inquiry.

As I have attempted to better understand the processes women work through after experiencing rape toward living well, feminist standpoint epistemology was the base from which I approached this study. This basis for knowledge led me to accept that there is no one true story of rape, as it is within a historical and cultural context that meaning about a trauma experience is created. As a researcher, I believed that the most appropriate starting place for this piece of work was with the experiences and voices of those women who had been raped and I challenged myself to be reflexive throughout this research process in order to critically distance myself from my own assumptions.

## Chapter 2: Method

### 2.1 Description of and Rationale for the Design

The decision and rationale regarding methodology, or how research should proceed, as well as specific research methods deemed appropriate for gathering information, are influenced strongly by a researcher's ontological and epistemological standpoints and in turn by the question(s) being explored. Traditionally, quantitative methods based in a positivist paradigm have been used to explore responses to trauma. While contributing in highly significant ways to our understanding of potential outcomes after trauma and the effectiveness of particular strategies toward achieving positive ends, these studies have been unable to provide an in-depth understanding of experienced transitions from trauma to living well. Qualitative research with an emphasis on interpretation and meaning from within a socio-political context offers researchers an alternative methodology that is better suited to offer rich descriptions of potentially complex processes. Specifically in regard to women's experiences, qualitative research has been promoted as "a flexible means toward attending to the complexity and context of women's lives" (Ussher, 1999, p.103).

Given the subject matter of the current study, with its inseparable links to issues of power and oppression, a feminist base for research was most appropriate. While feminist researchers may draw upon a variety of methodologies, a number of principles have been proposed as common to feminist methods. These principles include a focus on gender and gender inequality; a commitment to reducing forms of inequality and oppression; an expectation to explore personal, everyday experiences of women and

those of other marginalized groups; a researcher's critical reflexivity regarding the potential influence of personal bias and broader conditions on the research process; and a commitment to an approach that amplifies participants' power in the research process (Cook and Fonow, 1986; Reinharz, 1992). Thus, qualitative methodology, when informed by feminist principles, encourages researchers to "position [themselves] less as masters of truth and justice and more as creators of space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf" (Lather, 1991, p.137). Women's sharing about their own condition highlights the limitations of 'expert' knowledge and comprehension (Maynard, 1994). Qualitative interviewing can therefore become a strategy to listen to what women have to say about their lives, providing a means of understanding the social world from the distinct standpoints of these women participants, and highlighting the meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Miller, 1997; see also Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987).

A framework or formal guide is required in order to translate such principles and feminist standpoint epistemology into action. A constructivist approach to grounded theory offers one formal guide that can be aligned effectively with this epistemology as well as feminist research principles and goals. It is particularly relevant to the exploration of women's lived experiences of a process. This constructivist version of grounded theory should not be mistaken for the originally developed grounded theory, which is based in objectivist assumptions. This earlier objectivist approach to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has significant limitations for this type of study. Objectivists assume facts external to individuals' experiences of them waiting to be

discovered in a knowable world. Further, objectivists believe that a researcher can remain distantly objective and separate from participants' experiences, and can represent these participants as an external authority (Charmaz, 2002). Some feminist researchers have found that the assumptions and subsequent strategies of this objectivist approach to grounded theory do not allow the complexities of participants' lives to be heard (see, for example, Merrick, 1999). Further, without a primary research emphasis on carefully listening to understand the standpoint of each of the participants, the richness of these women's experiences can be lost to the research.

Constructivists, on the other hand, assume multiple realities given continuously changing contexts and therefore they focus their study on interpretation of one's experience. They "see both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants and the researcher's relationships with participants" (Charmaz, 2002, p.677). The focus of a given study explores how participants construct meanings and actions, and constructivists view data analysis not as uncovering the facts that already exist in a knowable world (as objectivists would), but as a mutual construction between researcher and participants that is located in time, culture, place, and history. This emphasis on context is particularly important when exploring political issues, including those related to power and oppression such as rape.

Using the constructivist approach, researchers are recognized as moving into and being affected by participants' experiences and stories. Thus their work attempts to provide an "interpretive portrayal of the studied world" (Charmaz, 2002, p.678), with an

aim to explain social psychological processes. Questions in grounded theory are framed to study process, which was again a strong fit for the focus of this current study.

Constructivist grounded theorists can also choose to include fuller stories than grounded theorists have traditionally been known to do. The constructivist approach lends itself to narratives because it rests on an interpretive frame (Charmaz, 2002). A focus on narratives is also useful toward investigating specific transitions in the life cycle and offering thick descriptions of complex processes. Since stories are useful vehicles for construction and expression of meaning and identity, and because they can be a means to articulate and resolve disruptions in persons' lives, they are valuable to this research (Becker, 1997). Particularly relevant to the current study, the process of telling one's story assists an individual to "develop creative ways of interpreting disruption and to draw together disparate aspects of the disruption into a cohesive whole" (Becker, p.27). The telling of life stories thus can assist individuals in the emergence of meaning making that cannot easily occur in the midst of the experience of disruption. Further, not only individual but also social and cultural meanings can be conveyed through this process (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). A constructivist approach to grounded theory, therefore, offers one means toward telling a collective story with social and cultural meanings, so that the development of a conceptual analysis of the material that has both explanatory and predictive power can be attempted (Charmaz, 2002).

## **2.2 Research Design**

### **2.2.1 Description of Sampling, Procedures, and Participants**

Participants in this study were women who were living in New Brunswick at the time that they first expressed interest in participating, who were raped as adults, and who described themselves as living well at the time of the interviews (see Appendix G for working definitions of and rationale for the terms, “adult”, “rape”, and “living well” for the purposes of this study). Two participants, however, did move from the province during the time of their participation. Follow-up interviews with these two women occurred by telephone.

Participants were self-selected in one of four ways. Some responded to invitations they read in one of four newspapers: The Fredericton Daily Gleaner, The Telegraph Journal, L'étoile, L'Acadie Nouvelle, The Tribune/La Voix du Restigouche (see Appendix A: “Letter to the Editor” and “Lettre à l'éditeur”). These newspapers were selected in an attempt to include both Francophone and Anglophone women (although this researcher's limited ability in oral French required that a Francophone participant be willing to hold the interview in English or that a translator be involved in the interview.) These newspapers also have the greatest readership in New Brunswick, and so reached the greatest number of potential participants.

As a second means to invite participation, posters were distributed to a variety of public settings in the Fredericton area in an attempt to invite women to participate who might not have seen the invitation in the newspapers. Establishments in which the researcher was given permission to post invitations to participate included laundromats,

video stores, hair salons, and a gym for women (see Appendix B: Information Letter to be Posted in Public Places.)

A third means of receiving signs of interest in participation involved women approaching the researcher who had heard about the study through word of mouth. While this had not been expected and no formal invitation had occurred, in such cases the researcher shared a hard copy of the information letter with each potential participant (Appendix B), and if the woman remained interested, a similar conversation to the “Initial Phone Contact” ensued (see Appendix I).

After an initial period in which those interested in participating contacted the researcher, several more participants were still required for the study. Therefore, a fourth means to invite participation was added. The invitation to participate was disseminated via email. The researcher sent an email to twenty women colleagues in academia and social services, as well as several social acquaintances, and these women were asked to share the email with others who might be interested in participating (see Appendix C).

Twelve women contacted the researcher with interest in participating, and were screened for participation. At the time of the initial contact (most often occurring by phone), the researcher offered a more complete explanation of the nature and purpose of the study, and details of informed consent were reviewed. Potential participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and/or express any concerns about their decision to participate. During this conversation, the researcher also assessed whether each individual met the criteria to participate in the study (having been raped at a minimum of 18 years old, and currently living in New Brunswick), and whether she was in the midst

of dealing with crisis (suicidal ideation or attempts within the last 6 months, or a recent major loss or crisis as described by the individual.) In circumstances of recent crisis, the individual would not have been invited to participate, and this arose once in the course of the screening (see Appendix I: Script for Initial Phone Contact.) A list of potential resources for women screened out from participation during this initial contact had also been developed, although was not required for the purposes of this study (see Appendix J). During initial screening, one other individual was screened out due to not meeting the criteria of having been raped as an adult.

After screening, ten women participated in the study and each was interviewed on at least two occasions. Of this group, four participants heard about the study through newspapers, one woman responded to an invitation posted at a laundromat, two women heard about the study through word of mouth, and three responded after receiving the email invitation to participate from an acquaintance.

Of the participants, two specified that they were Acadian, one noted that she was French Canadian and that while bilingual her first language was French, and one woman specified that she was Jewish. The remaining participants did not describe themselves as being affiliated with a particular culture.

### **2.2.2 Data Collection: Interview Schedule**

In-depth interviews involving an open and sparse interview schedule design allowed participants “to frame their own stories in their own ways, and to include or leave out whatever they choose” (van den Hoonaard, 2001, p.2). The participant-guided individual interviews explored women’s stories of progression to positive outcomes (see

Appendix F: Interview Guide). This style of questioning allowed an emphasis on understanding participants rather than having specific questions answered (Reinharz, 1992). A small number of demographic details were also collected at this time, including age of the participant, time elapsed since the rape, relationship to the assailant, and history of any other experiences of violence.

The focus of the interviews was on the evolving process from the time of the rape to the present time of living well, rather than only the final outcomes or descriptions of significant elements occurring within this time frame. For example, the key introductory question in the initial interviews was: “What I’d like for you to do is tell me about your experience of the process of moving from the rape to living well. You can begin wherever you like, and include or leave out whatever you choose. I’m just interested in finding out about your experience. Could you tell me about this?” Other significant questions to support this participant-guided exploration included: “Has there been anything that particularly surprised you about this process toward living well?,” and “How do you understand what has happened to you since the time of the rape until now?” (See Appendix F for complete Interview Guide.)

It was crucial to conduct the interviews in a physical and emotional space that each woman found safe and comfortable. A context needed to be created in which each woman could speak and I listen, and I needed to be willing to hear what each woman described, even if her descriptions violated my expectations or threatened my interests (Reinharz, 1992). Interviews were conducted in a place of each participant’s choosing

(such as their home, my office, a confidential and quiet area in the participant's community) in order to create a comfortable atmosphere for each woman.

### **2.2.3 Data Analysis**

Charmaz' constructivist approach to grounded theory has as its focus for study the *process* of a given phenomenon, and understands data analysis as a construction of meaning and action that locates the data in its social context. Along with a commitment to attempt to understand individual participants' experiences, data analysis is regarded as a mutual construction of the participants' and researcher's interpretive portrayal of the studied phenomenon (2002). These emphases on the study of process, mutual construction of meaning, recognition of the influence of context, and the assumption of participants' knowing based on their experiences as central to the knowledge building endeavor, suggest the appropriateness of this approach for the phenomenon I explored. The emphasis on context also aligns well with feminist research principles, as the feminist lens seeks to explore women's lives within their sociopolitical contexts (Thompson, 1992; Ussher, 1999).

Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and then analyzed following Kathy Charmaz' constructivist approach to grounded theory (2002; 2000), for themes lending themselves to a conceptual framework of the process described by participants after rape, including any positive outcomes. All participants received copies of their own transcripts from interviews, at which time they were given the opportunity to alter or add to their comments (see Kelly, as cited in Reinharz, 1992).

With any grounded theory approach, conducting multiple interviews with each participant is standard practice, in order to foster the development of trust and allow the researcher to “get closer to the studied phenomenon” (Charmaz, 2002, p.682). In a set of second individual interviews, also audiotaped, preliminary analyses were shared with participants in order to receive corrective feedback and further suggestions, before developing final analyses. All participants agreed to participate in this second round of interviews, which occurred approximately seven months after the initial set of interviews. Such opportunities for self-correction of my preliminary analyses were particularly important, as I was not neutral in relation to this area of study. Meeting with participants more than once may also have been valuable in building trust (given the sensitive nature of the topic being explored), which in turn may have supported women in sharing further their rich descriptions of personal experiences.

During analyses, re-listening to audiotapes and conducting follow-up interviews with participants allowed me to respond to the limitations of language as an effective representation of experience. Language can never perfectly represent lived experience, and this “linguistic incongruence” can be particularly problematic for women (DeVault, 1999, p.61). In our society, women have been a “muted group” and topic categories (such as posttraumatic stress disorder, trauma, and recovery) that are recognized within academic circles may not necessarily be compatible with categories that are meaningful in women’s lives. Thus, as women attempt to speak about their experiences parts of these experiences may disappear due to such linguistic incongruence. In order to better understand these neglected aspects of women’s lives, researchers must attempt methods

to “listen around and beyond words” (DeVault, p.66). Further, the use of language to express lived experience may be especially challenging when exploring rape. As Brison describes related to the telling of her rape experience, “The challenge of finding language that is true to traumatic experience is a daunting one. How can we speak about the unspeakable without attempting to render it intelligible and sayable? The paradoxes of traumatic memory may seem to defy analysis” (2002, p.xi). Self-reflexivity and self-correcting strategies were crucial elements of this approach in order to attempt to effectively respond to these challenges.

The specific process of this analysis, following Kathy Charmaz’ guidelines for a constructivist approach to grounded theory (2006; 2002), moved inductively from data to theoretical rendering, and included:

- Initial or open coding to discover participants’ views and link each participant’s specific statements to key processes affecting her;
  - Selective or focused coding that involves adopting frequently recurring initial codes in order to categorize and synthesize interview data;
  - Memo writing to link the researcher’s coding to written first drafts of analysis;
  - Theoretical sampling (a self-correcting step in which the researcher returns to participants to check out whether preliminary codes and analytic categories are incomplete or lack sufficient evidence. Interview participants are selected to explore “specific key ideas to extend, refine, and check those categories” (Charmaz, p.689));
- and

- Integration of the analysis, which involves categorizing the memos, mapping out potential ways to order the memos, and making connections across categories.

#### **2.2.4 Trustworthiness**

It is a researcher's responsibility to show evidence of methodological rigor in any research project. While in quantitative terms and based on positivist assumptions, this would involve a discussion of validity and reliability, in the case of a study employing qualitative methodology based in constructivist assumptions, the discussion instead tends to focus on trustworthiness. In short, trustworthiness provides a basis for establishing a research study's worth, while recognizing its limitations as a construction based in a particular social and historical context. The question of trustworthiness asks a researcher how she can persuade herself and others that study findings are worth taking account of.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) establish trustworthiness of any research endeavor based upon four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. First, evidence of the credibility of findings involves checking with participants about initial analyses to determine whether they agree with our representations. Central to grounded theory are measures to make alterations to analyses based upon participants' feedback, particularly in follow-up interviews. As well, the sharing of interview transcripts with each participant and their opportunities to alter or add to these transcripts after reflection offers women participants the chance to clarify their ideas, and may minimize misunderstandings of meaning drawn upon in the researcher's subsequent analysis. All of these measures were taken in the current study to support evidence of the

credibility of interpretations. Further, participants' reflections regarding my analyses were incorporated into the final draft of the document.

Transferability is a more difficult element to confirm when applying it to qualitative research. While it can be argued that any qualitative methodology allows only for results that are representative of the participants within that study, findings of any study can be used for comparison with other groups and studies, and through a process of critical reflection and comparisons of results additional exploration can be undertaken. Further, constructivist understandings of knowledge would call into question any significant claims to transferability that imply generalizability of results to other settings, populations, and circumstances, regardless of methodology. And yet, transferability can be claimed when one's research has obtained a greater depth and detail of understanding of a given phenomenon. Such rich interpretations may, in turn, apply *to a degree* beyond the specific boundaries of the original study context.

Evidence of dependability is demonstrated by showing that a rigorous methodological system was at work in the study to attempt to understand the phenomenon, and clear rationale was given for the choice of methodological system. A disciplined process and procedures following the steps outlined in Charmaz' constructivist grounded approach (2002), including initial coding, focused coding, development of categories, memo writing and grounding of categories, theoretical sampling to self-correct, and integration of the analysis have been outlined and recorded throughout the undertaking of this study, with a clear rationale for this methodology given in this document.

Beyond the detailed review of these procedures, confirmability was also demonstrated in this study. Confirmability refers to the quality of the data in relation to whether others who observe and interpret the data confirm the researcher's interpretations, and it was evidenced through description of disciplined reflective processes, and the ongoing involvement of participants and inclusion of their feedback throughout analysis.

For the purposes of this study, several forms of documentation were used to make transparent the lines of critical thought that led to particular conclusions (Rodwell, 1998). This documentation included the personal log (used throughout the research endeavor) for reflection on the interactive relationship between the researcher, and the method, participants, and interpretations. As well, while interviews were audiotaped, use of a field journal allowed the documentation of participants' emotions or key thoughts expressed in interviews as well as other observations I made during each interview. Further, a log of activities kept track of research tasks and appointments undertaken, including dates and times. Finally, written recordings were completed to show the steps taken in coding, categorizations, memo writing, theoretical sampling, and integration of the analysis throughout the data analysis process.

Catherine Riessman (1993), who draws upon constructive assumptions in research endeavors, highlights further areas for consideration in order to reflect methodological rigor in a study: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use. Persuasiveness suggests that readers can trust the author's interpretation as reasonable and convincing when these "claims are supported with evidence from informants'

accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered” (Riessman, p.65). The presentation of the data in this study highlighted direct quotes from participants when suggesting interpretations. Presenting participants’ ideas through direct quotes better enables readers to make their own evaluations of any interpretations, diminishing the researcher’s influence. It should be acknowledged that I chose which participant quotes from the transcripts to include in this dissertation. All participants, however, agreed to review the interpretations chapters of this document and their feedback supported my representation of their words.

Riessman’s concept of correspondence is consistent with Lincoln and Guba’s concept of credibility, discussed above, and so does not require further attention here. Her criterion of coherence, however, furthers the discussion of trustworthiness. Drawing upon Agar & Hobbs’ descriptions of global, local and themal coherence (1982), she suggests that if a participant’s particular idea is “thick”, or understandable in terms of all three forms of coherence, then the interpretation can be given more weight. In order to meet this criterion, each participant’s ideas will need to be considered from the perspectives of what she is generally attempting to accomplish in her telling (global coherence), what specifically she is trying to effect in her telling (e.g., to relate events, to show a contrast) (local coherence), and whether particular themes and ideas figure importantly and repeatedly in her telling (thematic coherence). When presenting the data, the inclusion of direct quotes from interviews were again valuable in order to demonstrate coherence when making interpretations.

Riessman's final criterion for trustworthiness, pragmatic use, also advances Lincoln and Guba's criteria, but it cannot be addressed before, during, or immediately upon completion of the piece of research (1993). Rather, it is "future oriented, collective, and assumes the socially constructed nature" of the research endeavor (p.68), referring to the extent to which a study's interpretations are drawn upon in future studies. This criterion requires being validated by the community of scientists in a researcher's area of work, and therefore degree of trustworthiness based in this criterion will not emerge until well after the defense and publication of the work have been completed.

#### **2.2.5 Data Presentation**

Feminist researchers have struggled with how to write about women and their lives without objectifying and thus, betraying them (Behar, 1996). In order to avoid such a reduction of a complex, multifaceted person to the status of a simple object, the researcher must not be sole owner of the content of a research text. Instead, qualitative and feminist research "(calls) for conversation, negotiated interpretations, texts in which multiple interpretations flourish, in which challenges are integrated into the manuscript" (Fine et al., 2000, p.127). In this "conversation," a balance is sought between the researcher's voice and the voices of participants. Self-reflexive text, or "gazing back at self," can be one valuable means for readers to judge the influences of biases and assumptions in a researcher's work. It is important, however, that such reflections not become central at the expense of hearing participants' voices (Behar; Wolf, 1996). Rather, the researcher's personal voice must be applied creatively, with the sole purpose of further exploring the social issue being studied (Behar). The researcher must also

strive to find respectful ways of presenting participants' voices regarding very personal matters accurately in a social science context (Olesen, 2000).

In order to accomplish these goals in this study, a variety of strategies were used in the writing of this text. In order to relay the complexities of a process from trauma to living well, quoting extensively from the women participants allows readers to better "hear their voices, to capture the essence of their journey" (van den Hoonaard, 2001, p.12). Including the voices of those interviewed in the written work was also an attempt to demonstrate the emotionality of this subject matter (Stanko, 1997). As well, an emphasis on direct quotes whenever interpretations were being made was an attempt to make more transparent the rationale for my understandings, enable readers to make their own evaluations of any interpretations, and thus diminish my influence over the analysis.

Finally, upon completion of a draft of my thesis, each participant was given an opportunity to receive a copy of the text, and for a final time was invited to give any further feedback. All participants chose to receive a copy of this document, I followed up with all of them a month later, and all but three had further reflections to share. Their reflections were incorporated into the final draft of the thesis, as a last attempt to share the content of the research text.

### **2.3 Ethical Considerations**

Feminist researchers often move beyond discussions of minimalist directives for research ethics, attempting instead to meet a "maximalist feminist ethic" (Patai, 1991, p.137). A central area of discussion that moves beyond minimalist ethical directives involves power and unequal hierarchies of control during and after research. While there

are often challenging contradictions regarding this dilemma, confronting and working toward potential solutions to these dilemmas is crucial in order to approach projects with a political awareness that enhances quality research (Wolf, 1996). Wolf describes power within the research process across three interrelated dimensions: power stemming from different locations of researcher and participants (e.g., race, class); power exerted as an element of the research process (e.g., who defines the relationship); and power exerted in the writing and representing of the data. While the first dimension of power noted by Wolf, the dilemma of unequal positions between researcher and participant, cannot be resolved through individual adjustments in a given investigation, strategies can be used to minimize power imbalance across the second two dimensions and to be as transparent as possible about remaining areas of power hierarchy. For example, as a PhD candidate completing this piece of research for the requirements of this degree there were clear limitations regarding the ownership of the final research document. Strategies to diminish power imbalances and enhance transparency in the interviewing process, data analysis and data presentation have been discussed in detail in the prior sections on methodology.

Another ethical issue often debated in feminist research circles involves not only the minimalist ethic of avoiding harm but also the maximalist ethic of offering benefit to participants. Some researchers have argued that participants can benefit from their inclusion in a study. For example, research participants may experience empowerment through their sense of having contributed to knowledge building, and/or through their reflection upon and re-evaluation of their experience during the interview process (Opie,

as cited in Maynard, 1994). The telling of one's story may also be empowering in itself, representing both action and agency (Becker, 1997). Feminist researchers who focus specifically on sexual violence against women have noted another potential benefit for participants. Therapeutic benefit has been noted for those who have experienced trauma in being able to create new meaning through the opportunity of having their stories heard and documented (Herman, 1992; Meichenbaum, 1994). This potential benefit has been suggested as extending to women research participants who speak about their rape experiences (Campbell, 2002). Other feminist researchers, however, have challenged the ethics of research given investigators' inability to ensure any real benefit to participants as a result of their involvement in a study (Patai, 1991; Zavella, 1993). Given that in any research project involving human participants, the potential for benefit cannot be guaranteed and the potential for some experience of harm cannot be completely eradicated, ethical research calls for transparency and clarity with those considering participation in a study regarding limitations to any potential benefits and possibilities of potential harm. By being clear with individuals regarding the purpose of the study, uses of the information, and any possible risks of involvement, we can then avoid paternalistic tendencies as researchers - individuals can decide for themselves whether they are willing to participate in an endeavor that likely does not involve a "fair trade". In the case of this research, this involved being clear in the initial letter and informed consent form that the interviews did not have as a goal to be therapeutic in nature, and that the study's purpose was for increased knowledge in the area and as a means to completion of my PhD requirements (see Appendices A, B, C & D for the inclusion of these messages).

While the potential benefit to participants involved in feminist research projects is still debated, ethical guidelines are unambiguous regarding researchers' duty to do no harm. And yet, researchers are limited in their ability to fully gauge or control the potential impacts of procedures on participants (Patai, 1991). Thus, in order to avoid or minimize potential harm, arrangements were established for accessible and appropriate counselling services in the event that any participant experienced emotional distress during her involvement in the study and requested the assistance of a counsellor for debriefing. No participants in this study, however, requested this service.

Given the content being explored in this study, with its potential to evoke strong emotion, the structuring of the interviews was another important consideration toward the goal of avoiding harm. The minimally structured format of the interviews with no questions specific to the details of the rape event allowed participants significant leeway in what they chose to share and not share. Being clear about women's choice and control over what they chose to share in their interviews was crucial from the time of the introductory letter to the end of their participation. This control was highlighted in the Informed Consent form that women read and signed at the beginning of each first interview. As well, questions that guided the interviews focused on a process toward positive change rather than on negative events and effects, and therefore may have been less apt to elicit painful affect in participants. Finally, my years of practice experience and skills related to work with those who have experienced trauma were valuable toward the goal of avoiding harm to participants. For example, I focused on creating an atmosphere that would put women at ease when they first arrived for interviews, I

quickly highlighted women's control in the interview process, I worked to bring a calm and reassuring presence throughout the interviews, and I carefully watched for signs of physical and/or emotional stress or distress, ready to offer participants a break or end to the interview.

Related to avoidance of harm, a key ethical commitment of feminist researchers when studying women and their lives is to avoid objectification (Behar, 1996). In their attempts to avoid objectifying or overpowering women participants, researchers have sought different forms of relationships with participants. Challenging the traditional view of the researcher as neutral and emotionally detached, some have suggested the need for caring friendships with participants in order to avoid the objectification that arises from such detachment. Others have challenged that such intimate relationships increase the likelihood of disappointment and betrayal on the part of participants (see in particular Stacey, 1988, as cited in Zavella, 1993; also Wolf, 1996). Attempting a balance that includes some measure of caring to assist in the development of trust and comfort on the part of participants, as well as some degree of distance that does not suggest ongoing friendship seems most desirable for ethical research (Patai, 1991). This was a balance that I sought in my relationships with participants throughout this research process.

Avoiding coercive influences for individuals' participation is also an important element of ethical research. Inviting women's participation through newspapers was a strategy I used to avoid coercion, rather than inviting women's involvement through counselling or sexual assault crisis centres, in which case they may have felt indebted to staff and may have believed that their participation was a way to show their gratitude or

please their counsellor. Avoiding coercion in the research design was more challenging, when considering the option of paying women who may or may not have been dealing with financial difficulty, for their time and participation (Fine et al., 2000). In order to minimize the likelihood of women feeling compelled to participate in the study for financial reasons, but also recognizing that they may incur costs for their participation (including transportation and/or childcare costs), women were given twenty dollars for each interview in which they participated. Wanting to be consistent, payment was given to every participant.

Confidentiality is another important ethical consideration. The collection, transcription, and storage of data must all be considered from the perspective of confidentiality. Participants' rights to and limitations regarding confidentiality were made clear in the informed consent form. All women's names were recorded on a master list with corresponding code numbers. All other data (tapes and transcribed interviews) only had women's code numbers on them. From the time of collection of data on, I maintained security of the data, keeping it in locked storage except when I was directly working with the data. The only exception to my overseeing the data was during the first round of transcription. During this time, the transcriber was obligated to ensure confidentiality of the data (see Appendix E). The transcriber for the first set of interviews was a professional who has significant experience in working with confidential material, and I transcribed the second round of interviews. The master list of participants, completed informed consent forms, tapes, and transcribed interviews will all be kept in

locked storage for a maximum of five years, following Memorial University's policy on retention of data.

Submissions were made to the Research Ethics Boards of both Memorial University of Newfoundland and St. Thomas University, and both institutions with whom I am connected concluded that I had carefully considered ethical issues related to the study and had adequately responded to any ethical concerns.

## **2.4 Considerations Regarding the Researcher**

In considering issues related to the researcher in this study, two specific areas are addressed in this section: the role and influence of the researcher, and the potential emotional impact of this exploration on the researcher.

### **2.4.1 Influence of the Researcher**

Given investigators' inability to be neutral and objective, we have a responsibility to two key tasks toward our goal of achieving less distorted insights. First, we must work to be self-reflective regarding our social location, biases, and the power that comes with this role. Just as importantly, however, we must take measures to be transparent to others regarding our location and biases without undue focus being taken away from the participants' descriptions.

With regard to the first of these tasks, we must "be aware of our own particular gaze as researchers, of the influence of our own subjectivity on the research process, and of the moral, political and cultural concerns which shape both ourselves as researchers, the research process, and the lives of those we investigate" (Ussher, 1999, p.105). Thus, a critically reflexive process has been necessary throughout all stages of the investigation.

Insights from feminist standpoint theory are helpful in the consideration of a researcher's place in an investigation. One's own values are recognized as inescapable, and therefore attempts at 'objectivism' merely hide these cultural beliefs and practices. As Harding (1998) notes, adhering to an ideal of neutrality "insures only blind loyalty to unexamined cultural elements" (p.145). Therefore, feminist scholars argue that in order to achieve less bias, researchers must explicitly include their values for critical scrutiny (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1998). By acknowledging and analyzing their own previously hidden cultural agendas and assumptions, researchers can critically distance themselves from these assumptions. Harding has coined this "strong objectivity", and asserts that through this reflexive process, objectivity is actually enhanced (1991, 1998). In essence, "by fully acknowledging the conditions of its own production, it is argued that standpoint science can attain greater objectivity" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995, p.17).

Specific to this project, as I stated early in this proposal, I approached the work with passion and some particular motivations. I needed to be careful, however, not to simplify what is complex. Just as past trauma research has focused predominantly on "victims" and their negative outcomes, in looking for the "story" of capacities and a process toward positive outcomes I could have erroneously simplified a complex area. Any pain or difficulty in the participants' shared experiences could not be denied as a result of my giving serious consideration to these women's capacities for growth (Fine et al., 2000; Grossman, Kruger, & Moore, 1999).

Several strategies were implemented during the project to minimize potential difficulties related to the influence of my expectations and biases. In order to work

toward a strong objectivity, reflexive journaling throughout the research process was important. I was influenced in this task by Lather's suggestion that investigators must reflect on how their "value commitments insert themselves into [their] empirical work" (1988, p.576). She also quotes Jardine (1985), who stresses the need to "think constantly against ourselves" (p.577), an intriguing term to be on constant alert for one's own assumptions and biases, and a readiness and willingness to challenge these. Also influential to my journaling, I considered Reinharz' call to the researcher to reflect on how she has grown or changed through the process of the study (1992). Other strategies to de-centre my voice in this study, which have been discussed in more detail previously, included participants having significant room to lead the focus and details of the interviews, and participants' involvement in the review of their transcripts and analyses.

With regard to researchers' second task toward achieving less distorted insights, that of effectively expressing to others our location and biases, investigators must be transparent both to participants as well as to others who will read our documents (Lather, 1988, p.574). Bloom (1998a) describes this role of writing as a "responsibility" and an "exercise of power" that cannot be avoided by a researcher. As with other responsibilities, then, the issue may be how to use those aspects of our position of power that are unavoidable, such as writing, in as ethical a way as can be found. With regard to her role of presenting data, one researcher notes, "To have this privilege and responsibility means that I must speak, not 'for' the respondents as if they cannot speak for themselves, but 'with' and 'about' them in a shared struggle that acknowledges different social locations" (Ellsworth, in Bloom, p.10). Writing strategies that have been

explored in more detail in the “Data Presentation” section of this text, such as articulating my motivations for undertaking this piece of research, and drawing significantly from participants’ interview transcripts assisted in expressing and minimizing my influence as a researcher in this study.

#### **2.4.2 Emotional Impact of Research on the Investigator**

Many researchers who have studied rape have acknowledged the emotional drain of investigating this topic (see, for example, Alexander et al., 1989; Gordon & Riger, as cited in Reinharz, 1992; Schwartz, 1997; Stanko, 1997). Rebecca Campbell (2002) has subsequently moved beyond simply acknowledging that the study of rape can be emotionally difficult for researchers. She has challenged the strict dichotomy between thinking and feeling when conducting research, and contends that the “emotionally engaged researcher” can use their emotional experience in response to the topic as a resource for thinking about rape, and thus intellectual gains may arise from this emotional reflection (p.10). Although traditionally investigators have been trained to exclude the uncomfortable and emotional elements of their work, more researchers today are recognizing that such a strategy has a negative effect on the eventual narrative of any piece of research (Kleinman & Copp, 1993).

With this recognition that detachment from the focus of study and participants is illusory and limiting, researchers must seek ways to effectively use the emotional impact of their work toward knowledge building (Hyde, 1994). Stanko (1997) suggests that we acknowledge and demonstrate the emotionality of the content area by including the voices of interview participants in our work. Taking opportunities to address my

emotional reactions while discussing data analysis with my supervisor, thesis committee members, and colleagues was a strategy I used to more clearly understand the data.

Campbell acknowledges that while focusing on the emotionality of rape may have costs for researchers given an academic climate that views emotionality as weakness, she suggests that it is important when researching this subject to ask “how we can describe rape in ways that are more consistent with victims’ lived experiences?” (2002, p.113) By drawing heavily upon the interview transcripts of participants and noting my own reflections, I strive toward this ideal in the following Interpretations section.

## **2.5 Participants**

Ten women living at the time in New Brunswick answered the invitation to participate in this study; four responding to the letter of invitation submitted to one of several newspapers, two responding after learning about the study through word-of-mouth, one responding to one of the flyers posted in a laundromat in the Fredericton area; and three responding after receiving the email invitation to participate. Participants’ ages ranged from 22 to 52 years, with three women in their twenties; four women in their thirties; two women in their forties; and one woman in her fifties. Women’s cultural backgrounds included two women who defined themselves as Acadian, one woman who was French-Canadian, and one woman who was Jewish. Remaining participants did not align themselves with a particular culture. Nine of the ten participants described their first language as English, and all were fluent in English.

Three of the ten participants had histories of being raped on more than one occasion by the same assailant, and three participants had faced more than one incidence

of rape, these involving different assailants. All ten participants were first raped between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four years old. This age range is reflective of trends that have been noted in the literature, which have found that most women raped by acquaintances or romantic partners are in their late teens or early twenties (Lenskyj, H., 1992; Randall & Haskell, 1995). In this study, given women's age when first raped and their current ages at the time of their first interview, the time that had elapsed since first being raped ranged from four to thirty-one years.

Participants in the study had varied relationships with their respective assailants, all of whom were men. These numbers sum to greater than ten because three women had more than one rape experience (by different assailants). Six assailants were acquaintances of participants, four were strangers to the women they raped, three were romantic partners of the women, two had been friends to the participants, and one had been the husband of a participant at the time of the rape. That four of ten women had been raped by strangers seemed to fairly closely correspond with reported trends in sexual assault in North America. The literature on prevalence of stranger rape compared to rape by a known assailant, while both sparse and dated, suggests that approximately 67-84% of assailants are known to their victims (see, for example, Koss, 1988; Stermac, DuMont, & Kalemba, 1995). The fact that more than one third of the participants in this investigation had been raped by strangers may also suggest, however, the influence of self-selection, reflecting a sense on the part of women that rape by a stranger is viewed as a more "valid" rape in our society and so is less apt to be met by judgment. Women's

decision not to participate in the study after having been raped by a known assailant may also be influenced by fewer women recognizing the experience as rape.

Interestingly, of the ten women who chose to participate I was known to all but two of them in some capacity. It is important to note, however, that my relationships were not, and had not been, of a therapeutic nature with any of these women. While being acquainted in some way to eight of the participants, I had no knowledge that any of these women had been raped prior to their contacting me in response to the invitation to participate. The two women who had no prior knowledge of me were the two oldest women in the study, and both had been raped by strangers. This raises interesting considerations regarding self-selection for participation in the study. It seems to suggest that for many women the choice to participate in the study was influenced by having some basic level of knowledge of, and trust in, the researcher. Several participants, when asked why they chose to participate, mentioned that my role as investigator in the study influenced their decision. This factor seemed particularly relevant for those women whose rape experiences did not match the stereotypical although less common circumstances surrounding rape, characterized by an assailant who is a stranger using a high degree of force. Fear of judgment may well have discouraged potential participants who did not recognize my name from responding to the invitation. Seemingly related to this factor, at the time of choosing to participate all women lived in the Fredericton area (although two had moved out of the region by the time of the interviews). For a tabular summary of some of the key characteristics regarding the ten participants, refer to Appendix K.

## 2.6 Analysis Process and Procedures

Data analysis process and procedures, as outlined by Kathy Charmaz (2006: 2002), were followed in the analysis of all participant interviews for this study. Coding evolved as an emergent process, beginning with the first contact with potential participants and continuing in an ongoing way. Initial coding occurred first through line-by-line documenting in the margins of interview transcripts, identifying actions and processes, and also using language that drew heavily from participants' choice of words. Based on this preliminary process, initial codes were tabled (graphed) to assist in establishing analytic distinctions. Using 'constant comparative methods' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), similarities and differences within and across interviews were compared. Some "in vivo" coding was completed at this stage of analysis, considering key terms and language used by participants to highlight their understandings of particular aspects of the process to living well after rape. A preliminary round of focused coding followed, with a goal to categorize the data "incisively and completely" (Charmaz, 2006, p.57) by employing the initial codes that make the most analytic sense. Preliminary axial coding was undertaken at this time to specify categories and their sub-categories, identifying properties and dimensions of each category. This preliminary round prepared me for a second set of interviews with all participants. During this second set of interviews, specific topics were explored further, and preliminary interpretations were shared and discussed. This set of interviews was transcribed, and the focused coding was subsequently further advanced through sequential comparisons of interviews of the same participant, and refining of the codes. Theoretical coding followed the focused coding.

At this stage, analysis involved broadening the interpretations by clarifying the context(s) and particular conditions in which phenomena occurred.

Clustering, which is a visual, non-linear technique used to organize codes, categories and sub-categories was helpful at this point in the analytic process as a means to develop a tentative map of the process from rape to living well, and prepared me for advanced memo-writing. The writing of memos began in a rough way early in the research process, beginning immediately after initial participant interviews. This writing informed the ongoing coding, and assisted in exploring the data in various ways and focusing on dynamics and patterns rather than on individual participants. Successive memos moved my interpretations toward the more abstract and theoretical, and prepared me to consider the need for any theoretical sampling. By drawing upon the clustering as well as sorting and integrating the later memos, my analytic frame and theoretical interpretations were developed, and arguments were constructed.

Through theoretical sampling, I sought data that would assist me in refining and elaborating upon the emerging theory. This occurred as I returned to data collection during the second interviews and through subsequent phone contact with two participants in order to ensure that categories reflected respondents' experiences, offered useful and appropriately complex interpretations, and assisted in understanding variations in theoretical categories. Based on the outcomes of the coding, memo-writing, clustering, and theoretical sampling, I considered whether I had attained "theoretical sufficiency" through the data collection and analysis. While Charmaz (2006) challenges traditional understandings of the goal of theoretical "saturation", she draws upon Glaser's more

recent understanding of saturation as occurring when new properties of the pattern are not emerging and conceptualizations are dense. She also looks to Dey's (1999) recommendation that "theoretical sufficiency," rather than theoretical saturation, be the objective. Charmaz asserts that, in practice, saturation is "an elastic category that contracts and expands to suit the researcher's definitions rather than any consensual standard" (Charmaz, 2001, p. 690). She and Dey further challenge the value of the concept of saturation for grounded research on two counts. First, the concept is used imprecisely, because while grounded theorists develop codes through partial coding of their data, the meaning of "saturation" implies exhaustive rather than partial coding of all data. Second, a reader's acceptance that saturation has been achieved "relies on the researcher's *conjecture* that the properties of the category are saturated" (Charmaz, p.114), and evidence of this saturation cannot be proven without completing the coding work. Therefore, a claim of theoretical sufficiency, made when theoretical categories are *suggested* by the data, rather than "achieving saturation," is a more reasonable (and a more realistic) expectation. Based on this definition, through multiple layers of analysis and after careful revisiting of the data, several presentations and other opportunities for collegial review of my analyses, I assessed that theoretical sufficiency had been met and made the decision to end the analytic process.

### **Chapter 3: From Rape to Living Well – Overview & the Initial Struggle**

The process from rape to living well, as understood by the women interviewed, is complex, multi-layered, and time consuming. My analysis of women's interpretations of this process is structured across this and the following chapter. In the current chapter, I first introduce general characteristics and phases of the process from rape to living well to offer the reader a sense of the broad landscape of this process. Participants' stories of their process to living well include their articulation of three phases in the process; key tasks within each phase; pacing and transitions in the process; and influences that assisted or hindered their progress.

In this chapter, I consider the first phase of the process in context, highlighting two significant barriers faced by women early in the process – the invisibility of rape in its most common forms, and society's blaming of women in the midst of their experiences of victimization. I also share key tasks undertaken by women during this phase. To conclude and prepare for the following chapter on the second and third phases, I present issues of pacing through the process and transitioning between phases.

#### **3.1 Phases of the Process from Rape to Living Well**

The stories women shared regarding the process from rape to living well are rich and unique in detail. Within this diversity of experience, however, common themes and elements emerged. For instance, as each woman described her process toward living well, a clear sense of a process became apparent that was both gradual and profound, and which involved irrevocable life change. The effects of rape that are frequently cited in the literature (such as nightmares, flashbacks, and suicidal ideation) were often marginal

to, or absent from, their accounts. While one might assume from this that women in the study had not experienced these negative effects, this conclusion would be inaccurate. In follow-up interviews, when asked specifically about negative effects women noted having experienced a variety of these difficulties. However, management of these specific effects was rarely central to their stories of progressing through the post-rape process toward living well.

Three common phases emerged that together span the process from rape to living well. These phases are distinct, based on the particular focus, tasks at hand, and relative intensity and centrality of the post-rape experience in their daily lives. In some circumstances, the transition from one phase to another was brief, marked and unambiguous. In others, the transition occurred over a stretch of time and some tasks central to one phase overlapped into the ensuing phase.

The phases within this process were traversed by all women in the study and always in the same order. I have described these as, "Phase I: Surmounting Barriers to Name and Claim the Rape," "Phase II: Doing the Hard Work," and "Phase III: Growing in Living Well." In Phase I, women described a preliminary task that involved coming to name and understand their respective experiences as a valid rape for which they were not to blame. This was the central task in the first phase of the process toward living well, which often took months or years, due to frequent and substantial social influences that misname women's rape experiences and/or blame women for them. The second phase was marked by 'hard work,' during which women described their rape experience and its negative effects being quite central in their lives. This period required significant energy

and focus on their part. Finally, hard work did not lead directly to an end point of living well. Instead, participants described a third phase of 'growing in living well.' In this phase, work continued but was described as less central, and increasingly peripheral. Work during this third phase was described as significantly less painful and requiring less consistent energy. No clear ending point to the process was described by participants, nor was it expected by them. Instead, they expressed acceptance of the ongoing nature of the process and did not experience this lack of "arrival" as being a contradiction to their experience of living well in the present.

In addition to a description of three phases in the process to living well, participants' stories also conveyed patterns in the pacing of women's progress. All women described the overall process as one that was gradual, at times painfully so, often involving complex work impacting many areas of their lives. However, women's stories also illustrate that interspersed with their very gradual progress are significant advances during particular times in the process, most often as they moved from one phase to the next. Overall, women described a long, intense process from rape to living well, characteristically gradual and slow in its progress but marked by particular breakthroughs, which assisted in their passage between the three phases. And while this process was experienced as never fully concluded, women nonetheless described themselves as growing and living well during the third phase of the process.

With this introduction to the overall process from rape to living well, we turn our attention to the first of three phases outlined by women in this process toward living well.

The next section detailing this phase includes quotations from each of the women interviewed, to introduce them to readers and to outline the circumstances of their rapes.

### **3.2 Phase I: Surmounting Barriers to Name and Claim the Rape**

For me, the biggest thing was coming to terms and admitting what had happened... ..Because it is hard when you don't know why you are doing things or where things are coming from... ..Then from there the rest is kind of, not easy, like I don't want to say it is easy because it is not that it is easy, but for me that was the big key that was missing. When that fell into place everything else just kind of went with it. (Angelina)

For me, [the process] took years and that was because of what the reactions were around me and the lack of information I had. That was the start off, and if that hadn't started off that way it would have been different. If it happened today, it would be a different story because I have information, I am confident, I don't define myself by other people. But because of when it happened, because of the reactions, that's what shaped the process. (Isabelle)

If I would have known about date rape earlier, if I'd known someone who this had happened to, or if I would have at least heard about it before, I think that would have helped me a lot more. Like, I don't ever think that I could have prevented it but I think that I could have at least been able to do something at the time with what had happened. (Lillian)

...I think all of this is about how definitions, the words we have don't necessarily work to define these experiences. (Lyra)

In the initial days, months and, for some, years following the rape, each woman was faced with the primary task of recognizing her experience as rape. Interrelated with this task was claiming the rape's validity. The distinction between naming and claiming is important here. Participants' comments reflected a need both to identify what had occurred (to name the experience) and to assert and strongly declare this as an experience that had happened to them for which they were not to blame (to claim the experience). Clearly, naming was a necessary precursor to a woman's claiming of the experience. Together, the identification as well as the assertion of one's experience as rape was

paramount in women allaying their self blame and shame in relation to the event and its aftermath. These interrelated tasks were central to the successful completion of the first phase in the process toward living well after rape, which for these women was an essential precursor to progress into subsequent phases.

All participants described some challenge in claiming or asserting their experiences as rape and thus they faced some degree of self blame and/or shame after being raped, related to a social context that for the most part neither validated their experiences as rape nor acknowledged them as blameless in the occurrence. However, the task of naming was especially challenging for participants whose rape experiences did not fully reflect traditional conceptions of rape in our society. Six of the women, all of whom had been raped by someone who had been known to them, described having particular difficulty naming, or coming to understand, what had occurred. Knowing that they were upset by their rape experiences but not conceptualizing them as such, women often struggled at length to understand and then claim their experiences as rape. Progress during this time was experienced as minimal or non-existent, as women had considerable difficulty achieving this central task in the midst of their confusion, shame, and emotional pain. As Angelina explained, "How can you heal when you do not know what you are healing from?"

Sociopolitical context was the factor most clearly contributing to women's difficulty in naming and claiming their rapes, and their subsequent reactions of shame and self blame. The process to living well following rape, described by all participants as long and involving gradual progress, was influenced strongly by the broader contexts in

which each rape occurred. Every participant described how, to varying degrees, the social and political contexts of their rapes invalidated their experiences. In particular, the social contexts had considerable harmful effects during the first phase of the process, offering up significant obstructions that women had to overcome in order to advance in their work and extending the duration of the entire post-rape process.

### **3.2.1 From Invalidating Contexts: Dominant Rape Scripts**

Predominant values, social norms, and views regarding rape impacted significantly on the women's personal experiences. These prevailing ideas influenced others' reactions in response to participants' rapes, and structured their initial conceptualizations of their rape experiences. Women's stories illustrated that the process to living well cannot be understood without understanding the contexts of their lives – contexts that can include both individual circumstances as well as conditions shared with other women in North American society. They noted, for example, that living in a social environment that in numerous ways discounts rape experiences and discredits women who disclose rape, and having limited legal options were shared features that have influenced their process to living well. Such factors were described as having significant bearing on the process itself as well as on each woman's needs and choices during the process toward living well.

Dominant societal rape scripts, communicated both through formal means (such as literature, media, police, the judicial system, and professional helpers) and informal routes (including friends, partners, family, and community members) lead to women's struggles to name and claim their own rape experiences. Dominant discourse regarding

language and frameworks used to articulate rape have led to a narrow understanding of rape that regularly questions women's responsibility when raped. The more divergent a woman's rape experience is from this limiting rape script, the greater a woman's challenge becomes to name and claim her rape as valid. Time and time again, all participants described various forms of negating feedback in response to their disclosures, reactions that were based in dominant rape discourse. And all but one of the participants in my study found that traditional dominant rape scripts were highly problematic, serving to either exclude their experiences of rape (if, for example, the rapist was not a stranger), or blame them for the rapes (if, for example, a woman had been drinking or had been kissing the assailant before being raped, had not fought back during the rape, or had not contacted the police following the rape).

For those women who knew their assailants prior to the rape, naming was a challenging task since their experiences did not reflect societal representations of rape. Until they managed to succeed in naming the experience, women's opportunities to validate their rape experiences and thus to vanquish self blame, were obstructed. Isabelle's comments typify those of other participants raped by assailants known to them. She was raped by an acquaintance at a party while she was passed out in a bathroom, and experienced shame resulting from social barriers that interfered with her being able to recognize her experience as rape:

The first while I wasn't even identifying what happened as rape... .. I just remember coming to and realizing, okay, he had sex with me and I wasn't involved... ..I went immediately to, okay, and I think I started to internalize the whole like, 'I am a slut, I am worthless, guys will only use me, guys only want me for one thing, I'm not good, I'm not like other girls,' basically. 'I am a slut, it is my fault, I deserved this.'

Isabelle further articulated that as long as she was unable to name and claim her experience as rape, “no real recovery (was) going on there”, and this “holding pattern” persisted because the context had failed to validate her rape experience.

Maria was raped on numerous occasions by a threatening and violent first boyfriend. Like Isabelle, she experienced difficulty naming her boyfriend’s actions as rape:

I never would have seen any of what he was doing as rape because when you are with a person I didn’t think that you could rape them. That was my mentality at the age of eighteen, nineteen. I also thought that’s just what men did...

Facing these barriers to accurately name the experience, Maria contended with negative impacts on her identity. Despite his use of weapons and physical force during some of the assaults, without conceptualizing this as rape Maria felt to blame, and described “the shame and ‘I’m no good, I deserve that.’”

Because of inadequate information to name her experience as rape, Lillian also experienced barriers to progress in the initial phase of the post-rape process. She described the shame and self blame she felt after being raped by an acquaintance in her dorm room after a group of her peers had been socializing and drinking during frosh week:

I felt that I’d been stupid. He was a lot stronger than I was, so I knew there wasn’t, there’s nothing I could rationally have done differently, but I definitely felt I was stupid for not, like, screaming so someone else could hear me or, like, I just kind of let him do it. Like, I just said, “No, No, stop, stop.” But I didn’t, like, I felt that I could have maybe fought back more [begins crying], but looking back I know that there’s nothing I could have done. And then I passed out.

Angelina was also raped by an acquaintance after a party. Her description highlights that circumstances surrounding the rape that have received little validation in the wider structures of society (having known the assailant prior to the rape, Angela's consumption of alcohol the evening of the rape, returning to his home after the party, and some sexually intimate activity with the assailant leading up to the rape) acted as barriers to Angelina naming the event as rape and thereby diminishing her sense of self blame:

I didn't know what to classify it as because, to me, I had said no and I never said yes but I was submissive and I caved. So it became one of those, "Well, I am still partly responsible."... ..I think I blamed myself partially too at that point because I had been drinking and out. And I did go back to his house voluntarily but not for that reason, of course, but you know that it is still that stigma within society that we still take that blame onto ourselves because, 'Well, if I hadn't...' ...So I guess after that I never really, for years I guess, I never came to terms with it.

For four years following the rape, Angelina had experienced significant confusion regarding what had occurred and her role in the event, noting, "I don't think I knew what was going on."

Early in the post-rape process, Lyra, too, was unable to conceptualize an experience of rape by her first boyfriend because the circumstances did not fit with what she had learned about rape. Lyra's initial reaction to this distress and confusion was to attempt to make sense of the event by researching at the library. She described her reaction while reading first about 'sexual activity' and then 'rape':

Here is an account of rape, oh, well that's not what happened. You know, I am not sure that this was sex but it sure as hell wasn't this. In many ways, I mean, we are talking ten, eleven years ago, date rape wasn't as prominent so I am thinking, nobody jumped out of the bushes, there wasn't a use of a weapon.

For all of these six women, ongoing difficulty in identifying their experiences as rape precluded any claiming of the rape experience, and delayed work to vanquish, or at least subdue, self blame and shame.

Even once women managed to name their experience as rape, this achievement did not automatically guarantee that a woman could claim the experience. Margaret, for example, who was raped by an acquaintance after a party at university, did not initially conceptualize her experience as rape. As she noted, "Certainly I was raped, although I think it took me a little while to sort of really be able to put that label on it." In her initial confusion and inability to accurately name her rape experience, Margaret described embarrassment, fear of others finding out about the experience, and confusion about how to move forward, stating, "I just didn't know how I would respond" if questioned by others, and "(I) didn't make any decisions." Soon after, however, Margaret did manage to *name* the event as rape. She described ongoing difficulty, however, in *claiming* the occurrence as rape, and thus she experienced self blame and shame for a much longer time after the attack. She noted, "I probably wouldn't have been brave enough to say the word out loud. But pretty soon after, I was conceptualizing it as rape. However, I didn't see myself as blameless." She had been in a tumultuous long term relationship with a boyfriend at the time of the rape, and the dynamics of this relationship seemed to play a role in Margaret's successful completion of naming without the same success in claiming. As she explained, the rape occurred during one of the couple's break-ups:

We broke up a few times but really for very short periods of time. But whenever we did, I was very much interested potentially in dating other people. Some of that was because I was interested in ending that and, like, getting past that but also some of it was very much like, well, I'll show him.

This suggests that because Margaret's motivation to flirt with and kiss the assailant wasn't based solely in her interest in him, she had experienced herself as somewhat of an accomplice in the crime. Dominant scripts regarding a victim's role in a rape continued to act as a barrier to Margaret claiming her experience as rape, and thus inhibited progress toward the second phase of the process toward living well.

While women who knew their assailants tended to struggle both with naming and claiming in relation to their rapes, those who were raped by strangers had little difficulty naming their rape experiences. Participants were able to immediately recognize rapes that more closely aligned with dominant societal scripts of rape, which involve highly aggressive and hostile strangers. This did not, however, shelter women from subsequent self blame. Maria, when raped by a stranger years after being raped by her first boyfriend, had no difficulty naming the event as rape, but struggled to claim the experience and again experienced shame as well as self blame. She described the night of the rape and her reaction:

He just knocked me off my feet and I froze. It was the same reaction then that I had any time (my first boyfriend) had come home and was violent with me. It was all the same reaction. For me it was, there was a lot of shame in that for me. Number one I was drinking, I was out without my husband, I shouldn't have been.

Dominant social scripts that blame women for rape if they have been drinking or are out unaccompanied in the evening initially blocked Maria's claiming of this rape. Self blame and shame therefore persisted.

Lyn, first raped twenty-six years ago by a stranger who had broken into her apartment while she was sleeping, immediately named the event as rape. The

circumstances reflected the social understanding of the rape experience – a stranger using a great degree of physical force both to gain access to a woman and during the rape itself. And yet, the response by police officers had a significant negative impact on Lyn's ability to claim being raped. Subsequently, self blame came to be a central feature of her response:

It had to be, why me? Why? It had to be some reason. I had to have attracted him in some way so it must have been, well, what did I wear? Did he see me at the Club? Maybe it was the way I was dancing. All those things go through your mind and you just blame yourself.

In most cases involving stranger rape, dominant social scripts enabled women to accurately name their experiences. Even women whose rape experiences strongly reflected dominant societal rape scripts, however, could still face challenges in claiming their rape experiences. In such situations, the question is not, 'What occurred?' (as it is when attempting to name the experience) but rather, 'Why did it occur?' (in order to claim, or assert that what happened to a woman was wrong). Dominant rape scripts frequently acted as roadblocks to participants who were raped by strangers in understanding why the rape occurred, and thus these women still struggled to overcome self blame and shame. Brianne's story highlights this point. After being attacked in an alley by a stranger, she escaped and fled the short distance to the home she shared with her boyfriend. He immediately called the police, she was taken to the hospital, her parents were quickly contacted, and they raced to meet her there. While understanding fully that she had been raped, Brianne still experienced initial difficulty in claiming her rape experience, reflected in self blame:

I definitely got mad at myself for a while. You know, why didn't I just go home with [my boyfriend]? Why didn't I just take a cab home?... ..definitely, initially I had a lot of self judgment.

Marise was raped thirty-one years before her interview, by a stranger while walking her dog in an open public area during the day. She had no difficulty naming the incident as rape because the circumstances of the event reflected the dominant rape script of the time. She did not, however, see herself as being able to claim the experience of being raped. Rather, she faced a degree of self blame directly after the rape, not for the rape itself but because she had not fought during the attack and because she had subsequently chosen not to contact the police. Dominant rape scripts had suggested to Marise that these reactions (fighting back to show that the act was not invited; and contacting the police) were the right things to do in order to assert that the act was rape and that she was in no way to blame.

### **3.2.2 Messengers of Dominant Rape Scripts: Others' Reactions**

Women learned or had these rape scripts re-iterated in a variety of ways, but most frequently this took place via others' responses to their disclosures. Participants reacted to invalidating responses, understandably, with confusion, shame and self blame, unable often to either recognize that what had occurred was, indeed, rape, or to assert that they had been wronged by this occurrence. Under these conditions, simply conceptualizing the experience as rape became no simple feat for participants:

I wasn't identifying it as rape. I don't know what I was calling it but I wasn't calling it something that happened to me that was wrong. It was basically something happened to me and I am very upset now that my friends don't treat me the same, they're not treating me well. That was my concern was my peer group's reaction. (Isabelle)

Of course they all find out, your friends always find out those things because people talk... ..it sounded like I had willingly slept with him. So where do you go with that? ...I just kind of like, whatever, shrugged it off like no big deal. I think that was hard too because my feelings weren't that it was no big deal but I wasn't comfortable saying, 'Oh, well, you don't know what happened and I am going to tell you', because I wasn't even sure what I felt happened. (Angelina)

Such comments were echoed by others, as fully six participants did not initially name their experiences as rape, and naming became an onerous task taking months to years. And once women had named the incident as rape, the task of claiming their experience as valid still remained. Those participants who named their experiences immediately also faced challenges in claiming their role in the rape as blameless. Others' reactions repeatedly served to undermine women's tasks to claim their rape experiences:

I was able to tell my mom what happened. And it's hard but because there was alcohol involved there was a lot of judgment involved and it wasn't held in a way that I wished it had of been. (Serena)

I had terrible feedback from a lot of people, people who I had entrusted with the knowledge of what had happened to me. I had one woman tell me that she didn't believe that any woman could be raped. She thought it was impossible. She said, 'You can't thread a moving needle.' ...But the time period [27 years ago] made women who were raped a shaming thing... ..and most people didn't want to talk about it or didn't even want to know about it, and men were worst of all. (Lyn)

As can be seen above in Lyn's comments, others' reactions often served to simultaneously misname rape experiences and shame women who have gone through them.

For most of the participants, men played particularly powerful roles in their ability to either undermine or affirm women's understandings of their rape experiences as valid. Early in the process most of the women, unfortunately, received messages from men that undermined the validity of their rape experiences. The assailants themselves as

well as men in participants' natural support systems, including intimate partners at the time of and subsequent to the rapes, and peer group members variously suspended women's progress toward living well. Through acts of misnaming, not believing, blaming, and re-victimizing, men stalled women's efforts to name and claim their rapes, thus delaying their entrance into the hard work phase of the process. Assailants (particularly those who were known to women), for example, regularly asserted the rape as 'typical sex':

It was my first sexual experience. This individual was someone that I was, I guess, sort of dating. I think at the time I would have considered this person my boyfriend... ..This person managed to convince me that this is sex. "This is how that works. Most girls cry their first time," blah, blah, blah. "All girls need convincing," this sort of thing. (Lyra)

After [confronting the assailant], I was really just in denial. The guy was really popular so I didn't want to say anything. I went to kind of confront him and he said that I had made him cheat on his girlfriend... ..So then I didn't really talk to anybody, nobody knew that it had happened. (Lillian)

While assailants had a direct investment in undermining a woman's assertions that she had been raped in order to avoid legal consequences, such harmful reactions were noted by all but one participant from other men in their lives. The types of relationships women had with these men varied, but most frequently it was intimate partners who women described as powerfully undermining the naming and claiming of their rapes.

Lyra's partner reinforced her self blame:

I would disclose a lot of things [to an intimate partner who I dated for two years after the rape], these weaknesses... ..Like for instance, I might talk about this is why I am uncomfortable with this, because of this experience that I had, so the rape. This is why I am not comfortable with this position or you acting that way, that kind of stuff. Just his ability to manipulate that so as to again bring me back into, "That was really your fault and you have these hang ups and if you hadn't done this that probably wouldn't have happened and, come on, he probably didn't

really do that.”... ..I definitely wasn’t able to make any progress there, or the progress I made was undermined every time.

Lillian’s partner blamed her for being unfaithful:

What happened is that when I started university I broke up with my high school boyfriend and then the rape happened and then 3 or 4 weeks after that I started going back out with him again. He was the first person I told... it would have been 5 or 6 months after the rape. I told him because he wanted to know if I had slept with anyone and I told him what had happened and he reacted really bad, saying, you know, that I had slept with someone other than him and he was really offended that I had done that, so he wasn’t exactly the most supportive. I don’t think he believed me [begins crying], so then I didn’t talk about it again until my second year [of university]... .. It just devastated me, he was so much more concerned that I had slept with someone else, that was all that he cared about. And I was not expecting that reaction so that’s really, I expected him to just be so concerned for me and he wasn’t.

Maria’s husband blamed her for the rape (both before and after it occurred) because she went out alone:

When I went out that night, [my husband’s] last words to me when I left the door were, “If anything happens to you, it will be your fault.” So I totally, that’s all that went through my mind when I was being raped. ... .. I told him in March directly after I told [my closest female friend] and he blamed me, he made it clear that it was my fault.

Unfortunately, responses from professionals and those in positions of authority were frequently no more helpful. Echoing narrow dominant rape scripts, their comments tended to misname the rape or blame women for having been raped and/or for their reactions following the rape. And while women who had been raped in the more distant past believe that professionals’ negating comments and actions reflected an earlier time, women raped more recently still faced quite similar problematic feedback. Lyn’s graphic and jarring comments of her interactions with authorities after being raped by a stranger who had broken into her home offer just one example:

...At that point in time I don't think I'd ever even had a pap smear. I was still a kid and you had this strange doctor, a man...he was awful. I was so shy and I was so embarrassed and I was so humiliated and he acted like, well, he told me to grow up... ..He told me to put my feet up in the stirrups or whatever it was, and I was trying to hold my legs together. I still remember it, it was humiliating. Then the policeman walks up there right beside me and has his bag, and sticks my underwear in it...Then they took me down to the Police Station afterwards and they never so much as offered me a box of Kleenex... ..I was practically incoherent. These two big, big cops, they're both way over six feet tall and to say the least seeing a man wasn't something I really wanted, let alone they wanted to know every disgusting, every detail, every heartbeat. They wanted to know everything. That was so, I mean reliving it again and they're staring at you like you are a bug under a microscope. Then their determination was I had a fight with my boyfriend and he kicked the door in and they didn't do anything. It wasn't until some months later that they started putting the pieces together, of my description and what was done with all these other rapes they had. ... ..I was victimized again totally by them.

Judgmental reactions of both agents of the criminal justice system and those in the medical community tended to undermine women's claiming of their rape experience.

Serena shared another example of harmful responses by authority figures, as she reached out for medical assistance immediately after being raped. Having been gang raped on a Saturday night, she contacted her general practitioner on Monday. Initially, she experienced validation as her physician believed her story and expressed concern and anger at the violence. As Serena noted, "My doctor, she did the physical examination. She said, 'I'd never seen anybody...', just what they did, how much bruising there was, how torn I was." While her doctor did not doubt Serena's account that she had been raped and certainly treated the rape as a horrible act, the appointment was still a harmful encounter for Serena. The doctor had become very upset about the extent of the violence by the two men and demanded that Serena tell her who had done this. The rape had occurred in a small, rural community and the doctor's administrative assistant was the

mother of one of the assailants. Serena believed that her disclosure could have negative repercussions, including backlash against her by community members – she had already faced her mother’s and father’s judgments because she had been drinking at the time of the assault. Therefore, she refused to disclose the names of the assailants to her doctor, who became hostile. Serena was not offered information regarding medical considerations related to the rape, follow-up assistance to address her fears of sexually transmitted diseases, or referral to a counsellor by this doctor, and she was forced to advocate on her own behalf in order simply to be checked out for pregnancy and STD’s:

Of course, the doctor was extremely frustrated with me because I would not give the names up. But then it almost became a power thing and I felt very frustrated. It is not who did this, it’s I’m here and look what’s happened, like, I need help... ..I wouldn’t doubt that given how, physically the shape I was in that night, I don’t think the amount of alcohol that I consumed would have done that. I often have questions about whether they had put something in my drink and there was no framework around that, that wasn’t even being questioned. I guess my insistence about blood work for pregnancy and disease, like all of those things, I pushed for those things to have happened...I left that room feeling very, I don’t know, it almost felt again like another attack in a different kind of way. Her anger, she was really frustrated with me for not telling her who did it.

And thus, while Serena had been supported by the doctor in her naming of the rape, claiming of her rape experience was undermined as the doctor focused her judgment on Serena’s reactions and choices in response to being raped.

Not even the mental health community is exempt from having reacted in ways that blamed and shamed women regarding rape and their reactions to it. Maria, for example, had been referred to a psychiatrist:

I had a lot of internal bruising and she was my gynecologist, she had referred me to psychiatry. Once I told her what the experiences were, she felt I should speak to somebody. In her words, “Nobody goes through that and not need help.” Unfortunately, the psychiatrist was more traumatizing than the actual rapes...

...She just walked up and sat down in a very upright, very official manner and asked me in a very cold tone of voice, "Why are you here?" And I said, "Well, my doctor thought that I should come." She said, "Well, what is it that your doctor thought you should come here for?" I remember I kept trying to figure out, does she know or doesn't she know? I said, "Well, when I was with my boyfriend..." "What boyfriend?" I can remember it like it was yesterday. I said, "Well, my ex-boyfriend", and I could feel my throat tightening up...I said, "Well, he raped me a few times." "A few times?! Do you know why you stayed?" At that point, I started crying and I couldn't stop. She literally got upset with me because I couldn't stop crying. She said, "Maybe you can come back when you know how to calm down." So I got up and I literally sobbed all the way home and I swore I would never see another therapist again and I didn't.

These experiences left Maria with a sense of being to blame both for not immediately leaving the relationship with her first boyfriend (who had threatened to harm her family if she did so), and for her emotional reaction to the experience in the psychiatrist's office.

Influenced strongly by dominant scripts, shame and self blame were common responses when women had not yet named their experience as rape, or claimed their personal rape experience as valid. During this time of confusion or misrepresentation of their experience, women's self identity was negatively and significantly impacted.

Margaret's comments in the following passage reflect her shame resulting from not having yet named her experience as rape:

I was pretty embarrassed because there were some people who knew what had happened but didn't see it necessarily as a rape... ..So I was certainly embarrassed and didn't really talk about it to anyone at the time.

Lyra, too, described feeling shame and self blame during the time when she had not yet conceptualized her experience as rape. She experienced significant guilt related to the idea of 'losing her virginity,' which was problematic both from her mother's perspective and according to teachings from Catholicism that Lyra had internalized:

Mom had two girls and so she wanted to make sure that we preserved some level of both personal and bodily integrity. I remember her telling us, "Don't give everything away to the first guy that...", and "The person that you end up marrying, you'll love this person more than you will love anyone else and you don't want to be old news." So I had this feeling in the beginning like, what am I going to do? I guess I've given this thing away that I didn't mean to give away but now I have done it and now I am just 'old news', and all that sort of stuff... ..I remember going to general Absolution Mass, really very soon...probably within a week or two weeks because I really felt like not only had I sort of betrayed these family values that Mom had tried to instill in me but I had also had somehow managed to betray sort of religious values that I had grown up with. Of course this is all under the assumption that this was sex.

Once having conceptualized the event as rape, women were not yet freed from their feelings of self blame and shame. While clearly naming her experience as rape, Lyn, for example, still struggled with shame based in others' reactions to her disclosure and her perception of others' reactions:

I felt people were looking at me differently, like I was dirty or I deserved it, or mostly it's that it really wasn't rape. That if I hung around the bars and I did all these things, well, you were kind of asking for it... ..Police basically laid the blame on me. It had to be your fault, you must have enticed him, you must have done something, are you sure it wasn't your boyfriend? So obviously, it was like you had spent literally years analyzing your own behaviour and blaming yourself. The way I dressed, the way I walked. I can't flirt with anyone, that is why I spent an entire year wearing a coat even in the middle of summer, 30 degree weather wearing a coat, no make-up, I couldn't meet any man's eyes, I was petrified that it was something I was doing was leading people to think that I was some kind of slut or something, and I got what I deserved.

Given the confusion and negative self identification that women contended with in the face of negating messages, they were vulnerable to actions and choices that did not reflect intentional change efforts in the process to living well. At times, this was described as trying to ignore or carry on as if the rape never occurred:

I remember afterwards crying, being really upset, not knowing why I was so upset because deep down inside I knew it was wrong even though I didn't want to come

to terms with it, so I just ended up carrying on as though nothing had happened. (Angelina)

I had pushed [the memory of the rape] back for so long and I had figured, I'm not going to look at that, I'm not going to look at that. I didn't have a memory with me. ... ..It kind of looked like it had never happened because I got back with my boyfriend, and I said, like, everyone's fine, you know, whatever happened during that period stays in that period, you know, I don't have to remember it. And I pretty much blocked the whole thing out and just kind of lived as if it had never happened. (Lillian)

Women also noted marked changes in behaviour after being raped and before naming and claiming the experience. These were not understood by participants, however, as intentional actions or strategies to manage this difficult time. Women instead described these changes as confusing even to themselves, and emphasized that their actions at the time were inconsistent with their prior self identification and values. Angelina, for example, spoke to the impact of her shame and diminished sense of self on her interactions with her family and within her church community:

My behaviours were very different. My mom would seriously classify me as being bitchy. She said, "I don't understand what is wrong with you, you don't hug us, you're not affectionate"...I look back now and I think I was always that huggy, affectionate, cuddly type person. I was always in a good mood, happy-go-lucky. I had respect for myself...and that kind of took a turn. Actually, one of the biggest clinchers is that I stopped going to church, and I never knew why I stopped going to church. It's kind of, I guess, a lot of these things happen subconsciously and you are not even aware of it yourself, you just start changing habits. You start doing things you normally wouldn't do.

Not only did women describe their progress toward living well as delayed during this time but, of even greater concern, the confusion and negative self identification experienced by women due to the effects of the dominant rape script left women vulnerable to actions and choices that could actually cause further harm. Most frequently, these actions were described in the realm of sexual and intimate relationships.

Three women described facing forms of violence in their relationships with men (either by remaining in a relationship with the assailant or in subsequent abusive relationships) due to their confusion and shame related to the rape. Maria, for example, noted:

I thought that's just what men did... I'd never labeled it rape probably until the, this sounds a little stupid, but when I was in [a university program, more than a decade later]. I knew it felt wrong and the whole nine yards but see I never saw it as rape so I always let him go. I just did what he told me to do because I knew I would suffer for it if I didn't. But yeah, in hindsight to look back he was doing all the forcing.

Lyra, too, had difficulty deciding how to respond and protect herself without understanding and claiming her rape. As a result, she remained in the relationship with her abusive boyfriend for several more weeks after being raped, facing further sexual pressuring and aggression. Even after the termination of this relationship, not having yet claimed her experience as rape, Lyra remained in subsequent relationships that involved abuse. In her story, she made direct connections between these choices and her shame resulting from the rape:

There is kind of a residual, like what's wrong with me that that would happen or that I would let that happen. So in many ways I trace the other unhealthy or abusive relationships that I was in afterwards to that event. Even when I look at those abusive relationships I'm like, why did I do that? That's not who I am... I think that I needed to believe that I could be valued in a relationship and that I could be sexually desired in a relationship in a healthy way. That took a long time to get to. I had a string of really bad relationships, one of which was very abusive. If I had known me I would have said, "What are you doing? Like, this guy is not good for you." Yet not being able to get to that place because of...that sort of "old news" concept of not worth being treated better.

Four participants also described heightened vulnerability to further harm due to new patterns in sexual behaviour before naming and claiming their rapes. In the following three passages, we clearly hear about confusion, change to risky behaviours, and both

emotionally and physically harmful consequences. Isabelle felt she was 'sluttish', and acted according to her understanding:

I don't know how to explain it but it was like, from the point that the rape happened...I was not feeling good about myself period. I mean I was basically doing various levels of intimate activity with any of these guys that wanted to... .. Back then if I'd had that knowledge [to conceptualize my experience as rape], it would have been, like, 'I don't want you in my life. I am going to get help. I am going to get new friends.' But again, you don't know, you don't feel very good about yourself. As a result, you're so vulnerable... ..the fact that I had no clue that this was sexual assault, that this was not my fault, that he was the one that was at fault, ...that was huge. Like, I think that really set me back probably years and layers of emotions and behaviours and attitudes, like from other people, and then I would end up doing, I would perpetuate that 'slutness' by participating.

Angelina began frequenting bars and participating in indiscriminate sexual activities with acquaintances, behaviours that deepened her sense of shame and heightened her risk of re-victimization:

I had had two partners, I was twenty, twenty-one, so I wasn't a promiscuous person, I didn't go around having sex with just anybody. But after that I think I just lost respect for myself and kind of, as hard as it is to admit that, and it is a hard thing to admit, I look back now and I think, oh my God. That's not exactly how I would have pictured myself behaving. If you would have asked any one of my friends, "That's not Angelina." And one of my friends actually kept bugging me, "What is going on with you? This is not you."... ..I was so risky...You would think that it would be the opposite. To me when I think about it I'm like, why wouldn't it be the opposite? Why wouldn't I want to get out of it? But no, I totally put myself in risky situations. I was almost out of control that way, like I had no regard for where I went, who I went with.

Serena lost her sense of self respect:

That was a whole distinguishing part between being sexual and being intimate, because I would not be open. I, it's almost like everything split for me at that moment [of the rape]...I was just trying to prove to myself that I could still do this, that I could still be sexual with someone, and even the whole energy around it, it was, you know, it became rough, I don't know, I mean I often remember having these encounters and not that they happened often but feeling horrible, horrible about it all. It just was so, there was no intimacy with it, there was no sense of respect, there was no understanding. I don't know, there was so many

things that weren't there, but I seemed to think that that was okay because that was about all I could handle. And there was one night that we were together and it was really clear that we didn't have a condom and I was not on birth control, and that I didn't want things to happen, and they did happen, and that's when I got pregnant. And I was just blown away. (Serena)

These poignant passages highlight the perilous attempts to cope by women without adequate rape scripts to give them bearings in their work toward living well.

These actions heightened their risk of re-victimization, and also diminished women's self identity and deepened their shame. Influential frameworks in our dominant discourse of rape had significant repercussions. Progress to living well can be delayed for months or years, and further harm to a woman can result during this time of confusion, isolation and vulnerability. Unfortunately, inadequate and skewed rape scripts are evident even in women's stories of rape that occurred more recently. An alternative rape script that both acknowledges the event and asserts the woman as blameless must be found and embraced, or her capacity to act as an agent of intentional change efforts is seriously hindered.

### **3.2.3 Deconstructing Dominant Rape Scripts**

[The assailant] was taking out all his hatred on me because he couldn't on the person he actually hated. Once I understood that and stopped blaming myself, I really started making progress. (Lyn)

With only invalidating or limited frameworks to draw upon, women must find means of making sense of and validating their experiences as rape. The more divergent the circumstances surrounding their rapes are from circumstances traditionally validated as rape and the more invalidating messages they receive from those around them, the more challenging and complex this task can be. Thus, the length of time needed to

achieve the goal of understanding and validating their rape varied across participants from moments to years. Women used varied and often multiple strategies to deconstruct the dominant discourse of rape.

### **3.2.3.1 Deconstructive Strategies: Gaining Information**

One strategy frequently cited by participants toward this end involved gaining information about rape and its effects through a variety of sources. Some women intentionally sought out this information in an effort to distinguish common myths regarding rape and help them begin to affirm and make sense of their experience, as noted in the following examples:

It was funny, I always sought out TV movies and news pieces if they were about rape or violence against women. I was totally into that, like I totally wanted to pay attention to that. So I think it was deep down in the beginning but I think it was coming up. (Isabelle)

I read all I could about the subject, all the research that had been done. It was self-help. I needed to understand it... ..I thought the more I could learn about it and understand my thought processes then I could grow. (Lyn)

I remember just flooding this [library] corridor, this little bookshelf area, with all these books and reading and reading and reading, trying to figure out, okay, is he right when he tells me that's what sex is?... ..this led me obviously into literature on sexual assault and women's experiences of them and narratives of them and feminist analyses of these and then into feminist theory. I found that it was, really, in those accounts and in feminist theorizing that I started to come to grips with, okay no, this is how I can define what happened. It doesn't need to be in the definitional terms that were given to me by this individual or by, certainly, my Catholic upbringing, my home life... ..I had not known that level of empowerment and those discourses. Those alternative frameworks for understanding what had happened to me were revolutionary. (Lyra)

I remember reading statistics about how many women have self harmed and killed themselves through that process [after being gang raped], and I think at that point I started realizing, "You've survived this. You got through this and you're not dead." And I think that really started shaping the way I started looking at it, and really becoming even more focused and reading and understanding. (Serena)

Other participants described an increased understanding of their experience upon gaining information that they had not purposely sought out:

I remember when the Sexual Assault Crisis Centre started saying 'No means No' regardless, I remember that having a big impact on me. That's like, wow, like that was the experience I had, No means No, and they're saying regardless of your circumstance... ..Those are powerful words to somebody who didn't feel very powerful at that time. (Angelina)

I always thought growing up that rape was like a stranger, like if you had made out with somebody that wasn't necessarily rape...I never actually thought of it as rape until I started taking those [women's studies] courses and we talked about it and in my head I kept saying, that is exactly what happened to me! Like, I always knew that it wasn't right. I always felt violated, that he shouldn't have done that, but I'd never called it rape until my second year. (Lillian)

And while most participants described that gaining new information from formal sources was important in their deconstruction of dominant societal rape scripts, several women described that these alternate descriptions remained in part problematic toward assisting in the naming and claiming of their experiences. Lyra, for example, explained:

There are some great liberating and empowering things about feminism in that respect but there are some other things that they also create, this is what a sexual assault victim is, and it is almost always 'victim', even the word 'survivor' I am not a hundred percent comfortable with, but they say, 'This is how they feel, this is how they experience that, and this is how they feel the rest of their life.' Right, it's almost supposed to be this sort of life altering, life changing... Now it probably is, but I'm not sure that the assault was any more life changing for me than, I don't know, my grandparents dying in a car accident or my sister getting a brain tumor recently... ..So again, I sort of tip my hat to feminism in one respect because it was through their presentations and discourses of female empowerment and, look, we can define things for ourselves. Or at least their identification of problems where women don't define terms of their own experience. I realized, wait now, I *do* have the ability to look back on this and make it my own and figure out how did it feel and what did it mean.

The problem, as explained by Lyra, occurs when a framework is not inclusive of all women's rape circumstances and varied post-rape responses. Before discovering

feminist analyses of rape, Lyra observed that traditionally accepted circumstances surrounding rape had excluded her experience. Upon being introduced to feminist theorizing, however, Lyra found that the circumstances surrounding her rape were included and women were validated as not to blame. Such analysis was helpful to Lyra. Because, however, she did not believe that many of her *reactions* to rape were reflected in feminist literature, she again felt that her personal experience was invalidated and excluded from existing alternate discourses.

Other participants also noted limitations related to the language and frameworks of alternate discourses developed by feminist theorists. While two participants found that feminist discourse was a sufficient alternative to dominant rape scripts for the purpose of fully understanding their rape experiences, seven others reported that the feminist framework and terms such as 'victim,' 'survivor,' and 'healing' in relation to the post-rape process failed in part to adequately reflect their personal experiences of the process toward living well. The following passages exemplify these concerns. Maria associated the term "survivor" with weakness rather than strength:

I guess I've never been comfortable with the whole word, I'm a 'survivor.' I guess I see myself as more than that, I don't like the word... 'She's a survivor of sexual abuse', 'She is a survivor of rape, a victim of rape'. I have to say no... I think for me there is an underlying weakness to it.

Lillian also could not find empowerment in the concepts of "healing" or "survivor":

I'd never call myself a 'survivor,' I don't think, or that I've been 'healed,' it is just not language I would use. So when I read it, I just kind of read over it. I know what it means generally but it is not, the term isn't powerful for me, I guess.

And Lyn refused to use "survivor" language for the same reason:

I don't think of it, myself as being a survivor, because when you think of it as a survivor to me it had a connotation of being weak. That is something that I flatly refused to have in my vocabulary. ... ..I don't think of myself as a survivor, I don't want to think of myself as surviving anything. I like growing. I don't want to think of myself as ever being a victim.

Through these passages, we hear various limitations of feminist discourse to reflect participants' experiences, including a perceived weakness regarding one's identity, a passive role in the post-rape process (e.g., "I've been healed"), and a perceived assumption that rape is always significantly life altering.

Feminist discourses were sufficient and fully embraced by two of the nine participants seeking alternatives to the dominant rape scripts. They in turn needed to search no further for alternate scripts in order to name and claim their experiences.

Isabelle, for one, found meaning in what she learned from a women's studies course:

Going from being, it was my fault, I didn't have a language for it and then into the next stage which was like, this is rape and I'm learning about all the stuff around women's issues. I am becoming politically aware, I am becoming involved so getting this framework, taking the Women's Studies courses, so getting the academic too, that's when all the framework, everything was being filled in then. So sexual assault wasn't just a label. It wasn't just, I was sexually assaulted, it was, I'm a survivor, and I'm a feminist. This is a tool that keeps women down. It is a systemic issue. This happens to many women, this is normal unfortunately. ... .. You know just saying, wow, like this happens all the time, the normalizing of it, like it is not about you being a slut, it's about a society where men and women are treated differently. Men are superior, women are inferior, and women are sex objects or basically targets for some men...If we want to rape you or if we want to beat you around then that's fair game. We live in a world where that is acceptable really to one degree or another.

And Lillian came to see patriarchy everywhere:

I have more of a global perspective, especially with violence against women and rape. ...I tend to make the connections with what happens to women all over the world and not just me. Like, I read a lot about what happens to women in Africa or areas where there's conflict, and things like that I find I make a real connection there. So I see the world very differently and I see it, I see patriarchy everywhere

where before I would never have noticed. I would have thought, you know, one person got raped, that's one thing that happened. Now I see it as this huge, systematic, almost like a machine, that happens everywhere where I don't think I would have saw that before.

Because a feminist framework reflected a strong and sufficient explanation of Isabelle and Lillian's rapes, they reported needing no further strategies to understand their experiences. For the remaining seven participants, however, further strategies of deconstruction were required to augment the tool of gaining information.

### **3.2.3.2 Deconstructive Strategies: Considering Contexts**

Another strategy utilized by women in their deconstructing of dominant rape scripts involved considering specific and/or social contexts to better understand their choices and actions at the time of and following the rape. Both personal and socio-political contexts are ignored in the dominant script of rape, and a woman's experience is instead treated as universal. Participants, therefore, described the value of introducing context as a variable in their understanding of what had occurred and their reactions to the event. In relation, first, to consideration of personal context in one's understanding, Maria noted, "You can't have rape, the impact of rape, in isolation of the rest of your life." Participants noted that coming to understand these influences surrounding the rapes was important in validating their rape experiences and their subsequent choices and actions. Factors such as youth and lack of confidence at the time of the rape, social isolation, prior challenges of teen pregnancy and childhood abuse, one's relationship to the assailant, and the assailant's social positioning in the community were reported by participants to describe their developed understanding of their experience and reactions.

Four of the women, for example, shared that they had been in isolating situations leading up to or at the time of being raped, and that this isolation had influenced their reactions to the rape. All four of them made the choice not to report having been raped to police, a choice that is negatively judged in society. Each of the participants, however, described personal contexts in a way that brought a new and less judgmental understanding to their decision, as can be heard in the following examples:

[In my] teenage years I didn't enjoy myself. It was hard. I had a child when I was twenty. That was not the hardest thing I went through in my life... That I could accept a lot better than being raped... ..So at school I had a little bit of a hard time... ..When I got raped, it was a low time. Oh yah, even harder than when I was pregnant. (Marise)

I believed that nobody would believe me... ..Ooh, charging a Police Officer wasn't done. You weren't going to go anywhere, it was never going to happen. (Lyn)

Being in a rural community, everybody knows everyone. The [doctor's] secretary happens to be [the assailant's] mom, it becomes very confusing and very, maybe I took on more responsibility than I would have had I been in a different situation. Feeling the pain of her having to experience a disclosure like that through documentation. I don't know, that felt very limiting in itself. (Serena)

Limited social supports and past experiences of exclusion also played a role in

Lyra's reaction after being raped:

I was the kid on the bus that everyone threw their leftover lunch at, that got beat up on the playground. I was just horribly picked on and bullied most of my formative years as a kid... ..I remember coming home and Mom having to wash tuna fish out of my head, and we are talking well into my fourteen, fifteen... and crying of course about this, not understanding why kids were just so unbelievably mean and Mom saying, trying not to cry herself, 'While it is hard for you to know this..,' but someday I would find a place where the things that kids were hard on me for now would be the things that people respected me for. And I remember thinking, where is that utopia and could I go now? And when I came to [university] this was it, this place, this was it.

Lyra went on to describe a context in which after growing up being bullied and excluded, at the age of seventeen she had arrived at university and there had finally experienced acceptance into a popular group of young adults and was dating a popular young man when she was raped by him:

This was a guy who was incredibly popular, really well liked, smart... .. We had many mutual friends. In fact, I say mutual, they were really his friends that I had been introduced to. ...I did not have a lot of friends on my own and I wasn't going to jeopardize those things because I knew it was going to come down to a "he said, she said". There is no way in hell anyone is going to believe this about him.

Lyra later described that her background of exclusion from her peer group as a youth impacted on her difficulty in naming her experience as rape and prolonged her isolation in the experience:

When [the assailant] said, "Oh, you just don't know that this is the way sex is," I remember thinking, well, there's lots of things that cool people have known that I didn't understand before, maybe this is one more example of a situation where I am different from what the norm, the cool norm is.

Participants offered such contextualizing as a means to deepen their understanding of the rape itself and their subsequent reactions, in turn avoiding the negating and judgmental dominant rape script.

Consideration of the socio-political climate in which women were raped further informed participants' growing understanding of the experience, and assisted in their deconstruction of the dominant rape script. Marise, for example, explained that the historical context in which she experienced rape influenced her understanding of her options and subsequent choices. She pointed out that thirty-one years ago the justice system was even less validating of women who had been raped than it is today. As she

stated, "What's the sense of calling the police? Because when you think 31 years ago, it's not the same as now." Lyn, raped 27 years ago, also described the earlier social context as limiting her choices. She noted, for example, that reporting to the police had not been an option given their significantly limited recognition of rape. She noted the lack of a Victim Services department at that time. By recognizing these social barriers, participants' understanding of their choices not to report challenged the judgments of the dominant scripts regarding 'how victims should respond.'

Most participants also came to claim their rape experiences, in part, by recognizing them as both an individual experience and a women's issue. They included a social and political analysis in their explanations of the rape and their subsequent actions. Angelina, for example, highlighted the political in her personal experience:

I was confident and you can't explain where the embarrassment, the shame, the guilt comes from. It just, it's there. In a sense, I blame society because we're still not open enough about it... ..I felt responsible, and I shouldn't have felt responsible and that really pisses me off... ..We still get that image of, it's what she is wearing. Well, why did she go there? Well, why did she do this? That is something that needs to change...I still remember what I was wearing that night. That's a horrible thing, and I totally do. I had a short skirt on and a tank top... ..Now I'm like, gee, what I'm wearing really should have no bearing on where your hands go or what you do... ..Seeing the power dynamics in society of women and men really becomes clear. You realize how little credence is given to women being raped...I've seen how dragged down women become, it becomes their fault... ..it is just a harsh society out there and I think that's what upsets me the most.

While some women using this strategy acknowledged the influence of feminist thought, others did not make a direct link to the feminist roots of their analysis.

### **3.2.4 Accessing Allies to Support Deconstructing of Dominant Rape Script**

Every participant described at least one other person as highly influential in supporting her deconstruction of the problematic dominant rape discourse. Given the negating and/or blaming reactions to most participants in response to their initial disclosures of rape, however, it is not surprising that a number of the women feared and delayed disclosure for some time. In this seeming Catch-22, women faced a perilous undertaking. They could choose not to disclose about their experience in order to protect themselves from others' potentially harmful reactions by others, but this choice led to isolation, a sense of culpability in relation to the rape experience, guilt, and lack of access to informal or formal supports that might have validated the experience and challenged inaccurate dominant messages regarding rape. On the other hand, women could choose to disclose in order to benefit from others' support, but most participants who did disclose, initially experienced unsupportive and harmful reactions. Either option resulted in significant challenges to a woman's progress toward living well. Therefore, while accessing allies to assist in deconstructing dominant rape scripts can be very useful, women reported various barriers to accessing allies (including not knowing how to articulate their experience; fear for their safety; fear of judgment or disbelief by others; and actual judgment or disbelief on the part of others). Several women, therefore, described remaining silent for significant periods of time.

Lacking the language to describe one's experience is an obvious first barrier to accessing allies. And thus, most participants needed to at least name their experience

before being able to make use of allies in their claiming of the rape. As Angelina explained:

Now that I think back, counselling would have been really beneficial but you have to know what it is. That is what bugs me... ..I knew it made me uncomfortable. I knew it was a bad experience. I cried, I didn't like it. But you have to label it first... .. I didn't see a counsellor and I should have. I look back now and I think, oh my gosh, how different things would have been had I been able to go see someone and be able to have them help me label it back then. It would have saved me a hell of a lot of heartaches, do you know, when you look back.

And Lillian reported that by the time she had managed to name her rape experience, she worried that referring herself to the sexual assault crisis centre would be perceived as inappropriate by staff:

There wasn't really a crisis. Like if I would have gone like that week or even that month but I didn't really think about counseling at all until a year or two later and I thought well, you know, it is not really an urgent crisis. I'm living okay now, I'm fine. But I wish I had gone earlier... ..They would wonder why I was coming so much later on.

Numerous participants reported not reaching out to formal or informal potential allies due to fear of disbelief or blame, fears founded in responses they had received during prior disclosures. The following passage from Marise typifies this fear of judgment:

Because I didn't call the police, a lot of people could ask, "Why didn't you call the police?" And all of this is coming back to blame on me. Why didn't I call the police? So if I don't say a word, that question won't be asked and I don't have to open up, I don't have to say anything, it'll be alright. Yah. And I eventually told [my partner], but I wasn't expecting anything from him as far as support, because it was, you know, so many years after.

In this instance, Marise had not contacted the police because she felt the process would be harmful to her. Because she had frozen during the rape, she did not believe that there was adequate evidence that the encounter was not consensual. In order to avoid disbelief

and judgment by the police, she did not report the crime. This first act to self protect, however, led Marise to believe that she could not access other supports, fearing that others would blame her for choosing not to report. In this double bind, Marise faced the potential prospects of either blame and disbelief by the police when reporting the rape, or blame by other subsequent supports for not reporting.

Women also feared disbelief or judgment from other types of potential allies.

Lyra noted, for example, her fear that her rape would not be validated at a women's support group:

I know that even though there would have been support groups...I know that I would have felt that I wouldn't have belonged there, that they might say, "Oh, well that's, you weren't really raped." I mean, I realize now that they wouldn't do that but at the time it was very much tied into whether or not what happened to me was really rape or whether it was enough rape to constitute speaking with women who clearly would have had experiences that fit either the sort of the text book descriptions or had in my mind what would have been real trauma.

Despite these barriers, over time all women accessed allies to assist them in deconstructing dominant rape scripts. They described the support they then received in challenging dominant rape scripts as often very influential and helpful in progressing toward living well. But who was most effective in supporting participants in this task?

Perhaps surprisingly, men were most often described as being influential in their roles as allies to women in their task of claiming their rapes as valid. My first reaction, I admit, was shock and some frustration. Men had been the assailants of these rapes, and had been described by participants as most often having a hand in undermining women's attempts to initially name and claim their rapes. And so, it seemed irreconcilable to me that they could also be the most powerful allies to women in this work. On further

consideration of women's interview passages and drawing upon a sociopolitical analysis of this dynamic, however, men's helpful influence to name seems quite logical. Those who carry more power to name in our society might well be expected to be most influential as validators, and it is not uncommon in our patriarchal social structure for men to define women's experience.

Based in participants' descriptions, the influence men hold to support women's naming and claiming of their rape experiences as valid seems to be linked to their sharing gender with the assailant, and to women not *expecting* men to validate their alternate scripts, given prior negating reactions by other men. Lillian's new intimate partner, for example, believed and validated her experience as rape:

I told [my new partner] probably the first week we started dating, and his reaction was completely different, and I think that was so helpful because it was a man and he believed it where not a lot of other men believed that it happened. So I think, like he didn't question it at all, he just completely believed everything I said [begins crying], and I think that helped me a lot with growing and just kind of accepting that it did happen.

Maria's new partner cried with her when she described the rape:

It is so different. Like, [my husband] is more of the type, "You dress that way, you deserve what you get", his words to me. [My partner], on the other hand, when I shared my experience, although he didn't say, "He shouldn't have done that, that was wrong", [he] cried with me. That to me was very powerful... .. We're going to get that from women for the most part but there is more of a power behind it with the men I think because they are usually the assailant, right?

Margaret's male friend didn't judge her, and was kind:

[A male friend] and I talked about it because...[the assailant] had sort of gone home and bragged to his roommate that we had slept together. His roommate, Chris, and I were talking because I was saying, 'Chris, I don't remember what happened. I don't know what happened' [due to intoxication]. So Chris is actually the one who told me what happened. At the time I don't think Chris, Chris and I, neither one of us put the word rape on it. But we did talk about it a

few times after that... But Chris isn't naive, he is not naive, he knew, he knew...  
...I can remember Chris' tone at first was like, you know, not really wanting to share the news with me but he did. Then Chris was, he was just quiet and kind.  
...I think that if Chris had judged me in any kind of way that that would have sent me reeling but he didn't, he was kind.

Most frequently, women identified their intimate partners as allies, as reflected in these passages.

Even the assailant can be influential in supporting women's naming and claiming of their rape (although only two participants were afforded this opportunity):

He had been the person that tried to convince me, and had convinced me for a while, that it *was* right. And now to have him come back and tell me what I had really known all along but hadn't been able to find confirmation for in literature, in feminist literature, in legal cases, in sort of even the social rhetoric... ..He was the only other person there and to have him essentially, we reached a consensus on that's what that was and that wasn't right. So it was an affirmation of yes it happened to you, yes it wasn't right and, *finally*, okay, what I have been feeling all along is true. Wow. (Lyra)

Interestingly, two women described not having received affirmation and validation of their rape experience from a man during the first phase in the process. Therefore, when receiving this validation from intimate partners who were in their lives later in the process, it was described as unnecessary for validation, as each woman was already certain that she had been raped and was not to blame. Margaret, for instance, remarked:

If [my new boyfriend] had been in any way negative towards me, in any way he had tried to say that I was responsible or anything like that, like that would have ended our relationship. Because by that point I would certainly have said I wasn't looking for a relationship when we met so I'm okay moving along...I would have been very surprised if that was his reaction. But I would have been A-okay with saying, okay, that's fine, then clearly you are not the person for me.

Once participants clearly understood their experiences as rape, men's role of validating was not important to women's continued progress. Rather, the disclosures to intimate partners were to ensure that they would honour the woman's lived experiences and understand her current needs.

While individual men carried significant influence to support women in their naming and claiming of rape, not one participant described individual women as effective allies in this task (unless that woman was in a position of authority). Instead, we hear from participants that individual women did not carry the weight to unsettle the hold of dominant discourse and validate a participant's rape experience. Isabelle's and Angelina's descriptions act as clear examples of this phenomenon:

Now she, it was funny, that best friend...she never really blamed me but the others all did, right? And it's funny how they outweighed her in one sense because she was my best friend and I didn't listen to her... ..I think now, why the hell wasn't I listening to her more and listening less to them? Like, why was I valuing them so much and not putting more value in what she was saying? But, you know, it was a group of friends and that was your network and I put a lot of value in what they thought. (Isabelle)

She just knew that what happened wasn't consenting. She was the one that tried to explain to me that that was considered rape because she said, 'Angelina, that's not, something is not right there; if you didn't say yes then he was obviously violating your rights.' We never talked about it much after that though, it was kind of left. ... ..I just know that I went through a big long spell of two or three years where I didn't respect myself, my behaviours were very different. (Angelina)

The problem was not that individual women were unwilling to act as allies, but rather that their opinions alone did not carry the weight to assist women's deconstruction work.

The combined power of women's affirming messages, however, carried more weight. Several participants stated that sharing their stories with a group of women in an

atmosphere of support and affirmation was central to validating their own experiences and furthering their understanding of rape as a social issue. In the following example, we hear Lillian contextualizing and politicizing her own rape experience through sharing at the women's collective on campus:

I was able to right away make the connection that it wasn't me and I didn't put myself in that situation, and there were women around me who were reinforcing that message towards me... ..There were women there in their 40's and all different ages, and we realized that at one point we had all been raped. I just think that really helped so much that if I had just gone to personal counseling, I don't think the impact would have been as strong. I think I still would have had a little bit of blame left, because I wouldn't have realized that it really had nothing to do with me, and that this happens all the time but nobody talks about it... ..I had to hear other people blaming themselves and thinking logically no, you didn't ask for that. And no, he has no right to do that and me thinking of my own experience saying, well no, if it's not her fault then it's not my fault either. But I needed to hear it from other women before I could get it through my head.  
(Lillian)

Lyn, too, described the value of women allies that she gained through her experience in a support group for women who had been assaulted:

We all went in there feeling embarrassed and shamed and having no faith and feeling like victims...Most of us walked out stronger because we wanted to be strong for the other person. It was funny, we could tell another person that no, no, no you weren't to blame... ..If you were really, really, really honest about ourselves it was the same for us, we were not to blame.

Of particular note, participants seemed to engage in a more active and collaborative process to name and claim their rape with female allies than they did with male allies.

With male allies, what was reflected in their comments most often was, "He believed it was rape, therefore I could believe it was rape" – it was quite simple and straight forward. In hearing about the role of female allies, however, deconstruction of dominant discourse was less immediate, requiring negotiating and active engagement in the work. Reflected

in women's comments most often was that they had challenged and deconstructed the dominant story together.

While most frequently these women allies were found through formal and informal groups in which participants were actively engaged (support groups, university classes, groups of friends, groups in volunteer agencies), women also cited the assistance of groups of women with whom they were not directly involved. Isabelle, for example, described that while working at the university radio station, she had been introduced to the Riot Grrrl movement. She explained that Riot Grrrl bands "named the political," and she specifically cited the influence of the song, "Dead Men Don't Rape" by Seven Year Bitch (C/Z Records, 1992), some of whose lyrics follow:

I don't have pity not a single tear  
For those who get joy from a woman's fear  
I'd rather get a gun and just blow you away  
Then you'll learn first hand  
Dead men don't rape

You're getting sucked into society's sickest  
Don't go out alone you might get raped  
But not by a dead man 'cuz  
Dead men don't rape

Regarding this and other Riot Grrrl music that addresses forms of violence against women, Isabelle stated, "This music became the background to my life at the time. The Riot Grrrls' music told us this happens everywhere, it's rampant, and men get away with it... ..They are screaming it like it is...there was analysis going on." While noting that she has not listened to this music in several years, at the time that Isabelle was working to deconstruct the dominant rape script she experienced affirmation from the collective

voices of these women who were angrily and aggressively challenging dominant discourse.

Participants also described the value of authority figures as allies in the deconstruction task. Counsellors, professors, a lawyer and a judge, for example, acted as allies to the women. Individual women in these authority positions were described as having the adequate influence to help participants establish new rape scripts. Maria and Lyn, for example, found their female counsellors to be effective allies in this endeavor:

[My counsellor] offered absolute one hundred per cent acceptance, no judgment whatsoever. That was key for me because I was so self-blaming that any type of judgment would have shut down that process for me. Their gentleness was absolutely, totally appreciated and their insight as well, just wonderful guidance that they gave as far as different activities to do. (Maria)

I did have somebody, a psychologist that I was seeing on a weekly basis, that helped me for about, well actually, it was the better part of three years, to understand myself, to accept myself and stop blaming myself. She was very, she was an incredible woman. (Lyn)

Again, with these authoritative female allies, participants describe an active and shared engagement in their naming and claiming efforts. Maria, for example, noted her counsellor's suggestions that Maria herself could use to move past self blame, and Lyn described her counsellor "helping" her to "understand myself, accept myself, and stop blaming myself."

Men in formal positions of authority also acted as allies to women. Lyra, for example, described the purpose of her disclosure with a male professor, seeking both affirmation and forgiveness, as she worked to deconstruct dominant scripts:

He was like this man that had this male perspective but yet was unbelievably sensitive and peaceful and very, very understanding of the violence that men can bring to women even unintentionally. It was within a very academic conversation

about this that I managed to disclose it, because I think [he] was talking about how every woman, you know, has one of these stories and about his own work. ... And I just for some reason felt like maybe I could tell this story... ..[He] was one that I sought out. He was one that I sort of, much the same way that I sort of sought out the absolution from the church, I would have sought out some sense of acceptance or, not really approval, but forgiveness in some ways.

Both validation that what had occurred was rape as well as affirmation that she was not to blame for the rape seemed important to Lyra in this exchange.

Lyn also said that validation by male authorities was very helpful. Despite ultimately losing her court case against the second man who had raped her (a police officer), both the judge and the prosecutor assisted her in moving beyond despair about the verdict, and in claiming the rape as valid and herself as strong:

There was nine women altogether [who had laid complaints] and I was the only one who had a case or was strong enough they thought to go to Court but then we lost. That was pretty devastating at the beginning but the Judge did the most unprecedented thing, he came out to talk to me afterwards... ..He said, "It was not because I did not believe you." He actually said that. But he says, "There is no physical evidence," and he says, "I would sentence him to ten years if I could," but he said, "if there had been any physical evidence, but after all those years, why didn't you come forward earlier?" Well, sorry, I'll know next time [said with sarcastic tone]. Anyhow, he said that I was a very strong person too but he said, "I would have sent him to jail even without the evidence but," he said, "you are giving him a death sentence. He is a Police Officer, he is not going to survive ten years in jail." So he said, "What he did was terrible," and he said, "but he did not deserve a death sentence." No, I agree he didn't deserve that, well, maybe not. But...the Prosecutor and the Judge both said I was strong. I came to the conclusion, hey, you are darn right I am strong and I have never looked back since.

Despite Lyn's experience, women clearly did not see the criminal justice system as their potential ally in their quest to validate their rape. Participants noted distrust (in all cases but one) of this system that is meant to protect all citizens and respond strongly when basic rights have been violated. Only two of the ten participants (Lyn and Brianne) chose

to access the police after being raped (only one of which led to a guilty verdict), and they cited reasons other than hopes of validation from this system. Participants' decisions not to report to the police was based in their lack of confidence in the system to validate that what happened to them was wrong, fear that they would be disbelieved or blamed by the system, their own lack of self confidence, and their beliefs that they could not be helped because they could not identify the assailant.

By and large, the criminal justice system was viewed as reflecting only the dominant rape script, and because most participants' experiences fell outside of this narrow construct, women expressed fear and an expectation that they would be disbelieved or blamed. Repeatedly, women recognized the injustice of the system's failure to act as an ally in validating their experiences. Marise felt that there was no justice associated with the legal system:

When people are caught for rape, justice is not there. No, it's not. It certainly feels like a joke... ..Even though I would have went to the police, went to court, they could have done what? The sentence is hardly anything. It's still, people that are being raped are in prison [begins crying].

Isabelle believed that she would be unfairly judged during a legal process:

...you know darn well that if somebody was mugged or like robbed or anything like that there wouldn't be questions about what you were wearing, or why did you go to the ATM at midnight? Why did you go by yourself or whatever? There just wouldn't be any questioning or judging or anything like that. So if you are going to have all those questions, why would you then go report it?

Angelina felt that what had actually occurred would be twisted in court:

I have listened, I've watched, I've seen how dragged down women become, it becomes their fault. Everything is twisted in the court of law. No wonder women don't report it, in all honesty. I can tell you that if I were to go back, I don't know if I could have reported then.

Maria believed that potential ridicule during a court process would have been difficult for her daughter:

I don't think the police would have helped me at all. I think I would have been ridiculed or somehow taken down a road because of the fact that I was drinking, out without my husband. I think that would have been harder on (my daughter).

Lillian believed that the current system is too flawed to achieve justice:

I didn't even think about it as an option. ...It would have been my word against his. I just don't think with all the lead up to it happening, I don't think if it had gone through the legal system, I don't think he would have been proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Like, I just don't think there would be enough evidence. The way the system is set up, it wouldn't work for me.

And Serena would have wanted to press charges if a more fair judicial system had been available:

We don't have any kind of safety net for women going through [the court process] that really does hold the magnitude of what it's done...that these people will be called upon for what they've done. It is really sickening... ...I contemplated [going to the police], but no. Well, I mean too, this is a lonely enough journey that ostracizing yourself even further... ...I don't regret my decision given the community I was in and the system we have. With a different system, yes, for sure, I would have wanted to press charges.

Participants described choosing not to report their rape to the police because they believed that the criminal justice system would not have validated their experiences.

Particular circumstances influenced their decision, such as knowing the assailant, being intoxicated at the time of the rape, the popularity of the assailant, few or no physical signs of struggle, some level of intimacy with the assailant leading up to the rape, a perception of the woman's clothing as provocative, and a lag in time between the rape and the decision to report. Their distrust of the criminal justice system was based in a history of women frequently being disbelieved or blamed for rape experiences, resulting in

assailants walking free (Estrich, 1987; Gilley, 1974; Lakeman, L., 2003; Lees, 1996; Parrot & Bechhofer, 1991; Ussher, 1997). Lyn's story of police involvement after being raped by a stranger who had broken into her apartment testifies to these concerns and choices:

I was treated terribly by the police... . In those days I was very slim and I was proud of my figure, I worked out all the time and the police acted like I deserved it for attracting attention... . If I felt like it was my fault to begin with, I certainly felt it was more my fault after I dealt with them. They basically dismissed my case. It was quite a long time afterwards that I ever found out that somebody actually was arrested in that case. They never even let me know... . There had been nine of us and he had gone to prison. That was, even though I did not actually go to court for him, against him, just the knowledge that he was paying for what he did and I was safe again, you have no idea what enormous relief that was.

Lyra's view of women's option to report is also telling. Despite being a lawyer herself, with specialized knowledge in the area of law as it relates to sexual assault, she believed that the legal system would not have benefited her:

Like many, I think, rape complainants talk about in terms of worrying about their credibility and I definitely fit within that stereotype, that I didn't report it and I wasn't going to report it. This was a guy who was incredibly popular, really well liked, smart.

Despite participants' view of the system's significant failings to recognize and validate their experiences, some women grappled with a sense of obligation to lay charges to try to protect others from future assaults by the same assailant. Reflective of several participants' comments, Angelina stated:

It puts women through more hell to go through the legal system than to just deal with it on their own because, let's be honest, they try and turn it on you, everything about you is brought up into the open. Everything is used against you and I don't agree with that. Would I be willing to sacrifice it now? Yeah, I probably would because I don't want it to happen to anybody else. But I don't

think it's useful. I think that the way that the legal system goes about it is not the right way.

Striking and poignant is Angelina's sense of facing further pain through the court process in order to attempt to protect others. She felt drawn to do so while, at the same time, expecting that the system would probably harm her and ultimately fail to protect other women from her assailant. It is another Catch-22. Angelina had not gone to the police, not having named her experience as rape for several years, but she seemed to carry an ongoing sense of responsibility, and regretted that she had not done so.

While some participants struggled with a sense of obligation to bring their case to the criminal justice system in the interests of other women, Lyra was a qualified exception. She believed that accessing this flawed system, in her circumstances, would not have helped other women, and might actually have done harm:

I feel there is a lot of stuff in the literature about how, and not even just the literature, but opinions that "victims" of sexual assault or rape should come forward because it helps other women come forward. I don't believe that. It is not that I don't believe it. I think sometimes it does help other women come forward. I don't think it is the only way. In fact, I am certain that if I had come forward and hadn't been believed that was actually going to do more harm than good in terms of women reporting.

While participants vary in their sense of lingering obligation to report their rapes, all women noted significant flaws within the system to recognize rape experiences in varied contexts. Reflecting dominant societal rape scripts, the criminal justice system was not perceived as an ally in women's naming and claiming tasks.

Despite the challenges described here, participants did manage to find allies, including men, groups of women, and persons in positions of authority, who played significant roles to support them. Allies were almost always involved in supporting

women in their successful naming and claiming efforts that resulted in breakthroughs in their progress toward living well. This is highly significant, as participants described this aspect of the process toward living well as irreversible – once they had named and claimed their rape as valid, there was no turning back. And while work was still ahead of them in the process, women described that at this point, the most painful and greatest barriers toward living well had been overcome.

### **3.2.5 Negative Case Analysis: Brianne's Experience**

While almost all participants articulated the harmful influence of societal messages regarding rape on their progress in the first phase of the process toward living well, one participant's experience stands out as a clear exception. Because Brianne's personal experience followed the socially accepted script of rape and she received immediate validation of her experience by numerous others, her naming and claiming of the experience was not challenged to the same extent as the other participants. Brianne's story acts as a negative case regarding the dismissive influence of dominant rape scripts on women's naming and claiming of their rape experiences, as she did not require deconstruction of dominant rape scripts. Her negative case, however, confirms rather than challenges this pattern due to the circumstances surrounding her rape (Charmaz, 2006; Wood & Kroger, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Women whose rape experiences closely reflect dominant rape scripts are more apt to name and claim their personal experiences of rape, have these interpretations affirmed quickly by others, and thus manage to quickly act as intentional agents in their change process. In a small town, late one summer evening in 1997 after walking a friend to her home, Brianne had begun to walk to the

home she shared with her boyfriend. In our first interview, she described the assault that ensued:

He pulled me into an alley behind the store and raped me there repeatedly. Of course I tried to get away but he pulled me back down and forced me to give him oral sex and at the end he was on my chest and strangling me and I remembered looking down and it being very dark and sort of thinking this was it, and then I said, "No, I'm not going to die," and I bit him. And at the time he had his penis in my mouth. I bit his penis, and they found the marks still there 2 weeks later when they found him, so -- And then I ran home and I had overalls on. I pulled up my overalls and I had bare feet and I ran home. We called the police, and they rushed an ambulance to get me. That was the incident. He had me for just about 4 hours. He had just gotten out of prison two months before. He had served 7 years for rape.

In this case, the assailant was a stranger who had already been convicted on charges of rape. The rape itself was extremely violent, occurring at night in an alley. Brianne was a young, Caucasian, educated woman who had not been drinking excessively, neither her clothing nor her behaviour could have been construed as provocative, and there was evidence of her fighting back during the assault. In short, while not the most common circumstances of rape, the conditions surrounding Brianne's rape fit the dominant legal and social framework. And while in no way am I suggesting that Brianne was "lucky" to experience rape under these conditions, due to its mirroring of the dominant rape script Brianne was able to by-pass most of the challenges related to naming and validating her rape.

Brianne's experiences in the aftermath of being raped again differed quite markedly from the experiences of other participants. Prompted by her immediate disclosure to her boyfriend and his subsequent phone call to the police, she accessed police and medical aid directly after her attack. Through these contacts, Brianne was quickly connected to a

network of various formal supports. The police, a doctor, and her mother all subsequently advocated to ensure that other needs were met and professional supports were in place for Brianne. For example, her mother, a doctor from out of town, and the police advocated on Brianne's behalf to arrange for her to be prescribed AZT and other STD medications (a particularly important achievement given that they later learned that her assailant had been HIV positive at the time of the rape.) Her supports included counsellors, medical staff at two hospitals, police, lawyers, a victim support worker, a massage therapist, and a physiotherapist. Most of Brianne's descriptions of these supports were very positive:

The police were excellent, just excellent. Right from day one to the very end. They were just really amazing... ..From day one they did everything they could to get him, and did everything they could to be supportive of me. You know, like even during the pretrial and trial they came and sat with my parents, you know, and would go out with us after. They just were amazing the whole time. There was a victims support worker at the police station too. She was awesome, really really good and helped me find a counselor, and all of that. They were just very supportive, very concerned. Once they found him and he was in custody, in some ways they probably stepped out of bounds a bit because they were very honest with us, like sort of said that they wished they could kill him. It was made very obvious to me and my family that they did not like him, that they'd do everything they could to make sure he was in prison. They were just very, very supportive throughout the process. Like even when they didn't have to testify, they attended every single day of the trial and pretrial.

A key difference that set Brianne's situation apart from the others involved the reactions of others in the moments, days, weeks and months following her attack. The key people surrounding Brianne after the rape (both formal and informal supports, of which there were many) believed her, understood the event as rape, and did not blame her. When asked what most helped her in moving beyond the initial self-judgment she had

experienced, Brianne's response highlighted the role of others in avoiding a delay to name and claim her rape experience:

Probably counselling. Yah, probably processing that with the counsellor helped the most and talking about that and having someone work through that with me. And [my boyfriend] has never judged me and I know my parents have never judged me, and I know a lot of my close family members have never judged me. They've all said that to me.

Thus, almost immediately after the rape Brianne, with the support of others, was taking steps to effectively take charge, self protect and sustain herself.

Hers was also the one case in which her rape was validated and supported through the court system with a guilty verdict. And yet, even while experiencing validation from a variety of sectors in society, including the medical community, family, and the legal system, Brianne acknowledged with a jarring example that the dominant framework of rape does not serve all women:

It was interesting, during the trial they were going to bring in the other woman that he had raped in [town], but she was a native woman, who had at one point been a prostitute and they decided that she wasn't a credible witness. That was interesting. You know, I definitely was treated very well because I came from an educated family, I was educated, was white, all of that.

Of the participants interviewed for this study, the justice system validated only Brianne's experience, the one case that fully mirrored dominant rape scripts. And yet, even in these circumstances, Brianne reported that their legal team had gone through periods of time in which they feared their case would fail based on technicalities. Brianne's work to protect herself and others ultimately paid off when the assailant was found guilty and given dangerous offender status. However, this was not without a price. Even with

circumstances acknowledged as “classic rape,” the full legal process, including appeals, spanned almost a decade.

Because Brianne was supported in naming and claiming the rape right away, she did not require deconstructive strategies, such as gaining information to understand the rape or considering the socio-political context. Neither, therefore, did she require allies to support this deconstructing. Quite the opposite, Brianne described that attempts by groups of women to politicize her personal experience invalidated elements of her own process, and dishonoured her courage and work in the decade following the rape. Brianne described, for example, her reaction to the local women’s centre, an agency considered as having expertise in validating and responding to violence against women. Without invitation, staff from the centre contacted Brianne by phone several times in the days following the rape, wanting to politicize the event in the media:

The worst was the Women’s Centre. They were constantly calling, and wanting me to go public on the news and they were very feminist, you know, forced the feminism. They were awful, they just were awful. (*Was your name on the radio?*) ...The first day it was, on the radio and in the newspaper, but then after that, once they realized the police called...we had them stop putting my name in. But the women’s centre also wanted to put my name in. They were awful, just awful. ... ..They were just very invasive and very, I mean I was just, growing up in such a small town, it was just something I never anticipated and I had been very sheltered and they wanted to make this very political, and I was just a basket case. I was not functioning at all and for them to be trying to make my experience political days after I was attacked, it was so inappropriate.

At a time when Brianne was reeling from her attack and feared for her life (given that the assailant had not yet been captured, and her name had wrongfully been aired on the news the day after the attack), she perceived the response by staff from the Women’s Centre as insensitive, belligerent, and attempting to take control of the experience from her.

Despite this particular challenge, most often Brianne described others' highly affirming and supportive reactions. She, thus, avoided a prolonged struggle to name or claim her rape experience as valid, the need for deconstruction of dominant rape scripts, and the support of allies to challenge these scripts. Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising that Brianne, whose rape was not called into question by societal norms, was the one participant who evaded an extended initial phase after a first rape experience in the process toward living well.

Before turning our attention to the second and third phases of the process in the ensuing chapter, consideration of how women achieved these transitions to subsequent phases in the process is important. With regard to these transitions, women's descriptions indicate several distinctive patterns, which receive our focus in the following section.

### **3.3 Small Steps and Breakthroughs**

All women described the process from rape to living well as gradual, at times painfully so, often involving complex work impacting many areas of their lives. Phrases such as, "It was gradual" (Maria), "It does take time" (Angelina), "It was like taking baby steps" (Lyn), "It has been a long road" (Maria), and "It wasn't a big one light bulb moment, it was moving, moving, moving..." (Isabelle) were characteristic of women's descriptions of the pace at which they navigated the process toward living well. The experience of a long, gradual process is evident in the following descriptions:

It's so much of a small step at a time. ...It's with all those years. ...In fact it was so slow I found that you don't think you are making any progress because it is so slow. But looking back, of course from where you are now, where I am now, certainly the progress has been made. (Marise)

Initially I wasn't functioning very well at all, it did take that year to even get to being functional... .It's amazing how many years it takes. I can't believe it was ten years ago, probably because the trial has brought things to be more current. It wasn't all over ten years ago. It was all over a year and a half ago. (Brienne)

It took me two and a half years to sort of get to the point where I would say that I was living well so I don't want to make it sound like I just made this decision that one day I would get up and change my life because it wasn't really like that. (Margaret)

While these comments emphasize the drawn-out nature of the process, women's stories also illustrate that interspersed with the gradual advancements were times of significant change and movement.

In exploring women's descriptions of times of more significant advancements in the process, a pattern emerged. Most often, significant change signalled transition from one phase of the process to the next: between the 'surmounting barriers' and the 'hard work' phases, and between the 'hard work' and 'growing in living well' phases. These breakthroughs from one phase to the next were described most often as occurring at a distinct moment in time but could also be described as lasting over a number of weeks. For example, Maria described that her process, while usually slow in pace, involved critical moments of significant progress:

It has definitely been a gradual process. A little at a time, every day I could say that I lived a little bit better. But I have to honestly say, as far as really feeling the shift, was with the spiritual retreat... .I believe in anybody's healing there is a pivotal moment that kind of sticks out when things really started to shift and you could feel it and you could see it playing out in your life. I would say that was the retreat for me.

Maria explained that it was during this spiritual retreat that she transitioned into the third phase of the process, and began to grow in living well.

Notable about times of breakthrough is that they almost never occurred for a woman in isolation, but rather involved allies. Significant others to affirm and support women in their experiences and progress appear to be central to women's breakthroughs. For instance, approximately two to three years after being raped, Isabelle described a breakthrough from the initial phase into the hard work phase of the process, triggered by a clearer understanding of her rape experience. Isabelle's significant step forward was supported by women she had met in her volunteer work and a newly embraced feminist analysis that assisted her in claiming her rape as a social issue involving violence against women:

I joined the radio station ...I was involved in the newsroom and then later got involved with, just got really involved with the women's issues program there, so I really got introduced to feminism. I mean I was aware of feminism before but I really got into being involved at like grass roots action, feminist action, campus politics, and I think that was a real turning point for me. That was a major turning point. It was, 'this is what this is'... ...I think that was a huge, like, that had to be the first real turning point for me.

Such times of significant progress often stand out clearly in women's memories. Brianne described the vividness of her transition from the 'hard work' phase to the third phase of 'growing in living well':

I can totally remember the day, I actually know the final day of the pretrial was when it first went behind. I can remember everything: I can remember what I was wearing, I can remember the smell in the air, I can just remember just that feeling of, like, "It's behind me". ...

While all but one participant articulated at least one breakthrough that assisted in transition from one phase of the process to the next, several women explained that when immersed in the process they had not recognize their significance. Angelina, for example, explained:

I don't think I knew it was even a breakthrough moment, and that's the interesting part is that now, yes, I look back, like now that I look back and describe it to you, I can say, "Yeah, that was my breakthrough moment," but I don't think that in the moment I even recognized that it was a breakthrough.

Given some distance from the time of the rape and early process as well as some space for reflection in their interviews, most participants portrayed a long, gradual process punctuated by periods of breakthrough, most often in transition from one phase of the process to another and in interactions with others.

Change from one phase of the process to the next was described by participants as significant and fundamental in nature, enough that fear of losing ground was of little or no concern to women. On this point, Lyra noted:

All that sort of access to the kind of raw wound, the path just isn't there anymore.... ..There was a road there. I took it. It was important but it isn't there anymore. Or if it is there it is so grown over that I can't see it and couldn't go back along it but it was integral to getting to where I was now.

Along with a sense of irreversible change, Maria reflected on her sense of empowerment in relation to the changes she had accomplished:

If, God forbid, I was to be raped again, the experience would be totally different, not less painful, not less fear provoking, but the internal impact, the internalizing and the personalizing would be very different. I don't know if this makes sense but because of that, I almost feel a sense of power that I can't be raped again because I am in a different place. I don't think I would freeze like I did before. I think I would fight back. I think I would be willing to lose my life to at least fight.

Several of the participants who had experienced an initial delay in naming and/or claiming their rape experience believed that they could not re-experience the same challenge if raped in the future because of fundamental and irreversible developments in themselves and their understanding of rape:

I don't think I would ever, if it happened again I don't think it would be the same process at all. I think I would start way further on than I had at the beginning. Like I have learned too much and I would recognize things faster. (Lillian)

I don't think there is anything that could pull me back there. (Margaret)

I've been through this once before, I didn't know anything then but I know something now. It's going to be a totally different story of survival, totally different story. (Isabelle)

While several of the participants focused on their developed understanding of the rape experience and acquired strategies to respond both during and after the rape as crucial to their progress being irreversible, for Lyn an altered sense of personal identity has been central to viewing her change as permanent:

(When) I think about it now...it brings back the memories but I feel that I can draw on the memories, they don't hurt.... ..But if it happened today, someone broke in, I wouldn't react the same way at all. The trauma would be traumatic but nothing like what it was then because I am a different person, I am stronger. (Lyn)

These conceptualizations of having experienced significant and lasting changes through their process to living well echo other participants' descriptions.

This testament to irreversible change seems to have been born out in two participants' stories of having been raped several years after their first rape experiences. Lyn described facing a second rape (this time by an acquaintance) ten years after first being raped. She reported that the process was significantly abbreviated after the second rape because of her prior change and progress toward living well in the years following the first rape. Lyn described a very different understanding of her experience this time, one that did not involve self blame because of all that she had learned since first being raped. Lyn clearly attributed responsibility for the attack to the assailant, which assisted

her in quickly naming and claiming her rape experience. And thus, her work in the initial phase of the process was significantly accelerated:

I was furious, I was so angry. Angry, angry, I hated him...angry at the man who did it, yes. He took advantage of me but in this case I did not blame myself, I wasn't responsible for it... ..I definitely was making a lot of progress before the second rape...It was a set back but not as much.

During an initial interview, Serena's description of her reaction in the early days after being raped by two acquaintances also intrigued me. For six of the seven participants who were raped by acquaintances, extended difficulty in identifying their experiences as rape precluded any claiming of their rape experiences and made it difficult to vanquish, or at least subdue, self blame and shame. In contrast, Serena almost immediately claimed her experience as rape and took intentional actions to take charge, protect, and sustain herself after being gang raped at the age of thirty. How had she managed to so quickly recognize and assert the experience as rape? In a follow-up interview, her experience was further explored, and three factors clarified this exception. Being raped simultaneously by two acquaintances, and being badly physically harmed by them during the act distinguished for Serena that what had occurred was rape. She also noted that she had been raped by a boyfriend twelve years prior to the gang rape. After this first rape at eighteen years of age, Serena had lacked understanding of the experience as rape and had experienced intense self blame. She described that the work she had accomplished over several years to name and claim that first rape had allowed her to avoid difficulty in understanding and asserting her more recent rape experience:

I guess if you were to start back from the first time this ever happened to me, definitely the process was delayed. I wasn't able to conceptualize it as rape at the time. It was a lot more self blame in that. That happened but through the journey,

being able to identify not only learning more about it and understanding and educating myself, but by talking to other women. And then when [the gang rape] happened... .initially, I was so upset that this happened but it moved quickly into that place of anger and this will never happen to me again. This is humiliating, this is wrong at every level...I think that's what I was able to identify. Like, this is not going to happen to me again. That's, I think, what helped me move into that place [of action].

Serena's ability to name her experience and direct her anger at the assailants rather than blame herself are evident, allowing her to quickly progress into the hard work phase of the process. Having successfully navigated the initial phase of the process toward living well in the years following their first rape experiences, Lyn's and Serena's actions after being raped at a later time suggested potential transferability of this knowledge and confirmation of the irreversibility of this progress. Immediately able to name and claim their more recent rape experiences, and experiencing anger at the assailants much more strongly than self blame, they quickly progressed into the second phase of the process toward living well.

To summarize, participants interpreted their process toward living well as involving three phases experienced in sequence. Progress was described as gradual, although almost all participants noted times of significant progress, usually experienced as breakthroughs from one phase of the process into the next. The presence of allies tended to be key in supporting women's successful breakthroughs into subsequent phases. Change in understanding and identity experienced by women as they progressed through the process was viewed as profound, and thus their progress was understood to be substantial and secure. The next chapter offers a detailed discussion of the work of the

second and third phases of the process, which can further shed light on how women managed to progress through this complex undertaking to live well.

## **Chapter 4: Rape to Living Well - Acting as Agents to Effect Change**

The transition out of the first phase of the process toward living well is highly significant, marking the successful naming and claiming of one's rape experience through deconstruction of exclusionary dominant rape scripts. In overcoming this significant barrier, women move into the latter two phases of the process, "Doing the Hard Work" and "Growing in Living Well", with a new clarity. This new understanding allows for more purposeful navigation through post-rape process. In effect, participants can now act as intentional agents of their own change.

Having challenged in Phase I any dominant rape scripts that exclude their experiences, women entered Phase II, in which they deliberately began doing the hard work in the process. They moved beyond deconstructing rape scripts, working to actually transcend dominant discourse of rape by reconstructing and exercising alternative rape scripts that validated their experiences. While women varied in the strategies they used to progress through this phase of hard work, three broad common themes emerged. Specifically, participants utilized strategies in attempts to: 1) take charge of their progress; 2) protect themselves; and 3) sustain themselves through the hard work of this second phase of the process. As will be shown in the second half of this chapter, focus on these three areas continued into the third phase of the process, although women's emphases and needs related to each of these three objectives shifted in Phase III.

### **4.1 Phase II: Doing the Hard Work**

I know that I had made a decision that I was going to stay healthy and strong so that I could defend myself. I made the decision, I had to commit to healing and

reaching out for help. That was one of the big decisions, that I had made a choice to go into the healing aspect and to stick with it no matter how hard it came and it got. (Maria)

I believe it was close to three years that basically it was a part of my, hardly a day went by when I didn't think about it. (Lyn)

There was definitely that where the rape really does drive you. Basically you're doing stuff because you're a rape victim. You're double-checking the locks, you're looking over your shoulder. You know what I mean, there is living as a rape victim. (Isabelle)

Having successfully named their experiences as rape and taken steps to validate themselves as blameless, women transitioned into a second phase of intentional hard work. Women's comments about this second phase of the process are punctuated by phrases that note the centrality of the post-rape effects in their lives such as, "It was a major part of (my life), I thought about it all the time" (Lillian), and, "It was a constant" (Marise). This phase of the process was described by participants as most intense, as women attended to the impacts of the rape in multiple aspects of their daily lives.

Marise, for example, described the significant energy involved:

Well, I was going to [university]. I had to walk. That was difficult. Uhm, to concentrate, watching everywhere you went... .. I didn't trust anybody of course. You know, I was running a lot of times from one point to the next. I had a hard time to go to bed.

Marise's challenges during the hard work phase encompass many aspects of daily living, including safe transportation, ability to concentrate at school, fears and anxiety, comfort and trust in relationships, and sleep disturbances.

Participants frequently found this the most emotionally demanding time in the process. Margaret highlights the taxing aspect of this hard work phase: "You just have to

get through the stuff in the middle,” and “That was the time, I think, that would have probably been the most difficult in a lot of ways.”

While significant energy was required by participants to progress in Phase II, they arrived in this second phase significantly more empowered, making it possible to advance toward living well. In this phase, women intentionally took charge of their progress and focused on means to protect and sustain themselves. In this phase, women were most likely to participate in individual counselling and/or support groups. As Isabelle described:

I was in the group, so obviously was dealing with stuff, being very upset a lot of the time because of the stuff that was coming up in the group but still feeling really good about what I was doing and I was glad I was there... ..it meant delving, it meant moving ahead.

The intentional active engagement in the change process, reflected in Isabelle’s words, was experienced by the women as meaningful, even though painful at times.

The second phase of the process involved participants undertaking a range of strategies that involved three common themes, as participants: took charge of their progress; protected themselves; and sustained themselves through the hard work.

#### **4.1.1 Taking Charge: Choosing to Take Control of One’s Progress**

All participants articulated their need to take charge of their situations after the rape in order to affect positive change. This involved taking ownership of their progress toward living well, and included both decision making and following through on those decisions. This reclaiming of control reflects not only a salvaging of one’s ownership of self in response to assailants’ acts of rape, but also represents a declaration of personal control and choice in response to the harmful reactions and betrayals of others during the

first phase of the process. Having worked through much of their confusion, shame, and/or self blame, women became active agents in their own lives as they took charge by concurrently reconstructing their rape experiences and establishing or re-establishing positive self-identities. In Phase II, women developed strategies to more fully reconstruct and thicken alternative rape scripts. They then proceeded to exercise these new scripts, and in doing so transcended and worked to transform dominant discourse.

As alternate rape scripts were thickened and strengthened, more affirming and empowering self representations were constructed within them. Strengthened by these alternate and affirming self representations, women were to intentionally attend to self protection and sustenance needs. While participants who found that dominant rape scripts (Brienne) or existing feminist frameworks (Isabelle, Lillian) adequately represented their rape experiences did not need these reconstructive strategies, all participants described the importance of making decisions and taking actions to take charge of the process toward living well. Lyn explained:

I'd say I was gradually getting to the point of realizing you have to take charge of it, you cannot allow whatever things happen in your life to destroy you... ..I was determined nothing in this earth was ever going to destroy me or hurt me again, I would never allow it. Because only if you allow it and if you are strong enough minded and I believe truly everybody has the depths within them and the strength, they can do it... ..I started working out again. I was exercising and I was strong. I felt like I was taking charge of my life.

And Lyra found herself questioning her situation, and making decisions based on this reflection:

I found myself in a kind of abusive relationship...I remember sort of when that ended saying, "Okay, like, what is going on? Why is this me, the person that I conceptualized as being strong and intelligent, independent, why do I continue to get into these relationships that aren't good for me?" Then I am kind of forced

into doing the self-work and then it is hard... ..you have to do this work, once you get into it you are so glad you did... You really do gain that strength. The control that you feel that you lost, you get that back.

Angelina described it as taking back her power:

It is like taking your power back is basically what it is all about. Because not that we have given it away but it has been taken from us, taken away from us. So it is like being able for me, now I can say I have the power, I can make choices. You don't control me; you don't have the power over me. That is probably the hardest thing to come to terms with, and I have to be honest with that. Because...I didn't want to take responsibility for my actions. It was him, he is the reason I did this. But then, now I am like, no. You know what? He did that one thing that was terrible and that changed your life but I chose which path I was going to take... .. I think for me being able to take charge of my life and take responsibility is empowering. It's like, wow, I can control how I act. He is not in control of my behaviours now. He had control over me in the moment at the time, but now it is up to me to make the best of my life and do what I need to do to heal and get over it.

These quotations underscore the deliberateness of the actions taken and the personally empowering effects of exercising one's own control in the process. The clarity of purpose evident in women's decision making contrasts starkly with the confusion expressed in the first phase of the process, as exemplified in Marise's comment:

When you *want* to be happy, you have to make some changes. You've got to make it happen. What did I do to achieve that? I separated and thought, "Here I am, by myself. I've got to do the best that I can." I could see that I'm able to do this. I came to realize that I'm okay, I can do it; it gave me confidence. If you have confidence, the rest is automatic; it opens up.

Marise's decision to take control, and those of others, reflected women's own sense of what was required in order to live well, rather than being based on others' conceptualizations of what was best for them. As Brianne, for example, explained:

The victim assistance worker referred me to another counsellor and I did not like her at all. And so I just refused. I went to her one session, and then I just said, "No, I refuse to see her." So then they found me this other woman, and it was 3 weeks or a month (after the rape). She was really, really good... ..When I was attacked, when I knew I was unable to attend school, I called and talked to the head professor... ..I contacted her and asked her to let all the rest of the profs and classmates know. She did that. I'm someone that is very big on, the thing I

find hard is the awkwardness of who knows, and who doesn't know, so it was a lot easier for me to just go back to class knowing that people knew. I didn't have to explain it. So that was really good.

Brianne was helped by quickly taking charge of her own process, but also by the support from those around her (including the counsellor, victim support worker, and her professors) to take that control. This support, unfortunately, was not as extensive for other participants.

While all participants articulated the importance of taking charge of their progress toward living well in Phase II, the seven participants whose experiences were not adequately reflected in available rape scripts, described an additional aspect of the process. These women had to continue to develop alternate rape scripts as a key element of taking charge during this phase of the process. While women had made progress to better understand their own rape experiences by deconstructing dominant rape scripts (as described in the previous chapter), in Phase II these seven participants developed strategies to reconstruct alternate, more inclusive rape scripts.

#### **4.1.1.1 Reconstructing 'Rape': Creating and Exercising New Scripts**

Once I sort of got to a place where I said, "No, that *is* what happened and that's okay for me to say that and I can own that." Then trying to figure out, okay, what's going on here that it took me this long to find a place for this experience? Why is my experience so different from the accounts that I read about?... ...I realized, wait now, I *do* have the ability to look back on this and make it my own and figure out how did it feel and what did it mean. (Lyra)

The scripts we draw from, the language we use, the stories we tell, not only describe, but are important in constructing and understanding our experiences and ourselves. In Phase II, these seven women created new rape scripts to help them make meaning of their own rape experiences. These scripts served three central purposes: to

further validate the rape (as both real & significant in its effects); to acknowledge a woman's personal agency in the process toward living well; and to defend her identity and integrity in relation to her rape experience. In effect, these new scripts affirmed and empowered women, anchoring them as they navigated the remainder of the process toward living well.

This reconstruction of alternate scripts furthered the deconstruction work already begun in Phase I, serving to thicken and strengthen new understandings that would act as a solid base for intentional action<sup>2</sup>. To construct useful rape scripts, women first *created* new scripts by both developing complex descriptions, and/or using metaphor. Then they *practiced* these new scripts, helping them to take root by asserting them to others.

#### Creating New Scripts: Developing Complex Descriptions

Participants developed descriptions about their experiences that expressed complex realities and navigated simultaneous and seemingly oppositional ideas. At first, I heard these descriptions as contradictions, but upon careful review of participants' transcripts, I came to understand that they were holding and balancing contrasting elements of their complex stories, refusing to negate or oversimplify parts of their experience. Participants seemed aware of the potential for misunderstanding. At times, they prefaced their carefully thought through and finely distinguished understandings of their experiences with phrases such as, "This might sound weird but..." and followed them with questions such as, "Do you know what I mean?" in order to cue the audience

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<sup>2</sup> The bulk of the work involved in transcending inadequate language and frameworks by reconstructing alternate rape scripts occurred during the hard work phase of the process, although for some this work began during the tail end of Phase I and tapered off in Phase III.

to listen carefully, and to check out the listener's understanding. They were also ready and willing to grapple with and explore these points, aware that current language and frameworks regarding rape and its effects are limited in their capacity to reflect their personal experiences. Participants' complex descriptions most often dealt with the following binaries: putting rape into perspective/not minimizing; seeing "one's role" in the rape/not blaming oneself; and acknowledging growth and learning in the post-rape process/not suggesting that rape is good.

a. "Putting Rape into Perspective"/Not Minimizing

Four participants noted that their own experiences of rape were not the worst that an individual could experience. And while such statements might be perceived as a minimization of their rape experiences, this was not the purpose or meaning of their descriptions. Illustrative of this type of account, Lyn described putting rape into perspective while at the same time avoiding minimizing:

There are horrendous things that happen in people's lives and no matter how horrible being raped is, it is not the end of the world. I had a neighbour who was a very good friend who lived through Auschwitz. Comparatively, what happened to her...I was still alive.... ..It is like any other horrible, like a death in the family or anything else that is traumatic or terrible, or flunking out of high school. It's a terrible thing, there are lots of terrible things in life and most people are going to experience something horrific in their life...But it is basically what you make of that and if you let it defeat you.

In this way, Lyn affirmed her experience as real and significant, but also made manageable the process to living well. It is an empowering explanation of rape, that both recognized its significant harm while also suggesting that these negative effects were surmountable.

b. Acknowledging Growth and Learning in the Post-Rape Process/Not Suggesting that Rape is Good

Seven participants described themselves as having grown and learned in various ways through the post-rape process, and yet they were often careful to clarify that this statement did not imply that rape itself is a good experience or that the rape was worth going through in order to attain this growth. Women seemed aware of this “double edged sword,” some expressing fear that this recognition could wrongly suggest that assailants were being helpful to women, the rape itself acting as a catalyst to women’s growth:

I understand what has happened to me as being the universe’s way, although I am not saying it was caused and put upon me, but they were the circumstances that were required to get me to get down to the path that I needed to take. These things were all meant for the better of my character. I believe that, and I guess I get strength from that... ..It’s when I try to rationalize it at the ego level that it’s, like, that sounds like I am saying that it is good that it happened. But I can look at [my daughter’s past cancer], we have had so many gifts, both of us, from her illness. Are we glad it happened? Absolutely not. But we are able to use the trauma to look at the gifts, and that’s what I am saying about the rape. (Maria)

I don’t regret it, and as weird as that sounds to people, I’ve grown and I’ve become who I am because of that experience. Would I want to do it again? No, of course not, who really willingly wants to go through that? But I don’t regret the learning that I gained from that experience. I think that it has made me a stronger person in a lot of ways. (Angelina)

While I wouldn’t obviously wish the experience on myself again, I am not sure that I would wish it away because it has been so integral to my own understanding of who I am and who I am now. So not just sort of forgiving the event, not just accepting it but really, this will sound weird probably, but almost embracing it in terms of how it has helped me understand myself and my place in the world and all that stuff. ... ..Yeah, I like what’s grown there so I can’t deny the roots.. ...I guess it sounds odd to say I am going to embrace a sexual assault but it isn’t like that. In many ways it is not something that I would cut out of myself, which I think, at one point I would have wanted to. (Lyra)

Trying to deal with that, to hold the pain of it through those times, was hard...but I really believe that you don’t experience joy without having felt pain. ...And I

don't mean that to sound that it's deserving, do you know what I mean? Like, it's not that you've got to be tortured through your life to really, I don't mean that... what you're presented with, you learn from it. No, I really think I'm living better now than I may have. And it's not that I'm really thankful that, "Geez, I'm glad this happened to me," because if I could go back it's something I wish I would never have had to experience. (Serena)

All these things has created a lot of personality. It is a hard way to get personality... ..I certainly wouldn't thank [the assailant] for it, it is an awful way to learn it, but I said if it had to happen, then use it for good, to make you, to grow to whatever. (Lyn)

Participants distinguished this growth as having been gained during the post-rape experience, powered by themselves, rather than suggesting any benefit having resulted from the rape itself. This distinction was important in order to avoid any misunderstanding that assailants' actions had in any way helped women. Rather, women's exploration of growth occurring in their post-rape experiences honoured their hard work through a particularly challenging time.

#### c. Seeing "One's Role" in the Rape/Not Blaming Oneself

These seven participants came to perceive that their own actions may have increased their risk at the time of the rape, while simultaneously assigning the assailant with responsibility for the rape. While at first glance this may appear a form of self blame, women noted that these descriptions have given them means to move out of self blame while also developing new strategies for self-protection. Women struggled to find language and a framework to adequately express both their claiming of agency while also not assigning themselves blame for the rape. Lyra's comment typified this struggle, as she noted that dominant discourse does not easily accommodate this simultaneous reality:

I was eighteen years old, first sexual experience, I don't blame myself, but that is because I'm so far away from it now that I can look back and say of course that

isn't your fault. But at the same time I'm an actor, I'm an autonomous individual, I have a role there and I can claim that action, that can be mine and it doesn't mean self-blame, it doesn't mean this was your fault and guilt. I can now claim that individual freedom of action, that free will, that responsibility... ..But it is funny because when I am talking to other people, particularly to you, because you are doing all this research, I want to make sure that I make it really clear that, don't put me in the self-blame thing.

Several women returned to this challenge in their interviews. The struggle to express their perception of their actions having played "a role" in the rape while not being to blame for its occurrence seemed crucial to their sense of their own capacity to diminish future risk. Angelina, for example, returned to this point in the interview:

(My Mom) said, "I am proud of you because I don't want you to blame yourself." She said, "The sad reality is that we, in our society we do have to be careful," and she is right, we do. We have to really be careful what situations we get ourselves into. Not that it makes it right but that's probably one of the biggest things that I have learned is that, you know what, I'm going to cover my own ass at all costs.

Angelina stressed that with this developed knowledge she learned to "cover her ass at all costs." In effect, these alternate scripts served to empower women in their self protective strategies while not accepting the victim blaming references of dominant scripts.

And yet this was the complex description most frequently reported by women in a way that suggested a continued struggle to fully understand or express. Angelina's continued questioning to understand her reactions while being raped was one case in point:

Okay, it is that one thing for me where I said "no", I never said "yes", but I caved and that still irritates me sometimes. I think, "Why, why do we do that?" And I know that I am not the only person who does that. We become submissive and, you know, I can think that I know why but that is the one thing I wish I knew for sure, why I did that. Why didn't I scream? There was people in the house! But embarrassment, and that's the hard part, is knowing that there were other people in the house, why didn't I do that? Why did I just go inside myself and not fight back? Because I always thought of myself as pretty feisty but apparently in that

circumstance I guess you lose the fight in you after saying “no” so many times. What more can you do? When a man is bigger than you, it makes it difficult. But I think for me that’s still something I just, ewww, it irks me.

And as a listener, I was challenged to hear women walking what seemed to be a very fine line between “having a role” and “self blame”:

It was my choice to quite intentionally go out with the intention of kissing boys for fun for that evening. So I don’t feel like I was a victim at the time because I was choosing my circumstances to some extent. So when I chose different circumstances I was choosing a different life and choosing different things. I don’t feel like I was to blame for that evening but I absolutely take responsibility for that period of my life when I was making bad decisions... . I can classify myself as living well now because I fully believed that changing the way that I was living, growing up if nothing else, but certainly changing the way I was living made a difference. I don’t feel like this is something that could happen tonight or this weekend to me. It’s not like I was walking down the street and dragged into a park. I don’t feel helpless I guess is what I am trying to say. I didn’t feel helpless over the situation. It is probably the best way to put it. I don’t feel responsible but I don’t feel helpless either. (Margaret)

I blame myself to a certain extent but very, very, very little. Mostly just being stupid. Believe in somebody, I don’t believe anybody. Don’t set yourself up. I should have, before I’d gone to coffee with him I should have known him a heck of a sight better. (Lyn)

Distinction between perception of one’s actions having played a role and self blame could seem ambiguous in such statements. My concern is that in a social context of dominant rape discourse, without new language that more effectively reflects women’s experiences such as these, a complex description that suggests in any way a woman playing any sort of “role” in a rape edges too close to her being blamed for its occurrence. This is, indeed, dangerous, risking the perception of conformity to oppressive dominant discourse. I continue to struggle with this dilemma and search for more appropriate ways to language this tension. Still, without alternate available frameworks and language, these complex understandings seemed to at least serve women in developing and living

with boundaries that both allowed freedom and offered some reassurance of greater safety within this freedom. It may well be that because dominant rape scripts so strongly emphasize women's responsibility for their own rape in most contexts, transcending this element of the dominant framework was particularly challenging for women.

#### Creating New Scripts: Using Metaphor

Six of the seven participants who developed new rape scripts drew upon metaphors to reflect their understanding of the process to living well. Women developed their own metaphors or utilized metaphors that they had borrowed from songs or poems, and used these to articulate their experience of the process itself, or specific elements of the process, toward living well. Serena, for example, was able to fulfill the three central purposes of new scripts through her story of a tree's growth:

I read this poem one time about a tree that grew and when the tree was young it came into contact with a barbed wire fence, and then the barbed wire fence became...engrained in the tree, but the tree continued to grow, and it developed...and that to me is part of my story but, and it will be a part of me, and it may be a part that I may always need to, no, not need to, it will be a part of me that I will reflect on, I'm sure. But it also, I don't know that it stunted my growth. For a while I thought it did... ..there are barbs attached and it is painful, but I really feel like I've moved beyond and I continue to grow and thrive and do all kinds of neat things now, but I mean it will be part of me.

Given the central purposes women had in the creation of new scripts, Serena achieved all three with this metaphor. First, the metaphor validated Serena's rape experience as real and painful. Second, it acknowledged her personal agency in the process toward living well, and finally, it defended her integrity and identity as a woman reacting to and overcoming hardship.

Participants most frequently chose metaphors that involved navigating a path, journey or road; and moving from darkness to light. Three women used metaphors of a journey and/or a path needed for growth, noting, for example, that the process was “a good journey” (Angelina) and a “path that I needed to take” (Maria). Through references to the metaphor of a path or journey, these participants were able to highlight their personal agency and recognize the value of the process.

Lyra’s path metaphor highlighted that the Phase I work was now “the forgotten path.” More specifically, Lyra described her experience of the post-rape process to living well as a path grown over and no longer accessible to her:

...There is a great line in this Tricia Yearwood song when she says, “Forgetting something put into the past so that even if I wanted I couldn’t find my way back”...The kind of road to that raw pain level is gone... ...When I describe moving the path or removing that sort of road or having it grow over, that in many ways is what I think of as living well too. That just the roads have gone other places and their routes were perhaps painful but they are not necessarily there anymore and what’s grown there is good and better... ...So there was a road there. I took it. It was important but it isn’t there anymore. Or if it is there it is so grown over that I can’t see it and couldn’t go back along it but it was integral to getting to where I was now.

This metaphor validated the “raw pain” of Lyra’s rape experience, acknowledged her personal agency in having navigated the road to living well, and honoured her achievements through this process – “What’s grown there is good and better”. The metaphor also achieved a further purpose of acknowledging Lyra’s progress as considerable and secure, noting that she could not slip back to the prior pain of the early phase of the process. The path to the raw pain has grown over and thus she experienced herself as living well.

Three participants used metaphors related to movement from darkness to light. Lyra, for example, noted, "You really do need to sort of go through the darkness on the way to the light," and Maria described the process as "a stairwell of darkness but the light at the end of the tunnel." Through these metaphors, we hear again validation of the pain after being raped as well as a woman's personal agency in moving toward living well. Serena's 'darkness to light' metaphor also served to validate the rape experience, and honour her process:

It is like being at the bottom of the ocean and how dark it is, and as you come up and feel the light, you're driven more to go to the light. ...you'll never go to the depths of that darkness again. There is nothing that would draw you there...  
...Actually there was at times that I felt that I was almost to the surface but felt bound by something, just keeping me below the surface. I always had strong images of that but always moving up towards the light.

When asked where she is now in the process, in relation to the water, Serena replied:

Oh, I don't feel bound at all. Two years, three years ago I still was feeling that, but no, I don't feel that, I am definitely surfaced; I am a beautiful mermaid now (laughs). I became a mermaid on top of the water.

With this metaphor, Serena articulated the process as challenging, one-way, and something she felt compelled to complete. The metaphor also included a sense of building momentum, the act of freeing oneself, significant identity change, and a clear element of living well. Like Lyra's "path grown over" metaphor, Serena's imagery acknowledged the secure changes achieved through this process.

The metaphor of freeing oneself, described by one participant, served the same purposes. Marise described "giving myself freedom from prison" through her actions in the process toward living well. She returned to this metaphor twice during the interview, which was powerful for her - she cried the first time using it in the interview. It both

acknowledged her years of deep pain resulting from the rape, and also honoured her personal agency in ending this pain.

While not all participants used metaphors, they helped a number of women explore the complexities of their experience where dominant discourse had failed. Metaphor allowed them to address multiple elements of process simultaneously, and better understand the nuances of that experience, validating rape experiences and the painful effects of rape, defending women's integrity, and storying the women as active agents in their change process.

#### Exercising the New Scripts: Speaking One's Own Truth

Women used complex descriptions and metaphor to create new representations of their rape and post-rape experiences. While this new understanding was significant to their progress, all seven participants who created new scripts also described a subsequent time of exercising these new scripts by asserting them to others. It seems that both understanding and voicing that understanding are important to solidify an alternate script as meaningful in a woman's life. Serena, for example, articulated connections between her years of being silenced related to various forms of violence that she had endured, including being raped on three separate occasions, and her subsequent diagnosis of cancer:

I always find the irony that my cancer came in my throat. And if you look at that mind-body connection, the fact that I held so much silent, you know, I find it just interesting to find that that would be that whole neck area, the throat, the area that you give voice and you name things to. And I just find that interesting physically what we go through as part of this process as well, how much damage that [rape] potentially can do to our bodies and our souls.

Serena contrasted this experience of being silenced for years with the process of claiming her voice after being raped for the second time. Although initially experiencing suicidal thoughts after this rape, this changed after she prepared for and acted upon the exercising of alternate and empowering rape scripts:

And then all of a sudden feeling like a voice is starting to grow within that, that it is about taking that power back for yourself and really starting to make decisions that this wasn't going to be, like I wasn't going to hide for the rest of my life over this. And then becoming a little bit more brave to be able to tell peers, friends that this had happened and trying to deal with all of that, so you move through that phase of trying to, like, okay this has happened, I don't really know what sense to make of it in my life but here it is, and being able to say those words out loud.

Ending her silence, by creating and exercising affirming scripts, was perceived as important for both emotional and physical wellbeing. Lyra also described the therapeutic value of exercising new validating scripts:

It is speaking of the taboo, like making it, not necessarily public but taking it out of that bedroom, out of that really private place so it is a way of making the wrong public, you are able to speak about it. There is something about being able to talk about it that I think moves people towards healing in a way, there is something just in speaking about it, something empowering about being able to give words to this thing that you are not supposed to talk about.

Participants often described the importance of voicing their own understanding of their rape experiences, regardless of whether they were validated by others, as a means to more fully transcend the limiting effects of dominant discourses regarding rape. Sometimes, voicing of one's experiences was directed at the assailant, while at others direct confrontation was either not chosen or not possible. Women then chose to speak to others, individually or collectively, about their experience. They exercised these new

scripts by articulating them to partners, friends, or family members; by speaking to formal groups of women; and/or by testifying in court.

Three of the seven participants who created new rape scripts had the opportunity to confront their assailants directly, either through the formal court process or in informal settings. Lyn described the value of speaking her truth during the court process following the second rape, despite not being affirmed by the system with a guilty verdict:

What have I got to be afraid of? I remember thinking about that afterwards, I don't have anything to be afraid of. I go in, I tell my story, whatever. Bottom line, I was victimized and I dare you to contradict me and say otherwise... .I walked in there and I stared at him through the whole thing. The prosecutor said, "That is okay, you don't have to face him, you can look that way." It doesn't bother me any, and it didn't, but it sure made him, he squirmed. He got on that stand and he poured water, he went through two pitchers of water and the sweat was pouring off him. I was like, yep, I made him weak.

The exercising of her rape story was clearly validating and empowering for Lyn, solidifying its meaning in her life. Lyra also exercised her alternate rape scripts through direct confrontation, although, unlike Lyn, she did so without a formal structure and process. She took the opportunity to speak directly to her assailant about the effects of being raped, with liberating results:

I had not seen him for three or four years, so he shows up outside the lab... .and standing outside...he said, "I know what happened between us, it wasn't right. I know I didn't treat you right, I know it was wrong. I'm really sorry, can you forgive me? I want us to be friends." And I just was floored. As an aside, this did not fit into any of the literature that I had read about experiences. I said, "I can forgive you, I think I have forgiven you." I remember saying to him, "It has not defined who I am. It was hard, it changed things about me, it changed who I was sexually, emotionally, it has altered relationships I have had since then but you did not define who I am. So, forgiveness, if that is what you need, okay, I don't harbor any ill will against you. I can't be friends. I am sincerely sorry about that, that I can't be friends, but it is just not something that I can do." And that was it... .I think the other big part of it was being able to essentially tell him things that I had thought and come to over the course of those four years. Things

like being able to say to him, "That didn't define me. You do not tell me who I am." Those things that you would tell to a pillow in a therapist's office. If you could say anything to him, what would it be? I got to... ..I think I realized that I was stronger than he was.

In exercising this script, Lyra articulated both her pain after being raped, as well as the strengths and abilities she had used to move beyond that pain. In essence, she honoured herself and her story of the rape experience, with the assailant as audience.

Serena also confronted her assailants as a means to exercise her validating rape script. Having been raped in the past by her first boyfriend, she had already made progress in her deconstruction of dominant rape scripts before being raped years later by two known assailants. Her earlier progress seems to have prepared Serena for the reconstructive work of speaking her own truth soon after being raped on this second occasion:

I mustered courage and I contacted both [assailants] by phone within two days [of the gang rape] and I named exactly what I was feeling to them. One of them refused to answer the phone...but the person who initiated the event that night, I was able to say, "This is where I'm at, this is what I feel like you've took from me, but this is what you haven't." And I, and I felt that was really, like I said, "I will not be in a place that I will run from you," and I named all of those things and it was really important.

Like Lyra, Serena acknowledged both her pain due to the rape, but also herself as an agent acting to move beyond this pain. It was another honouring and empowering description of her work.

Women who did not or could not choose to directly confront their assailants found alternate audiences for their new rape scripts. In the following passage, for example, Angelina exercised an alternative script in response to a blaming comment made by her mother that had reflected dominant rape discourse:

Even talking to my mom [she said], "You were drinking." I was like, "You know what? I am not going to accept that as an excuse because whether or not I was drinking does not take away the fact that we all need to take responsibility for our actions and I can take responsibility for my part in the sense that I went there, but I did not ask for that." It was good for me to say.

Angelina here exercised the complex description that simultaneously described her actions having had a "role" in the event while expressing that she was not to blame for the rape.

Maria also could not exercise alternate rape scripts with either of her assailants. She feared for herself and her family members' lives due to prior threats by her first assailant, and wanted no contact with him. And when raped later in her life, Maria's assailant was a stranger, and she could not have confronted him even if she had wanted to. Instead, through her position at work she spoke to youth and adult sex offenders about her rape experiences. This opportunity to speak her own truth had a powerful influence on her progress toward living well:

I started the first client I had in my office when I was at the training school... it was actually only two years after the [stranger] rape. ...There was some anger tied to that. I can remember having to kind of bite my tongue before I spoke. It was almost like I was projecting what I wasn't able to give and speak to the people who really raped me. And I was giving it to them in a much more gentle way but nonetheless in a real way...It was almost like more than just having your rapist there on a certain level.

Lillian exercised her new rape script, as a student giving a presentation. Speaking to a full class in a university course was important as a means to break through to the third phase of the process toward living well:

I started getting more involved with the Sexual Assault Crisis Centre, and the Take Back the Night March, and then I got into [a university program] and I really admitted that it had happened, and in [a] class we did a consciousness raising night. I was the first person to do the consciousness raising, and I

shared...the experience of what had happened, and I think that's when it kind of hit the big moment where it just kind of all came out.

While most often new scripts were exercised verbally by participants, a few women also found power in writing their new scripts. Maria, for example, had written extensively about her healing process, and hoped to publish one day. And Serena, as part of her counselling work, wrote her autobiography.

Women described the development and exercise of affirming scripts as resulting in a more gentle self perception. Through first deconstruction and then reconstruction of rape scripts, women arrived at a greater understanding of their choices and actions in response to the rape itself and during the first phase of the process, and thus were able to re-establish a more positive self identity. This outcome is reflected in the following:

I think that [the rape] was unfortunate because it ruined my own perspective of myself and how I viewed myself for years...Now I look back and I think, well, you can learn from that or you can beat yourself up for that for the rest of your life. Well, I would rather learn from it than beat myself up. I'm a good person deep down inside and I was then. I made mistakes and it wasn't even mistakes, I guess to me it was my way of coping. (Angelina)

It's when I said to myself, "What I did was okay," that's when I was able to forgive myself. I think that's probably the biggest thing is I forgave myself for the action I'd taken by not calling the police, by not fighting back, all of this, I accept that now. (Marise)

The most important thing is I forgave myself when I realized, I don't have anything to forgive. It dawned on me one time, he was a complete stranger who kicked in my door, I had no control whatsoever. (Lyn)

Participants' new understandings of their rape and their reactions to the rape resulted in a clearer and more self-affirming understanding of their actions. With more self acceptance and self compassion, women expressed more confidence in their own ability to take charge of continued work in the process.

#### **4.1.2 Protecting Oneself**

During the second phase of the process, all participants described efforts to emotionally and/or physically protect themselves, with two common themes evident. The first involved participants' strategies in response to their intense emotional reactions to the rape experiences, particularly their fear and anger, until finding means that best fit their needs at that time. The other theme concerned making changes in their relationships, leaving problematic ones (often followed by intentional periods of social withdrawal and an increased sense of greater personal independence.)

##### **4.1.2.1 Channeling Emotions to "Try On" Strategies**

Participants experienced a variety of intense emotions as a result of their rape experiences, which motivated them to find means to protect themselves. Most frequently women described experiencing fear and anger, although other emotions, such as sadness, embarrassment, and love for others, were also mentioned as motivators for action during this phase of the process. Most participants drew upon more than one emotion to motivate self-protection efforts, although not all participants emphasized this use of emotions. Lyra, for instance, noted that while she had an emotional reaction to being raped, her intellect was more significant than feelings in helping to navigate self-protective measures. Most participants, however, described trying out various means of channeling their emotions into self-protective actions, often making adjustments to these strategies until discovering a "best fit" to balance their needs for both safety and freedom.

Perhaps not surprisingly, fear was the most prominent emotion initiating self-protective measures. Isabelle, for example, after recognizing her experience as rape and

when moving out of her parents' home for the first time, faced intense fear of being alone. Her initial response to this fear was not highly effective:

I was living on my own for the first time... I found out that I was terrified of being by myself. So I had done a lot of work, labeled it, had a framework, was doing community campus action, you know, women's collective, and then it was like, oh my God, like, I couldn't stay by myself at night. I'd be calling up my boyfriend at the time to come get me. He was really frustrated, like didn't know what to do. I am crying. I am having nightmares, like night terrors, and I hadn't had those for a long time.

Isabelle had responded to her fear by contacting her boyfriend to avoid being alone.

While responding to her fear, this strategy limited her independence and freedom. Later in the interview, Isabelle shared examples of subsequent strategies in which she more effectively balanced self protection with her need for personal freedom and autonomy.

These strategies involved taking charge of the situation in order to feel more secure in her home, experiencing a diminished sense of isolation by realizing that this fear was shared with many women, and having a plan in mind for back-up support:

I had to have the phone by the bed, I had to do the whole door and window check, and sometimes I'd lie there a lot at nights half awake but eventually... I got so where I actually didn't mind it and actually liked the day parts anyway. ...So I got used to being by myself and I had a best friend that I could call at any time, I had books. So I think I was able to get through it because I had resources and a framework and I knew what was going on. So it was just a matter of, okay, what am I going to do about the fact that I am scared?

In response to intense fears, Marise also attempted strategies to protect herself. A significant element of her hard work involved developing ways to manage these fears so that she could function in her daily activities. Early in the process, Marise stayed on alert for potential danger for prolonged periods of time:

It was a constant, constant, I had to watch everywhere. ... I had a hard time to go to bed. No, I couldn't leave the door (tears). ...My husband was going to

work at 11 o'clock at night and I was there by myself. But it was from the door to go to bed, to go anywhere else, I could not leave. That part was hard for me, extremely hard. ...If I was at the door...at the peep hole, if I would stay there I could see, look at the door and see if there was somebody, but the minute I was leaving I didn't have control there.

While helping Marise to experience an immediate sense of safety, this strategy of remaining on "look out" through the night could not be sustained. She needed rest and sleep. Therefore, over time, Marise replaced this strategy with self talk to diminish her anxiety. As Marise explained, "It would take me a while there, I had to bring myself control and say, 'This is enough. You have to leave here.'" With practice, Marise's self talk strategies calmed her when alone and allowed her to sleep.

Brianne's hard work also involved finding strategies to effectively manage her intense fear and to reclaim daily routines. In the months following her rape, Brianne curtailed basic and social activities that seemed too threatening:

I was a mess. I remember for the first couple months I couldn't even sleep in a bed. I slept on the couch and [my boyfriend] slept beside me on the floor. Ugh, it was just, I wasn't able to walk by myself for a year... ... For years I was so concerned to go out with a new group of people that I didn't know very well. That was always very difficult because I didn't know if it was safe... ...And even things like I wasn't able to drink alcohol or go to a bar for I think two or three years, so things like that, it hindered living well. Especially the first year, I was really stuck in the house a lot.

Brianne sought these strategies to allay her fears in order to meet her basic needs of sleep, rest and physical safety – sleeping on the floor with her partner, walking outside only when accompanied, choosing not to socialize. And while these met her basic needs, they could not be sustained without curtailing Brianne's independence and freedom. Thus, over time and along with her counselor, she developed alternative approaches to manage her fear and reclaim some daily routines. To regain comfort to walk alone in public in

the daylight, for example, Brianne and her allies collectively developed and practiced new strategies:

[The counsellor] would do things, like she set it up that, eventually, like this was quite a few months after the rape, she would give us ideas of ways to cope so like my Mom and [boyfriend] would be at one end of the block and I would start to walk by myself, and things like that.

With these new self protective strategies, Brianne was balancing her needs for both security and freedom.

Lyn's story also highlighted evolving strategies for self protection, motivated by intense fear of the perpetrator after first being raped. She detailed her initial strategies to preserve her safety:

I slept with a knife under my bed. I barred my doors, I had my landlord put iron bars every four inches up my windows... I lived in terror all the time. It took me years to get over that. That summer I know it hit 30 degrees and I wore a coat. ... I was petrified of anyone noticing me. I used to open the refrigerator and I'd eat, I'd stuff my mouth with anything and everything, I would eat until I was sick because I was going to be so fat and so ugly that nothing and no one would ever look at me again. I still remember crying in the middle of the night stuffing my face, the refrigerator door open, anything, it didn't matter what it was, I ate until I threw up.

Some of these strategies, such as covering her body and gaining weight, were to help Lyn become unnoticeable to men, in response to the erroneous and blaming message from police and others that she had attracted the assailant's attention. This exemplifies the damage that dominant rape discourse can inflict on women attempting to navigate the post-rape process.

Later in the hard work phase, Lyn realized that she was not to blame for the rape and she had "had no life" with her prior self protective strategies. Lyn then used her fear to implement alternate strategies:

I think it was a good three, three and a half years after the first rape, that I actually went out again. I fixed myself up and I went out with a girlfriend. We went out for supper and we went out for a couple of drinks and I was amazed to feel, I remember not feeling scared to death or nervous like there is a rapist sitting at the next table kind of thing. I felt pretty ordinary. I can do it. I didn't stay out late. I mean, I didn't take any chances like walking home or whatever... What I did before did not entice him to rape me. I was not to blame so why should I look like a dowdy old woman? And I started dressing up again.

And thus while continuing to make choices related to self protection, such as going out accompanied by a friend and not staying out late or walking alone, Lyn's specific strategies now allowed some independence, freedom, and enjoyment in her daily life.

Later, after being raped a second time, Lyn worried that she was somehow particularly vulnerable to being victimized, and she feared that she was at high risk for being assaulted again in the future. Thus, she chose to enhance her self-protection repertoire:

Everybody considered me the wimp. I cried easily, I was a wallflower, I was very, very shy... After the second rape, I was very conscious of the fact, and that is when I decided that I wasn't going to give those signals off again. That I was going, even if I was feeling intimidated or nervous, I was darned if anybody would ever be able to pick up on it. I made myself look everybody right in the eye, which before I never did... ..The first thing that I had to do was to make sure that a person wouldn't consider me as a victim. That I would look strong, I would look confident and I started standing very straight.

Lyn was not receiving protection from authorities, and needed to develop and re-develop strategies over several years to take her physical safety into her own hands. Later in the process after the second rape, Lyn also described using a dominant feeling of anger to assist her: "My anger made me strong... I made a total success of my business. I had relationships." As Lyn's fear subsided, she focused less on how to maintain physical safety and more on how to live well on her own terms.

The predominant emotions experienced by Margaret after being raped were first embarrassment and then anger. In describing the role of these emotions in the process, she noted:

I am not sure if the embarrassment helped me, well no, maybe it did. Maybe it did because it helped me to not want to go back to where I had been and helped me to make better choices so maybe it did. Certainly the anger did. ...Certainly because I was pissed, I was pissed at him but I was also, you know, didn't want to be where I was any more... ..I certainly didn't want to be that person any more so I figured out how not to be.

While Margaret was less certain whether the emotion of embarrassment (closely tied to self blame and shame) played a helpful role in preserving her safety, she was more certain that anger was a motivating force for positive change efforts to diminish the risk of future assaults.

Lillian's anger was also a dominant emotion during the hard work phase, and one that she found valuable initially to motivate her for change. Unlike Margaret, however, Lillian's anger was not directed at the assailant or herself but rather at a society that makes rape invisible, and thus she was motivated to act for social rather than individual change. Her focus, therefore, was to raise awareness and invite public discussion to better protect all women:

I think I got angry about the fact that it has happened to so many people and it's not a big issue. Like, I'd never really thought about rape until it happened to me and then when you talk to other people about it, it seems like almost everyone has had some experience of some form of sexual assault. It happens all the time, every day, and no one is making a big deal about it. ...It was more an angry at the whole, just the way it's dealt with and just the fact that it is not dealt with... ..It keeps me motivated almost... to keep working at it, like, to keep trying to make it an issue and to keep bringing it up.

During the hard work phase of the process, most participants described using at least one emotional reaction to being raped as a motivator to find and practice self protective strategies. Fear and anger most often spurred women on to preserve their safety, and at times, the safety of other women. Women's strategies for self protection evolved to better meet the seemingly competing but compelling needs of both safety and freedom.

#### **4.1.2.2 Leaving Problematic Relationships and Gaining Independence**

Participants who had been in problematic relationships with men during the first phase in their process described coming to realize in the second phase the need to leave these relationships. Eight participants had male partners who minimized women's rape experiences or re-victimized them, or the women engaged in sexual activity without emotional intimacy. Not surprisingly, participants described that these elements had served to stall or otherwise hinder their progress toward living well. Thus, in a self protective measure, women exited from these problematic relationships, most often following this move with a period of self imposed isolation from intimate and/or sexual relationships with men. During this withdrawal, participants described the development of a deepening sense of personal independence and autonomy. Maria, for example, described the dissolution of her marriage in the year following her rape by a stranger and the ending of a subsequent relationship when she learned that this partner had cheated on her. After leaving the second of these relationships, Maria described a period of growing independence in which she chose not to engage in intimate relationships:

So then I have been single ever since, close to five years. And lots of work... I knew what I wanted. I needed that soul connection...and I wasn't willing to be with anybody that I didn't feel that with. So, that took me down my path of healing.

Other participants also noted clear intentional choices to leave relationships that they perceived as deterring their progress, and subsequent helpful periods of greater autonomy, as highlighted in the following passages. Lyra left a relationship with an abusive man:

After that really bad relationship I remember saying, "There is really something going on here because that's not me and I know that's not what I want. So I think I need to spend some time with me. I need to be alone and I need to be alone for a really good (amount of) time so that I can feel good about me." So I did that, I was alone for probably three years. I didn't date anyone and really dated me [laughs].

Margaret ended a problematic relationship and gained autonomy by removing herself from the community where she had been living:

I had been sort of dating on and off this particular guy and, you know, he and I knew we were never going to get married but for whatever reason it was, we were at that age where we just couldn't quite get away from each other. I ended up traveling on the other side of the world and that made a significant enough break that we were finally sort of able to get past that... ..When that was finally well and truly over I quite consciously decided to sort of be on my own for a while. Which was important to me because...I pretty much always had a boyfriend at high school and then throughout all of my university... So I made the decision to sort of spend some time on my own.

After some time, Lillian chose to end the relationship with her boyfriend who blamed her for "having sex" with someone else after she disclosed she had been raped:

I started to understand things like patriarchy and violence and all that group of stuff. I think I started to realize that I wasn't in a good situation and that I deserved better, and I think, like when we broke up it was because of that. It was because he wasn't growing when I was growing, and he still was very sexist, and really not the type of person I wanted to be with.

After an abortion and ending contact with the man with whom she had had a sexual but non-intimate relationship, Serena deliberately removed herself from relationships with men:

I went through this whole phase too that I, dear God, like I am woman, hear me roar. And I really got myself focused that I would live my life independently, and I would live it isolated kind of from ever needing to be in a relationship with a man again. (Serena)

Through self reflection during this period of withdrawal from certain relationships, women often described gaining or regaining a sense of personal control, confidence and deepened independence that supported their personal needs and efforts toward living well. Lillian epitomized these sentiments:

That year I grew so much over that year being on my own, living on my own, kind of taking care of myself. I think that year was very important. I did a lot of the work during that year.

Participants described this deepened sense of independence in overwhelmingly positive terms.

Acting as a negative case in this instance, Brianne did not need to leave intimate relationships after being raped. The distinguishing point, however, is that Brianne found affirmation and support in her closest relationships, including the relationship with her boyfriend, and thus she did not face the dilemma of a relationship that hindered her progress toward living well. Brianne did note, however, the need to work toward greater independence while continuing in these relationships:

I became very reliant on [my boyfriend after the rape]. Very, very... To be honest I think that really when I did [my second university degree] was, because I was really away from [him] a lot and especially this year even being on my own is probably really being finally, totally not reliant on him in that way. It did take a long time for me to really be on my own.

And thus while the development of personal independence to manage her self protection was also important in Brianne's work, she did not need to leave a relationship in order to achieve this goal.

#### **4.1.3 Sustaining Oneself**

While working toward living well, women highlighted their need to intentionally sustain themselves, particularly during this second phase, as their progress required significant investment of thought and emotional energy. Participants' comments suggested two patterns regarding means to comfort and sustain themselves in their hard work. Most women noted the value of informal and/or formal supports to sustain them in their work, and several participants drew upon their spiritual beliefs and traditions for comfort.

##### **4.1.3.1 Accessing Supports**

While in Phase I men most often played central roles as allies when women worked to name and claim their rape experiences, during their hard work phase women stood out more as active supporters to participants. Women described actively seeking both informal and formal supports to sustain them in the hard work of the process. Those with the help of supportive persons described this as positive and highly significant to their progress. Most frequently, groups rather than individuals were cited as sustaining presences, and eight participants noted a supportive role being played by at least one formal or informal group of women. The following passages offer examples of the supportive role played by those in formal roles, such as counsellors (noted in the first two

quotes), women's support groups (described in the third quote), and networks of professionals of varied disciplines (highlighted in the final quote):

[My counsellor] was really, really good and I saw her for a year. And she also worked with me through the whole pre-trial, and even at the trial, even though I was no longer seeing her she came... ..[She] was very, in a lot of ways non-directive, but just also very aware of the issues related I think to rape. She did a lot of different things, she would just let me talk, or she would do relaxation techniques, that kind of thing. I think a big part was just her awareness of the issues. (Brianne)

You have to have therapy. I had a really, really good therapist, and I just love that lady, she cared so much. (Lyn)

Being able to go to meet with a group of women and...we all know what has happened, we all understand each other on a certain level. Yeah, there are differences of course because we are all different but we are all women and we have all experienced this and we are all dealing with similar issues. I really think that for so many reasons...bringing women together just, powerful magical things happen. (Isabelle, discussing a support group she attended)

[At the pre-trial], Mom and Dad and the Sergeant and everybody would go in and I had my Aunts and Uncles attend too, so I had this big crew of people attending but I would sit with [the victim services worker] in a room and do a visualization, and she would walk me through it. And too the crown lawyer would run, he and I practiced all the questions that he would ask me, so I went in really prepped as far as that went... .. Before the trial we would all, like my parents and [my boyfriend] and my Aunt and Uncle and the detective and the Sergeant and the lawyer would all go for coffee, and then we'd all go in, and then we would all go for lunch together...It was kind of like I had my own little posse with me. (Brianne)

Women emphasized their experience of feeling understood and cared about by others in all these individual, group, and network settings.

Informal and natural support systems were also described as important to sustain women in their hard work, as the following examples highlight:

I was at [graduate school] when I heard [the assailant] got married and that just, waah, I was just really upset, like really, really upset. Thank God I was volunteering at the Women's Centre because I could go there and I cried and I talked about it and they were all, like, "Yeah, that sucks." (Isabelle)

They stayed by me, totally believed me, I trusted them, I could talk to them... .. My mother and my sister were extremely strong and they totally believed in me and saw me through it all, everything. (Lyn)

I had moved back to this area, there was a group of women that I reconnected with...I drew so much support from that... ..There was probably about five, six of us, and it was just really powerful. ... ..different ways that I drew from them and how sharing the story, sharing my tears around the story, and just in ways that they responded so gently. It was wonderful. (Serena)

Being present to participants' emotional pain is clearly important in these instances, but two participants also noted the sustaining role of sharing in laughter and humour.

Brianne's story of her mother's and police officers' support highlights the role of humour in beginning to reclaim moments of 'normalcy':

After I was attacked, my mom and I watched *The Bird Cage* together, and I remember laughing and I remember that was the first time I laughed. And so funny movies and laughing did really help me cope. Having a sense that life can be normal again and I can be happy again. ... ..We used humor a lot then... ..I remember making jokes, you know, during the trial. I remember joking with the police officers, I don't remember what we said, but I remember laughing with them.

Shared humour seemed to offer at least two women a reprieve from the intense emotional challenges of the hard work, in turn helping to sustain their energy.

Given that all participants were teenagers or young adults when first raped, one might assume that parents could be central allies, and most women did spontaneously mention their parents' role in this process. However, while one or both parents had been central supports for a few participants, for most women significant barriers excluded their parents as allies and supporters.

Parents played a significant supportive role for both Brianne and Lyn during their hard work. Brianne described her parents' support roles being central throughout the

process. Immediately after the rape, her parents met her at the hospital and accompanied her to the police, playing active roles as Brienne navigated systems of formal support:

My Dad had a lot of questions [for the police] and they were really good at answering all of my Dad's questions, you know, that kind of stuff. It took, I'm trying to think, from when all this happened 2 or 3 weeks to find him so that was a scary time, so as soon as this happened I pretty much moved, [my boyfriend] and I both moved in with my parents.

Throughout both interviews, Brienne frequently mentioned her parents in her description of the post-rape process, noting their central assistance in: advocating for particular medical intervention, sleeping nights in the same room with her until she felt safe, bringing her medication, accompanying her to appointments with her counsellor and to medical and legal services, and assisting her with exercises suggested by the counsellor. Lyn also experienced significant parental support during her hard work after the rapes. While Lyn's father had passed away when she was a child, her mother and sister were central supports throughout her process following both rapes:

If I hadn't had my sister and my mother at that time who totally believed me and totally supported me and were strong where I was weak, I don't think I could have survived it.

In contrast to Brienne's and Lyn's experiences, however, most participants faced numerous obstacles to parental support during the hard work phase of the process. In some instances, this was despite parents knowing about the rape. One participant (Serena) who did disclose immediately after being raped, for example, described her parents' reactions as unsupportive and blaming:

I was able to tell my mom what happened. And it's hard but because there was alcohol involved there was a lot of judgment involved and it wasn't held in a way that I wished it had of been.

This reaction is further evidence of the negating effects of dominant rape scripts.

More often, participants chose not to tell their parents that they had been raped, although the rationale for this decision varied. As young adults, some were uncomfortable discussing sexual matters with parents. Margaret understood her choice not to tell her parents that she had been raped as a consequence of her age:

With my dad, it's just not a conversation I would have ever had with him. I say that while I am rolling my eyes a little bit. I mean, I was nineteen or I had just turned twenty and it was my parents! ...I was certainly much closer to my mom at that point than I would have been to my dad. But I was twenty and I think I just had the sense that I needed to figure things out, with that and with other things in my life as well.

Several women feared judgment or disappointment of parents, particularly related to premarital sex and drinking. The following passages highlight participants' choice not to disclose to their parents based on their developmental stage, the circumstances in which the rapes occurred, and anticipated reactions of parents:

I think just because of the context of how it happened, to have to explain to them, that I had been drinking, I was only eighteen, so I just didn't think, you know, that it's something you want to tell your parents, that you were partying in your hotel room, you were drinking and you passed out. It is not the thing you want to share with your parents. ... If it was a stranger I think I could easily have told them...My parents and I had never talked about date rape or safety or responsible drinking. Like, it was just you don't drink, you don't have sex. So to admit to them that I had been drinking and that I was making out and that he was in my bed, and I would have to explain all that. I think they would first say, well, you shouldn't be drinking, you are only eighteen and try to see it as that is why it happened, instead of the fact that he chose to violate me. It would have been, you guys really shouldn't have been drinking. I think they would have seen it in a different way. (Lillian)

First of all, there was the issue that I was at a party drinking. Right there, that would have gotten me in trouble. I would have gotten in trouble for that. But there was also the sense that I think they would have been, like, very upset and I think my mom, it would have been more about her than it would have been about me. Like, I really felt that... ...So I made that decision not to tell... ...And I

think my dad would have felt guilty keeping it from my mom. So I didn't tell my dad, even though I'm sure my dad would be a wonderful support. (Isabelle)

Fear of potential blame and punishment, belief that parents' reactions would not be helpful, and discomfort as a teen to disclose personal information to parents all factored into these women's choices not to look to their parents for support.

Participants who had been raped by acquaintances raised this concern regarding parents' judgment most frequently. This fear also seems related to an expectation that dominant rape discourses would influence parents' understanding. Marise's account of one conversation she had had with her father bears this out: "My father told me once, he said, 'I don't understand, if teenagers are so casual about having sex, you know, a one night stand, what is the difference of having been raped?' And I could have said something there, to explain to him, but that comment was hard for me."

Women in the developmental stage of young adulthood, along with the influence of dominant rape scripts, faced a particular challenge. This transition into adulthood is commonly a time of separating and differentiating from one's parents. This may leave young women with few close and trusting relationships with adults in their natural support system, adults with lived experience and a deep concern for their children's wellbeing that could support them through such a challenging process.

Several women who did not approach their parents for support articulated that they had not believed that their parents would have been helpful to them in their post-rape process. Maria, for example, while choosing eventually to disclose to her parents about her first boyfriend's physical and sexual violence, did not draw upon support from

them. This decision, however, was born from a pre-existing problematic relationship with her mother, in which Maria had not felt adequately supported:

Their reactions...my mom for instance, she cried but that was wrapped up in more than just the rape for me because my mother, in my opinion, to me was not a good mother towards me. So for the first time I was seeing my mother express emotion towards me. But it was almost like, "Okay, I needed that for, like, eighteen years so here it is?" Too bad it took this.

Isabelle also believed that a disclosure to her parents would not elicit support.

Rather, she believed that a disclosure would cause harm without offering her assistance. She stated, "I really think it would have been about my mom and it wouldn't have been about me...She is an unhappy person and I think it would have given her another reason to be unhappy."

One further rationale for choosing not to disclose to their parents was articulated by four participants. Although acknowledging the potential for parental support, these women tried to shield or protect their parents from the inevitable pain from such a disclosure. Statements such as, "I think that they would kind of blame themselves for not teaching me" (Lillian), and "I think they would have been very upset" (Isabelle) were followed by the decision not to disclose to parents. Angelina's older sister had disclosed having been raped to their family when Angelina had been much younger, and remembering the pain this information had caused her parents spurred Angelina's protective reaction after her own rape. She explained, "I was nine years old at the time and I saw my dad's reaction and it was heartbreaking for him so I didn't want to break his heart, I guess, again."

Lyra too detailed her choice to refrain from sharing her rape experience with her mother despite the potential comfort such a disclosure could have offered:

For a long time I really wanted and needed forgiveness from my Mom. But it was something that I didn't feel that I could get for a really long time...I didn't want to tell her this because I knew how much pain it would bring her. I also didn't know how I could explain to her how the experience itself for me and the role that she had played in that, I didn't want her to feel guilty for this "old news"...the morals she tried to instill in me and the role that they had played in my own sort of feelings of guilt and pain. So I could never quite, and we're close, Mom and I are very, very good friends. But I could never quite figure out how to tell her this without hurting her. So I never did.

Women's parents only played sustaining roles for two participants through the hard work phase. Instead, most women either believed that their parents would not show concern and be effectively supportive, or they wanted to protect their parents from the pain this knowledge would inevitably bring. Both groups chose not to disclose rather than gain support for themselves. And thus, most participants found sustaining presences elsewhere.

In general, participants were helped by both formal and informal supports during this phase of the process. Marise is one apparent exception and described a pattern of working through challenges independently, not believing that she required the support of others to assist her as she progressed toward living well. She explained:

To be able to talk to somebody to help myself, I never had that need. No, I never... But I'm like this with everything. I just don't have a need to open up. And I read something kind of funny. You know, they say you should talk about your problems and they help you, but if you don't need it, what do you have to say about your problem if you don't need it?

Despite this comment, several times during both interviews Marise wondered aloud about whether counselling or another type of support might have accelerated her progress: "It

could have been a quicker process, I think, if I'd gone for help." Despite not being drawn naturally to share personal information, Marise seemed to question whether sharing might have been helpful in this instance. While questioning this, Marise also seemed committed to not regret her choices. Her lack of support throughout the process appears to be the most complex and challenging for Marise to come to terms with, and thus I am left unsure about whether Marise's experience is truly an exception. Did she have no need for external supports in the process, or did she face enough obstacles, both related to context and personal style, that she came to terms with navigating this process almost completely in isolation?

Within her story, Marise did highlight her current partner's understanding, that has been meaningful and helpful in her process. While she had rarely spoken about the rape with him, this had not seemed to detract from the power of his understanding. When asked whether she had shared details when disclosing to him about her rape, Marise replied, "No details. But he understood, he never questioned after that... .. It was helpful because I felt that he understood."

Near the end of our second interview, Marise described her thoughts about reaching out for supports immediately after being raped, and this explanation is enlightening:

Right after the rape, I thought, who could help me? And I couldn't think of anybody. ... ..You really need supports in order to go through something like this.

Despite reaching out being an uncommon approach for Marise to manage most challenges, after the rape it seems that she quickly considered support options but felt

isolated at the time and without alternatives to help her. Based on this passage, it would seem that more accessible supports might have yielded a less solitary strategy on Marise's part.

#### **4.1.3.2 Drawing Upon Spirituality**

One thing that probably surprised me was how important spirituality is, that spiritual piece, you know. That surprised me. (Brianne)

Six of the participants described drawing upon spirituality for comfort during the hard work of the process. However, this was not an obvious option for five of these six participants. Rather, it tended to be achieved only after going through a process of deconstruction of church doctrine and values (reflecting the broader deconstructive process participants undertook in response to negating dominant rape scripts.) Again mirroring the broader process, participants then reconstructed the meaning of faith and spirituality for themselves, and only at that point did they describe spirituality as having a comforting, supportive role.

Six participants discussed facing difficulty reconciling organized religion with their rape experiences. As noted in the previous chapter, some described that church doctrine had exacerbated their guilt and shame during the first phase of the process as they struggled to name their rape and claim themselves as blameless in the event. Lyra, for example, before naming her rape and instead understanding the event as sinful premarital sex, attempted unsuccessfully to find forgiveness through familiar church practice. She noted, "I remember going to the general Absolution Mass and that didn't work. I did not feel absolved."

During the hard work phase of the process, these women entered into a deconstruction of the dominant discourse within their faith traditions, and most drew at least somewhat on feminist analyses in their critique of institutionalized religion and its perceived influence regarding violence against women. The following passages exemplify participants' deconstructive analysis, triggered as they worked to understand their rape. Isabelle critiqued limiting church images of woman as either the virgin or the whore, reflecting her experience of being treated as 'whore' by her peer group after being raped:

I went to church. I don't know if I was overly critical of it but, boy, was I critical of established religion once I really became immersed in feminism. Really starting to look at the fact that the church is like every other institution, it's man made, it's male driven. There is either the absence of the female or the female is very much reviled...you know, she's Mary or she's the whore... ..I think I probably would have kept going to church if I hadn't been raped...I probably would have kept going to church and maybe would have worked with the church from within. But being sexually assaulted and then getting involved with the radio station and women's issues, it became very much about I have a real issue with the structure of society. I have a real problem with the fact that it's created to suit one group of people's needs, men, and women are down here. And the church, unfortunately, is a part of that.

The crisis following her gang rape moved Serena into a process in which she differentiated religious doctrine and spirituality:

[The rape] shook the foundations that I had of my spirituality in many ways. That summer I made a decision to actually, I went for application and was part of a process to begin, I was going to become a United Church Minister. ...I think I was seeking that, at that time, but then it also made me realize that this is not the spiritual, this is not what I want, this is not who I am. But it has also taken me further into that whole journey around my spirituality. I have had very interesting conversations around the patriarchy, the use of that in religion, and I couldn't accept that and I am sure that that tied in with the rape.

As Lillian navigated the process of deconstructing dominant rape discourse and its oppressive influences on women, she also began to critique Catholic practices as oppressive toward women:

I was very close to becoming a nun. I was very Catholic, I went to Mass every day, and everything that goes with being Catholic, you know, there were no women in positions of power, women are quiet, I would say anti-choice and against same sex marriage, like lots of things that are a really big part of my life now. And where I am now, I don't think I would have chosen that, I would have stayed on the course [if I hadn't been raped]. I probably wouldn't have become a nun but I would have stayed very religious probably.

Such deconstructive practices led to one of two outcomes: entrance into a reconstructive process of a more personalized spirituality practiced either within or beyond an organized faith community, or withdrawal from one's prior connection to religion or spirituality.

One participant described her deconstruction of dominant church doctrine as resulting in a choice to abandon her faith and spirituality. Lillian articulated that the inherent guilt that accompanied organized religion had been unhealthy in her development as a youth, and so she had made the decision during the hard work phase of the process to avoid spirituality as well as organized faith, believing that both held similar dangers. For Lillian, therefore, she did not look to spirituality to comfort her during her hard work in the process toward living well.

Five women recounted entering into a reconstructive process following their deconstruction of dominant discourse within their church communities. Women described this reconstructive process as guiding them into a more personalized experience of spirituality, whether ultimately practiced within or beyond the physical space and traditions of organized religion. For three women, this process culminated in a

choice to practice their spirituality outside of the confines of their prior organized religion:

I got very interested in Wicca and Goddess. I did a lot of reading on that, did a paper on it, so that became really interesting and just very important to me...  
...When you look at the Goddess it is about looking at the world from a female, it is a female force, right? I just saw that as this positive female force that was out there. In a world where there was a positive female force, we wouldn't have violence against women. We wouldn't have women being treated like second-class citizens. (Isabelle)

I don't think it was until that moment, not that moment but that time in my life, going through [the rape], I pulled more away from the religious side and I think I went further into the spiritual journey. ... I think my spirituality was a huge connection for me getting through this. It made me realize the power in the word Goddess and all of those things. I am still enthralled with that and learning more. And not just learning but experiencing. (Serena)

I learned to see God in a different way, in a positive way. ...I came to discover that as we heal and rid ourselves of the darkness, the light shining inside is our God. So it is basically God inside of us and that's the light and that's the joy and that's the love. So I started reading the Bible with more of an open mind. ... It was very fear provoking for me to go down that road but I did. The more I did, the more it gave me the strength to follow through with my healing... So my sense of spirituality now is very strong. To me spirituality is no longer about religion. It is strictly about my relationship with God and it is a very personal thing. I have found amazing ways to worship and feel grounded and centered. They range from singing to dancing to just relaxing and just loving other people and doing for others. (Maria)

For two other participants, their reconstructive process resulted in a choice to practice their evolving spirituality within their original church communities. Both acknowledged that while they have had to manage some discrepancies between their own spiritual beliefs and church doctrine, their known faith communities and traditions still offered them significant comfort. Angelina described withdrawing from her church community soon after being raped for approximately four years, as she struggled with confusion about her rape experience, and shame and guilt regarding her sexual behaviour

following the rape. Once Angelina had named and claimed her rape experience, she made the choice to return to her original faith community:

It is not that I consider myself religious. It's that I found my peace in God and that is what I needed. Other people deal with things differently but for me that's really what healed me was that I got that... .. If it wasn't for going back to church I don't think I would be where I am... ..I believe that, yes, that's what worked for me but I don't necessarily think that it's what everybody needs or how everybody deals with things. But for me that is exactly what, not saved my life, but brought me back. ...I felt connected to God and being a part of a community. In essence to me they accept my faults. Other people would disagree but...I guess it is that I don't feel per se judged in my church community. I can't speak for other Catholic Churches within the region but I've always felt very comfortable in my church. There are people that I have known my whole life... ..For me it's not even that it's the right way, it's I'm comfortable in that community. It is like going home, it feels like I am supported there and I am very comfortable with the Priest there. ...I don't know, just, it completes me. It is who I am.

And while Lyra seemed to have reconciled the role of Catholic traditions as a comfort during her hard work toward living well, this was achieved only after navigating a deconstructive and reconstructive process. In the following passage, this achievement through struggle is highlighted:

I have remained Catholic and it is a hard thing to do (laughs). It is a hard row to hoe as a woman and I think a lot of it isn't necessarily that I believe in the doctrine of Catholicism so much as it is the place that I, it is the tradition that I was raised in and so it is where I feel most comfortable and where God or spiritual beings or spiritual awareness is most accessible to me... ..I am very tentative about it because I have a lot of hang ups about Catholicism clearly but the chapel was always a really easy place to go to feel safe, and [the priest] was a huge instrument in that for me... ..we got over the sort of Catholic stuff and I always talk about 'my God,' he is a lot more laid back than the Catholic God (laughter), so that was a place where I was able to gain access to, I shouldn't say "he" either because I don't really think of God as male, but to that sort of spiritual awareness. I think that has been, I sit there, you know, on the days that I go [to the chapel] and there is a real sense of self reflection... I feel the calm as a result of some of that spirituality and it has been very good. It was very helpful.

Whether finding the comfort of spirituality within or outside of organized religion, these five participants accessed its comforting role only after navigating a critical and challenging process. One participant, Brianne, also found significant support in her experience of spirituality. However, her process to access this sustenance was much less complex and more immediate due to not having been affiliated with a faith community or doctrine prior to the rape occurring. She did not associate spirituality with negating messages about her rape experience, and therefore was able to avoid the need for deconstruction of any invalidating church doctrine before accessing spirituality for support during the hard work of the process:

I did a lot of spiritual work, not so much prayer but a lot of spiritual work, a lot of positive thinking, a lot of mantras, that kind of stuff that I would never have done otherwise. ...My uncle...does a lot of healing crystal work and I remember he gave me a crystal and I kept that and I wore it as a necklace for probably about three years and I never took it off. At bedtime I would hold it and I would say, "You're not going to get HIV. You're not going to get HIV. You're not going to get HIV." And I said that for a year, every time I got stressed or every single time I got upset about being attacked, or every time I had a flash back, every time I had a nightmare I would hold my crystal and say, "You're not going to get HIV..." And that got me really through that.

For all six women who described that their practice of spirituality played a sustaining role during the hard work phase, they most often highlighted its role in offering comfort through the challenges. Other specific benefits, such as assisting women to find meaning in their experience, reestablish a sense of control, and manage anxiety and fear were also noted as aspects of the supportive role of spirituality during the second phase of the process.

#### 4.2 Phase III: Growing in Living Well

Women described a significant shift from a period of challenge during the second phase of the process that required much thought and energy, and a central place in their daily lives, to a time in which focus on the rape and its effects was moved progressively more to the margins:

[Moving into the third phase], it was just kind of refining getting from there to today because I think the really major challenges were from eighteen to twenty-two... ..[After that, it] was challenges but also growth. (Isabelle)

There were many days initially where I just thought, "How am I ever again going to be able to do this?", and I'm able to go out and have fun again and just be, you know... I seriously go for months without even thinking about it. (Brienne)

The shifting of this process to the periphery of one's life was often described as intentional. Lillian, for example, explained it as "not letting it affect you every day. Like, before I used to always think about it, try to remember exactly what had happened and now I just, I don't try to remember everything." For Lyra, however, while particular elements of the process had moved to the periphery of her life, other aspects of the process had remained more central. She differentiated the ongoing centrality of growth work during this third phase from the dissipation of the focus on elements of the rape itself and related emotional pain:

The work is still as central as any work on the self is for me but what I think of as being on the periphery is the rape or is the pain... ..I think of it as being more in control or having it be more about me than it is about [the assailant] or about [the rape] or about the feelings.

For Serena, one element of her intentional work in the third phase involved sustaining a healthy intimate relationship with her current partner, but she noted the less intense energy required for the ongoing work in this phase:

I wouldn't say it's overwhelming now though, it isn't. We've moved beyond that, so yah, I would consider myself living well, but it takes more maybe than other people experience.

While not focused directly on the rape, Serena's comment suggested that for her, some aspects of growing in living well (such as building and sustaining trust and intimacy with a partner) required more intentional practice because of the impact of her rape experiences.

While becoming progressively less central in women's lives over time, all women described the entire process as lasting for years. Further, for all but one participant the process was described as unbounded, or never fully concluded:

It is not as though the process is finished. There is always work to be done and I am constantly confronted with that work. Not that it is painful work but I am always sort of making more moves and more understanding of the process. (Lyra)

There's always something that, it never goes away because you're always careful of what you're doing. You don't put yourself into a situation, it's always behind your mind saying, "What could happen?" (Marise)

For me living well, the definition of that after that type of experience, is being able to live first and foremost without extreme fear, without that everyday fear being there, and being able to live and to actually, if not totally there, but heading towards a space where you actually love yourself and accept and have integrated what's happened to you as being part of your path versus feeling like a victim still... ..The process to me is definitely a life long journey. I don't think I'll ever finish processing that. But do I consider myself living well? Absolutely. (Maria)

This interpretation of a never-ending process required a significant adjustment to my preconceived formulation of the question I had been exploring. While expecting to learn about the process from the time a woman had been raped to the endpoint of living well, in initial interviews women described "living well" not as an outcome at the completion of this process but rather as an experience that began to occur through the hard work phase

and deepened with practice through the third phase of this ongoing process. Thus, they were not offering accounts of a destination. In second interviews, participants concurred with this interpretation, and they agreed with one participant's description of this phase as "growing in living well," which emphasized the continued process described by most. Several participants also noted that the phrase, "growing in living well," with its focus on growth rather than recovery, accurately reflected their experience.

Given the ongoing nature of the process, women made note of process tasks of Phase III in which they remained involved while simultaneously defining themselves as living well:

I find that there are residual, sometime residual insecurities, or am I a valuable person, am I a valuable partner, am I worthy of love? These kinds of things sort of hang in there. They are not at the forefront and they are not prominent but sometimes there are things, well, like even stuff that in many ways seems unrelated like today, my ex getting married again. That relationship didn't work and shouldn't have worked and it ended for really healthy reasons. But there is almost like a tiny little echo of kind of like, 'probably not good enough.' Those kinds of little things I do attribute to the rape...as a woman or as a partner...those insecurities I didn't have before this. (Lyra)

It has really affected my intimacy issues that way, that I am a little more reserved when it comes to connecting emotionally and even physically with men. I think that there is that guard that comes up automatically with me and sometimes I think it does affect my ability to get into a relationship with other people. (Angelina)

Sometimes I still grapple with self-doubt, and in trusting myself. So, yah, I would definitely associate that with the rape because, I mean, you really thought you were in a place that you were safe and that got undermined, so sometimes I still doubt myself, yah. And I miss dancing. The night that that happened was the last night that I really remember being alive and dancing. (Serena)

In these passages, women highlighted the sporadic and less intense nature of these ongoing challenges. They occurred "sometimes", there was a "tiny little echo" of

insecurity, and one could be “a little more” reserved. The work and energy required to respond to these challenges, therefore, was articulated as manageable.

In response to ongoing work that arose while growing in living well, several participants described the value of reminding themselves of what they had learned through the process and drawing upon this knowledge. Lillian, for example, described still facing moments of self blame in which she felt that she “should have known better.” She highlighted strategies that she uses in response to these thoughts:

Whenever I start to think that way I just kind of say no, no, no, it’s not your fault...it’s not the woman’s fault, no one ever deserves to do that to someone. No matter what you did, he does not have the right to do that. So intellectually I can kind of shut it off, but still there is doubt. I can shut it off really quickly but it still lingers I guess and pops up from time to time. It is a lot better, I can really quickly just say, “That’s foolish, obviously that’s not right, I didn’t deserve it.”

Lillian’s example reminds us that despite significant progress in the process toward living well, women continue to live in a society in which dominant rape scripts are negating and can interfere sporadically with the claiming of rape experiences. However, due to work in prior phases of the process, by the third phase women have secured the knowledge (often culminating in the development of alternate rape scripts) and the skills to combat the negative effects of dominant discourse quite quickly.

Margaret’s experience was one potential exception to experiencing this process as never fully accomplished. She made very few remarks about ongoing work and also stated, “This happened to me, it happened to me a long time ago, and I am absolutely over it.” If any ongoing work still arose for Margaret, it seemed to be in a less frequent and more peripheral way than for other participants:

It still surfaces from time to time, most notably in two particular areas. [The assailant] and I still have some mutual friends so every once in a while, like when he got married, I was kind of pissed off... ..More often it is the work that I do with students. Every once in a while someone will be leading a very similar life [to the way I had been living in university] and I'll want to say, 'Trust me on this one, trust me, you want to do this differently,' and I don't and I can't and they need to learn for themselves. But every once in a while that will come up, particularly with the work that I do with the Sexuality Centre.

Interestingly, none of the nine women who experienced the process as continuing indefinitely identified significant or ongoing frustration with this reality. Rather, they conveyed this idea with clear acceptance, as evidenced by the following examples:

I was frustrated with this at first, but not now. Most of the work is finished, but it changed my outlook toward safety always, and about what's important. I'm okay with this being a continuing piece. It has to be to some extent but I also do more now... it's not the same as it was. (Brienne)

That's not to say that at times it doesn't get frustrating, but there is a difference between, that there is more of an acceptance that this is part of your journey but you are not bound by it. (Serena)

It certainly feels good where I am now. I wish I could stay where I am now, but tomorrow might be a better day so why would you want to stay where you are? Because you don't know what the future brings you. So it's a good time but I want to move on as well. And it doesn't matter for me if there's some bad times in between because I think I have a better sense of how to deal with problems because of where I am now. (Marise)

Such acceptance appears to be linked both to participants feeling unrestrained by their continued work to lead full lives, and their confidence in their developed skills and strategies to effectively manage the continued work.

Two women described actually welcoming the ongoing nature of the third phase in the process. Angelina, for example, understood her "embrace" of the continuing tasks as a reflection of self acceptance:

When you reach that point... that you are accepting of the fact that past experiences have affected you in one way or another, that you are going to react to different things and that it's going to bring up memories. So I guess for me, yeah, it is an acceptance. And like I said before, I guess it's made me who I am and I'm not ashamed of who I am. So I guess that's why I embrace it.

Elements involved in this phase of the process tended to extend from prior work and progress achieved during the hard work phase. While focus on the same three task areas (being in charge of choices, self protection, and personal sustenance) carried over from the second phase into this third phase of the process, adjustments were made and strategies added in all three areas. As women grew in living well, their emphases and needs related to each objective shifted. Thus, while continuing to be in charge, strategies were modified to include not only a deepening of a woman's independence and personal strength but also incorporation of taking action to assist others. And thus, accompanying women's growing confidence and acknowledgement of their personal strengths and abilities, women's energies more frequently turned outward in this phase to support other women who face sexual violence.

During this third phase of the process, participants also revised the strategies they had been using to protect themselves. Having left problematic relationships and in most instances having chosen to avoid intimate relationships for a period of time during the "hard work" phase, during the third phase of the process participants often decided to re-enter and participate intentionally in intimate relationships, practicing living well with new boundaries in their lives. The channeling of emotions for self protection during the second phase of the process was also frequently adapted during the third phase, as

women made conscious choices about when to lay down their emotions related to having been raped.

Finally, women frequently supplemented or replaced their means to sustain and comfort themselves in the process. Women characterized Phase III as less time- and energy-consuming, and thus their need for sustaining strategies was less acute. However, two key sustaining strategies were noted during this phase of the process. First, women described honouring themselves and their choices through the process, often highlighting an attitude of “no regret.” And second, participants expressed an embracing of their present circumstances, with an emphasis on paying attention to what was good in their current lives. In exploring each of these three areas, we attend first to women’s continuing objective of being in charge of their post-rape process.

#### **4.2.1 Taking Charge (Revised)**

##### **4.2.1.1 Deepening One’s Independence and Strength**

It was really a time that you moved from that, okay, I’m just coping, I’m just coping, I’m just coping into really starting to look at yourself and realizing that you have some kind of strength and it’s powerful...realizing that it’s not about control but it is having an inner strength, and when you can kind of stop there and look back over, okay, this is what’s happened in the last couple of years and that’s all been tremendously painful but I am still here and these good things are happening. That’s the train I went on. (Serena)

Already having taken charge of their choices and progress during Phase II of the process, women described Phase III as involving a deepening sense of inner strength and confidence in their life choices. Most participants articulated coming to see themselves in the third phase as having become stronger through the process. Their descriptions often referred to having gained a positive self identity, and reflected both a belief that

they had become stronger but also that this emotional strength would allow them to effectively manage future challenges. Participants made numerous brief comments to acknowledge the strength they had gained through the process. Angelina, for example, noted, "I don't regret the learning that I gained from that experience. I think that it has made me a stronger person in a lot of ways." Brianne, too, stated, "My own abilities surprised me," and, "I think in many ways I know myself really well, I've had to put things in place in different parts of my life, just sort of deal with things." Knowledge of self and one's abilities to manage challenges, as reflected in Brianne's comment, was also noted by other participants, suggesting women's confidence in their own assessment of themselves and their strengths. For example, when asked how her life had changed since being raped, Maria's response was concise and straight forward. She stated, "It has forced me to look at myself and into my deeper issues, that's what it's done. How it's made me change, I've become much stronger as a result of all of it." Lyn's words also reflect self confidence and recognition of the personal strengths she has developed through the process to living well:

I [am] equally as strong as I once was weak. In some ways [the rapists] made me that way. I took what they did and I turned it around. Instead of letting it destroy me, I made it work for me... . . . From being the weakest member of my family, I am now the strongest. I am the one everybody else turns to including the ones I once turned to because they were strong. I call that justice. That's balancing things out right. I spent half of my life weak and the other half getting to this point.

A distinguishing factor between Phases II and III relates to the degree to which participants required intentional practice of independent thought and action. By the time women had entered the "growing in living well" phase, their independence was

frequently described as much more fully integrated into their self identification.

Typifying this, Brianne described her realization that she had come to a time in her life in which her independent lifestyle had not only been achieved but was also no longer experienced as intentional work:

I can be on my own and functioning on my own and walking on my own...  
...There were many days initially where I just thought, "How am I ever again going to be able to do this?", and I'm able to go out and have fun again and just be, you know.... I seriously go for months without even thinking about it.

Her experience of these activities as natural rather than as intentional practice seem to mark for Brianne that these changes have been solidified in her life.

Participants also shared moments that for them have confirmed their developed self confidence and strength. In essence, they described stories of proven strength. For instance, Serena documented a fairly recent experience that had allowed her to affirm her personal strength, tested in the presence of one of her assailants:

I ran into [one of the assailants] about 4 or 5 months ago. It was the first time, we were in a store together and it was hard. But I held myself with every ounce of respect I had for myself when I walked through and, yah, it was hard but it wasn't... ..I really didn't feel that my own sense of power...I didn't feel it was diminished by being in that same proximity with him. He was standing there with his wife and his 2 children, and I just, I felt more pity and continued on my own path. And it very much disturbed him that I was there, I could see physically what was happening to him, and I continued on my way. I felt, you know, I felt good. I mean, of course it was a first moment so when I left it was a bit again unnerving for a while but again I felt proud of the way I handled myself.

Growth in self confidence and independence commenced during Phase II of the process as women made specific decisions aimed to assist in managing challenges specifically in response to having been raped. A number of the participants, however, articulated ways in which their developed self confidence and independence led them to

make choices in the third phase of the process that also supported them more broadly in living well. Lillian's strength and self confidence, for example, were reflected in her comfort with leadership positions, public speaking, and challenging others during Phase III:

I think I feel a lot stronger now...I used to be very shy, I feel a lot more comfortable with groups and taking leadership positions and doing public speaking or, I feel a lot more self confident... ..I feel now that I believe in what I do 100% and I feel so much more confident in myself. I find that I'm much more likely to speak out, not just for myself, like, if somebody's being rude to me or, it doesn't have to be about sexual harassment or violence or anything, I feel much more comfortable telling someone if I'm not okay with what they're doing than before.

And Lyn's choices to start up her own business, not marry, buy a home, and become a foster mother demonstrated a marked development in self confidence and strength:

If I made a decision and I handled myself in a situation that normally would have left me tongue tied or I would avoid it entirely, I congratulated myself. I felt, hey, I am an adult now... ..I got in business and from being nervous and scared and oh my goodness can I survive? Am I over-stepping myself? Well, I am going to give this my very, very best. I know I have succeeded in everything else, I know I can do it and I did... .. I feel I didn't have to be married. I bought myself a house. I became a mother.

Participants' deepening sense of independence and personal strength was also reflected in women's approach to and expectations in relation to others, particularly men, as is typified by both Angelina's and Maria's comments:

It has basically just been the past two or three years where men are telling me that I am intimidating. I'm like, that is really bizarre, but I think, you know what? I wasn't intimidating back then because I wasn't confident. I didn't know what I wanted, I didn't know who I was. Now I am in a space where I can say I am confident, I'm a good person and I know that. I know where my life is going, I know what I want out of life, and I know where I am going to go with my life.  
(Angelina)

I was determined that the next person in my life was going to be one that respected me. That I was going to pay attention and listen to my intuition when things did not feel right. I was going to pay attention to that for my own sake, whether that meant speaking up or walking away in a relationship or otherwise. And just be true to myself. (Maria)

The difference is striking when comparing the tone of these passages with those describing Phase I. As women struggled to name and claim their rapes early in the process, the responses of men had power to undermine women's self perception and sense of worth. In stark contrast, these two passages highlight women's confidence in themselves and their preparedness to stay true to their self knowledge, regardless of men's reactions to them.

While women underscored their developed independence and strength in Phase III, before they could comfortably incorporate it in their identity, two of the participants had to explore its meaning. In identifying her strength during the second phase of the process, Serena had understood this concept as meaning that she was "an island", requiring no one. Early in Phase III, Serena realized that this approach to living from a place of strength negated opportunities for support and intimacy. Prompted by a diagnosis of cancer, Serena realized that she needed to allow for vulnerability as congruent with her experience as a strong woman:

I had a hard time when I heard people say, "My God, you must be strong", and that was difficult because, by God, I didn't want to be strong sometimes. But then I finally, as the growth continued to happen and, I mean, who knows where you go now, like it's continual so, but now I can see that, yah, I am strong. I don't always *have* to be strong but I am strong, if that makes sense.

Lyra needed to distinguish between her physical strength and her emotional and intellectual strength. She ultimately came to validate both her emotional and intellectual

strength to effectively manage the process after rape, rather than expecting herself to have had the physical strength to resist. Lyra explained:

I was one of these women [before being raped] who felt that when you joke around with guys you say, "Hey, I could take him." I felt that way. I was intellectually strong, I was an emotionally strong person and I thought that would translate to physical strength...I remember being amazed at the weakness... ..I could not believe the level of lack of physical strength. So I think [confronting him] was momentous, that interaction with him, because obviously I still wouldn't have physical strength to get out of that if he chose to overpower me but I guess the power of emotional, intellectual strength, that I was able to overpower him there.

Both Lyra and Serena described needing to arrive at an understanding of themselves that could simultaneously acknowledge personal strength as well as vulnerability:

There will be other moments that I'm weak but I think I used to be really, really hard on myself when I demonstrated weakness and that's certainly something that comes from my family background. That as children with my father we were never allowed to cry, never allowed to demonstrate weakness, and realizing that it is okay to demonstrate weakness. I shouldn't be using the word weakness, because saying it doesn't make you weak. No, vulnerability is the right word. To be able to be vulnerable and demonstrate vulnerability doesn't make you weak. In fact, if anything, you have to be a fairly strong person to be willing to be vulnerable. That strange relationship between those two concepts, that has been something that I didn't realize before and that has been really, really valuable. [This realization] helps me form better relationships, more honest ones, I think.

Complex understandings of personal strength in various realms of women's daily living, alongside rather than in contrast to vulnerability, were hallmarks of this "growing in living well" phase of the process.

#### **4.2.1.2 Taking Action to Assist Others**

I am really involved with the sexuality centre at [the university], so I feel good about that. I feel like I am able to make a difference and hopefully empower others or help others who may face similar situations. (Margaret)

I have already volunteered with both RCMP and the City Police to talk to other people and victims that are willing to, are going to Court, going through the

process and they are terrified. I know I had a million questions but Victim Services are so, so busy. It happened twice, I have been allowed to, with their permission of course, meet them to talk to them and we in turn really develop a friendship where they could call me every time they had a question... ..It causes a little bit of pain in a way but yet it is therapeutic to do that. (Lyn)

In Phase II, women had taken up action that assisted in their personal progress through the post-rape experience, but in Phase III women directed their intentional change efforts beyond their personal needs. Having already achieved significant progress in their taxing personal change goals during the second phase, they were now afforded the energy to broaden their focus in the third phase. Notably, each and every participant described that by the time they were growing in living well, they had chosen one or more means to assist other women to diminish the negative effects of their experiences of sexual violence. Six participants related their main motivation to participate in this research to their desire to ease the process to living well for other women who have been raped. Participants grounded their motivation to assist others in their belief about the social roots of the problem of rape. Several participants also experienced empowering and healing personal benefits of such action.

Women noted a variety of avenues for this action to assist others, through volunteer and paid work with individuals and small groups, as well as through broader social change efforts. The emphasis in participants' efforts was most often described as working to remove social and structural barriers to women's naming and claiming of rape. Several women described having taken up roles as allies to others facing the effects of rape and, in essence, offering the types of support that they would have valued at an earlier time in their own post-rape process. In these roles participants put to effective

use the alternate rape scripts that they had developed and exercised during Phase II. They gave voice to more inclusive and affirming rape scripts, either supporting individuals' naming and claiming of their own rape experiences or attempting to transform dominant discourse with broader educational strategies.

Three women described work with teens and young women that involved offering them knowledge through education or counselling to assist them to accurately name their experiences of sexual violence. Isabelle, for example, worked with teens in the school system:

It is a healing issue as a woman, you know, to say, "I want the world to be a better place, I don't want teenaged girls being raped and basically being told, 'You're a whore.'"... .. I don't want women to go through that, I want them to skip that part, just skip ahead to the, "I know this is wrong and I am going to get help," whatever that looks like. ... ..Today I give the information, the support, the best way I can. That's how I do things differently, I guess in a sense is I do what should have been done with me... ..I've talked to a lot of teens and...they will tell each other before they will tell a parent, let alone another adult. I totally get that. I talk to teens a lot about what to do, like how to help a friend... ..If they are going to each other, let's get the teens armed with information then, so they can help each other as best as they can.

Through this work, Isabelle attempted to minimize the barriers faced by many women to name and claim their rapes during the first phase of their process toward living well.

After she had progressed into the third phase of the process, Angelina also accepted a position that involved support work with adolescent girls. In her work role, girls have disclosed experiences of sexual violence, including rape:

I deal with it a lot at work. I do get girls who will confess that they have had an experience such as my own and I'm careful, I don't always disclose...But there's been a few that I've shared, in not an overly large amount of detail, but I find it seems to normalize them and that's what I wish I had had back then. Because even recently, there was one who didn't know what to term it and I said, "Well, you know, let's sit down and talk about it." In essence in the end, she came to the

conclusion much faster than I ever would have, because she had someone to term it with... ..But it is sad, because if all women were given that opportunity then we probably wouldn't go through all of these steps, we'd probably be able to process it a heck of, well, we may go through the steps, but I think they would be done quicker rather than years of "Where am I at?!"

Like Isabelle, Angelina highlighted the powerful support role she has been able to play with young women in their work to name and claim their rape experiences.

Other participants spoke out, challenging dominant scripts that misname sexual violence, or negate or minimize its effects on women. In a clear example of this, while she was moving into her third phase of the process Lillian faced another encounter of sexual violence, this time in the form of sexual harassment:

When it got a lot better was when the incident happened, when I spoke back... ..That day was International Women's Day so I was doing all kinds of events for pay equity and we had, like, a potluck and I was really feeling great. Then I was having a girls' night and we went out and we walked in [to a bar] and the bouncer was handing out all these plastic beads to people. It wasn't mardi gras officially, and I didn't know that it was mardi gras at the bar. I said, "Oh, can I.?" Like, I paid my fare and asked for the beads and he said that I had to flash him. And I told him that was sexual harassment and he couldn't say that. Then I went in and, I thought it was just him but it wasn't, it was all of them, and there were probably like four men for every one woman there, like it was just packed with men. And a lot of them were from the Base so it was really intimidating, like big Army men, and they kept grabbing us and kind of trying to get us to flash them and trying to throw beads at us so I was able to confront them and tell them that they had no right to do this, and that I didn't come here to be sexually harassed and things like that, and then I left. And then I wrote a letter to the manager and to the papers and [the manager] called me the next day and apologized and I felt a lot better after that, that I was actually able to, felt that I *did* something.

Through this passage, Lillian highlighted that it was not only speaking out that had been important to her, but also that she had experienced the power to affect positive change as a result of identifying men's actions as wrong, and ensuring that occurrences of sexual harassment, misnamed as Mardi Gras activities, would not occur at this bar in the future.

During her growing in living well phase, Maria has spoken out about her own rapes, in her work with sex offenders in order to challenge negating and victim blaming dominant scripts, and in turn to dissuade them from re-offending:

I've gotten more healing from the counseling that I do with sex offenders... .. Being able to self-disclose a little bit and say, "As a victim of rape," and then express a little bit of experience and see the impact. There was a little bit of, okay, maybe some of these men can be reached. Maybe these young boys can be reached before they continue, so that they don't continue. I just felt like I was affecting change on the preventative side... I, a couple of times, felt like maybe I prevented one more woman from being raped.

Angelina valued speaking out to affect social change, but addressed the need to advance these collective efforts so as not to continue to duplicate the limited frameworks surrounding the experience of rape:

This is the world that we live in. It makes me want to help make changes. Like, I went for the walk there with the Sexual Assault Crisis Centre. ... ..I went to that and that was big for me... Take Back the Night is good but it kind of, to me, sometimes misses that piece of it that it is not just taking back the night because it is not just strangers and that still portrays the stranger aspect when I think I have heard statistics wise it is seventy to eighty percent are somebody you know. So that's where we need to make changes, I think. I think that's great, Take Back the Night is amazing...it is getting awareness but it needs to be more than that. It needs to be educating people on the broader spectrum of that it's not just walking outside at night and taking that back. It's women taking back power and having that control to control their own lives and not have to worry about someone stepping on them.

Lyra's work to assist others, in the form of research, was a further attempt to transform limiting and harmful rape scripts. Her research work shared the goal with other participants of eradicating barriers to women's naming and claiming of their rapes:

Related to my work and research, [I am] wanting to help make this kind of a process better for other women who might have experienced something similar to me and I have tried to do that through...doing research and the work and wanting to try to open up those definitions of what it is to be sexually assaulted or raped or what that experience is and then to widen it... ..It was a big thing for me and a

big obstacle and I feel that if there is some way to name that and then some way to help remove some of those obstacles, the only way I know how to do that is again through my research and through sort of the intellectual route. But, yeah, I think it's an important task for me as a result of the experience.

The message repeatedly advanced by participants in their efforts to assist others was that this work must challenge the limitations of dominant rape discourse that can harm women and delay their progress toward living well after rape.

#### **4.2.2 Protecting Oneself (Revised)**

As an extension of the gains achieved in the hard work phase of the process, in Phase III participants often described altering the self protective strategies developed and used during Phase II. During the earlier phase, for example, participants needed to exit from harmful relationships and take some self-imposed time on their own. By the time they entered the growing in living well phase, many described a readiness to re-enter intimate relationships, although with an intentional manner that highlighted new priorities. A number of women also described making deliberate choices about whether to set aside their fear and anger, emotions that had been useful in developing their self protective strategies during Phase II, after adapting to new boundaries that created space for both freedom and safety in their daily living.

##### **4.2.2.1 Entering and Living in Intimate Relationships**

It is getting to that point of going through the isolation into the recognition that relationships are good, they're necessary, but then it's moving into that phase now of being aware, of being conscious of the relationships that you are in much more than I ever would have been years ago. (Serena)

After a significant period during the hard work phase in which women experimented with time apart from intimate relationships with men, time in which they

gained confidence in their abilities to be self sufficient, participants described a renewed interest in entering relationships. Distinguishing their actions from the past, however, was the very intentional way that women approached these new relationships, gauging their safety, and then in order to foster intimacy practicing a willingness to be vulnerable once the safety of a relationship had been established. Priorities for these relationships shifted in Phase III, emphasizing the requirements of mutual respect, trust, and a safe intimacy within the relationship with a man. As women chose to explore relationships with men, they approached them with a clear sense of their own needs and expectations. With self confidence and independence, participants also asserted that they would not remain in these relationships if their expectations were not met. Angelina, for example, emphasized her expectation that any current or future partner would need to be accepting of her:

I am not going to sacrifice myself to appease someone else and to please them because ultimately I need to please myself. I guess that's where I'm at now is, if you don't like me for me or if you can't accept who I am as an individual, then I guess you are going to have to move on because I am not going to change who I am. I have worked damn hard to get where I am at this point and I am happy and I like where I am at.

Lillian asserted that pro-feminist values would be a pre-requisite for any future intimate partners:

I don't think if this relationship ever ended that I would be able to go with someone who didn't have those beliefs and wasn't pro-feminist. I don't think I would put up with it, I guess. I would just say it is not worth it.

And Margaret described her intention and readiness to end a relationship with the man who she had begun dating after her period of self-imposed withdrawal from intimate

relationships if he had challenged her naming and claiming of her rape experience upon her disclosure:

[When I disclosed the rape,] if he had been in any way negative towards me, in any way he had tried to say that I was responsible or anything like that, like that would have ended our relationship. Because by that point I would certainly have said I wasn't looking for a relationship when we met so I'm okay moving along.

Not only were participants forthright in their expectations and standards as they approached a re-entry into relationships with men, they also clearly and spontaneously articulated new priorities and described what they valued most in these relationships. Lyra, for example, described the importance of experiencing intimacy and gentleness while avoiding misuse of power:

I have been able to see that their gentility or their generosity or just the exact sort of opposite things that I think the rape displayed to me, I mean, this sounds too cliché, but that not all men are like that or not all people are like that, and that there is possibility for real joy there, real communication. That it can be about connecting, it doesn't need to be about physical overpowerment.

Maria highlighted the importance that she places on trust, open communication, and safety in her current relationship, as well as her willingness to assert these priorities to her partner:

If I get triggered, I feel a sense of control over [the feelings] and I can pull myself away and open that up with my partner and he is extremely understanding... .. I never ever thought I'd get to the point of being able to say to a partner, which I did with (past partner) who I was with after my marriage broke up, I was with him for six years. That's where I got really comfortable with my sense of self, my sexuality, and I was able to look at him and say, "I don't like it when you hold my arms down to my sides even though you are playing, and that's part of me and you need to accept that." To be able to do that and say those things without the fear of him walking away... .. That's as much about my own healing as it is about the sense of trust that has come out of that healing as it is about our relationship. But I don't believe I could have the relationship I have today had I not gone through the process that I have in the past.

Angelina also described making very different choices in Phase III regarding the attributes of the men she was choosing as partners. In Phase I, she had been drawn to “the tough, forceful, powerful guys.” In contrast, her most recent partner had displayed qualities that Angelina found necessary for the development of intimacy within a relationship. She noted, “He is very gentle and that is kind of what I look for now...he is very respectful of me.”

Having chosen to re-establish intimate relationships with men, participants described ongoing intentional work to develop and sustain intimate and trusting partnerships. They articulated this as collaborative work with their partners, highlighting the requirement of trust in their partner in order to progress in it. In essence, most women described intentional ongoing practice with their partners in both building and maintaining healthy intimate relationships. The following examples typify this intentional practice:

He is much more affectionate than I am. He doesn't pressure me, he understands, we have discussed it and that it is something that is taking me time. I think he has seen the changes because he made a comment not that long ago that “you're getting more comfortable.” And for me, I think that's what it is, is that it is reaching a comfort level... ..From a year ago to now it is something I have been working on and trying to work towards, not being so reserved and so holding back on my affection. (Angelina)

I feel like I'm in a relationship that is safe, and I feel listened to and respected, but I remember, like, even the first couple of times...I had anxiety and I really had panic attacks around having my partner spend the night with me, that was just too much. It was hard...but it was about talking and being open and trying to, the closeness was hard. Yah. That was a hard part to get through. And it's much better, you know, I'm feeling much better about all of that, about being open and close and holding all of this, but it doesn't go sometimes without challenges that, again healing, continually healing, you know, and recognizing and addressing that... ..I really had to open myself up...to both me and, I mean, it was me first because it was, like, what's going on here?... ..And then it was being open to my

partner and saying, “This has been my journey and it has been difficult,” because again, like, he felt rejected many times, and didn’t understand, and it created all kinds of problems that we needed to work together on. (Serena)

While Brianne did not need to leave the relationship that she had been in at the time of the rape, given her boyfriend’s support and care, they too needed to work together to re-establish elements of intimacy within their relationship. Brianne and her boyfriend (now her husband) had remained emotionally intimate in the weeks and months following the rape, but intentional work was required of the couple to rebuild their sexual relationship:

Luckily (my husband) is an excellent husband, and so we’ve been able to work through a lot of that. So at first just setting limits, and gradually too we did a lot of the easing into sexual stuff, like massage and that kind of stuff, and visualization helped too a lot. And I remember, I don’t know where we got it but we had a book about romantic visualizations, and (my husband) would read it to me or I’d read it to him, and kind of going through that as a couple.

A number of women highlighted the vulnerability required of them to foster and sustain intimacy in their relationships during this third phase. While risky and anxiety provoking, women articulated a changed view of their own vulnerability. While in earlier phases of the process, women had equated their vulnerability with risk of harm and therefore an attribute to be avoided, in Phase III women reclaimed the role of their own vulnerability in fostering intimate relationships. Participants, however, first assessed their safety with partners and only then began the work of expressing vulnerability to enhance these relationships. Women, therefore, reclaimed a place for personal vulnerability when paired with safety in their relationships, as expressed by Serena and Lyra:

Like I said, I went through a period of time when I really, I did not connect, I didn't want to be intimate with a male partner, and that has been a wonderful surprise, because I see, I experience that it's okay to be vulnerable with someone, and that's a wonderful part of growth, to be vulnerable and be safe all at the same time. And that has been a wonderful surprise. (Serena)

I associate vulnerability now with really nice things. Like sort of the tender vulnerability, the trusting thing that you have to get to in order to have a healthy relationship....I guess, it still in a sense can be weakness, it's still exposition of yourself, exposure, but it feels so much safer now. (Lyra)

Entering and developing relationships at this phase of the process involved participants' willingness to take intentional risks in being vulnerable. Their prior work to deepen self confidence and independence seemed to ready women for the work involved in considering and honouring their needs in relationships, carefully assessing their safety in new relationships, and then allowing vulnerability in order to attain healthy intimacy with partners.

#### **4.2.2.2 Choosing when to Lay Emotions Down**

For me, living well, the definition of that after that type of experience, is being able to live first and foremost without extreme fear, without that everyday fear being there, and being able to live and to actually, if not totally there, but heading towards a space where you actually love yourself and accept and have integrated what's happened to you as being part of your path versus feeling like a victim still. (Maria)

While during Phase II women attended to and used their strong emotions in response to being raped to prompt and guide various self protection strategies, by Phase III they began to consider whether and when to set aside these feelings. In this decision making process, participants chose to lay these emotions down if they were deemed no longer necessary to prompt the development or maintenance of required protection strategies and potentially problematic to continued progress in living well. During Phase

II, women experimented with various self protective strategies, often initially highlighting safety as their central need. During their work of the second phase, however, women also recognized their need for autonomy and freedom in their daily living and so had begun to take up self protective strategies that enhanced their personal security while also considering their needs for basic freedoms. By the third phase, women needed to re-assess the personal boundaries they had developed in Phase II to incorporate their needs of both safety and personal freedom. If women felt they had struck the right balance between these two sets of needs, then participants for the most part described a readiness to lay down their fear and anger. This conscious act to set aside their intense feelings was described by women as freeing them to grow more fully in living well.

As women entered into the “growing in living well” phase of the process, several noted that they re-assessed the boundaries that had previously met their needs for self protection. Balance was sought in the boundaries they had set, attending to needs for both security and freedom. Maria offered one example:

So being in a new relationship as of eight months ago, the first six months were difficult...it allowed me to see myself and my fears connected to all of the pain. Although a lot of healing had been done, what took place is I was working with residual pain...fear I didn't want to let go of because it was those fears that kept me safe from these things ever happening again. So what it was doing was pushing somebody that I was starting to love a great deal away and when I saw that was potentially happening, when he felt too much pressure from my fears, work was done again.

Maria came to understand that while fear had helped her be cautious about relationships during the hard work phase of the process, in her most recent relationship the fear was interfering with achieving the level of mutual caring and intimacy that she desired with this man.

Brianne too found that holding onto her fear and anger for years had begun to impede her progress in living well. She described the discomfort of these ongoing feelings of both fear and anger:

To be able to live without daily fear. I was fearful for a long time... ..I processed a lot in counselling, but I had a lot of, like, if I'd see a girl walking at night I'd have a lot of anger, like, doesn't she know? How can she be walking alone at night?

Marise also sought balance, and in re-assessing her boundaries realized that her fear had led her to strongly attend to her safety needs during Phase II while her needs for autonomy and freedom had been secondary. Over the years, Marise had come to experience these boundaries as a form of imprisonment:

I couldn't see myself being in prison like I was at the beginning, and that's probably how I realized that I've got to change something because I didn't want to be in that prison (cries)... ..And I think that the reason that I am emotional about this is because I was in prison and he wasn't.

Serena offered an analogy to articulate the tension that she experienced as she worked to achieve this balance between safety and freedom needs:

I think after you have been raped it is like standing in the middle of a teeter-totter and safety becomes huge. But then there is this other adventurous side of you and you are constantly trying to keep that in balance. Okay, can I do that and still be safe? You are trying to find that balance.

If women had not yet struck the right balance in meeting their needs for both safety and personal freedom, during the third phase participants adjusted and practiced living with new boundaries that better achieved this balance. With comfortable boundaries that balanced both sets of needs, women often concluded that maintaining their fear or anger was unnecessary and in some respects impeded their progress in living well. And thus, women maintained these boundaries, but discontinued their intense

feelings, as exemplified in the following descriptions. Brianne regularly walked on her own without fear:

Now, I can walk. ...I keep myself quite safe and I definitely live with different boundaries than I did before. I mean, I certainly don't walk after 9 o'clock at night by myself...I always kind of have a safety plan in mind. I still do that, but it's just sort of become something that I do, it's not something that I'm consciously thinking about all the time.

Isabelle stayed in her house by herself overnight, and could enjoy the solitude:

My husband is going away this weekend. I'm looking forward to it because I am thinking, I am going to have the house to myself, I am going to wear pj's around... ...I am just going to look forward to the weekend by myself. So that's what I mean by living well.

With the setting aside of these feelings, several women experienced freeing results as the process no longer took up as much emotional energy in their lives. This lightening of the load is captured in the following:

You take all the precautions that you can, but with time, like I said, you've got to take chances...It's a change that I had to bring. It was almost a gift to myself (laughs). Or giving myself freedom. (Marise)

More recently, subsequent to living well, I would say that I have been really surprised at, I guess, about...not being angry anymore, not needing vindication, not really seeing it any longer as victimization. I mean, it is, and I don't want to seem like I don't think it is, but not feeling in any way like a victim. (Lyra)

While describing the positive impact of laying down their fear and anger, several women noted strategies that they had used to allay these feelings. Two women, for example, described fully acknowledging their feelings in order to ready themselves to release them, Serena in the form of unsent letters and Maria by welcoming the fear as she allowed vulnerability in an intimate relationship before letting the fear go:

I remember sitting on the beach writing letters to both of the [assailants] and I did that several times and then I could really let that anger go. (Serena)

I feel a depth not only about how much I love him but I allow myself to feel how he loves me. Again, [I was] never able to do that before to this caliber at all...  
...I'm facing into the fear and I'm going to experience it happening or not, and I'm going to grow and then I am going to dissipate the fear and I am not going to have to live running from it. (Maria)

Isabelle noted strategies, such as self talk and comforting activities, that she has used successfully to release her fear of being alone at night in her home:

Every once in a while he was travelling again and then I might get a little nervous about being alone at night...but now I am kind of like, okay, yeah I was nervous before and then I get over it. Like, there is no kind of obsessing over it. It's just kind of, well, I know I'll be okay, and I know I am probably nervous because it has been a while or whatever. So I am just going to jump ahead to what I need to do to make myself feel better. Like little things that tell me that I have come a long way.

Maria used a tangible boundary symbol in the form of a belly chain that wrapped around her torso under her clothes. She wore this always, to remind herself of her right to protect herself, and this in turn eased her fear:

Putting my belly chain on, this is telling me I've got the right to say no and I really exercise my right to say no... ...I don't deserve to be raped. I am not questioning myself, that fear is not there. Because the fear is not there, I am totally comfortable in who I am.

Two women highlighted one other specific strategy. While not an aspect of the process for most participants, Maria and Angelina described the act of forgiving their assailants as an important means of "letting go" of feelings that had become limiting to their progress. Maria explained that forgiveness made possible her own freedom from her anger and fear, which she experienced as empowering to move on from the rape:

I feel forgiving the person is as freeing for me because it allows me to let go of my anger and my sense of victim. It allows me to rise above feeling like a victim... ...I feel that when I forgive somebody in any context, even in this one, it

has allowed me to continue my life and not focus on it and do what I need...  
...Forgiving gives me a sense of letting go.

Angelina also experienced forgiveness as a liberating and empowering act that involved setting aside her anger:

The biggest thing for me was I forgave him. I knew that in order to move on with my life I had to do that. I genuinely do forgive him. Like, that is the interesting part, I don't hold anything against him... ... I truly believe for everyone, if you cannot forgive someone for something, you carry that hatred and the anger around with you and that really can control your life... ...I am not angry with him. I have no feelings and that, to me, is forgiveness... ...I think with forgiveness comes understanding that I control me.

For both Maria and Angelina, forgiveness had more to do with their own needs rather than those of the assailant. For both women, forgiveness was described as a central means to diminish the power of the rape in their lives and, in effect, to send it to the margins of their current experience so that their energies could be directed elsewhere. Participants, therefore, noted a broad range of strategies that assisted them in laying down their anger and fear once these emotions were deemed unnecessary for their self protection and limiting to their continued progress.

In contrast to the women who chose to allay their fears or anger, two participants during this phase of the process chose not to let go of the anger they felt in relation to their rapes. Their choices, however, were intentional as both women saw continued value in sustaining the emotion as they protected themselves and grew in living well. Lillian, for example, noted anger's continued influence that spurred her social change efforts. Serena, in comparison, described a choice to neither fully sustain nor lay down her anger. She explained that while she had experienced much anger in the first years following the

rape, which had motivated her to take control of the situation and her progress, in Phase III she drew upon the ability to regularly set aside or pick up anger:

I think I've learned that anger can come and go as easily as joy, and I acknowledge it more now after being through this process... ..I think maybe that's a force in a lot of women's lives that they don't really recognize or don't, I think we just minimize anger so much... ..I think it is a really important part of the process. For me it was. (*To experience the anger?*) ...Yes, experience, validate it, not judge it. ... ..I can still feel anger about that but it doesn't have the impact or the force that it had years ago.

Serena's words suggest that her progress had prepared her to be able to both utilize and set aside her anger based on her specific need at a given time, reflecting flexibility in her strategies for living well. Still, Serena acknowledged the value in allaying anger at times and not sustaining the intense anger experienced earlier in the process.

Self protection during this third phase encompassed women's intentional navigation of intimate relationships, and decision making regarding their ongoing uses of both fear and anger after incorporating self-imposed boundaries in their daily living that support women's needs for both security and individual freedom. These elements were often intertwined in women's stories of growing in living well. As one vivid example, Serena told a long story that culminated in loosening her social boundaries, allowing herself to rely on and be vulnerable with others, and for the first time since the rape intentionally laying down her anger, sorrow and pain:

I remember one day I woke up and it was a week before one of my [cancer] treatments and it was raining. And there were so many windows where I lived and I was watching the rain and I was so overwhelmed with feeling sad. And it was one of the first times I remember I went to the phone and I called one of my girlfriends...I said, "Look, I need to go to the beach." She was like, "You always go to the beach." And I said, "But you know what? I need you to come with me." And she was like, she didn't know what to do because she said, "You never ask me for anything, and on the outside," she said, "we all saw you going through

all of this and no one knew what to do because you always seem like this pillar.”... ..I said, “I need you to come with me.” So she came, and she definitely is not someone who is really open about stuff but I said, “I don’t, I don’t even want you to say anything. I just don’t want to be by myself at the beach today.” And we walked in the rain and it was powerful for me that I pushed myself to do that. ...That was right after the hurricane had happened, and in Nova Scotia when I was living there the hurricane came through and it was so powerful and I remember the night of the hurricane, it was the night before this [walk on the beach] and I remember waking up and feeling all the force of that, like the winds, I will never ever forget what that sounded like. And I remember laying in bed, and it felt like anger all around me, and I became almost swept into this, and I really was so mindful of my own anger and everything that was bottled up. It was just a powerful moment. And anyway, when I asked her to go to the beach the next day, we were walking along the beach and I saw this bottle laying there, a brown bottle, and I picked it up and I said, “My God, how did that ever survive that storm?” And I chucked the thing back down and I went home. ...I woke up in the middle of the night because I dreamed about it...that was powerful. There’s something about that. And I went back to look for this bottle, and it was gone. ...I still think back to that whole experience because it did, it changed a lot for me. Because I remember going back to the beach and being so upset that I couldn’t find this thing, and then the fisherman sitting there saying, “Are you Serena? And are you looking for your bottle?” And I said, “I don’t even know you.” And I didn’t, I’d never seen this man before. I said, “What do you know about my bottle?” And he said that I had told one of my male friends, and he recruited a whole bunch of people that night to go out and look for this bottle. And that hit me, about how somebody would be so willing to do something like that. And that took me to a whole new place of trusting this male friend of mine, and realizing the value that he had in me and in our friendship...I still to this day am grateful for that experience. ...I called him and I said, “I’d really like to have that bottle.” He said, “Of course, I got it for you. I’m just going to let the sand out.” I said, “Dear God, don’t let the sand out. That’s such an important part of this.” And even now, the bottle still sits in the light, and I empty the bottle. I empty some of the sand out of it all the time and I’m really realizing how much more I let go of the painful parts of life, and the more that you let the light in.

Later in her interview, Serena referred back to and offered an epilogue to this story of self protection in living well:

The sand in the bottle, and the miraculous thing that it survived the hurricane intact. It sits for all the world to admire on my table wherever I go. Yah. Jacob, one of my kids, asked me, “Are we always going to bring that bottle everywhere

we go?" I says, "That bottle will probably be buried with me." [laughs] "Yes, it's coming with us."

#### **4.2.3 Sustaining Oneself (Revised)**

Women's efforts to sustain themselves through the third phase of the process took significantly less energy than required in earlier phases. They drew upon supportive allies less frequently and some who had drawn upon spirituality for sustenance during the hard work phase now gave less attention to this aspect of their lives. Women described requiring fewer strategies to sustain themselves as the intensity of the work diminished, the process shifted to a less central place in their lives, and momentum increased. Having said this, women did note two broad strategies that supported them through the growing in living well phase. These involved both coming to honour themselves and their choices in the process, as well as embracing positive aspects of their current lives.

##### **4.2.3.1 Honouring Oneself and One's Choices**

All of the participants described complex understandings of themselves and the choices they had made through the process, as well as positive assessments of themselves at this time in their lives. In her final statement of her first interview, for example, Margaret succinctly honoured her work and achievements in the process toward living well. She reflected, "I'd never articulated the process in any way...and I guess it has just affirmed that I am where I want to be. That's good."

While making it clear that they understood the rape itself to be negative, women spoke of the process they engaged in after the rape as an experience to honour. Angelina noted, for example, "It's just been a good journey," and Maria acknowledged the value of the post-rape process in her life, saying, "As painful as it is to go through, I can

remember some very clear memories of, ‘This feels good, this is meant to be, I was meant to walk this path.’” Serena too stated, “I can feel joy in how much liberation I feel in my life through this experience.”

All ten participants spontaneously made reference to honouring themselves even more frequently during the third phase of the process. These comments contrasted to their earlier understandings of themselves during the first phase of the process. Their comments in the third phase had progressed significantly from a time when deep shame, self blame and confusion had been central to their self identities. The following represent participants’ comments in Phase III:

If you were to compare before and now, I’m in a space now that I’m happier with myself, physically, emotionally, in all those ways I’m happier and I like myself but that comes with working on all areas of your life. I have actually made that effort to work on everything to be a better person. Even though I am not perfect yet, I am still working on that one. Maybe someday, you think? (Laughter)  
(Isabelle)

Before the rape, I didn’t fully accept myself. I didn’t have the confidence I do now. It’s back to acceptance... ..I have a better sense of how to deal with problems because of where I am now...If I said that rape was one of the hardest things in my life, what else could come that would be so bad? I think I would be equipped to deal with other problems better. (Marise)

Such honouring comments toward themselves in the process tended to emphasize the active roles they had undertaken. Lyn, for example, “put it behind” her, Isabelle “worked on all areas”, and Marise could “deal with other problems”. They honoured their active role in the progress achieved.

One element of self identification in the process, as described by three participants, has been finding a delicate balance of not being fully defined by the experience while avoiding denial of its impact on their personal development:

For me it has been coming to grips with the experience in a way that allows me to define it in my own terms. ...Recognize that it didn't make me who I was but has in the same way contributed to who I am. ...It isn't the ultimate definition of my life but it is a part of who I am and seeing there are some good things about that part of me. (Lyra)

I found that that's been interesting too is just trying to not hang onto [the rape] but realize that it is part of you. Your experience of anything is part of you. (Serena)

It has become a part of who you are just like, I don't know, like you are a student, you're a feminist, you're whatever, it has become a part of who you are. You kind of brought it in and it's kind of joined the rest of you, it's taken its place amongst everything... ...It doesn't dominate your life the way it did in the beginning. So living well is being able to live your life, I guess, not specifically with sexual assault, living your life knowing that you've gone in, you've processed it, you've moved on. ... ...You're directing life, the rape is not directing you. (Isabelle)

In these comments women highlight their desire to acknowledge and affirm the strength and growth they achieved through this challenging process, while not basing their self identity solely in this experience.

While women affirmed their active role in the progress achieved through the process, participants highlighted that a perception of navigating the process 'perfectly' was not required to honour themselves and their choices. Most women acknowledged challenges regarding choices they had made, but this was not viewed as incompatible with self affirmations:

That's the way I chose, so it is okay... ...You'll never know what could have been the best way. But that is the path I chose and I accept that and I'm fine. (Marise)

This is strange but I almost think I live well better now (laughs), if that makes sense. I think it was, like I said, about a pivotal point in my life that happened, shook my foundations, made me question, brought so much to the surface, and almost forced me to really look at a lot of things in my life. And I can't say that my growth has always been in the most positive directions, but again it's growth. (Serena)

For a long time I felt really bad that this has happened to me and that I let it happen to me and now I think my understanding of it is, it is normal, that it happens to a lot of people and it is the ability to move on and deal with it, those are the things that are really the source of strength... ..It is almost like proven, proven power, proven strengths. Those things, I didn't know that I had, those things in me. I did not know I had a weakness and I did not know I had strength to overcome weakness. (Lyra)

As women honoured themselves and their albeit imperfect choices, a commitment to having "no regrets" was meaningful to several participants. They emphasized coming to not regret their actions and choices in the process as a crucial aspect of honouring their achievements and current circumstances. The following explanations highlight this commitment:

I wouldn't wait so long to tell. No, no, I am quite satisfied with the ways things have unraveled. I mean, I could say I wish I had more self-awareness so that this relationship, that relationship wouldn't have fallen apart but there is nothing even there that I would have done differently. I feel I did everything I could in relation to the healing. (Maria)

I've really just gotten through it the best way I know I could. Yah, so I'd hate to look back at it and tell myself, "Oh, I could have done this and I could have done that." It wouldn't help me... ..I remember very clearly saying that I would not change it, that the way it taught me to live and the bonds it made with my family, and sort of the higher learning I got from that shaped me a lot. It made me realize my potential and who I am... ..I think in many ways it taught me to get much more in touch with who I am. (Brianne)

A big part of the process for me is coming to terms with really no regrets. Trying really hard not to say, "You shouldn't have done this," or, "This would have been better." ...Yes, I made mistakes but they are all part of...the road. They have all gotten me to where I am and to say that I would have done something differently is to say that I don't like where I am now because I would have ended up somewhere different even if it was only marginally different." (Lyra)

These affirming understandings of themselves, with their refusal to regret their actions and choices, was far removed from the self blame and shame women experienced in the

first phase of the process. This is another indicator of the significant changes that women have achieved in the process.

#### **4.2.3.2 Embracing What is Good in Current Life**

In the third phase of the process, participants also described sustaining themselves by acknowledging and appreciating their current lives. Further, rather than attending to unusual or monumental achievements, most often women's appreciation focused on the routine, daily elements of their lives:

I'd come to the conclusion that I was (very good in my job), I was pretty talented. I was content, I was happy, relatively happy. I would have considered that I had made a success of life. (Lyn)

I am happy with my life, I am happy with the direction it is taking. I have come to terms with everything that has happened in my past. I am working at making the changes that I need to make. I am not perfect, but who is?... ..Basically, my life is heading in an upward direction. ...That, to me I guess, is why I feel I am living well. (Angelina)

I have a wonderful family with two little girls... ..They have a really great dad who I adore and who adores me I think and we very intentionally chose (this city) as our home... .. It is a great city to raise a family, we love it...we've got a roof over our head on a great street. We have enough food on the table, we've got good friends... ..We've got a really good support system around us. We've got good families who care about us and are good to us and we enjoy... ..We've got jobs that we enjoy. It's a good life. (Margaret)

All women's comments reflected contentment in this phase of the process, which they related to the general and day-to-day elements of their lives.

As participants noted aspects of their current lives that they valued, four women also addressed a shift in life priorities that had come about through their work toward living well, and each of these women described the results of the re-prioritizing as significant and positive. Brianne and Lyn, for example, gave family relationships a

higher priority as a result of having navigated the post-rape process. Lyn choosing, chose to nurture her relationship with her sister, while Brianne described an emphasis on appreciating and nurturing relationships with her parents and extended family. Lillian described a significant change in her beliefs and commitment to feminist values, which occurred as she progressed toward living well, with significant and lasting consequences:

Because I'm a feminist I have a very different life now than I think I would have if I wasn't one. Like, I was a feminist before I joined the NDP, and I joined the Party because I was a feminist. I would have never joined the Party otherwise, I don't think. When I voted, that wouldn't have been a factor. So I wouldn't have this job now, and I never would have met my partner, I wouldn't have the friends I have. So, when I look back at it, I think it had a huge impact... ..The sexual assault probably led to me doing what I do for a living and not just in my spare time but across the board. I mean it's my frame, that's how I see the world. It really does shape how I look at things, how I live my life.

While some participants embraced new priorities in their current lives, women also valued other aspects of their day-to-day experiences. A number of participants, through their comments, celebrated their ability to be light hearted and playful – to simply have fun. Brianne, for instance, articulated appreciation in being able to again enjoy engaging in social activities in her community:

I'm able to go out and have fun again and just be, you know.... I seriously go for months without even thinking about it.

Maria valued playfulness and laughter in her current intimate relationship:

Our relationship has continued in that manner to develop in ways that I look at myself and I laugh and I'm, like, I cannot believe I'm part of this. We laugh, we laugh so much, it is all about fun for us... ..I'm like, who'd have thought? Ten years ago I would never have thought, and it's all very fun and loving.

Serena embraced the invitation to lightheartedness in her relationship with her sons, and appreciated that she had reclaimed dance and fun in her life:

[My sons] force you to play, and not take life so seriously... ..And it's just experiencing life with them as they're growing and forming opinions and really embracing that they're healthy young boys that are growing up to be healthy men.

Within the last year it's really neat to see that that's coming back, the ability to be out dancing and having fun and those things.

The contentment, fun and lightheartedness in women's lives during the phase of growing in living well seems particularly striking in contrast to women's significant periods of emotional pain and hard work experienced during the first two phases. Women were aware of this contrast, and did not take their current contentment for granted. Rather, participants appreciated their enjoyment of life. Serena's comment emphasized this awareness and appreciation:

I don't take anything for granted anymore, I don't take people for granted, I don't take opportunities, I don't take the small things, like it's amazing how sunsets will bring me to tears now, you know, because I just am so aware and conscious of everything around me. To me, that's all about living well. It's about doing what you love and being with people... ..It's not about living perfectly, it is about every day, and it means acknowledging the fact that here you are, this is behind you, look what's ahead of you, and boy, look at today and embracing today.

Such acknowledgement of their contentment with their current lives was clear evidence of these women's achievements in their growth in living well.

From a time marked by self blame, shame and confusion participants had managed to overcome significant social obstacles that either denied women's rape experiences or blamed them for being raped. In spite of these social barriers, women had developed and practiced an array of strategies to name and claim their rapes as valid, to take control, and to protect themselves and sustain themselves as they successfully navigated a long and challenging process toward living well.

The following chapter will offer a summary of key interpretations of this detailed and complex process. Discussion will then focus on the influence of social context on women's post-rape process, with specific considerations focused on the powerful acts of naming and claiming. In particular, the acts of both deconstructing dominant rape scripts and reconstructing alternate scripts are explored by drawing upon a narrative lens. I reflect back on the research process and my role in it, drawing parallels to the deconstruction and reconstruction process described by women in their navigation toward living well. Following this, implications of these interpretations for allies (both individuals in women's natural support systems as well as professionals in practice) are examined. Finally, I attend to limitations of the current study, as well as potential future research directions based on these limitations and interpretations developed in this current investigation.

## **Chapter 5: Summary & Discussion**

This investigation was unique in its study of the process into growth and living well after rape, as experienced and understood by a group of adult women. The previous two chapters offered interpretations based on individual interviews with these women, detailing characteristics and phases of this process, as well as objectives sought within each phase.

The interpretations reflect a long, complex, and multi-dimensional process. To highlight “the forest” of this process rather the many “trees” within it, in this chapter I provide a summary of the interpretations detailed in the past two chapters. Two areas addressed in the interpretations are then explored. Specifically, I critically discuss the impact of the social context of rape on women’s naming and claiming of their experiences during the post-rape process toward living well. As well, strategies used to deconstruct inadequate dominant rape scripts and reconstruct them as more helpful scripts are considered as a central means to progress toward living well. In the latter part of the chapter, I address implications for both informal and professional allies, and make comparisons between the process to living well and the process involved in completing this study, with regard to deconstruction and reconstruction of rape scripts and the roles of allies. Finally, limitations of the current research design and focus are addressed, and future directions for study are considered.

### **5.1 Summary of Interpretations**

Through significant time and effort, women used complex and varied strategies in order to navigate challenges and achieve success in living well after rape. Toward this

end, participants faced a long, gradual process involving three distinct phases, each having key objectives although women drew upon a variety of strategies to meet these goals. While progress tended to be slow, breakthroughs of more significant progress occurred that assisted women in their transition into subsequent phases. Women most often achieved these breakthroughs with the assistance of allies. Further, participants described their progress from one phase of the process to the next as secure and irreversible due to fundamental developments in themselves and their understanding of rape.

The central task of the first phase of the process is reflected in its title, “Surmounting barriers to name and claim the rape.” Key to this task was women coming to understand their respective experiences as rape for which they were not to blame. This task was significantly complicated by the social contexts at play, which for the most part neither validated their experiences as rape nor acknowledged them as blameless in its occurrence. Together, the identification of the experience and their assertion of being blameless were paramount in women allaying their confusion and shame in relation to the event and its aftermath. While all participants described some challenge in claiming their blameless role in their rape experience, the task of naming was especially challenging for participants whose rape experiences failed to fully reflect traditional conceptions of rape in our society. Dominant and narrow rape scripts were conveyed to participants most frequently through others’ responses to their disclosures. Men played particularly powerful roles in undermining women’s understandings of the validity of their rape experiences, although women and professionals also had a hand in invalidating practices.

Through acts of misnaming, minimizing, blaming, and re-victimizing, those in formal and informal roles stalled women's efforts to name and claim their rapes. Not only was progress delayed in response to the invalidating reactions of others at this time, women's resulting confusion and negative self identification left them vulnerable to actions and choices that could cause further harm.

As a first step toward validating their experience as rape, women used varied and often multiple strategies to deconstruct the dominant rape discourse. One strategy frequently cited by participants toward this end involved gaining information about rape and its effects. While feminist discourse offered some participants a helpful alternative to dominant rape scripts during this task, others reported that feminist frameworks and language such as 'victim,' 'survivor,' and 'healing' in relation to the post-rape process failed in part to adequately reflect their personal experiences. As a second deconstructive strategy, women considered specific and social contexts, ignored in the dominant script of rape, to assist them in understanding their choices and actions at the time of, and following, the rape. All participants described the positive influence of having allies to support them in their deconstruction of dominant rape discourse. Although frightening and risky to disclose to others given the harmful reactions most had received soon after being raped, when women did access allies their support in challenging dominant rape scripts was very helpful. Men were most often described as being influential as allies to women in their task of claiming the validity of their rapes. Individual women, in comparison, tended not to carry sufficient weight to unsettle the hold of dominant discourse and validate a participant's rape experience, but the combined power of

women's affirming messages when in groups did suffice. As a further distinction, participants described engaging in a more active and collaborative process to name and claim their rape with female allies than they did with male allies, regardless of whether these allies were in formal or informal roles. Finally, women forcefully articulated their lack of faith in the criminal justice system to act as a potential ally in their quest to validate their rape. Instead, the system was viewed as reflecting only the dominant rape script.

Once the successful completion of naming their rape experience and significant progress in their task of claiming their rape had been achieved, women entered into the second phase, in which they deliberately took up hard work in the process and expended significant energy. During this time, women experienced the negative effects of rape as quite central in their lives. Participants utilized strategies in their attempts to: 1) take charge of their progress; 2) protect themselves; and 3) sustain themselves through the intentional work of this phase. Seizing control reflected not only a reclaiming of themselves and their choices in the aftermath of rape, but also represented a declaration in response to the harmful reactions of others during the initial phase of the process. For those women who had found that dominant rape scripts and existing feminist frameworks did not adequately reflect their rape experiences, one aspect of taking control involved women strengthening and solidifying alternative rape scripts in order to transcend the negating impacts of dominant discourse. They did so by using complex descriptions and metaphors, and then exercised these new scripts by voicing them to others, which served to solidify their influence. The three central purposes of these new scripts were:

validation of a woman's rape experience; acknowledgement of her personal agency in the process toward living well; and affirmation of the integrity of her identity as a woman reacting to and overcoming hardship. More affirming and empowering self-representations were constructed within these scripts, preparing women to attend to self-protection and sustainment needs during this challenging work.

All participants described efforts to emotionally and/or physically protect themselves in the second phase, in at least one of two general ways. First, participants attempted various strategies in response to their intense emotional reactions to the rape experiences, particularly their fear and anger, until finding means to better meet the seemingly competing but compelling needs of both safety and freedom. Second, women left problematic relationships with men, most often following this move with a period of self-imposed isolation from intimate and/or sexual relationships with men. Participants described the development of a deepening sense of personal independence and autonomy through this self-protective process.

Women also highlighted their need to sustain themselves during this second phase that required significant investments of thought and emotional energy. Most women noted the value of others, in both informal and formal roles, to support them in their work. Other women stood out as active supporters to participants during their hard work phase, and support through group experiences were most frequently cited as sustaining presences. Except in the cases of two participants, women's parents did not play sustaining roles for them due to two key concerns. Women either believed that their parents would not be effectively supportive, or they believed that their parents would be

very concerned if they learned about the rape. In this latter instance, women tended to protect their parents from the pain of their disclosure rather than gain support for themselves. As a second means of supporting themselves, several participants drew upon their spiritual beliefs and traditions for comfort. However, most often this occurred only after women deconstructed the dominant discourse within their faith traditions regarding violence against women. Deconstructive practices led to women reconstructing a more personalized spirituality that they practiced either within or outside of an organized faith community, and they found comfort in this practice.

Upon entering the third phase of the process, "Growing in Living Well", women described a significant shift from a time that required much thought and energy to a time in which focus on the rape and its effects was moved progressively to the margins and involved significantly less pain. They described "living well" not as an outcome at the completion of this post-rape process but rather as an experience that deepened with practice through the third phase of this ongoing experience. In all but one instance, women described the process as never fully concluded, but they accepted its ongoing nature because its continuation did not preclude their ability to live well. In this third phase, women continued their work in the areas of being in charge, and protecting and sustaining themselves. However, they adapted and furthered their earlier approaches, basing their strategies on progress achieved during the hard work phase.

Thus, while continuing to be in charge, women modified their strategies to not only achieve a deepening sense of inner strength and confidence in their life choices but also to take action to assist others. A distinguishing factor between Phases II and III

relates to participants requiring significantly less intentional practice of independent thought and action in the third phase, as their independence has become more fully integrated into their self-identification. This developed self-confidence and independence also buoyed women to make choices that supported them more broadly in living well. As well, complex understandings of personal strength, not in contrast to vulnerability, but rather alongside vulnerability, were developed in this “growing in living well” phase of the process.

As participants had already achieved significant progress in taking up and meeting personal change goals during the second phase, women’s energies frequently turned outward in the third phase to support other women who were facing sexual violence. Most often, the emphasis of their efforts involved working to remove social and structural barriers to women’s naming and claiming of their rapes, and offering the types of support that they would have valued at an earlier time in their own post-rape process.

As a continuation of their self protection efforts, during the third phase women often chose to re-enter and participate intentionally in intimate relationships, practicing living well with new boundaries in their lives. Women tended to approach these relationships with new priorities and expectations for their male partners and themselves, asserting their confidence to leave these relationships if their expectations were not met. Gauging their safety, practicing a willingness to be vulnerable in a safe context, and fostering intimacy were aspects of their intentional work in these intimate relationships.

Women's channeling of emotions for self-protection used during the second phase of the process was also adapted, as women made conscious choices about when to set aside their emotions related to having been raped. Participants re-assessed the personal boundaries they had developed in Phase II to incorporate their needs of both safety and personal freedom. If they believed that the right balance between these two sets of needs had been struck, then they tended to lay down their fear and anger, experiencing this as an act that freed them to grow more fully in living well. If during women's re-assessment they ascertained that they had not yet adequately met their needs for both security and freedom, participants made further adjustments and practiced living with new boundaries that better achieved this balance. Two participants saw continued value and chose to sustain their anger as they protected themselves and grew in living well.

Finally, women frequently replaced their means to sustain and comfort themselves in the process. Women characterized Phase III as less time- and energy-consuming, and thus their need for sustaining strategies was less acute. However, two key sustaining strategies were noted during this phase of the process. First, women described honouring themselves and their choices through the process, often highlighting an attitude of "no regret." What women highlight in these comments is their desire to acknowledge and affirm the strength and growth they achieved through this challenging process, while not restricting their self identity based solely in this experience. While women affirmed their active role in the progress they had achieved through the process, participants highlighted that a perception of navigating the process 'perfectly' was not required in order to honour themselves and their choices. And second, participants

expressed an embracing of their present circumstances, with an emphasis on paying attention to what was good in their current lives. As participants noted aspects of their current lives that they valued, four women also addressed a shift in life priorities that had come about through their work toward living well, and each of these women described the results of the re-prioritizing as significant and positive. Several women also celebrated an ability to be light hearted and playful – to simply have fun. Such acknowledgement of their contentment with their current lives was a strong reflection of women’s achievements in their growth in living well.

## **5.2 Naming and Claiming: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Rape Scripts**

The purpose of this research was to further the shared quest of authors of post-traumatic growth literature to understand individuals’ growth in the aftermath of trauma experiences. Specifically, in response to some key limitations in this body of literature, I wished to better understand the *process* involved in achieving wellness after trauma (rather than focusing only on positive *outcomes*); I wanted to study the meaning attributed to this process and outcome as understood first and foremost by those who had experienced it; and I wished to better understand the impact of context on individuals’ process toward living well after trauma.

While prior frameworks of post-traumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; & Schaefer & Moos, 1992, as discussed in Chapter One) have suggested that individuals’ experience can be generalized across types of trauma and environments, the findings of this study challenge this assumption, instead highlighting that such a process cannot be de-contextualized. Women’s post-rape experiences and their processes required in order

to progress into living well, as described in the current study, were highly contingent upon women's personal, social and political contexts. The first phase of the process in particular, as women worked to overcome barriers to name and claim the legitimacy of their experiences, was significantly influenced by a patriarchal social context, reflected in dominant societal rape scripts. Women, therefore, were faced with both initial harm, through the rape itself, and secondary experiences of victimization via the social processes at play, which negatively influence post-traumatic experiences (Davis & Breslau, 1994; Ullman, 1996). Frameworks that generalize the process toward achieving positive outcomes following varied types of highly stressful experiences are therefore highly problematic, since the social and political contexts in which numerous forms of traumatic events occur can significantly influence the process in a way that may be quite different from that of another form of highly stressful experience. Findings of this study call into question any imposition of de-contextualized understandings of trauma that simply individualize the experience, and any assumptions of a universalized post-traumatic growth experience. Constructing trauma as merely an individual phenomenon is clearly inadequate. As noted by numerous authors and highlighted in Chapter 1 of this document, trauma theory, whether focusing on negative effects or positive outcomes, cannot be furthered if potential social and political roots of a problem, forms of oppression, and experiences of communities are ignored (Brown, 1995; Burstow, 2003; Davis, 1999; Wasco, 2001; Wood & Roche, 2001). Given participants' emphasis on the impact of context upon their post-rape progress, particularly in their naming and claiming of the event, a more detailed exploration is warranted.

For some time, at least as far back as the early 1980's, Western society has been accused of becoming a secondary offender of women through unsupportive social environments and practices during the aftermath of rape (Madigan & Gamble, 1989; Russell, 1982; Williams, 1984). This phenomenon was coined 'secondary victimization' in Williams' landmark paper (1984) and has influenced theorists' understanding of the impact of the generally victim-blaming responses of a 'rape-supportive culture' on women's post-rape experiences (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Rozee & Koss, 2001) since that time. While we might assume, or at least hope, that significant social progress has occurred over the past 25 years, the findings of the Amnesty International Sexual Assault Survey (2005) completed in the United Kingdom and summarized below by Anderson and Doherty are indeed stark:

Of the 1095 adults interviewed, 22% of the respondents thought that the woman is at least partially or totally responsible for the rape if she were alone in a deserted spot at the time of the attack. The same number of respondents thought that she is partially or totally responsible if she has had many sexual partners. Thirty percent of respondents thought that the woman is partially or totally responsible if she was drunk at the time of the rape, 37% thought the same if she failed to say 'no' clearly enough and 26% thought that she is partially or totally responsible if she was wearing revealing clothing at the time of the rape (p. 3, 2008).

In order to understand such disturbing attitudes and beliefs, feminist theorists have suggested that we must not only consider the social production of rape but also the social production of normative sex (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Brownmiller, 1975; Gavey, 2005; Griffin, 1971; Jackson, 1995; Ussher, 1997). Society and its established structures, including law and science, have for years framed particular sex acts as normal, legal, and natural. What has dominated this social production of healthy sex has been a particular form of heterosexual intercourse. Early sexologists, as noted by Jane Ussher, "positioned

sex primarily as an instinct for reproduction, with heterosexual intercourse, the man in control, and the woman acquiescent, being seen as a biologically driven act” (1997, p.246). A woman’s modesty was perceived as feigned resistance to the attentions of men as she ascertained and selected the fittest male for procreation. This process of women’s resistance was raised to a biological act necessary to further the hardiness of the species.

These early explanations have continued to have a significant impact on current dominant social scripts regarding healthy sexuality. Man is to be sexually active and woman to be sexually responsive, and her feigned resistance is viewed as one anticipated element of this interaction. This “dominance-submission dynamic leaves little room for notions of women’s active desire, pleasure or consent and little or no imperative for men to check that women are actively consenting to sex” (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p.6). In such a script, “coercion is positioned as part of the ‘art’ of seduction, merely an attempt to subvert the woman’s initial resistance, the feigned ‘no’ which is part of the feminine script” (Ussher, 1997, p.298). Referring back to the recent Amnesty International survey results summarized above, we are witness to the ongoing influence of these dominant scripts regarding ‘normal’ sex. The clear expectation for men to initiate and be sexually active is reflected in respondents assuming women’s responsibility for sex occurring when she is in a deserted place, when she is intoxicated, or when she wears revealing clothing. A woman’s sexual history with other partners is viewed as proof of her sexual responsiveness and therefore her more recent resistance is assumed to be one element of foreplay in a healthy sexual encounter. Failing to resist

strongly enough is also deemed adequate reason to blame the woman for her rape. But what is 'adequate' resistance given dominant scripts that normalize women's resistance as a natural element of healthy sex?

In this context, normative understandings of heterosexuality offer socially acceptable justifications, termed 'rape myths' by feminist scholars (coined by Burt, 1980), to challenge rape claims. "Behaviour categorized as 'rape' by a rape victim may thus be rendered 'acceptable' by re-defining it as within the boundaries of normative heterosexual gender relations and behaviour" (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p.21), and rape claims are thus much too easily reconceived as 'just sex' (Gavey, 2005). An extensive body of research that has studied public attitudes toward rape, including attributions of responsibility for rape, has noted significant endorsement of rape myths, and although examples of more recent research have found smaller numbers of respondents endorsing rape myths or expressing stigmatizing comments in reaction to disclosures (e.g., Hinck & Thomas, 1999; Littleton et al., 2006), other recent studies continue to find significant numbers of participants articulating attitudes to justify rape (e.g., Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004; Buddie & Miller, 2001; Johnson, Kuck, & Schander, 1997). As a result, the naturalization of men's aggressive pursuit of sex and women's passivity connoted in dominant sex scripts can "let rape slip by unnoticed as just part and parcel of normal sex" (Gavey, p. 214). Such negating reformulations are currently witnessed throughout Western society in court rooms, pornography, and other forms of pop culture on a regular basis (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Ehrlich, 2001; Gavey, 2005; Ussher, 1997).

Research in the past thirty years has found, however, exceptions to these societal scripts that minimize or condone rape claims by including them within the parameters of natural sex scripts. However, only narrow definitions of rape with regard to the perpetrators (e.g., “deviant”, working class), victims (e.g., “respectable,” white, not drinking, having limited or no sexual experience), and circumstances (e.g., a blatantly violent attack by a stranger, signs of struggle, immediate reporting of the incident) have been reliably included within dominant rape scripts (Bondurant, 2001; Estrich, 1987; Klemmack & Klemmack, 1976; LaFree, 1989; Littleton et al., 2006; Weis & Borges, 1973). Theorists argue that socio-cultural supports for rape have been integrated into societal structures at all levels, resulting in intrapersonal secondary victimization through self-blame as well as interpersonal secondary victimization through informal and institutional settings (Anderson & Doherty; Rozee & Koss, 2001; Wasco, 2003). Numerous studies have reported on the negative reactions of others to women’s disclosures of rape (Ahrens, 2006; Campbell et al., 1999; Draucker, 2001; Wasco, 2003; Xenos & Smith, 2001). Teenagers and young adults, for example, tend to hold unfavorable attitudes toward those who have been raped, believing that they contribute to their own assault and are responsible for its occurrence (Xenos & Smith, 2001). Not only are individuals in women’s informal social systems guilty of these perceptions. Professionals too are frequently reported to have reacted poorly to disclosures of rape. Women encounter harmful institutional (media, criminal justice, health care) and interpersonal (family and friends) responses to their experiences of sexual victimization (Ahrens; Campbell, 2005; Campbell et al.; Draucker; Ehrlich, 2001; Kitzinger & Frith,

1999; Wasco), and such responses from both groups can reinforce women's feelings of self-blame, exacerbate uncertainty regarding whether their experiences qualify as rape, and silence them from disclosing to others (Ahrens).

The interpretations offered by this body of literature regarding the acceptance and influence of sex and rape scripts are strongly supported by the findings of the current study, and aid our understanding of the significant post-rape distress experienced by women during the first phase of the process due not only to the rape itself but also to others' reactions. Understanding then how women have overcome these broadly accepted rape myths and related negating and/or blaming scripts in the aftermath of their rape is a natural extension of this focus. The deconstruction of narrow dominant rape scripts and reconstruction of more inclusive and affirming scripts was key to participants' process to overcome social barriers in order to name and claim the legitimacy of their rape experiences, and so we turn our attention to consideration of this process.

### **5.2.1 Naming that Challenges the Political Apparatus**

The organization of professional knowledge...is a monopolization of control within a dominant class. It ensures that bases of organization do not arise out of the discovery of personal troubles; it ensures that personal troubles become no more than public issues framed and contained within the public media, and that they do not become the bases of political organization uncontrolled by the institutional structures of state and relations of ruling. (Smith, 1987, p.217)

Dorothy Smith's words highlight that the act of naming, which is central to the production of knowledge in a society, is an element of the political apparatus. Within this apparatus, a ruling class produces ideologies that serve to order and legitimize its domination. The interests and objectives of this ruling class, however, depend upon "the social relations that organize and enforce the silences of those who do not participate in

the process... .The silence of those outside the apparatus is a silence in part materially organized by the preemption, indeed virtual monopoly, of communications media and the educational process as part of the ruling apparatus.” (Smith, p.57)

In the case of rape, many women’s rape experiences have been misnamed as “just sex”, and this labeling has been supported by informal social relations and enforced by those who actively participate in the ruling apparatus. Within such a context, it is understandable that women may well internalize the dominant scripts that misname rape as sex and emphasize victim culpability. Researchers over the past 25 years have repeatedly found that approximately half or more of women surveyed who report having experienced events that meet the legal definition of rape/sexual assault, do not label it as such (Bondurant, 2001; Gavey, 2005; Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 1987; McMullin & White, 2006; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993), and thus have been referred to as “unacknowledged rape victims”. There are disturbing consequences for such misnaming of their experience. Upon being raped women will frequently mislabel the event, blame themselves for its occurrence, and experience shame, particularly when their experiences do not conform to dominant rape myths (Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, & Halvorsen, 2003; Layman, Gidycz, & Lynn, 1996; Wasco, 2003; Wood & Rennie, 1994).

It is also unsurprising that within this context, upon women’s disclosure of a distressing event others fail to confirm the event as rape. Of significance, one must remember that “the naming of what happened is worked out and negotiated in interactions with other people. It is not constructed in a social vacuum” (Wood & Rennie, 1994, p.131), and more often than not women receive negating feedback from

others. Poorer functioning is consistently related to women having experienced negative social reactions to their disclosures (Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Ullman, 1996), and avoidance coping rather than approach coping is more likely to be employed (Littleton & Radecki Breitkopf, 2006). Due to the harm experienced by negative social reactions, women can remain silent, confused, and distressed for significant lengths of time (Gavey, 2005; McMullin & White, 2006; Warshaw, 1988; Wood & Rennie, 1994). Given the negating rape myths that are predominant in our society, even the assailant's denial of the incident as rape can compound women's confusion in naming the event (Bletzer & Koss, 2006; Wood & Rennie).

While most researchers have assumed that naming the experience of rape is helpful to women who have been assaulted, some have conducted research on the potential benefits of either labeling or not labeling rape experiences. Linda Wood and Heather Rennie (1994), for example, noted that if struggling to define one's experience as rape, "the woman cannot locate and define self and others, does not know whose judgments to accept, and does not know how to act. The experience is thus not only profoundly disruptive, it also seems to engender a 'paralysis' or 'numbness'...beyond what is expected" (p.135). Further, Botta and Pingree (1997) discovered that women who acknowledge their experiences as rape score more highly on psychosocial adjustment variables (1997), and McMullin and White's results suggest that labeling rape is related to a decrease in self-destructive behaviours (2006). Layman, Gidycz, and Lynn (1996), on the other hand, found that women who labeled their experiences as rape reported more post-traumatic distress. These results can be construed in various ways, as

naming may bring about increased stigma, or those who have been affected more by rape may be more likely to label it (McMullin & White, 2006). While naming the rape experience may involve both benefits and challenges for individual women, it can be argued strongly that naming rape experiences benefits society as a whole (Kahn et al., 2003). Based on varied findings regarding the value of naming the rape experience, it has been suggested that “qualitative research would be helpful in better understanding the processes involved in labeling a rape experience” (McMullin & White, p.104).

Interpretations in the current study attempt to do just that, and a focus on this process leads us into a discussion of women’s efforts to deconstruct and reconstruct rape scripts.

### **5.2.2 Deconstructing and Reconstructing Dominant Rape Scripts**

The political challenge is surely, at least partly, to chip away at those dominant discourses of gender and sexuality that disadvantage women, and simultaneously to work on the creative task of generating new oppositional and otherwise inventive discourses. It is these new discourses (such as feminism itself) that provide new cultural resources by which we can become shaped differently as subjects. ...We don’t need to believe in the existence of some pre-cultural authentic form of experience and subjectivity to see how agency and resistance can come into play and, perhaps more importantly, how a different range of choices can be legitimized within our particular cultural locations (Gavey, 2005, p.94).

As a form of resistance against oppressive discourse, women participating in the current study found or created a variety of means to both deconstruct negating dominant rape scripts and replace these with reconstructed scripts that acknowledged their personal rape experiences. In doing so, they challenged the ruling class’s control of the political apparatus (Smith, 1987). Participants of this study highlighted the value of gaining information and considering the contexts within which their rapes had occurred as deconstructive strategies, used in order to diminish the harmful influences of dominant

rape scripts. Botta and Pingree (1997) also found that in their study of women who had experienced rape by acquaintances, interpersonal communication to gain information about acquaintance rape significantly predicted women's acknowledgement of their experiences as rape.

By far the most prominent alternative discourse meant to socially legitimize rape has arisen through feminist writings. By the 1970's, "second-wave feminist scholars began to position sexual violence as central to the analysis of patriarchy" (Gavey, 2005, p.20). The discourse affirmed women's experiences of rape and acknowledged its significantly harmful impact in women's lives (see, for example, Brownmiller, 1975; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Griffin, 1971). Feminist analysis for the first time situated rape within a socio-political context, and "the feminist radical notion that 'the personal is political' was classically embodied by the phenomenon of rape" (Gavey, p.28) Language too was introduced to accompany this alternate and political discourse. The language of victimization "was proposed as a way of making sense of and opposing the moral injustice of women's oppression through violence and harassment; injustices that had for too long been routinely denied and minimized within what they referred to as the dominant ideology" (Gavey, p.170). Within this new discourse, rape was described as "a form of mass terrorism" (Griffin, 1971, p.35), and an act of extreme violence that always carries the threat of death (Brownmiller, 1975). Feminists continued to study and write about rape over the next three decades, contributing to the growth of an alternate discourse that contextualized, politicized, and avoided minimization of the experience of rape. And thus it is understandable that participants in the current study often noted the

influence of feminist analysis in their deconstruction of dominant rape scripts. Through women's studies courses, books they had chosen to read, and the sharing of experiences with other women who had also faced sexual violence, participants described powerful shifts in their understandings of their rape experiences. At the same time, several women participating in the study noted limitations of feminist frameworks in their efforts to deconstruct dominant rape scripts. They did not perceive, for example, that terms such as "victim," "healing" or "survivor" reflected their rape experiences, and one participant described that while finding feminist analysis helpful in affirming that what she had experienced was, in fact, rape, she perceived that feminist analysis regarding the highly traumatic effects of rape excluded her personal experience.

Participants' comments reflect an area of discussion and debate that has been occurring amongst feminist scholars. The representation of victimization was key during the emergence of the anti-rape movement, in response to the social and historical context of the time. "The question now," Gavey suggests, "is how it works thirty plus years in to this campaign, when the meanings of rape have changed" (p.175). With the social constructivist developments in academia that have challenged positivism, researchers' definitions of victimology cannot be accepted irrespective of women's identifications of their own experiences. While recognizing the value of a powerful framework from which to argue the moral wrongs of sexual violence, Gavey ponders, "How might we attempt to incorporate the heterogeneity of rape into our theories?" (Gavey, p.229)

A recent study confirmed the importance of this area of exploration. Stacy Young and Katheryn Maguire (2003) investigated the terms that women who have experienced

sexual assault use about themselves and their experiences, and found that most participants avoided using static labels altogether. Based in this finding, they argued that “the recovery process may be impeded by restricting language choices or by forcing labels on individuals that they are unwilling or unprepared to embrace” (p.40). Wood and Rennie (1994) also found that women who had experienced sexual violence troubled the use of the victimization framework, and tended to negotiate victim/non-victim identity by making a clear distinction between “having been victimized” and “being a victim.” This “accomplishes a shift in emphasis from the person to the event...and places temporal boundaries on the experience” (p.137). Thus, women are able to draw upon the victimization framework to acknowledge the injustice of the rape without accepting the disempowering, totalizing and long-term consequences of a victim identity.

It can be helpful to closely consider benefits and limitations of feminist discourse regarding the effects of rape and one’s personal identity following rape, in order to ascertain its potential value as a knowledge base to assist women in deconstructing dominant rap scripts. Is it that some women whose rape experiences do not fit traditionally understood rape circumstances do not believe that they deserve these terms? Has intoxication at the time of one’s rape for some women dulled the intensity of the rape memory and eased some of the negative effects? Do certain variables, such as not experiencing a rape as life threatening, cause some women to not believe that they have the right to claim terms such as “survivor” or “healing”? Or is the issue not about “having a right” to these terms, but rather that the terms simply do not reflect some women’s rape experiences? Given that both the circumstances and effects of women’s

rape experiences vary and the reality that some circumstances continue to be validated more than others, it is difficult to decipher fully the influence leading to the inadequacy of these terms for some women. What was made clear, however, based on women's descriptions was that while feminist analysis may offer women assistance in deconstructing dominant rape scripts by contextualizing the act of rape and offering information that rebuffs rape myths, its full use for this purpose has been problematized by several participants.

Upon achieving some success with deconstructing invalidating dominant rape scripts, participants in the current study described engaging in a reconstructive process to both develop and then exercise alternative rape scripts. For participants, these scripts were meant to achieve what dominant scripts had failed to do. Their purpose was three-fold: 1) to validate a woman's personal experience of rape; 2) to acknowledge her personal agency in the post-rape process; and 3) to affirm the integrity of a woman's identity.

I would suggest that the reconstructing of rape scripts is an act of power that was exercised by the women in this study. Drawing from the ideas put forward by Michael Foucault, meaning is constituted through language, and language is always located in discourse. Discourses set out not only the socially understood ways that we talk about an issue, but also establish appropriate actions in relation to the issue, and thus they are evident in both language and social practices. Foucault strongly associates language and discourse to power, and suggests that disciplinary power is achieved through normalization and self-surveillance of societal members to produce compliance (1979).

Applying these interpretations to women's reconstruction of rape by developing and exercising alternate scripts, their actions can be understood as women refusing to comply with social rules, instead reclaiming power by setting out their own understanding of rape and acting in their social world based on this new understanding.

One strategy to develop new rape scripts despite the inadequacy of available language and frameworks involved women creating complex descriptions regarding their experiences. Women described, for example, putting rape into perspective while not minimizing the effects of their experience; recognizing the benefits of their experience while not suggesting that rape is good; and noting their role in the rape while not blaming themselves for its occurrence. Researchers have not tended to give women credit for the complexity and value of this reconstructive strategy. Rather, their descriptions have been interpreted merely as cognitive distortions (see, for example, McMillen, 1999), or as "positive illusions" such as exaggerated perceptions of control (see, for example, Taylor & Armor, 1996). A return to such data may glean more nuanced descriptions that express complex realities and navigate simultaneous and seemingly oppositional ideas. Past studies involving nuanced perceptions and understandings have faced difficulties. Offering one case in point, Anderson and Doherty (2008) explore methodological and logistical failings in the rape-perception literature:

Researchers working in this field have employed a variety of dependent measures to evaluate observers' attributional reasoning about depicted rape incidents. Although causal attributions (following attribution theory – to internal or external loci) have been a frequently utilized measure, the same conceptual status is often afforded to the dependent measures of blame, fault and responsibility, and in practice these terms get used interchangeably. However, these measures are not conceptually identical... ..It seems likely that attributions of responsibility are

most clearly linked to issues of causality (though it may not imply intention) and that attributions of fault and blame function as moral evaluations. (pp.29-30)

Nuanced and complex understandings, particularly when language and dominant discourse are inadequate to reflect personal experience, can be missed completely in quantitative designs and easily misinterpreted during qualitative analyses. In contrast, Wood and Rennie (1994) employed discourse analyses to carefully explore the complex discursive strategies used by women to formulate their experience and to negotiate victim/non-victim identity. Participants in their study describe the development of complex descriptions that are seemingly paradoxical as well. This first example is similar to participants' complex description of their actions 'having played a role' while 'not being to blame for the rape' in the current study. The authors find that women's attributions of blame are not clear-cut, and in their descriptions, "neither blame nor control are uni-dimensional; women do not claim control over nor blame themselves for all of their actions during the rape" (p.137). My concern remains that given a dominant rape discourse that highlights women's blame for being raped, descriptions that involve terms such as playing a "role" or having some "responsibility", even when handled in a complex way that asserts women not being to blame, can be too easily misinterpreted by the listener as conforming to oppressive dominant rape scripts.

And yet, the women's complex descriptions involve discursive strategies that allow them to carefully navigate the pitfalls of the post-rape process in our socio-political context. For example, participants use the concept of victimization by distinguishing the event from the individual. Thus, the injustice of being victimized is acknowledged, but temporal boundaries are placed on the experience of victimization, and a victim identity

and its negative consequences (such as perception of helplessness) are avoided. Another discursive strategy used by participants and noted by the authors involves considering everyone as a victim, which seems to afford women the same benefits as the strategy of “putting rape in perspective” as described by participants in the current study. By recognizing many forms of victimization, women allow themselves to reject special status as a victim without fully abdicating victim status, and thus they can maintain a balance in their negotiated victim/non-victim identity. Further investigations into women’s strategies to develop and navigate alternate rape scripts with limiting language could yield useful insights to support the reconstructive process.

Another strategy that women participants of the current study used to reconstruct rape involved using metaphor to transcend limiting language and discourse. Individuals use metaphors in their conversation about their daily lives and experiences. In their influential text, *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) describe metaphor as primarily a conceptual construction that is central in the development of thought. They assist us in defining our everyday realities. Metaphors draw upon imaginative connections that are shared within a culture in order to understand and experience one ‘mental domain’ in terms of another. As Lakoff and Johnson highlight, this meaning-making influences not only our understanding of the everyday world but also our actions within it:

In all aspects of life...we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor (p.107).

According to Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphors involve two parts: that which is known (the source domain) and that which is unknown (the target domain). A conceptual metaphor is the product of a resemblance being made between the two domains.

Researchers who have studied the use of metaphors in maintaining gender power relations recognize metaphor's role in creating and sustaining dominant conceptual frameworks that guide sexual interactions. For example, "Weatherall and Walton (1999) found that the metaphors analysed in their sample reflected male dominance in sexual relations in the form of the 'active male, passive female' bias (e.g., 'he broke her in')" (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p.109). Another study found that male participants often used metaphor to objectify women (e.g., 'when she came along she was just about everything in the package that I could want'), and subjugate women (e.g., 'there's one boss and that's me and end of story') in order to condone violence (Adams et al., 1995, as cited in Anderson & Doherty). Anderson and Doherty further explore the metaphorical constructions used to give meaning to the incident of female rape, the victim, and the rapist. As one example, participants frequently used a 'scientific' metaphorical frame to describe the incident of female rape – they described 'the odds', 'probability', 'doubling your chance' of being raped in particular circumstances. In the following passage, the authors discuss the implications of this metaphorical construction:

In mobilizing the metaphorical vehicle of science to describe and discuss the target domain of female rape incidents, female rape is construed as mathematically predictable, and as knowable and describable in objective terms... ..The metaphorical vehicles of science and mathematics enable female rape to be constructed as a material 'hazard', an objectively describable event amenable to a 'scientific' analysis of the risk of occurrence. This construction of hazard/risk can function to emphasise the 'moral character of the risky individual' (Fox, 1999: 208) by adding weight to the suggestion that individuals have a responsibility to

engage in practices of risk assessment and risk reduction. Victimhood is understood as a consequence of the failure to take this responsibility seriously, which can lead to victim-blaming. (p.112-113)

Their interpretations highlight the role of metaphor “in constructing the meaning of social relationships, in constructing and maintaining power relations (Adams et al., 1995) and in the interactional development of identity and accountability” (p.119). These findings offer powerful examples of the way metaphor can be used to maintain rape myths and dominant rape scripts.

What is striking and new in the current investigation is women’s harnessing of this meaning-making tool for their own reconstructive purposes. They have drawn upon a device that has been used to maintain harmful conceptual frameworks of sex and rape, and have used it instead for their own transformative purposes: validation of their rape experiences; acknowledgement of personal agency in the post-rape process; and affirmation of their personal integrity.

As a final step in women’s descriptions of their reconstructive process, all participants who created new rape scripts also described the benefit of exercising these scripts by asserting them to others. It appears that the voicing and assertion of these new understandings served to solidify the meaning of these scripts in women’s lives. Michael White and David Epston’s work on the role of ‘audience’ and ‘re-membering’ in narrative practice as a means to thicken new, alternate stories is relevant and reflective of the women’s strategy of exercising new scripts (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). White (2004) emphasizes that the redevelopment and reinvigoration of one’s sense of self after trauma can be achieved by having others act as witnesses to one’s newly ‘re-

authored' conversations. The active participation of an audience creates a "powerful practice of acknowledgement" in therapeutic conversations (p.50). White also includes 'definitional ceremony' in his narrative practice, which "creates...a ceremony for the redefinition of people's identity" (p.53). It involves the re-remembering and re-telling of individuals' newly authored (or 'reconstructed') stories. White and other narrative practitioners have developed these activities in order to strengthen and exercise individuals' reconstructed understandings, and to significantly acknowledge 'counter-power' (p.58), in the same way that participants in the current study described the strengthening role of exercising their new understandings as a final step in their reconstruction of alternate rape scripts.

### **5.2.3 The Research Endeavor as Deconstructive and Reconstructive Process**

Three months ago on a day when I had been absorbed in my interpretations and writing regarding participants' deconstruction of dominant rape scripts and reconstruction of alternate scripts, I left my laptop and office at the end of the day to meet with my running partner, Michelle, and head for the trails of some nearby woods. I often find articulating preliminary interpretations with Michelle to be a useful exercise. Her questions, probing and reflections encourage me to further develop and refine my interpretations. This day was no different. During our run, as I shared with her about participants' strategies to develop and exercise new scripts, parallels to the research process suddenly became pronounced. We began to note ways that the research process in which I was immersed corresponded with elements of the post-rape process that participants described.

The research process itself has become a forum for the deconstruction of limiting scripts and the reconstruction of alternate, affirming scripts. It has created space for the creation and thickening of a shared alternate account of the post-rape experience. Three participants, when asked at the end of the first interview about their reasons for choosing to participate in the study, specified being drawn to participate when they first read the Invitation to Participate and became excited by the focus on moving to 'living well,' which they perceived as a "new way" of exploring the post-rape experience. Serena's explanation of her choice to participate, and her interest in being part of a shared endeavor to create an alternate, more helpful script of the post-rape process, highlights this point:

Every book that you pick up about rape there is no, like, it's heavy. I mean, the topic is heavy. The statistics are heavy. The lack of supports is all heavy. And there's no way out of it... ..we have to look at it, the political structure of it, and we have to look at it from the feminist approach but have we? Maybe we haven't found any way. That's what I like about what you are doing with this, because it is a way out of it. Not out, through it. Because I think it is important to understand conceptually what this is and what it is all about in society. How do we offer people, how do we support them through?

Rebecca Campbell and her colleagues (2004), exploring the experience of researching rape, describe the importance of creating a safe environment in which women who have been raped can tell their stories. They have also noted that when such space is offered, women tend to report a therapeutic effect of their participation in the research (despite this not being a purpose of the study). Repeatedly, I too found that participants spontaneously described to me the beneficial effects of participating in the current study. They described feeling heard and affirmed in the telling of their experiences, and expressed excitement and developing understanding as they heard or read about

interpretations evolving from the comparison and integration across participants' experiences. As I reflect on the meaning of this, I now conceptualize my role in part as 'audience', acknowledging women's experiences as they exercised their alternate scripts during their interviews.

And by remaining involved in the interpretations for this research (through second interviews, and reviewing and giving feedback in response to drafts of the interpretation chapters), participants also became 'audience' (or 'outsider witnesses') to each others' alternate stories, and acted as allies to each other in the thickening of their alternate scripts. While participants did not meet each other as part of this research design, several women noted after reading the final draft of the interpretations chapters that they felt they had a bond with the others and had come to know each other in important ways. More than one participant noted an interest in being able to meet once with the other participants to share their acknowledgment of each other.

Collaboratively, we have shared in the creation of an alternate script of the post-rape process that incorporates growing in living well. Importantly, this product of our research process does not only benefit the participants. Almost every participant, when asked during the initial interview about her reasons for choosing to participate, noted a keen interest in helping to create knowledge that may assist other women who will have to traverse the post-rape process at some time in the future. The participants had faced challenges in their own process, and hoped to ease the demanding experience for others. Sociologist Arthur Frank (1975) notes, "People tell stories not just to work out their own changing identities, but also to guide others who will follow them" (p.17). Through their

participation, women have shared their stories as a form of action to assist other women who face this process toward living well. Further, this research offers an addition to information that can be accessed to deconstruct dominant rape scripts. Collaboratively, we are building alternate scripts to challenge dominant, harmful discourse on rape.

### **5.3 Implications for Informal and Professional Allies**

In considering potential implications of this research for allies, I am focusing my reflections in three areas: making efforts to eradicate contextual barriers to living well; offering assistance in the naming and claiming process; and attending to tasks of living well. While the focus of this investigation did not involve any direct assessment of current services or approaches, women's stories certainly highlight challenges that they faced without assistance. These descriptions and themes offer us a place from which to reflect on potential assistance for women who are progressing toward living well after rape. And thus, consideration of relevant areas of literature to aid our understanding of potential implications is warranted.

#### **5.3.1 Making Efforts to Eradicate Contextual Barriers**

For me, more disturbing than any other aspects of participants' shared experiences were their numerous examples of secondary victimization within our rape-supportive culture. It is this context that creates the need for women to navigate the initial phase of the post-rape process, the phase during which women frequently described lingering far too long as they struggled to name and claim their rape. Without a rape-supportive culture, the first phase in this process would be an anomaly rather than the norm. We cannot, therefore, lose sight that the priority in our efforts must include strategies to

eradicate social and structural obstacles to women's progress toward living well after rape.

In order to minimize women's experiences of secondary victimization in the aftermath of rape, feminist writers and activists concur that education efforts whose purpose is to 'dismantle rape supportive culture' (Klaw et al., 2005) must not only continue but be broadened and intensified. Prevention efforts involving rape education have been occurring for more than two decades. Workshops for university and college students have become commonplace, particularly during orientation week or sexual assault awareness week, and are likely to include a section on rape myths to assist women in redefining and acknowledging rape (Botta & Pingree, 2005; Koss & Harvey, 1991). There is little data to suggest that these efforts have been successful in lowering rates of rape (Gavey, 2005), and some evaluations indicate that they are largely ineffective (Bachar & Koss, 2001). However, these rape education efforts have repeatedly yielded positive changes in women's rejection of rape myths and their redefinition of rape (Borden et al., 1988; Fonow et al., 1992; Harrison et al., 1991). Elena Klaw and her colleagues developed and studied an intensive semester-long rape prevention training college course whose focus was to train undergraduates to facilitate rape education workshops. In essence, their course prepared students to become effective allies. Not only did they find that participants' rape supportive attitudes decreased as a result of feminist rape education, they found that this transition involved gaining information and insight into the interpersonal and socio-cultural factors that contribute to dominant scripts. Further, the supportive environment that was established in the class over the

semester played an important role in facilitating ideological change and students' subsequent commitment to activism. The authors suggest that both an ongoing supportive environment as well as opportunities for interaction and participation in activist events facilitate individuals becoming ready to act as effective allies.

To further these efforts in the prevention of secondary victimization, not only are recommendations being made for longer-term training and opportunities for activism (Klaw et al. 2005), others are calling for: greater education efforts with younger students (at elementary and high school levels) and their parents in order to change rape-myth acceptance before it becomes entrenched (Xenos & Smith, 2001); a focus on changing coercion-supporting sexual scripts (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004); and education and training specific to helping professionals in the medical, mental health, education, criminal justice and legal fields (Ehrlich, 2001; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Elena Klaw and her colleagues also note a continued need to better understand how to create effective rape education programming for men. A paucity of research is available in this area, and given the influence men had in either extending or assisting participants' efforts to name and claim their rape experiences in the current study, finding strategies to support men's development into effective allies is integral to our dismantling efforts.

Other researchers and activists are calling for even broader educational efforts, ones that will not only challenge dominant discourse regarding rape but also unsettle normative sex scripts (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Gavey, 2005; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Xenos & Smith, 2001). Gavey notes that "an important target for the deconstructive impulse...is sexuality itself." (p. 223). This may involve challenging heteronormativity,

transforming the nature of sexual relationships between men and women, promoting female agency, offering opportunities for girls and women to develop physical strengths and pleasures, and promoting women's desire as a prerequisite to sex and the expectation that forms of female sexuality will be as agentic as male forms of sexuality (Gavey). Sexuality education for boys also needs to "chip away at the cultural idealization of and infatuation with overly aggressive hegemonic masculinities, which teaches boys and men (as well as girls and women) that men have gender-based entitlements that women do not" (p.223).

In our efforts to eradicate contextual barriers to women's progress toward living well after rape, we must also maintain an open invitation to women who are journeying along the post-rape process. Participants of the current study emphasized the value of becoming involved in volunteer or work opportunities to assist others while in their third phase of the process, most working to remove social and structural barriers to women's naming and claiming of their rapes, and offering the types of support that they would have valued at an earlier time in their own post-rape process. Due to their interest in more broadly supporting the deconstruction of dominant rape scripts, women's participation in such efforts can be both an asset to this collective social change work as well as personally supportive of their growth work.

Systemic reform is also a necessary component of eradicating contextual barriers to women's progress in the post-rape process. Despite law reform efforts, such as altering the legal definitions of rape/sexual assault, instituting rape shield laws, and making spousal rape illegal, Carol Bohmer (1997) argues that "while these changes are

important, they have a limited impact on the legal response to rape because many judges, prosecutors, attorneys, and jury members continue to hold inaccurate, stereotyped beliefs about rape and sexual behavior” (pp.223-4). The comments of participants in the current study highlight the dire need for further reform within the criminal justice system, and their concerns are borne out by research. For example, Susan Ehrlich (2001), in her study of the ideological frameworks and discourse influencing courtroom proceedings in Ontario, analyses the language of a sexual assault trial. She found that culturally dominant notions regarding rape penetrate the rhetoric of adjudication procedures, centering the ideology of the “utmost rape standard.” Within this ideology, the accused’s use of ‘grammar of non-agency’ was legitimized, and the complainant’s behaviour as lacking in appropriate resistance was presupposed. Ehrlich asserts that such “institutional coerciveness of legal discourse” ultimately shapes a case’s outcome (p.4). Campbell and Johnson (1997) have found that police officers’ descriptions of rape often included rape myths and ascribed stereotypical ideas, and Anderson and Doherty’s review of the literature regarding cases of sexual assault is stark:

Lees (1993, 1997) argues that in cases of rape it is the victim, not the perpetrator, who is on trial and that the experience of secondary victimization is so profound in this context to be tantamount to ‘judicial rape’, ‘a spectacle of degradation visited upon the victim rather than the offender’ (1997: 73). Similarly, Rait and Zeedyk (2000) conclude that the treatment of rape victims in the criminal justice system is so notorious that ‘many women describe the judicial response to rape as worse than the rape itself’ (Raitt and Zeedyk, 2000: 88).

Recent national statistics reflect significant ongoing failings of the criminal justice system to legitimize women’s rape experiences: “Sexual offences are among the crimes least likely to be reported to the police. Once reported to police, sexual offences are also

less likely than other violent offences to be considered by police to be ‘founded’ and are less likely to result in charges laid against a suspect” (Kong et al., 2003, p.1).

These significant failings have led authors to call for changes, such as the education of judges (Ehrlich, 2001), and promotion of alternatives such as restorative justice given “psychologically damaging and ineffective” court procedures (Koss, 2000, p.1339). And while further exploration of such reform is beyond the scope of the current research study, continued work in this area must be a central element of ongoing efforts to eradicate contextual barriers to living well.

### **5.3.2 Offering Assistance in the Naming and Claiming Process**

In considering potential strategies to assist women in the naming and claiming of their rape experiences, three areas will be explored in this section. Discussion will address: facing challenges of service accessibility and outreach efforts; avoiding pitfalls of positivist feminist assumptions; and considering narrative practice applications for naming and claiming.

#### **5.3.2.1 Facing Challenges of Service Accessibility and Outreach Efforts**

Accessibility of services and outreach efforts for those who have been raped become central issues, given the challenges many women face in labeling their experience rape. Several participants described seeing that they could have benefited from accessing support services after being raped but having no means to do so as long as they had not recognized their experience as rape. And by the time they had managed to name their experience, until they had also claimed the rape experience as an incident for which they were not to blame, shame and self blame often kept them from accessing

services. Once women had both named and claimed their experiences (which often took months or years), by then they questioned whether using rape support services was appropriate. It is a dilemma faced not only by these women, but also by staff who wish to have their services be easily accessible to women who have been raped. And while there may be no simple solutions, several considerations come to mind. After being raped, the service accessed most by women is medical assistance. Therefore, medical centres have the greatest opportunities to act as a gateway for the women to access other supportive services. Training of medical staff to be attuned to signs of a sexual assault (both physical and emotional) and to sensitively employ language and questions in their assessments that assist a woman in naming her own experience would be useful. For example, asking a woman if she has been raped may yield a quick negative response if she has not yet labeled her experience. Asking, however, about the circumstances related to her current medical needs may yield more helpful information and give the staff person an appropriate opportunity to make a referral to a trained staff person (for example, the medical social worker on staff) who could offer further support. Rape victim advocate services, charged with assisting women as they interact with legal and medical systems, also has potential to assist with women's initial interactions with professionals. Rebecca Campbell (2006) found that women "who worked with an advocate during their emergency department care received more medical services, including emergency contraception and sexually transmitted disease prophylaxis, reported significantly fewer negative interpersonal interpretations with medical system personnel, and reported less distress from their medical experiences" (p.30). However, when it has been assessed that

an advocate could be of assistance a method of quick and easy access to these services is important to their success (Campbell).

In outreach and advertising efforts, staff may need to carefully reconsider the language and messages used about their services. For example, only one participant in the current study accessed a sexual assault crisis centre for personal support and assistance (some did become involved with their local centres when becoming socially active). Timing and self doubt seemed to be factors in their decisions. Because several women did not label their experience rape for an extended length of time, at least two noted that they were concerned that their situations no longer qualified as a “crisis”. They both, however, mentioned that they would have valued seeing a counsellor at that time. Another woman described continued feelings of shame about her actions during the rape, and fear of judgment by others. Outreach efforts may benefit by working to dispel these misconceptions. For example, some sexual assault crisis centres have chosen to drop the term “crisis” from their title, attempting to reflect that their services offer more than immediate crisis response. Centres may then be perceived as more open to responding to women’s needs at various phases of the process. Advertising efforts may highlight and normalize women’s self doubt and fears in accessing their services, and reassure them of their open and nonjudgmental approach. Services might be offered to those “who are uncomfortable, upset, or are questioning a sexual situation that they experienced,” leaving the door open to serve those who are not sure that they fit the agency’s target population.

### 5.3.2.2 Avoiding Pitfalls of Positivist Feminist Assumptions

Strong efforts continue to be made by feminist theorists, practitioners, and activists to offer an inclusive framework to understand and respond to the issues of violence against women. While feminists are committed to recognizing rape as a social and political issue as well as an issue experienced by an individual, and avoiding minimization of the effects of rape, there is a need to reconsider some of the language and frameworks that have become common place in feminist practice. For some participants in the current study, exposure to feminist analysis of rape (and the related language and concepts) was powerful in assisting them to deconstruct dominant rape scripts and replace them with an affirming alternative. For others, however, terms and assumptions associated with feminist analysis fell short in fully assisting them to label their experiences. Hesitance in using terms such as “victim,” “survivor,” and “healing” may create space for women to better describe their own unique post-rape experiences. Listening to and following women’s lead regarding the terms, metaphors, and descriptions they use to explain their own experience may affirm and reinforce their reconstruction of rape.

In relation to assumptions of feminist practice, one other common practice of support services for those who have been raped involves being staffed solely by women. And while this decision has been carefully considered, participants’ descriptions of the influential assistance offered by male allies in the naming and claiming of their rape experiences have given me pause. Would women benefit from a greater male presence in support services for those who have been raped? I am hesitant in even asking this

question, and I am in no way advocating for a quick change to staffing policies. The male privilege of being granted with more authority and the power to name others' experience was both highly problematic and helpful to individual women attempting to name and claim their rape experiences during the process toward living well in this study. Even when a man recognizes a woman's experiences as rape or affirms a woman in her disclosure, her ownership of this naming may be precluded and the power imbalance remain secure. It seems that rather than staffing support services with more men, enhancing strategies to collaborate and support women in their own naming of their experience would be worthwhile. Further, rape education efforts for men may benefit from a focus on sensitizing men to power dynamics and encouraging collaborative strategies in their roles as allies.

### **5.3.2.3 Considering Narrative Practice Applications**

Given the concerns I have highlighted above regarding assumptions that can be made when drawing upon feminist analyses that can result in women's experience of exclusion, I propose the benefit of integrating feminist and narrative approaches to practice. Narrative practice offers an approach that centers women's development of new, more empowering stories about their lives, highlighting their resourcefulness (Kamsler, 1990). Narrative practice creates space for this reconstruction while also emphasizing sociopolitical influences on personal process and experience. Through externalizing conversations that contribute to the politicizing of experience, individuals are assisted in moving away from stories of self-blame (White, 1995). What is emphasized is "the notion of providing the space for the 'voice' of the person" (Duvall &

Beres, 2007, p.231). In this space, people are provided with opportunities in which they “can give voice to their traumas, evaluate their interpretations, reconsider their identity conclusions, and re-author their lives” (Duvall & Beres, p.233). Our stories and our identity conclusions establish our perception of what we can do. And while master narratives (“the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings” (Nelson, 2001, p.6)) have been harmful to women during their post-rape experiences, counterstories can be positioned against these master narratives. Counterstories, as explained by Nelson, are developed in two steps:

The first is to identify the fragments of master narratives that have gone into the construction of an oppressive identity, noting how these fragments misrepresent persons...and situations. The second is to retell the story about the person or the group to which the person belongs in such a way as to make visible the morally relevant details that the master narratives suppressed. (p.7)

The development of counterstories makes possible the opportunity for narrative repair of identities damaged by oppression, provide a powerful form of resistance to the negative effects of master narratives, and can alter not only a person’s perception of herself, but also the oppressors’ perception of the group to which the person belongs (Nelson).

The rich social and political analysis also offered in feminist practice to assist in contextualizing personal experience, complimented by the strengths of narrative practice in its emphasis on women’s unique stories and strategies to support deconstruction and reconstruction efforts has significant potential to assist women in their naming and claiming efforts. The incorporation of ‘audience’ or ‘outsider witnesses’ to support women in the thickening of their alternate scripts/counterstories is another asset of narrative practice (White, 2004). As participants in the current study highlighted, allies

supporting them in their naming and claiming process were highly valued. Drawing upon an approach, such as narrative practice, that honours and guides the role of an ally can be an asset. Given the important role that allies can have in supporting a woman's breakthrough from one phase of the process to the next, their inclusion in narrative practice may have significant value.

### **5.3.3 Attending to Tasks of Living Well**

A number of the tasks that participants in the current study described as useful and growth-inducing during the third phase of their process toward living well have been given little if any attention in therapeutic textbooks for work with those who have been raped. Women in this study, for example, noted the value of:

- Deciding how to support themselves more broadly in living well;
- Taking action to assist others by working to remove contextual barriers to naming rape experiences or offering support to women who have been raped;
- Deepening one's understanding and acceptance of living with both personal strength and vulnerability;
- Practicing the incorporation of one's personal needs for both safety and freedom;
- Acknowledging one's own needed boundaries and honouring new priorities as intentionally participating in intimate relationships;
- Practicing living with trust and vulnerability in intimate relationships once safety has been established;
- Deciding if and under what conditions to lay down emotions of anger and fear stemming from the experience of rape;

- Honouring oneself and the choices made during the post-rape process;
- Clarifying one's identity beyond the rape experience; and
- Developing habits to embrace what is good and meaningful in their present circumstances.

All too frequently, these tasks have been absent from, or given little focus in, the work professionals have engaged in as they have attempted to support women's 'recovery,' 'survival,' or 'healing' after being raped. While some theorists and practitioners have encouraged professional helpers to work conceptually and therapeutically beyond these frameworks (e.g., Berg & Dolan, 2001; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999; Dolan, 1998; Wasco, 2003), professionals need to find, develop and study means to effectively support women in their third phase tasks in living well. Our practice solutions must extend beyond the medical and psychological realms with their focus on individual recovery or survival to a more encompassing approach that includes individual growth and emancipatory efforts.

While attending in this discussion to three broad implications for allies of those who have been raped, these strategies alone will clearly not be sufficient in our efforts. To further our efforts, in Gavey's words, we must "simultaneously fight against rape on many fronts, always attempting to be reflexive about the practical political implications of the strategies we choose. This certainly implies theoretical sacrifices, as well as strategic gambles and concessions along the way; but such messiness is inevitable in any reflexive political contest" (2005, p.219).

#### **5.4 Limitations of the Current Study & Future Directions**

My initial hope for this study was and remains that it might make a contribution to the literature regarding potentially helpful knowledge for those working with women who have been raped. As we gain knowledge to explain how women move to living well after rape, we may be better equipped to support women through this process far beyond survival.

Still, knowledge gleaned from this research project is partial and transitory at best (Olesen, 2000). Knowledge developed through the process is limited to preliminary ideas for a conceptual framework of a post-rape process toward positive outcomes. Due to the small size of the study and its cultural and social context, knowledge developed is local in nature. These limitations, however, do not need to be perceived as problematic. Indeed, the interpretations presented here are explicitly informed by a feminist standpoint, and standpoint theorists and constructionist epistemologists would not suggest that a researcher attempt to build a meta-theory. Local qualitative studies, such as this one, allow for rich and critical exploration of a phenomenon within a particular context, and can suggest frameworks whose broader relevance to other contexts can be studied in the future.

Still, this study does not include exploration of the process toward living well in relation to one's cultural identity, and this is one of its limitations. In recent years, some attention has been given to the cultural context within which trauma occurs (see, for example, Atlani & Rousseau, 2000; Friedman & Marsella, 1996; Nader, Dubrow, & Stamm, 1999; Stamm & Stamm, 1999; Wasco, 2003; Weaver & Yellow Horse Brave

Heart, 1999). The experience of refugees is one case in point while experiences of women of Indigenous backgrounds is another. In particular, Stamm and Stamm emphasize that studies of personal distress and difficulties within North American Aboriginal communities must recognize their experiences of community and historical trauma through discrimination, colonialism, geographic dislocation, and genocide (see also Gagne, 1998). As a consequence of these experiences and other cultural variations, different meanings in relation to rape, responses to such an experience, and processes toward living well may emerge for an Aboriginal woman following rape. Further, an extensive search of the literature did not reveal studies that explored processes toward positive outcomes after trauma in an Aboriginal context. This is a potential area for future study, but would need to be an initiative that involved a process and partnership with individuals of First Nations communities. (A more detailed explanation of my rationale not to study the experiences of women from cultural backgrounds of disadvantaged status in our society is given in Appendix H).

As a further limitation of the study, participants were gathered through a process of self-selection, since I had asked to hear from women who perceived themselves to be living well. I did not, therefore, hear the stories of women who had attempted to but had not, in their own eyes, achieved the experience of living well after rape. This study, therefore, does not address barriers that may be experienced as insurmountable to achieve living well for some women after rape, and the contexts related to these barriers. Interpretations of the current study may not apply or be of assistance in such

circumstances. Exploring the applicability of the current interpretations to women in earlier phases of the process is, therefore, another research project for another time.

The influence of self-selection in studies involving participants who have been raped brings with it specific limitations. As has been discussed in this paper, women often do not name an experience as rape, particularly if their circumstances do not meet all the criteria of dominant classic rape scripts (noted too by Wood & Rennie, 1994; Warshaw, 1988). All participants in the current study responded to an invitation to participate based on their understanding of having been raped. The interpretations put forward in this document, therefore, may be limited to women who have come to formulate their experiences as rape in their process toward living well. We are left not knowing whether women who have not fully constructed their experiences as rape are able to progress toward living well, and whether this occurs through a similar or different process than women who have eventually named their rape experience.

In further considering the influence of self-selection, it should be noted that I had been acquainted with eight of the ten participants prior to conducting the study. This trend was striking and came as a surprise to me, as I had not known that any of these women had been raped before they responded to my broad call for participation. Of the two participants who had no prior knowledge of me before responding to the invitation to participate, both had been raped by strangers, and the circumstances surrounding their rapes would not be considered “high risk” (they did not occur at parties or at the assailant’s home, there was no use of alcohol, and the woman was not out alone at night). Based on these circumstances, the two participants may have not feared that I would

discount their rape experiences, as their circumstances closely reflected dominant rape discourse. In contrast, for those women whose rape experiences fall outside of the particular confines of dominant rape scripts, significant risks could be involved in disclosing their experiences to a stranger (in a position of some authority) who might negate their experience and undermine their counterstory of having progressed to living well. It is not surprising, in hindsight, that women with no prior opportunity to assess my trustworthiness would choose not to risk participation in this study.

A key limitation of the research, given my interest in informing direct practice work with women who have been raped, is that results can allude to but do not directly suggest effective practice implications. This study, however, can be viewed as one contribution toward a growing body of knowledge in better understanding positive change after experiencing sexual violence. This stage of knowledge development, building a better understanding of the process to living well after rape, is of value to inform future research that explores how to assist individuals in successfully moving through such a process. Toward this goal, professional approaches whose goal is to assist women in their progress toward living well after rape deserve our attention. Practice approaches meant to transform dominant rape scripts at the societal level; to assist women's efforts to name and claim their experiences, and to develop more inclusive alternative rape scripts; and to support women's progress in the areas of taking control, self protection, and sustenance through Phases II and III are particularly relevant as the focus for future study.

## 5.5 Conclusion

With a concern based not only with the individual but also with the social, the current study is politically grounded in its desire to deconstruct relations of power and in its attempt to inform the continuing efforts for improved services for those who have been raped and in the prevention of secondary victimization. Findings of this investigation emphasize the necessity of avoiding generalized and de-contextualized frameworks of post-traumatic growth. As an alternative, I offer an example of studying one form of highly stressful experience from the standpoints of those who have been raped, center context in this exploration, and attend to the specific process in attaining positive outcomes after rape. By listening intently to these women's stories and the meaning-making they have given to their process from rape to living well, and inviting their continued feedback throughout the analytic process, a previously untold process has been shared.

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### Appendix A: Information Letter / Letter to the Editor

(Flesch-Kincaid Readability Grade Level: 8.8)

Researching experiences of women who have been raped and are now living well

Dear Editor:

Please publish the following letter for women who might be interested in participating in this piece of research:

I am a PhD student in social work at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's, Newfoundland. I am living in Fredericton and work at St. Thomas University. For my research I am talking individually with women who have been raped and who now describe themselves as living well.

Many researchers have studied the negative effects of rape. Still, there is very little research about the process that women go through as they deal with these negative effects and move to a place of living well again. The goal of this research is to learn more about this process to living well by listening to women who have experienced it.

I would like to talk with you if you are a woman living in New Brunswick and have been raped (minimum age of 18 at the time of the rape), but now consider yourself to be living well. Rape, unfortunately, is an experience faced by many women. Your participation in this project will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of women who have been raped. This may provide new directions for helping other women in such circumstances.

Taking part in this research involves participating in an interview in which you share your experience from after the rape to living well. The specifics of what you share is completely up to you. The interview will take about 2 hours. It will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you.

You will have the opportunity to give feedback on your interview experience. If you wish, you will receive a written copy of your interview to keep. You will also be invited to review my first draft of analyses and meet with me a second time to offer your feedback. You will receive \$20 for each interview, in return for your participation.

All information shared by you in this study will be kept confidential. Interviews will be used for research purposes only. They do not involve counselling or therapy.

If you are interested in this study (or would like to ask questions about possible participation), please contact Sue McKenzie-Mohr at (506) 460-0389 and leave a confidential message, or write to the following address:

Sue McKenzie-Mohr  
c/o Social Work Department  
St. Thomas University  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5G3

Sincerely,  
Sue McKenzie-Mohr

Lettre de l'information/Lettre à l'éditeur

Recherches sur les expériences des femmes violées qui mènent aujourd'hui  
une vie satisfaisante

Madame, Monsieur,

Auriez-vous l'obligeance de bien vouloir publier la lettre suivante à l'intention des femmes qui souhaiteraient participer à mon projet de recherche :

Je suis étudiante en travail social au niveau du doctorat à l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve, à St. John's (Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador). Je vis actuellement à Fredericton, et je travaille à l'Université St. Thomas. Dans le cadre de mon projet de recherche, j'interroge des femmes violées qui estiment mener aujourd'hui une vie satisfaisante.

Les effets négatifs du viol ont fait l'objet de nombreuses études. Cependant, il existe encore très peu de documentation sur le processus que doivent suivre les femmes pour composer avec ces effets négatifs et reprendre une vie satisfaisante. Dans le cadre de cette recherche, je me suis donné comme objectif d'en apprendre davantage sur ce cheminement en écoutant le témoignage de femmes qui en ont fait l'expérience.

J'aimerais vous parler si vous êtes une femme vivant au Nouveau-Brunswick, si vous avez été violée (et que vous aviez au moins 18 ans au moment du viol) et si vous estimez mener aujourd'hui une vie satisfaisante. Le viol est malheureusement le lot de nombreuses femmes. En participant à ce projet, vous m'aidez à mieux comprendre l'expérience de celles qui en ont été victimes. Il est à espérer que cette recherche débouchera sur de nouvelles orientations qui serviront à d'autres femmes dans des situations semblables.

Pour participer à cette recherche, vous devrez accorder une interview dans laquelle vous me parlerez de l'expérience que vous avez vécue après le viol pour accéder à une vie satisfaisante. C'est vous qui choisirez les détails à me confier. L'interview prendra environ deux heures. Elle aura lieu à une date, à une heure et à un endroit qui vous conviennent. Malheureusement, comme j'ai une connaissance très limitée du français, les interviews devront se dérouler en anglais.

Vous aurez l'occasion de donner vos impressions de l'interview. Si vous le souhaitez, je vous ferai parvenir une transcription de vos réponses. Je vous inviterai également à examiner la première ébauche de mes analyses et à me rencontrer une seconde fois pour la commenter. En contrepartie de votre participation, vous recevrez 20 \$ pour chacune des interviews accordées.

Tous les renseignements que vous me communiquerez dans le cadre de cette étude demeureront confidentiels. Les interviews serviront aux seules fins de la recherche et n'ont aucun but lié au counseling ou à la thérapie.

Si cette étude vous intéresse (ou si vous voulez obtenir des précisions), composez le (506) 460-0389 et laissez-moi un message confidentiel. Vous pouvez aussi m'écrire à l'adresse suivante :

Sue McKenzie-Mohr  
A/s du département de travail social  
Université St. Thomas  
Fredericton (Nouveau-Brunswick)  
E3B 5G3

Sincèrement,  
Sue McKenzie-Mohr

**Appendix B: Information Letter to be Posted in Public Places**

**Research Project:  
Experiences of Women who have been Raped and are Now Living Well**

I am a PhD student in social work at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's, Newfoundland. I am living in Fredericton and work at St. Thomas University. For my research I am talking individually with women who have been raped and who now describe themselves as living well.

The negative effects of rape have been well studied. Still, there is very little research about the process that women go through as they deal with these negative effects and move to a place of living well. The goal of this research is to learn more about this process to living well by listening to women who have experienced it.

I would like to talk with women who have been raped (minimum age of 18 at the time of the rape), but who now consider themselves to be living well.

**What the study involves:**

- Taking part in this study involves participating in an individual interview. The specifics of what you share is completely up to you. The interview will take about 2 hours of your time. It will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you.
- All information shared by you in this study will be kept confidential. Interviews will be used for research purposes only. They do not involve counselling or therapy.
- By participating in this project, you will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of women who have been raped. It is my hope that this research may provide new directions for helping other women in such circumstances.

**What to do if you want more information on participating:**

**Call** (506) 460-0389 and leave a confidential message  
**Email** [suemm@stu.ca](mailto:suemm@stu.ca)  
**Or Write** Sue McKenzie-Mohr  
c/o Social Work Department  
St. Thomas University  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5G3

### **Appendix C: Information Letter/Email Invitation to Participate**

Hello women,

As a number of you know, for my PhD dissertation I am talking individually with women who have been raped and who now describe themselves as living well. Many researchers have studied the negative effects of rape. Still, there is very little research about the process that women go through as they deal with these negative effects and move to a place of living well. The goal of this research is to learn more about this process to living well by listening to women who have experienced it.

If you are willing, would you share this invitation with others who might be interested in participating or who could pass the invitation along to others?

Thank you, and see below for the Invitation to Participate,  
Sue

Hello,

I am currently completing my PhD in social work at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and I teach at St. Thomas University in Fredericton. For my research I am talking individually with women who have been raped and who now describe themselves as living well.

Many researchers have studied the negative effects of rape. Still, there is very little research about the process that women go through as they deal with these negative effects and move to a place of living well. The goal of this research is to learn more about this process by listening to women who have experienced it.

I would like to talk with you if you are a woman living in New Brunswick who has been raped (minimum age of 18 when raped), but now consider yourself to be living well. Your participation in this project will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of women who have been raped. This may provide new directions for helping other women in such circumstances.

Taking part in this research involves participating in an interview. It will be conducted at a time and place that is best for you. What you share is completely up to you. If you wish, you will receive a written copy of your interview to keep. You will be invited to meet with me a second time to hear some of my early analyses based on the interviews, and offer your feedback. All information you share will be kept confidential. Interviews will be used for research purposes only, and do not involve counselling or therapy. You will receive \$20 per interview for any costs incurred to participate.

If you are interested in this study (or would like to ask questions), please contact me at (506) 460-0389 and leave a confidential message, email me at [suemm@stu.ca](mailto:suemm@stu.ca), OR write to the following address:

Sue McKenzie-Mohr  
c/o Social Work Department  
St. Thomas University  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5G3

Sincerely,  
Sue McKenzie-Mohr

Sue McKenzie-Mohr, MSW  
Department of Social Work  
St. Thomas University

### Appendix D: Informed Consent

I understand that as a participant in this study, I will be interviewed about my experiences after rape and the process I went through to living well in my life. The aim of this study is to better understand this process by listening to women who have experienced it. Sue McKenzie-Mohr is carrying out this study. She is a graduate student in social work at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Dr. Leslie Bella is her supervisor for this project.

I understand that my **interview will last about 2 hours**. I will receive \$20.00 for my time. **My participation is completely voluntary**. If there is anything I do not understand, I have the right to ask. If any questions make me feel uncomfortable, I do not have to answer. **I can stop the interview at any time** without giving a reason. If I decide to stop the interview, I will still receive the \$20.00.

I understand that **my interview will be tape-recorded**. The only people who will listen to the tape recordings will be Sue McKenzie-Mohr, Dr. Leslie Bella and the person who transcribes the tape. Each of these people is bound by ethical requirements to keep the information on the tape confidential. **All information I provide will remain confidential**. However, the interviewer is ethically and legally required to break confidentiality if:

- 1) The interviewer becomes aware of current child abuse;
- 2) The interviewer becomes aware of sexual abuse perpetrated by a health care professional toward an adult or child;
- 3) The interviewer becomes aware that the participant is threatening harm to herself or another person; or
- 4) The interviewer is subpoenaed to court.

The tape recording of my interview will be transcribed into typed form. This will be analyzed along with other participants' transcripts. The analysis will form the basis of a report of the study's findings. **In any report my identity will remain anonymous**. Reports will not include any information that lets others know my identity. **All tapes and written material will be kept in a secure place** when not in use. **At the end of the study, all tape recordings will be erased**.

I understand that **I will be offered a copy of my written interview** to keep. I will be given the opportunity to read over my interview notes. I can make any desired changes to better reflect my experiences. **I may request that information I provided in the interview be removed from the transcript** without giving an explanation. I will be invited to read the first draft of the report. I will also be **invited to meet with the interviewer for a second time** to share my feedback and ideas regarding these initial ideas. I will again receive \$20.00 for my time if I choose to participate in this second interview. Again, my participation is completely voluntary. If any questions make me

feel uncomfortable, I do not have to answer. I can stop this second interview at any time without giving a reason. If I decide to stop the interview, I will still receive the \$20.00. I will have the opportunity to **receive a copy of the study findings.**

I understand that my participation in this study is for research purposes only. It does not involve counselling or therapy. If anything should arise due to my participation that causes me distress, **I am free to discuss these concerns with the interviewer.** I may also bring my concerns to **Dr. Leslie Bella (519-565-2373).** These concerns will be held in confidence. **Arrangements will be made for me to meet with a counsellor if I experience distress** during my involvement in the study and request such assistance, and the cost for this meeting will be covered by the researcher.

I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I am willing to participate in this study. I understand and agree to the conditions of the study.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E: Transcriber's Agreement to Confidentiality Form**

I agree to keep all information related to the participants in the research study, "Moving toward positive outcomes after trauma: Stories from women after rape," and contained within the interview tapes strictly confidential. I will not relate any segment of this information to another, nor will I discuss the contents of the tapes with anyone other than the researcher for purposes of clarification in transcription and for debriefing purposes. I understand that hearing these stories might be upsetting and that upon my request I will be provided outlets for dealing with any emotional impact. This would consist of debriefing with the researcher and, if need arises, further debriefing with a designated professional counselor.

Name of Transcriber (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Transcriber: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Interview Guide

### Guiding questions:

“What I’d like for you to do is tell me about your experience of the process of moving from the rape to living well. You can begin wherever you like, and include or leave out whatever you choose. I’m just interested in finding out about your experience. Could you tell me about this?”

“How have you responded to the rape over time?”

“How would you say your life has changed since the rape?”

“Has there been anything that particularly surprised you about this process/these changes toward living well?”

“How do you understand what has happened to you since the time of the rape until now?”

“Based on your experience of being raped, what kinds of decisions did you make about what you wanted or needed?” “How did you go about following up on those decisions?”

“What has helped you in this process? What has hindered or challenged this process?”  
(prompt for both personal and situational factors)

“Is there anything that I haven’t asked you about that I could have?”

### Themes to explore:

Relationships: e.g., “Have your relationships changed since the rape?”

Identity: e.g., “Have there been changes in the way you see yourself?”

Views of Others and the World: “Have there been changes in the way you see the world? In the way you see others?”

Spirituality: “Have you experienced any changes related to your faith or spirituality, or what you find particularly meaningful?”

### Follow-up prompts to explore process further:

“Can you tell me about how this happened?”

“You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about this?”

“You spoke about \_\_\_\_\_. Can you give an example of this/tell me a story about this?”

Specific questions:

“How long ago were you raped?”

“How old were you at the time?”

“What is/was your relationship to the assailant?”

“Have you had any other experiences of violence?”

### **Appendix G: Definitions of Terms**

#### **RAPE:**

For the purposes of this study rape involves a single act of forced intercourse by a stranger or acquaintance, and often does not include ongoing sexual assaults by the same perpetrator within a relationship. Because effects of ongoing trauma can be quite different than effects of a single event (see Herman, 1995, and her discussion of complex post-traumatic stress), participants will have experienced a single rape experience.

#### **ADULT:**

Women in this study will be individuals who are currently living in New Brunswick and who have been raped as an adult (the rape will have occurred when the participant was no younger than eighteen years of age). This age qualifier is set because research has shown that the effects and process experienced after trauma can vary significantly depending on one's developmental stage (see, for example, Morrissette, 1999; Perkonig & Wittchen, 1999; Solomon & Lavi, 1999). The focus of this study is on adult women's experiences.

#### **LIVING WELL:**

Researchers who have studied the diversity of human responses to trauma, which may include positive outcomes for some, have used a variety of terms to demarcate such positive outcomes (Dunbar, Mueller, Medina, & Wolf, 1998; Grossman, Cook, Kepkep, & Koenen, 1999; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McMillen, 1999; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996). These terms include posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), stress-related growth (Park et al., 1996), thriving (Calhoun, 1998), resilience (Grossman, Cook,

Kepke, & Koenen, 1999; McMillen, 1999), successful coping (Frazier & Burnett, 1994; Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz, & Garwood, 1991), and psychological growth (Dunbar et al., 1998). While interrelated, these terms describe different aspects and interpretations of possible growth following trauma.

Rather than selecting a particular term or certain dimensions as a focus for study, I choose to leave this conceptual area as “terra incognita” (Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, 1996). Therefore, I define “living well” as whatever the women participants say that it is. As recognized within grounded theory, this open approach to defining the term may better allow what is relevant to “living well” to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and may permit us to achieve a broad spectrum of the phenomenon.

### **Appendix H: Rationale for Population**

In considering whether to focus exclusively on the experiences of women from a population of disadvantaged status in our Canadian context for this study, several tensions arise. Academic feminism has been challenged as highlighting only Caucasian women's experiences as universal to "women" while failing to address other potential power differences such as race and class (see, for example, hooks, 1989; Wolf, 1996). To bar women who experience multiple oppressions from participating in this project in effect excludes women who are often considered to be most at the margins. Further, exclusion of their voices in the study does not allow for as thorough a challenging of our dominant construction of trauma. On the other hand, inclusion of women who experience multiple oppressions, such as sexism and racism, raises significant difficulties. For example, I as researcher would be more of an "outsider" interviewing and working with these women (McKinley, Brayboy & Deyle, 2000). Therefore building trust and rapport may be more difficult. My preconceptions or assumptions are also at more risk of influencing the line of inquiry. As well, given their multiple oppressions, an even greater power difference will lie between my privileged position as the middle-upper class, Caucasian researcher and the positions of participants, making the development of a research partnership more challenging. While feminist standpoint research might assist in reducing knowledge distortions based on stereotypes due to its emphasis on starting with the everyday experiences of participants (Van Den Bergh, 1995), a significant challenge is to avoid both nonrecognition and misrecognition, both of which "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false,

distorted and reduced mode of being” (Taylor, Appiah, Habermas, Rockefeller, Walzer, & Wolf, 1994, as quoted in Christians, 2000, p.146).

The structure within which I conducted this research was the deciding factor for me in response to this dilemma. In the case of a doctoral thesis, in which flexibility related to issues of ownership and timeline for the research process is quite restricted, I believed that strategies to respond to some of the ethical challenges involved in working across cultures were insufficient. Therefore, I chose not to focus on the experiences of women of cultural groups that have been disadvantaged in our society, but hope that this may be an endeavor I have the opportunity to explore in the future.

### **Appendix I: Script for Initial Phone Contact**

**The beginning of the phone call involves thanking the individual for calling, and introducing myself and my role in the study:**

“Thank you for calling. I am a graduate student completing my PhD in social work at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Dr. Leslie Bella is my supervisor for this project, and I will be the only person interviewing participants in this study.”

**The purpose of the study is reviewed very briefly, and some details related to participants’ rights and informed consent are given:**

“Perhaps I could start by telling you a bit about this research and participants’ roles in the study, and then give you a chance to ask any questions. Women participating in this study will be interviewed about their experiences after rape and the process they went through to living well. The aim of the study is to better understand this process by listening to women who have experienced it. Our hope is that as helping professionals better understand this process that women go through to living well, we can better assist other women after they have been raped. This study is for research purposes only, and so interviews do not involve counselling.”

“Interviews will last about 2 hours, and participants will receive \$20.00 to help with any related costs. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants may ask questions, not answer particular questions, or stop the interview at any time. Interviews will be tape-recorded, but the only people who will listen to the tape recordings will be me, my supervisor, and the person who transcribes the tape. Each of us is bound by ethical requirements to keep the information on the tape confidential.”

“The tape recording of a participant’s interview will be transcribed into typed form. I will interview approximately 10 women, and then I will analyze participants’ transcripts. The analysis will form the basis of a report of the study’s findings. If interested, those participating in the interviews will be invited to meet with me for a second time to give me feedback about my initial ideas before I write this report. In any report a participant’s identity will remain anonymous. All material about the interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office, and at the end of the study, all tape recordings will be erased. All participants will have the opportunity to receive a copy of the study findings.”

**The individual is asked if she has any questions about the study, and her possible participation in it:**

“I have told you a bit about the research and what I am asking of participants. I wonder if you have any questions or concerns about the study and your possible participation in it?”

**It is explained that I do not wish to include women as participants who have recently faced significant life challenges:**

“For this study, I am only interviewing women who are not presently dealing with significant difficulties, as I don’t want a woman’s participation in the study to add to challenges that she is already facing. So, I would like to ask you a couple of personal questions about your circumstances. Would that be alright with you?”

“Have you faced a crisis in the past 6 months?” (If yes, ask if she could briefly explain.)

“Have you had thoughts about wanting to commit suicide or have you attempted suicide in the past six months?”

**If the individual answers “Yes” to either of these questions:**

“Due to your recent challenges, I would not recommend that you participate in this study. Have you received support during this challenging time?... ..Would you be interested in finding out about potential supports in your area? I have a list of services that might be able to offer you assistance. I would also be willing to assist you with a referral to one of these services, if you would find this helpful.” (See Appendix J for Potential Resources.)

**After discussing potential services and arrangements for assistance with a referral (if desired by the individual):**

“Thank you for calling. I really appreciate your interest in this research.”

**Wish this individual the best, and end the call.**

**If the individual answers “No” to both of these screening questions:**

“Would you be interested in participating in this study?”

**If she is NOT interested in participating, thank her for calling and end the call.**

**If she IS interested in participating:**

“Do you have a preference of where and when to meet? We can meet at my office, in your home, or at another private place of your choosing. What is most important is that it is a time and place that is comfortable for you.”

**Once these details are arranged:**

“Please feel free to call between now and our meeting if you have any other questions or concerns. Thank you for calling. I really appreciate your interest in this research, and I look forward to meeting you.”

**Appendix J: Resources for Women Screened Out**

**CHIMO Help Line:** 1-800-667-5005 (a province-wide service)

**Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Centre:** 506-454-0437 (a province-wide service)

**COUNSELLING SERVICES/COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CLINICS**

Bathurst	547-2110
Campbellton	789-2440
Caraquet	726-2030
Edmundston	735-2070
Fredericton	453-2132
Grand Falls	475-2440
Grand Manan	662-7023
Miramichi	778-6111
Moncton	856-2444
Perth-Andover	273-4701
Richibucto	523-7620
Shippagan	336-3061
St. George	755-4044
Saint John	658-3737
St. Stephen	466-7380
Secours	857-4357
Sussex	432-2090
Tracadie	394-3760
Woodstock	325-4419

**VICTIM SERVICES**

Bathurst	547-2924
Bouctouche	743-7251
Burton	357-4035
Campbellton	789-2388
Edmundston	735-2543
Fredericton	453-2768
Grand Falls	473-7706
Miramichi	627-4065
Moncton	856-2875
Richibucto	523-7150
Saint John	658-3742
St. Stephen	466-7414
Tracadie	394-3690
Woodstock	325-4422

**TRANSITION HOUSES/SHELTERS**

Bathurst (Passage House)	546-9540
Campbellton (Maison Notre Dame)	753-4703
Edmundston (Escalle Madavic)	739-6265
Fredericton (Women in Transition)	459-2300
(Gignoo House – for Native women)	458-1224 or (800)565-6878
Miramichi(Miramichi Emergency Shelter for Women)	622-8865
Moncton (Crossroads for Women)	853-0811
Sainte-Anne-de Kent (Kent Transition House)	743-1530
Saint John (Hestia House)	634-7570
St. Stephen (Fundy Region Transition House)	466-4485
Sussex (Sussex Vale Transition House)	432-6999
Tracadie (Accueil Sainte-Famille)	395-1500
Woodstock (Sanctuary House)	325-9452

## Appendix K: Participants

	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Age First Raped</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Years since Rape</b>	<b>Relationship to Assailant</b>	<b>Other Violence</b>	<b>Reported Rape?</b>	<b>Formal Supports</b>
<b>Margaret</b>	Jewish	20	34	14	Acquaintance		No	None
<b>Lyn</b>	Not Aligned	24; 33	49	26; 16	Stranger; Acquaintance	Child sexual abuse	Yes X 2 (No success)	Police; Counsellor; Support Group
<b>Serena</b>	Not Aligned	18; 36	36	18; 6	Husband; Acquaintances (2)	Witnessed family violence as child	No	Doctor; Counsellor
<b>Marise</b>	French Canadian	21	52	31	Stranger		No	None
<b>Angelina</b>	Acadian	20	28	7	Acquaintance		No	Sexual Health Centre
<b>Brianne</b>	Not Aligned	20	30	10	Stranger		Yes (Success)	Hospital staff; Counsellors; Police; Doctors; Lawyers; Masseuse; Physiotherapist
<b>Isabelle</b>	Not Aligned	18	35	17	Acquaintance		No	Support Group
<b>Lillian</b>	Acadian	18	22	4	Acquaintance	Sexual harassment post-rape	No	None
<b>Maria</b>	Not Aligned	19; 34; 35	41	22; 7; 6	Boyfriend; Stranger; Husband	Child sexual abuse	No	Counsellors; Doctor; Support Group
<b>Lyra</b>	Not Aligned	18	29	11	Boyfriend	Partner abuse post-rape	No	None







