

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WALKING THE WOODS:
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT
SURVIVAL FOR WOMEN IN COLLEGE

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Doctor of Philosophy 2012

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This phenomenological study explores the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. Through a grounding in the philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology (Gadamer, 1960/2000; Heidegger, 1927/1962, 1968, 1928/1998, 1971/2001, 1950/2002), this work uncovers the lives of six sexual assault survivors who lived through rape during their university years. The research activities designed by van Manen (1997) provide the methodological framework for the study. Within this framework, the researcher is able to bring readers into a visceral feeling of the lived experience. Deep, rich meaning is brought forth from the words of each rape survivor.

The six survivors in this study remained at their respective universities for one to four years following the rape. They identified as American Indian, Taiwanese American, Italian American, European American, Caucasian, and White. At the time of the study, participants ranged in age from their late twenties to early forties. They attended different universities across the country.

Hermeneutic phenomenological conversation revealed one overarching theme of the *all en-COMPASS-ing* nature of rape survival in college. In other words, after being raped in college, the experience continued to be intimately connected to everything they would live through thereafter. The first of two sub-themes, *stoppings*, uncovered

experiences that halt survival from the outside, the inside, through (re)iterations of the rape, through divisions, and through loss of control. The second of two sub-themes, *movings*, uncovered experiences that progress rape survival, such as moving away from campus, reclaiming reiterations, reclaiming voice, reclaiming strength, reclaiming body, reclaiming reactions, reclaiming foundation, and the movement from victim to survivor.

From this work, two main sets of pedagogical implications come into view. The first, *being with*, examines the personal ways in which we, as college and university professionals, can authentically listen and respond to women surviving rape. The second, *being-for*, examines the campus world, and the possibilities brought forth when faculty, staff, students, friends, family and survivors come together in the creation of communities that pause and focus on what survivors need in order to survive.

WALKING THE WOODS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL
ASSAULT SURVIVAL FOR WOMEN IN COLLEGE

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

Advisory Committee:

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Professor Stephen Quaye
Professor Jennifer Turner
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2012

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the six women who walked this phenomenological path with me in order to reveal their lived experience of sexual assault survival in college. Thank you for being your strong, authentic selves, for sharing so deeply all that you felt in college, and the meaning you make from it today. To the survivors who have come before us, we stand with you to break the silence that covers what it is to live through rape and ongoing trauma. To the survivors who come after us, it is my greatest hope that this work will inform college and university practice, and help to create the all-encompassing communities of care needed for healing the unseen wounds. May this work lead us, faculty, staff, students, family, friends, and survivors, in and out of the forest that holds the secrets of our world.

Acknowledgements

To the survivors:

To Aeryn, Beth, Chloe, Lulita, Pink, and Sweetie (under their self-chosen pseudonyms), I am so grateful to you for sharing your lived experiences with me, and lending them to these pages. Your strength is truly an inspiration. To the generations of sexual assault survivors who have come before us and those who will, I say with great sadness, come after us, I hope that this work will help in the creation of all-encompassing campus communities of care.

To the dissertation committee:

To Francine Hultgren, thank you for exposing me to phenomenology, a methodology that truly allows me to (re)search for myself. In the searching, and (re)searching, I found my way of being in the world, thinking in the world, and writing in the world. I am eternally grateful for your teachings. Thank you for your time, your patience, and your unending belief in my ability not only to finish, but to create something transformative. With your encouragement, I achieved something that I thought was not quite possible—the PhD! Thank you, too, for the kindness you showed my daughter, Anna, as she traveled with me to dissertation feedback meetings. One of my favorite Maryland memories will forever be her poking her little head around every corner in the Benjamin Building, calling for you, “Dr. Francine! Dr. Francine!” and asking me, “Mommy, do you think we will see Dr. Francine *and* her turtles today?” In so many ways, you are the woman I aspire to be.

To Susan Komives, almost three year ago, when the university buckled down on doctoral students nearing the end of their allotted time-to-degree, you told me that you would be a lion in a cage behind me all the way. What a comfort it was to know that you were there, waiting to pounce on anyone or anything that might get in the way of my completion! Thank you for fighting for me. Thank you for taking me on as an advisee when Marylu retired, and for seeing me through to graduation. You are a force to be reckoned with in the field of student affairs, and I count myself one of the lucky few who has had you as both a teacher and advisor. You are a remarkable woman! Happy retirement!

To Robert Nash, thank you for being my doorway into the realm of narrative research. You were, and continue to be, a powerful force in my life. The work you’ve done to develop Scholarly Personal Narrative is freeing students from the confines of traditional scholarly expression, and only you could have done it! Thank you for creating a classroom space at the University of Vermont that encourages music, poetry, artwork, dance, and other forms of expression that we do not typically see in student affairs programs. You are a revolutionary and an inspiration! You make it possible to share a multitude of small truths, and in doing so you are clearing the way for student authenticity. Thank you for allowing me into your life, into your family, and into your home. Thank you for allowing me to play guitar and sing not only in your classroom but at your daughter’s wedding, too! What an honor it is to know you and call you teacher, mentor, Vermont Dad and friend. You started me on this path, and you continue to support me every step of the way. I am so lucky to have you in my life!

To Stephen Quaye, thank you for agreeing to sit on my committee even though you hardly knew me at all, and thank you for remaining on my committee after you left for Miami University! Miami is lucky to have you, and the expertise you bring in such a wide range of writing and research styles. It is a unique gift to be able to access positivist and constructivist thought and expression! Thank you for sharing with me your passion for narrative research. I hope that your students at Miami will have the opportunity to see that side of you! The gift of your teaching will be transformational for them.

To Jennifer Turner, thank you for joining us on the dissertation committee! When Francine recommended you, I knew that you would make important contributions. It has been an honor to share the work with you. Thank you for your thoughtful questions and insight!

To Linda Valli, thank you for joining the committee at the very last minute when Hurricane Sandy kept Robert from joining us in person. It was your quick response that allowed me to stay on track and keep my defense date. What an honor it was to share that time with you!

To the University of Maryland community:

To Marylu McEwen, thank you for being the first to officially invite me into the doctoral program at the University of Maryland, and for taking me on as an advisee. I have very fond memories of sharing special moments with you early in the program, especially when you joined our PhDiva group for my 31st birthday dinner! Thank you for taking time, over the years, to be a sounding board on social justice issues. I have learned so much from you, and I still have so far to go. What an honor it was to learn from you in the classroom, and from the cushy pink chair in your office. Thank you for seeing me through to graduation. Happy retirement!

To the PhDivas—Zaneeta Daver, Dawn Johnson Zakiya Lee, Wendy Wilson—thank you for being an amazing cohort. We have just celebrated our 10th Diva-versary! How time flies! Thank you for all of our study sessions together, especially when we focused on statistics. I am quite certain I would not have made it through stats without you all, especially Zaneeta. Through major celebrations and heartbreaking losses, we have been there with each other. Even though we are scattered across the country, I know that we will always share a very special bond. Thank you for everything!

To the entire staff at the University of Maryland University Health Center, who gave me a graduate assistantship addressing sexual assault on campus. You taught me many of the do's and don'ts in this area, and for that I am forever grateful. To Pat Johnston and the health promotion staff, to the victim advocates and the men's program, you all did, and continue to do, some of the most remarkable work I've ever seen. Thank you for your passion and dedication.

To the SAFER (Student Advocates For Education about Rape) Peer Educators and Senior Advocates, thank you for working passionately and diligently to make the campus a better place for all students. You were my first student groups at the University of Maryland, and you will forever have a very special place in my heart. Although you didn't know it then, you helped me, personally, through some very dark times. I feel so honored to have been a part of your lives!

To the staff of the University of Maryland Department of Fraternity and Sorority Life, including the volunteers in the Ten Man Plan/Ten Woman Plan Sexual Violence Prevention Program, for your commitment to sexual violence prevention. To Mike Hayes and Matt Supple, thank you for creating a position dedicated to sexual violence prevention, and then entrusting me with that role. Thank you for making room for me to bring baby Anna to work before I had full-time childcare! The work you do with fraternity men and sorority women is truly transformational.

To the sorority women I had the pleasure of working with, thank you for your commitment to the wellbeing of survivors in your sisterhood. Sororities have the capacity to be a survivor's saving grace, but they also have the capacity to do real and lasting damage. Thank you for fighting for grace, sisterhood, and uncompromising support.

To the countless fraternity men I've worked with over the years to address rape on campus, especially Ryan McBride, Sammy Juh, Andy Civetti, Mark Delaney, AJ Arrese and others who went above and beyond. Thank you for recognizing when it was time to clean up and clean out, for being the men to do it, and for making a once triggering space for me and other college rape survivors one of empowerment and hope. Keep up the good work. There is still so much to be done.

To the numbers of survivors who trusted me with their stories. Thank you for having the courage to find your way to a safe place. Your strength helps others know that it is possible to heal after rape.

To Linda Clement and Warren Kelley, for continuing to have faith and trust in me.

To my friends in the doctoral program who have been there for writing, studying, venting, celebrating, and socializing over the years—Lee Hawthorne Calizo, Wendy Wagner, Keith Edwards, Craig Alimo, Claire Robbins, Cara Appel-Silbaugh, John Dugan, Jeremy Page, Patty Alvarez, Kirsten Freeman Fox, Daniel Ostick, Susan Longerbeam, Kristen Vogt-Kawas,—thank you for your commitment to accountability, forward momentum, and completion!

To the rest of the University of Maryland doctoral students, thank you for being there for this extraordinary experience. There are too many to name here. Thank you for your support, your kindness, and your words of encouragement on Facebook and in person. Thank you for challenging me in ways that you may never know. I am a much stronger

person for it! You are all brilliant people, and I feel quite lucky to have walked this path with you.

To the UMBC Women's Center:

To Diane Lee, Eryl Pettit, Jess Myers, Christy Wilson, Mahnoor Siddiqui, Alyssa Cartledge, Keisha Turner, Kat Patterson, Lisa McFarlane, Anna Mallillan, and the rest of the UMBC Women's Center Community for bringing me back to center, for rooting me on, and for saying some of the kindest words to me I've ever heard. You have no idea how much I needed it at the time, and you have no idea how much I continue to miss our time together at the center. Special thanks to Kat for watching Anna—splashing in puddles, rolling in leaves, and finding echoes in campus buildings. You gave Anna kindness and loving care while I wrote in my library research room on Saturdays.

To my editors:

To Leah Ewing Ross—You are a genius! Thank you for taking me on as a client. What would I have done without you? I'm quite certain I would have missed my proposal deadline! You helped me clean it up (all 180 pages of phenomenological proposal!) so beautifully, and on such a tight deadline. I will be forever grateful for that. Thank you, too, for the amazing work you did to help me clean up the final draft of Chapters 4, 5, and 6. What a difference it made! You took the time to comb through every word in precisely the way I needed. What a gift! Thank you for offering book and article suggestions. There are times throughout this process that I've felt like you were in my head, anticipating my every writing need. Thank you, too, for sharing deeply, for transparency, for getting right to the point when we didn't have time for niceties, and for offering kindness and care when we did. You gave me the freedom to write from my heart and to rest assured that the formatting would follow. Thank you for your thoughtful words about this work—I truly hope it will make a difference.

To Adrienne Hamke Wicker—for coming in as my editor at the ninth hour for my first draft of Chapters 4 and 5. The work you did on Chapter 6 was so helpful—Francine had only minimal changes for me to make. I could have never gotten those final pages into shape so quickly without your help. Thank you for watching Anna while I met with Francine, and for offering so much encouragement along the way. Our email exchanges made me laugh out loud. You are an amazing woman!

To the organizations providing grant funding:

To the Mac and Lucile McEwen Research Fund and the McEwen Research Grant Committee, thank you for awarding me the McEwen Research Grant. Funding from this award made it possible for me to travel the country to meet with study participants in person. Without this funding, I would have been reliant only on email and telephone conversations. Meeting with each sexual assault survivor in person allowed for deep and personal sharing. The final round of conversations, conducted face-to-face, gave a richness to the understanding found in this dissertation that would have otherwise been missed.

To the Byrne-Marx-Magoon Endowment and the CAPS Dissertation Award Committee, thank you for awarding me a CAPS Dissertation Award. Funding from this award, when paired with funding from the McEwen Research Grant, made it possible for me to meet with research participants in person for the final round of phenomenological conversation. The final round of meetings was critical to the uncovering of the phenomenological meaning found in this dissertation.

To the coffeehouses:

To Tryst, and Bussboys and Poets, two of my favorite spots to write in Washington, DC. Thank you for brilliant writing space, great inspiration, and giant mugs of coffee.

To Flynn's Coffeeshop and Betsy's Crepes in Southern Pines, NC, for becoming my favorite local spots to write in NC, and to Flynn, Pops, and Betsy, who were the very first to make Southern Pines feel like home.

To Panera Bread, for being there no matter where I happened to be—Maryland, DC, Florida, Michigan, North Carolina... Special thanks to the Panera in Aberdeen, NC! Thank you for allowing me to claim the back corner table as my own. Special thanks to Mary, Abigail, Marsha', Lea Anne, Jim, and the rest of the staff who know me by name and continue to cheer me on. Jim, I'd like to start wiping down tables now, please. It is about time I started giving back!

To Anna's school:

To the kind, brilliant, loving staff at the Village Children's House in Pinehurst, NC, thank you for answering my call for a full-time Montessori experience for Anna! I needed all-day support so that I could write, but I needed to know it was a place where Anna would thrive. We found that place in your exceptional hands. You were the perfect school at the perfect time. I am so lucky that you opened your doors right when I needed you!

To my friends:

To John Sama and Lance Ladue for hanging out with Anna while I took some time to write in your lovely Vermont home. John, thank you for being an amazing supervisor while I was at UVM. I learned so much from you that I still take into my professional life today.

To Marcy Hessling O'Neil for many week-long dissertation binges and countless text and phone accountability meetings. I love that our deep friendship has lasted over twenty years, and I know it will continue for lifetimes to come. What an honor it is to live life with you, and now to share the experience of achieving our PhDs. From high school to higher education, we've come a long way! Thank you for being there to share the experience of weddings and funerals, love and loss, kids and the complexities that come along with them. Madame! Nos travaux sont finis! Fêtons!!!

To Kirsten Drummand, for writing sessions, academic achievements, knitting, tea, and brilliant conversation. Where have you been all my life? I feel like I've known you for 20

years. You are a dear heart and a kindred spirit. Thank you for becoming such an important part of my life.

To Kristen Osborne Obst, fellow Army wife, liberal, and PhD, thank you for being such a big part of my transition to Southern Pines, and for being so supportive of me through the end of the dissertation. Thank you for writing sessions and play dates with the kids and Spring-Thyme in the Pines! Your strength is incredible, and your friendship is so special to me.

To Danielle Massanari-Thatcher Ward for lending a part of Tad to this work in order to bring forth the powerful feeling of loss felt by the participants in this study. Thank you for your friendship over the years, and for allowing me to be a part of your life during some of the brightest and darkest times.

To Nancy Hensler-McGinnis, I cannot possibly fit all of my gratitude to you in this one small passage. We met as doctoral students, and were charged with creating sexual assault prevention and victim advocacy programs at the University of Maryland. Little did we know then that our lives would become so deeply connected. It is a connection that will last many lifetimes, I'm sure. Thank you for being a mentor, a support, a kindred spirit. Thank you showing me what writing a dissertation looks like, and for supporting mine along the way. Thank you for trusting me with your vulnerability—it brought us together in such powerful ways. Thank you for laughter, tears, hugs, meditation, guitar, and the tremendous complexities life brings. Through all of the stoppings and movings in our own lives, it gives me great peace to know that you are with me every step of the way.

To David and Bethany Applebaum Gordon, thank you for being there in so many ways throughout this process. From seeing me through the pregnancy and back into writing, to watching Anna, to giving us good food and a roof over our heads whenever we visited Maryland for dissertation feedback, you are amazing friends. Can we take some time off and just hang out, now?

To Kia Kuresman, for being there to celebrate this achievement with me, and for providing some of the most essential breaks and distractions that ultimately helped to keep me on track.

To my dissertation coach:

To Wallace Eddy, friend, mentor, dissertation coach, philosophic co-meanderer, where do I even begin? This dissertation would not have been possible without you. I know that you deflect such comments whenever I make them, but it is true. Without your guidance, I would never have returned to this topic. It was as if you knew from the moment we first sat down together that this is where I would find my authentic voice. Thank you for (I'll use your metaphor here!) nudging the pebbles out of the way so that this boulder of a dissertation could begin to gain momentum. You are a kindred spirit and a kind soul. Thank you for believing in the importance of this work, and for reminding me that

finishing it was always about more than just finishing the PhD. You kept telling me, “You need to finish because this work needs to be in the world.” Thank you for your transparency, and for letting me all the way in. Our way of *being* in the phenomenon, in the writing, and in the world together was exactly what I needed. Thank you for phenomenological questioning, philosophical meanderings, cognitive distributing, laughing, crying, exploring, wondering, worrying, and achieving... and Really Really! What a brilliant and inspiring play on the very phenomenon examined here on these pages! Thank you for helping me work through my confusion about this beautiful, challenging, complex, painful, empowering thing we call phenomenology! Your guidance continues to be priceless, and my gratitude for it immeasurable.

To my family:

To my sister Nancy, 9 years my junior, whom I have come to know so well as an adult. I treasure that you moved to Washington DC while I was there, and that we got to spend that time together. You are one of the most amazing women I know, and I get to be your sister! How lucky am I!? Lucky, indeed. Thank you for acts of rebellion, like PJ Turkey Day, that proved to be just the break (and now massive family sensation!) we needed from work and dissertation. I love you so much.

To Francoise and Bryan for allowing Anna and me to have a home base as we travelled back and forth from North Carolina to Maryland and for your support throughout the doctorate. To Margaux, Timmy, and baby Henri for fun playtime in the sandbox! You are amazing cousins.

To the Emmetts, thank you for opening your arms to us! What fun it has been to get to know our DC cousins while I was working on my PhD. From the Bay to Bethesda, Holidays to home-buying, we will carry these great memories wherever we go. Hope to see you next Easter!

To my Aunt Nancy for watching Anna and the rest of the kids in Georgia! Cousin time is priceless.

To my cousin Debbie for taking on her fair share of Anna time. You are so giving. Thank you!

To my Auntie Linda, for taking on your fair share of Anna time, too. You moved into town right when we needed a fairy godmother! How fun it is to have spent a lifetime with you, to be raised with your kids, and now to have annual Anna and Porter play dates in NYC! Thank you for coming into our lives, cooking, cleaning, organizing, teaching, and loving us so much. We love you!

To my cousin Jeff Whitehead, his wife Laura, and their kids, Jake, Bo, and Tess, thank you for inviting me into your home in Georgia to push through the final edits of my dissertation proposal. Laura and Tess, thank you for playing with Anna all day every day while I wrote. I know I’ve said it a thousand times, and I will say it a thousand more as

we all grow old and grey together: I could not have done this without you. It just wouldn't have happened without your generosity. You were able to give me the one thing no one else could give, and that was three intensive weeks of sun up to sun down (and often well into the night!) uninterrupted writing time. I will never forget the beautiful view of the lake as the sun rose and set each day. We realized at some point during our stay that we were repeating history, because Jeff, your mom watched me every day while my mom finished her bachelor's and master's degree. What a special thing to pass along the generations! Because of your generosity, Anna's relationship with your kids mirrors that of our's growing up. It is a very special bond that cousins can only share when it is purposefully cultivated. How fun it is to know that our kids' relationship will grow into adulthood, just as ours has!

To my dad, thank you for teaching me how to play guitar! Who knew that it would come in handy at my doctoral dissertation defense? "You are My Sunshine" and "Inch by Inch" will always be my favorites. Love you so much.

To my brother, Todd, the professional boxer, the minister, the loyal friend and caring soul—thank you for being my little brother no matter how much bigger than me you are! We have shared hugs and tears and laughter—I love you so much!

To my mom. When I was born you showed me the greatest love of all. You took me away from our bad situation and you started life all over again. It took a village to raise me back then as you went back to school to finish your degrees, and you did it! This past year has been a hard one for so many reasons, but here we are on the other side, safe and sound and ready to celebrate! I love you so much. Thank you for giving me life, love, strength, and passion. You are an incredible woman. I aspire to be as generous, thoughtful, hard working, spirited, beautiful, and kind as you are. How lucky I am to have you as a mom! What a privilege it is.

To Pete, my love, my partner, my husband, thank you for everything you have given me throughout the writing of this important work. We came together during what might be the most stressful times of our lives. You were in your residency at Walter Reed, and I was a doctoral student at Maryland. We learned how to navigate the impossible waters of academia while tending to our life together. It was a challenge! On top of all of that, we decided to plan a wedding, get married, have a baby, and buy a house! Just as we thought our lives were settling down, you had to leave for rotations at the Cleveland Clinic for months at a time! We were PCS'd (translation for civilians: permanent change of station) to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. The bright side—it's a swing state! May our liberal votes count! We've been through a lot together, Kreishman. I think we've proven to ourselves that we can make it through just about anything.

We are an unlikely pair! How is it that the Army surgeon and the feminist activist fell in love? This is the question people continue to ask, but is it really such a mystery? We may work in very different places, but we believe in the same things. We walk together in questioning the hard issues of our time—race, religion, homophobia, politics

and so on. We know each other as who we are on the inside—not by the clothes, uniforms, or titles we wear—and that is what matters most.

You are the man who opened me to trusting men again. Thank you for being my partner, my sounding board, my reality check, and my encouragement. Thank you for taking so much time away from work to be a full-time dad while I finished my dissertation. I know that it wasn't easy requesting vacation time, rescheduling surgeries, and taking a lighter load when there was so much work to be done at an Army hospital in wartime. You found a way to give me that time, though, when I desperately needed it. You are amazing. I love, love, love you.

And finally, to my smart, strong, beautiful daughter, Anna. You are my joy and my heart. Thank you for making me take breaks to play Legos, dinosaurs, puzzles, superheroes and suction cup archery. Thank you for being the reason I stepped away from the research to do art projects, go to the park, and snuggle. Thank you for helping me exchange readings on philosophy and trauma for readings on oceans, fairies, adventures and cats in hats. Thank you for understanding, in whatever way you could, when Mommy needed to leave to work on her dissertation again, and again, and again. Thank you for travelling with me every time we had to drive from North Carolina to Maryland and back so that I could receive dissertation feedback in person from Dr. Francine. Thank you for doing your best to be a good kid for everyone who has cared for you over the years. You are my remarkable big girl—almost 4 years old! I love you so much!

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**CHAPTER 1:
FROM MEANDERING TO UNDERSTANDING AND BACK AGAIN: A
TURNING TO THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT
SURVIVAL FOR WOMEN IN COLLEGE**

The Phenomenon Re-remembered

Keeping me pinned to my own floor required somehow only three limbs. One hand was free for what he wanted. Please, I said. Please. I could not say those words again without immediate need of those good pills. But I can say that word now and still get some sleep the same night. Some small things are returned to us given enough time and careful care. (Driscoll, 1997, pp. 4-5)

The Woods

I love to walk in the woods. For me, it is a perfect escape. I can be in my body and outside of it at once. I am far away from home and the comforts that wait for me there, but I can find a peace in my mind that is better than the comforts of home. It is my way of choosing to detach. It is my way of being in control of my detachment.

The Assault

His hands were not required to keep me on the floor. It only took a look—a look I had come to know well, but one that had never been directed toward me. It was the look that told everyone who knew him that they had better get out of the way. Something bad was about to happen.

“Get on the floor.”

At first I laughed. It was all so absurd. What was he doing? He *knew* me. It was *me*. Get on the floor? What? But when I said, “C’mon, cut it out, you’re kind of scaring me,” and he didn’t respond, I knew something wasn’t right.

I drew in a quick breath. My stomach tightened. Nothing about this moment made sense to me, and as such, my mind was trapped in some useless loop of confusion. I was frozen, helpless. As he stood blocking my access to the door of his room, I could feel the

hot Ohio summer creeping in through the second-story window behind me. It clung to my exposed arms and dampened my skin as if the universe was trying desperately to wrap its arms around me in protection.

This hulking college man was someone I had tried to love. In many ways, I did love him, but never as fully as he wanted or needed. It was never enough for him, and truth be told, the love I provided him wasn't all the love I could give. He just wasn't "the one." He wasn't *my* one. Being with him never truly felt right to me. When I broke up with him, he told me that it was a stupid move—that no one would ever love me as much as he did. Despite an anger and rage I had come to know well, he had given me access to the softest and most sensitive part of his soul. At the time, I felt as though I was the only one who could ever really know him. I thought I could trust him, but the breakup had put me in a place of real danger. It was a danger I did not know, realize, or understand until after the incident. Actually, I did not come to understand it until *years* after the incident.

"Get on the floor."

As he spoke those words, his body was so still and towering—a great wall between me and the door. Why was he blocking me in? What was he doing? I could not wrap my head around any of it. I went there in kindness; I went there in an effort to help. He was going through some big thing... what was it? I couldn't even remember.

His teeth were clenched, and I recall clearly the sight of a little tremor just under the surface of his skin at the back of his jaw near his ear. That little tremor, so seemingly tiny and insignificant, stopped my heart. He was about to lose control, and for the first time since I had come to know him (almost two years—an eternity in college), he was about to physically lose it on me.

He had called me and said that he needed somebody—that he needed me—but in that moment I wasn't just *somebody* to him, I wasn't just *anybody* to him. I wasn't even just *some body*. For him, I had become an *embodiment* of his anger and feelings of rejection. He was so still, but I could feel the rage of his broken heart boiling just under the surface. His hands were in tight fists. He was breathing through his nose.

My mind was moving in slow motion. What did I do? Did I do this? Did I bring this on?

“Get on the *floor*.”

I furrowed my brow and slightly cocked my head to one side, like the dog who doesn't quite understand what is said to her, but is doing her best to work it out. It didn't make sense. I was there to help. The room seemed to tip slightly—I was losing balance. Everything I could hold on to was out of reach—every piece of furniture, every reality I had come to know.

The moment stood still. Too many thoughts swarmed in my head like a nest of disturbed bees. The buzzing made it hard to hear. It didn't make sense. I was following the rules. I knew him, I trusted him. We weren't drinking. It wasn't nighttime. We weren't at a party. We weren't in his fraternity house. I was in a safe place. I was in a SAFE PLACE, DAMNIT! I knew him well. We had dated. I *thought* I knew him. My clothes covered me fully—an oversized t-shirt, a long, wrinkly peasant skirt, and buckled leather sandals. My heart was telling me that he would never hurt me. He always said he would never hurt me. And yet he was about to hurt me in a way that would splinter my life into too many detachments to count.

“Get on the *floor*.”

And I did. I just *did*. I couldn't think. My mind was numb, and fuzzy, and thick. A person I trusted demanded that I get on the floor, and my body simply did what it was told. Now, looking back on the event, I want to tell myself to get away from there. Get out! But what can you do when you have the raging storm of a mountain on top of you? Sometimes you just need to remain still and hope that the storm will move on and that someday the sun will come out again. In the meantime, though, you stay put and try to survive.

The room was tipping. He was on me. The smell of the dirty, matted carpet, and sweat, and last night's beer filled my nose as I turned my head away from him. I closed my eyes in an attempt to get away. I felt my chest tighten. I could not breathe. A sob stuck in my throat, choking away the last vestige of my life before rape.

And I was gone....

I simply was not there anymore. I didn't scream. I couldn't scream. My friends were waiting for me just downstairs, and yet they were a million miles away. They would never know what happened there that day, although on the way home they asked if I was okay. They could tell that something was not okay. I wasn't able to use my voice. The rape was the first of many moments that my voice became disconnected from my self. Even on the walk home with my friends, my *self* was somewhere away from there and them. I was mentally pulled away from the pain as it smothered my detached, helpless body, and as I walked home, it still hadn't come back. It wouldn't come back for some time. Sometimes it still isn't there.

Sexual Assault

What is the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college?

What does it mean to be sexually assaulted? What does assault do to the sexual act? To sexuality? How do the two come together? How do they come apart? How is the coming-apart of survivors connected to the assault of one's sexuality? Of one's being? Is this union reflected in the coupling of the rapist and the raped?

The term “sexual” comes from the Latin word *sexus*, meaning “pertaining to copulation or generation,” and from the Latin *seco*, as division or half of the race; “sexual” is also connected to the Latin *secare*, meaning “to divide or cut”¹. There exists a tension within the word “sexual” between the concepts of creation and division—the very tension that exists when the word “sexual” is combined with the word “assault.” What is it for self and sexuality to be divided or cut? What is it for self and sexuality to be assaulted?

In copulation, there is creation. The Latin word *copulatus* means to “join together, couple, bind, link, [or] unite”. In that single act of sexual assault, the rapist and I were joined together, coupled, and bound, but his action toward me did not create anything beautiful. We were linked, and are united for life—he was bound to me as the cause of a trauma that only he created and with which only I live. I do not know if he ever even thinks of the incident, and for many years the unknowing added to my feelings of division and separation. I felt separate from my world, and, as such, I separated from my world. Why did I move so frequently? Why did I gravitate toward separation? Toward leaving? Toward detachment? Toward disconnection? Why did I always want to get out?

Footnote: 1. All etymological definitions throughout this dissertation come from the Online Etymological Dictionary and/or the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary.

Copulation begets generation. The early 14th century Old French word *generare* means “to bring forth.” What is generally brought forth during sexual connection? Love. Kindness. Pleasure. What did he bring forth that day? Division. Separation. Detachment. A cut between who I was and who I became. A division between who I was and my ability to maintain deep connections. A separation between me and the people I love, some of whom still don’t know about what happened on that hot summer day.

What have I brought forth as a result of his assault on me? What meaning do the survivors bring forth? And in the sense of generation, *generare*, being formed—how did the incident form me? Inform me? Deform me? What can be said of these questions to the women who will participate in this study? How are they informed or deformed by their traumas? How do these words make them feel? I can only speak for myself, but I do not want to be seen as deformed. I do not want to feel deformed. But for many years, as I looked in the mirror, something was broken. Something was, in fact, deformed. It had come apart, and I needed to find a way to put it back together. My call to this phenomenon, then, is from my own experience as a sexual assault survivor to work with other women sexual assault survivors as pieces are put back together in lives that were once shattered.

Yet what does this knowledge bring to my generation? The early 14th century Old French defines generation as the “body of individuals born about the same period” leads me to question the context of “my generation” with regard to this study and the study participants. The generation of the survivors as related to this study is comprised of women of all generations. And what of generations to come—those who are currently in college or who have yet to enter the hallowed halls of higher education? I am compelled

to write this dissertation because of the implications it will have on my peers, the participants in this study, the individuals who will follow us on college campuses across the country, and the generations who have come before.

Assault...generation, generare, bringing forth...what did he bring forth? What have I brought forth as a result? What meaning, if any, will survivor-participants glean from my experience and bring forth with them? *The question that drives my study, then, is this: **What is the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college?***

The Victim

Was I a victim? The etymology explains that a victim is a “person oppressed by some power or situation.” If this is true, I was a victim, a victim oppressed. I was oppressed. I was pressed, pressed by the hands of my once lover. Pressed into the carpet, pressed into the ground. Pressed. Oppressed. I was overpowered by him—his hands, his body, his size, his reputation for anger and physical destruction. The etymological sense of the word “victim” speaks to a “person taken advantage of.” I was a person taken advantage of. I went there in kindness. I went there to reach out to someone who I thought was my friend—a friend who needed somebody. Instead, I found an anger and retaliation that was never meant for me. I thought it was never meant for me. He said it was never meant for me. Until that day, he had never intended to use it on me. That was what he told me.

So, I was a victim. Am I still a victim? What is my oppression? Is oppression a shared experience with the women participating in this study? What would they call it? How would they describe it? In the late 15th century, the word “victim” described a “living creature killed and offered as a sacrifice;” it is from the Latin *victima*, a “person

or animal killed as a sacrifice.” Was I a sacrifice? Was I a sacrifice to his demons of pain, and shame, and anger? What was sacrificed? Did he need to sacrifice something in order to sacrifice me? Was I sacrificed in sexual urge? Was I sacrificed in anger? Was I sacrificed in revenge? Was I sacrificed to prove a point? *What was the point?* He sacrificed everything about me that day—my body, my soul, my spirit, and my desire to connect deeply to a partner-soul. It would take years before I could share my soul with a partner again.

Was I seen by him as an animal? Less than human? To be hunted? Killed? Eaten? Where was his humanity? Was it sacrificed along with mine? Can I regain my humanity? Have I regained my humanity? What would that be like? Look like? Am I there? Is there a point at which one can arrive at regained humanity? Arrive at survival? Is survival a destination, or is it part of a meandering walk in the woods?

The Departure

The rape, for me, was a departure. The departure, itself, was like a walk in the dark, scary, unknown woods. It was an escape into survival mode. During the assault I experienced an immediate departure from mind, body, and spirit. In the time following the incident, I departed from my life in many ways. There was a departure from sleep, from school, from friends, from family, from thinking about the incident, and ultimately from my life as it was before the rape.

When I walk in the woods, I feel my body go into a type of survival mode. Water is precious. Food is precious. Each step represents a monumental movement toward the safety and security that waits for me at the end of the trail. I am drawn to the woods by a sense of freedom. There is a sense of victory that comes from surviving in the woods

many days at a time. Learning how to survive the rape was the same type of victory once I recognized and named what happened to me. Each moment was precious. Every day was a small victory. And while I may not have known it at the time, each proverbial step was one step toward healing and toward the safety and security that I have now. But have I fully found that safety and security? Do survivors ever really find safety and security in life?

To be sure, my life still contains shadows of fallout from the rape. I struggle with deep connections to other people. I've experienced long stretches of time without sound sleep. I gravitate toward a state of over-involvement and *busy-ness* as a way to escape... to depart... from shameful self-doubt when it starts creeping in.

Each step toward my recovery gave me an insight that allows me to be where I am today: at some level of peace with myself, and ready to do this research. The process toward that insight, however, began with a departure, or an escape. Gadamer (1960/2002) states:

[Insight] is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus, insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense. Insight is something we come to. (p. 356)

My insight about the rape started to develop through my initial "escape," as Gadamer calls it, from school. Unlike some sexual assault survivors whose college experiences are broken or halted by their assaults, I escaped from college with my diploma in hand. I believe that I was afforded that privilege because my assault happened during my senior year. The level of minimization and denial I went through at the time allowed me to function through degree completion.

I did not break down until many years later, at which time my life started falling apart in ways I never thought possible. My falling apart happened while I was engaged in coursework for the doctorate. So, in some ways, much of my collegiate sexual assault survival happened as a doctoral student. I wonder about the experiences of survivors who had to stay for some length of time in college after their incidents, and I wonder about those who decided to leave. What is it about staying or leaving that allows us to survive? What does leaving look like? What does staying look like? Does it look the way I perceived myself during my doctoral coursework: an unprofessional, confused, embarrassing mess? I had a mentor once tell me, “If you’ve got any demons, and we all have some, a doctoral program is sure to bring them out.” The gravity of that statement never struck me until now.

For me, the escape that led to insight began very literally with an escape from my rapist who “deceived [me] and held [me] captive” (Gadamer) that day on the floor of his room. It was followed by my escape from school and my desire to stay away from my alma mater for many years. That escape allowed me to minimize and deny what happened in a way that kept my recovery from truly beginning. I did not know the reflection that was to come. When our brains experience trauma, we are only given the memories and insight we are able to handle when we are able to handle them (Dugan & Hock, 2000; Lauer, 2002; Ledray, 1986/1994; Matsakis, 2003). Either I was not able to handle the trauma I experienced, or I did not need to handle the trauma until I became a doctoral student with an assistantship in the area of sexual assault prevention and victim advocacy. My insight is informed by the clarity provided me by medication, and by the escape turned insight that is meditation. Medication helped to clear my mind so that I

could gain insight, and meditation replaced it as my way to maintain the clarity. As Gadamer (1960/2002) says of insight: “We say that someone is insightful when they make a fair, correct judgment. An insightful person is prepared to consider the particular situation of the other person” (p. 323).

Is my insight, or judgment, of an incident that happened over 15 years ago fair and correct? Certainly to me it is very fair, very correct. It is my experience, and it will be the lens from which I interpret the lived experiences of the study participants. Can my insight, or judgment, of an incident (or several incidences) that happened to the study participants be fair and correct? How will I be able to “consider the particular situation of the other person,” (Gadamer) which will be at both similar to and different from my own? Only if I am able to engage *their* insights, to bring out their perspectives, and to reflect those insights and perspective back to them and hear their affirmations will I have captured their lived experiences.

It took me a very long time to embrace my insight—over 15 years of struggle, and dysfunction, and depression, and departure from what could have been a much fuller life. The fuller life is something I have come to over the years, however, and is part of what makes it *possible* for me to engage in this research. I am no longer trapped by a brokenness I cannot define. I live in a more peaceful place now—one that did not always exist, and one without which writing would be impossible.

The piece that makes it *necessary* for me to conduct this study is that while there exists a wealth of knowledge on the topic of sexual assault, including personal accounts of survival (e.g., *Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Duke*, 2011; *Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010), the available

information is either positivistic in nature (e.g., Greenfield, 1997; Johnson & Sigler, 2000; Kilpatrick, Edwards, & Seymour, 1992; Koss, 1988; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) or is based on accounts of stranger rape (e.g., Lueders, 2006; Raine, 1998; Sebold, 1999, 2002). The existing works on the topic are essential—I have come to know them, appreciate them, and be thankful for them in my pursuit of knowledge on the subject. However, little is published that shares personal accounts and also seeks to make the kind of meaning implicit to phenomenological work: from the lived experience of sexual assault in college with particular attention to acquaintance rape. I am moved by a pressing necessity to share stories of surviving rape in college, and to do so in a way that helps to make meaning of the trauma.

It is not only the lack of existing literature on the subject that compels me to explore this topic. It is also for the sake of survivors who have come before me, and for those who will inevitably come after me. Conducting this research gives me some small hope that the work will help them to cope with the trauma. In the solitude that survival imposes, victims deserve far-reaching communities of care. I have come to know an empathy and sense of loyalty to other survivors through the years of doing this work. I gained empathy for other survivors by helping them navigate the sometimes confusing resources available on college campuses. I feel a sense of loyalty to every woman I have met, and even those I have not, whose lives have been affected by sexual assault. As a fellow survivor, I have learned so much from these women—they have become an inspiration to me, and were undoubtedly an important part of my own ongoing recovery. I hope that in writing this dissertation, I can pay the favor forward. It is my hope that the

participants in this study will consider their participation as vehicles through which to share their own stories.

Finding My Way to the Phenomenon, Fortitude, and the Facing of Fears

I wonder, sometimes, if I go into the woods in a deliberate attempt to face and conquer my fears...if, somehow by going there and coming out alive, I can survive anything. I wonder, too, if my gravitation toward discussion on rape, and specifically the location of those conversations in fraternity houses, might have been the same thing—a deliberate, although subconscious at the time, attempt to conquer a fear. If I could go into the fraternity house, week after week, and come out psychologically and emotionally alive, then I could conquer the ways in which the rape had affected me so deeply. It was a secret I held so close that I did not even know it was there, and yet it was a secret that something inside me was trying to fight, trying to overcome.

That which fear fears about is that very entity which is afraid – Dasein. Only an entity for which in its Being this very Being is an issue, can be afraid. Fearing discloses this entity as endangered and abandoned to itself. Fear always reveals Dasein in the Being of its “there”, even if it does so in varying degrees of explicitness. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 180)

And so my fearfulness, and my *being's* attention to it (whether consciously or unconsciously) became a way for me to find my way of being-in-the-world, or my *Dasein* (Heidegger). Through it I was able to find my way to this work, pedagogical and practical, and to do it as a way to conquer my own fears about it. In doing so, I may be able to do some good work that is helpful to others; if, by reading my journey and joining me on my meandering path, per se, others may not feel so alone, and their loving and caring communities may find ways of being-with their survivors, if that is what those survivors need at the time.

The Meandering Path

The steady, solid rhythm of a walk in the woods is like a meditation. From the earth to the soles of my feet, through my legs and the core of my body, my heart beats more rapidly. From the pine, to the air, to the deepest breath in through my nose, the smell of wet earth and evergreen cools my lungs. The air is damp and chilly. The light is dim, choked away by leaves. The steady, solid rhythm of my heart echoes the meditation my feet have begun and takes me to my most deeply covered thoughts. I whisper a song just under my breath as I walk, keeping the rhythm in my heart and in my feet. I am a survivor. I am a songwriter. I am a foot traveler on a path to understanding my life and the lives of other women who have experienced sexual assault in college. My meditational meandering over the earth takes me there. I am lost to the forest. I am lost inside thoughts turned to song and back again. I am found inside my memories—memories that are inextricably connected to some of the most defining moments in my life. The rhythm of the song comes to me and takes me back to the time that inspired it.

His breath was sweet once. I can almost taste it again now—warm and welcoming as I brush my nose against his. My eyes are closed. I grin. I am filled with a warm sense of contentment that only his arms could bring, and only his arms took away. Now I can only taste the bitter morning when I wished it were all a dream.

The air in the forest was sweet once. We used to go there together whenever we could. I remember the evening when the rain came down on us so hard that we were soaked well into the next sunrise. We had been on the trail for four days and were chilled to the bone for the next ten hours at least, yet we had two days of walking ahead of us to reach our destination. We looked back on it and laughed—until the laughter was choked

away by a tightness in my throat. I'm coming back to the forest now. I will not allow it to be taken from me.

Meandering through “fields of ideas...understanding the world in which [one] lives, but not completely shaped by it” (Berman, 1998, p. 171), I continue moving through the woods, lost in my thoughts. My hope is to understand the experiences of sexual assault survivors who experienced their traumas in college. I am driven to understand the experience through my lens and their lenses. It is, in essence, the only way I can understand my own story, and it is my story informs my understanding of this phenomenon. I want to know the phenomenon because it is a part of me, and I want to integrate it into a larger, more complex understanding of self and world. I wish to pursue a constant reaching for understanding, never quite arriving, but always on the path to learning more.

I walk alone for now. My feet are bare and I can feel the cool dirt of this forest path where patches of pine needles have blown away. The pine needles that remain prick and pinch my soft, protected winter skin. It's good for me, though. I have to toughen up the soles of my feet if they are going to make it through the summer. I will walk many more paths before summer's end.

It is an exhilarating experience to both know the woods and be lost in the woods. The senses come alive in coexistence with that which is wild. There is a primal connection that happens, harkening back to a time in which survival in the woods was essential. No matter how far we get away from nature, I believe a connection to nature and survival is hidden in primal areas of our brains. We all have a familiarity with the woods, or with surviving in nature, even if only because our ancestors lived and died that

way. Such intense physical survival experiences cannot help but be passed on generation after generation.

After surviving sexual assault in college, I feel situated within a generational sisterhood of women who have gone through, and will go through, similar trauma. Being situated in this way is orienting and disorienting at once. From the Latin term *orientum*, meaning “discerning bearings” being situated among other women who experienced sexual assault in college gives me a sense of knowing my place, and knowing where I belong. It provides a place in which I *do* belong. It is comforting to know that I am not alone.

The word “disorient” is from the French word *desorienter*, and means to “cause to lose one’s bearings.” He caused me to lose my bearings when he raped me that day. I didn’t know what was happening. I could not get my bearings. I could not find any physical objects or any mental sense or reality to grasp. Being without bearings on that day, and for the years that followed, led me to meander—to walk without any particular direction, to go wherever the path took me. I was scared. I was alone. I didn’t know when it would end that day, or if it would ever end. I thought I was in familiar territory, and suddenly I did not recognize anything around me. It was disorienting. It felt like loose dirt started rolling out from under my feet, and no matter how hard I scrambled to regain my footing, I fell and fell and fell. It felt like I fell down an entire mountain. Sometimes it still feels like I’m falling.

Meandering Im-Perfection

Am I faithful, am I strong, am I good enough to belong
In your reverie a perfect girl
Your vision of romance is cruel and all along I played the fool

All your expectations bury me.
(McLachlan, 2003)

My meanderings toward survival took me through some very dark places; I was torn between my own overwhelmingly damaged, loathful, imperfect self-image and an external drive to maintain the bright, interesting, fun, creative woman everyone really seemed to like. I kept it together on the outside, but my soul was broken into pieces on the inside, and I had no idea how to get myself together. I did not know at the time that part of me was shattered and in need of mending. I thought that my existence was normal: turn the energy on outside, and collapse on the inside.

Being the perfect everything on the outside—“the perfect girl,” the perfect vegetarian, the perfect activist, the perfect leader, the perfect lover, the perfect advisor, the perfect student—was destroying me. These identities were just facades, and if anyone ever looked under the surface, he or she would find that in the months and years after my rape, I became a raging, insurmountable storm of internal imperfection, and I could not stand myself. The depression was so devastating some days that I simply could not get out of bed. My commitments to work and school were often the only things that got me past the threshold of my apartment. I preferred to be alone, and often, I still do.

Depression overwhelmed me. When I was home alone, the solitude would consume me—the comfort of it, the away-ness of it. By staying inside, alone, I did not have to pretend to be anything other than what I was—a sad, tired, shadow of who I became when I went out. By staying inside, I did not have to expend the energy I felt it took to be perfect. I could remain imperfect, and even though I hated myself for it, it was easy to just stay.

Turning Away and Turning To

Even as I sit here,
He stands behind me
Clamping two colossal hands on my shoulders
And bends down
And whispers to my neck
From now on
You write about me.
(Bonanno, 2009, p. 13)

I was scared to write this dissertation. It felt to me as though his colossal hands were clamped on my shoulders and his beer breath was whispering to me about the ways in which he would decide how to define me and my writing. I did not feel ready to take back the power—all of the power rested in his hands. I told people that the topic was just too hard; that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process would be too complicated; that engaging rape survivors would slow up my process; and that, while surviving rape in college has not been explored enough in the academy, maybe this was not the project for me. I would mention that it was difficult—that the writing was hard. I just never mentioned why. Now I can say it: the writing was hard because I am a survivor, and writing about rape in college brings attention to unresolved feelings and emotions around my own assault.

So I turned away. I thought that I could explore another topic—something else about which I care deeply, but would not trigger such deep emotions from my own experience. I needed a topic that would get my dissertation done. Doctoral students often hear that *a good dissertation is a done dissertation*. So I changed topics. I started exploring the lived experiences of fraternity men engaged in rape prevention. It seemed like a perfect transition, the ideal solution; I would study the lived experiences of

fraternity men engaged in the Ten Man Plan, a sexual violence prevention program I created in partnership with many extraordinary colleagues. Of interest is the fact that I ran from writing about my own lived experience to writing about, as Hong (1998) states so eloquently, “men the very age and demeanor of my attacker”. It is no wonder I needed to turn away from that topic, too.

I turned away from my original topic because on some level I was still scared of him. I was scared of what he would do if he found out that I was writing about the incident. In some ways, I am still scared, but my fear is now overpowered by a need to write. I am compelled to write. I may still sense his colossal hands on my shoulders, and the heated whisper of his voice in my ear, but the emotions I feel now compel me to move forward toward the writing. Maybe through the writing I will find healing.

So I turned back. After many months seemingly lost to another topic, I returned to my exploration of the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college. I do not really feel like the time was lost—the work I completed may someday be the seeds of a book about fraternity men engaged in rape prevention. For now, though, thoughts and writing are coming quickly, and I feel emotionally ready to write. I am drawn to the topic because I was raped in college, but the pull is much stronger than simply that. After years of working in the area of sexual assault prevention and victim advocacy on campus, I have met scores of people—men and women—whose lives have been deeply affected by sexual assault. If the writing of this dissertation can help in any way, the emotion of this project will have been worth it.

I hope that my story, and this study, will help people who work on college campuses have empathy for survivors. I hope that this dissertation will help higher

education professionals craft policies and procedures that are sensitive to the unique needs of female survivors raped by male students. I hope that through telling their stories, the women participating in this phenomenological exploration will be provided with an outlet and support for finding peaceful integration of their traumas into who they are today. Some of them may feel as I do—that by sharing their stories they might lessen the burden for others who follow in our paths of rape and recovery. I also hope that this project will give collegiate rape survivors' friends and family members better understandings of their loved ones' lived experiences so that they can support them on the path to survival.

As the French philosopher Ricoeur (1990/1992) would say, he (my rapist) was the director of my movie, and I served as the narrator. I was narrating a story over which he had control. I needed to become the writer of my own story, and that is what I have done. I have taken control of telling the story in my own voice, as opposed to reading the story as it was written by someone else.

When I first gravitated toward phenomenological inquiry on the lived experience of sexual assault in college, I did not have a good understanding of what had happened to me. It was abstract. I was disconnected. I started to write, and with the writing came a pain so deep that I put it aside and did not look at it for months; the months became years. Each time I would try to turn back to the writing, I turned away. I could not face the pain. I did not know how to manage it. The dissertation was stagnant.

Through my work on campus, and through therapy, I began to gain clarity on my own experience of rape. I had buried the thoughts so deeply that I no longer even considered them. Looking back, the after-effects of the trauma haunted me in many ways.

I was affected by an erratic connection and disconnection from the people around me, and a sense of disconnection from self. When I gained some clarity on my rape, the reality left me shaken. It was hard for me to write in that frame of mind. Once I was shaken, everything started crumbling.

At some point, though, with the help of meditation and therapy, the shaking and crumbling stopped, and I was able to start putting some pieces back together. Once some of the pieces were resituated, they did not fit perfectly in the places where they started, but I found that I could start looking at the dissertation again. I discovered energy and a drive to write about the lived experience of sexual assault in college in a way that I never had before. In reflection, I realize that I had to *turn* away in order to *return*. And now the writing is coming quickly. It is still hard, but I have the fortitude to do it, and I feel motivated to do it for myself, for other survivors, and for anyone with any connection to sexual assault in college. I have found the strength to push his hands, and face, and breath away, and now I get to decide what and how to write.

On the Floor Again: The Continuing Pull of the Phenomenon

The memory is clear
She sees his face this time
Her tears are softer now
There are ways to dull the pain
Will someone hear her pain?
(Monahan-Kreishman, 2006)

I'm on the floor again, but I'm scrubbing this time. Fumes from the floor cleaner burn the inside of my nose and the back of my throat as I gasp for air between sobs. Sobbing. At least I can't smell the dirty carpet, the sweat, or last night's beer seeping through his pores. At least he's not on top of me. At least I made it out that door...tears

pour out of my eyes, down the bridge of my nose and off the tip, mixing with a pool of cleaning liquid just below my face.

Scrubbing. Sobbing. My sight is blurry. I'm not wearing gloves, and I can feel the solution burning my fingertips. I welcome the physical pain as it dulls the emotional. I'm present. I am separate from the stories I hear every day from sexual assault survivors, and from the story of my own rape. The burning dulls the pain in my heart, and makes room for feeling something else. It means I'm still here, still alive. I find a sense of security in the connection that comes with the burn. By scrubbing my floors, I'm trying desperately to scrub the images of other women's traumas, and of my own trauma, from my mind's eye so that I can just get some sleep. The images of their traumas mix with my own, like the toxic liquid burning under my fingernails; if I can't scrub it away, I'll never be able to do the work again tomorrow—the work of trying to end rape, the work of helping survivors who have been raped. Bringing order from the dirty chaos of my floorboards makes me feel like I have some control over the chaotic world of sexual violence. The dirty earth of the woods beyond my back door creeps in and onto my kitchen floor; I can't sleep in that filth. I can't help anyone inside the confines of this paralyzing, sleep-deprived mess. I can rest when the floors are clean.

I'm in the office. Listening. My ankles are crossed and my toe is hooked around the leg of my chair. One of the many realizations I made soon after starting this work was that, for many of us, there is no division between prevention and advocacy. One of my friends used to say: "Once you put yourself out there as someone who cares, survivors will just find you. It is inevitable. We just have to do our best to make sure we're ready to do the right thing once they come through the door."

Some survivors in the field of prevention and advocacy tell me that they have had similar experiences to mine in terms of opening the floodgates of disclosure. I put myself out there as someone who cares about this issue, and people start coming to me for help. I find myself in classrooms, coffee shops, bars, malls, and grocery stores engaged in conversation with survivors I've just met. It feels like I have a sign on my forehead that reads: "I'm a safe person to talk to. I know the path you are on. I'm on it, too."

I go out on campus and speak about these issues. I help undergraduate students become proficient in doing the same. College students who hear us speak find us accessible and seek us out to help them with problems they are having in their own lives related to the issue of sexual violence. I do my best to refer them to numerous resources on campus, but there is nothing stopping the initial meeting, nor am I interested in stopping it. If someone needs help, and he or she is able to find it with us, one more person is on his or her way to recovery. I just need to figure out how to manage my own recovery in the process.

"Can you help me? Something bad happened."

The black leather office chair surrounds me—it holds me steady. I'm steady enough to help them through. Just steady enough. They sit in different places on the long blue sofa. Some sit cross-legged, feet tucked under. Others sit closed. Some sit open. Some cry. Some have no affect. Some are numb. Some laugh. Some are angry. Each story is just as horrifying as the last and the next. Their collective stories lodge in my throat next to my own trauma. I have to remind myself that this isn't about me. I have to choke back my own tears in order to listen the way I need to listen and say what I need to say. I have to hold down the jumble of details about my trauma so that I can be present,

hear them, offer options, and help them feel that their stories, their lives, matter. There will be time later for me to deal with the mess in my own head left by that original mess on the floor. In the moment, I need to be present for each individual in front of me.

Their stories are about boyfriends, ex-boyfriends, friends, and groups of guys they know. That is, the they thought they knew the men until their trust was undermined by manipulation, and premeditation, and rape. Their stories are about single rapes, multiple rapes, and gang rapes. My heart breaks for these women and I am left wondering what it is I can do about it all. I can listen. I can share resources. I can help empower them to take back their lives. I can help some of them share stories and make meaning. Yet I cannot take away the trauma, and I feel helpless to stop it from happening again.

When I get home at night, I get down on my hands and knees and scrub the kitchen floors again. I am at a loss. I need to breathe. I need to sleep. The tears are softer now, but I need to stop crying. I can't do this forever. I have to find another way. I can only go on so long helping people after the damage has been done without trying desperately to do something else that might make a difference in their lives. I send a cry out into the universe for help and strength. I have to try. Maybe the trying is in the writing.

Turning to...for Them

Turning from the page, I can not turn from her, from the light streaking in between those dark, weathered boards, fracturing, splintering upon reaching the dry blood, each marking the slender golden length of her. I find in her eyes what I found in the eyes of my own mirror. Until I just plain stopped looking. I could not stand what was there, not there. What I still have no language to describe. (Driscoll, 1997, pp. 3-4)

I cannot turn from her, from this topic, from this dissertation, from these survivors because they are too important to me. They are a part of me. They are my sisters, and countless college women I have cared about over the years. They are part of my years of being a college student and caring for the women around me. They are part of being engaged in college sexual assault prevention and victim advocacy, and the numerous women who have come through the revolving door that leads to my office. I cannot turn from her, from the dissertation, the survivors, and my own recovery. She is (they are) too important to me.

And yet, I turned away. I turned away because it was too painful and I could not find the words for that which I thought *I still have no language to describe*. I turned away in an attempt to protect the people around me. Could my husband, my mother, my sister read these words without crumbling into a thousand unrecognizable pieces? Would I be able to pick them up in the way that I had to pick myself up? Do I have the energy to manage their reactions to my trauma? How can I care for them when I need to be cared for by them? But they are the adults, and I have to believe that they can manage to get through this as secondary visitors to my primary world. I have to believe that they will understand my need to tell this story.

I turn back again to the lived experience of sexual assault in college because it belongs to me, and I belong to it, and there is not enough printed language about this LIVED experience. Especially when the trauma is invoked by a loved one, a trusted someone...so much of the existing literature on this topic comes from those who have been traumatized by strangers. It is time to add to this knowledge base so that we, as a collective community of caring people with mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and

daughters can better know our lived experiences, and so that we can better care for the souls who are in it. We never *chose* to be in it...it is a misguided and ugly place that we were thrust into. It is time to bring our voices up. The voices of those of us who have been sexually violated by men we liked, loved, and trusted. There is no other way they could have done this to us except by manipulating our like, love, and trust of them. There is no way.

“Until I just plain stopped looking, because looking was far too painful” (Driscoll). I looked away. I got busy looking away. It took all of my time and energy to do everything except look in the mirror. But the work of this problem came back to me in the form of my work on campus. Don’t “they” say that until you really face something in your life, it will just keep coming back to you? Well, it came back. It came back in a way that rocked me to my very core. I had no idea that when I took that job in prevention and advocacy that I would be sucked back into a past I had tried so hard to forget.

In so many ways, I need to write this dissertation for them—for the survivors who came before me and for those who come after me, for their friends and family members, and the people who care about them, yet have no idea what they are going through. And in some ways I need to write for the caring people who work on college campuses so that all of us can have more empathy for survivors. We are the ones with the power on campus—when survivors are treated badly, it is up to us to roll up our sleeves and clean up the mess that was created on our watch.

In an effort to know what we, as campus professionals, need to do, we should listen closely to the voices of the victims and survivors of sexual violence on our campuses. If we look closely, and listen intently, and create safe spaces, many of them

are willing, even eager, to talk. When survivors at Duke University and Harvard University were offered opportunities to share their stories in annual campus magazines, the responses were bold and powerful (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Duke*, 2011; *Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2008, 2010). Women on the campuses came forward to share poetry, letters, artwork and narratives in order to break the silence around sexual violence.

The following is an excerpt from the Harvard series of survivors' stories:

I might as well go ahead and say it up front: I am a victim of rape... I was a virgin... we had been friends for years and years... he was an "upstanding Christian boy with solid moral values." Oh the irony... The last thing I remember is heavy breathing and no pants. That's where my memory stops. No, I hadn't been drinking, and no, I hadn't been drugged. Afterwards, in the part where my memory comes back, he was under the delusion that we were in some sort of relationship, and all I wanted was to go home... the nurse at UHS said something along the lines of "trauma in the genital region... broken blood vessels... honey are you okay?"... I blocked him on facebook, blocked his texts, deleted his number... Then of course I felt terrible because I had irreparably ruined our friendship. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 8)

The writer calls herself a victim in the present tense. The event is in the past. Where is the line between victimhood and survival? What does she think and feel about the word "victim"? What does use of the word "victim" to describe herself feel like? She is sure to tell us, just as I was sure to say in my opening narrative in this chapter, "no, I hadn't been drinking." What is it about rape, and the mythology around it, that has compelled both of us, without knowing each other, and without ever having met, to feel compelled to assure our readers of this point? What if we had been drinking? Would we then be somehow to blame for getting raped, as if we were alone in the situation with some phantom second self committing the horror, as opposed to the individual who actually perpetrated the act?

Are we concerned that the general readership may blame us? And what is it that compels us to blame ourselves—to feel it necessary to examine the things that we did with a heavier focus than that applied to *his* actions? I would love an opportunity to reach out to her now, or years from now, to hear how she is doing, and how, in retrospect, the rape affected her lived experience of college.

There are other voices, too. One woman shares her experience in a therapy group for sexual assault survivors, where a common thread shared by all of the participants is shame. They all take time to share their stories and to support each other, carefully telling each other that the rape or rapes that happened were not their fault. The following is an excerpt of her internal struggle as she participated in the group:

“It wasn’t your fault.” I struggled with this. I felt like a fraud every week, an impostor invading the group and violating the “real” rape survivors. I was different, it was my fault. I had something to feel guilty for. I would ask myself all the time, “Are you just thinking like the rest of them, taking the blame on yourself, where it doesn’t belong? Or are you right, you did this to yourself? What would the rest of them think if they really knew?” (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 8)

What does it feel like to go through an event and to come out on the other end of it truly feeling self-blame? I certainly felt self-blame. I wondered then and still sometimes wonder now what I did to make him act that way. Was it that I broke up with him? Was it that I went up to his bedroom? Was it that I didn’t scream and yell and kick? Why do we feel that it is necessary to scream and yell and kick? Aren’t there other ways to convey the sentiment of “no”? The story above was written by a woman who was raped several times within a matter of weeks. It was not her fault, and yet she, like me and so many other survivors, is steeped in a culture that has us believing from somewhere deep in our

bones that it *was* our fault. What does that do to us? What does that do to our day-to-day lives after the incidents are long past?

Some of the narratives speak to the struggles, and to the deepest, darkest places the soul goes when it has been torn apart. Other narratives, however, speak to the regaining of power after such atrocities have been perpetrated. The Clothesline Project is an outlet for the voices, the stories, the narratives:

Let each woman tell her story in her own unique way, using words and/or artwork to decorate her shirt. Once finished, she would then hang her shirt on the clothesline. This very action serves many purposes. It acts as an educational tool for those who come to view the Clothesline; it becomes a healing tool for anyone who makes a shirt – by hanging the shirt on the line, survivors, friends and family can literally turn their back on some of that pain of their experience and walk away; finally it allows those who are still surviving in silence to understand that they are not alone. (Clothesline Project, n.d.)

The following text was written on a t-shirt for the Clothesline Project at Harvard:

I AM A FRESHMAN, AND I WAS RAPED ON THE SLIMY FLOOR OF A BATHROOM IN A CLUB. TODAY IS ONE YEAR, ONE MONTH, AND ONE DAY LATER. TWO WALLS SEPARATED ME FROM 100 PEOPLE. I SCREAMED AND SCREAMED, BUT NO ONE HEARD. YOU HIT ME... I WAKE UP, AND I AM OVERCOME WITH SHAME. SHAME THAT RISES UP FROM DOWN OVER YOUR HEART. THE SHAME IS GONE, BUT IT HAS BEEN REPLACED BY ANGER. ANGER, HATRED, GUILT, YES, BUT NOT FEAR. I REFUSE TO LET YOU MAKE ME AFRAID. YOU HAVE NOT WON. I WILL NOT LET YOU WIN. THIS IS MY LIFE, NOT YOURS. EVERY MORNING I TELL MYSELF THAT, AND EVERY NIGHT I CURSE YOU AND LONG FOR THE PART OF ME YOU KILLED. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p.10)

What does that transition from hurt, to anger, to action, to healing look like and feel like? What happens for the collegiate sexual assault survivor when that movement from one to the other takes place on the campus where she was raped? What if she could not stay on that campus long enough to heal because the pain of being there was too

great? What does it look like and feel like for her to heal somewhere else, on a different college campus or elsewhere?

Turning to...for Me

And who can hear her words?
The story of her pain
Another soul like hers
Who knows it all the same
(Monahan-Kreishman, 2006)

I feel like I know it all the same, but do I know it at all? Their stories are not mine. Are there ways in which we, myself and women like those whose stories are shared above, can open the phenomenon together—the knowledge of the lived experience? There will be some same-ness, and there will be some different-ness. And can we know it all?

I am her. I am a survivor, and I am compelled to write this dissertation for myself as much as I write it for anyone else. The writing of this dissertation and the work I do in sexual assault prevention and victim advocacy have become my survivor mission. Herman (1997) spoke of the survivor mission as a way of turning one's own trauma into "a gift to others" (p. 207) through social action. I find that writing gives me power toward my own healing, and I hope that this body of research will give energy to others who are healing and surviving, too. Indeed, as the researcher I have developed "a certain moral obligation to [my] participants" (van Manen, 1997, p. 98) and to all women who are survivors of sexual assault in college.

I want to hear their words so that, together, we can make meaning from their lived experiences. Through sharing their stories, I hope that they can continue on paths to survival, and that I can continue on my own. I want to listen to them, to their stories. I want to hear them as carefully and thoughtfully as I can now hear my own story. I want

to hear their voices because I can finally hear my own, and I want to know more deeply others who are out there. *Can I tell them my story?* Will they tell me theirs? Will we have the strength? If we can find the strength, I will be here. I will listen. I will come to know *it* better—the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college. I’m listening. I know my own story, and I can come to know it better as the stories—theirs and mine—come together to make a deeper meaning.

When I walk in the woods, I overturn rocks to see what hides beneath. Sometimes I am disgusted by what I see, just as I am sometimes disgusted by my own uncovered feelings about my own rape. It is the uncovering, though, that holds the most promise—promise of healing, promise of community, promise of hope. I wish that my path out of the dark forest would immediately open into the clear, blue, sunny sky, but for now the course ahead is tangled and dark. I walk until the route narrows and the trees are grown together and I can no longer move forward. Heidegger’s (1950/2002) *Holzwege (Off the Beaten Track)* essays are collected around the concept of a place on a path in the woods, a *holzwege*, or a place in the woods that is so overgrown that travelers can no longer move forward. The idea of the path in the woods is one that Heidegger returned to again and again, like in this poem (as cited in *Philosophy Today*, 1976):

Paths,
paths of thought, going by themselves
vanishing. When they turn again,
what do they show us?
Paths, going by themselves,
formerly open, suddenly closed,
later on. Once pointing out the way, never attained, destined to renunciation –
slackening the pace
from out of the harmony of trustworthy fate.
And again the need

for a lingering darkness
within the waiting light. (p. 287)

The path Heidegger refers to reminds me of my own path to recovery, which has often stopped abruptly, or feels stunted, until my head clears enough to see new openings before me. It has become my interrupted journey. The Greek word *aporiai* speaks to the “blockages” of such paths (Heidegger, 1950/2002), but Heidegger hopes rather to find the one that opens into the clearing. He finds that one’s clearing opens into being. While my path ends when it is entwined in trees too tight for me to squeeze through, I can see a small speck of sun through the winding branches. I will learn; I will teach; I will be patient. I will work away at the entanglement, and the time will come that my unearthed, hidden being will lie in the sun-drenched, warm, sweet grass, revealed and at peace.

Until that time, I am compelled to ask questions—to dig deeper into the lived experience of collegiate sexual assault survival. I am compelled to meander through the woods, to find myself deep in thought, and to labor my way through the overgrowth. The path is covered with mud, loose rocks, and roots that stick out and grab at my feet. I slip, and trip, and fall, and I get back up. It is not easy, but it is the way I have chosen.

Sexual assault survival seems, to me, like the ongoing Escher stairway. The people on the flight of steps never arrive at any particular destination, but continue moving up and up and up, or down and down and down. Some of us move from victimization to a place of empowered survival, but the journey never reaches an end point (Ledray, 1986/1994). Survival is a living process, and is always changing. Some survivors feel compelled to engage in community action as part of their healing processes (Herman, 1997; Hill & O’Brien, 1999). This dissertation might become that action for

some of the study participants. It has already become that action for me. Through action, many of us find meaning, as I have found meaning through my work with college women, and with college men who strive to end violence against women. Without the action of working and talking and writing, I could not have come to the understanding of my own experience in this way. I believe that my work led me to the path of studying the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college.

It helped me to uncover my own experience, to name it, and to begin to make peace with it. It was painful at first, but now it feels like a helpful, healing pain. In some ways it feels the way my legs, arms, and lungs react when I have been away from the woods for too long. The walk burns, but it feels good at the same time. I know that making it through the burn is essential. When the burn goes away, I'm left with easy breath, and a sense that I could walk for days and days.

The experience of being a collegiate sexual assault survivor has been a powerful one for me because it has led to a tension between personal re-traumatization, helping others, and larger social change. The action that moves me forward in my own healing has sometimes become the very action that has caused my healing process to stop or regress. Like movement through the forest, though, I can always look up, I can always travel on. Here in writing, just as in the forest, each step takes me closer to a place of understanding. Because I do not exactly know where the path leads, I feel a little unsure. My destination is a feeling for which I long, but I cannot yet see. For now, I am content to be in the forest, walking along the path. Through the meandering, my mind drifts to another song—one that brings me to think about the people who have been helpful throughout my healing process. What is it about these special few who have held me up

through my own recovery? They are with me on the path now, like spirits lifting me forward. As I walk on, I again whisper a song to myself. The sound of the wind in my ears makes the music inaudible except to me. I do not need to hear it to know it. It is in my heart and in my bones. As I mouth the lyrics, I can almost see the people around me who have so often given me strength. They are the strength in my legs and my heart and my mind, all moving me forward on this path in the forest—a path to understanding victimization, recovery, and survival.

Returning, and Turning To

(And I) write to the living
I write to the dying
I write to the souls that are torn up inside
And through me, the writing,
There is no denying
These lives and the ways they are tied up with mine
(Monahan-Kreishman, 2006)

And so *I write to the living*—for those who are surviving life after rape. And *I write to the dying*—for those who are struggling to survive. Maybe our collective stories will serve as a rock among the dark and scary trees. *I write to the souls that are torn up inside*. I write this dissertation, in part, for the people who struggle the most. The ones who are so physically and psychologically damaged, and may not know that there are others out there who were raped in college by the boy next door—the cute boy, the charming boy, the popular boy, the boy everyone loved. *And through me, through the writing, there is no denying these lives and the ways they are tied up with mine*. There is no denying the ways in which we are connected—the other survivors and I. We were sexually assaulted in college and we survived. We were shattered, but we found ways to put our lives back together. We were destroyed in the moment, but survived in the end.

What does that mean to the survivors? How did it feel? What is it to be assaulted? What is it to have your sexuality assaulted? Your most private and intimate thing to give—what is it to have that taken away by force? We are connected, we are survivors. We will come to know the phenomenon better together.

From Questions to Clearings

What is it that I really seek to know, how am I meant to know it, and what sort of clearing will it reveal in the end? As Gadamer (1960/2002) says, “we will have to consider the *essence of the question* in greater depth if we are to clarify the particular nature of hermeneutical experience” (p. 362). As such, it is the activity of hermeneutical questioning that will lead to the clearing that is hermeneutical experience. It is an ever-changing, ever-evolving way of understanding the world in which we live.

The Path Toward the Question

The question is understanding, and understanding is central. In other words, without the guiding question, how can I know what I seek to know? How can I find my way to understanding? Gadamer (1960/2002) teaches us that “the path of all knowledge leads through the question” (p. 363). By meandering toward the question, we step closer and closer to a sense of truth. The sense of truth, or honest understanding, is found in the metaphor of the home. The home is the space in which, or a person with whom, we feel most comfortable. It may not be a structure, but it is the center—the very core of our experiences. For me, it is the people who have helped me through the process of recovery, and who have given me the supportive space in which to heal and grow. “The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (Bachelard, 1958/1969, p. 6). Indeed, it can be the place in which one can

be her most vulnerable, asleep, knowing that the walls or people around her will protect her until she finds consciousness again. Of course, not all houses and walls and people are that way.

And so I will question, and the questions tumble forward: Who am I? Am I damaged? Why did this happen to me? How did this happen to me? Have I recovered, or will I always be on an Escher stairway, leading at once up and down and nowhere at all? What does the lived experience of recovery look like? What were some things that have made it harder? Easier? What are the joys that sustain us through the trauma? How was anyone ever able to love me again? How was I ever able to love? To trust? I must try to be strong enough to teach others by finishing this work—this phenomenological inquiry. I can hope that my words might save someone else from having to go through what I've had to endure, or at least make the pain more manageable. Is this process even about saving anyone from anything? I will push toward that end. Is there ever an *end*? I will try to answer. Are there any *answers*? Or are there just meanderings and horizons inching further and further away?

Hinson (1995) writes about the *horizontal person*:

To feel oneself en route, to feel oneself in a place where there are always possibilities of clearings, of new openings. This is what we must communicate to the young if we want to awaken them to their situations and enable them to make sense of and to name their worlds. (pp. 149-150)

My hope is to engage survivors who have graduated from college and have found some time away from their traumas and the spaces in which they happened. I want them to have reflected on and explored their experiences, in whatever ways they were and are able. I hope to bring their lived experiences together as a group, and to *awaken them to*

their situations and enable them to make sense of and to name their worlds in a way that makes meaning from the cumulative lived experience. My hope is that in doing so, their stories and meaning making will affect us all—me, them, and our respective communities.

As I walk, I ask questions, trouble over them, attempt to answer them, and in doing so, I move closer toward the horizon. By moving closer to the horizon, the horizon is pushed a little farther away. Gadamer (1960/2002) taught me that “The openness of a question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question” (p. 362). But has the horizon not moved farther away? It is not static. The horizon is not a final destination, but rather a lead that keeps us moving toward something in the distance. Knowledge is in the distance. Survival is in the distance. By asking the question, answering it, AND opening up to new questions, the horizon continues to move just out of reach. Our “bodies” of knowledge and understanding continue to expand. It is a fluid process. One will never fully grasp the horizon. It is unattainable, as are definitive answers. There is only a fluid movement toward deeper understanding. The horizon is everything ahead of us that influences individual meaning-making. It keeps us on a path toward unearthing understanding.

The arms that lift me up now are many. I count among them my teachers, students, colleagues, friends, family, husband/partner, and daughter. As I find ways to bring my heart to all of them, I move closer to a deepening understanding of the phenomenon, and of the ways in which my experience colors my understanding of it.

My feet move forward and I trouble over the *what* and the *how*. What is it exactly that I’m searching to know better, and how might I best go about uncovering it? I know

what I'm searching for; I am searching to understand the lived experience of sexual assault survivors who experienced their traumas in college. How far along in their recoveries do they have to be in order to be ready to put their broken hearts on display, just as mine is now? How does my experience enhance my understanding of others who walk similar paths? Phenomenological inquiry will help me to uncover the phenomenon, ask new questions, and continue walking the entangled path in search of each new speck of light. But the question that drives my search is: *What is the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college?*

As I explore the ways in which my history fuels the understanding of the phenomenon, I am practicing phenomenological inquiry (Gadamer, 1960/2002; Heidegger, 1977/1993; van Manen, 1997, 2002). We are curious about our curiosities because they are connected to who we are and to our personal histories. There is a bias, and the bias makes for deeper understanding; "thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what it said" (Gadamer, p. 370). This speaks directly to the deep meaning and understanding phenomenological research is able to uncover. Personal reflection adds to the understanding, rather than diminishes it. I will walk the path with these survivors so that we each may more deeply understand the phenomenon through what we bring to the clearing in the woods.

And yet again, my mind returns to the path I walk under the trees. From thoughtful meanderings about the people who hold me up, to the women who will travel with me to find a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, I continue to be propelled forward. As each step moves me along the forest floor, my mind moves even faster in anticipation of the understanding yet to come.

The Path to a Clearing

Phenomenology is the path to a clearing of the mind, so what is it about phenomenology that provides such clarity into the lived experience? Hermeneutic phenomenology, a human science methodology, seeks to describe the lived experience of a particular phenomenon as described by the individuals who most deeply and richly experience it (Gadamer, 1960/2002; van Manen, 1997). It does so through a meaning making process that occurs between researcher and participant, or in this study, survivor-researcher and survivor-participants. Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) notes:

[Phenomenology] also offers an account of space, time and the world as we ‘live’ them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations on which the scientist, the historian, or the sociologist may be able to provide. (p. vii)

In other words, it is a methodology that provides rich insight into what may otherwise seem insignificant—the inner workings of individual lives. But these inner workings are tied to the outer workings of the world in which we live with others.

So why am I using hermeneutical phenomenology to study the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college? What drew me to this methodology? The answer lies in the question, or rather, the question in the answer. What is the question I want to ask? What is it that I desire to know? How is it that this way of knowing is most appropriate to guide me through my inquiry?

Perhaps it is van Manen’s (1997) description of phenomenology that speaks to my musician self and artist self, drawing me into the process of examining lived experience. He explains that phenomenological inquiry is “not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that

is both holistic and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive” (p. 39). It is the attention to detail and minutia that draw me to the methodology van Manen describes:

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a research methodology, reintegrates part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire. It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday lives. It makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. (p. 8)

In other words, phenomenology provides a mechanism through which the researcher may find meaning in seemingly commonplace occurrences. It is the instrument of phenomenological inquiry that will allow me to examine such questions.

What does it feel like to be raped by someone you know and trust? What are the sights, smells, and bodily feelings associated with the trauma? What is it like to live inside Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the depression, anxiety, and multitude of complexities that comprise it? What is it like to go (or try to go) to class, to the gym, to parties, and to hang out with friends, when your rapist is there in many of those spaces? How does that experience inform and help to make meaning about the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college? What meaning can be made from the lived experience of as many as one quarter (Brener et al, 1999; Kilpatrick et al, 2007; Koss, 1988; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) of women on college campuses in the United States?

It is the nontraditional format of phenomenological inquiry that drew me in, as well. Chapter 1, or the “turning to the phenomenon,” allows me, as the researcher, to overtly uncover the ways in which I am connected to the field of inquiry. Chapter 2, “the exploration of the phenomenon,” allows not only for literature to be included, but art, music, poetry, and other forms of expression that may help to open the phenomenon. Chapter 3, the “philosophic grounding,” calls me, as the researcher, to unpack any

philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of phenomenological work. Thereafter, the phenomenological process engages me, as the researcher, in an artful process of phenomenological conversations and “interpretive rendering” of themes (van Manen, 1997). What may otherwise be called a “conclusion” includes practical and theoretical insights that may be gleaned from the phenomenological study. As a researcher, phenomenology speaks to a way of knowing to which I am drawn, through philosophy, art, poetry and language. It is the finding of the extraordinary in everyday life that engages me and draws me in. In doing so, the hope is that it will do the same for the readers and consumers of this research.

I like the overt way in which phenomenology brings together research and researcher. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) says, “Body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my comprehension” (p. 235). The lived experience, as described through retrieved memory, sensory recall, and narrative draws out an organic and natural form of inquiry that speaks to the ways in which I naturally question and wonder. I am drawn to understanding the lived experience of sexual assault in college, in part because sexual assault in college is woven into the fabric of who I am. That fabric—the fabric of phenomenological knowing, the fabric of survival—is my way of knowing. Through art, music, and narrative inquiry, I am grateful to the forefathers and foremothers of phenomenology for developing a methodology designed to help answer the kinds of questions I wish to ask.

As Merleau-Ponty (1964/1998) describes:

[Phenomenology] is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is

also a philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence. (p. vii)

I find this description helpful in understanding why phenomenological inquiry does not call for prior knowledge on the phenomenon. For example, the phenomenological dissertation does not require a traditional literature review, but instead calls for a poetic rendering of works that bring forth the essence of the phenomenon. At its core, phenomenological studies are weakened by too much knowledge of the sociological, scientific, or historical nature. An ideal phenomenological research environment is one in which the researcher is drawn to the bodily experience of the topic, and can enter into each phenomenological conversation and each interpretive emergence of themes with only the lived experience of self and participant in mind. A theory of the unique emerges *from* the experience, rather than being the lens through which one looks.

My own academic exploration of hermeneutic ways of knowing began in Burlington, Vermont, where I was enrolled as a master's student in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration. During my studies, I played guitar, wrote songs, and sang at local coffee shops. As we studied the philosophy behind hermeneutics in class, I was inspired to write a song with the original chorus:

Question leads to question leads to knowledge leads to power
Only answers hold the power at our one most trying hour
Question leads to question leads to knowledge leads to pain
And only honest questioning leaves something more to gain.
(Monahan-Kreishman, 1999)

It is within the circular understanding of phenomenology (“question leads to question”) that one comes to better understand a phenomenon. As Gadamer (1960/2002) explains, “We must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of

the whole” (p. 291). The song I quoted above, *Come Home with Me*, is also about surviving sexual assault:

Giving her a choice
She'll grow into her own sense of being
Why define for her, her joys?
Let her keep herself, her dreams
(Monahan-Kreishman, 1999)

These lines speak to the sense of giving survivors the room to make their own decisions. An enormous choice was taken away from us the choice of when and with whom to share one's body—and it is essential for survivors to be given the room to make decisions, realize our own joys, discover who we are after our rapes, find dreams, and keep dreams. As such, the bringing together of two parts of the same song serves as an illustration of the coming together of the phenomenological process and sexual assault survival, as both parts of myself as researcher. It only stands to reason that I would be drawn to both—one as methodology and one as topic of inquiry—and that both would come together to make meaning from the lived experience of sexual assault in college.

It is through the process of hermeneutic phenomenology that I write what I see and feel, and when I re-read what I have written, I am able to come to a newer, fresher understanding. Furthermore, once this dissertation is complete, the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective it manifests will continue as each new reader examines it within her or his own framework, and through her or his own lens. It is just as Gadamer (1960/1975) explains:

In actual fact, writing is central to the hermeneutical phenomenon, insofar as its detachment both from writer or author and from a specifically addressed recipient or reader has given it a life of its own. What is fixed in writing has raised itself publicly into a sphere of meaning in which everyone who can read it has equal share. (p. 392)

Further, Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) asserts that a phenomenon is best examined at a distance, from which the entire scope of it can be assessed. He notes that a phenomenologist may best reach her goals when she can bring herself “wholly to the transparency of the imaginary, think it without the support of any ground, in short, withdraw to the bottom of nothingness. Only then could we know what moments positively make up the being of this experience” (p. 111). I am drawn to the methodology of phenomenology because it will allow me to explore the lived experience of a group of sexual assault survivors in college in a larger, more meaningful way than I would be otherwise left to on my own, from my own experiences, or by using other methodologies. Further, it is through the phenomenological writing that I will most creatively capture the essence of their collective narratives.

“What makes a call upon us to think, and by thinking, be who we are?” (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 390). It is this type of thought process that draws me to phenomenology. It is a process of exploring the ways in which we think about things, make meaning, and experience life. It is a process of gaining insight into lived experience, and how people see their worlds.

Because the topic of sexual assault in college has become central to the work that I do in the field of higher education, I also appreciate phenomenology’s inherent bringing-together of researcher and research. Just as Merleau-Ponty (1962) spoke of the body as fabric of comprehension, phenomenology affords as much insight for the researcher as it provides of the phenomenon itself. Above all of this, though, it is my

question of interest that calls me to phenomenology. *What is the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college?*

How do we do phenomenology? Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a human science methodology, was developed in order to better understand lived experience (van Manen, 1997). As a recognized and valued methodology, it stands to bear that certain processes must be followed in order to gain phenomenological insight. Van Manen (2002) outlines what he calls the essential phenomenological research activities:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

While van Manen did not suggest that these tasks be linear in nature, they are necessary components of the methodology. There are some components that will naturally come at the beginning of the process. Chapter 1, or the “turning to the phenomenon,” allows the writer to overtly express her experiences that drew her to the phenomenon, so that the reader knows where the author is coming from and can understand the lens through which she arrives at understanding. Once such understandings are expressed, it also allows the researcher to bracket these understandings in a way that embraces them as part of the researcher, in order to be open to experiences of the participants (van Manen, 1997).

The process of phenomenology is hermeneutic in nature; new meaning is uncovered each time an experience is explored. The process of writing and rewriting is especially important, and with each new reading and writing, the writer brings a fresh

lens. Additionally, Gadamer (1960/2002) points out: “Written texts present the real hermeneutical task. Writing involves self-alienation. Its overcoming, the reading of the text, is thus the highest task of understanding” (p. 390). In other words, the reading of the written text furthers the hermeneutic process. With each new reader’s insight, understanding will expand.

The Clearing

I find myself in a clearing in the woods. I was lost in thought and now am lost in the woods. My lungs are tight. I am scared by the unknown of where I am, but am also comforted by the clearing. There is clarity in the clearing. It is a clearing of the woods, and a clearing of the mind. The inquiry, hidden within the melody of the songs that take me to deeper understanding, is here in the moment and in this space. In this clearing I will find clarity.

I look up from my feet and the path to see that I have arrived to find a circle of survivors. I pause to look at each of them, one at a time. My eyes move around the circle slowly from left to right. As I stop to rest on each soulful pair of eyes, we connect deeply because we know what we, together, share. We know each other in a way that is only possible for those who have shared similar tragedies...and triumphs.

In some ways, they are like me; they have survived some form of sexual assault while they were in college. They have taken some time to heal. I wonder, though, are they also like me in other ways? Do they have good days and bad? What do the good days feel like? Are the bad days anything like mine? Did they know their perpetrators like I knew mine? Where were they in the spans of their college experiences—what did life look like and feel like for them during that time? Was it early on in college, or later,

as was mine? How old were they, and how does age color the experience? Did recovery begin in college? They look to me for guidance. Where should we go now? I return the question—where *should* we go now? I ask the same question of them because they will guide me more than I will guide them. Without speaking, they somehow understand—some nod, some smile, all wait to see what will happen next. We move toward the edge of the clearing together with the understanding that somewhere in the woods lives a deeper understanding of our lived experiences. Somewhere stuck in the tangled branches and overgrowth we will make meaning from our cumulative experiences. We will all inform the understanding of what it means to be a collegiate sexual assault survivor. The following steps we take, we will take together. They will lead me toward deeper understanding as much as I will lead them.

As they walk into the woods, my intention is to immediately follow where they lead me, but something holds me back. There is more for me to discover in the clearing—more clarity for me in the clearing—before I can best learn from their individual paths.

I watch the survivors disappear into the woods, and I worry that I will not be able to find them again. Reluctantly, I turn back to the clearing to see a group of grey-haired White men sitting around a fire. The skeptic, the critic, the judgmental part of me wonders what this group of men have to share with me that I haven't already examined from a feminist perspective? Have they examined *anything* from a feminist perspective?

I shake my head at myself. Who am I to know or decide where I might learn and who I might learn from? I walk to the side of the circle and peer in because deep down I know that there is something to be gained here. I need to step outside my limited perspective and try to explore ideas that may be outside that to which I am naturally

drawn. It happens this way for me time and time again—each time I think I know what there is to know, I am reminded that I know very little at all.

As I peer into the circle, there are many more people than I originally perceived. The philosophers are there with their important texts about phenomenology. They will help me to explore the methodology that will lead me to understand the lived experience of collegiate sexual assault survival. They are joined, however, by a strange cast of characters from music, poetry, theater, movies, fairytales, and mythology. Together, this band of brothers and sisters will situate me in the best frame of mind to phenomenologically inquire and walk with women who have survived rape in college, like me.

From the pine, to the air, to the deepest breaths through our noses, the smell of wet earth and evergreen cools our lungs. Depending on the direction of the wind, we are either engulfed by fireside smoke or warmed by its crackling, burning branches. I will sit with my face to this fire until I have heard all of the songs and stories this group has to tell me. And then I will turn to the heart of the woods.

From Heart to Home

Their hearts, the ones of other women who have survived sexual assault in college, join students who have struggled with this lived experience, as we move forward in exploration of the phenomenon together. Later in my study, participants will join the circle. I am their sister, their mother, their daughter. They are my earth and my wind. They are my grounding and unleashing. Ultimately, my writing will represent our collective knowing. I am with them on any path they choose to take because their paths

will teach all of us about collegiate sexual assault survival. I will continue to try to see more deeply into their hearts, and to the openness of their sharing.

As I walk together with other women who have survived, I come closer to an understanding of this phenomenon. We are all sexual assault survivors and we all experienced our traumas in college. Do they sometimes feel like life before rape is so far away, as if it was someone else's life? Do they wonder if they will ever really be heard? Understood? Will anyone ever truly hear our cries?

And so I write. I write so others may understand this phenomenon. I write with some of the survivors because their voices are best heard through their own writing—pen and ink, keyboard and screen. They can choose whether to speak with me or write with me because some of them feel that they can be most honest when they do not have to look anyone in the eye or speak their words to actual ears. The writing is more real to them, and as survivors, they have the power to choose.

As each one of us has taken our own journey to recovery, do the memories become clearer? It was so hard, so painful at first. What does healing feel like as we follow individual paths toward survivorship?

I will hear all of their words. I will uncover the phenomenon of their pain and persistence. We will come to know each other through our writing and meeting, and they will understand that they are not alone. I will help to shed light on this phenomenon—a phenomenon that is kept hidden in shadows of collegiate life. Leaders of the academy are afraid of a reality in which college men are committing unspeakable acts on college women under their watch. I am part of the academy, and I am fearful, too.

The survivor-participants and I—we are all found in each other and yet we have individual paths. We will share our stories with each other in time, and we will share them with anyone who cares to read the text. My desire, one that I hope is shared, is that by telling our stories others will feel less alone, and their friends and families and campuses will know better what they have experienced. I will listen. They will be heard. We will all come to know their lived experiences.

I am a survivor of collegiate sexual assault. I bring women together who have similar experiences so that we can better understand this phenomenon. My purpose is to better understand their lived experiences. The forest path is dark now, hindering my ability to see clearly. Each conversation, like the sunrise on a crisp morning in the woods, will bring light to the darkness and will burn off the mist that gathers in the night. Sometimes the light shines through the trees and inspiration fuels a fire to move forward with this work. We do it for ourselves and we do it for everyone else our lives touch. Sexual assault in college is not well-understood. Somewhere along our path together, we will construct our ways of knowing this phenomenon. We will shed light on it so that others—survivors and those who love them—may walk on more easily.

**CHAPTER 2:
THREE STEPS FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK:
UNCOVERING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVAL
FOR WOMEN IN COLLEGE**

Boundaries in the Woods: Crossing the Line(s) of Victimization and Survival

It is 1987.
Sarah Tobias stops for a drink at a bar called The Mill.
She drinks. She dances. She kisses a man.
And she is brutally gang raped on a pinball machine while bar patrons cheer it on.
Lines are crossed, and crossed, and crossed.
As each man enters her,
As each man rapes her,
As the back of the pinball machine is banged and banged and banged against the wall,
Her eyes go glassy and blank and she just stops fighting and pieces of her self are torn and torn and torn away.
Pieces of her soul are torn away.
When they are through she is still alive.
True, she is still alive.
She is still breathing.
She is still walking.
But has she survived?
(Monahan-Kreishman's poetic rendering of film *The Accused*, [Jaffe, Lansing, & Kaplan, 1988])

Victim Lines

For Sarah Tobias, lines were crossed, and crossed, and crossed.

When does survival begin? Pause. Take a step back. When does victimization end? Now, when does survival begin? If she is still breathing immediately following the rape, has she survived? If she can walk away, has she survived? Has she? What parts of her have survived? What parts of her have died? Can those parts of her that are left for dead and dying ever be resurrected? For Sarah Tobias, lines were crossed, and crossed, and crossed.

Sarah Tobias was gang raped—a heinous crime also inflicted upon college women (Sanday, 2007). Like when the guy she liked walked her back to his house, hand in hand, laughing...until she realized he brought her there for all of them to take a turn. Like when she sat down with a group of friends to smoke pot and didn't realize until later that the stuff they gave her would render her unable to move. Like when she cried and pleaded—*please, please don't do this*—and each one laughed, or cheered, or closed his eyes and just kept going.

Ledray (1986/1994) writes about a phenomenon on some college campuses: “Some fraternities and gangs actually consider rape a game, in which one member is charged with finding a woman and setting her up for the group. Rape is a common initiation rite of these male groups across the country” (p. 235). What is the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college? What does it do to a woman's everyday existence when a fun night of partying ends with her at the center of a sadistic “game” of gang rape? How does the turning-upside-down of the reality she thought she knew change the world as she *now* knows it, feels it, sees it, lives it? What does that do to her college experience? What does it do to her when she thought her campus was a safe place, and now, after surviving such a trauma, she knows it is not safe at all? What happens when *her place at her university* no longer feels like a safe place to *be*?

Surviving sexual assault is sometimes described as “taking three steps forward and two steps back.” In the experience, it feels like no progress is being made at all. After being in it for a while, being in the state of survival, can one look back on the path and see that true progress has been made in life on campus after rape?

The word “university” comes from the Latin *universus*, meaning “whole, entire.” So what does that mean for her when her *whole, entire place* of being becomes the site of her trauma? What happens to her, and her state of *wellbeing*, when she suddenly does not know her place within *her place*? Casey (1993) writes about this sense of displacement as an anxiety-producing environment, as if it were an unknown place in the woods:

As we wend our way through a heavily forested region, the sequence of right versus left turns may become a bewildering maze (perhaps this possibility underlies our fear of being lost in a forest, engendering “place-panic”). Even the seemingly intangible difference between front and back is subject to confusion when we inhabit wilderness in the dark: was that strange sound directly in front of me or just slightly to the right? (p. x)

It is a disorienting feeling when a place that was once safe becomes a place that feels unsafe. And what if the new sense is that the place was never safe, and that one was led to falsely believe the safety? Where is the line between safety and security, yes and no, consent and no consent? What happens when those lines are crossed in a place where one once felt secure?

Where is the Line?

“Where is the line?” they ask. “Where is the line?” I feel like I’m stuck in the movie *Groundhog Day* (Erickson & Ramis, 1993), in which Bill Murray’s character relives the same 24 hours over and over again until he gets it right. At the end of each day, time loops back around to the beginning of the day he just lived. Every morning Murray’s character wakes up to the same alarm clock playing the same Sonny and Cher song, in the same hotel room, in the same small town, with the same cast of characters reenacting the very same day he had yesterday. Yet the other characters in the movie do not know it is the same day. To them, it feels like the day is new.

I feel that way when I do sexual assault prevention education. “Didn’t we just do this yesterday? Didn’t we *just* have this conversation?” The answer is yes and no. As soon as confusion over the location of the line between consent and sexual assault is cleared up for one undergraduate course in sociology, women’s studies, family studies, psychology, or related fields that chose to bring us in as guest speakers, we have to move on to the next. The most frustrating, though, is when the 50 minute class is up and the definition of rape is still not well-understood, especially when it seems so clear to many students. As Brownmiller (1975) says:

To a woman, the definition of rape is fairly simple. A sexual invasion of the body by force, an incursion into the private, personal inner space without consent – in short, an internal assault from one of several avenues and by one of several methods – constitutes a deliberate violation of emotional, physical and rational integrity and is a hostile degrading act of violence that deserves the name of rape. (p. 376)

So what can be said about rape? What is the line? Where is the line, and what does it have to do with the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college? Is there something we can say of these things? “There is nothing to say, or rather, it is impossible to truly ‘say’ something” (van Manen, 1997, p. 244). The phenomenologist is charged with finding the essence—saying something by sensing something, and yet knowing that some things will be left unsaid. In other words, some things are un-say-able. What is rape? What is the survival of it? What are survivors able to say, and what is left unsaid? And what, in the un-saying, is actually spoken so loudly that volumes could be written about it? It is in unique moments of what van Manen (1997) calls “transcendental bliss” (p. 244) that we, as writers, may glimpse the un-glimpse-able, and find a way to share the essence of a lived experience existentially.

In a letter to Ernst Jünger, Heidegger (1950/1998) muses about Jünger's 1955 text *Across the Line (Über die Linie)*; in particular, Heidegger is interested in the concepts of "the line," "the zero meridian," and "the zero line" as they pertain to the ultimate ethical "line" human beings cross against each other. Heidegger writes:

As meridian, the zero-line has its zone. The realm of consummate nihilism constitutes the border between two world eras. The line that designates this realm is the critical line. By this line will be decided whether the movement of nihilism comes to an end in a nihilistic nothing, or whether it is the transition to the realm of a 'new turning of being. (Heidegger, p. 292)

And so the questions remain. What is the line? Where is the line? Where Heidegger is concerned, the line is nihilism, "a doctrine that denies any objective ground of truth and especially of moral truths." It is the "ultimate ethical 'line' human beings can cross against each other" (Heidegger, p. 292). The worst possible thing one human being can do to another. Nihilism is the line. Degradation of morality is the line. Crime against humanity is the line. It seems pretty clear to me: don't cross the line.

What happens to a young college woman when that line is crossed? How is her lived experience in college affected when a crime is committed against her very humanity? What does it do to her when a friend—a peer—committed the rape? What does it do to her when her friends—her peers—cannot understand or empathize with her lived experience? What does it do to her when she is sitting in class with college students, both men and women, who tell me (as the presenter) that they do not know where the line is...they cannot understand "the worst possible thing one human being can do to another"? They cannot understand where care ends and the degradation of morality begins. How does that make the sexual assault survivor feel as she sits in that room? Where else in her collegiate life is she met with the same level of confusion or ignorance

from her classmates, or worse, from her closest friends? I cannot be sure what it does to survivors sitting in the midst of such discussions, but I imagine that it is horrifying, ostracizing, suffocating.

And so I am back in the loop of *Groundhog Day* (Erickson & Ramis, 1993), and back to the line. What is the line? *Where is the line?* For some reason, no matter what I say, the students are not usually satisfied with the answer. I try to clarify for them:

Did she say no? *That was the line.*

Was she crying? *That was the line.*

Did she shake her head? *That was the line.*

Did she pull away? *That was the line.*

Was there reason for her to be scared? *That was the line.*

Did she stop moving, stop responding? *That was the line.*

Was she unable to stand on her own, move, take off her own clothes? *That was the line.*

Could she answer some basic questions, such as who are you, who am I, where are we? No? *That was the line.*

While it used to take every ounce of my spirit to maintain professionalism when engaged in the same exact conversation day after day, my heart broke twice-over for every survivor in each of those classrooms who felt the disbelief and isolation that only a room full of uneducated and unaware peers can foster. My heart ached because in some ways, I could see a younger version of myself sitting among them. Regardless of my feelings, the students continued to ask and I continued to answer. *Where is the line?* In my head, I would scream at them. *Really? Are you really asking me 'where is the line'?* A seemingly simple question led me to feel exasperated on good days and re-traumatized on bad days. I can only imagine how difficult it must have been for the women who had been traumatized on campus to sit in those classrooms and hear those words, those questions, that ignorance.

So many things can lead rape victims and survivors to be pulled back into a traumatized state of mind. As Herman (1997) says of that kind of moment:

Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep. Small, seemingly insignificant reminders can also evoke these memories, which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event. Thus, even normally safe environments may come to feel dangerous; for the survivor can never be assured that she will not encounter some reminder of the trauma. (p. 37)

And the question phenomenology must ask of this is—what does it feel like to live through this kind of experience? What is it like to sit in a classroom and be jarred back into such atrocity? In one moment, she sits in a safe classroom, and in the next moment her mind would have her believe that she is back in the moment of her rape—naked, terrorized, unable to breathe. What must that be like for so many women trying to finish their college educations? How is it even possible to continue on in college after living through rape? Herman goes on to say that there is a “frozen, wordless quality of traumatic memories” (p. 37). What is it for words and voice and survival to rise up from their entrapment in a tundra of traumatized mind?

Levin (1985) has an interesting take on how it may be possible for words/voice/survival to rise up: “The human body will not, I think, be redeemed until the truth of the masculine principle is brought into balance —balance and harmony—with the corresponding truth of the feminine principle” (p. 58). Given this insight, I wonder if some of us, as survivors, may be drawn to working with men on sexual violence issues because of a need to find a balance between the masculine and the feminine? Maybe the

icy encasement will thaw if some kind of harmony can be found after a male attack on the female self? Perhaps our voices, words, and very survival are freed by our small part in creating, with men, a kind of gender equilibrium.

Some years after I began outreach and education work with different classes on campus, I engaged in similar prevention work with college fraternity men. I spent several hours each week sitting in fraternity basements and fraternity board rooms discussing rape culture and how to work to end it. Not only was I ready to do the work, I was compelled to do it, just as Hong (1998) says of her own similar outreach to men:

That I am a survivor also means that the timing of my involvement with [college men] was critical; just a few years before I became the advisor for *Men Against Violence*, I would have been incapable of working effectively with this group. I wasn't yet at a point in my recovery process that would allow me to do this kind of work, which requires an ability to empathize with young men – men the very age and demeanor of my attacker. (pp. 15-16)

As Hong reflects on her own experience working with college men on rape prevention, I, too, was working with men *the very age and demeanor of my rapist*. I did not have the clarity then to know it, but I am sure now that it is why I was drawn to the work. I wanted to work in fraternity houses with fraternity men because I wanted to reclaim the space of my own rape so many years ago. I wanted to be part of something that kept other young women from having to endure what I had to endure. It became my *survivor mission*.

Most survivors seek resolution of their traumatic experiences within the confines of their personal lives. Yet a significant minority, as a result of the trauma, feel called upon to engage in a wider world. These survivors recognize a political or religious dimension in their misfortunes and discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedies by making them the basis for social action. While there is no way to

compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it; one such way is through making it a gift to others. For some individuals, trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a “survivor mission” (Herman, 1997, p. 207).

In essence, my work with the fraternity men was central to my own survival experience. Talking about *the line* with men, specifically men who were so much like my perpetrator, was essential to my own survival. The examination of that line, or the existential looking-into the line and wondering what the experience is of having it crossed and living past it—that is my survival mission, too. Writing this dissertation is part of my survival mission. I wonder if any of the other women have engaged in their own kind of survival missions, and what those experiences were like for them? I also wonder about the women who, as Herman (1997) suggests, “seek the resolution of their traumatic experience within the confines of their personal lives” (p. 207), and what those experiences are like for them? What is the essence of the experience between them? Is there a line that divides them, or is it a line that connects to each side and pulls them together?

The fraternity men and I worked together, and we were joined by faculty and staff committed to outreach efforts, yet the work was not easy. The men asked the same questions. They wanted to know, *where is the line?* My blood would boil, but I did everything I could to maintain a safe space for them to have the conversation. I wanted desperately for them to stay in the conversation until they understood. I *needed* them to stay in the conversation until they understood. In many ways, I was sitting in the basement of the fraternity house as a proxy to the college version of myself. Somehow, if

I could help them find better understandings, I could take a few more steps forward in my own recovery.

The word “understanding”, from its root word “understand,” finds its etymological foundation in the combination of the Old English *under* and *standan*. *Under*, instead of meaning “below” or “beneath” as we might assume, has the etymological meaning “among, between.” *Standan*, then, has a root meaning “to exist, be present.” My effort to get the men to understand was my effort to exist and be present among them. Given this reflection, we are returned to the aforementioned consideration of finding balance between the masculine and the feminine.

In my time with them, I did feel a certain among-ness. As our time together went on, they relaxed in my presence. As one of the men said, “I say things to Mollie that I would never say to my mom.” I take that as a compliment. To me, it means that I truly did (and still do?) find a way to exist and be present among them. It gave us a special relationship in which we could be honest and open with each other. They could use language with me, as raw as it was sometimes, that they otherwise only used with each other. In those moments of crude honesty, I could feel my survivor-self rise up and gain strength. By being with them, by helping them make their fraternity memberships and houses safer for women, I found myself reclaiming a space and spirit that I had lost so many years ago.

My work with one of the fraternities lasted nearly eight years. When I ask them now, “*Where is the line?*” they respond by saying, “*You [meaning themselves] know where the line is. You just know, and you don’t cross it.*” The first time I started hearing that reply from not one, but *many* fraternity men, was after three years of working with

the chapter. It was then that I started to regain hope. And when the well-educated fraternity men began to partner on programs and conversations with their sorority peers on the topic of sexual assault prevention, I knew that they were making a difference for silent victims in the sororities with which they partnered. Some fraternity men were contacted by victims/survivors who told them that the men were the first people in their (the women's) lives who ever truly articulated an understanding of their experiences. The fraternity men were able to connect collegiate victims of sexual assault with resources that could help them. Each time I heard a story about a fraternity man helping a victim of sexual assault, a little part of my heart was healed. From fraternity basements to fraternity boardrooms, the tightness in my lungs relaxed. Sometimes hope comes in unexpected packages, and I did not expect it to come from the fraternity men.

Fraternity men, in so many ways, and for so many reasons, have a very bad reputation. Movies like *Animal House* (Reitman, Simmons, & Landis, 1978), as dated as they may seem, depict the worst of the worst—hazing, drugs, drinking, sexual assault, verbal assault, physical fights between men—and it is images like these that still influence our perceptions of fraternities. To some degree, these perceptions are warranted. Members of fraternities and sororities engage in much higher-risk behaviors than the general campus population, especially in the areas mentioned above (DeSimone, 2007; Humphrey, 2000; Scott-Sheldon, 2008); because I am a sorority member and have worked in or closely to Greek Life for my entire professional career (over 15 years), I know firsthand what that can look like. Living in and working in the Greek community can be disheartening. For those reasons, I did not have high hopes for my work with the fraternity men. I was very surprised when our work together started taking off. I am even

more surprised that, today, their momentum is self-sustaining. They do not necessarily even need me anymore, but I will always be available to them. I was so powerfully affected by their abilities to change their own cultures that I will be forever deeply connected to the young men with whom I worked.

Survivor Lines

Days later,
Sarah Tobias is at home in her trailer.
Her eyes go glassy and dull like that night on the pinball machine,
And, as if possessed by another entity,
She pulls a pair of kitchen scissors from a drawer.
She walks vacantly to the bathroom where she turns on two cylindrical florescent lights bookending a small rectangular mirror.
She looks into it, past her long blond hair and her blue eyes, past her clammy skin gone greenish in the unnatural glow.
She grabs a hunk of hair and starts to cut.
She cuts and cuts until most of it is gone.
She wants the memory to be gone.
She can't cut enough of it away.
And when she returns to the kitchen,
Her boyfriend asks her when she is going to snap out of this?
He tells her that the whole thing is getting boring.
She screams at him to get out and never come back,
And after he leaves, she breaks down for the first time after being raped,
And cries and cries and cries.
(Monahan-Kreishman's poetic rendering of film *The Accused*, [Jaffe, Lansing, & Kaplan, 1988])

Sarah Tobias crossed the line from victimization into survival that night. It was one step. She certainly had not found closure or become fully healed, but she took a step, and that is sometimes what it takes to start the forward momentum into greater healing, surviving, and thriving. These may all be part of the essential lived experience of sexual assault survival. Sarah regained some control over her own body by changing the image of who she was on the outside to reflect the changes she felt on the inside. She wanted her old outward appearance to be gone because she was very much *gone* on the inside.

Despite the amount of hair she cut away, though, she could not cut away what had happened. Regardless, it was a step forward. She moved forward. She took another step that night, too. She voiced anger at her boyfriend for not being there to support her in the way she needed him to be. She screamed and she cried. Two steps forward for Sarah Tobias. Progress. She crossed a line, and on the other side she began to inch toward survival.

Survival, for some of us who have experienced the infliction of sexual assault, can be a communal/community experience, especially for those who have found a *survivor mission*. As Herman (1997) states:

Social action offers the survivor a source of power that draws upon her own initiative, energy, and resourcefulness but that magnifies these qualities far beyond her own capacities. It offers her an alliance with others based on cooperation and shared purpose. Participation in organized, demanding social efforts calls upon the survivor's most mature and adaptive coping strategies of patience, anticipation, altruism, and humor. It brings out the best in her; in return, the survivor gains the sense of connection with the best in other people. In this sense of reciprocal connection, the survivor can transcend the boundaries of her particular time and place. At times the survivor may even attain a feeling of participation in an order of creation that transcends ordinary reality. (pp. 208-209)

It is this power, initiative, energy, and resourcefulness that fills us with a necessary reserve to move forward. Because ordinary life after rape is anything but ordinary, the escape into something real, tangible, and good can be fulfilling. It takes the energy that is otherwise spent on the powerfully negative trauma influence and pushes it into a powerfully positive one. As Herman explains, it gives us abilities to *transcend the boundaries of [our] particular time and space* especially when that time and space can be filled with the immensity of trauma.

Bachelard (1958/1969) explores of the concept of immensity:

One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity. (p. 183)

And it is, indeed, that infinity that can be the opening needed for survival, a wide open expanse of possibilities coupled with a sense of power that makes the vastness energizing as opposed to overwhelming. The concept of the daydream, too, is appealing. It allows us temporary relief from reality in order to shore up for the journey of survival ahead.

For me, there was an initial strangeness in the survival. There was a numbness and a detachment. I walked through the world in a daze. I did what I was supposed to do; I moved from thing to thing, but I did not engage. If I did indeed walk over the line into survival—and I imagine that I did at some point—I did not do it consciously. Being in survival, in some ways, may just mean *being* after the rape... whatever that means for each survivor.

For me, survival meant that I did not attach to people for a very long time. When I started connecting with people again, I think I may have been searching for people who would not want to connect fully with me. The first two people with whom I connected were men I met in Burlington, Vermont. I think that I originally expected each of them to treat our friendships with cavalier nonchalance, and that the friendships would likely end after we completed our master's degrees and went our separate ways. To this day, more than a decade later, they hold a special place in my heart. My relationships with them

became a first step for me toward the other side of the line—the survival side. I had a long way to go then, but it was a good step. I think I will always be taking steps.

What does it mean for survivors to make it through their initial traumas? How are the rest of their experiences in college affected? What does it mean to take the first steps on the other side of the line into survival? Levin (1985) states:

Resistance is not ever enough, but it can be the beginning of a... response. And the communicativeness which shares both the experience of affliction and the experience of resistance multiplies in the most wonderful ways our emancipatory possibilities. (p. 82)

Levin's words speak to the possibilities of survival after trauma, emancipation after oppression, and the hope and faith and possibilities that can come with *living in survival*. Perhaps the initial resistance of, or the escape from rape is not the survival, per se, but is instead “the beginning of a response.” Perhaps it is the beginning of survival.

What is living in survival? Does it mean that a woman has escaped her attacker, her rapist, her boyfriend, her friend? For me, in the beginning, survival was like stepping into the forest for the first time. It was a feeling of unpreparedness. It was the feeling that even if I had come prepared, I could not be sure of that until I was in it—in the forest, in the survival. Boots may not fit properly after walking in them for a few days. The map might not give the perspective or information needed. It is hard to know what tools one may need in survival until one is actually in survival.

What are survival *lines* for women who have experienced rape in college? The word “line,” from the Latin word *linea*, means “rope, cord, string.” Knowledge of the origin of this word allows for an expansion of understanding it, and therefore the lived experience of survival, beyond a two-sided victimhood/survival scenario. As in the case

of sexual assault survivors, while one side can be victimization and the other side can be survival, there are other ways to delineate *the line*. One side might be safety and the other side might be trauma. In this light, what does it mean for the line to be a *rope*? What does it mean for the other side of the *rope* to be *trauma*?

A rope can serve many purposes. A rope can be menacing. A rope can suffocate.

A rope can kill. A rope can be a tool of suicide:

Long after the event, many traumatized people feel that a part of themselves has died. The most profoundly afflicted wish that they were dead. Perhaps the most disturbing information on the long-term effects of traumatic events comes from a community study of crime victims, including 100 women who had been raped... Rape survivors reported more "nervous breakdowns," more suicidal thoughts, and more suicide attempts than any other group. While prior to the rape they had been no more likely than anyone else to attempt suicide, almost one in five (19.2 percent) made a suicide attempt following the rape. (Herman, 1997, pp. 49-50)

The question for phenomenologists is this: What does it feel like, and what meaning can survivors and researcher make together from a place of being in such despair that the only perceived release is death? As one survivor puts it, "I wish he had killed me. It would be so much easier" (Ledray, 1986/1994, pp. 160-161). What does being in that state and place do to someone who otherwise might be trying to attain a college education? Where does the college education fit in that kind of lived experience, if at all? Is there even room for thoughts of college in a mind so focused on that one, most permanent escape?

Death: that one, most permanent escape. What happens in the lived experience of rape that breaks a spirit to such depth, and what is it that brings such a spirit back out again, toward survival? Heidegger (1927/1962) writes of this dichotomy in terms of *Dasein*, or a way of *being-in-the-world*. *Dasein*, here, manifests as a *being-towards-death*

or *being-towards-the-end*, and its potential opposite, *being-a-whole*. Of *being-towards-death/being-towards-the-end*, Heidegger says:

Being-at-an-end implies existentially *Being-towards-the-end*. The uttermost “not-yet” has the character of something *towards which* Dasein comports itself. The end is impending...for Dasein. Death is not something not yet present-at-hand, nor is it that which is ultimately still outstanding but which has been reduced to a minimum. *Death is something that stands before us – something impending.* (pp. 293-294)

And so it is for all of us—death is waiting for us when our times come. But if that time comes too soon for a survivor of sexual violence who choose to take her own life—and I believe *that* moment of death *does* come too soon—what is it to be in a place *at the end of her rope*? Being-at-an-end signifies a being-towards-the-end. As such, there *may* be a space within *being* that can move away from the broken-ness of victimization back toward the whole-ness of healing and survival. There is a “not yet” that exists there—one that poses the question of whether the finality must come now, by her own hand, or later. As she is in that *end-space*, does she think of the end she might have otherwise met had her soul not been shattered by some college boy? How present is the “not yet” for women in college surviving sexual assault? Is there a moment of no return? Is there room for turning? Is there a tiny bit of rope to cling to at the end that might pull her up and out to *being-a-whole* again?

Of *being-a-whole*, Heidegger (1927/1962) says:

We must accordingly ask whether [Dasein], as something existing, can ever become accessible in its Being-a-whole. In Dasein’s very state of Being, there are important reasons which seem to speak against the possibility of having it presented...in the manner required. (p. 279)

And so the question is this: Can beings ever be whole regardless of what has happened *to them/within them*? In other words, is wholeness something that ever existed for survivors

before they were raped, and is it something that can ever be attained after their rapes? If it never existed, can it ever be found?

While a rope can be an instrument of death, it can also signify hope and safety. It can be thrown to someone drowning in a great, tumultuous sea. The rope, or the line, can stand for and stand between many things. A rope can serve as a lifeline. When one escapes rape, even after the rape occurred, does crossing the line feel like death is menacing? Like one is hanging on in a struggle for life while someone else is holding the other end in a rescue effort? Where is the rope? Where is the line? Is it different for every survivor? What is the lived experience of the rope/line? Does it become part of the lived experience only once, immediately following the trauma? Or, does the rope/line resurface like a struggling swimmer hanging on for dear life throughout the lived experience of survival?

A significant line that is crossed toward survival is the anniversary of the rape. While some survivors do not remember the date of the incident, many do, and may “re-experience symptoms” of the rape on the day or days surrounding the anniversary (Ledray, 1986/1994). A survivor told me once that there was an anxiousness around the anniversary for her, that she was having trouble breathing in an unpleasant, but not alarming way. “Often [the survivor’s] symptoms may be so vague or mild that while [the symptoms] are uncomfortable, [she] may not recognize them as related to the rape” (Ledray, pp. 159-160). On the anniversaries, some survivors spend “considerable time thinking about ‘the day’” as a way to reclaim part of their lives, the moments in time, that have been taken from them (Ledray, p. 161). One survivor writes about her experience in the following poem entitled, *The First Anniversary*:

Wind blows
Wind blows every day
It blew on the day a year ago
It blows today.

Today I said a prayer for him.
I wrote it on a piece of paper
I burned it with a match
The smoke carried the paper away.

I took the ashes with me
Two miles high we flew
I jumped from the edge of the world
I left behind all I knew.

Wind blew in my face.
I was free, free from gravity
Free from worry
Filled with faith and hope.

In canopy the world was peaceful
It was full of life
Void of hate and violence
Filled with love.

I gave the world my ashes.
I released them to the world
Now this problem is no longer mine
Today it became the world's.

(Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Duke, 2011)

For survivors of sexual assault, crossing the line may be part of the lived experience—
from day to day, anniversary to anniversary, and victimization to survival (Ledray).

Rules (Out)Lined

What are the rules, and how does the survivor feel when she thinks she has followed them? What if she did not follow them? What if by not following the rules, she is blamed by her peers for what happened at the hands of her rapist? And what is she feeling when she blames herself? What is it like for her to think that she somehow made

her perpetrator do this terrifying thing to her, that something she did brought it on? What does it mean to live with self-blame? To truly believe that had she done something differently, he would have heard her more clearly and would have decided to stop before *he* crossed the line?

The interesting thing about “the rules” is that they are based on rape mythology. In other words, our society falsely believes certain things about rape that are not based on the actual experience of it. Of rape myths, Ledray (1986/1994) states:

Myths about rape have survived in our culture so tenaciously for so long because they have a number of social functions. Rape myths allow people to feel safe by letting them believe that rape rarely happens, and that when it does, it is because the woman secretly wanted to be raped. The myths enable us to maintain our belief that we live in a just world. They allow us to believe that we can prevent future rapes. (p. 13)

So the question is: What is the lived experience of survival when one’s world is steeped in such beliefs? Where does that sense leave survivors of sexual assault in college in terms of their lived experiences of survival after rape? What do the rules do to their lived experiences of survival? What messages do they send to them, how do they hear them, and how do they color their worlds? What are the rules?

I’ve heard some of the following over the years:

Walk in groups,
don’t walk alone,
if you do walk alone, be sure to look all men squarely in the eye,
don’t look men squarely in the eye because it will provoke them,
don’t wear your hair in a pony tail because that’s what they’ll use to drag you off,
don’t wear your hair down because it is too sexy,
don’t wear a short skirt,
don’t drink,
don’t go to parties,
talk on your cell phone on your way to your car so someone will know the moment you’re attacked,

don't talk on your phone because you'll appear distracted and will become a target,
get a safe walk home with someone you know,
don't walk home with they guy you know and like because, statistically speaking, he's most likely the one who will rape you,
hold your keys like this,
hold your keys like that,
look in the back seat,
under the car,
all around the car,
kick and scream,
RUN AWAY...

When the rules so often contradict one another, and fail to take into consideration the complexity of each situation, how do we know which ones will keep us safe? A rape myth that I hear, time and time again, is "if she didn't want to be there, why didn't she run away?" Of this, Ledray (1986/1994) explains:

The myth that, "a woman can run faster with her skirt up than a man can with his pants down" is simple enough. People who believe this myth think that a woman should be able to run away from a rapist, and if she does not, then she really must not have wanted to get away. This does not, however, take into consideration the immobility that results when [the victim is] faced with a threatening, angry man, with or without a weapon, and [is] afraid of being hurt or killed if [she doesn't] do what he tells [her]. (p. 14)

What is the lived experience of trying to follow the mythological rules before and after victimization? What is the lived experience of "knowing" the rules, and being steeped in them? Are the rules part of the survival experience at all? What are the messages about what young women *can* do in college? Are there rules that add to the lived experience in college, or are there only rules that take away? Do those messages affect her lived experience if she is a survivor of rape in college? How is her lived experience in college affected by different messages about who can and cannot affect the outcome of sexual assault?

Often, the result of being immersed in the mythological rules is a deep sense of self-blame that is then magnified and underscored by the knowledge or perception that the people in the survivor's life think that the rape was her fault. Of shame and self-blame, Herman (1997) writes:

Beyond the issue of shame and doubt, traumatized people struggle to arrive at a fair and reasonable assessment of their conduct, finding a balance between unrealistic guilt and denial of all moral responsibility. In coming to terms with issues of guilt, the survivor needs the help of others who are willing to recognize that a traumatic event has occurred, to suspend their preconceived judgments, and simply to bear witness to her tale. When others can listen without ascribing blame, the survivor can accept her own failure to live up to ideal standards at the moment of extremity. Ultimately, she can come to a realistic judgment of her conduct and a fair attribution of responsibility. (p. 68)

A survivor told me once that before her rape, she followed all of the rules. She did not drink. She did not go to parties. She wore sweatshirts and yoga pants almost every day. She thought about the possibility of sexual assault all the time. She told me that people told her she was crazy. They said that she was paranoid, that she never did anything that would "get her raped, so why do you worry about it so much?" "Maybe I am crazy," she said, "because none of it stopped my friend from raping me after a study session in the residence halls."

After she was raped, she decided to break all of the "rules" she followed before the rape. She drank heavily. She did drugs. She started wearing very revealing clothing. She had sex with a lot of different people. That, at the time, was survival to her. She told me that it felt good to live without fear, and that for the first time in her life she felt in control. That was her lived experience at the time. Her story resonated with another survivor's words:

It was so unlike me. I started going out to bars and going home with men I met. I don't know why I did it. I slept with six different men in two weeks, more men than I'd slept with in the previous two years. (Ledray, 1986/1994, p. 162)

As Ledray states about this kind of behavior: "For some women this is an attempt to regain or maintain a sense of control over their sexuality. For other women it is an attempt to discount the importance of one sexual contact...and of the rape" (pp. 162-163). The question, though, must always come back to the lived experience. What is the lived experience of this—of living through rape and then moving to a place of hypersexuality? What about non-sexuality or diminished sexual interest? What is that lived experience as it pertains to survival?

Lines of Escape

I felt a numbness at my escape, if it can be called an escape at all. I walked out of an off-campus house in broad daylight with two close friends who had no idea what had just happened to me on the second floor. He did not return to the main floor to say goodbye when we left. He had been at the door upon my arrival, and had seemed irritated that I brought my friends. I can't remember why I brought my friends. He asked me if we could go upstairs to talk. He said that he didn't want to talk in front of them. So we went upstairs. And I was on the floor, and I was silenced, and I was stunned. And when it was over, I left. I walked away with my two friends. I'm not sure that it was an escape, but I did *leave*. Within the next few months, I left campus, I left my friends, and I left a little piece of my soul.

Feel no pain, but my life ain't easy
I know I'm my best friend
No one cares, but I'm so much stronger
I'll fight until the end
To escape from the true false world

Undamaged destiny
Can't get caught in the endless circle
Ring of stupidity.
(Metallica, 1984)

There is often a solitude in rape survival—one in which the survivor needs to “know I’m my best friend.” The world becomes “true false,” and it becomes difficult to trust (Ledray, 1986/1994). There is an overwhelming sense of pressure, and no sense that anyone else is out there to help. At the center of it, there is also an intense feeling of shame and self-blame, one that can feel like a “ring of stupidity.” Overwhelmed by all of this, survivors reach to many outlets for escape—drugs, drinking, hypersexuality, eating disorders, and others, including death (Herman, 1997; Ledray, 1986/1994).

What are the lines of escape for survivors of sexual assault in college? Is there a call to fight, a call to run, or a call to hide? What is the lived experience of survival when one may reflect on one’s own inaction in such a circumstance? Is there an initial escape from the rape—a pulling up and moving out, a breathing, a walking? What is the lived experience of those who have made it through the escape?

When I am on college campuses conducting educational workshops and lectures on sexual assault, I am often asked about the “fight or flight” response, and why it is that more rape victims aren’t able to engage this response and therefore escape their attackers. I prefer to speak to the “escape” responses in terms of “fight or freeze,” as this creates a clearer picture of the body’s two automatic responses to threatening situations.

There are two types of escape mechanisms for survivors of sexual violence—one that triggers the energy to fight and get out of the situation (even though with a larger and stronger attacker, this response may be insufficient for escape), and one that saps the

system of all energy—essentially, the victim is rendered immobile by her own bodily system’s attempt to save her (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006). The fight response tends to make more sense to audiences in terms of survival, but the immobility and silence can as well, if one considers threatening experiences in which the victim must hide, be still and silent, in order to evade her attacker. The issue is that the victim does not have control over which response system is triggered. It is regulated by a part of the brain over which we do not have conscious control. The fight response tends to maximize functionality of those parts of the body needed to escape, while minimizing those that are not (Ogden et al., 2006; Siegel, 1999). In this way, the body sends the greatest amount of energy to areas that are necessary for escape. “The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness” (Herman, 1997, p. 1).

The areas of the body that are depleted of abilities to function normally, most notably a “shutting down of the mind” (Siegel, 1999, p. 254), contribute in some ways to the feeling that Rothschild (2000) describes:

The most troublesome traumatic memories are those that involve body sensations and little else. In such cases, the body sensations associated to the traumatic memory are intact, but the other elements, particularly the cognitive aspects – i.e. facts, narrative, time and space context (mediated by the hippocampus) – that could help the individual to make sense of the memories appear lost. (p. 13)

The experience of this kind of memory loss was described by a survivor:

What I remember most is the not remembering. I remember the journey he made down my front. I remember a fractalization of my consciousness and darkness and this fear. I remember holding very, very still. And when I remember coming back to myself it was dawn light that was pouring through the windows, my shirt was off, my jeans were bunched around my ankles and my steel-toed black doc marten boots were still on my feet, still tied. This. Is. All. I. Remember. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 25)

It is a splintering of the essential elements of experience—sensations, images, behaviors, affects, and meanings (Levine, 1992). When one or more of these pieces are gone, or when they are mixed out of order, the experience can be incredibly disorienting. There is a way in which only part of her is there, and that other parts of her are gone. Later in the same narrative, the survivor speaks to freezing:

Somewhere in the distance between his lips on my chin and when they reached the tops of my tiny, barely budding breasts, I disengaged. I froze. I was frozen. It was 3 a.m. and my mom had no idea where I was. I barely knew where I was as the guys had driven us home with them, I didn't know where or how to go anywhere other than there. While one part of my mind crawled along the walls, searching out a door, a window, an escape route home, another part of my mind told me to take it, to like it, to do it... so I stayed there. Frozen. Quiet. Silent. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 25)

When survivors freeze, a certain consciousness remains, but their bodies are unable to respond in a fight/flight way. In the freezing, they “may also feel ‘spaced out’ and fail to orient,” and may “become ‘stuck’ in defensive responses and the accompanying extremes of arousal” (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006, p. 82). Whether in fight, flight, or freeze, survivors’ bodies are taking control of survivors’ conscious minds in attempts to escape and to maintain safety and survival.

From the French word *échapper*, escape means to “leave a pursuer with just one’s cape.” Perhaps human beings each have their own “capes” or means of escape that emerge when people need them most. Perhaps these tools are available to them at the most frightening of moments. Perhaps some of us are able to leave the scenes of our rapes with our capes in hand. Through fight, freeze, or flight far above and away from traumatic events, there is a strength that may, in the beginning, be the tiniest lights. It is as if we do not know how to fly immediately, and that flight initially seems so far off that

it is likely impossible. Maybe we've never seen anyone else fly, or successfully survive through a trauma, and so we feel alone and isolated. Maybe we are supposed to just take a leap of faith—to try to believe that we have it in us to make it through. Trust the cape, as it were...

He's one of those who knows that life
Is just a leap of faith
Spread your arms and hold your breath
Always trust your cape.
(Clark, 1995)

Maybe by escaping the initial trauma, even with very little left in a woman's soul or on her back, there is the hope of a cape, a way to fly away, tied around her neck. Maybe all anyone can escape with is a cape—an ability, at some point, to fly out of the hellish nightmare. It is not the line's noose tied around her neck, but rather it is escape's cape—and there might just be hope for flight out and away from the pain.

Is it that survivors in college each leave their perpetrators with nothing but their capes in tow? But many of us have hard times finding our flights or our ways out of the mental trap of victimhood? Is it that once we find our trust and faith, we will be able to fly out of the hopelessness we often feel immediately following the trauma? If not a cape, how else can we escape trauma's tether to depression, sadness, and fear?

What does escape from sexual assault in college look like? What does it feel like? It is the slow numbness that comes with walking out of a house. It is taking pills to bring the numbness back. It is drinking to forget. It is depriving one's body of food or eating far too much, either way seeking control through control of a life-giving substance. It is having sex with as many men as possible in one month or one week or one night. It is

hiding away in a residence hall room or a basement or a sorority house. It is pressing a razor into your skin just enough to feel the pain, but not enough to bring death.

Calling Out in the Quiet Woods: Voice in the Face of Survival

Never go off the beaten path, they said.
Never go off the beaten path.
But she didn't listen.
And she got lost.
We couldn't find her.
Or maybe we weren't trying hard enough.
Either way, we didn't find her.
Later we learned that she cried out,
But when she did, her voice was small, and
She was too far out there to be heard.
(Monahan-Kreishman, 2011)

Being Silenced

Never go off the beaten path. That is what so many sexual assault prevention educators tell young women in college. They tell you not to drink, and not to go to parties, and not to go home with boys you don't know.

But what is the beaten path in college? Is it not the parties? Is it not the drinking? Is it not the so-called "random hookups" that so easily become the headlines on Sunday morning's slam sheet? Has it not become some twisted badge of honor to take the walk of shame? Stay on the beaten path, or leave it; take the walk of shame, or never hook up at all—what do these messages say and do to the lived experiences of women sexual assault survivors in college?

What happens to the rape survivor's way of being in the world when she tries to follow the rules, but gets terribly hurt in the process? What happens to her sense of trust when she gets walked home by the safest guy she knows and he rapes her? What does it do to her sense of safety when she only has one drink, but cannot remember the rest of

the night? What does it feel like when she has done her best to refrain from what may be called “risky behaviors,” yet she does not escape rape? What internal dialogue is she left having with herself after experiencing a trauma like rape? Is there a silencing through this kind of questioning? Survivors become silent, and the silence affects survival in college.

One survivor says:

The fact that I couldn't remember any of it, the fact that I was frozen, that I didn't speak one word for the hours and hours he had me laying on that bed – these facts, for years, lay as silent in my psyche as I had been that night. I learned to separate my mind from my body, to let my mouth or my cunt meet the needs of a partner while my mind inched along walls, ceilings, basements, bathrooms, seeking refuge by burying itself deep in a place that another body couldn't touch. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 25)

In voice and in mind, she is gone—silenced. “Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*” (Herman, 1997, p. 1). The silencing is an entrapment—it is a prison without walls, but with so many barriers. The same survivor goes on to say: “I learned these skills well. The problem, now, is un-learning them” (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, p. 25). So what is it to unlearn the skills of a kind of survival that has a human being letting her “mouth and cunt meet the needs”? So what might it be to be freed of the silence, and freed from the destructive behaviors that keep the soul down?

Lost Voices

Survivors' voices are lost when friends, family, communities, and self converge to form a suffocating sense of blame and shame. Versions of silencing happened over and over again in my years working in sexual assault prevention and victim advocacy. In my experience, many friends, family, and campus faculty and staff members say things that essentially shut survivors down when instead, they could be working to lift survivors up.

It can be the smallest, unintentional thing—an offhanded comment like “What are these young women on campus are thinking wearing things like that?” and “Some of them put *themselves* in these situations.” For survivors, such words can be heartbreaking and can make them feel as though they were to blame for their assaults; they sense that if they try to voice their stories or seek help, they would be met with individuals who blame them for the rapes—an act that someone else committed against them. One survivor writes on her Clothesline Project t-shirt:

I feel like there is no one who wants to hear my painful story.
It is my deep, dark, dirty secret.
In this society, I have to carry this AWFUL
Burden ALONE.
I CAN'T TAKE IT.
Signed,
Silent Sufferer
(*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 28)

Survival has a lot to do with voice and community—an ability to find and share voice with others who care. An individual’s friends need to be with her; campus faculty and staff members need to be there, too. The individuals who surround a woman who has been raped generate energy and forward momentum where energy and momentum are needed. She needs support. She needs to know that her people are there for her, and that faculty and staff are empathetic and understanding in terms of their responses to her ability or inability to tend to coursework.

For two weeks I couldn’t talk. People would talk to me and I felt nothing. I felt like a zombie. I couldn’t cry, I couldn’t smile, I couldn’t eat. My mom said, “What’s wrong with you? Is something going on?” I said, “Nothing’s wrong.” I thought it was my fault. What did I do to make him think he could do something like that? Was I wrong in kissing him? Was I wrong to go out with him, to go over to his house? (Warshaw, 1994, p. 17)

Her mind spins, trapped in a loop of self-blame and shame each night when she climbs into her quiet bed. The voices, her own voice being most powerful, hover over her, suffocating her with shame and blame. One woman writes of her campus' normalizing and minimizing of campus rape:

At Harvard, unfortunately, a lot of this normalization comes at the expense of victims. It is so tempting to think that rape doesn't happen at Harvard. I wish it didn't. I wish it didn't really happen that way, or it wasn't really that bad, or it was just a misunderstanding, or she could've stopped it. But rape *does* happen here, it *did* happen that way, it *was* that bad, it was *not* a misunderstanding. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 28)

Community response matters. Shame and blame have the power to silence voices; they are like the childhood monsters lurking under the bed. Outsiders might think they are not real, but *she* knows. They are real for her no matter what school she attends, from the most elite to the most accommodating, the largest to smallest, public and private.

Community response matters, and, for better or worse, becomes part of her lived experience.

What is the lived experience of young women in college today? Do they feel like the young women described above—pushed out, disbelieved by their peers? Do their peers, their faculty, and the staff members with whom they interact ever ask them how they are doing? Do they reach out? Do they mean it when they ask? What does their *meaning it or not meaning it* do to survivors' lived experiences?

Cameron (2002) explores the common social experience of being asked, "How are you?"

But to focus on the words, 'How are you? - fine' is to ask a question. Why ask 'How are you?' when you obviously want to hear and see 'Fine'? Why answer 'Fine' when it is obvious that you are not? Do these words serve any purpose in everyday life other than a greeting or do these words actually encompass more

than we see in a social situation? Is there an impact of other meaning at a deeper level? (pp. 11-12)

Cameron notes that this question is an odd linguistic predicament. On the one hand, it is a question, and yet on the other hand it is a greeting in and of itself. It is perfectly correct and appropriate to pose this question when you meet or greet an individual, and it is also perfectly correct to respond simply with the word “fine.” As a matter fact, if the other individual responds with anything other than “fine” and begins to express a full and true response, our social milieu considers the person’s behavior as somewhat unorthodox.

In turn, what is the experience of “How are you?” for women survivors of sexual assault in college? The passing, shallow exchange is devoid of depth and lacks connection that the individual craves until she is forced to live without it. Even then, she still craves it, but convinces herself that she does not need it. But what happens when the momentary “How are you?” becomes what Cameron (2002) describes as a “tangible touch” (p. 12), creating an instant in which the opportunity to truly meet and know the other? Is there a pain there? Is there a relief? What does it mean to have the space to voice how one truly is faring?

One survivor who found some support on her campus says this,

I’m completely devastated by my rape and the effect that it’s had on my life. Anger—picking fights indiscriminately—I need to be rescued from this pain. And so, I’m seeing someone from the counseling center at my university. I considered changing schools but came to see that as a victory for the rapist so I’m not going to do that. I’m a shy person by nature and making the friends that I have on this campus after three years is not something I’m willing to walk away from. My counselor at the rape center told me about the Campus Sexual Assault Bill of Rights, which was invaluable to learning about services available to me. (Lauer, 2002, p. 126)

The *tangible touch* she felt here made a difference. Her experience was one of anger, picking fights, and seeking pain until she found someone on campus who could help. It shifted her experience to one of resilience—she wasn't going to give her perpetrator *victory* over her by transferring schools. Her voice may have at one time been lost, but she was able to find it again.

Voices Crying Out

If voicing is a relief, what happens to her when she cannot cry out? Where is she left to be? How can she regain voice? What does voice sound like? What does it feel like?

Is my zipper bothering you, he said, well into the second hour on the floor. I don't want to hurt you. By then, nothing hurt and nothing resembling sound would come out of me. I tried mouthing the word, No, tried moving my head the way we do in this country and perhaps in other countries when what we mean is: No. (Driscoll, 1997, p. 9)

She tries to speak, to cry out, but cannot. She is numb, she has the desire to scream, a desire to shout, when all she is able to do is try to shake her head. She cannot feel the pain and she cannot make a sound. She makes an effort to communicate NO, which is ignored.

It is a lost-ness and a quiet-ness that has nothing to do with peaceful solitude, and everything to do with the sense that *this thing* cannot possibly be happening. She wants desperately to be heard. She wants desperately to be delivered to some place where her voice, even in its absence, will be heard. But she is stuck in that awful, suffocating place. She may not be found unless she finds herself, finds her own voice. It is as if her own terror muffles the sound for those around her. She tries to scream. Is it that her voice is lost, or is it his unwillingness to hear it? Their inability to hear? When voice is lost,

where can it be found? If it cannot be found through tissue of throat and mouth, can it be found in a pen, or on a keyboard?

While working to address sexual assault on campus, I was impressed with campus victim advocates coming up with a brilliant plan for reaching out to young women who could not find their audible voices: use of Instant Messaging (IM). Women could reach out to advocates online, without ever stepping foot in the Health Center. Students could maintain their anonymity by creating screen names used only to access campus support services. It gave the students a sense of control and privacy. If they were paralyzed by fear at the thought of looking at other human beings in the eyes and voicing what happened, they were able to write their stories instead.

The floodgates opened when the IM program was implemented. The number of young women seeking resources doubled, then tripled, and more. It was incredible. It was clear that something made young college women hesitant to access the physical space of the office, but that they still wanted to utilize the resources and speak to people who could help. Even if their voices are not audible, they are being heard through the buzz and glow and clicking of computers.

Francisco (1999) writes “If the occurrence of rape were audible, its decibel level equal to its frequency, it would overpower our days and nights, interrupt our meals, our bedtime stories, howl behind our lovemaking, an insistent jackhammer of distress” (p. 2). But the sound of rape on college campuses is not audible at all—not really. Sure, colleges and universities have the occasional rally, march, or campus speaker. Student organizations are created to bring forth some level of education on the topic. Opinion pieces related to the topic are published in the campus newspaper from time to time. In

actuality, the sound of rape on college campuses is no sound at all. In terms of the impact its noise has on our abilities to viscerally understand—truly and deeply understand—we do not hear it. We do not really want to hear it. When a voice is not fully heard, how can one know what it is fully saying? How can the community and how can the survivor, herself, know what she is fully saying if it cannot be said at all?

“The saying that is more fully saying” (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 135) is that which can be heard. So what of the voices that can be heard? When a voice is given space, it will become stronger. After one is *silenced*, and has been *silent* for some time, it takes a great moment, a power of will, to raise it up. A voice, like a muscle, needs to be used, exercised, and cared for lest it atrophy and fall into disuse.

In his book, *Writing in the Dark*, van Manen (2002) says that “The world of becoming is the one in which we become ourselves; the world where our understanding, expression, and creation takes place; the particularly human world in and through which we become more human” (p. 132). Is not the experience of being fully human one of being heard, one of crying out and speaking truth as it is felt and experienced? Is it not one in which a community of care exists for the survivor, one that hears her, and one that does not judge her? Where can she find space to reclaim her voice if it has been pushed out and left to atrophy in silence? How can she find her humanity?

Too Far Out There to be Heard

Several survivors of sexual violence in college have told me that they felt like they were “going crazy.” One says that she thought she was going “out of her mind.” Another says that she felt as though she was really “out there.” What does it mean to be out there? And what does it mean to be “too far out there?”

I didn't tell anyone. In fact, I wouldn't even admit it to myself until about four months later when the guilt and fear that had been eating at me became too much to hide and I came very close to a complete nervous breakdown. I tried to kill myself, but fortunately I chickened out at the last minute. There's no way to describe what was going on inside me. I was losing control and I'd never been so terrified and helpless in my life. I felt as if my whole world had been kicked out from under me and I had been left to drift all alone in the darkness. I had horrible nightmares in which I relived the rape and others which were even worse. I was terrified of being with people and terrified of being alone. I couldn't concentrate on anything and began failing several classes. Deciding what to wear in the morning was enough to make me panic and cry uncontrollably. I was convinced I was going crazy, and I'm still convinced I almost did. (Warshaw, 1994, pp. 67-68)

She felt so out there—so out of the ordinary, out of herself, different and strange. Imagine “drifting alone in the darkness,” no light, no orientation, no stars, no direction. Just the natural swells of the earth's water, uncontrollable, beneath one's back. Imagine. Imagine the terror it must be to feel so far adrift, so far out there, so far from shore, so far from anything that feels normal, if normalcy is life before rape.

In the woods, one can feel the same way. Off the trail all of the trees look the same. There is no up from down, there is no right from left, there is no civilization from expansive wilderness. If she (the survivor) feels too far out there to be found, she may never escape the dangerous loop of paralyzing terror and helplessness.

In the narrative above, the survivor did not know what was happening to her, or why. She simply felt lost and alone, adrift. If she is left adrift for too long, she may meet death in scary solitude and silence. What does that look like for a sexual assault survivor who is seen—well, at least looked at—every day? Is she really seen for who she is, or is she seen as too far out there? In other words, is she seen as someone who is “crazy” or “out of her mind?” Does she appear to be someone who has “lost it,” is lost, or out there?

What is the lived experience of being labeled in this way, of being put in a box of out-there-ness?

To be put in a box, or otherwise be told, “this is how you are, this is how you show up in the world”, can be a form of silencing. What if there are inconsistencies between what she feels and what outsiders (friends, family, faculty, staff) perceive? And what if she feels the box she belongs in is the one labeled “going crazy”? How hard is it to escape the box once one has chosen to be in it? Is it ever a choice to be boxed?

I think I had a harder time dealing with the abortion decision in the beginning than I did with the actual incident itself. It took me a long time. I’m Catholic and I had to go to confession about it. I told my parents about it six months later....My father’s never really brought it up [since] except in terms of “Have you been to confession yet?” For a long time, for two years, that’s all I heard. “Have you been to confession?” I don’t really want to get into it anymore with anyone. There’s no need for anybody else to really know about it. It just makes me feel sad when I talk about it. (Warshaw, 1994, p. 73)

Have you been to confession? This very statement implies: you have sinned. You are a sinner. You’ve done something bad. You are a bad person. That is your box. Get into your box, sinner, and never come out. Be quiet about it. Be quiet. We don’t want to hear it and you don’t want to speak it. It is better if you are not heard. Talking about it makes us all feel sad, so whatever you do, do not raise your voice.

The box. What is it like to be in the box—hot, stifling, suffocating? There is no air to breathe. There is no sun, no nourishment, no water, nothing to help with growth, with moving on, with moving up, with finding freedom. The box is a prison: “The first thing I can remember [my mother] saying was, ‘Well, Holly, I don’t know what you expected’ and that just crushed me. I wanted someone to say, ‘We still love you, it’s

okay” (Warshaw, 1994, p. 79). The words of our loved ones can be silencing. Our own inner voices can be silencing. The box is a prison.

And, conversely, what does it feel like to be freed from a box? A mother can say, “We still love you, it’s okay.” A father can say, “You did nothing wrong, this was not your fault, you are not a bad person,” A friend can say, “I believe you. It doesn’t matter what you did, you didn’t deserve it.” Nothing will be lost by that, and there is everything to gain—soul, wholeness, voice, freedom. She can be assured that whatever she is going through, it is normal given the trauma of her experience.

She is a normal person having a normal reaction to trauma, which is as far from normal as it can possibly be. She wants to escape back into normalcy. She wants to escape from the box. What is the lived experience of escape, of busting out, of becoming *un-boxed*? What is it to be given the space to *become* whomever she truly is? One cannot become while one is trapped. Or is it that the trapping, as in a caterpillar becoming a butterfly, is the only way in which transformation can occur? Or is it the bulb within the frozen winter earth, asleep until wrapped in springtime’s warmth, becomes a bright, yellow daffodil? Is it the way to freedom?

Freedom comes with climbing trees
And the sweetest taste of wild blackberries
Tadpoles in empty butter bins
And when we race, when Sam and I race, I always win
Coming home with grass stains on my knees
Childhood is the sweetest form of peace.
(Monahan-Kreishman, 2004)

Or is freedom these things: a return to childhood, a return to innocence, a return to a time in which rape was maybe a whisper in the distance, instead of the loudest drum in some deafening parade, a parade for him? Freedom is a lasting escape from him.

What does the entrapment-to-freedom way of being bring forth in terms of lived experience? It speaks to tadpoles in empty butter bins, about being trapped, and being given freedom again to become healthy, living, little green frogs. Yet, it also speaks to that simple childhood confidence, lost somewhere in adolescence, in which a being, simply by being, knows that she is who and where she is supposed to be. Without speaking it, children can simply be the beings they are. And how did they arrive at that place, from the womb—from the dark and separate space that allowed for a certain safety in growth before coming out into a big, cold world to be wrapped in mothers' caring arms?

Surviving Seasons in the Woods: Summer's Smoldering Fire and the Long Cold Winter

Survival is a venture. Survival is a game. Survival can be dangerous. "Venture includes flinging into danger. To dare is to risk the game" (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 100). The seasons present obstacles in the game of survival. Summer's smoldering fire, winter's freezing cold—these are the things that stand between victimization and healing, between suffocation and breathing again.

Surviving the Heat

The heat—the fire—can consume survivors lost in the woods. A survivor's fire can smolder for years before it explodes into an angry, enveloping force that removes every speck of life-giving air and water from the earth, from the soul. My survival was a fire that burst from the smolder. Like the undetected, smoldering fire, the *knowing* and *being* in my own victimization did not surface until years after that hot, summer day.

For so many years after the rape, I did not understand what was happening to me whenever I found myself unable to breathe. It was like a creeping, subtle asthma that always demanded pauses, deep breaths, and time to gather myself. It was both a literal and a figurative loss of a life-giving force. The wind was knocked out of me. Life was knocked out of me. It was tough to get out of bed in the morning. I was just starting my doctoral program at the time, and it was very difficult for me to get to class and focus on each particular task. It was hard for me to go to work, to talk to college students about rape prevention, and to have conversations with other rape survivors who were going through something I went through a lifetime ago.

For other survivors on campus, the heat can come in more formal ways. The following narrative is one woman's attempt to clear up misleading media coverage about her sexual assault. The piece was printed in a campus magazine highlighting the experiences of survivors of sexual assault:

I believe he was a student. And he wasn't hiding behind a bush, he was standing in a bathroom stall. The media's account of what happened in that stall was not entirely accurate. While I'll spare details, I would like to clear up a couple of misconceptions. The attack was labeled as an "attempted sexual assault." This is wrong: A sex act was committed against my will. I did not "fight him off and escape to my room." He left—I didn't escape. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Duke*, 2011)

What must it have been like for that student to live on campus and know that people were reading about her assault in the school paper, to sit in the dining hall or go to class and hear people discuss such a personal incident in cavalier ways? How re-traumatizing must it have been for her to relive the experience through the eyes of the entire campus community as they each weighed in on the matter of her victimization? By writing this article, she was able to take control back from her attacker and the campus-wide

retraumatization. In her own way, she was surviving the heat—the heat of the media, the staring heat of eyes on campus, the hot feeling you get when you know someone has told a slanderous lie about you, the hot feeling in your stomach when you lose control of something that was already spinning, spinning away.

Harnessing the Fire

Harnessing the fire. It can come to survivors in so many ways. If surviving the heat means walking over the hot coals made of accusing looks, angry and misleading words, gossip, anxiety, breathlessness, depression and so on, then harnessing it will be just as powerful, if not more. If surviving the heat means living through the hot, smothering sweat of a rapist, or many rapists, then harnessing the fire will come tenfold. Harnessing the fire is the will to FIGHT! Fight hard, fight as if your life depends on it, because it absolutely does.

Those feelings – anger, rage, and guilt – remained suppressed and buried for nearly 16 years. But then, just this year, the lid flew off, and suddenly I was experiencing all those horrible emotions and fears. I actually had genuine anxiety attacks with physical symptoms. It took me several months to figure out that I was going to have to deal with what had happened so long ago. Those 16 years had allowed those feeling to magnify, to fester, to boil. I was a real basket case. Finally, fearing an emotional breakdown, I decided to seek professional help. Within the last few months, I've been learning to deal with a lot. I'm changing my attitude and my perspective about myself. I'm even learning to like myself for the first time in 16 years. But I'm still angry that such a single mindless act of violence against a woman can cause such havoc. (Warshaw, 1994, pp. 70-71)

Survive the heat and harness the fire. Her fire was boiling a big pot of liquid fury and fault until one day the lid blew off, and her molten certainty spewed all over the naysayers and victim blamers. She was able to harness the energy that gave her the help she needed to make steps toward survival—an attitude change, a perspective change, “liking herself,” and allowing room for the anger that still deserves to be there.

So many survivors choose to harness the fire by putting their words and stories boldly in front of their community members in an effort to say—LOOK! THIS HAPPENED TO ME! The shirts carry sadness, anger, rage, and hope. In a symbolic reference to the ways in which her attacker burned away a part of her, one woman harnessed the fire so literally that she burned a hole through her Clothesline Project t-shirt. Another survivor harnesses the fire with the words she chose to place on her shirt:

I am a **HARVARD** woman.
I live in **LOWELL** house.
I am in the **CLASS** of 2001.
I AM A SURVIVOR.
and now...
There is **LIFE** after rape.
There is **HAPPINESS** after rape.
There is **LOVE** after rape.
There is even **MAKING LOVE** after rape.
I HAVE SURVIVED
but
I WILL NEVER FORGET

(Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard, 2008, p. 18)

Surviving the Cold

Sometimes, survival feels like a long, cold winter. At some points, survival is like being left out in the cold for so long that the snow and ice penetrate every layer of clothing and protection on the body. At other points, it feels like being trapped inside during a snowstorm long after the excitement of a snow day has worn off. It is stifling. It is maddening. And if the power goes out and you're left in the dark, it feels like an eternity before you will see the light again.

In the long, cold winter, there are moments of freezing. For the earth, everything becomes still. From inside a warm home, winter can look beautiful. Even when outdoors in the winter elements, it can be exhilarating if wrapped in enough protection, enough

warmth. For animals, the freezing earth can simply be a nudge from nature to move along. Birds must be able to fly to move along, to escape the freezing winter. The injured bird is left behind, and will likely face a slow, terrifying death, unable to move from her inevitable grave. Surviving rape can feel that way—a slow, terrifying, cold, inevitable death. “Her eyes go glassy and blank and she just stops fighting and pieces of her self are torn and torn and torn away” (Monahan-Kreishman’s poetic rendering of film *The Accused*, [Jaffe, Lansing, & Kaplan, 1988]).

For some women, in the moment of rape, there is a cold that overwhelms the body, removing all ability to move. It is called *freezing* (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006)—and from what I am told, it feels like a bad dream in which she is bursting with a desire to run and hit and scream, but her body betrays her. Instead, her body shuts down.

Abram (1996) describes the exploration of the “temporal experience” where the past, present, and future are the three “ecstasies” of time, the three ways in which the irreducible dynamism of existence opens us to what is outside ourselves, to that which is *other*” (p. 205). Does the experience of survival takes place over time, and when pieced together can they become an *ecstasy* of new life? Is survival the static moment beginning when he pulls out? Is it the very experience of *past-ness*, *present-ness*, and *future-ness* that allows a survivor to *survive*, to be inside and outside of herself, and to begin to know the new part of who she is? Is this new part at once other and self, foreign and familiar? When does it come into being, and what does it feel like?

The cold survivors feel can also be a tangible freeze—literally chilling—such that some small comfort can be found by layering on clothes and crawling into a warm bed.

My mom had gone out and I just laid on my bed with the covers up. Everything I could possibly put on I think I put on that night – leg warmers, thermal underwear – everything imaginable in the middle of summer I put on my body. That night I dreamed it was all happening again. I dreamed I was standing there watching him do it. (Warshaw, 1994, p. 17)

The warmth that her spirit would otherwise bring her has been taken away by a boy who said to her, “I know you must like this because a lot of women like this kind of thing... This is the adult world. Maybe you ought to grow up some” (Warshaw, p. 16).

That feeling of cold can be like the walk to the far student parking lot in the dead of winter. Especially at night, the cold reaches in so deeply that it collects between your shoulder blades and consumes that region of your torso just behind the heart, so that your heart, while still finding a way to pump, is encased in ice. Even when you reach your car, it feels like an eternity before the heat kicks in and a piece of your being can begin to thaw.

Harnessing the Winter

I have found ways to harness my winter as part of my work in addressing sexual assault on campus. During the early part of my decade spent at the University of Maryland, I charged my students with a “Year of Action” project. The philosophy was this: Why concentrate all of our energies solely into October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, January for Stalking Awareness Month, and March for Sexual Assault Awareness Month? My question, as a survivor, was this: Does the issue of sexual violence not warrant a year-round effort? If I live it year-round, may I not ask my community to work on it year-round?

Some of the students who engaged in Year of Action projects created programs that are still woven into the annual traditions on campus. One such project is the Survivor

Garden. It stands in front of the University Health Center, and it is marked by a small stone in front that reads, "For all survivors of all violence, this garden is for you." The garden is planted in honor of survivors who struggle to make it through the dark winter that trauma brings with it, and who, time and again, show the fortitude to bloom again on the other side. In the fall, students, faculty and staff from across campus participate in a bulb planting; each bulb represents a survivor of sexual violence on campus. The thoughtful care with which these bulbs are planted is meant to symbolize the care with which a community comes together to support its survivors. The bulbs stay in the ground through the winter, through the dark time of moving from victimization to survival, so to speak. When the springtime sun melts the snow and warms the earth, each bulb blossoms into a bright, yellow daffodil. Each bulb, having survived the winter, blooms on the other side, just as the rape survivor may live again, love again, breathe again, and see the sun again.

What does it mean to love again when the touch associated with the deepest, most passionate act of making love can feel so similar to rape? Even in the warm, protected sun and safety of the garden, a kind touch can take a survivor back to the most unsafe of times. And how does it feel to come out on the other side of winter and try to connect with someone so intimately? What is like for her to be with someone who wants to make her feel good and loved, yet all she can do is feel fear and be transported back to the time of her rape because his touch, even though safe and full of love, brings her back to the trauma?

It is a step forward to open oneself to love. It is a step forward to become intimate. It is a step forward to trust. And what happens when that trust is met with a

loving touch that, instead of filling her with warmth, fills her with nausea and imbalance? Step back. Step back. How does she separate the two? How can she feel one without the other? The tension can pull so hard on her heart that sometimes it feels easier to walk away. When the only difference between the experience of love and violence is an intellectual knowing, and the knowing is not met with a synchronous feeling, there may not be room for love. It is like walking in the woods. The trees are the same in winter and summer, but in winter they are transformed by a blanket of snow.

Surviving

Survival is a way of being in the world, and the *Dasein* of survival is to *be* a survivor, to *live* in survival. “*Dasein* tends to understanding its own Being in terms of that being to which it is essentially, continually, and most closely related—the ‘world’” (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 58). The *Dasein of survival*—what is the way of being in the world for women sexual assault survivors in college?

I am not dreaming
Of a hope-victory-life.
I am just dreaming
Of a hope-survival-life.
(Chinmoy, 2007)

The word “survival,” or *survive*, comes from the Anglo-French *survivre*, and from the Latin word *supervivere*, from super+vivre, “to live,” or “to live beyond, live longer than.” Survivors are “living beyond” the trauma; they are perhaps “living longer than” the trauma can live in them. In other words, as time goes on, as the life continues to be lived, the trauma grows smaller and the living grows bigger.

How does one take her first step in the search or movement toward survival? Is the first step taken with the end in mind? As in *someday I will be healed, I will be whole*,

I will complete school, and fall in love, and find happiness, and feel good again. Or is the first step taken with great trepidation, as in one step at a time, I can't imagine victory yet, I can only imagine the first step. If I try to imagine beyond the first step, I will be overwhelmed, and I will simply stop. In other words, perhaps the dream is of survival at first, and of victory—or something else entirely—someday, someplace down the road. As each step is taken, a new feeling is experienced. *I took a step. This is a small victory. A new understanding is formed. A new belief is created. Maybe I can do this.*

It was not until 2004 when I had an emotional breakdown and the world, as I knew it, was crumbling in on me, that I realized that I needed to take care of myself and come to terms with being raped or I was never going to be ok. I sought counseling services, and I am better for it today. There are still some lasting effects of the assault that will always be with me, but for the most part, I am okay. On the anniversary date of my rape I take time out and still do the things I love to do, and at the beginning, my mom would stay home with me just in case. It is my rebirth day. I will never forget that day for as long as I live. I will never be the same as I was before I was raped. (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2008, p. 7)

Survival does not have to be a perfect victory. It can be one day in which the survivor pays special attention to the travesty that befell her—a day of remembrance and a day of rebirth. In that one day, many more may be born, such that life becomes better and better, more and more whole. It evolves, turns in on itself, and grows. She can *look* at herself—her place in life—and *see* that she is surviving.

“The life-world exists in a movement of constant relativity of validity” (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 247); in other words, an understanding of place in life is always evolving and moving in relation to the subject that is being examined. For the survivor, this may be at the very essence of the survival process. Through a movement toward survival there is a growing and a coming to new understanding that happens along the way. Living in the

survival world, and surviving in the living world, is interconnected in a being-learning-knowing-being cycle.

Is survival a natural state of being? Do humans gravitate toward survival? One unconsciously participates in breathing—in and out, in and out. It happens unconsciously. It makes life possible without any effort at all...until effort is required. Only then does one pay attention to each breath; one will go to great lengths to ensure the next breath is taken.

The significance of the need for survival through breathing can be understood through consideration of drowning. One cannot drown oneself. The body can only be drowned by force—the force of nature, the force of a malevolent human. The drive to live is too strong. Drowning happens when opposing forces are stronger than the individual's fight for breath, such as the waves of the ocean or the hands of a man, and one simply does not have adequate strength to fight.

On the one hand, the air is the most pervasive presence I can name... rolling in the eddies along the roof of my mouth, slipping ceaselessly through throat and trachea to fill the lungs, to feed my blood, heart, my self. I cannot act, cannot speak, cannot think a single thought without the participation of this fluid element. I am immersed in its depths as surely as fish are in the sea. (Abram, 1996, p. 225)

If breathing is a natural state of being, and if fighting for breath is a natural response to lost breath, one can consider a space in which a survivor experiencing loss of breath in terms of loss of self fights for her life. There was a time in which I fought, but the fighting did not start for many years. In the meantime, I simply passed the time in disconnection.

The word disconnection: dis-connect-tion. The word “connect” comes from the Latin *conectere*, or “join together.” Disconnection, then, is a forcing apart. There was a force between me and the world. When he forced me down, he forced the world away. Does it feel that way for others? What does it feel like for them?

The nature of being took me back to the woods. For me, the nature of being was the being-in-nature. A human detachment met with a natural world connection. Sexual assault is a crime of nature, and as the hermeneutic circle moves on, isn't it natural to move toward survival, to become a survivor, to survive in a natural state of being? For me, that state of being was in the woods. Other survivors may have discovered the spaces in which they can attain natural states of being, and like me, discovery of such places may be steps on their paths to survival.

For survivors of sexual violence, the remembrance of a safe place can help to ground them to an emotional safety. This powerful sense is used by therapists in an effort to give trauma survivors something to run to when they are in emotional distress during recovery. “It is best to stick to both a place and a person that the client has really known, so that the actual sensory memories (images, smells, sensations, etc.) can be identified” (Rothschild, 2000, p. 137). The following is an excerpt from a counseling session in which this technique was utilized with the client, Hope, and her therapist. Through most of the session, Hope envisions her safe place, thinks through the route she can take as she “runs” there in her mind, visualizes who will be there when she arrives, and anticipates what the person will say to reassure her that she is okay. This is the power of the safe place:

Therapist: From the oak tree?

Hope: Yes.

Therapist: All right, run from the oak tree down the path and climb over the fence and then down to the stones. Run over them and then continue down the path to where your grandmother waits by the stream. You run up to her and she embraces you. She says, "Oh Hope, my little hope. You are safe now."

Hope: (smiling) I can picture it! Yeah!

Therapist: Tell me how you feel?

Hope: (very happy) I feel good!

Therapist: You made it.

Hope: I made it, yeah.... It felt like I hadn't made it before. I feel much more relaxed, really relieved.

[Hope] had forgotten what 'loved' and 'safe' felt like. Without that internalized safe place, she was constantly scared that she could no longer tell the difference between safety and danger. Being able to imagine a place of safety and comfort of her grandmother helped her to make this distinction. (Rothschild, pp. 149-151)

For Hope, the power of the oak tree, the stones, the path, the stream, and her grandmother returned her to a sense of safety that she had lost. Before going through the exercise, Hope's therapist helped her work through feelings that she described as "My heart is beating fast and I feel a bit tearful," to "holding my breath," to "some hotness in my back, my feet are quite cold. I got mixed up when I was lost," to "very calm. A little sad." The remembrance of her safe place helped her to feel "relaxed" and "relieved" (Rothschild, 2000, pp. 138-146). Her safe place was helping her to survive.

**I've Visited These Woods Before:
Recollecting to Re-Collecting, Remembering to Re-Membering**

When he comes back, as he does so often, I try to see him still in the brown polyester slacks. But my luck's gone bad. My wishes all run out. Used up on the one: Please, just don't kill me. Please. Just. Don't. Just a few hours of just one night. A Wednesday in a February that would have been ordinary. Had it not been my grandmother's birthday...He gave me what he wanted to give. Took away the dark, metal teeth grinding against me. Engraved the memory of those legs that went on forever. Those legs that keep coming and coming back to me. Hard as New Hampshire granite. Material meant to last. (Driscoll, 1997, p. 8)

Recollecting Events

A recollection.

A tiny piece of the picture. We visited this forest once. We walked this trail. We talked sometimes, and were silent sometimes, and ate peanuts and raisins and pretzels from worn-out plastic baggies. I thought I was safe with him. I thought I was safe.

A recollection.

A small sense of what once happened. She sees his brown polyester slacks and feels the dark, metal teeth of the zipper grinding into her leg—a grinding that would leave a physical scar on that leg for the rest of her life. The recollection of a date—her grandmother’s birthday. This recollection came to Frances Driscoll so many years later, as she sat one evening eating plums in the safety of her own home. She is recollecting. She is remembering. Recollection is a part of the lived experience of survival.

A recollection.

A part of the whole. I am on a college campus now where I hear student voices, and so many of them belonging to sexual assault survivors. I feel all of their numbness and take in all of their tears as they recollect their own traumas. Each one is different—the trauma, I mean. Each one is different—the women, I mean. And when the eyes of countless young women look for direction on where to be next, how to be next, to whom can they look? When countless young women whose hopes and dreams and lives have been unimaginably changed at the hands of some young college men, who do they look to for direction? Can they look forth into themselves for future, stronger selves? Can they find the power there? Is there power in the recollection? Is there power in the past when it comes together with present and future? Young men, like the man who took me, took

what they wanted without a thought for them, the young women. These young men are in the past. They are recollections. Will the young survivors someday “look forth” and see a light through the dark trees? They hope for hope, but are sometimes left with only the dim illumination to guide them. To guide them where?

Levin (1985) articulates the meaning and value of recollection:

The goal of recollection is not to capture the past for a slavish repetition, which in any case it is not possible to accomplish, but rather to find/create new historical opportunities for ourselves. The truth in the work of recollection is therefore to be judged not by an accurate correspondence to the objective reality of a past epoch and another culture, but rather in terms of the character of the transformation by which a deeper understanding of the past significantly alters the course of the future. (p. 89)

I think about who I am now, after the trauma, after the years of not thinking about it, after the years now of being in it, of being in survival. I think about who they are, the young women who have been traumatized by cute college boys they thought they could trust.

Who are they now? What are their lived experiences?

He was some nice boy from the next suburb over from me. I had known his cousin in high school. He was this perfectly acceptable person that you could bring home and not be ashamed to be dating...[while he was raping me] it didn't occur to me that it was okay to hurt him, to kick him in the balls, or punch him in the eye. Good girls don't do that. You sort of just lie back and let this happen and then you deal with the consequences. (Warshaw, 1994, p. 52-53)

For generations, women have been taught about sexual assault prevention from the perspective of “stranger rape.” Sexual assault prevention, a phenomenon that began in the 1970s with the women's movement, originally focused on teaching women to prevent men's acts against them. It has, for decades, affected the way we think about rape prevention, and women's lived experiences of it (Warshaw, 1994).

[Women] were cautioned to carry whistles, air horns, or simply their car keys gripped firmly in their hands when walking alone, at night, down empty corridors,

through parking lots, on elevators. These were the places they were told to fear. There were undoubtedly few women who had not worked out a “what if” scenario of sexual self-defense for themselves. (Warshaw, 1994, p. 1)

Why do we not question this effort on which we spend countless hours and immeasurable energy, when there is one fact that renders it almost completely useless? Eighty-four percent of rape victims know their attackers (Koss, 1988). It might make sense to hold pepper spray out on the way to the car at night, but it is far less likely to be on hand when the seemingly safe reality is pulled out from under one’s veritable body. What use is mace, or a “rape whistle,” in the privacy of your own home? Think about it. Question it. And understand that framing rape prevention in this way has a deep and meaningful effect on the lived experience of survivors.

“What makes a call upon us to think, and by thinking, be who we are” (Heidegger, 1977/1993, p. 390)? What calls upon us, those of us who have survived a rape, or multiple rapes in college, to think about the trauma, and society’s messages around it, and how it has come to shape our lives? From self-defense to self-empowerment, the focus on the self may deeply affect the lived experience of sexual assault survival. On the one hand, safety planning and empowerment can be, well, empowering, which can make us feel good—emotionally healthy and strong.

On the other hand, a constant beating message that says, “You have everything to do with your own safety, and if you get hurt it is very likely because you did something wrong” leaves a survivor feeling the intensity of shame and self-blame. How can survivors help but blame themselves when the only things they have been taught about sexual assault center on their own abilities to stop it from happening? Where is the conversation about perpetration? Where is the conversation about those who perpetrate?

History, such as that of a community or culture that fuels commonly held beliefs as illustrated above, is connected to the ways in which we recollect certain remembrances. Community belief and history come together to inform *Dasein*, or a way of “being in the world”:

In its factual Being, any Dasein is as it already was, and it is ‘what’ it already was. It *is* its past, whether explicitly or not. And this is so not only in that its past is, as it were, pushing itself along ‘behind’ it, and that Dasein possesses what is past as a property which is still present-at-hand and which sometimes has after-effects upon it: Dasein ‘is’ its past in the way of *its* own Being, which, to put it roughly, ‘historizes’ out of its future on each occasion. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 41)

In this way, a historical fueling of community beliefs becomes intertwined with recollections, or the way in which we look back upon life and living. The lived experience of the community, and therefore the community’s beliefs, will affect the lived experiences of survivors, their recollections and re-collections. How is it that through our recollections, our thoughtfulness, we are able to more fully be who we are? Is it through the thinking? Is it through the recollecting? Is it through the movement between a place of confusion and silence to a place of deafening anger, and then back again?

The term “recollect,” from the Latin *recollectus*, means “to gather again” or “to collect again.” For survivors to *recollect* rape, they will *collect again* myriad memories, senses, and feelings connected to the day or days around their rapes. Through the recollection, they will *re-collect*.

Levin (1985) claims that “by grace of what Heidegger calls ‘our inherence in Being,’ we always enjoy an inherent capacity for opening to the presencing of Being and the deepening our experience of its dimensionality” (p. 75). This speaks to the lived

experience of survival being an opening to the knowing and being of survival—what it is, what it feels like, and how it is now part of a new way of being.

Thus, it is clear that we need to articulate how the presencing of Being has already laid out the ‘topology’ of an historical journey out of the wasteland...this too calls for a process of recollection which gradually retrieves the lost body of ontological experience. (Levin, 1985, p. 75)

Survivors have the capacity for finding presence, for finding space, thought, connection to what happened...and that the “historical journey out of the wasteland” of trauma is a clear representation of the movement from the initial trauma to survival and recovery, and the hermeneutical experience that is this new way of being.

“There is a ‘therapeutic’ character of the work of recollection” (Levin, 1985, p. 75). Levin explains that part of the experience of recollection is part of a way of being that is healing...and that the healing can come through the sometimes painful recollecting of trauma and its piecing back into the knowing of the new life being lived. Levin further explains that “Heidegger believes that the recollection he initiates also retrieves a ‘spiritual’ wisdom: not only a concept of Being, but ultimately, an experience of Being that has somehow been concealed (lost and forgotten)” (p. 75). As such, the experience of collegiate sexual assault survival for women in college can be explored through this notion of survival as an uncovering of *spiritual wisdom*.

Levin (1985) writes about an uncovering of Being that is not a “‘repetition’ in the sense that it attempts to replicate the experience of the past,” but that it is “in keen awareness of its own time, it prepares us to undergo an original experience of Being—an experience whose disclusiveness is somehow emancipatory” (p. 77). Survivors, within the world of their lived experiences, attempt not to replicate, but to reclaim their

experiences (Herman, 1997; Ogden et al., 2006). In the way that survivors revisit the site of their traumas to meditate, release ashes, or even “putz,” as one of our earlier quoted survivors said, they are there in remembrance, holding up the place as one of importance, but rewriting the future of where it sits in their lives.

Re-Collecting Memories

The re-collecting is only necessary, of course, when the memory has been taken via trauma, by a human being capable of smashing the memory out of another. This kind of memory is stored in a safe, although not immediately accessible, place in the mind (Herman, 1997) until it is ready to be examined and gently tended to. For survivors of sexual violence, having lost memory can be confusing, and even terrifying. It can catch the individual off-guard. It can be disorienting and overwhelming. When the psyche is overpowered by such an intense emotional disturbance,

The whole apparatus for concerted, coordinated and purposeful activity is smashed. The perceptions become inaccurate and pervaded with terror, the coordinative functions of judgment and discrimination fail...the sense organs may even cease to function....The aggressive impulses become disorganized and unrelated to the situation in hand....The functions of the autonomic nervous system may also become disassociated with the rest of the organism. (Kardiner, as cited in Herman, 1997, p. 35)

Missing memory can leave a survivor feeling confused, afraid, angry. It is like a space with no light, no time, no orientation. It is wholly unnerving, nauseating.

To this day I cannot recall the events in that dark hold of my memory. To be honest, I don't want to know. For a long time, I treated the situation like I wasn't even involved, like it didn't happen to me. I couldn't understand why there was blood in my underwear... I'd had my period the week before. Why did it hurt to walk, to sit, to pee? (*Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard*, 2010, p. 8)

For some, like the college woman above, there is no desire to know more about her rape. On some level, she is not ready to know, and so the memory will remain locked away. It may never be retrieved. For others of us, memories come back because we want them to—when we are ready for them to return. Maybe we do not make the conscious decision to let them return. In these cases, some may be ready and others may not. I want to believe that when they come back, that means we are ready for them.

That is how I chose to frame my remembrances—I wanted to believe I was ready for them when they came. I wanted to believe that I was ready to learn about the missing chapters of my story, especially when it felt like I was not ready at all. My story was coming whether I liked it or not.

[Normal memory,] like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially it is the action of telling a story....A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated... until we have achieved, not merely an outward reaction through our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization of the recital of the events to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history.... Strictly speaking, then, one who retains a fixed idea of a happening cannot have a “memory”...it is only for convenience that we speak of it as a “traumatic memory.” (Janet, as cited in Herman, 1997, p. 37)

As such, the memories, the pieces of the puzzle, the chapters in the story, push us as survivors to experience both an inward reaction (reflective, thoughtful, conflicting, whatever it may be) and an outer one (to share with friends, speak with a rally, discuss with a family member). And, as Janet says above, memory is not fixed. It continues to grow and shift as we gain new understandings of it.

For me, a re-collecting of memory may have started the first time I stepped into a fraternity house to do the work of rape prevention education. The smell of the house was not exactly the same as the house in which I was raped, but contained a similar

semblance of sweat and beer and dusty furniture that had never really been cleaned. Maybe it was also the energy there—an untouchable sense of too much testosterone in one contained space. Taking those first steps into a fraternity house began a re-collection of memories that allowed me to examine and tend to my own being. It started me down a path of understanding, of *being* with a person, a part of myself I lost those years before.

Remembering the Trauma

For me, re-collecting started as a slow burn that gradually intensified over time until it was unbearably suffocating and I wanted out, out, OUT. I think I probably had it easy. Mine was measured. I was like the frog in a cold pot of water that gradually comes to a boil. I couldn't tell how hot it was getting until it almost killed me. For others, the unbearable, suffocating boiling point comes quickly as a flashback of the lost event.

A flashback feels like you're stuck in hell. Everyone is living life around you but you're not there. My first flashback was so terrifying to me—I thought I'd lost my mind. I saw, experienced, lived through a portion of the rape all over again; as if it was happening at that very moment. I learned that my rapist had been watching me for some time from his apartment. One evening when my husband was out of town I woke and found this man sitting at the foot of my bed. I've never experienced a moment like that—except in these flashbacks. Everything becomes all black like it was in my room and then my eyes seem to adjust and I'm able to make out his form on the bed. I can even smell him. My fear is palpable, just like that night. (Lauer, 2002, p. 130)

The heat, the terror—are like being stuck in hell. It was the most traumatic moment of your life—and suddenly you are sucked back into it with the fiery passion of every sensory neuron in your body. You are there again, and as far as you know, there is no escape. The escape only comes later. In the meantime, enormous, hidden beasts terrorize you from within.

The things of memory remain with me, within me. They occupy interior psychical (and doubtless also neurological) places and are determinative loci of my life. I

remain with them as well by returning to them in diverse acts of remembering. Much the same two-sided dialectic of the 'with' obtains in the experience of built places, thanks in large measure to what Husserl calls 'retaining-in-grasp' (*noch im Griff behalten*, that is, 'bearing in mind' or, more appositely here, 'bearing in body'). (Casey, 1993, p. 129)

Memories "remain" with the person, even though they may be buried, like a smoldering fire under the surface of the ground. A smoldering fire can exist without anyone knowing, until one day that fire breaks through the surface and envelops the trees. The mind will not remember until the body is ready to do so (Ogden et al., 2006).

Bearing in mind and bearing in body, the first memories of trauma will often be *bodily*—smell, taste, touch, sight (Herman, 1997; Ogden et al.), and as the memories of trauma,

They seem to announce themselves as if from a dark depth. These experiences seem on reflection to be sometimes hidden and at other times noticeable, as if there were a space that we can either enter by way of investigation or close off from scrutiny by forgetting. (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 110)

The openings and closings of memory are deeply connected to the being in trauma and recovery. It is an oscillation between silence and voice, between that which cannot be seen and that which can. Memories can be, as van Manen says, "closed off from scrutiny and forgotten," and they can be dredged up from the "dark depth."

The word "remember" comes from the Latin *rememorari*, re- again + *memorari*, "recall to mind," or "be mindful of." The word remember can uncover its part of the lived experience of sexual assault in college as a space in which survivors can *be mindful of* their own trauma experiences. And maybe while existing in that mindful space, one can come into a place of self that is more full than it was before there was room for mindfulness.

Re-Membering in Community

The re-membering comes with sharing one's story with others—a mother, a sister, a lover, a trusted friend. Re-membering involves becoming a member again, a member of a group of friends, a family, a community. Holding the secret alone can be so hard. Sharing it with the people you love can be even harder. Both remembering and holding secrets exhaust the body, soul, and psyche of the survivor.

Personal secrets have consequences for interpersonal relationships. When there are secrets that stand between people, they tend to make interactions less open, less intimate, less spontaneous. In contrast, when secrets are shared, disclosed, and confided between partners, then the interpersonal relation tends to turn even more intimate, more close, more sharing. The word secret derives from the Latin *secretus*: “separated, set apart, hidden.” Thus even the etymology of secrecy makes us aware of the relational significance of human secrecy. This is the major observation for our discussion: Secrets are always relational. Secrets are commentaries about human relations as well as commentaries about the relation of the person to his or her inner self or inner life. (van Manen & Levering, 1996, pp. 12-13)

The coming-back-into-society is very powerful when survivors are able to freely share their stories. With family, friends, faculty and staff, the campus community can be a big part of a positive lived experience for the survivor. This is so if people are there for her in ways that let her be true to herself. If she is able to unveil her secrets without fear of ramifications, she will find herself re-membered, or back among her community. She will be part of a re-membered remembering, in which her community will rise up with her and share the burden of remembering her trauma. They will remember the trauma with her. They will carry it. They will carry her. She will be re-membered.

When secrets are revealed between two people, such as a sexual assault that has pressed upon one of them and the other is a trusted confidant, the reaction of the trusted confidant plays a key role in the lived experience of the survivor. Does he wish it would

go away? Does she somewhere, inwardly, blame the survivor for what happened to her? These reactions matter as deeply to the lived experience as if he were to say, *I'm here with you as long as this is with you*, or if she were to say, *I'm your friend no matter what*. Re-remembering can be helped or halted by the reactions—supportive or dismissive, tentative or forthright—of the community around the survivor. The fear of telling, the fear of blame, the fear of being overprotected, the fear of being judged...these are the fears that keep survivors questioning whether or not re-remembering will be worth the energy it take (Ledray, 1986/1994).

Holding the secret, she feels *separate, apart, hidden*. Sharing the secret with friends, family and loved ones who are not supportive, she feels *separate, apart, hidden*, as if she is the secret they wish to keep. She feels as if they want her to go away, her trauma to go away. She wants her trauma to go away, too, but she has no choice in the matter. Sharing the trauma, sharing the secret, can lighten the load, but only when friends, families, loved ones are there to receive it, carry part of the burden, and give the survivor unconditional love and care.

A Body in the Woods: Disembodiment, Embodiment, and Survival

A little girl wanders off from her family as they picnic at a park in Maine. After a long day waiting for her return, hoping for the best, never even uttering the worst, search and rescue teams scatter throughout the woods with trained dogs and trusted volunteers hoping to find her alive, not just her *body in the woods*. Please...let there be life in her body in the woods. So it was with great relief that just after three o'clock in the morning,

a handler and his K-9, Grace, came out of the woods, walking toward her parents, with a little girl in an Elmo sweatshirt. Girl and family were reunited (Braestrup, 2007).

They thought the little girl, Alison, was gone. She seemed lost; she might have been dead. There are two ways in which Alison survived that day and that night, other than Grace's keen sense of smell. *Physically*, she survived. She made it out of there alive. And *emotionally* she survived. How can one see her survival? What was the experience for her? She curled up under some brush and slept. She slept. She went to the place where she could dwell in dreams until she came out on the other side, safe and sound and on her way back to her terrified parents. She disembodied. She left her body. She was hiding in her own mind until she could leave the forest. She survived...for now...but what about later when the memory returns?

Disembodiment: Sleeping in the Woods

If the woods, in this case, are the trauma, and the body in the woods is the body trying to survive, what is the experience of the body in the woods? What is it for the body to be sleeping in the woods? What is the bodily experience of sleeping, disembodiment? What is the lived experience of surviving rape? What does ongoing survival look like? What does it feel like?

Survivors of sexual assault sometimes disembody during rape and during recovery. It is the body's way of escaping, of enduring only that which it can bear at the time (Ogden et al., 2006). What does it mean to be disembodied during or after trauma? What is it like to leave the body for a place so deeply internal, hidden, and protected that it feels outer and far away? Rothschild (2000) explains:

One person might become anesthetized and feel no pain. Another might cut off feeling emotions. Someone else might lose consciousness or feel as if he has become disembodied. The most extreme form of dissociation happens when the whole personalities become separated from consciousness. (p. 65)

Later, through the daily experience of trauma survival, “one might continue to become anesthetized when under stress, be unable to access emotions, or feel disembodied when anxious” (Rothschild, p. 65).

What does disembodiment look like? What does it feel like? A woman once told me that during her rape, she felt like she was floating above her body, looking down at it happening to her. Dissociation is “the mind’s attempt to flee when flight is not possible” (Rothschild, 2000, p. 66). Rothschild shares that the experience has been expressed to her by clients who, “express it as, ‘It was like I left my body.’ ‘Time slowed down.’ ‘I went dead and could not feel any pain.’ ‘All I could see was the gun, nothing else mattered’” (p. 67). And in the time immediately following their traumas, or the initial moments of the survival experience, survivors have expressed a feeling of being “beside oneself” (Rothschild, p. 66). Will the study participants have experienced dissociation? What did it feel like for them? Do they still feel it now? What is that like? Inspirepub (n.d.) writes:

Dissociation is a strange thing...It’s awkward. Slippery.

What does dissociation feel like?

Like being hollow.

So there’s a shell there, on the outside, and people look at the shell, and they talk to it and they act like it’s really you but you know it isn’t. It’s just a mask. A cover. A defence [*sic*] mechanism carefully tweaked over years and decades, with razor-sharp antennae out, reading the signals, ready to react, ready to duck for cover, ready to be whatever it is that they want me to be today.

And inside, nothing.

A great, big, gaping, hollow space.

More than a space.

A chasm. A vortex. a bottomless pit, and if I look too closely at the vortex I will spin and spin and spin until I separate out into a million lost little particles, mixed invisibly with the substance of the universe.

So I cling to the side and I don't look.
I know where my real self is. She's off there, to the right and a little in front of
me.
I can use dissociation to deal with pain.

It is out there, instead of in here. It is a bodyguard inside the body. Disembodiment is the way in which survival happens when the survivor does not have the tools for protecting herself any other way.

Embodiment: Being in the Woods

I have asked the question before and will ask it again here: If the woods, in this case, are the trauma, and the body in the woods is the body trying to survive, what is it for the body to be surviving in the woods? What is it to *be* in the woods? What does it mean to *embody* one's own body, one's own trauma, one's own survival? It is to be a lived-body in the world—connected inside and outside to everything connected to everything that extends out from the self?

The lived body, therefore, is not simply a thing among other things, a type of the world's furniture... To exist as a lived-body is always already to be-in-the-world; it is to be cast out of nonexistent Earth; it is to be a worlding. In a word, to be embodied is to be outside one's flesh both in space and time' it is to be more than *here and now*. (Anton, 2001, p. 17)

So, as a survivor, to be embodied means that one must be aware of the internal and the external, and to find the self and other as one giant connected entity. It is to expect the most tender love and care from friends and family, if that is what you wish and what you try to do for yourself. It is to have empathy for those who do not understand because they are part of the inner workings of you—past, present, and future. It is kindness and compassion for others as for self. It is a holding to the highest standards for others and for

self. Embodiment sounds like either too much to ask from a trauma survivor, or a utopian goal that is worth working toward. Either way, it feels as big as the universe.

The word “embodiment” stands “in reference to a soul or spirit invested with a physical form, of principles, ideas, etc.” As such, the embodiment of survival is like a physical and spiritual bodily possession. As in a spiritual possession, there is a struggle over possession between trauma and survival. If she is possessed by the ghost of a trauma, it is in her. It is on her. Others cannot see the ghost, but she can feel it all the time. She is embodied by the ghost of trauma, or by her own spirit of survival, or in some ways both at once.

I’ve been present for the telling of many of ghost stories around campfires in the woods. There is something about the isolation of the place, the quiet buffering of the trees, and the sense that at any moment an actual ghost could appear and scare us all into untimely death. It sounds overly dramatic, but being in the woods, in the dark, is a viscerally intense experience. All of the senses are alert. Every hair stands on end, and every sound is amplified as if the primal self is resurrected, preparing to fight or flee.

Some of the ghost stories we used to tell described battles between a ghost’s spirit and a person’s soul for a bodily place to be. Soul versus spirit: neither could inhabit the body until the other was driven out. Just as in the struggle for possession, trauma wants to hold on, it wants to survive, it wants to live. But it doesn’t belong in the body of the sexual assault victim. The body belongs to her and to survival, and in the end, the body, and survival, can triumph over evil possession.

Embodied rape, embodied trauma—these things are woven into the *fabric of being* for women survivors of sexual assault in college. The fibers are loosened by rape

and then strengthened by survival. Rape is carried *in the body*. Trauma is carried *in the body*. But the fabric can be used to transform the rape, transform the trauma, into something that the victim can use for escape, liberation, and transformation. Perhaps it is the fabric of the flour sack cape that a common day hero uses to fly, or a blanket to hide under, or a sweater to warm the soul. Flour sack or fine linen, the fabric of survival is that which is made of the world as it lives inside and outside the self. It is strong enough to foster forward movement toward a peaceful life past the trauma because it is as strong as the universe is wide—it is never ending.

He left his mark on her skin, in her nose, on her tongue, in her being.
You are her love.
You cannot see the marks.
You only know they are there, sweet man,
when you touch her with love and she recoils.
(Monahan-Kreishman, 2011)

Here, we see embodiment through the lens of a third person—one who is closely connected to both individuals in the intimate relationship. All three, connected through the embodiment of the survivor self-world, see clearly a dynamic between the two that has everything to do with rape and survival. Love begins in her and is stunted within her by the rape. He reaches out to her with love and care, and she recoils because her connection to the world—her embodiment—is not yet healed. Because she is not yet healed, the entire universe reacts to her with her own energy at the forefront—one that is nervous, and tentative, and guarded.

The experience of survival is bodily—in the body—through the senses. Rothschild (2000) speaks to the experience of trauma recovery, or—the survival experience, as one that is externally brought in from “outside the body by way of the

eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin” (p. 39). Trauma is then experienced physically “from inside the body from viscera, muscles, and connective tissue” (Rothschild, p. 40). What does this mean for the lived experience? What is it like for the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin to bring in trauma, to live in it and through it? What is it like for the viscera, muscles, and connective tissue to hold trauma as one walks through life, sits in classroom chairs, reaches for books, and climbs into bed at night, engaging each muscle that holds the trauma?

Rothschild (2000) explores the concept of “feeling” as it relates to embodiment:

The English language is a bit awkward when it comes to differentiating the conscious experience of emotions from body sensations. The word “feeling” usually stands for both: I feel sad and I feel a lump in my throat. Perhaps it is no accident that “feel” stands for both experiences, a semantic recognition that emotions are comprised of body sensations. (p. 56)

As survivors, when we feel sadness, or triumph, or anything that lives on as an echo of our traumas, we feel it in our muscles, and our bones, and our hearts. We taste it in our mouths, and feel it in our skin. It is as if the act of trauma becomes an entity that lives within our very cells.

Sensory and experiential data are stored in the body like the red mark a slap leaves on the skin. The experience, the memory of the hit, the response, and the recovery last far longer than it takes for the redness to dissipate. In her book about sexual trauma, *The Body Remembers*, Rothschild (2000) states that “The sum total of experience, and therefore all memory, begins with sensory input. It is through the senses that one perceives the world...It is through the senses that reality takes form” (pp. 38-39). As such, trauma and the subsequent survival of body, mind and spirit are perceived by the survivor through the layers of her experience—sight, sound, touch, taste, and being.

The Body: Survival in the Skin and the Senses

Sexual assault survival is bodily—it is in the skin and in the senses. It was placed there by the hands of a perpetrator who imprinted himself on a woman’s very being. She embodies his actions taken upon her. She wears them, feels them, smells them, tastes them.

Is the goal of recollection not just to recollect the past as it was, but to find meaning from it? And what, then, is the lived experience of recollection as it pertains to surviving sexual assault in college? Like “fragmented memory” (Ogden et al., 2006, p. 3) that is only known in pieces by the sense that it clings to—the smell of stale beer, a certain cologne, the touch of a wool coat, or the sight of yellow wallpaper—survivors sometimes speak to going through a time in which the memory is not linear, but exists solely in sensory flashes (Ogden et al.). Some women have told me that, without expecting it and without any warning, a sense will be stimulated by something similar to that which was present in the trauma, and it takes them back to the trauma. They viscerally feel or see or smell something that they experienced during the trauma. The common thread is that often they cannot remember the events in succession, and the parts they can remember are tied only to a piece of sensory recognition.

What must it be for a survivor to have to take her fractured memory to her friends, to her faculty, to the campus staff, or even to the police? What must it be for a survivor to be told by a police officer that she must be making the story up if she cannot tell it the same way twice? What must it be for her to truly not know the story in a linear way, to only know one bit here as the smell of marijuana, and one bit there as the touch of a beer stained t-shirt? What must it be for her to have her reality disbelieved by an entity that

could help her find closure? What must it be for her, then, to hear the frustration when people say, “Why don’t rape victims ever speak up? Why don’t they go to the police? Why don’t they speak to their caring faculty and staff?”

As the communicativeness of all great literature attests, in its spanning of historical epochs and cultural worlds, it is the open and sincere sharing of that which has been directly experienced in a thoughtful way which transcends most completely, or anyway most satisfactorily the inevitable discontinuities that can so easily separate different people, different historical epochs, and different cultures. (Levin, 1985, p. 81)

And so it is in the openness and the sincerity that the survivor both craves and worries about its existence. If she is able to share the core of who she is, though, she will “transcend completely” any separate-ness that she feels with the world.

And so what is it the lived experience of sexual assault in college for women? What is it for them to want to share, but to be disbelieved because their memories are fractured? What is it to be unable to speak because the voice of the trauma is held bodily in places that have no voice—the eyes, the ears, the skin, the tongue? Levin (1985) continues:

At the very least, we can speak from out of that place in our experience where the enframing most deeply touches us with pain. We can speak...or we can cry out. And we can always somehow share, in communications that make a direct experiential contact, the power of our resistance. (pp. 81-82)

At the very least, survivors can speak in some ways, and be silent in some ways, be hot in some ways, and cold in others. There is space for recollecting, re-collecting, remembering and re-remembering. There is space for disembodiment and embodiment for survivors as the lived experience for women in college is explored.

We will explore the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. It will be our discovery in the woods—the darkness and the light, the suffocation

and the inspiration, the lost-ness and the found-ness. At times the exploration will be slow and methodical, and at other times it may feel as though we are being chased by some unknown thing. Let us prepare for the exploration—the grounding, orienting, understanding, and interpreting, and whatever it may bring.

**CHAPTER 3:
GROUNDING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRAIL:
ORIENTING, UNDERSTANDING, INTERPRETING**

**Lost Among the Trees:
Understanding Why Phenomenology is the Way In and Out**

Running through the trees, lost among them. Running... running... running... Looking back, trying to see if *it* is getting closer, if *it* will get me, if *it* will consume me. Heart racing, skin hot, sweat dripping, breath burning in-out-in-out of my lungs. Hair sticking to my face as I whip my head forward to see where I'm going. Watching my footing. Trying to *escape* something, trying to *find* something. Escape what? The *unknown*. Find what? What it is to *live*.

Running, running, running. I lose my footing and BAM! I hit the ground. I am grounded and the unknown is upon me. There is no way deeper in and no way back out of the forest, while I am covered by this thing. So we must *uncover* it, and in doing so, uncover us all—the survivors. Let our *unknown* be *known*.

What unknown do I speak of here? It is *the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college*. How will I uncover it? Hermeneutic phenomenology is the way both in and out of understanding and uncovering lived experience (Gadamer, 1960/2002; Heidegger, 1927/1962; van Manen, 1997). Why is phenomenology the methodology for uncovering the lived experience? How is it the compelling way, here, to come to know sexual assault survival? What is hermeneutic phenomenology and how will I go about *doing* it? These are the questions I examine throughout this chapter.

A Grounding in Human Science

I hit the *ground*. With my face so close to the earth, I can smell decomposition and rebirth. I can feel the matted layer of rotting leaves and imagine what tiny beings must be wriggling around just below my dampened hands, my belly, my knees, my toes. The wet seeps in through the fabric I wear. I am grounded in solid earth, where everything lives and breathes and drinks and grows. The *lived*. The *living*.

Phenomenology finds a *grounding*—a natural, organic way of uncovering, digging up the soil and finding the roots. The roots of hermeneutic phenomenology feed the tree of understanding lived experience, allowing the branches to spread wide, feel the sun, release the air—particles of lived experience for the world to have and know. Like the trees, phenomenology finds a way to support, shelter and feed the knowing of the beings above the ground, the *human* beings, and the ways in which we experience the lives we live.

In keeping with their nature, “truths” – true assertions – assume a relation to something *on whose grounds* they are able to be in accord. That linking which is taking apart within every truth in each case always is what it is on the ground of...that is, as self-“grounding.” In its very essence, truth thus houses a relation to something like “*ground*.” In that case, however, the problem of truth necessarily brings us into a “proximity” to the problem of ground. Therefore the more originally we master the essence of truth, the more pressing the problem of ground must become. (Heidegger, 1928/1998, p. 102)

And so I worked to find the truth, the essence of lived experience, and I did so by using the human science methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology (Gadamer, 1960/2002; van Manen, 1997) to ground me in the endeavor. Researching phenomenologically is a way of being-in-the-world. It is a way of coming to understanding. It is deeply personal, and therefore brings together a knowledge of self-in-

experience and other-in-experience, when the experiences, on the surface, may appear to be the same. “In the human sciences...one does not pursue research for the sake of research. It is presumed that one comes to the human sciences with a prior interest of [a phenomenon]” (van Manen, 1997, p. 1). As phenomenological researchers, we seek to know more deeply something we have already come to know in some way. For some of us, we are living the phenomenon, ourselves. For others, the lived experience we seek to know is somewhere outside of our own bodies, but within their proximity and therefore quite connected. We, as phenomenological researchers, are overtly transparent about the ways in which we already know *it*, the phenomenon, and we therefore open ourselves to knowing in unexpected ways.

Being academically raised in the social science approach to research, I find the human sciences to be a bit of an academic departure for me. Van Manen (1997) describes the social sciences as such:

In the sense that traditional, hypothesizing, or experimental research is largely interested in knowledge that is generalizable, true for one and all, it is not entirely wrong to say that there is a certain spirit inherent in such a research atmosphere. Actions and interventions...are seen as repeatable; while subjects and samples...are replaceable. (pp. 6-7)

The social sciences seek to know the world in a way that is different from the human sciences. Van Manen goes on to say:

In contrast, phenomenology is, in a broad sense, a philosophy or *theory of the unique*; it is interested in what is essentially not replaceable. We need to be reminded that in our desire to find out what is effective systematic intervention (from an experimental research point of view), we tend to forget that the change we aim for may have different significance for different persons. (p. 7)

A Grounding in Who I Am

While I was academically raised in the practice of social sciences, the human sciences speak to me in a way that helps not only nurture the kind of researcher I am meant to be, but helps to uncover pieces of the world in an essential way that complements other kinds of research. I am, at heart, a poet, a musician, a wonderer and wanderer. It is best that I leave the objectivist work to those who are better suited for it, for there is room for all of us in academia. I am drawn to knowing lived experience—I am curious about lives and feelings and the way people *are*, in *their own ways*, in the *world*, and I believe that by knowing what phenomenology can teach us, we can be better practitioners. Knowing the lived experience, and the meaning that individuals make from it, is an essential part of knowing the world in which we live. And so, this study was brought forth from a human science perspective—one that allowed the unique phenomenon, the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college, to be deeply examined, and then described through a poetic rendering that allows readers to engage in a deep, feeling, emotional way (van Manen, 1997).

Poetic rendering is a way for the writer to bring the reader into the lived experience she is trying to convey. While we know much about the *numeric prevalence* (Brener et al, 1999; Greenfield, 1997; Kilpatrick et al, 1992; Kilpatrick et al, 2007; Koss, 1988; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), *recovery processes* (Herman, 1997; Lauer, 2002; Ledray, 1994; Levine, 1992; Mastakis, 2003), and first hand *accounts* of sexual assault in college (Saturday Night, 2008, 2010, 2011), little is known about the *lived experience*. In order to begin to know the lived experience, the reader must be given entry via written expression that helps readers to *feel* (van Manen, 1997). Such writing may be rendered

through poetry, metaphor, and prose that emerge from this goal. The purpose of phenomenological exploration is to help people *outside* the lived experience come close to feeling what it is to actually live *inside* the experience (van Manen, 1997). When it is done well, phenomenological work is ultimately an act in sanctioned voyeurism of the deepest kind—insight into a *lived world* that the reader may not otherwise be given access. One cannot *feel* the lived experience through numbers, processes, and accounts. One may come close to it, however, by reading a poetic rendering of it, and that is precisely the offering of phenomenological work.

As discussed in Chapter 1, I have been exposed to academic research and writing that relied upon music, poetry, dance, and other personal forms of expression to inform—indeed, to uncover—the ideas and experiences that we seek to know about as student affairs scholar-practitioners. That kind of academic investigation is now known as Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN; Nash, 2004). SPN is different from phenomenology, but was my introduction to a different way of exploring the world academically, nonetheless.

Let me be clear—I find great importance in all types of research. In my belief, they all have significant places in adding to our knowledge of the world in which we live. Over the years, I have become what Nash and Bradley (2011) call a “research pluralist” (p. xiv). My argument for the human sciences is merely one of appropriate methodological application—it is the right methodology for this study, but it is also a reflection of who I am. I am seeking to know a lived experience, a way of knowing through the existentials of body, space/place, time, and relation (van Manen, 1997), and hermeneutic phenomenology is the way to uncover it.

In the Body and Bones: Aching, Walking, In the Woods

The adrenaline from running, running, running has worn off, and I am left with a bodily depletion so bottomless that even my eyelids are too heavy to keep up. The chase, the *being* chased, has taken it all out of me. I am on hands and knees trying, *trying* to climb out from under this thing, but it is stuck on my back and far too heavy for my drained body to lift right now. My muscles ache so deeply that I feel it in my bones. My joints crunch and crack as I try to press up from the wet earth. I collapse. Maybe it is better to sleep now and try to move out later when I have regained some strength. Maybe in my dreams, in my most fluid state of thinking, I can uncover more.

Like the adrenaline and depletion, the fight and fatigue of survival are felt bodily (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006; Rothschild, 2000). At times it comes out like a raging bull, and at other times it can look as peaceful as a sleeping feline. Survival sleep might be better explained as the restless dog who, in his dreams, continues to run and bark and seek—muscles twitching, eyes moving under his lids, feet in motion as if pads are hitting the ground, guttural sounds rumbling up from his throat. What does he see? A ball? A squirrel? What does he feel? It is the feelings that arise from the experience that we seek to know. Like the dog's dream, in phenomenological exploration there is always something *inside the senses* to be sought, and found, and had.

What is *body*? The Old English speaks to the word “body,” meaning “the main, central, or principal part.” And what is *sexual violation*? From the Latin *stuprum*, it means “to disgrace.” As such, when a woman's body is taken without consent, when her own *grounding* in bodily trust is pulled out from her, when her main or central part is disgraced, a central bodily shift takes place. The thing that has happened outside the body

will be felt within “by way of the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin” (Rothschild, 2000, p. 39).

The bodily feeling that comes with sexual assault survival is an essential way of knowing the phenomenon viscerally, phenomenologically. As one survivor explains, “I was shivering uncontrollably. It was cold out and the cold combined with the fear, with the exhaustion, made me shake from head to toe” (Sebold, 1999, p. 7). Other survivors describe the physical and emotional, depressive and manic, furious and calm (Herman, 1997). The ability to *be*—be who she once was—or just be in the ways she once took for granted—sleeping, waking, breathing, eating. It is by mining the “rich ore of lived experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 72), that we come to better know the phenomenon from that which lies *within*, and it is by *thinking* about it, troubling over it, that the bodily experience can be better known.

If thinking is our gift, uniquely our gift, then it should be given to the body as a gift, a gift *acknowledging and reciprocating* the gifts which the body, receptive to the sensuous presencing of Being, has passed on to it in the mode called ‘givenness.’ Indeed, thinking should give *itself* as a gift to the body. But in fully giving itself, it would not insist that the body’s way of being must *conform* to its own set of categories, would not *object* to the body’s ownmost way of being and giving itself. On the contrary, thinking would open to the body, would listen, would shift into a more receptive attitude, an accepting attitude, an attitude whole spelling of graciousness the body would feel and find fulfilling. (Levin, 1985, pp. 40-41)

This “mode of givenness,” then, can be best uncovered through the hermeneutic phenomenological questioning that puts researcher and participant in partnership toward a deeper understanding of the experience we wish to know.

The lived experience must be known bodily; as phenomenologists, we must give our thinking over to that kind of exploration—one of feeling and sensing—as it is the one

true way to uncover the essence of the lived experience (Gadamer, 1960/2002; Heidegger, 2008; van Manen, 1997).

Phenomenology would seek not to explain the world, but to describe as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience. By thus returning to the taken-for-granted realm of subjective experience, not to explain it but simply to pay attention to its rhythms and textures, not to capture or control it but simply to become familiar with its diverse modes of appearance—and ultimately to give voice to its enigmatic and ever-shifting patterns—phenomenology would articulate the ground of other sciences. (Abram, 1996, p. 35)

Back to the ground. The grounding in the body, the body on the ground. I wake up on the ground, and in the moments before consciousness seeps in, I am in my warm bed, in my home, in my safety. But as the awareness of my reality returns, I find myself back on the ground with this thing upon me, trying to be known, trying to be uncovered.

It is the core of phenomenological work to uncover that which is lived within the body—how life experience feels through the senses. Van Manen (1997) explains:

Lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world. When we meet another person in his or her landscape or world we meet that person first of all through his or her body. In our physical or bodily presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we conceal something at the same time. (p. 103)

Phenomenology seeks to bring the inside out, to help the reader *feel* what the lived experience *is* within the body. It is through the “landscape” of the other that we come to know that which is lived experience. Uncover the bodily experience, and we will uncover that which is *lived*. So why use phenomenology? Because sexual assault lives in the body and bones of the survivor, and phenomenology seeks to uncover that which is “bodily in the world” (van Manen, p. 103); that is what the researcher must go to glimpse inside the being who lives it.

Finding the Authentic Self in Relation to Self and Others

Who are we, as survivors, when the self we once knew is destroyed by a trusted love, a crush, a cute friend of a friend? What happens to self-worth, self esteem, self-hood? How can we come to know the self more deeply, as it is lived in sexual assault survival for women in college?

For generations women have been socialized to defer their worth, power, and authority to men, to play a secondary, supplemental role in a male-dominated world. Rape represents the ultimate surrender of any remaining power, autonomy, and control. The surrender is not by choice but is usually necessary to ensure survival, or in the hope of survival. Through this destruction of a woman's feelings of personal power and self-worth, to take from the woman what he does not already feel in himself. (Ledray, 1986/1994, p. 1)

When an historically diminished self-worth is destroyed—when whatever leftover fraction is usurped after sexual trauma—it leaves women sexual assault survivors questioning who they are in the world (Lauer, 2002). This questioning of authentic selfhood is then magnified by society's propensity to victim blame (Herman, 1997; Ogden et al., 2006; Rothschild, 2000). So what is it to live in that space? What is it to be in search of authentic selfhood while swimming against a current of shame? “The self is social” (Anton, 2001, p. 53), and so we see ourselves in relation to others. If, in the case of survivors, others have harmed, others blame, others ignore, shut out, or dismiss, then what is left for the survivor to find in terms of relocating an authentic self, one that has been shattered by the other?

All living creatures come into being through other entities like themselves. It is by others, in the plural, that any lived-body comes to exist as a living breathing entity. In this most basic sense others are the sources of my existence. (Anton, 2001, p. 53)

Survivors struggle to find authenticity as the authentic self is so often tied into others' perspectives and perceptions. As such, selfhood often becomes defined by others'. In the case of phenomenology, another person (the researcher) is meant to discern the perspective of selfhood and authenticity through the eyes of the survivors, which may, inevitably, be a reflection of how they see others seeing them. Of the effort to understand phenomenology's role in uncovering the lived experience as it is in relation to others, van Manen (1997) writes:

Lived other (relationality) is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them...In a larger existential sense human beings have searched in this experience of the other, the communal, the social for a sense of purpose in life, meaningfulness, grounds for living, as in the religious experience of the absolute Other, God. (pp. 104-105)

And so it is that lived experience may be known, indeed *experienced*, through the eyes of the other. Researchers may find a way of knowing the survivor through the eyes of the other, survivors participating in the study, and survivors may come to know self through eyes of the *other* others, the eyes of the people in their communities.

Or maybe not. "People dwell in the things into which they meaningfully weave their lives" (Anton, 2001, p. 7). If there is a way in which survivors can separate from the others who shame and blame, and find it within themselves to name and experience selfhood, they will be achieving genuine selfhood outside of others' perspectives. It is when the supportive *other* others shift their own way of knowing, that perhaps the perception of selfhood for survivors will shift as well. Either way, the perceptions of the others are affecting the perceptions of self, and phenomenology is the way to uncover it, whatever it is.

Phenomenology seeks to find the socially constructed authentic self within lived experience:

Authenticity, as a quest for self-fulfillment, requires or demands an adequate comprehension of the selfhood that is to be fulfilled. And yet, such a comprehension is sorely lacking. We seem to be without an adequate grasp on the nature and constitution of the human self, and moreover, it is only through such a comprehension that the quest for authenticity may be fruitfully enabled. (Anton, 2001, p. 8)

So it is that phenomenology is the way in and out of understanding selfhood and authenticity—it is a way of exploring that which is central to the human experience (Anton). It is also the way to explore the *possibilities* of selfhood. Survivors participating in this study had done some exploration of selfhood and authenticity prior to engaging in conversation with me, and the study did not only provide a way for them to convey those self concepts, but also gave them an opportunity to pause, reflect, come to know them and convey them again deeply. It is through hermeneutic engagement that depth of understanding in this realm (selfhood and authenticity) can be achieved (Anton).

Wild Places and Spaces as They Are in Time: Where Survival Lives

It is in the wilderness—wild places and spaces in which time can *stand still*, as on a mountaintop with a breathtaking view where phenomenology has its call. Bodies *move slowly*, as a trudge up an incline that seems to never end. Time *creeps in too quickly*, like a sunset when the trail's end is far off and will be nearly impossible to find in the dark.

Lived time (temporality) is subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time. Lived time is the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture or when we are anxious, as in the dentist's chair. Lived time is also our temporal way of being in the world—as a young person oriented to an open and beckoning future, or as an elderly person recollecting the past, etc... The temporal dimensions of past, present and future constitute the horizons of a person's temporal landscape. (van Manen, 1997, p. 104)

It is, then, up to the phenomenologist to get to know the participants in ways that reveal their individual understandings and views of their own temporalities—where they were, where they are now, and where they are going. It is yet another piece of the puzzle that is lived experience.

The wild space/place is overgrown, and is outside of society's intervention. When you stay too long, it changes you—for better or for worse. When you don't stay long enough, you can't hope to be changed—for better or for worse. What, then, are “wild places”?

We would be mistaken to believe that wilderness has always been an object of veneration—far from it. By the time of the Middle Ages in Europe...[it was] the domain of be-wildered members of the human species, such as hermits, mad people, wanderers, and “savages,” who threatened to undo the fragile fabric human civilization had begun to weave, (*savage* derives from *silva*, woods, forest). No wonder that throughout Europe...wilderness became a haunt for ghosts and ghouls, witches and werewolves (Casey, 1993, p. 188).

Is it, then, that these wild places, like the “wild” college campuses of media lore and, in some ways, reality, are places that become *fear-full* from the moment of trauma and subsequent survival? Perhaps the image of the “wild” college campus informs the lived experience for survivors who are made to feel like outsiders, strangers, strange. Perhaps it is as if survivors are the ghosts and witches who haunt the places that everyone else would rather not see; rather not traverse.

A bathroom floor. A bedroom floor. A bed. A bar. A classroom. An off-campus student house. A residence hall room—sexual assault and the survival thereafter is lived in place and space (Herman, 1997; Lauer, 2002; Levine, 2002; Ogden et al., 2006; Rothschild, 2000). Moments of trauma. Hours of trauma. Days, weeks, months, years of

survival—struggling, succeeding. Time is lost. Time is altered. Sexual assault survival is lived temporally (Herman; Lauer; Levine; Ogden et. al.; Rothschild). Spaciality and temporality are not only central to the concept of sexual assault survival, but are also central to understanding its lived experience.

Spaciality and temporality refer to the primary connective tissues along which this expanding destructuring of Earth (and structuring of the world) proceeds and continues...“spaciality” and “temporality,” more primordially, refer to the depth and endurance which characterizes all lived-through experience. (Anton, 2001, p. 21)

Earth, then, is a reference to all that is earthly space, a representation of places in which sexual assault and its survival are lived. It is therefore imperative to explore the experience of place, space, and time as they are experienced by survivors, as they *live* in these existential dimensions of experience.

Lived space (spaciality) is felt space. When we think of space we usually first speak of mathematical space, or the length, height and depth dimensions of space...but lived space is more difficult to put into words since the experience of lived space (as lived time, body) is largely pre-verbal; we do not ordinarily reflect on it. And yet we know what the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. (van Manen, 1997, p. 102)

And so it is for the survivor that the university is not merely made up of ivy covered walls, of campus greens, of classrooms and residence hall rooms and board rooms—no. It is the lived experience within those spaces that must be explored, and hermeneutic phenomenology is the methodology that can uncover it (van Manen, 1997).

Body, self, relation, space/place, and time—these are the existential ways of knowing lived experience (Anton, 2001; van Manen, 1997). It is through these ways of knowing that we come to see and feel what van Manen calls “traces on my being” (p. 104). Through engaging the bodily senses, we come to understand what it is to feel, taste,

touch, and smell the phenomenon. Through selfhood and relation to others, we come to know better where it is that the authentic self lies, and how it is that the participant has come to know herself that way. Through space/place, we come to know how the surroundings of the participant are informing the lived experience, and through time, we get to know the past, present, and future of the phenomenon.

Orienting One's Place in the Wood: Pathmarks to Understanding Phenomenology

“Wood” is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden.

They are called *Holzwege*.

Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so.

Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*. (Heidegger, 1950/2002, p. v)

Phenomenology and phenomenologists are guided by pathmarks to knowing, like signs in the woods that guide along twists and turns on a hiking trail. There is soft earth and room for walking; however, if the path is paved and its loose and natural curves become prescribed angles, it becomes a *way-of-being* quite different than it otherwise would. It would still be a way of travelling, but the researcher would gain a completely different way of knowing on that paved and angled road.

Phenomenology's pathmarks to knowing often take the researcher off the beaten track to a place that is less explored, to a place of knowing lived experience where the senses—sights, sounds, smells—become an intricate part of knowing. Heidegger (1950/2002), in his collection of essays entitled *Off the Beaten Track*, speaks to the nature of it—the natural consciousness that arises through phenomenological work. In the translators' preface, Young and Haynes speak to Heidegger's (1950/2002) collection:

In entitling his work *Holzwege*, literally, “Timber Tracks,” or “Forest Paths,” Heidegger chose a term that carefully balances positive and negative implications. On the one hand, a *Holzweg* is a timber track that leads to a clearing in the forest where timber is cut. On the other, it is a track that used to lead to such a place but is now overgrown and leads nowhere. Hence, in a popular German idiom, to be “on a *Holzweg*” is to be on the wrong track or in a cul-de-sac. (p. ix)

Some things become clearer, but some things become more overgrown, like the issue of sexual assault survival, covered over by falsehoods and mythology, and masked by years of misunderstandings that have arisen from them. So we must gain clarity by asking the question: *What is phenomenology?* It is both a philosophic tradition and a human science methodology. It is a coming together of a way of thinking, a way of uncovering, and a way of doing.

Pathmarks to Stillness: *Dasein* and the Philosophic Tradition

Phenomenology is an influential and complex philosophic tradition that has given rise to various related philosophical movements such as existentialism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism, culture critique, and various forms of analytical and new theory. Major contemporary figures such as Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, find the impetus and sources of their writings in the earlier phenomenological works by Husserl, Heidegger, Blanchot, Levinas, and others. (van Manen, 2011)

Letting something ‘be’...means rather that something which is already an ‘entity’ must be discovered in its readiness-to-hand, and that we must thus let the entity which has this Being be encountered...so that *Dasein*, in its ontical dealings with the entity thus encountered, can thereby let it be [what it is]. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 117)

I imagine the act of philosophy, *philosophizing*, to be physically very still. Like in a meditation, all of the energies of the heart, mind, and spirit are focused only upon a singular thing. In phenomenology, I imagine a stillness in the philosophers who created it. I imagine them sitting, eyes closed, deep in thought. They are *beings*, being still, which

allows them the ability to open the mind to the great thoughts that guide us down the path we are on.

I imagine Heidegger being still with the fundamental question of phenomenology—the essence of *Dasein*, itself—What is Being? By coming to understand *Dasein*, we come to understand the essence of phenomenology, itself—it is the exploration of being-in-the-world. “If Being-in-the-world is a kind of Being which is essentially befitting to *Dasein*, then to understand Being-in-the-world belongs to the essential content of its understanding of Being” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 118). And it is the openness of *Dasein*, itself, that lends itself so well to phenomenology, which is the uncovering of the essence of something.

This tradition keeps [*Dasein*] from providing its own guidance, whether in inquiring or in choosing. This holds true—and by no means least—for that understanding which is rooted in *Dasein*’s ownmost Being, and for the possibility of developing it—namely, for ontological understanding. (Heidegger, pp. 42-43)

But the question remains unanswered: What is *Dasein*? Let us look to Heidegger (1927/1962) to answer the question for us:

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of *Dasein*’s Being, and this implies that *Dasein*, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being. And this means further that there is some way in which *Dasein* understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. *Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being.* (p. 32)

So the way of being in the world understands itself by exploring what it is to be in the world. The people who are experiencing the thing are the only ones who may delve deeply enough to uncover, for others, the essence of their experiences. It is up to them to

illuminate their own *Dasein*, their way of being in the world—what it feels like to be in their skin for their lived lives.

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself. The understanding of oneself which leads along this way we call “*existentiell*”. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 33)

So, then, the question must be asked: *What is Being?* There is so much dialogue on the matter of being in phenomenological study, but do we really know what we mean by it? The answer is yes, and no, and we are glad to be able to answer the question as such. It is in the pursuit of *knowing Being* that we may uncover the essence of phenomenologically lived life. The phenomenological researcher is led forward in writing a way into understanding. It is our way of taking apart and putting back together so that meaning may be made. It is our way of moving toward the hermeneutic aspect of phenomenology. Although we may never quite know the meaning of *Being*, it is in the struggle that we find the lived life.

We do not know what ‘Being’ means. But even if we ask, ‘What is “Being”?’ , we keep within an understanding of the ‘is’, though we are unable to fix conceptually what that ‘is’ signifies. We do not even know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. *But this vague average understanding of Being is still a Fact.* (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 25)

In other words, in not knowing what *Being* is, our understanding of it remains fluid so that we may uncover the uniqueness of its presence in each individual phenomenon. From the *unknown* emerges the *known*. In one brief phrase, *Dasein is what it is by what it is.*

So what can be said of this? *Dasein* is fluid. Being is fluid. It is the fluidity that lends itself so well to the philosophy of phenomenology. When we aim to bring the method of phenomenology into a grounding of practical application, though, it is through the structures and contextualizing of phenomenological research that this comes to light.

It is on the path to stillness that we may be grounded in philosophical inquiry. As philosopher-researchers, it is our way into thinking and knowing. So where do we go now that we have troubled over *Dasein* and what it is to *Be*? We go down the path, keeping with us a way of *thinking and wondering*, toward a place where we may join with it a way of *doing*. It is through the coming together of writing *and* thinking, poetizing *and* philosophizing, that we may emerge knowing the lived experience. It is now that I take stillness to action.

Pathmarks to Action: Human Science Methodology

From the exploration of what *Dasein* is, I can move to the more tangible work of uncovering what *Dasein* looks like and feels like. I can begin to uncover the examples of *Dasein* in the world—the *Dasein* of survival (what it means to *be-in-survival*), the *Dasein* of victimization (what it means to *be-in-victimization*). These are thus the essential ways in which *Dasein* may be used to uncover the lived experience. By uncovering the *Dasein* of the thing, we uncover the very essence of the thing, itself.

It is the *doing* of phenomenology that allows phenomenologists to truly know it. “There is a difference between comprehending the project of phenomenology intellectually and understanding it ‘from the inside’” (van Manen, 1997, p. 8). It is a way to understanding.

To understand is to participate immediately in life, without any mediation through concepts. Just this is what the historian is concerned with: not relating reality to ideas, but everywhere reaching the point where “life things and thought lives.” (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 211)

The philosophic understanding of the phenomenon is but an ideal until phenomena make their way to the ground—a grounding in human science. When a phenomenologist really sinks her teeth into a project for the first time, it is then that she will truly come to know phenomenology “from the inside.” And even when she is finished, she may struggle to explain the experience of it fully, and will have to suffice to say, “you cannot know it until you do it,” to anyone who may ask what it was like. In her phenomenological exploration of *doing* phenomenology, Hultgren (1995) examines the way of *being* in phenomenology:

In pursuit of understanding phenomenology from the inside out as it were, by bringing accounts of lived experience forward through writing and through reading other lived experience texts, there [is] a place for becoming familiar with the philosophic traditions. I always struggle with this balance and the “accessibility” of phenomenology, recognizing the irony of bringing the lived experience language of “everydayness” into the presence of the philosophic abstractions. I smile when I read Emily’s comment: “It’s pretty amazing to be ‘practicing’ phenomenology when you still know almost nothing (formally) about it.” But that is what we [do]. (p. 379)

It is through the *doing* of phenomenology that one comes to know how it is *done*. I did not understand this concept until I was well into my own experience—*understanding comes from practicing, which comes from exploration*.

The practice of phenomenology is likened well to the expression of the experience of swimming. As Heidegger says, “We shall never learn what ‘is called’ swimming, for example, or what it ‘calls for’ by reading a treatise of swimming. Only the leap into the river tells us what is called swimming” (1968, p. 21). Hultgren (1995) explores this quote

through reflection on her teaching of phenomenology by writing “I approach my class in Phenomenological Inquiry with such a leap, realizing that to learn what phenomenology is, we must be in it—not merely talk about it or define it” (p. 372).

So, as I write from the middle of my own *swimming-through* phenomenological exploration, I do my best to explain here what the method of phenomenology *is* and what it *aims to produce*. Van Manen (1997) explains the method of phenomenology through the following areas:

1. Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience.
2. Phenomenological research is the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness.
3. Phenomenological research is the study of essences.
4. Phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them.
5. Phenomenological research is the human scientific study of phenomena.
6. Phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness.
7. Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human.
8. Phenomenological research is a poetizing activity. (pp. 9-13)

Lived experience.

“Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). In uncovering the lived experience, phenomenology works to show how human beings live their everyday lives. There are no abstractions in phenomenology in terms of the development of steps or categories within which certain human behavior may be classified—the thing is disclosed as it is at its very core. Phenomenology is, at once, a liberation from “theoretical and technological thought,” and a harkening back to the “artistic, philosophic, communal, mimetic and poetic languages,”

that have grounded human beings in a way of sharing and understanding lived experience for as long as time can remember (van Manen, p. 9).

As presented to consciousness.

What is it to *present something to consciousness*? It is to bring the phenomenon forward, to see it, to be aware of it. “It is by virtue of being conscious that we are already related to the world” (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). If we are not aware of something—that is, conscious of it—then we are not able to bring it into the realm of lived experience. If we are unable to bring it into the realm of lived experience, we are unable to know it phenomenologically. In order to become aware of something, we must reflect upon it, which means that there must be some distance between the time of the incident and the time in which we are reflecting upon it (van Manen).

The essences.

Phenomenology works to uncover the essence of the phenomenon it studies. What is the essence of the thing? The word “essence” finds its roots in the Latin, *essentia*, meaning “being, essence.” An early origin of the word is also noted as meaning “substance of the Trinity,” or the “basic element of anything.” As such, to find the essence of the thing is to find God, spirit, universe, all of nature (depending on one’s religious and spiritual leanings) within it.

“Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is—and without which it could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p. 10). By describing what it is to *live* an experience, we are able to uncover the essence of it. “The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in

language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, p. 10).

Meaning.

Phenomenology not only seeks to portray the phenomenon in the fullest, most tactile way possible, but also seeks to make meaning from that descriptive representation.

In this focus upon meaning, phenomenology differs from some other social or human sciences which may focus not on meanings but on statistical relationships among variables, on the predominance of social opinions, or on the occurrence of frequency of certain behaviors, etc. (van Manen, 1997, p. 11)

Also, the type of meaning that phenomenology seeks to uncover is unique to the methodology. As opposed to other methodologies, which seek to make meaning from cultural, sociological, historical, psychological, or biographical perspectives, phenomenology seeks to focus meaning-making on the unique experience as it is lived by the people who experience it, however they experience it (van Manen).

Human scientific study.

Phenomenology is considered a “human science study of phenomena” (van Manen, 1997, p. 11) because it is a way of systematically uncovering through “questioning, reflecting, focusing, intuiting, etc.” (van Manen, p. 11). The word “science” derives its meaning from the Latin *scientia*, meaning “knowledge (of something) acquired by study,” or “probably originally ‘to separate one thing from another, to distinguish.’” As such, phenomenology, as a human *science* study of phenomena, is one that allows the researcher to separate the lived experience of something from other things about it as they are derived by scientific study. This entails explicitly attempting to “articulate, through the content and form of text, the structures of meaning embedded in

lived experience,” as opposed to it being implicit if left to poetry and literature, alone (van Manen, p. 11). It is “self-critical” in the ways in which its practitioners examine it for its strengths and weaknesses, while using its connection to hermeneutics to engage researcher, participant, and reader in the activity of meaning-making (van Manen, 1997, p. 11).

Phenomenology studies that which is *human*, as opposed to the natural sciences, where human beings experience the world *consciously*, and natural objects, including the makeup of the human body, are *not conscious* and therefore are unable to experience *anything* (van Manen, 1997). It is the study of the consciousness of human beings, and their abilities to make meaning from the lives they live, that make phenomenology a unique area of scientific study (van Manen).

Attentive practice of thoughtfulness.

Phenomenology’s core practice, in terms of the researcher’s way of being-in-phenomenology, is thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1997). Heidegger’s (1927/1962) application of thoughtfulness to the philosophy of phenomenology is that of a mindful *paying-attention*, a conscientious *listening-to*, a sort of caring concern.

If Dasein-with remains existentially constitutive for Being-in-the-world, then, like our circumspective dealings with the ready-to-hand within-the-world (which, by way of anticipation, we have called ‘concern’), it must be Interpreted in terms of the phenomenon of *care*; for as ‘care’ the Being of Dasein in general is to be defined. (p. 157)

In the practice of phenomenological research, the act of thoughtfulness, as it comes through caring and concern, allows the researcher to be immersed in the uncovering of lived experience. By practicing thoughtfulness in our research, we may pass it along to the more practical nature of pedagogy and practice in whatever field the study might be

helpful. Van Manen (1997) calls this application of phenomenology “a ministering of thoughtfulness” (p. 12).

What it means to be human.

Phenomenology, as a practice of study, seeks to uncover what it is to be human in the lived—the ways in which human lives are experienced (Gadamer, 1960/2002; Heidegger, 1927/1962; van Manen, 1997).

As we research the possible meaning structures of our lived experience, we come to a fuller grasp of what it means to be in the world as a man, a woman, a child, taking into account the sociocultural and the historical traditions that have given meaning to our ways of being in the world. For example, to understand what it means to be a woman in our present age is also to understand the pressures of the meaning structures that have come to restrict, widen, or question the nature and ground of womanhood. (van Manen, p. 12)

For this study of the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college, it is the human aspect of survival that is at the core. Indeed it takes into account an understanding of what it is to be a woman, too, as referenced above by van Manen. The human experience of sexual assault survival for women in college is about all of those things, and more. The essence that seeks to be uncovered, though, is the *human-ness* of it all. What it *feels like to be* that survivor. And through the moral nature of uncovering what it is to be human, “phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are” (van Manen, p. 12).

Poetizing.

That which is understood through phenomenological exploration is then shared through poetic rendering (van Manen, 1997). It emerges from the back-and-forth between textual conversations with participants and the textual writings of the researcher about it, *within* it. Phenomenology is in the writing, and in the *poetic sharing of lives as they are*

lived that comes through it. It uses an “incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling” (van Manen, p. 13). It is a language that sings the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1973).

But poetizing is not “merely” a type of poetry, a making of verses. Poetizing is thinking on original experience and thus speaking in a more primal sense... We must engage language in a primal incantation or poetizing which hearkens back to the silence from which the words emanate. What we must do is discover what lies at the ontological core of our being. So that in words, or perhaps better, in spite of the words, we find “memories” that paradoxically we never thought or felt before. (van Manen, p. 13)

What does van Manen mean when he asks us, through phenomenological text, to find memories of which we have never before been conscious? He means that it is through the poetic rendering of something that others, readers, will be moved deeply by the words they are reading. For them, the words will disappear, and in their place there will become a living-within that happens through-the-words. Poetry and poetic renderings have a way of touching the human spirit, the human soul, in which the history of all human-*kind* lives. It is there that the memories *of all* may be touched, and lived *by all*.

Setting a Course for the Clearing: Phenomenology as Methodology in Action

How long has it been that I have been trapped under this thing? Night is day and day is night and I have no sense of orientation, no sense of where I might be and when I may get out from under it—the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. And so I work down here, in the dark, under cover, until the thing begins to lift. Is it lifting? I believe I may see some light beginning to emerge, creeping in to where I have been suspended, thinking, questioning, going deeply in and trying to find my way back out.

It begins to lift off of me, like the oversized blanket I was once lost in as a child. It was hot and dark under there, under that thing in the forest, and hard to breathe—stuck

with the musty leaves kept damp with no sun and no air to dry them. But now the fresh air rushes in and, yes! I can see some light. I squint my eyes until they adjust to this newfound illumination, this newfound clearing. I can see the forest again, but somehow, after what feels like an eternity of thought and questioning in the darkness, I see *it*—what it is to live—far more clearly than I did before.

To say that it is ‘illuminated’ [“erleuchtet”] means that as Being-in-the-world it is cleared [gelichtet] in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it *is* itself in the clearing. Only for an entity which is existentially cleared in this way does that which is present-at-hand become accessible in the light or hidden in the dark. By its very nature, Dasein brings its “there” along with it. If it lacks its “there”, it is not factually the entity which is essentially Dasein; indeed, it is not this entity at all. *Dasein is its disclosedness*. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 171)

And so it is that I uncovered the phenomenon, the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college, by using the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology. I found its *facticity*, I found its *there*, I found its way of *being-in-the-world*, and I found it all by the following “methodological themes” (van Manen, 1997, p. 31) as explored below.

A Forest Illuminated: Van Manen’s Research Activities Light the Way

Phenomenology is a glimpse into the darkened forest of human existence. Phenomenology is the light that shines down and illuminates some pieces of it—human life in its uniqueness. It is a glimpse, not a generalizable Truth. But, a glimpse into the human condition is a glimpse into us all, and may serve to shed light on the entirety of human life, and the way we all live our lives.

The phenomenologist as writer is an author who starts from the midst of life, and yet is transported to that space where, “as Robert Frost once said, ‘writing is like falling forward into the dark’. Here meanings resonate and reverberate with reflective being (van Manen, 2002, p. 7).

“Phenomenological research aims at establishing a renewed contact with original experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 31), which is a necessary complement to the categorization and organization of aspects of what we do and how we do them. There is certainly room for all types of research, and the human sciences and social sciences seek to understand different pieces of human life. It is through the world of phenomenology, though, that the illumination of human experience may elucidate human life as it is lived, so that we may all come to live our fullest lives.

Seeking survival: A turning to self in order to know.

The first of van Manen’s (1997) six research activities calls the researcher to a “turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world” (p. 30). It is a turning inward to *why it is* that the researcher is drawn to know the phenomenon better. Turning inward shows the place from which the research is shared, and therefore allows it to be known overtly by the reader. It requires a singularity of commitment on behalf of the researcher—one that allows her (researcher) to focus narrowly, yet very deeply, on the uniqueness of one particular way of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1971/2001; van Manen). It is a narrowing of focus with great intensity. As Heidegger explains, “to think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world’s sky” (p. 4). It is the deepest thoughtfulness—a being-full-of-thought—that is embodied by the researcher.

“It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence” (van Manen, 1997, p. 31). For me, the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college can be my singular, unique focus because I,

myself, am a woman survivor of sexual assault in college. My “turning to the phenomenon” in Chapter 1 is deeply personal even through its written word and adherence to phenomenology’s “poetic rendering” may have assaulted the reader with its transparent view of a deeply harmful moment in my life.

While it is deeply personal to me, and deeply revealed as one piece of my experience as a survivor, it is essentially *only* my experience. I do not use the word “only” as a way to minimize what happened to me—I understand the gravity of that. I use it to note a key ingredient of the phenomenological movement toward understanding—a recognition that my perspective is only one perspective. It can serve to be enhanced and deepened when joined together with others of similar backgrounds. It is for me, as a phenomenological researcher, an attempt to understand overtly that I bring my perspective into the work I do to uncover the lived experience of others. From there, a second piece of recognition is intrinsic—my interpretation of the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college can only serve as one interpretation, and will never “exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description” (van Manen, 1997, p. 31). Indeed, phenomenological study is humbling. I cannot speak for the whole world of lived experience; I can only speak to one little star—a partnership between me and the research participants. As Merleau-Ponty (1962/1998) writes, “All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world” (p. viii).

Being in the forest: A moving through, not mapping of.

Of being *moved*, not *mapped*—lived experience is *moving*—bodily, personally, uniquely. We say that an experience has been “moving” when, by going through it, the body has a physical reaction. As in a movie that brings the viewer to tears, or news of a death that generates goose bumps, the *moving* experience *moves* the body. It is about moving through life, moving through the senses, moving through self, and moving through relationships with others. The work of phenomenological exploration has been called a turning “to the things themselves” (Husserl, 1911/1980, p. 116), and is found through the second of van Manen’s (1997) six research activities: “investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it” (p. 30). Van Manen nudges the phenomenological researcher to express the essence of the thing, rather than to categorize, organize, or try to map it out.

It is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analysing [*sic*]. . . . I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1998, p. viii)

In other words, the human being’s *lived* experience cannot be *known* in any other way than through hermeneutic phenomenology and its power to deeply question and uncover. It is a getting into the bodies, hearts, and souls of beings as they live in the world.

But a *moving-through* is not only about bodily experience, as I have explored above. It is also about space and time. The *moving-through* elicits a sense of the *here-to-there-ness* that is essential to *moving through* life. In life, there is a beginning, middle, and end. There are incidents along the way that inform the way we are in the world and

the way that we live. Those incidents, too, have beginnings, middles, and endings. There are spaces and places that we visit along that temporal path that become one with our way of being in the world—our lived experience—our *Dasein*.

On the one hand it means that phenomenological research requires of the researcher that he or she stands [*sic*] in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations. On the other hand it means that the researcher actively explores the category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects. (van Manen, 1997, p. 32)

In other words, to be a phenomenological researcher, one must stand with the “fullness of life” all around, open to it as if there were nothing between it and the researcher’s skin. Stand naked within the phenomenon, so to speak. Let it wash over, infuse and inform. And after the lived experience has fully soaked in, reflect upon all that is there so that it can then be shared with the world in a way that *moves it*.

Clearing waters in the woods: Reflecting in, reflecting on.

I am in a clearing in the woods, up to my waist in grasses and wildflowers filling the wide expanse. Wading through growth I find myself in a *clearing within the clearing*, and look down to see a pool of water that looks so *clear*, as down and down and down it goes. I cannot see the bottom of this small pool, but I can see myself *reflected* on the surface. I find a warm, flat rock to sit on; I take off my shoes and dangle my legs over the edge. My feet dip in, troubling the reflection that was so clear only a moment before. The water is icy cold and feels so good in stark contrast to the hot sun on my face. I take a deep breath. I will sit by this reflecting pool until I gain some clarity on what it is I seek to know.

Clearing, troubling, clearing again. It is the phenomenological way in and out of knowing a lived experience. Down, and down, and down it goes...the seeking of depth of

life experience through essential themes. Question and reflection, question and reflection, until life's essential themes emerge—this is the way to van Manen's (1997) third research activity of "reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon" (p. 30); this is an essential piece of the puzzle that is at work in the uncovering of lived experience.

A true reflection on lived experience is a thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance...Phenomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life...About any experience or activity...we can reflectively ask what is it that constitutes the nature of this lived experience? (van Manen, p. 32)

I see it far below the surface—a tiny glittering piece of something, obscured by my vantage point so high above. I am compelled to bring it to the surface so that I may see it more clearly. I do not know what it is, but somewhere inside me a voice is telling me that it will help me to *see* what it is to *live*, and *know* what it is to *live*—know the *lived experience*—that is what I seek now more than any other thing. It is calling out to be brought up. Before rational thought can hold me back, I dive into the icy depth; it is so cold that it takes my breath away. Eyes wide open, I swim down and down and down. I grasp the thing tight in my hand, push off the wall of the cavernous pool, and rocket to the surface. My face hits the air, my eyes open, I bring it to the surface, and I see it for the first time. It is a multifaceted stone *in which*, and *through which*, I can see a thousand reflections bouncing back. I pull myself out of the water and back onto the warm rock, breathing quickly from the exertion. Each time I go deeper I find more to reflect upon, just like this little stone, and this time I have found more than I ever expected to be called to explore.

Letter writer, pensive responder: Time to think on the trail.

Very dear Mr. Kappus: I let your letter go unanswered for quite a while, not that I had forgotten it – on the contrary it was the kind one reads again on discovering it amongst one’s letters... Whenever I read it, as I do now in the great silence of this remote place, I am touched by your beautiful concern for life... Here, where I’m surrounded by an immense countryside, with winds blowing over from the sea, here I feel that in their depth your feelings and questions take on a life of their own. (Rilke, 1903/2011, pp. 44-45)

Laying on that rock in the sun next to the water in the clearing, holding my newly won symbol of *life as it is lived*, I can feel myself drifting off to sleep. In my dream, I am back on the trail in the woods, but I am not walking. I have found a destination along the way, a primitive shelter, and will sleep there when night falls. In the meantime, there are letters to read and letters to write. It is an old fashioned way to keep in touch, I know, but I rather enjoy the time for reflection between sending and receiving. As in Rilke’s letter to Kappus, above, it is by *being in nature* and *being in each letter’s words* that I may find both depth and life. The words stay with me, especially as I walk along the trail, playing in and out of the meaning I make in my mind. There is a turning and re-turning to the letters as each time brings new significance.

On the trail, my mind can pause on an idea or question posed by a loved one, and I can take my time penning a response at the end of my day. When I reach the next town, I’ll send the ones I’ve been writing, and pick up the ones that are waiting for me in one of the many pre-arranged mail drops I set up along the trail. I will call from town, and I will email from town, but I cherish the conversation that is to be had through the letters. These are some of the deepest conversations I have with the people I love because this is the only time we are forced to stop for a very long time and think about what we might say in that next letter.

Letters are an interesting intermediate phenomenon, a kind of written conversation that, as it were, stretches out the movement of talking across purposes and seeing each other's experience. The art of writing letters consists in not letting what one says become a treatise on the subject, but in making it acceptable to the correspondent. Yet on the other hand, it also consists of preserving and fulfilling the standard of finality that is intrinsic to everything stated in writing (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 369).

Phenomenological writing can feel like writing letters that may, at least for the time being, only be read by the writer. It is a call and response, self to self, that helps the lived experience emerge. By writing, stepping away, reading, and writing more, there is time for the mind to idle on that which has been said, instead of rushing to respond verbally, or electronically. This concept is captured through van Manen's (1997) fourth research activity of "describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting" (p. 30).

To *do* research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always a *bringing to speech* of something. And this thoughtfully bringing to speech is most commonly a writing activity. Is phenomenological writing thought brought to speech? Or is it language that lets itself be spoken and used as thought? (van Manen, p. 32)

The answer to both questions is a resounding yes! Phenomenological writing is thought brought to speech, *and* it is spoken language that is then used as thought. The two are inseparable in the realm of phenomenological exploration.

When I speak to another person and listen to him, what I understand begins to insert itself in the intervals between my saying things, my speech is intersected laterally by the other's speech, and I hear myself in him, while he speaks in me. Here it is the same thing *to speak* and *to be spoken to*. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 142)

We hear ourselves in others, and the others in us. The written word may be written and rewritten until it is the union of both, and emerges as the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Standing your ground: Facing the phenomenon, phenomenologically.

[On the trail] if a bear persistently follows or approaches you, without vocalizing, or paw swatting, try changing your direction. If the bear continues to follow you, stand your ground. If the bear gets closer, talk loudly or shout at it...Act together as a group if you have companions. Make yourselves look as large as possible (for example, move to higher ground). (National Park Service, 2009)

While the phenomenologist's orientation to the phenomenon may or may not be as terrifying as the hiker to the bear or the bear to the hiker, there are glimpses into phenomenological exploration that may be gleaned from this metaphorical comparison. The treatment of the bear by the hiker can be likened to van Manen's (1997) fifth research activity of "maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon" (p. 31).

If the phenomenon is not yet upon you, change your direction. When the phenomenologist has yet to focus on *the* phenomenon of interest, or if she has found a phenomenon that does not resonate with her as deeply as another might, she may find that she is treading on dangerous ground. Spending too much time forcing a certain area of interest when another is screaming to be uncovered will leave the researcher's focus torn between the two, even when she is unaware of the tearing. There needs to be only one determined focus during phenomenological engagement, and that focus is firmly on *uncovering the phenomenon, phenomenologically.*

Unless the researcher remains strong in his or her orientation to the fundamental question or notion, there will be many temptations to get side-tracked or to wander aimlessly and indulge in wishy-washy speculations, to settle for preconceived opinions and conceptions, to become enchanted with narcissistic reflections or self indulgent preoccupations, or to fall back onto taxonomic concepts or abstracting theories. (van Manen, 1997, p. 23)

As in my case, I had strayed into a superficial engagement with another phenomenon before realizing that my true direction was down the path I take now. It is not that I was disinterested in the lived experience of college men engaged in sexual violence prevention work. Indeed, it is a great passion of mine both personally and professionally. It simply was not the phenomenon screaming for my attention at the moment. I needed to change direction, so to speak. I needed to turn my full attention to the phenomenon that was calling to me more loudly. In other words, if the phenomenon is nowhere in sight, you are moving in the wrong direction phenomenologically.

It can be attractive, though, to engage with a phenomenon that is less frightening than the one that more truly calls because it might seem like the easier thing to do. However, there are no easy paths in hermeneutic phenomenology. “Contrary to what some think, phenomenological human science is a form of qualitative research that is extraordinarily demanding of its practitioners” (van Manen, 1997, p. 23). Poetic rendering, singular focus, attention to the depth of lived experience—these are the things that phenomenology demands of the phenomenologist. It can be grueling at times. When exhaustion from such intensity sets in, the pull to render more scientifically, more traditionally, can be strong.

To establish a strong relation with a certain question, phenomenon, or notion, the researcher cannot afford to adopt an attitude of so-called scientific disinterestedness. To be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense. To be strong in our orientation means that we will not settle for superficialities and falsities. (van Manen, 1997, p. 23)

What does it mean to be “animated by the object in a full and human sense,” as van Manen describes? It means that when I sit down at the keyboard and give myself a moment to enter a phenomenological frame of mind, I am able to see the world I wish to

uncover in metaphorical, poetic terms that have the capacity to paint a full picture of lives as they are lived. As a phenomenologist, I cannot settle for the surface perspective; I am required to delve as deep as I possibly can.

If the phenomenon is near, stand your ground. In other words, when the phenomenologist finds the phenomenon that elicits an unmatched call to attention, she has found the phenomenon that is most suited for her uncovering.

As we speak or write (produce text), we need to see that the textuality of our text is also a demonstration of the way we stand pedagogically in life. It is a sign of our preoccupation with a certain question or notion, a demonstration of the strength of our exclusive commitment to the pedagogy that animates our interest in text (speaking and writing) in the first place. (van Manen, 1997, p. 138)

This singular focus of attention to the writing and rewriting, the poetic rendering, “seeing the real flesh and blood [of the phenomenon]” (van Manen, p. 139), is the key to achieving this level of work. There may be a tendency for us, as scholar-practitioners, to theorize our way into an abstraction of the living human being. It is critical that we, as phenomenologists, remain diligently focused on both phenomena and phenomenological method.

For example, I began this section with a quotation about what to do when one comes across a bear in the wild. I was, at first, attracted to the metaphor that I am using now, but once I started researching the topic to find the right quotation, I became distracted by the lived experience of hikers meeting bears in the wild. It was at that point that my phenomenon, the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college, began to slip away. As I moved further from the realm of what must continue to be my singular focus, I also became interested in exploring the science and behavior change models behind bear attacks... I wandered way off course. I wandered away from my

phenomenon, and from the art of phenomenological exploration. I needed to get back on track, and I need to be vigilant about standing my ground. Hiking, the outdoors, the woods—these are my metaphors within the context of exploring the true phenomenon at hand, the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. The realm of the wild outdoors needs to remain a tool for uncovering the phenomenon, and not become a distraction to the phenomenon and methodology themselves.

If the phenomenon is near, make noise. In other words, when the researcher is on the right track, phenomenologically speaking, the noise she should be making comes in the form of questioning, speaking, troubling, writing, and re-writing. It is a noisy-ness in mind and spirit. There should be a great racket of exploration in her mind that calls to be examined. Through that exploration, great themes will emerge, and the noise will steadily quiet. When the quiet comes on, the phenomenologist knows that she is on the right track. Like a child who bursts out a piercing scream when he cannot otherwise gain the attention of a parent or caretaker, so should the phenomenon do to the phenomenologist. And the phenomenologist must do the same, although from a decibel level quite a bit lower. It is imperative, though, for the phenomenon to emerge boldly and for it to be met with attentive questioning and curiosity before it can come to be known in the deep way possible through phenomenological work.

Make noise as a group. The phenomenologist cannot hope to come to know the phenomenon without her participants. Together, with participants, she and they may band together toward the same goal of uncovering the phenomenon as it is, as they see it, as they live it.

In phenomenological research the emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience. The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experience and their reflections on their experience in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (van Manen, 1997, p. 62)

As such, an understanding of lived experience may only be achieved through the bringing together of those who have lived the thing. It is the “borrowing” of their lived experiences, coupled with the researcher’s interpretation, that informs the poetic rendering of the phenomenon, itself. Of course, the researcher must be open to hearing the lived experience as it is shared by the participants, while overtly recognizing her own perspective.

Take higher ground. In other words, if the phenomenologist has had an opportunity to see the phenomenon from a close perspective, say, as someone who has experienced the thing herself, it is essential for her to open her view of the thing through a much wider lens. The phenomenon will lead the understanding of it, and it is essential for the phenomenologist to know that her own experience of the thing is not the thing, itself. It is only by engaging with others and combining their experiences to find the essence of the thing that the depth of phenomenological understanding may be achieved.

Seeing the forest for the trees: Considering parts and whole.

Emerging from a dream on that warm rock in the clearing’s clearing by the water’s edge, I roll over onto my belly and stretch, toes pointed, arms straight out front. Peering out at the wildflowers and grasses just beyond my rock, I am struck by the beauty of the colors as they wash together within the borders of the trees. I bring my gaze inward, and focus on one small flower less than a foot from my face. It is tiny—no bigger

than the nail on my little finger—and the brightest pink that only exists this way in this moment.

In phenomenological work, it is essential to see both parts and the whole of the phenomenon.

Qualitative research (*qualis* means “whatness”) asks the *ti estin* question: What is it? What is this phenomenon in its whatness? But as one engages in the *ti estin* question, there is the danger that one loses sight of the end of phenomenological research: to construct a text which in its dialogical structure and argumentative organization aims at a certain effect. In other words, one can get so involved in chasing the *ti estin* that one gets stuck in the underbrush and fails to arrive at the clearings that give the text its revealing power. (van Manen, 1997, p. 33)

It is remembering to look above the wildflowers, above the trees, and to take in the entire landscape, even when the tiniest speck of dirt on the forest floor has caught our attention.

It is this, the ability to see the smallest piece and the largest whole, that brings us to the final of van Manen’s (1997) six research activities, which is “balancing the research context by considering parts and whole” (p. 31).

Where Do We Go From Here? Walking the Methodology

Human science methodology is an uncovering of the lived experience of human beings (van Manen, 1997). It differs from the social sciences in that it does not attempt to generate theoretical steps, maps, or frameworks that attempt to name current human conditions or predict future developments. Phenomenology leans on the art of poetic rendering, coupled with a depth of understanding lived experience—experience as human beings feel it in body, space, time, and relation (van Manen). The phenomenologist uses a thematic approach “understood as the *structures of experience*” (van Manen, p. 79) to render the essence of the phenomenon. This undertaking is done in partnership with participants in the study.

Both the interviewer and the interviewee attempt to interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in the light of the original phenomenological question. Both the researcher and the interviewee weigh the appropriateness of each theme by asking: “Is this what the experience is really like?” (van Manen, p. 99)

As I wove my interpretive rendering in and out of the words shared by the survivors, I often stopped to ask myself the very question van Manen asks here: “Is this what the experience is really like?” Knowing that this question is best answered through a back and forth questioning with study participants (Gadamer, 2002), I periodically reached out to them to hear their thoughts on my renderings. It was not an exercise in finding whether or not I “got it right,” for each individual, per se, as each singular voice is a piece of the collective understanding of the phenomenon. Phenomenology’s poetic rendering asks the researcher to work in partnership with the words of participants wherein no singular voice is “right” or “wrong”. As the researcher, I stand with participants at a jumping-off-point, and I carry them with me as I dive to the greatest depths. Their words are with me, and it is my work to take them as deep as my abilities will allow us to go.

Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

Manifestly, [a phenomenon] is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground. (p. 59)

The phenomenon, the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college, therefore “lies hidden” in the words of the participants. It is by bringing the participants’ words together, through finding the emergent themes, and thereby bringing their words into interpretive meaning, that allows the essence of the thing to emerge. The

phenomenon exists somewhere within the ebb and flow of phenomenological conversation and poetic interpretation.

There is no one way, or format, that phenomenology prescribes toward the intention of rendering the essence of the phenomenon. Instead, there are the six research activities as they are outlined by van Manen (1997). It is up to the researcher, then, to apply this guide to the uncovering of the unique phenomenon of interest. I have already begun to discuss the research activities above, and will continue the conversation below as I delve more specifically into the details of how this particular study was conducted. I have outlined four areas of exploration in order to accomplish this task: walking with being(s), walking through conversation, walking in questioning, and walking for meaning.

Walking with Being(s)

The essence of phenomenology is to understand a way of *being-in-the-world* for those who have lived the phenomenon of interest. In other words, it is my mission as a phenomenologist to uncover *beings being*—not only the ways in which they express their experiences, but further how I deepen the understanding of how they live it through phenomenological uncovering. In the following section I discuss the ways in which I brought together participants for my study—who they are, how and where I found them, and the methodological process I lead them through.

In essence, my goal was to find participants who identify as women having lived the experience of sexual assault survival in college. Past successful phenomenological dissertations engaged between five (Pigza, 2005) and eight (Packard, 2004) participants. At no time in my selection process did I have more than eight potential participants. In

this way, there was never a need to “reject” participants from the study. Any time a potential participant would choose not to be part of the study, I would reach out to other survivors who I had not yet engaged.

Reclaiming the power of choice is a critical piece of rape survival because the act of rape is a fundamental taking of these things (Francisco, 1999; Herman, 1997; Lauer, 2002; Ledray, 1994; Levine, 1992; Matsakis, 2003; Sebold, 1999; Warshaw, 1994). The notion of taking any kind of choice from participants (here, the choice to participate or not participate in the study) was therefore inconceivable. Given the sensitive nature of this study, rejection could have a negative and harmful effect on potential participants. It was important to me that everyone invited to join the study be given the power to choose for themselves whether or not to become involved. I took great care not to take that choice away from anyone I had already invited.

This study brings together the stories and insight of six women. All of them were raped in college, and experienced their own survival of it while there. Every participant in the study was able to delve very deeply into their own lived experience. Each woman was able to engage with me about their personal and unique journeys and was willing and able to do the challenging work of uncovering lived experience.

I identified participants several ways. First, I personally reached out to survivors with whom I worked on the issue of sexual violence either collegially, or while they were in college (see Appendix B). Second, I reached out to colleagues who have, themselves, worked with the issue of sexual assault in college and could identify individuals who will qualify for participation (see Appendix A). For potential participants who were identified through the nomination process, I contacted them by email with an invitation to

participate in the study (see Appendix C). Third, I implemented the snowball sampling method (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) and asked identified participants to nominate others who fit the criteria.

The criteria I used for participant selection included the following “essential criteria” as identified by Moustakas (1994):

The research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview and (perhaps a follow-up interview), grants the investigator the right to tape-record, possibly videotape the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation and other publications. (p. 107)

In addition to the essentials outlined by Moustakas, I used the following criteria.

Participants:

1. identified as women;
2. identified as having experienced sexual assault in college;
3. identified as having survived, or having gone through survival experiences, of their sexual assaults in college;
4. experienced time in college, surviving the assault, for a minimum of one year;
5. experienced time away from college (after graduating or withdrawing) for a minimum of three years;
6. went through their own therapeutic or spiritual journeys of healing;
7. identified their own coping mechanisms for dealing with deep discussions about their own traumas. This identification allowed me to, if needed, help to employ helpful coping mechanisms when and if the participants needed them;
8. were willing and able to engage in phenomenological conversation over email, by phone, or face-to-face.

A key element in the criteria for participation in the study was participants’ abilities to reflect upon their own lived experiences. The choice to engage women who have already graduated from college is a purposeful one for that reason. “A person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 10). Thus, it was essential for participants to have had some time between their college experiences and their participation in this study.

Participants in this study had remained in college for at least one year following their assaults. I chose to use the time period of one year following the assault based on the significance of the first anniversary after the assault. Ledray (1994) writes, “Anniversary dates [for traumatic events] have been found to have a significant impact on people’s behavior and emotional wellbeing, often reawakening concerns they thought they had put to rest” (p. 159). As such, the anniversary became a compelling piece of the lived experience to explore with participants. Together with participants I explored questions like: What did it feel like to experience the anniversary while existing within the context of campus life? How was it lived in your daily life, in your thoughts and in your senses? How did it color your life as you lived it on campus? The goal of this work is to help the campus community (faculty, staff, students, family, friends) gain insight and empathy for college women who have been raped. It was critical to explore what participants had to say about the lived experience of being on campus after the rape(s), and through at least one anniversary of the trauma.

Based on the work of Dr. Kirsten Freeman Fox (2011), I made the decision to engage participants who had either graduated or been out of school for at least three years. Fox’s research regarding the transition from college to post-college indicates that the three-year marker is a significant one. In order to deeply examine the lived experience of sexual assault in college, participants in this study needed to have had enough time to reflect on the phenomenon after they left college. As such, their identity at the time of engaging in the study needed to be more aligned with life after college than with life in college. Fox’ work indicates that many undergraduate college students see themselves as “kids” while they are in college, and that they begin to transition to a place of

“adulthood” after being out of college for around three years. Having been out for that amount of time gives graduates the sense of having moved into a new phase in life, giving their time in college a sense of separateness that may make room for fuller phenomenological reflection. While Fox acknowledges that it would be inaccurate to impose a strict date on such a transition, her work does indicate that around the three year marker, college graduates start to see themselves in a new and different place in life. It is that difference, or separateness, that makes the three-year marker an appropriate minimum timeframe to include in participant criteria for this study.

Walking through Conversation

After I identified potential research participants, I sent them the participant interest form via email (see Appendix D). After reviewing interest forms and deciding on the group of individuals who participated in the study, I sent them the hard copy consent form (see Appendix E) by mail to read and sign prior to the beginning of our phenomenological conversations. Along with the hard copy consent form, I also included state and local sexual assault crisis and counseling resources specific to the areas in which each participant lived (see Appendix I). I sent return envelopes with postage attached so that participants could easily send me signed documents with original signatures. After each participant received the consent form, I engaged them in brief phone conversation. This conversation served two purposes: (a) we were able to discuss the consent form, expectations, and preferred coping mechanisms to engage if/when needed throughout the study, and (b) participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the study in real time. If participants had not yet chosen their pseudonym

for the study, they did so by the end of the phone conversation. Each participant then sent me their signed consent form prior to the first round of conversations.

The majority of conversations were conducted by email, giving each participant time to consider questions and respond at their own pace. Each participant was required to create a private Gmail email address, using their pseudonym, in order to best protect their anonymity. The use of a Gmail email address allowed all participants to engage in a final online group conversation, which I outline below. They were asked to secure a private area in which to email, and asked to use a private computer, not a work computer, for electronic interactions. Participants engaged in between two and eight email conversation exchanges, depending on how much depth they shared on an individual basis. Conversations continued until they reached a depth of understanding necessary for phenomenological inquiry. I knew that we had reached that depth once I started to see major themes emerge that were supported by deep, rich descriptions through the words of the survivors.

The choice of email for the method of conversation proved to be one that resonated well for five of the six participants. In terms of phenomenological work, “Writing and reading are the ways in which we sustain a conversational relation: a discourse about our [lives as they are lived] (van Manen, 1997, p. 111). Indeed, there is no more immediate form of reading and writing the lived experience than through electronic exchange such as email. The five who engaged prolifically in email conversation commented in their own ways that using email allowed them to respond more freely than they might have otherwise done in person. Some shared that this was the case even though they already knew me and trusted me with the conversation. When we

reached the face-to-face conversation, each participant spoke comfortably, openly, and deeply with me about her lived experience as we sat together in shared space. The sixth participant cited that her intensive work schedule kept her from responding quickly to my emails. Although our email conversations were fewer than the rest, they were densely powerful and revealing. The questions that lead our conversations are found later in this chapter, and also in Appendix G.

Five of the six participants were able to engage in the final one-on-one conversation in person, and I traveled the country to meet with them individually. The sixth one-on-one conversations took place over the telephone. That particular participant lives outside the continental United States, making travel to meet her cost prohibitive. I met with participants in their home cities across the country. I recorded this final round of conversations on two separate electronic recording devices (primary and back-up), and transcribed them myself. This type of engagement allowed the transcripts, which are a form of translation, to come alive for me again. As I worked to find the essence of lived experience within page, voice and text, I was able to be present, again, in the moment of the conversation. “Where there is understanding, there is not translation but speech” (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 384). Conducting the transcription myself allowed me to immediately, while I was transcribing, begin to render the unique truths that the participants wished to convey.

When I began to see emergent themes speaking clearly to the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college, as shared with me by the participants, I returned to the participants for a final online group conversation. Using Google Groups, I set up a private online forum, accessible only to the participants. Participants were asked to log on any

time within a one-week timeframe to share their thoughts on the emergent themes as I interpreted them. Participants were given the leeway to log on as many times as they wanted to throughout the week in order to discuss other participant responses. Three participants requested that they share their responses privately with me instead of posting them to the forum, and I accommodated their requests. Two of the remaining five responded online, interacting with me there, while one noted that she would not have time to respond within the one-week timeframe. When I expanded the timeframe to one month, and gave her other opportunities to respond privately, she was still unable to respond. The five participants who engaged either in the online forum conversation or private email conversation with me shared that they could see their experiences clearly through my interpretations.

Conversational interviewing is a central part of the phenomenological uncovering of lived experience (van Manen, 1997). It is through this type of inquiry that lived experience may be known.

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct...No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation...All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it—i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists. (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 383)

Conversational interviewing is an art. Like the painter whose picture evolves within the confines of the canvas, phenomenological dialogue emerges within certain parameters, too. It is far more organic than the traditional social science interview in which questions are developed and adhered to without deviation. In phenomenology, there is a question and response interplay, and there is greater freedom for the researcher to ask questions

that were generated prior to the conversation at hand. If a participant says something that could lead to deeper meaning via a further probing question, there is room for the phenomenologist to move in that direction. Doing so allows the conversation to delve deeper with questions and comments that may encourage the participant to disclose at the level necessary of a true phenomenological study.

The point of the phenomenological conversations, whether they are conducted face-to-face or via email, is to find truths in the participants' *words*—what is their lived experience as they say it *is*.

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is...the art of questioning. (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 367)

This is part of the reason why it is critical for the phenomenologist to put her own story overtly in view for reader and participant to see. Without doing so, she may be inclined to push a participant into a certain place, believing that her (the participant's) lived experience must be like her own (the researcher's). Without having put her own experience out there, the researcher may not be held accountable by herself, her participants, and her readers to a true phenomenological exploration. And so it is the art of questioning that leads the researcher on the pursuit of authentic phenomenological understanding.

Walking in Questioning

“We cannot have experiences without asking questions” (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 325). It is through questioning of lived experience that one can come to know it better, to

know it deeply, and for the reader to come as close as possible to viscerally living it without having lived it at all.

“Asking [the question] opens up possibilities of meaning and thus what is meaningful passes into one’s own thinking on the subject” (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 338).

As I engaged in my own phenomenological conversations with participants, I considered asking the following questions, based on both Moustakas’ (1994, p. 116) and Eddy’s (2008, p. 138, p. 313) work within the phenomenological method:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me what sexual assault survival means to you.
3. What language do you use to describe yourself? Do you use the same language in describing other survivors of sexual assault?
4. How would you describe your sexual assault survival experience in college?
5. When, where, how did survival begin for you?
6. What does that mean to you?
7. Describe what it was like for you to be a sexual assault survivor in college.
8. How do you describe yourself in relation to the sexual assault?
9. What dimensions, incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you, in terms of sexual assault survival on campus?
10. Are there any changes you associate with the experience?
11. Did survival affect your worldview?
12. Can you imagine a different life in college? One without the sexual assault and the experience of survival? What would that look like?
13. What feelings were generated by the experience?
14. What thoughts stood out for you?
15. Were there any bodily changes or states you were aware of?
16. Do you have other dimensions of the experience to share?

Of course, these questions were only a loose suggestion—a framework, a jumping-off point. The questions were interspersed throughout my conversations with participants. They were not asked all at once. I asked all participants the first four questions, and from there the conversations varied depending on where each participant led me into questioning.

The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. Although the primary researcher may in advance develop a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon, these are varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114)

Conversations are back and forth exchanges, often inclusive of a great deal of questioning. It is the way in which the researcher questions, however, that makes a conversation *phenomenological* in nature. There is a delving into the lived experience, going deeper and deeper until the essence of the thing is uncovered as it is lived by the participant.

As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. A person skilled in the "art" of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion. A person who possesses this art will himself search for everything in favor of an opinion. Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter). (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 367)

And so it was up to me as the researcher to help each participant bring forth her own understanding of her experience. It was not for me to lead or guide, which could take us down a path of my choosing. Rather, it was a *walking with* her: a telling of her journey inside the phenomenon.

Walking for Meaning

In phenomenology, we do not analyze; rather, we progress through an interpretation of phenomenological text (van Manen, 1997). It is through interpretation that we make meaning of the phenomenon of interest. This kind of interpretation takes into account the historicity of the phenomenon—the researcher's history with it, the world's history with it, and the participant's history with it—as part of the essence of

what it is. It cannot be separated out from these things, as all things are connected. One understanding seeps into the other and they all speak to the essence of the thing.

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, pp. 190-191)

The interpretation of the thing, and the meaning that is made from it, are interconnected with the world in which it exists. The phenomenon is involved with everything and everyone it touches, and is therefore informed by all the world. It cannot sit alone to be examined in isolation because that is not the way we live in the world. We live in relation, and so interpretation and meaning emerge out of a relation with the world.

So what is it to find *meaning* through the interpretation of text? Meaning is the "upon-which" of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception. In so far as understanding and interpretation make up the existential state of Being of the "there", "meaning" must be conceived as the formal-existential framework of the disclosedness which belongs to understanding. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 193)

And so meaning emerges from that which was *had, seen, and conceptualized* before the phenomenon's existence. Its existence is dependent on and created through the historicity of all that has come before it. Meaning comes from within the thing, itself, which is to say that it exists at its very core. Like the core of an apple, meaning can only be seen if everything around it is peeled away. The core *is* and *was* made up of all of the entities that make up the fruit, itself. But it is otherwise hidden, until the skin and flesh are curled away in one long, connected strip (like only someone skilled in the art of the paring knife can do!). It must be tasted, felt, and experienced in order to find the *core meaning*. From

meaning, we are compelled into action, for what can we make of meaning if we do not act from what we learn?

With phenomenology itself, a finding of lived experience, which, with its depth of feeling elicits compassion and action from its readers. What will we do, as student affairs practitioners, with the knowledge we gain from this study? How will we shift our ways of being with students? How will our sense of as many as one quarter of our female students (Brener et al, 1999; Kilpatrick et al, 2007; Koss, 1988; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) be transformed? The answers to these questions are unearthed as the hermeneutic experience comes full circle. It is there that practitioners are able to read the final text and make their own meaning from it.

It is my hope, that this study will affect practitioners to their core, and that an empathy that we have not experienced before will rise up and affect all that we do. How many women on your campus live the experience of sexual assault survival every day? What is it like for them to try to go to class, to pass their perpetrators on the quad, to try to sleep, eat, study, socialize? These are the pieces of lived experience I have uncovered here. The time is now to understand this community of students better—their numbers are many, but we have yet to really hear them experientially. What is it that they have to say about the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college? This is the essential question that I walked through and explored in the pages to come.

Are you ready to enter the woods with us—the survivors of sexual assault on your college campuses? Are you ready to hear what we have to say about our day-to-day lives? Are you willing to know what it is to live inside our bones, inside our worlds? Come into the woods. We implore you to do so! We need you to walk by our sides as we

reveal all that is hidden, all that has been silenced. We are eager to share our stories by the cover of trees, and the light of the stars and the moon.

Chapter 4: Direction(LESS): The Things that Stop Us

Back to the woods. Our exploration seems to have started at the beginning of time, in the most primitive of forests—in the beginning of survival. Truly, our very survival *lives* in the most ancient part of our bodies and brains—those that are “evolutionarily more primitive,” (Ogden et al., 2006, p. 30), those that have not changed since the beginning of humankind. It is from there (the amygdala, the sympathetic nervous system) that our bodies *respond*, our bodies *live*. It is from there that our experience of life—our taste, touch, smell, fear, self-preservation—comes alive (Ogden et. al.). It is not in the knowing of the names and origins of these things that we come to know the lived experience. We know that it is primitive; we know that it is visceral; and now we must come to know how it is lived. The *lived* experience connects us with who we are and who we were in our most vulnerable and primal selves. It is from this primal place that we, as human *beings*, become *direction-LESS* and *direction-MORE*. It is from this place that we feel *stoppings* and *movings*. It is from this place that I seek, through this study, to know better how we *live*.

We have been up and down the path to understanding the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. We seem to have meandered away from it, and now we find ourselves quite lost. The path is long gone, and even if it were nearby, we can't see it. We are out here, on our own, with only the words of the survivors to guide us in uncovering the lived experience. At the moment, until interpretations emerge, we (researcher, participants, readers) are *direction-less*. And as the earliest days of survival are uncovered, whether they last for weeks or months or years, there is a

direction-less-ness that has yet to be revealed. There are stoppings on the path that keep survivors still, and these stoppings deserve to be unearthed.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which sexual assault survival for women in college is stopped, direction-less—the ways in which it is hindered, prevented, and blocked off. For those whose survival was ceased entirely, though, whether they left college or took their own lives, we will not hear their words here.

The lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college is littered with stoppings and direction-less-ness. The barriers come from outside of the survivors, and from inside as well. They come in the form of (re)iterations of the rape and the rapist, himself. They come in the form of the separation of selves before and after the rape, and friends who feel compelled to choose sides. Control is taken, and lost, and broken. It can feel impossible to move on when the rapist is okay and the victim is not, or when a survivor experiences multiple sexual assaults through her lifetime. What do any of these stoppings do to the lived experience? How do they add to the feeling of direction-less-ness?

In order to understand what it is to be *direction-less*, one must first understand the concept of *direction*. The word *direction* is rooted in the Latin *directionem*, meaning “course pursued by a moving object.” The course pursued is survival, and the object in motion is the survivor. She is in motion, moving away from object, toward agency, and away from objectification, toward *human-being*. He tried to take her sense of being human from her, but he will not keep it forever. It is objectification that first holds her down in that horrifying place. It is that objectification that has the power to root her in a state of *direction-less-ness*. Eventually, if she leaves the grasp of *direction-less-ness*, she

will move from being an object in motion, to a self in motion, moving in a way that she, as her-*self*, controls the movement.

In the beginnings of survival, the feeling of direction-less-ness is far more salient than the feeling of direction. Feeling adrift, without a direct course, guidance, or motivation, are all pieces of her way of *being in the world*, uncovered through the hermeneutic phenomenological conversations conducted with the survivors in this study. It is direction-less-ness that can stop us and keep us from moving forward toward survival. Without direction, survivors are kept away from the peace and healing that may come with direction.

What does it mean to have one's *survival stopped*? As I examined in previous chapters, the etymology of *survival* comes from the Latin *supervivere*, meaning to “live beyond, live longer than.” Surviving sexual assault in college, then, means to live beyond the rape and to live longer than the negative psychological effects of rape. Respectively, *stop*, from the Latin *stupere*, means to “be stunned or stupefied.” Like a wild animal stunned by an immobilizing dart, being stopped by rape is a sharp pain, followed by a dull and foggy stupor, and finally an emergence in a new and foreign place. So, experiencing *survival-stopped* is a way of being in which college women, after rape, can learn to live beyond, live longer than the stunning.

What is the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college? I uncover the meaning of stoppings and direction-less-ness from the participants in this study –Aeryn, Beth, Chloe, Lulita, Pink, and Sweetie (pseudonyms they chose). In Chapters 4 and 5, you will become more familiar with their lived experiences of sexual assault survival in college than many of their friends and family members. It was not easy for some of them

to share deeply the tumultuous nature of their survival, but each of them has done so with the hope that this work can help the women who come after us. After all, as many as one in four women (Brener et al, 1999; Kilpatrick et al, 2007; Koss, 1988; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) will be raped while in college.

This phenomenon—the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college—was all encompassing for these six women, and that within that all *en-compass-ing-ness*, there was a more and less-ness of that directionality. In other words, “direction-less” describes the experiences that stopped them from moving forward toward healing, toward survival, whereas “direction-more” indicates the experiences that propelled them—or at least nudged them—forward toward that healing space.

Without Direction: The All En-COMPASS-ing-ness of Survival

I wake up. I am disoriented. I must have fallen asleep out here, so deep in the forest. I sit up, shake leaves from my hair. I feel dirty. I feel confused. How long have I been out here? Days turn to weeks...maybe months...maybe years? I just don't know anymore. It feels like the longer I am in here, the less I know...the longer I'm in survival, the less motivation I have to keep going. I feel stuck here on the forest floor. I feel stopped. The *direction* I once had—my *compass*—has been taken from me and so I sit on the damp leaves and do my best not to cry. I lay back on the damp earth, close my eyes, cover my forehead with my hands. I feel the morning sunlight drip through the trees and flicker on my eyelids. At one point in my life I remember how good this might have felt, but now the dancing sun is made murky by the red blood vessels blocking my sight. Right now, this bloody veil distorts everything I see. I can't take it anymore. I'm never going to get out of here. The pain is bursting out of me. I can't contain it anymore.

Laying there, alone on the forest floor, devoid of hope, depleted of the energy to move, I curl up and cry. What else can I do? I am encompassed by the encroaching woods, by my own fleeting will to survive.

Lost in the woods *without* a compass, the space can seem vast, confusing, never-ending, direction-less. There can be a desperate search for a way out, a way home, and a sinking feeling that it may never come. Lost in the woods *with* a compass can be a different experience. There can be orientation, a knowing where to go and how to get there. But if the lost person does not know how to use the compass, she is lost without a way out. Perhaps, in that case, having the compass is even worse because it can be maddening. The desire to flee is overwhelming. The feeling of being overwhelmed stops me in my tracks. Moving? Stopping? Moving? Stopping. Without direction, I am stopped.

The study participants' words are the beginning of a descent into understanding what it was for them to feel *stopped*, *direction-less*. Chloe explains, "I think that the whole situation was frustrating. I felt like I couldn't/didn't know how to help myself and I wasn't sure what to ask for from others." She had a compass: she was well-informed about campus resources, but she still felt as though she was without direction. *Direction-less*. Stopped in a way that left her feeling alone and without support. Under other circumstances, she would know how to use the compass in hand, but after being raped she lived under a mental fog that made it hard for her to see the things she already knew.

Several survivors found their compasses through therapy. They speak of finding the tools she needed to find her way toward peace. As one may use tools to build a shelter, she was able to use her tools, her compass, to protect her and guide her through

her stoppings, her flashbacks, her nightmares, her constant and pressing fears. She says, “I think having those ‘tools’ helped me survive the experience” (and therefore be a ‘survivor’).

So where do we, as survivors, find direction? Where is the compass that guides us out of the darkest parts of the forest? What does lost-ness feel like? And how does one make a turning toward the light, toward safety, toward home, toward the more positive, more peaceful parts of survival? Chloe describes:

For a long time following my experience I felt like things were never going to improve. I didn't know how to get myself out of the 'funk' I was in. I didn't know if I should ask for help or even what I needed.

For her, the space, her campus, seemed vast, confusing, never-ending, direction-less.

There can be a desperate search for a way out, a way home, and a sinking feeling that it may never come. So, what is the compass? Where is it hidden? And what is it to be all en-compass-ed by the rape and the time of survival that follows? If the compass is the thing that can provide direction, what does the action of en-*compass*-ing the survivor do to the lived experience?

The word *encompass*, “to form a circle about, enclose... envelop”, includes the dark-ness and the light-ness, the stoppings and movings. For survivors of sexual assault in college, there is a sense of being circled, being trapped, being unable to escape from the experience. It is all-encompassing. It feels inescapable.

The catalysts for stoppings and movings can look very much the same –it is experiencing stoppings and movings that defines them. Certain words can elicit a crushing blow or a surge of empowered energy. Certain sights can lead to a whimpered “not again,” or a roar “NOT AGAIN!” Experiences can stop us and move us in both

positive and painful ways, and there are times when they are so intertwined that they are inseparable. It is the giving and taking, the stopping and moving, that is the all-encompassing living of sexual assault survival in college.

The En-COMPASS-ed: Introducing The Survivors and their Stories

Who are the survivors participating in the study? Are they, like me, lost in the woods? Each one of them, in their own way, speaks to the all-encompassing nature of sexual assault survival in college. For them, the experience was everything. They found that it was very difficult, and at times it felt impossible, to get out from under it. Study participants are introduced as they were in college, as that is the temporality of the lived experience I examine. At the end of Chapter 5, you will glimpse who these women are today, at the time of the study, years after they graduated.

In college, they were surviving one or more sexual assaults, which became the all-encompassing-ness of that time in their lives. Living through the trauma served as a sort of imposed compass, one that they had not chosen, and one that stopped, pulled, and pushed them in ways that they would not have chosen for themselves. They are from different parts of the country and attended different schools, and they represent different ethnicities, ages, and experiences. The one thing they share is the experience of rape. Each was raped in college by a man she knew, and each lived, day by day, through the grueling experience of survival that followed.

Aeryn

Aeryn, so often joking and laughing, describes herself light-heartedly as a “White European mutt.” She was an assertive, socially well-informed young woman when she entered college, where she was an honors student and resident assistant. She was raped

during her freshman year by a fellow honors student, student leader, and the future student government association president at her university.

When Aeryn speaks about her survival experience, it is often in association with being sexually abused as a child. She describes the all-encompassing nature of her college experience:

[Sexual assault survival was] all-consuming. There was a period when I woke up to what had happened to me and decided to deal with it, talk about it, do workbooks, read books, etc. One of the books (can't remember now) spoke about the "shadow rapist" and that always stuck with me because that's how I really experienced it during that time. I was haunted. My thoughts, when I slept, when I walked alone, all the time.

Like a haunting, Aeryn had a sense that her rapist was always there, lurking in the shadows, and present in the light. There was no escaping the sense of someone watching, someone almost touching, someone breathing, someone always there, even if no one was there at all. Her sense of unease was unbearable at times. 'It was as if once he entered her, he did not need to remain physically near her in order to haunt her. He was haunting her from the inside. At the time of this study, Aeryn was in her late twenties.

Beth

As a college student, Beth, an American Indian woman, was a member of a sorority and involved in sexual assault awareness programming on campus. At the time of this study, she was in her late twenties. She was raped during new student orientation, just before her college experience began. Beth says that before coming to college she was very trusting and naïve, which she attributes to being “sheltered and protected growing up.” As if living through the rape was not painful enough, her rapist took her virginity and gave her a sexually transmitted infection, too—HPV (the Human Papilloma Virus). The triple-impact weighed heavily on her then, and continues to affect her in both

physical and emotional ways. Her initial response to the trauma was that of indifference—she stopped caring about her sexuality. When she speaks about her survival experience in college, she articulates, “I started ‘hooking up’ more and I thought it was ok... it didn’t feel like [sex] was supposed to mean anything, anymore.”

For Beth, her college experience was altered in a way that was all-encompassing. The rapist took something from her that was irreplaceable, made her feel “horrible,” as she says, about herself. The trauma led her do things that she would regret later in life. At one point she told me, “I wish I had stayed true to myself,” in the sense that she now wishes she hadn’t “hooked up” with other men after the sexual assault. She feels that the sexual assault led to behaviors in which she would have never otherwise engaged. At the time of this study, she was in her late twenties.

Chloe

Chloe, who identifies as Italian-American and White, was a sorority woman in college. At the time of this study, she was in her mid-twenties. She was about to start her senior year when she was raped by her ex-boyfriend in her bedroom off campus. She describes the feeling of rape survival in college as “inescapable.” She says, “in my last year in college after experiencing sexual assault, it consumed my life. I thought about it constantly.”

It *consumed* her life in college. From the Latin *consumere*, it means, “to use up... waste.” And rape does, indeed, *waste* life. It was a time in which Chloe hoped to relish in friends and fun and the celebration of the enormous accomplishment that is college, but instead she spent much of her time suffering, depressed, anxious, and abandoned by

friends who sided with her rapist. She was “done away with” by someone she trusted deeply. As if in a fire, the rape consumed her. It was all around her all the time:

At this time [in college] I felt like I couldn't get away from it [the sexual assault]. I would try to do things to get my mind off of it, but somehow everything reminded me of him or the situation.

She used what little energy she had to go about her daily life, often very disengaged. At the time of this study, she was in her mid-twenties. When she speaks about her life today, many years after graduation, she says that while it does not affect her as intensely as it did in college, the trauma of it still impinges upon her.

Lulita

Lulita describes herself as the “eldest daughter of Taiwanese immigrants.” She was in her early forties when participating in this study. Throughout her first, second, and part of her third year in college, she was raped and stalked by her attacker until he was dismissed from the institution for academic dishonesty. The nightmare began at the end of her first year on campus, when her assailant raped her multiple times in one night.

Lulita was very introverted when she went to college:

I was so shy when I went [to college]. When I think of who I am now and who I was as I started college as a freshman, my engagement with the world, my engagement with people, I was so timid... and probably, relative to my peers, behind in my development, my maturation, because I had such a sheltered childhood, very conservative, very restrictive, controlling parents.

Lulita changed her major seven times as an undergraduate student. She was involved on campus as the pianist for the men's glee club, a member of the Asian Pacific Student Association, and was involved in public health peer education, which, in her words, “saved my life.” Lulita's college experience was defined by her experience of sexual

assault survival—it was all encompassing. She held that “BEING a survivor was a central aspect of my identity and self-view [in college].”

Pink

Pink, who identifies as Caucasian, has always been an outgoing, social person. At the time of this study, she was in her mid-twenties. She was raped in her third year of college, after transferring from one university to another. She went to a party at another school in the area and was drugged and raped by a well-known football player from that school. None of her friends stood by her as she struggled to recover from the rape. Each of them, in their own ways, deserted her when she needed them most:

My "best friend" from [the first college I attended] was friends with my assailant. She told me "I can't get involved, I have a family name to uphold." That was one of the most painful, bitter, and lonely times in my life when I had to cut ties with people I thought I would know for the rest of my life because of their selfishness, and slimy cowardliness.

Pink spent the rest of her time at her new school engrossed in activities that connected in some way to sexual assault. Her experience was all-encompassing: her class projects, student involvement, and even her choice of friends were in some way predicated by a connection to surviving the sexual assault. At the time of this study, she was in her mid-twenties.

Sweetie

Sweetie identifies as White/Caucasian, and describes herself before the rape as “young and happy.” She was a freshman when a high-profile university athlete raped her. She was a sorority member and very involved in programming around sexual violence on campus.

In the earlier part of college, [sexual assault survival] was very much all encompassing. In the later years, less so... [Even now] sometimes things can come up and although it is never as intense as it was 10 years ago, a reminder can surface (such as seeing perpetrator on TV/news) and that sort of makes me realize that this will always be a part of me.

The experience was all around her all the time, from the time she woke up in the morning to the time she woke up the next. Even as she began to heal in college, sexual assault remained a defining factor in her life. It informed her choices of student activities, of friends, and of academic pursuits: “In college, my experience was very much defined by sexual assault.” She was in her late twenties at the time of this study.

Finding Truth

I seek to find truth about the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college through the eyes of the women who have inhabited that space. What is the truth for the women participating in the study? I seek to find it by using the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition—a give and take between the participants and my understanding of what they bring to the table. Together the participants and I uncover the lived experience, and in this way we find a new truth, a *truth* that is true to us and therefore helps to inform the larger understanding of the ways in which we *are in the world*.

The question regarding the essence of truth is not concerned with whether truth is a truth of practical experience or of economic calculation, the truth of a technical consideration or of political sagacity, or, in particular, a truth of scientific research or of artistic composition, or even the truth of thoughtful reflection or of cultic belief. The question of essence disregards all this and attends to the one thing that in general distinguishes every “truth” as truth. Yet with this question concerning essence do we not soar too high into the void of generality that deprives all thinking of breath? (Heidegger, 1993, p. 115)

In the case of hermeneutic phenomenology, I seek a constructivist truth—it is the truth that these women speak about the lives they live. I come to the questions with my own background and understanding, and I work deeply and connectedly with the survivor participants to uncover the essence of their experiences as they know and live them. In order to know the things deeply, fully, richly, and viscerally, I must approach them from the inside.

And so the question is, why do we desire an exploration of the lived experience in the way that only phenomenology can reveal? It is because this is a way of knowing the phenomenon more deeply, and the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college is worthy of that. It is the drive toward a deeper understanding, one that will allow readers to connect with the ways in which survivors *are* in the world, that makes this pursuit so vital. A more shallow understanding of the lived experience leaves these women, and women whose collegiate experience comes after them, in peril. Literally, without greater understanding, lives are lost.

For Sweetie, her survival hinged on the support of friends, family, and campus resources:

I don't think I would be here. I wouldn't be surprised if I would have committed suicide (starts crying). I don't think I would have graduated. I remember early on I just thought I just can't do this, I can't do this, but even having great teachers or a victim advocate who says, I can help you make a plan. Let's talk to your teachers. Every possible place I had support, and if I didn't have that, I don't think I would be here, I don't think I would have graduated school, I wouldn't be who I am today, and I think that's why that piece is so huge. You know? I really I credit all of those people for me where I am today. (Sweetie)

We cannot know who among the sexual assault survivors in college take their own lives because living in the survival-space, for them, becomes too much to bear. We can

imagine, though, after hearing the stories of these women, that it is possible, even probable, that some number of them were raped. What was it about their experiences that took them to places of ultimate surrender? How can we come to know that place more deeply so that we can reach out to women and pull them back into a place of survival, of life, of the living?

And so how may we come to know this phenomenon better, more deeply, more significantly? We do so by asking the question of *being*—what is the lived experience for these women in college? How do they survive every day?

Everybody understands, “The sky *is* blue,” “I *am* happy,” and similar statements. But this average comprehensibility only demonstrates the incomprehensibility. It shows that an enigma lies *a priori* in every relation and being toward beings as beings. The fact that we live already in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is at the same time shrouded in darkness proves the fundamental necessity of recovering the question of the meaning of “Being”. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 44)

That is to say that while we grasp a surface understanding of the lived experience by hearing survivors say, “I was fearful,” or “the experience was devastating,” it is in the further uncovering of these statements that I begin to understand the meaning they make of such sentiments and, in doing so, reveal their way of being in the world.

I look to the directionality of their experiences—the times and spaces in which they feel direction-less, and the times in which they feel direction-more. Do not be fooled by the sense of opposite-ness that these words convey. While they may at first seem to be at two ends of a directional, experiential spectrum, seeing only the dichotomy is to discount the ways in which they overlap and intertwine. The direction-less experience and the direction-more experience (as they are revealed more fully below) comprise the essence of the lived experience. They are the more *and* less-ness of the experience, and

they represent an understanding that uncovers a phenomenon so deep that the bottom, at times, is difficult to see...more or less.

And so, we seek to know the truth from the inside of the participants. Who are they? What is their lived experience? How did they feel and breathe sexual assault survival in college? I begin the conversation with them in earnest now. As I uncover their lived experience, let's begin here with the all-encompassing direction-less-ness of survival, and the stoppings that participants experienced as they tried to survive. Stoppings come from outside survivors and from inside as well. Stoppings come in the ways in which the rape is (re)iterated through the many facets of lived experience. There is a divide that stops. Life is stopped by a loss of control. And certainly, life is stopped, or put in a place of direction-less-ness by the injustice endured by survivors. I examine here the lived experience of these things, and the ways in which the survivors live and breathe them.

The Outside

The outside can be a scary place—there are things out there that can be harmful to sexual assault survivors, and they come in the most (un)likely packages. On the surface, the packages are perfectly likeable, but just under the surface exists that which negates, that which is the 'un'.

Friends and family can become *the 'un'*, (un)real, when they do not respond in ways that are supportive of survivors. Real friends and family are expected to be supportive. Resources can become *the 'un'*, (un)helpful, when they fail to meet the needs of survivors. And Yet when survivors perceive that their loved ones may be too fragile, or lack the skills, to handle knowing about their rapes, they may feel that things are better

left (un)known; such efforts to protect others leave survivors to endure trauma alone.

Resources can become *the 'un'*, (un)helpful, when they fail to meet the needs of survivors.

(Un)Real Friends and Family

Through the crying, I've found sleep again. I feel more rested. My eyes are still closed and I can feel the warm sun shining directly on my face. Not through the leaves? No leaves...no trees? Where am I? I was in the forest. I hesitate to open my eyes. I'm not sure I can take another feeling of lost-ness.

Fists clenched, chest tight, fear lurking in my belly like I don't know what's coming next—because truly, I don't—I open my eyes to the tiniest slivers. Whatever it is, wherever I am, I know it is going to shock me, and I cannot handle one more shock. I can only make out the blurriness of blue and brown. I can feel the wind blowing in a way that it cannot do through the trees—faster, freer. I cannot lay here forever with my eyes closed, even though every part of my being is screaming to go back to sleep. Reluctantly, slowly, I open my eyes, and what I see launches me into immediate terror. I am laying on the thin ledge of a rock cliff. So startled, my body flinches. Pebbles are sent falling and I hear the faint sound of them bouncing off the cliff wall. If I move too abruptly, I will follow closely after them, although my body is bigger and softer than the pebbles and will not survive the plummet. I move my eyes without moving my body and see a ledge above me. It could be the safety of a vast expanse, or it could be a ledge much smaller than this one. I will never know unless I stand, but if I stand, I may die. Nothing is familiar in this precarious spot. I don't know what to do.

So it is for survivors of sexual assault. Like the forest, life after sexual assault is frightening because of the unknown and the chaos. There are pieces that can be counted on to stay the same, to continue to be what they have always been—the trees, the dirt, the air. Like these integral facets of nature, friends and family become the grounding, the well-known reality that helps to remind survivors that we are alive, we are still here, we will be okay. Yet when the trees wither and die, and when the dirt, without the trees, turns to barren rock, life becomes terrifying. Life becomes (un)real.

When the support of loved ones withers in our greatest times of need, when the life is drained from a foundation upon which we once stood strongly, there is a sense of being stuck on a ledge with nothing and no one. That ledge can be chipped away as friends and family members say and do the most horrible things.

At times a friend makes a comment that isn't exactly what he or she meant to convey, or perhaps was not informed enough to say correctly or sensitively. Aeryn describes that experience:

College is a time when we're just old enough to think we know everything, but not old enough to realize we know absolutely nothing. It's a ripe time for foot-in-the-mouth statements.

In this case, however, Aeryn is not talking about the truly damaging, the truly painful, and the truly hurtful statements people make all the time to and about survivors. Foot-in-mouth is along the same continuum, but the really painful experience comes from more of a foot-stomping-on-heart intention.

For Aeryn, it has to do with being in a place of managing and dealing with one's own trauma, and not having the energy to educate or serve as a counselor to those having a hard time dealing with the fact that *you* were raped. It is understandable that the people

outside the situation would need to process it and seek support to work through the ways in which the rape affects them, but the rape victim has too much going on to be that person. Aeryn, an avid reader, paraphrases a segment from one of her favorite books,

Lucky by Alice Sebold:

I know I talked to you about how I love reading and read a ton of books about every sexual assault story, probably too much (laughing!), but one of the great...scenes that I loved was in *Lucky*...and it is when she goes home after she was raped...she was talking about what had happened to her...dad [and he] said, but wait, I don't understand, if he didn't have the knife to you the whole time, how could he have still been raping you? And so she had to do this amazing job of being calm and saying, well, let me explain, and she explains...you can still be sexually assaulted even if you don't actively in that moment have a knife to your throat, and really had to take care of and educate and provide psychoanalysis for her dad in this situation, and I think that she was in a place where she really needed her family and that was important for her.

In some ways this depicts Aeryn's need to pick and choose who she tells her story to, and she would never tell members of her family:

Some of my family, most of my family, for sure, too...I don't necessarily feel comfortable sharing with [them] because...[I] don't feel that they have...the emotional maturity to be able to respond to it in a way that would feel helpful for me. So, I'm not looking to put myself in a position where I'm having to pick up other people's emotional slack, I guess. I don't usually waste my time trying to do that. Especially with people I don't need to, I'm not going to.

Aeryn discusses how she feels about the passage from *Lucky*:

[It's not that] I think her dad was an asshole, but he didn't have the skill set to be able to be there for her in the way that she needed in the moment, and there's sort of what I refer to as empathetic failure, in therapy terms (laughing!). People like that who might require a lot of education and taking care of, I just don't feel like I'm in a place where I have the energy to do that.

Just as in the book, Aeryn's (un)real friends and family are people who take energy from her at a time when she needs to conserve it for herself. They are in need of education and support, but she cannot be the one to give it to them. When they expect that of her, they

are expecting too much, and Aeryn has come to a place in her life where she can identify people who will be supportive and people who will not. She takes great care to share her trauma only with people who will know how to be supportive.

And so what does it feel like for survivors when those interactions with individuals they thought were *real* friends and *real* family become (un)real, or the opposite of love (hate), of favor (rejection), of genuine (fake), of permanent (fleeting), of immoveable (easily moved), and of servant (master)? What does it feel like to have the relationships that you thought were trustworthy be turned on their heads? It begins to feel as though the world is up-side-down, and everything you trusted, everything you knew, is now unknown, unfamiliar, and scary. It is like being outside in the dark without a compass, watching the emergence of the (un)real from what you once thought was real, and that is unsettling, indeed.

This new (un)reality can come in many forms. Of this experience, Pink says: “My family didn't want me to tell people. They didn't understand why I wanted to always talk about it.” It is understandable that they would have this very real reaction, but it was (and continues to be) unreal for Pink in terms of wishing for more support for what she wants, which is to share, speak out, and use her experience to educate others. To Pink, it is a silencing of the very worst kind. It conveys “this is shameful, keep it to yourself, we cannot let others know”.

Pink talks about the ways in which her friends became (un)real:

I lost my entire group of friends. Everyone sided with my assailant...I never realized how important social status was to some, how apathetic people could be or what denial they could live with. It angered me beyond belief and cemented my

set of values like nothing else could. I did not and still do not understand how people could care so little for others, try to make them feel so guilty, dirty or crazy.

The unexpected shift in loyalty was unbearable for Pink, especially when coupled with the ways in which her family reacted; she felt incapable of handling herself in the world, as though her loved ones saw her as a baby, as incapable, as weak. She felt further shamed when her father silenced her desire to speak out, share her story, and become a strong voice and example for other survivors:

It was incredibly hurtful when [my dad] would remind me not to say anything about my assault because he didn't want to have others "judge" me or see me as "damaged." We didn't really speak for a long time afterwards because I didn't want to make him feel uncomfortable. As I tried to move on with my life, he would start to pipe in about the safety of my school, my job, any aspect of my life. He would tell me how to "stay safe" or how to avoid "dangerous situations." I can honestly say I don't know if I ever feel like an adult or that I can make my own decisions.

Chloe, who was raped by her ex-boyfriend, continues to experience a lasting distrust that extends not only to men, but to all people. There is always an underlying unease, as if even those she trusts the most could turn on her:

I think [being raped by my boyfriend/best friend] taught me that you can't always trust the people you think you can. It showed me that just because on the outside someone is religious, very involved in their church and the community and gets good grades, you really can't ever know what they are capable of especially when alcohol is involved. I am definitely more cautious with people now. Not to say that it has prevented me from forming deep and fulfilling relationships with others, because it hasn't. I guess you could say that it just takes me a longer time to trust them!

For Chloe, trust becomes, and continues to be (un)real—something that she cannot hold onto any longer. Like the ledge upon which I found myself, trust becomes a precarious and unstable place for survivors of sexual assault. One wrong move, one person trusted

who should never have been given that trust, and it is over. Down you go, plummeting to certain death.

The (un)real resides in the (dis)trust, to which there is an emotionality that strangles the spirit in ways that stop survival. Without breath there is no life. Without life there is no movement. The kind of emotional distrust brought on by sexual assault is a kind of death. It is the ultimate stopping: a suffocating of the soul.

Those moments immediately following the rape call for particular emotional care. The first people who interact with the rape survivor will weave themselves tightly into the fabric of the survivor's story. Their words will richly color the survivor's world, no matter if those words are meant to support or demolish. Beth's experience with her roommate immediately after being raped brings this piece of the phenomenon to light:

I remember saying something to my freshman roommate the night everything happened...I said, "Is it supposed to feel so weird when you lose your virginity?" and her response was, "You're just making too big a deal of it." I think that had a lot to do with it...I thought I was overreacting.

Imagine it. Beth has just been raped by a man she had been seeing. He has also taken her virginity, something she held sacred. She did not want him to take it. She did not tell him it was okay to take it. He just took it. And now, as she says, she feels "weird." Weird—such a benign word, juxtaposed against the horror of rape. And why would she use such a word? Beth was trying to fit her response to the trauma into her roommate's perspective on the situation—a perspective far too removed and unknowingly callous to shed any appropriate insight on Beth's experience.

And what is Beth's experience in this moment with her roommate, a person she trusts with such a powerful and moving question in a powerful and moving moment? She

has been raped. She has lost her virginity. And she wonders if it should feel weird. The word “weird” comes from the Old English *wyrd*, meaning “fate, destiny.” This was not fate. This was not destiny. This was not supposed to happen. She intended to remain a virgin until she met the man she wanted to marry. She deserved to keep her plan.

Perhaps it was Beth’s choice of a common word used in casual conversation to simply mean “a little off, strange, different” that reveals more about her lived experience. Her use of the word may unveil her struggle to name it, to understand it. At the time, she did not have the voice to speak of the reality of what she had experienced, nor did she have the wherewithal to express her experience. The word “weird” was the best she could do. Gravity escaped her as she floated away from feelings she was not ready to acknowledge. It would take more than a decade of reflection for her to express her lived experience. Even today, though, she struggles to articulate what the experience has come to mean for her. .

(Un)Helpful Resources

What do we do with the compass after rape, when we have it in hand, and we are able to put it to use? When we do put it to use, and what are our expectations of it? That (N)orth is truly north? That we can rely on it to be accurate? And what happens when it does not do what it is supposed to do? What if, when the compass points toward N, it is actually directing us east? The person holding the compass, believing in its capabilities, will become even more lost than before.

The same is true for survivors of sexual assault when “helpful resources” become the most unhelpful tools in the toolbox. It is confusing for survivors to expect one thing from a resource, and to receive another. It is disheartening, maddening, and infuriating

when resources work against you. Pink's experience with the police was one of these situations:

They didn't write down his name; (I only knew the first); they hadn't written down where I thought his house was in comparison to my friends'; they didn't write down a description of what he looked like or anything that would give the impression that they had any intention of following up with the case.

For better or worse, survivor experiences are affected by the perceptions of those around them. While not all police officers engage in victim blaming, there is a tendency for officers to be suspicious of rape victims' behaviors (Jordan, 2004). As a resource, the police are supposed to be helpful, not (un)helpful.

What is it like to do what you are supposed to do, to use the tools that you know how to use, only to have those tools not work for you? When the officers did not write down any information about Pink's rape, it was like an act of erasure. What did that do to her survival experience in the moment?

It was actually the female cop that said the comment about burning when I peed. I found this to be even more insensitive than if it had come from a male since a female should know how their bodies work and that underwear wouldn't cause pain and burning. I was honestly in a state of disbelief.

Imagine it. Pink has already been stopped. Her movement forward has been halted by the actions of a high visibility football player at a nearby prestigious school. Maybe she expected some disbelief from the male police officer, but she did not expect it from the female officer. And when female officers engage in more victim blaming than their male counterparts (Galton, 1975), one must question how widespread this lived experience is and why so many rape victims experience it when they try to report the crimes committed against them.

Pink's experience spiraled further out of control with each unbelievable moment. Her entire worldview has been flipped on its head. Before the rape, she thought that she was safe and invincible, that friends would always be there for her, and that the police were an important resource to be trusted. Now, after the rape, she is immersed in a new reality where safety is (un)certain, friends are (un)real, and resources are not only (un)helpful, but are retraumatizing.

I felt numb [like] I was watching the scenerio from an outside perspective. I remember how sterile the room looked, as though it was a room out of a cop show. It was just a metal table and three chairs. There was nothing on the wall and I couldn't begin to guess the purpose of the room except for interrogations. It wasn't until I told my mom what the police said (she wasn't allowed in the room) it was her reaction that made me realize how inappropriate my interaction had been. The cops saying "they'd do an exam [forensic evidence collection] if I would stop complaining," but that "they had a good feeling that nothing happened" didn't phase me until much later.

So (un)helpful was the resource, including the people and the place/space, that Pink left feeling interrogated. The police, who were supposed to be there for her as a victim of a crime, instead treated her like the criminal. It was another turning up-side-down for Pink. The world was no longer right-side-up, certain, real, or helpful.

Better Left (Un)Known: Bearing the Burden Alone

My senses come alive on this ledge. Here, in isolation, in alone-ness, there is a quiet solitude that allows my senses to awaken in a way that might have otherwise been dulled. I would rather not feel and see everything so clearly. Every gust of wind, every creek, every crumble is an overt wave to my inevitable demise. There is only one relief for me in this moment—no one knows that I am here. No one else must know the pain I am in or the fear I am experiencing. I am glad it is (un)known by the people I love.

What is it to know? What is knowledge? Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

The sensation and images which are supposed to be the beginning and end of all knowledge never make their appearance anywhere other than within a horizon of meaning, and the significance of the percept, far from resulting from an

association, is in fact presupposed in all association, whether it concerns the conspectus of a figure before one, or the recollection of former experiences. Our perceptual field is made up of 'things' and 'spaces between things.' (p. 15)

Knowledge is on the horizon—it retreats as we approach it. Knowledge is a coming together of “sensation and images” whose understanding is very much based on the “percept”, or object of perception, and how something is perceived. And it is that perception that is held within whoever is seeking and knowing, and may change from person to person. It is all the things a person knows before seeing whatever it is she seeks to know. It is not impartial. It is unique. And it is true, and real, and known by the individual.

What is the experience of the (un)known for survivors of sexual assault in college? And, given that after being raped, they are smothered by knowing too much, by having too much reality forced upon their lives, what does the (un)known become to them? What is it to have something literally thrust upon you? Into you? The juxtaposition of act and allegory—the physical rape and the trauma it inflicts—are blended together in the pushing, in the thrusting. The definition is sickening to read in this context, and it begins to share the depth and horrifying breath of sexual assault and the survival that comes after. What is the point of this work? Can it tell us something real, something visceral, about the lived experience?

What does it tell? It tells of being pressed, and smothered, and spread, and stabbed. It tells of another human being—a cute, seemingly trustworthy college boy—using his parts as a weapon. It tells of being forced into position. It tells the truth. It begins to reveal itself as the known—and it is in this intensive knowing that it becomes unfathomable to share with a loved one. It is too painful to bring that grief into someone

else's life. And so survivors tend to keep what they know (un)known to others. They protect their loved ones from the trauma and recovery, and it leaves them (the survivors) in a place of heightened alone-ness, just as it is to be in the woods.

How does it feel to be in a trusted place and have that trust violently taken and have a foundation of support pulled out from under you? It is a taking of what was *known* into the *(un)known*. It is the realization that Jeckyl and Hyde are not only characters in a famous novel, but that they are alive in an attractive college boy. It is the realization that friends are (un)real and resources are (un)helpful. It is the sense that one's world is turned up-side-down. If the known could become (un)known again, would she go back to it? Would she try to turn the up-side-down right-side-up? If she could keep others from having to *know* her (un)known, would she do it? Even if it meant more isolation for her, because fewer people, if any, would *know*? The experience of sexual assault survival feels foreign to young women first crossing into its land. It feels (un)known.

Blue pill: Wishing to (un)know.

Taking pills, drinking, binging, starving, over-exercise, over-involvement—these are just some of the ways we try to forget what happened. We try to forget the rape. These are the ways we try to escape from reality, to (un)know the reality in which we live. We were raped, and now we have to live with it forever. We have to survive. Sweetie over-medicated herself with prescription anxiety pills; Chloe skipped class to exercise and work; Aeryn buried herself in classes and achievements. The attempts to (un)know, to forget, to escape—these are the ways we try to cope, try to survive.

Some survivors want the (un)known back. There is a desire to return to a simpler, easier way of life, free from trauma, free from the *known* atrocity. Without their prior

knowledge, without consent, some very ugly realities of life are literally thrust upon them—pushed into them by young college men who at first seemed trustworthy. They did not have a choice in the matter—not in the rape, and not in the new knowing and moving forward that the rape presents.

In the movie trilogy *The Matrix*, the character Neo is given the choice to live in reality or live in a dream. The action—taking a pill—is simple, but making the decision about whether to take it is far more complex. If he chooses to take the blue pill, he will fall back into a trance-like sleep, connected to a machine that fabricates a “normal” existence, one that is comfortable, with just enough conflict to feel very real. If he takes the red pill, he will “unplug” from the Matrix, and he will have to exist in a cold, dark, and dangerous world—a world without peace, without light.

Unlike the characters in *The Matrix*, however, survivors of sexual violence are not given a choice—try as they might to plug back into the lives they lived before rape, it is simply not possible. Perhaps it is that choice-less-ness that has them clamoring to the top of the Alice in Wonderland-esque rabbit hole, back to anything that will bring them closer to ignorant bliss. It is, of course, impossible to go back, but the clamoring happens nonetheless. Survivors desperately wish for choice—the very choice they were robbed of when they were raped. There is a scene in “The Matrix” that speaks of the moment of decision:

Right now, I imagine that you are feeling a bit like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole?...I can see it in your eyes. You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he expects to wake up. Ironically, this is not far from the truth.

After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red

pill, you stay in wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember, all I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more. (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999)

Neo has the choice. Survivors of sexual assault do not. For survivors, the red pill is shoved unwillingly down their throats and they are left to continually fall down the rabbit hole. That is exactly what some survivors want to shield their loved ones from—the inescapable feeling of falling into the *known*. It seems too unimaginable to place such a burden on a loved one. It seems cruel. After experiencing the cruelty of rape, survivors question the point of sharing the depth of such trauma with others. The burden may be too great for a loved one to bear.

Red pill: The *weight* of the known.

What is *burden*? And what is it for it to be (un)imagine-able? Like the death of a child, which cannot be imagined except by those who have lived it. Like the image of that child, seemingly asleep, awaiting burial, is the experience of the sexual assault survivor. To be (un)imagine-able, the thing must be an un-form-able image, something that is unable to be seen. And yet we can see it, even though it is something we want to wipe away.

The sharing of something as deeply personal as a sexual assault experience is precious. It is interesting to see that the origin of burden does not necessarily have a negative connotation—it is that of weight, it is that which needs to be tended to, it is that which is borne, like a child—but these are not things that, in and of themselves, carry the same sense that the word does today.

And so the sharing of a very precious thing that needs great care is so difficult for survivors to place upon loved ones. They know deeply and personally, because it is their

trauma, and they know how consuming the trauma can be. As a mother, I can say that I welcomed the birth of my daughter. She is the most precious thing in my life. I want to do everything for her, to make sure that she is safe and cared for. The same is true for loved ones of survivors. There are nights spent awake, caring for the trauma. There are days lost to the fog of sleep deprivation and diminished self care, all in the name of bringing the baby into health, into survival. Perhaps, if babies were aware of the things mothers do to care for them, they would not wish to impart the discomfort upon the women who birthed them. Perhaps, as grown children, there is an awareness of the weight placed upon a parent or loved one when trauma is shared. Perhaps it is in that awareness that that the trauma is not shared. Perhaps it is in that awareness that we, as survivors, sometimes wish to take care of ourselves before turning to others to care for us. Perhaps it is that we feel how difficult it is to care for ourselves, and we do not wish to place that on anyone else, or on more than a few people.

An unimaginable burden is like an unknowable child who is real, has weight, and needs nurturing. Because it is difficult to form a mental picture of her, she remains hidden. In the un-imagine-able state of their own traumas, survivors are left to isolate themselves in efforts to save others. They presume that it will be too much for loved ones to bear, and they decide to bear it alone.

Keeping it (un)known.

The ledge is above me. If I move my arm up, I will feel it. If I can stand up, I can reach it. It is not too far out of reach, and yet, with my life on the threshold of some devastating dive, what can I do? It is easiest, safest, to stay here. To not move. To keep myself balled up as small as I can possibly be and remain unmoved. (Un)known.

It seems that, at least in the beginning months and years following the rape, survivors try to keep the rape (un)known to many people they love, and who love them in return. They remain in a place in which releasing the trauma, sharing the burden of it, is not a possibility. They may choose one or two confidants—Beth, Chloe, and Sweetie all chose to tell their mothers—while others keep other loved ones in the dark.

I did ask [my mom] not to tell my dad. I'm not sure if she ever told him or not, and that still weighs on me. I think it would crush my dad knowing that something horrible like that happened to me. He's always wanted to protect me, and I think if he knew that it happened and he couldn't protect me or go back to fix it, then it would almost be too much of a burden for him. (Beth)

For some who told loved ones, their experience of guilt, of sharing a burden, was too big to bear. When Pink told her father and brother about the rape, she saw clearly the burden it placed upon them, and it affected the ways in which she was able to live through her experience of healing. She was put in a place of holding back, of not wanting, or being able, to share her emotions as they were, as they came:

They felt guilty that they didn't protect me. This came out as anger in my ex and my brother and shame in my dad. My dad really pulled away from me when I needed him most because I think it was too painful for him to see me cry and know that as protective as he is, he couldn't do anything to prevent what happened. My brother went from feelings of helplessness to anger. After my ex gave me the third degree that I didn't "lead him on," he was also very angry. I noticed that they didn't really seem to show sign of improvement until I did.

Knowing this, that they did not begin healing until she did, one may understand better the self-silencing. There can be negative ramifications for survivors when they share their experiences:

Seeing my little brother frustrated was really tough. He went from being frustrated with me and frustrated with himself. When I had a seemingly "good day" he was frustrated when I still asked him at night to hang out with me. When

I had a "bad day" he seemed frustrated with himself that he couldn't do more either in the past or in the moment to make me feel better. (Pink)

It is as if Pink is on her own ledge, trapped on the vast rock wall, all too close to plummeting to her death. She wonders about her family. She wants to protect them from the horrors she experiences. And at the same time, Pink is the one who needs to be comforted, sheltered, supported. When she spends time providing these things for her family members and friends, she depletes the energy she needs to heal.

The survivor is like the child who, by necessity, is called to care for other children. Her development, her healing, is halted, put on hold because she puts the care of others before herself. For some survivors, it is easier to simply not tell. It is easier to keep their known (un)known. She fears for them. She fears for their wellbeing. She fears for how it will affect their lives. A husband of a survivor shared:

I can't even tell you how angry I am over my wife's rape. I see red sometimes – I actually see red. It's the most difficult thing in the world to sit and watch her have a nightmare or flashback and feel completely impotent to help. I hold her when she wakes up crying but all I want to do is break the neck of the guy who raped her...I want her the way she was – funny, spontaneous, loving. She seems like a different person and I don't know what to do. I know I seem shallow and impatient but I'm at the end of my ability to understand what she's going through. (as cited in Lauer, 2002, p. 264)

She knows he feels this way. If she doesn't know, she has an inkling. She is already sinking in her own sea of sadness and solitude—she wants to keep her rape from burdening him, too. She wants to be funny, spontaneous, and loving again.

The last thing a survivor wants or needs is more violence in her life, even if it is committed by a loved one against her rapist. What if her husband was hurt? What if he was killed? What if he went to jail? What if his own violent response took him away from her forever? No. She cannot risk that. She wants, with every fiber of her being, for

him to be unfailingly by her side as she heals. If she cannot have that, though, perhaps she can do her best to keep it from him—keep it (un)known. At least that way he will remain by her side. At least that way she will not need to become his caretaker when she is the one needing care.

Unlike the brother, or father, or partner who may reflect and introduce a toxic fury into the life of the survivor, Chloe's experience with her friends unveils something different. Chloe's desire to keep her friends in the realm of the (un)known emerges along with her yearning for normalcy. She simply wanted to spend time with her friends. She wanted things to go back to the way they were before the rape. And because she couldn't go back there, she felt as though her friends had become infected by the horrible world her rapist had thrust upon her. It was like being sick and contagious. She wanted to be near them, but she did not want them to share what was making her ill:

It felt terrible upsetting my friends. I felt guilty because if I never told them, they would never be upset. It also felt like I was not only giving him control over my emotions but now my friends' emotions as well.

Chloe wished she could take it back—that the pain she now shared with those around her could be lifted and felt, again, solely within *herself*.

In her own way, Chloe felt as if by telling her friends, she had broadened her rapist's control such that it covered, and touched, and smothered the connected lives of her friends. She felt like the conduit of his power as the electricity flowed through her body and out to her friends. She wished she could dampen it, stop it, turn a switch that kept it from leaving the ends of her fingertips and jolting her loved ones' lives:

I felt guilty that I would get upset and my friends had to deal with me. I felt guilty some of my friends had to choose who to believe considering they were also

friends with him. I felt guilty that my teachers had to cut me slack with my schoolwork because I couldn't pay attention in class. (Chloe)

Survivors fear the *telling* of their stories because they fear the *responding* by those around them (Ledray, 1994). In sharing her experience, whether by her choice or by (un)real friends and gossip, the weight of her rape, the way it pressed down upon her every day and every night, increased in power and magnitude. Chloe's world was spinning out of control. Outside forces, like the responses from friends and family, kept it going. Friends and family fueled the tornado and Chloe's very being was swept away. There is a burdening of friends, family, and even faculty members that weighs heavily on some survivors after they experience rape in college. It became another way in which Chloe experienced a layering of burden. She carried the burden of the rape and after telling her friends about it, she carried the burden of their reactions.

The additional burden survivors bear of having to take care of others is a big part of their lived experience. When they, as survivors, are in need of such great care themselves, carrying a loved one's sadness or anger becomes crushing weight. For Pink, the reactions of her father, brother, and even her ex-boyfriend were too much to handle on top of the rape, itself. The reactions of anger, for Pink, turned into a burden when what she needed most were expressions of support. She shared her rape with her loved ones hoping that they would be able to support her through a very difficult healing, but ended up feeling further isolated and alone.

Even now my dad is incredibly overprotective because of guilt he has over what happened. It is sweet but sometimes frustrating that he still wants to have a say in what I do, since there is nothing he could have done differently to prevent the actions of someone else.

Pink is then kept from moving out of and away from the smallness, the childish-ness, the power-less place of victimhood. She is blocked by her loved ones from moving forward and moving on. She has a need to follow her dad's instructions as a way to quell his fears, when she actually feels competent to take care of herself. It is a binding between two places—a place of restriction and stopping, and a place of freedom and moving.

When they think they know.

For some survivors, stoppings are experienced through the lashing back of loved ones. It places the survivors further into a place of isolation and alone-ness. Maybe their loved ones were not emotionally destroyed by the news, as we have discussed above, but family and friends' responses can emotionally destroy survivors. This piece is especially deep because survivors, experience so much destruction in the early days and months of survival. If the little bit of them that is still alive, still whole, is then destroyed by hurtful or ignorant words or actions, no matter how innocent, survivors shatter into feelings of nothingness—there may be no more to lose, no more to break, no more to vanish. It can be simply too much to bear. Their being becomes nothingness. Of this, Sartre (1956) writes:

This appearance of the self beyond the world – that is, beyond the totality of the real – is an emergence of “human reality” in nothingness... On the one hand... human reality rises up as an emergence of being in non-being and on the other hand that the world is “suspended” in nothingness. Anguish is the discovery of this double perpetual nihilation. (p. 51)

The world of sexual assault survival in college becomes one of profound anguish as people around the victim postulate their creations of the survivor's lived experience. Indeed, the “human reality” for survivors comes to exist in a place that is void of all that was once real to them. The creation of parallel realities—that is, (un)realities, because

they do not match the lived experience of the survivor—serves to break all that the survivor knows into powdery crumbs. It only takes a gentle wind to blow away the dusty remains. After the wind, nothingness remains.

And in the stark depletion of nothingness, in the *knowing* that others feel they *know*, judgment presses down on the already crushed spirit. The survivor is met with the antithesis of the empathy and care she needs. She is met by a jury of her peers, and it is not a jury that sits in her favor. She is guilty of slander and perjury before she can speak. She is guilty of too much drama, too much drinking, too many hook-ups, too much, too much, too much. It all becomes too much to bear when none of these things have any bearing on what happened to her. Others take it upon themselves to know her reality in spite of her, in spite of what's true.

Sadly, I feel that being an assault survivor is one of the most judged positions in society. There is no other crime that people blame the victim or see them as tainted afterwards. (Pink)

It is, indeed, a “tainted afterwards;” one in which survivors are seen as spoiled, stained, contaminated, dirty. This is how that what they (family, friends) think they know causes so much harm.

The sense of judgment from people outside the experience keeps survivors annihilated by rape. Judgment is a re-raping.

Judgment is often introduced as what sensation lacks to make perception possible. Sensation is no longer presupposed as a real element of consciousness. But when it is desired to delineate the structure of perception, it is done by joining up the points of sensation. Analysis is then dominated by this empiricist notion which, however, is accepted only as the boundary of consciousness and serves merely to throw into relief a power of co-ordination of which it is itself the antitheses. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 32)

Judgment becomes the validator of the senses such that when one wishes to place blame on another, as in *others* blaming the *victim*, judgment serves to find the *truth* of the matter. But what is the truth and how is it found? Can a sense lead to the truth? Isn't sense, itself, a truth, as it is experienced by the individual? For Merleau-Ponty, the sense of the situation (a feeling, a notion of what may have happened) matters far less than the ability to connect the sensations in an organized way. Facts are facts, and they stand as validation of one direction or another.

Whose choice is it to organize the senses, and can they be organized to find a singular truth? How is it that someone, outside of a situation, may sit in judgment of the other who has lived through it? Is it even possible for the person outside the experience to truly sense anything at all about it? How is it possible to, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "delineate the structure of perception... by joining up the points of sensation"? (p. 32)

The matter becomes muddled when those around the victim try to *know* what she has gone through without first spending time with her to hear it, feel it. When the trying-to-know happens in the absence of the survivor, the joining and the sensing are no longer connected to the survivor, herself. And when the joining and the sensing are not the survivors', they cannot be used to find her truth. When a victim is, in her absence, judged by family, friends, and others, her truth will be unfailingly absent from the arbitrary and constructed truth of... what? Of hearsay, and fables, and lies? Sexual assault survivors' senses of their own victimization seem to be the least valid in the eyes of the law, of family, of friends. Whose senses share the *truth* of the matter? Sexual assault is the only crime in which the victim is assumed to be guilty of somehow fabricating her own trauma (Brownmiller, 1975).

What is it for survivors to know that their loved ones are forming opinions, believing that they have all of the facts, and are pronouncing a sentence upon the survivor? What is it for the survivor to know that her loved ones are estimating her, evaluating her, and forming negative opinions of her? It is a crushing way to live, an isolating way to live, and it is a clear part of the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college.

There is a telling and retelling—judging and re-judging—of others' stories in college. One hears the thing first hand and passes it along a bit changed. Another picks the story up, and on it goes. No one means for the passing-on of stories to cause harm, but when gossip hits home, the feeling of betrayal begins to creep in.

Chloe lost many friendships after she was raped because people thought they knew what happened, they thought they knew that she was lying, and they thought they knew that their friend could not have raped her. They judged her in her absence. She told only a small number of very close friends, but one of those friends began to spread rumors:

What is that game? The telephone game! [It was like that] because I told one person and then the story changed when they told the next person, and the story changed again, which happens with everything, but it's kind of a big deal, a big issue, for people to have the wrong idea. (Chloe)

It is through the telephone game that the perception of Chloe materializes. She has no control over a proverbial swarm of bees who devour her story, regurgitate it, create their own sticky sweet persecution. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

Our perception ends in objects, and the object once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it whence we have had or could have... to see an

object is either to have it on the fringe of the visual field and be able to concentrate on it, or else respond to this summons by actually concentrating upon it. (p. 67)

Chloe is in the center of the hive, and yet the worker bees do not see her, do not perceive her as she truly is, at all. Instead, their fabricated version of her gives them the ability to lay back and bathe in a fiction in which the true Chloe cannot and does not exist. It is this (un)real reality that causes Chloe to feel stuck and smothered. She is the object of their perception, and their perception is the antithesis of her lived experience.

The telephone game becomes less a game and more a form of psychological torture when the story belongs to a survivor of sexual assault. When Chloe's friends spoke mis-truths about her without a care for her wellbeing, her trust in the world began to crumble:

They never asked. Which I can understand that would be an incredibly awkward situation to go up to you and be like, hey, I heard that you said that my friend raped you, is that true? But they could have asked my friends, you know, what did she tell you guys? Nobody ever, they obviously talked to him about it, why wouldn't they want to talk to *me*? So, I don't know. Obviously it wasn't any big loss, looking at it now, but at the time it was devastating. And again, it proves that you can never really 100% know anyone.

In the asking, in the hearing, Chloe may have found healing. Instead, she was betrayed by those who had at one time claimed to be her friends. They came to believe that she was lying about the crime committed against her by her ex-boyfriend. What would it have taken for them, instead of engaging in hurtful gossip, to reach out to Chloe and say, "I don't know what happened, but I bet you could use a friend right about now." Chloe's experience could have shifted dramatically by an outstretched hand, one that could pull her up and over the metaphorical ledge that I was too scared to even stand to see.

Chloe's way of being in the world, her *Dasein*, was ruthlessly pushed and pulled by the people from whom she expected belief, support, and care. She lived between two truths—the truth they fabricated, the one they thought was true, and her own truth, the one she lived. Together, the two created her reality. Heidegger (1993) writes,

Dasein discovers beings but also covers them over: aware of its possibilities, Dasein is nevertheless “thrown” into the world and “ensnared” by it. Hence Dasein is “equally in truth and in untruth.” Open to the beings and to its own being possible, Dasein nonetheless relinquishes this openness in exchange for the security of whatever “they” say is true. (p. 113)

Just as *Dasein* is being covered even as it is discovered, so, too, is Chloe in her way of being in the world. Just when she is discovering, recognizing, coming to terms with what happened to her, her so-called friends begin to cover it over with lies. As she blazes her own way in the woods, many closest to her work tirelessly to cover her true path so that she may never find her way home.

The Inside

Out here on the ledge, I can feel myself shutting down. Hopelessness and helplessness rule this cramped and menacing space. I can feel my insides begin to slow. It isn't that the blood in my veins is actually turning sluggish, or that my muscles have somehow become lethargic. No—it is more of an ethereal slowing, a powerful core listlessness that emanates a stillness all around me.

Sexual assault survival finds stoppings in the world around it—people, places, and things that physically and emotionally halt survival. Walking forward stops. Movement toward healing stops. The stoppings come from all around. It is one thing to distrust one's surroundings, to know that loved ones' abilities can shift from supportive to injurious, that the environment's ability can shift from benign to betrayal—but what

happens to the lived experience when that distrust is turned inward? What happens when you begin to distrust yourself? When your mind plays tricks on you? When you feel like you cannot trust yourself to handle the most basic expectations—walking across campus without collapsing, sitting through class without a panic attack. What if the questions coursing through the mind are, “What could I have done to stop it? What if I had gone another way? Why did I trust him?” And what if the answers add up to anger, fury, disgust in oneself, instead of where they truly belong—with the rapist?

Inside Mind

I have found a way to press myself hard against the rocky wall behind me such that I am in a slightly less precarious position. What lays on the other side of the ledge just above my reach is still a mystery. The sun is going down. The air takes on a chilly calm. I would like to get some sleep, but I cannot seem to quiet my mind.

The quiet, peaceful mind is one that is so hard to find, especially in the midst of survival. In today’s busy world, on today’s busy campuses, and especially in life after trauma, the mind can be left spinning uncontrollably. We try to force our bodies into a distracted state with medication, or television, or other outlets, but real rest will only come when one finds real peace.

What if your peace is gone, and has been forcibly shifted into a way of being that is completely foreign? How does one find quiet when the noise of trauma is deafening? What is the lived experience of the noise brought on and turned up by trauma, by rape, by the sometimes hostile environment rape victims exist within?

(Dis)Quieting anxiety.

Perched on the ledge, I am in a heightened state of alertness. I cannot sleep—my

mind will not quiet. I am so concerned with falling, with wondering how I arrived in this place. Heidegger (1977) calls anxiety a terrible “loss of Being” (p. 142). The past-ness of self is *concealed* by the rape and the present-ness of self is *made foreign* by the rape. It is a frightening place to be, a disquieting place, an anxious place. When the past self is severed and forgotten at the hands of a trusted man, the world begins to tip and the survivor is left on uneven ground. The forgotten is part of our history, and yet, it is no longer recollect-able. Levin (1985) writes:

History is a process of human ‘forgetfulness’... corresponding to the ‘oblivion’ of Being; a progressive narrowing and restricting of the *field* in which (and as which) Being presences, to which there correspond, in the realm of human experience, an ever-deepening despair and complaints of dread. (Angst, ‘anxiety,’ stems from a Latin root, which recognizes very clearly the symptomology.) (pp. 69-70)

As such, anxiety is very much connected to forgetfulness, as it is entangled with the “oblivion of being”. Oblivion as a way of being in the world is a very disquieting place. Indeed, if all is forgotten as it once was fully known, then what is there to presently *be*? In the “narrowing of field” it is as if there is now only the present, and if the present is unrecognizable, then the lost-ness of being becomes overwhelming. Not knowing where you are is not knowing where you are going. The primitive self may embody the present moment in which the past is only a whisper of a memory. All other things (the past self, the ways in which one used to cope with the world) are gone, forgotten, and only the present moment is left.

Herman (1992) describes the experience of anxiety:

After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment. Physiological

arousal continues unabated. In this state of hyperarousal...many of the symptoms observed [include]...startle reactions, hyperalertness, vigilance for the return of danger, [and] nightmares. (p. 35)

The buzzing alertedness of survival, the sense that at any moment something may go very wrong, again, can focus the body and erase the mind. Singular thoughts take over— there is no room for other things, no room for certain memories that might cloud the ability to find the next moment, take the next step, survive. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

To perceive is to remember...A landscape...seen upside down [is] said to represent our original view of [it], our normal view of [it] now natural by reason of what is added to it by memory. Because of the unaccustomed arrangement of impressions the influence of psychic causes can no longer be felt...before any contribution by memory, what is seen must at the present moment so organize itself as to present a picture to me in which I can recognize my former experiences. (p. 19)

However, if there is no prior memory of the landscape, there will be no way to make sense of it. In Merleau-Ponty's excerpt, the landscape can be understood as it is up-side-down because the seer has previously seen a landscape right-side-up. However, for survivors, when the landscape is turned up-side-down, it cannot be matched to prior memory. The current state of *being in survival* is so foreign, so disconnected to any prior way of being, that anxiety and the sense of unease become omnipresent. The familiar is gone and there can be no quieting of the mind; there can be no peace; there can only be anxiety. In the inability to retrieve the way things used to be before the rape, there is a further distancing between the then-ness and now-ness of survival. The stability of the past, and how to again achieve that stability, is gone. The way to the memory, the way home, is forgotten. The proverbial breadcrumbs leading the way home have been gobbled up by a beast in the woods.

And so it is that when Sweetie says, “I always had anxiety leading up to the anniversary of the sexual assault and that time was quite difficult”, we understand better her feelings of dread, her self-doubt, her increased pulse, her tension. We understand better that she may become physically overheated, and that the fear she is experiencing is overwhelming.

Physically I remember having a hard time breathing and could never have a nice relaxed deep breath. I had difficulty sleeping and focusing. Emotionally I worried about seeing the perpetrator again, being triggered, having flashbacks, worried about being hurt again, etc.

It is a knowing and an (un)knowing at once. As the possibility of an event arises (seeing him on campus, being flooded by memories of the rape, reliving the rape through nightmares), the gravity of that event is met with the (dis)quiet in not knowing when it will take place, or even if it will take place. It is the possibility of it that takes the survivor to a place of tension. There is a what-if-ness that is open-ended, and the open-ended-ness of it leaves its energy floating out there, without grounding, without end. A tightness in the lungs, a breath-less-ness, rises up in survival. Of breathing, Clark (as cited in van Manen, 1991) writes,

Running out of air is experienced as “running out of time”; that the child cannot “last a second longer.” Is this because she is not in space or time as we measure it, but rather that the child belongs to space and time together? Her space recedes and closes and the capacity for air diminishes, time becomes measured by every gasping breath. Time becomes breathing. Breathing is time. (p. 147)

The temporality of breathlessness is a *survival stopping*. Will I make it through this? Will my breath carry me on? Will this tightness in my chest ever recede, or will I live in this state of perpetual unease forever? For Sweetie, the experience of anxiety was tied into loss of breath, loss of control, and the apprehensive anticipation of what may or

may not happen. There is something significant to the experience of the rape anniversary for many survivors of sexual assault; the re-living, the yearly marking of time that has passed, wounds that have healed, and wounds that remain open, raw, and painful.

Anniversaries were tough - each year I had anxiety leading up to it, I had flashbacks, triggers, and it was just awful. But again, I had amazing friends and family support...that helped me get through these. And they did get easier over time. (Sweetie)

It happens every year. Imagine at the same time *every year* having a hard time breathing, never relaxing, difficulty sleeping, difficulty focusing. If the rape occurred in the spring, the smell of newly blooming flowers might be a trigger. In winter, it could be the sight of snow, or the feel of a heavy coat. Rape (dis)quiets the mind, the heart, the soul. It robs women of themselves, of their peace, of a time in their lives that can be an opening. Instead, it becomes a closing. Instead, it becomes a trapping in a loud, cavernous space, where the inescapable blare reverberates off the walls, shaking loose the rubble, and endangering your life.

For Chloe, the experience of anxiety meant a sentence in a dark, enclosed space. For her, the only space that could give her peace was to be locked in her bathroom. She did not have control of her mind or her senses, and in order to regain them, she needed to cut off all input, all sensory engagement. She needed to not see, not feel. She needed to be in a space that was absent of sensory feeling. She describes her experience:

The bathroom was small and had no windows. Because there were no windows it was the darkest place in my apartment. When I would get panic attacks I always knew they were coming on because they would start with a migraine. To this day whenever I get migraines I get very sensitive to light so a dark place is always the best place to start. I remember the migraine started and then I felt short of breath and my mouth got really dry. It was different than my usual reaction to the assault because I wasn't crying. I suddenly felt my hands start to shake and I was speaking really fast. At this point I excused myself from my friends and that what

was when I went into the bathroom. The best coping strategy I had at the time was to try to get myself to fall asleep so I could let my subconsciousness take over. This was extremely hard to do because a) I was sitting in a bathroom and b) images of him raced through my mind so quickly that I couldn't make sense of them. Unfortunately this is pretty much where my memory of the event stops.

It is an experience so intense that Chloe's memory is *dis*-membered, cut away and taken somewhere out of reach. Memories do this as self-preservation, but at the cost of those who are *dis*-membered. The rest of the *membership*, the rest of the memories, decide that there is no longer has a place for them, and those deemed unworthy are pushed out of the circle—*dis*-engaged, extricated, *de*-formed.

Gadamer (2002) writes:

Memory must be formed; for memory is not memory for anything and everything. One has a memory for some things, and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another. Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity. (p. 16)

Some memories are preserved and some are banished, and in the banishment, room is made for the healing that must be done. The pain and loss, the stoppings, the survival lie in the tension here—*memories must be lost in order to survive and heal*.

Raucous-ness of doubt.

I have great admiration for and maintain loyalty to many fraternity men. In the past decade, many of them have been as big a part of my rape recovery as the one fraternity man of my college years who caused my trauma. The fraternity men of more recent years in my life are incredible, smart, and committed to the values they pledged to uphold when they joined their fraternities. But they party, and those parties can be raucous.

But must I accept this statement as “boys will be boys?” Just because a culture is a certain way now, does it always have to remain that way? This is the very culture that, when left unchecked, can turn into havens for all kinds of rape, from individually inflicted assaults to groups of men bonding over the act of gang-rape. It is that kind of raucousness, that kind of chaos, that lack of accountability that fosters the sense of “boys will be boys.” But if boys will continue to be boys in this way, then college women will continue to be raped, and I cannot accept that as a finite truth.

The men who lived in the mansion across the street from the apartment I first lived in as a doctoral student had enormous parties every weekend. They brought their human-sized stereo speakers out to the front porch and aimed them directly at my apartment windows. It wasn't anything personal; they didn't even know me. But their parties shook the windows of my apartment with only slightly less reverberation than the artillery practice I experience from Ft. Bragg today. When I think of the word raucous, I think of those parties. They lasted for what seemed like forever. They were deafening even from across the street, and the people who attended them were completely out of control.

The word raucous comes from the Latin, *raucus*, meaning “hoarse.” In this way, the action is likened to an extended scream in which the vocal chords and throat become raw from the prolonged intensity of it. And so what is the raucous-ness of doubt? What is it for doubt to be raucous? For survivors of sexual assault, the doubt can well up; it can be so loud, and can feel, figuratively, like a constant screaming that leaves the throat so hoarse that the voice is gone. It is a screaming—not for an elated boisterous-ness, a cheering on of a favorite sports team, or the winning of a prize—no, it is a screaming that

wells up from a place of despair, of worthlessness, of the utterly low of low.

For some survivors, the raucous-ness is a bouncing back and forth between doubt and acceptance. As Ledray (1986/1994) explains:

While the initial phase of shock and disbelief probably will last a day or two, some women essentially pass through it during the assault and immediately afterward they experience the resulting confusion and disorganization. Many survivors bounce back and forth between the two responses, one moment saying “I don’t believe this, it couldn’t really have happened to me” and the next moment, having accepted the reality, experiencing turmoil. (p. 87)

As such, the bouncing becomes part of the disorienting raucousness experienced by survivors. It is like being tossed about on the stormy ocean—rising up and crashing down, again and again, without knowing when it will all end. For survivors, being out on the tempestuous sea suspends them in the long and terrified shriek. There is no end in sight, and so there is a doubtfulness that it will ever end. *Trust* in self, *trust* in others, and *trust* that the world will take care of you in your greatest time of need—it is all taken, like the voice after a never-ending scream. Levine (2005) writes:

As the myriad losses of a lifetime accumulate and deepen the reservoir of grief, it is sometimes difficult to see the other shore – or even trust that there is another shore. One of the major inhibitors to the quality of trust is the shock to our system when it’s struck by unforeseen loss. The more unexpected the wound, the longer it may take for us to make peace with it. (p. 31)

Survivors experience loss after loss while surviving rape. In each of the people who say hurtful things, or engage in hurtful actions, the “reservoir” of pain and suffering expands. Rape is such a shock to the system, so unforeseen, that safety’s shore becomes an impossible dream. And so it is that on the ship that is in the roughest of seas, the safety of the shore becomes unattainable, far away.

What is the lived experience of doubt as it mixes and mingles with guilt? What is

it to have these ways of being placed upon the self, by the self? It is like the loudest fraternity party—with mind-numbing beer and ear-numbing noise of voices and music and darkness that stutters the light.

I felt an immense amount of guilt and self-doubt. It took me a long time to realize that there is absolutely nothing I could have done to prevent the football player from [a prestigious university in the northeast] premeditating his actions to his follow through. (Pink)

It is a demoralization *of self by self and other*. The demoralization stands as a circle in which the self stands alone. There is a vast, blank, white space surrounding the self. It is devoid of support, denuded of love. The whiteness and brightness becomes a blinding imprisonment of consciousness out of which the conscience emerges. It is within this conscience that one begins to see oneself as “good” or “bad,” “guilty” or “innocent,” and that sense of *being* can become as enveloping as the white light, itself. Heidegger

(1927/1962) writes:

How is the conscience to function as that which *summons* us to our own-most potentiality-for-Being, when proximally and for the most part it merely *warns* and *reproves*? Does the conscience speak in so indefinite and empty a manner about our potentiality-for-Being? Does it not rather speak definitely and concretely in relation to failures and omissions which have already befallen or which we still have before us? Does that alleged appeal stem from a ‘bad’ conscience or from a ‘good’ one? Does the conscience give us anything positive at all? Does it not function rather in just a critical fashion? (p. 324)

The part of our being that is enclosed in guilt and self-doubt is not only our way of being in the world, it serves to hold us back from a way of being that is free from it. The power of the conscience to judge, and the power of that self-judgment to become the white light’s entrapment, is what exists at the core of survivor shame. Through its purpose of “warning and reproof,” the guilty conscience (already internalized as such) illuminates the “failures and omissions,” at least as we have labeled them for ourselves. It is in our

labeling for ourselves that they begin to seep into ourselves, poisoning our *beings*. The conscience thus exists as Heidegger as pointed out—“in just a critical fashion.” And it is in this critical fashion that the circle of self judgment encircles us, spinning and enclosing and trapping us in. There is a questioning of self and a questioning of actions, as if one were pulling the strings, enacting one’s own rape.

Pink explains:

It's hard to get over "why me" or wondering what kind of vibe you were sending that person that would make them want to do that to you.

What is it for self-trust to be tampered with? To become self-doubt? What is it for trust to become (un)known? For Beth, the issue became trust. She whispers, “I felt like I trusted that guy before, how can I trust new guys?” There is a fogginess of the experience, one that blurs the ways in which you thought you knew the world. As Chloe says, “Right after the sexual assault I could not see clearly. I was caught up in not wanting to be labeled a certain way and I was scared to tell people what really happened.”

And what happens to the lived experience when one comes to realize that an experience was actually rape? When one has lived through days, weeks, months trying to convince oneself that it was not rape, that it was something else, something not quite as bad?

When the denial finally stopped and reality set in it was very scary. While I was aware of all of the textbook responses I did not know if knowing about them would mean that I would be above experiencing and I wasted a lot of energy trying to not "experience" the sexual assault.” (Chloe)

Unconsciously withholding reality—keeping it at bay until she was ready to deal with it—Chloe’s mind did what it needed to do to keep her safe in the months following the assault. Like the child who pulls the covers over her head in order to be protected from

monsters lurking in the darkness, Chloe peeked out from underneath, and finally glimpsed the menacing beast.

As such, when Chloe and the others speak of being in denial, they are inside of an experience of repudiation. I can imagine Chloe, when confronted with the concept that what she experienced was rape, turning, quickly walking away from that idea, that reality. I can imagine her saying, “No, no, this is not the way it is going to be.” She did not want to accept what happened to her. At the time, she could not believe it. At the time, it was not part of her reality.

What does it feel like to be *in denial*? There is a terrifying paralysis that sets in—one in which fear takes over and any sense of security is gone. There is a constant dread, a constant feeling as though rape could happen again at any moment. He could show up here—at my sorority house, at my apartment, in my class, at my work.

In the nights following the sexual assault, I remember feeling so scared and so afraid that after locking our door at night, I propped my desk chair underneath the door knob so nobody could break in. (Sweetie)

The (un)known about college, the sense that this place was supposed to be safe, that I was supposed to be okay here, live here, grow here, NOT BE RAPED HERE...it is shocking when that reality sets in for victims of sexual assault.

And for some, the reality of rape survival does not come for months or years. For me, it wasn't until the beginning years of my doctoral work that I began to deal with what happened to me in college. I always discounted it as something else, something not quite as bad as it was. Like Chloe, I could not believe that my ex-boyfriend would rape me. It just wasn't something I could wrap my head around. But that is what it was. He trapped me, he made it happen, he took what he wanted without a care for what it might do to me.

In the early days of survival, whether the first days, weeks, months, or years, the mind is so full of noise that it is difficult to sort through what happened, how one may feel about it, what to call it, and how to cope with the mind's reactions. It can feel like you are not the person you used to be—like this new person, after the rape, is someone you've never met. She has different reactions than you would have; she questions herself and her reality in ways that you never would have before. The lived experience is in the mind, but it is also in the body, and in the spirit, and I will explore those aspects of lived experience as I move forward in uncovering of the phenomenon.

Inside Body

Like a body of water, the human body can be clean, and cool, and beautiful. It can reflect the sun and sky through its healthy vibrancy. It can enact kinetic movement, and it be smooth with a calm as still as glass. When that body of water is violated, when it becomes contaminated, it begins to die. It has the ability to cleanse itself, this is true, but when the waste is all-en-COMPASS-ing, that ability is dampened, deadened. The animals and plants that live in and around it begin to die as a result of the pollution.

Like the human body, which can be resilient under great turmoil and oppression, survivors can manage only so much assault at a time. For survivors of sexual assault in college, it may be the college days, the earliest days of survival, that become critical to resilience or contributory to decay. And it is in the very interpretation of the body from each survivor, whether contaminated or clean, deep or shallow, clear or murky, that the lived experience becomes known. No matter what it is on the surface, the interpretation must come from within the survivor, herself, and can be as varied as the water is deep.

Merleau-Ponty (1964) writes of ways in which we can know the body:

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element', in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing....The flesh in this sense is an 'element' of Being. (p. 139)

As such, in order to understand the *Dasein* of survival, the way of *being in survival*, we must first seek to understand it in terms of the body and how survivors are *beings* in their own bodies. We must begin to understand the elements of the bodily experience as they are for survivors of sexual assault in college. For some survivors, dissociating from the body entirely is an important, although typically inadvertent, coping mechanism.

Between the divided mind and body, the survivor comes into a safety of separateness.

In an example of guided meditation for survivors of trauma who experience dissociation, Bass and Davis (1992) write:

[Set] a clear intention that you want to stay in your body – and feel what there is to feel – [it] is a powerful step toward being more present...[Feel] the sensations occurring in your body in the moment...Are you feeling more warm or cool and where?...Can you feel your breath moving in and out of your lungs, your nose or mouth? Can you feel your heartbeat or a muscle twitch?...What does anger feel like in your body? Where do you feel it? How about fear? Shame? Pleasure? ...Stay with the feelings. (p. 254)

It is in our bodies, especially as they become the manifestation of emotion and experience, that we find our *being* and our way of *being in the world*. Fear can be felt in the heart, beating faster, hoping no one will hear. Shame can be felt as burning, emerging red on the face, on the cheeks. Anger can be a gripping, a tensing. Fear can catch in the throat.

In terms of the early days of survival (the days, months, years following the rape that are covered in more darkness than light), there is a downward movement, and in

order to know it more fully, we must go down with it. Levin (1985) explores the *going-down-into* that is essential for knowing the way of *the phenomenon*:

There is awaiting us, then, if we are prepared to go down into it, a preontological (or proto-ontological) attunement, an ‘attunement woven into embodiment’: an attunement, in fact, to Being as a whole...Ontologically considered, our awareness of this feeling attunement – our retrieval of this perceptive, felt attunement as a ‘guardian awareness’ – is of the utmost significance, since it is that openness-to-Being which first acquaints us with the potential dimensionality of our being in mortal embodiment. As we question the body of mood, going (down) into it ever more deeply, it seems that we move closer to that field of our being in which the ontological gift (*‘Es gibt’*) presents itself, i.e., is felt to present itself, in its deepest truth. (p. 50)

And so it is that in order to understand the way of *being in survival*, we must first go down into the deepest and darkest of emotions. We must start from a place before knowing, because it is in our past that knowing is, at the moment, unknown, as it has been taken by the trauma. There is a “potential dimensionality” of the ways in which we embody survival, and we examine it by its depth and darkness, its sadness and vacancy. The “guardian awareness” of which Levin speaks seems to be that piece of the lived experience that, eventually, makes way for the ability to rise up, to heal, to overcome. It is as if, all along, through the darkness, there is a guardian spirit who lives within each survivor, trying with all her might to build up the survivor spirit so that she may emerge triumphant.

In the darker meantime, the ways in which the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college manifests in embodied moods are manifold. There may be insecurity about the body. There may be a desire to cover up, to hide, to disguise the body in order to seem outward-ly quite different from what it otherwise feels like inward-ly. There may be a meaning-less-ness to the body, and an indifference to the ways in which

it is used. There may be an overwhelming apathy or inertia—a way in which every movement of the body is held back as if tethered or glued or restrained by the violence of the past. It can feel inescapable.

Insecurity.

For Beth, an insecurity about her body carried through her experience of the actual rape. She talks about being with the college man who raped her in two ways. On the one hand, she describes herself as, “a shy, insecure girl who was seeking acceptance and a place to fit in...this guy’s attention made me feel good...I thought being accepted, and having a guy interested in me, helped me find my place.” She goes on to talk about the ways in which her body was reacting to him in different ways than her mind. She is aware that, “I wasn’t comfortable in my own skin with him, which should have thrown up red flags everywhere.”

Beth also speaks about what it felt like to have that innocence preyed upon. For her, coming from a place of innocence, feeling uncomfortable in her own skin, she lost so much to him, but more so, he took her innocence away. And there is a difference for Beth, between *losing* her innocence (a phrasing that *implicates her* actions) and having it *taken away* (a phrasing that implicates *his actions*):

I 100% believe that my innocence was taken away, stolen in fact. I was a freshman in college, very much sheltered by my parents, naïve to so many things in the world, and this guy stole my innocence away. He had no respect for me, not once did we ever talk about our “relationship” moving to the next level and having sex with each other (although he did know that I was a virgin) and somehow he thought he had enough power and control to take something so important away from me. He violated me, he stripped me of any choice and that is why I believe there is such a big difference between “losing your innocence” and “having your innocence taken away.”

In Beth's words, her bodily innocence was violated, and her ability to make choices about her body was stripped away *by him*. It was a *taking from* her. He *took* pieces of her away with him. He *took* her bodily innocence; he *took over* her bodily insecurities; *he violated* her body.

Hiding.

Hiding and seeking. Ready or not here *they* come.....the other kids playing their games, the other students living their lives, the unanticipated aggravators of a wound not yet healed. Will it ever be healed? Not if they don't stop picking, and poking, and nudging and aggravating. Not if they don't stop hunting her down. Did they intend to hunt her down? If she *feels hunted*, that is all that matters. It is in her feelings that we come to know her lived experience.

What is it to hide? Hiding in the woods, hiding from the world, hiding from oneself. What is it to be *one-self* hiding from the *other-self*, when the two selves are really one? Ricoeur's (1992) work entitled *Oneself as Another* explores the idea of the personal identity and narrative identity, or what I would call the *inner self* and the *projected self*. His is an exploration of the *sameness* of both selves, as they are embodied in one *being*:

Sameness is a concept of relation and a relation of relations...we say of two occurrences of a thing, designated by an invariable noun in ordinary language, that they do not form two different things but "one and the same" thing. Here, identity denotes one-ness: the contrary is plurality (not one but two or several). (p. 116)

And so it is that the survivor, in her own way of being in the world, embodies both an inner self and a projected self—the ways in which she inwardly feels, and the ways in which she hopes to be seen. As they are in objection to each other, they battle for their

places within the survivor's being, and they are both, in truth, part of who she *is*. Each one—the personal or the narrative (Ricoeur), the inner or the projected, exist in its rightful place both *in and about her being*.

And contained by the *in-ness* and *out-ness* of self, there is a hiding and a seeking. No matter where one is hiding and what one is hiding from, there is an electric anticipation of being found. For the children playing hide and seek, the fun is in the thrill of finding and being found. For survivors of sexual assault in college, there is an anxiety, a worry, a fear in the hiding and the being found. However, hiding can be peace, if one hides well enough to be left alone. One cannot hide forever, but in the hiding one may find respite for the healing necessary within the survival experience. Like an injured animal who seeks shelter to lick wounds in a concealed space, survival moves toward withdrawal for healing.

Here, Pink tells about her hidings, her ways of finding peace. Her environment felt so much like a war zone after being raped that her way of hiding was to put on her “war paint”:

I tried to hide my insecurities at times by looking polished and presentable...rather than a raggedy mess of a victim...my coat of armor and protection from people who might attack me. (Pink)

It was as if she were fighting a war, and the war paint somehow bolstered her, made her feel ready to face her enemies, to conquer them, to not let them conquer her.

Meaning-less-ness.

What is it for sex to become meaning-*less* after rape when before the rape it had great meaning and great importance? What if this experience of meaning-less-ness grows

to include virginity lost. What is it for sexuality and virginity to lose their meaning? In her book *Loose Girl: A Memoir of Promiscuity*, Kohen (2008) writes,

Back at school [college], I hang around Zoë's room. I try to focus on my schoolwork. I get the flu and stay in bed for three days. I am sick, but more, I am sick of myself. Sick of my desperation and emptiness. Sick of the constant defeat. I am convinced if someone will just love me I will be able to focus on something [other than sex]. I'll be able to enjoy my life. I'll feel whole and real, released from this weight. (p. 115)... It is the story of any girl who finds herself hurt in some way, who finds herself with pain and then makes a choice to do something about it. Some girls turn to anorexia. Others to alcohol, drugs, cutting, sports, ambition. I chose promiscuity. (p. 2)

And so it is for the college "girls" who have been raped—so much of their lives made meaningless in their own minds and eyes by college "boys" who took so many things...not just sex.

For Beth, both sexuality and virginity came to be meaning-*less* to her after her rape. Promises she once made to herself were dropped listlessly to the ground and replaced with a bland resolve for future meaning-less sex. She laments:

He took [sex and my virginity] away from me, it doesn't need to be anything special that I save for the man that I'm going to love and be with for the rest of my life. I guess it doesn't matter anymore. I pretty much maintained that attitude while I was still in college.

Drowning in alone-ness, Beth could have never known how not-alone she was. As an 18 year old rape survivor just before college began, she became part of a much larger sisterhood of young women *all unknown* to each other. Ledray (1994) writes:

Teenage girls... who have been virgins before rape seem the most likely to [become] very active sexually after a rape. Sometimes they seem curious to see what "real, normal" sex is like. At other times their sexual activity seems more an attempt to deny the importance of sex or remaining a virgin until they are married, if that had been an expectation before the rape. (p. 101)

And had she known this, would it have mattered? Could the coldness she felt have been replaced by warmth? Could connection to other young women like herself have helped to shift her feelings of meaning-less into meaning-more?

For Beth, giving up on saving herself for her future husband was not something she did consciously. It was an (un)conscious state of being, a giving-up, a letting go of what she once wished for. She stopped saving herself all together, and stopped caring. It was a stopping for her—a stopping of self, a stopping of being true to who she was.

Although I wasn't consciously seeking to have "hook up buddies" that's what I essentially had my senior year of college. Looking back, I am disgusted with myself that I did that.

She not only lost herself in the rape, she lost her sexuality and her virginity. He took her sense of self worth when he took these precious things from her. Now, as she looks back on those times in college, she does not look back warmly.

Inertia.

What is inertia? It is a stopping, a halting, an inability to move forward no matter how hard you try. From the Latin *inertia*, meaning "unskillful." And what is it to be unskilled? Is it to be without skill to begin with, or is it to have skill forcibly taken away? Can one *un-skill* another? And what does that feel like for survivors of sexual assault in college?

For Chloe, it feels like helplessness, or an inability to help her-*self*. Once a *self-sufficient* college student, after the rape Chloe found that her skills of movement, of accomplishment, of positivity had been forcibly taken. She no longer had the skills to take care of herself. She had been *de-skilled*. In other words, she had her skills taken

from her, when she was a highly skilled, highly competent college woman. Apple (1983) writes:

Deskilling workers...often generated slowdowns...exacerbated tensions, and created new forms of overt and covert resistance. Yet its ultimate effect was to legitimate...control. (p. 617)

And so it is for survivors, that a sense of inertia plagues them via the mental and physical slowing of depression. It is through that inertia that the de-skilling begins.

De-skilling finds its way in through the slowing, but hooks its roots in when survivors, struggling just to keep air in their lungs, find themselves unable to practice their skills. There becomes, as Apple (1983) posits, a separation between the conception of survivors' abilities (in that they know the abilities are there, or at least were once there) and the execution (in that survivors feel incapable of *doing* them, of accessing the abilities). Slowdowns come in the survivor's weakened sense of worth in the world. Survivors' bodies strike, choosing bed, sleep, alcohol, escape over *being truly alive*.

Even through the sleep, though, even through the escape, tensions mount in the innermost mind and thoughts, and erect themselves through the nightmarish images that only rise up when consciousness is shut down. One day she will find a way to resist it and to rise out of it, but for now she is controlled by it.

Helplessness was very frustrating for me as I am sure it is for anyone. I am the type of person that tries to do everything for myself instead of depending upon others. It was very hard for me to realize that I didn't know how to help myself and made me question my self worth. (Chloe)

He also took her ability to move, to get out of bed, to *get going*. Her body remained still, stuck, even as her mind willed and wished it forward.

I did not want to get out of bed for weeks. Part of it was that I was scared of running into him but mostly I just did not have the energy. I also did not have the

energy to do school work, answer emails or spend time with friends. (Chloe)

There are ways in which the body reacts in uncontrolled ways, stops you, makes you wonder if you are going crazy. The simplest things that you used to do become so hard. Just walking. Just moving. Just studying. Just making it through the day without crying.

The things I was doing that were out of character for me. I was incredibly tired all of the time and didn't want to get out of bed. I was avoiding answering phone calls or emails because I didn't have the energy to talk to my friends. I couldn't concentrate on schoolwork. I couldn't control getting really upset and crying. (Chloe)

Inside and outside of the body, manifestations of insecurity, hiding, meaning-lessness, and inertia all serve to stop the survivor's body. Stop it from moving forward, stop it from presenting itself in real ways, stop it from meaning beautiful things, stop it from going. But the lived experience rests also within the ethereal spirit—that which resides in us, that which is our life force and so much more. It is from inside the human soul, from inside the spirit, that experience is lived.

Inside Spirit

What, or who, is spirit? Is spirit an internal feeling or an external force? Is it holy? Is it crushing? Can it be silenced? For sexual assault survivors in college it can be all three, and it can be much more. What is the spirit of the sexual assault survivor in college? Where does she find it and what if it has been taken away? The meaning of spirit, finds its roots in the Latin, *spiritualis*, meaning “of breathing.” It is the life force, it is the thing that keeps a person alive, it is one of few things the human body cannot live without.

Holy spirit.

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.
Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?
Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God? (Epicurus)

Like the echos of innumerable choral voices reverberating off cathedral ceilings, survivors' voices rise up out of these heinous crimes. The lyrics come in questions and questioning: Where was God when this happened to me? If there really is a God, how could he have let this happen? Maybe there is no God. My rape cannot be part of a holy plan. My rape is rape. It is trauma, it is nightmares, it is starvation, it is horror. There is no holiness in that. Lauer (2002) writes:

The question[s] you're asking may indicate anger – at God, at the heavens, at the forces that allowed this rape to occur. There is a sense of disbelief. We've read about rape but this is personal... The feeling of isolation, of having been singled out and of having been abandoned by God is one that many women experience. When we experience rape we are angry and feel cheated out of losing the person we might have been. You know anger. That intense emotion that makes your heart pound and energy increase. (p. 165)

Anger—that red-hot guttural rising out of the deepest depths of the soul. A lover's betrayal, a mother's abandonment, a friend who takes no notice at your greatest moment of need. For those who believe, or *believed*, in God, the all-powerful is or was all of these things in one. The ultimate betrayal. The ultimate *betrayal*.

And it is this, the most holy of matters, that comes to mean the most for many survivors. It is a questioning of God's intent toward a soul shredded by rape. It is the very word *holy*, or at least evolution of its meaning, to some sexual assault survivors that *is* the arc of normal-trauma-aftermath. From the positive “sacred, godly” to the salutation “health and happiness” to the abrupt shift in meaning of desecration and annihilation of an entire people, the word “holy” appropriately weaves its way into the lived experience of sexual assault survivors in college.

The *holy spirit*, when connected to its earlier incarnations, can mean an *obliteration of breath*, which is not far from the meaning of the lived experience of sexual assault survivors in college. For Pink, there was a real struggle with God. After being sexually abused as a child, at the time of her rape in college, she found it impossible to believe that it was part of God's plan. How could God be so cruel?

I struggled with God. I didn't understand how he would allow this to happen to me again. How many people face the abuse I did, saw their life on the upswing and have been raped twice?...I saw [God] as apathetic as my friends and assailant.

For Pink, God had fallen from grace. He had, before the rape, been a positive force in her life. After the rape, there was ambivalence, a (dis)connection, because her theological foundation had been shaken, broken.

Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

Theology is seeking a more primordial interpretation of man's Being towards God, prescribed by the meaning of faith itself and remaining within it. It is slowly beginning to understand once more Luther's insight that the 'foundation' on which its system of dogma rests has not arisen from an inquiry in which faith is primary, and that conceptually this 'foundation' not only is inadequate for the problematic of theology, but conceals and distorts it. (p. 30)

It is the "primordial interpretation" of the beastly act of rape that leads Pink to a new way of *being* with God. This new way of *being* is one of *fury* and *disbelief*, and wraps her in the questioning of God discussed earlier in this section. It is both slow and shockingly fast. It is an unveiling of a new truth about God—that the holy spirit is fallible, and capable of standing by while the atrocity of rape, and the aftermath of it, ravage the spirit of this survivor.

For Pink, the binding-together that she once had with God was separated by his idly standing by, watching her trauma unfold. She began to wonder if he existed at all,

and if he did exist, how could her put her through it? To what end? Later in her healing she wondered:

I don't know if God placed more obstacles in my path because He knew I could handle them or if I gain all of my strength from the things I was forced to overcome.

It is an ongoing questioning of God, whereas before, a solid bedrock of belief stood strong.

For Beth, God was not a part of the picture at all. She “came to Christ later in life,” but at the time of her rape, she did not think about God as a source of support. The thought of gaining insight or strength from God was not on her agenda. Instead, she tried to find strength in herself. She considers where she was, in relation to God, at the time:

I guess because of how I handled everything immediately after my experience with sexual assault I didn't reach out to God then. I just focused on how I could get me through. I know God was calling to me before March of last year [when I first]...came to Christ..., but I wasn't answering.

The holy spirit that, for some, is in and around everything, can be a powerful part of the experience for sexual assault survivors in college.

What about the women for whom God is simply not there at all? For them, God was not necessarily a negative or positive force, but instead was simply nonexistent.

Levine (2005) writes:

The mercy we may not feel from God might come instead from ourselves when we recognize how much random discomfort attends our daily activities, how a barely definable suffering underlies each half-taken breath. (p. 44)

For Beth, the focus was inward, without the presence of a higher power. Indeed, she found the higher power within herself during those times, and she moved forward of her own accord. Perhaps in her alone-ness, her breath remained half-taken. Perhaps, wrapped

in the ripping-away of her innocence and virginity, there was no room for anyone else—no room for real connection to human or spirit. It would be quite some time before Beth opened her heart to either one.

Lulita's connection to spirituality changed several times while she was in college. When we first began to explore her lived experience of spirituality as it relates to her sexual assault, she said that it would be helpful to tell the story of the first night, of many, that she was raped:

I should share my story about what happened during my assault. My attacker ended up remaining in my room for the entire night and assaulted me multiple times throughout the night. When he got up the next morning...the way he got up out of my bed and left my room you would think we were...intimate partners with this loving relationship. He got up, tousled my hair, gave me a kiss on my cheek, and said something like, "I had a great time, I have to go now, I have to go church."

And so it is understandable that, although she was not raised with "a strong commitment to any particular faith," she laughingly says, "I have to tell you that that experience did not make me very comfortable with the concept of God!" In graduate school, Lulita and a classmate explored a higher power in a different light together:

I remember when I was in grad school I met a fellow survivor and we had this thing between us where we talked about SAM, it stands for Survivors Are Marvelous, and [SAM] was a she, and that was our goddess, so we believed there had to be some other higher power, but we had to think of that power in a different way. We kind of claimed it differently.

Reclaiming of spirituality through the image of a female higher power resonated with and was most healing for Lulita.

Perhaps it was the very maleness of God that stopped Lulita from embracing him, and moved her toward the femininity of SAM. Perhaps it was that feminine power, the celebration of body, the embrace of sexuality as a beautiful part of womanhood. The

feminization of God, like finding a soul sister or spirit mother, brings forth the natural empowerment that survives in every woman, regardless of trauma, but especially in those who have been deeply harmed by another. Estés (1992) writes:

There is a [goddess] who lives in the wild underground of women's natures. This creature is our sensory nature, and like any integral creature it has its own natural and nutritive cycles. This being is inquiring and relational, bounding with energy sometimes, quiescent at other times. It is responsive to stimulus involving the senses: music, movement, food, drink, peace, quiet, beauty, darkness. (p. 334)

It is through the imagery of the higher power as goddess, the embracing her as such, that survivors may connect on a sensory and visceral way to *the one* who *is one* with the power of healing. The empowered sense of femininity is one who drinks and eats and dances with all that life has to offer. She is not constrained by the man who once held her down. No. Instead she steps forward into her own world, her own life, and her ownership of it all. Within the sisterhood spirituality, she cannot and will not be owned.

Crushed spirit.

The rape is just the beginning.
Then it's one long drop into hell.
(Anonymous Survivor, as cited in Raine, 1998, p. 235)

A crushing of the spirit begins during the rape, but the body and mind are too startled, too fresh for the experience to reach much deeper than the flesh. It is the time after that, in the reflection, in the nightmares, in the uncontrollable visceral and emotional reactions to the most mundane of things when the spirit crushing really begins. It is a "long drop into hell," and it feels never-ending. There is no sense that hell's floor will ever come into view, and the thought of ever coming close to heaven seems like a lost dream. The crushed spirit is one that is depleted of the energy and drive to climb its way

out. The fire, lapping angrily at the feet and limbs, penetrates and burns. Heaven belongs to someone else. It is not for me, stuck here in the great and horrible depths.

Spirit is crushed for many survivors by a sense that they are to blame for the rape—that they somehow made the rapist rape them. There continues to be an inside-ness to the experience of survival, or a continued feeling of being tethered to the rape even though it happened in the past. Like the dog tethered to a rope and left out in the pouring rain, it can sometimes feel like an inescapable drowning.

[Survivors] are unable to reflect on events from a critical distance, which engenders a sense of instability, loss of control, psychological incompetence, and lack of confidence in coping with daily life. “I should be over this” or “I must be crazy” are two common complaints of traumatized clients, stemming from the conviction that they are psychologically inadequate rather than functioning with sensorimotor systems that are primed for the threat and reacting to danger long since over. (Ogden et al., 2006, p. 21)

For Beth, it began as a battle with herself that was rooted in the aftermath of rape. Her sense that people would crush her spirit loomed above her, and silenced her.

It was hard. I really felt like people would think “It’s your fault, you shouldn’t have let him come over, you shouldn’t have ‘led him on’ (I say that since we were hooking up when he came to visit me and I was half naked), you should have been stronger.”

She wondered if she had done something to cause him to rape her—to *cause him to rape her*. But did she force his hand upon her? No. Did she make him do the one thing she did not want him to do? How could she? Only in a world steeped in victim blaming can anyone point to her as the cause of his actions. He was the one with control over his actions. Not her.

And yet, on some level, she blames herself. She wonders and questions to this day whether or not he did anything wrong. She wonders if it was enough that she didn’t want

to have sex with him, that he never asked permission, that he did not respect her. She wonders if it was enough that he was bigger than her, manipulative of her, and had all the power in the relationship. She wonders *what if* I had done this or *what if* I had done that differently? She wonders about *her own actions*, but what about his? Lauer (2002) writes:

By engaging in the constant, exhausting “what if” questioning of yourself, you’re assuming you had some type of responsibility for the rape. You did not. Not if you wore a short skirt. Not if you were drunk. Not even if you were flirting. While some of these behaviors may not be in your best interest, you didn’t ask for it nor did you deserve to be raped. (p. 167)

He took parts of herself away from her—her self-respect, her sense of self-worth. What he did to her changed her deeply and harshly. It was painful for her to live with herself after the rape because she blamed herself so completely. Beth disregarded the role he played, the things he took. She carried the burden that should have been his.

Somehow I lost respect for myself and my morals. That disgusts me. What that guy did to me made me lose myself for a while, and that led me down the wrong path. While in college, I didn’t think anything of it. I just thought, “Whatever, my plans got derailed out of my control, who cares now.” I wish I had stayed true to myself.

What is it to be true to oneself? As parts of Beth were fractured by rape, which part is *the part* she should be *true to*? There was a part of her that found a great and compelling need to have sex and intimacy of her own choosing. Perhaps the self she is today would not choose that for the self she was in college, suffering in the aftermath of rape, but doesn’t that young, suffering rape survivor deserve some sympathy? Some forgiveness? At this time in her life, over 15 years removed from the rape, she does not think so. Her actions back then continue to, as she says, “disgust” her now.

And how is Beth to feel any other way when the world around her is steeped in a victim blaming mentality? Perpetrators seem so unfathomable that the sense is the

atrocities *must* have to do with the victim's complacency and responsibility. From the day we are born, human beings are raised on a steady consumption of victim blaming mythology. It can go as unnoticed as the air we breathe, especially in the most appalling times. Herman (1997) writes:

The propensity to fault the character of the victim can be seen even in the case of politically organized mass murder. The aftermath of the Holocaust witnessed a protracted debate regarding the "passivity" of the Jews and their "complicity" in their fate. But the historian Lucy Dawidowicz points out that "complicity" and "cooperation" are terms that apply to situations of free choice. (pp. 115-116)

And so it is that these young souls are crushed long before they experienced rape. By the time they experience this heinous crime, they are already poised perfectly on the cusp of self-disgust. All they need is for one wolf in sheep's clothing to come along and push them in.

Chloe's spirit has been crushed by her rapist. He took everything—her ability to sleep, eat, get out of bed, go to class, be a friend. She could not get out from under the sense of being crushed until she graduated and left her college, moved out of the room she was raped in, moved out of the town in which she was raped.

The overwhelming feeling of sadness and loneliness was a big part of my life [after the sexual assault]. From the time I admitted things to myself and others to the time right before I moved [away] from [college].

For Sweetie, the feeling was horrible—every moment of every day, she was crushed, as if a huge boulder rest upon her chest, and no matter how hard she pushed, it just wouldn't move. Even at full-strength, she may not have had enough energy to push the thing off of her. Immediately after the rape, though, she was so depleted that she did not stand a chance.

I remember just feeling "blah" like I didn't want to do anything, didn't want to see anybody, and just felt all around crappy. I had no motivation and no motivation to take care of myself.

And so remained the stopping of spirits. From under the boulder, their voices were muffled, weakened. It would take a tremendous will to push it away, to climb out from underneath. Their spirits were crushed by a few moments of entitlement, a few moments of power taken *from them*. Those few moments can effect an eternity, and an eternity cannot be lived without spirit.

Spirit silenced.

I press my back as hard as I can against the jagged wall behind me. I feel the sharp rock digging through my shirt and I wonder if I am bleeding from these self-inflicted wounds. All around me the wind pushes and pulls, madly trying, it seems, to whisk me from my precarious spot and off to my death. I am so filled with terror and dread that I can hardly remember who I am or where I come from. I could not tell you about my past. It has been silenced by the wail of the wind.

A silenced spirit is one that has had memories erased, that has forgotten who it is. It is not only “absent of sound” (from the Old French, *silence*), but also absent of self, as the self is made up of so much memory. Chloe speaks to lost memory in terms of her survival experience. While she can now remember what happened during her rape, a fact that she is regretful of and thankful for at once, there are parts of her survival experience that are gone from her memory:

I think having lost memory is both a good and bad thing. Do you know how right when you wake up from a dream you can remember what it is about but later in the day when you try to recall the dream you can't? It mostly feels like that. Sometimes I think it is a good thing that I can't remember because the memories

would certainly be terrible. Other times it frustrates me because I try to put the puzzle together in my head and I feel like I am missing pieces.

Like a puzzle, one may know generally what would appear if the missing pieces were set in their proper places. Even knowing generally that the piece is part of a giraffe, or a tree, or the sun, one will not know exactly what the picture looks like unless the pieces are returned to their rightful places.

For rape survivors, not knowing can be horrifying as the mind reaches to construct what may have been. The real memory, however, once recovered, may be even more horrifying. It can be much more. Ricoeur (2004) writes,

One searches for what one fears having forgotten temporarily or for good...Is it a definitive erasing of the traces of what was learned earlier, or is it a temporary obstacle – eventually surmountable – preventing their reawakening? This uncertainty regarding the essential nature of forgetting gives the search its unsettling character. Searching is not necessarily finding. (pp. 27-28)

While there may be some peace for Chloe in the not knowing, the uncertainty leaves her with a gnawing hunger for that which has been lost to waking consciousness. It is in the “not finding” that Chloe feels a sense of what is missing, without quite knowing exactly what it was. The pieces around it are clear—the pain, the physical evidence, the flashes of memory that are disconnected from each other but are deeply connected to her visceral experience (Herman, 1997; Lauer, 2002; Ledray, 1994; Ogden et al., 2006; Rothschild, 2000). It is the unwitting silencing of self.

While, for some, the memory silences itself as a protective coping mechanism, for others the silencing comes from outer sources. For Beth, the silencing was imposed. The words and actions of the people around her gave her the sense that sharing, even acknowledging, her pain was a sign that she was being melodramatic. She says,

It made me want to keep silent and not talk to anyone. Even though my roommate did not say "you're to blame" her comment that I was making too big a deal about losing my virginity made me feel in some ways like "I shouldn't be so upset about this, so what, I didn't do enough, this is my fault." I guess in some ways I thought others would think that too if I tried to talk to them, so I kept quiet.

There is a silencing of breath, a silencing of self, a silencing of the truth, when spirit is silenced. As Beth looked around her, she read the actions of people around her and the messages they sent were clear: "We do not want to hear what you have to say." It was Beth's own *silent reading* of the word that imposed the stifling of her voice.

Abram (1996) writes,

For [silent] reading...our eyes converge upon a visible mark, or a series of marks, yet what they find there is a sequence not of images but of sounds, something heard; the visible letters, as we have said, trade our eyes for our ears. Or, rather, the eye and the ear are brought together at the surface of the text—a new linkage has been forged between seeing and hearing which ensures that a phenomenon apprehended by one sense is instantly transposed into the other. (p. 124)

So it is in *what is not said* that we hear what *is said*. Although only marked by motions in space, the human behavior around Beth could be read as well as words on a page: she was to be quiet. No definitive words were necessary to convey what Beth could clearly see with her eyes. No one wanted to listen. With no one listening, she could never be heard.

(Re)Iteration

I have explored a (re)iteration, of sorts, in the sameness of the self—the inner and the projected, or that which the survivor *feels* inwardly and that which she hopes others will see outwardly and believe. But what about the (re)iteration of the experiences that contribute to her sense of *being in the world*? What about the ways in which her experience of the rape, the actual violation, is (re)iterated as she moves through her

world? What about the word *rape*, and the ways in which it is used flippantly, minimizing the recognition of the utter ripping/tearing/crushing violence inflicted upon victims? What about the (re)iteration of the rapist, and the ways in which he (re)appears in her life, (re)aggravating her wounds, ensuring that, at least while within his reach, she will not heal.

Of the Rape

The rape is (re)iterated, time and again, for women in college. For the women in this study, rape happened in college, in real time, in real space, and still, the rape will be (re)iterated. It does not stop simply because she got up and walked away. The rape followed her out of the room, and stays just behind her everywhere she goes. The stoppings continue, inescapable, through every (re)iteration.

Chloe was raped by a friend, her ex-boyfriend, in her own bedroom in college. She had to sleep in that room for the rest of her senior year after the assault happened. That very space was a constant reminder of her rape, from the moment she woke up in the morning to the moment she went to bed at night:

My room in college was extremely tiny. About enough space for a full sized bed and my desk (I had to put my dresser in the closet, which is something no woman should ever be forced to do!) I had pictures of friends hanging on the wall as well as some posters of bands and sorority memorabilia. It felt like everything in my room somehow reminded me of him. The pictures of friends that he was also friends with. The posters of bands that we had gone to see in a group together. The memorabilia from my sorority to which I had taken him to many functions. It constantly felt like I was playing six degrees of separation [from him].

Surrounded by physical memorabilia of her ex-boyfriend, turned friend, turned rapist, the literal and figurative nightmares about Chloe's trauma became inescapable.

What is it like to wake up from a nightmare? There is, at first, the terrifying saturation of the nightmare. It is in you, all around you, an icy fearful ocean where every breath is drowned by salty, crashing waves. And then you wake. You're drenched, not by the sea, but by your own salty sweat. But you are here. You are safe. Your sheets are tangled around you, but they are your sheets, in the color you chose, in the bedroom you decorated, surrounded by pictures and furnishings that give you peace. You are grounded in reality, and reality is safe.

This was not the case for Chloe. She was raped in her bed, in her bedroom. Whenever she awoke from the nightmare in which she relived her rape, she awoke in the bed where he raped her. In the darkness of night, in the post-nightmare, dreamy state, she would look upon her walls and see pictures of his friends, memorabilia of events they attended together. These were her beloved friends, her beloved memories, and should be a comfort to her awakening from the nightmare.

For the first six months it didn't bother me because I was so in denial. After that it was interesting because as terrible as the thought was [of the rape happening there] and the nightmares it probably gave me, I couldn't seem to get out of it.

For Chloe, it was a metaphor for what was going on in her everyday experience, too. Her life was a nightmare that she could not pull herself out of. The rape, the rapist, took her ability to eat, to sleep, to move, to do...and so she was left, stuck in the nightmare, no matter if she was awake or asleep. She was tied to the room in some way—unable to get herself out—like the night he raped her. It wasn't until she was forced to depart at graduation that she was able to leave the room behind.

For some rape survivors, the (re)iteration comes in flashbacks, or (re)living(s) of the event. It happens very quickly; one moment you are doing something very

mundane—walking, sitting in class, talking to a friend, folding clothes—and the next moment you are back in the rape, reliving it, fully immersed in the feeling, the pressure, the tightness, the smells, the sounds. Rothschild (2000) writes:

A flashback is a re-experiencing of the traumatic event in part or in its entirety. Most familiar are visual and auditory flashbacks, but the term flashback might also apply to somatic symptoms that replicate the trauma in some way. Whatever the sensory system involved, a flashback is highly distressing, because it feels as though the trauma is continuing or happening all over again. (p. 66)

But what does the experience feel like in the body and bones of survivors?

Sweetie explains her experience: “It felt like I was back on the night of the sexual assault...I would physically be in the present moment but feel like I was in the past.”

Beth shares a flashback experience:

I was washing the dishes...and I relived the experience...I felt yucky, I felt dirty and I felt scared...I thought (even though it wasn't my fault that it happened) “Why did I let myself get there with him? Why did I let him in my room and in my bed? And, why on earth did I take my underwear off???” I felt scared because just remembering the situation puts me back in that metal bunk bed, in that dorm room and it gives me the not-good-tingles down my spine.

It is an overwhelming, inescapable moment that you cannot control. Your mind just does it, takes you there, and, at least in the beginning, there is no way to control when, how, and whether it happens at all.

As Rothschild (2000) explains, and survivors experience, sights and sounds can (re)iterate rape. Chloe's room was filled with memories of her rapist, but so was the campus. Walking by the buildings in which he had classes or the place he worked would (re)iterate the rape for her. She had to make great efforts to change her routes on campus so that she would not have to cross any of his potential paths. Even in doing so, however,

she was engaging in a (re)iteration—a deciding to move away from a memory, from remembering. Sweetie had similar experiences:

I think the sights [that emotionally affected me] were the spots on campus that I associated with it [the rape] - so the dining hall where I had first met the

perpetrator, the football stadium, the dorm where he raped me, the police station where I reported it. Those spots are all places I associate with the victimization.

What does it do to the college experience when the most common and mundane places on campus become (re)iterations of the rape?

For Beth, her rape was (re)iterated when she learned that she had contracted a sexually transmitted infection (STI) from her rapist. At the time, she was working in her mother's office:

I picked up a message from my GYN that there was an abnormality on my annual pap and I knew immediately that it was from the assault...I was practically in tears just upon hearing the message. I went to my mom's office...I closed her office door, sat in the chair right next to her desk and just told her...I had been secretly seeing a guy who came to my dorm one night, we were hooking up and then we had sex (here's when the crying really started) and I said, "but I didn't want to, I didn't want to!!"

She did not want to do it, but he did it anyway, and so much more. He raped her. He took her virginity. He infused her body with infection. She learned about the STI while she was at work, which pushed her into a (re)iteration of the rape in a way she never expected. When someone is raped once, they continue to be figuratively raped over and over again through the (re)iteration of the event, of the feeling, of the moments, of the memories. It is a painful attack on the senses, on the sense of self, on the sense of well-being. In the (re)iteration of rape, there is no well-being.

Of the Word

What is the power of words? What is in the sentiment of the childhood sing-song "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"? Can words *really* hurt? Can they be likened to sticks and stones hurled at hearts and minds, bodies and heads, young women with hopes and dreams for the future? Shakespeare's often quoted

question about name fits this well: “What’s in a name? A rose by any other name will still smell as sweet,” calls to question what *is* in a name? Are these just children’s simplifications of grown-up wishes—wishes for strength in the face of hurtful words? What *is* in a word? How are words received? How do they shift and move away from being in the world?

We can never underestimate the power of words. For survivors—for anyone on the receiving end of hatefulness—words can hurt as deeply as open flesh, but this kind of bloodshed cannot be seen by the naked eye. Words *can* wound like sticks and stones. In fact, the pain of word-wounds may be more intense. As bruises and cuts go away, the damage imprinted upon the soul can take a lifetime, or many lifetimes, to heal.

And even for Shakespeare’s Montagues and Capulets, the name, the word, meant everything and caused two “star crossed lovers” to take their own lives. The words, the names, ran deep, incited fear, and finally, ended in death. *Romeo and Juliet* is a cautionary tale for the loved ones of broken hearted souls. Be gentle with our wounded sisters, or lives may be lost in many ways.

There are words in our culture that carry generations of pain, suffering, torture, enslavement. Some words carry such weight that to just utter them can incite deep rage, and even violence. They are not uttered unless spoken in-group for purposes of reclaiming, or out-of-group to inflict pain. We know the power of these types of words too well through their connection with hatred, with slavery, with violation, with abuse, with murder. When these words are normalized by those in power, their ability to impose a torturous environment intensifies, as was accomplished by the lyrics below, sung by suburban White kids across the U.S. at the time of the song’s release:

Police and n*****, that's right
Get outta my way
Don't need to buy none of your gold chains today
Now don't need no bracelets
Clamped in front of my back
Just need my ticket 'til then
Won't you cut me some slack

Immigrants and f*****s
They make no sense to me
They come to our country
And think they'll do as they please
Like start some mini-Iran
Or spread some fucking disease
And they talk so many goddamn ways
It's all Greek to me (Rose, 1988)

If you've experienced a palpable reaction to these lyrics, sit with it for a moment. Notice it. Is your stomach churning? Is there a burning in your throat? Is the hair on your skin raised? Or are you numb to the impact? Many survivors are *not* numb to the impact. This song is one that celebrates the very words and deeds that have threatened and taken life throughout history. Such is the word *rape* for survivors—the symbolic representation of life threatened and taken.

Powerful and destructive, words and names can deeply hurt. Regardless of inner or outer appearances and experiences, words possess the force of horrendous beatings without leaving so much as a hint of a physical scar. For sexual assault survivors, they can be a (re)iteration of the rape. The experience of words in the scenarios above is similar to many words used about and against rape survivors. The word *rape*, the name of the rapist, and even certain words associated with the trauma can stir such deep emotion for survivors that they can be moved, as were Romeo and Juliet, to death.

For Beth, the phrase “sexual assault survivor” was so laden with emotion and reaction that it was hard for her to claim. It was hard for her to say the words because she blamed herself at first, instead of her rapist, for his acts against her. She thought that in using the words, she would be unduly placing blame on the man who raped her.

I thought people would judge me and think things like “Oh, you deserved it, you shouldn’t have let him come over to your room.” It was hard at first to use the words sexual assault survivor in reference to myself. In some ways I think I felt like I should have been stronger about saying no to him and telling him I didn’t want it and I consequently blamed myself for a while so I didn’t want to label myself that way.

She blamed herself for the rape and therefore did not believe that she deserved the title of sexual assault survival. Her thought was, if she did this to herself, was it really sexual assault?

Why would Beth be compelled to do anything other than blame herself when victim blaming is encouraged on a national political stage? When our very nation’s leaders make public statements that only certain types of rape are “legitimate,” it is clear that we live in a country nestled deep within a hornet’s nest. Under the proposed U.S. House Bill that would pull funding for abortions in any case other than “forcible” rape (No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, 2011), none of the participants would qualify for abortion funding. It is unconscionable, although very real, that one of our nation’s leaders would be so incredibly misinformed and yet so empowered to say:

It seems to me, first of all, from what I understand from doctors, [rape resulting in pregnancy] is really rare. If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down. But let’s assume that maybe that didn’t work or something. You know, I think there should be some punishment, but the punishment ought to be of the rapist, and not attacking the child. (U.S. Representative Akin, “The Repugnant Code”, 2012)

Words have power. Not only is there no factual basis for what Representative Akin said, but it stands as evidence of ignorance on the part of the country's leaders and citizens. He is saying that if any of the women in this study became pregnant after being raped (and at least one of them did), that it was not really rape at all. It is no wonder that rape victims self-blame when they live and breathe it as part of American culture.

Of course, Beth was not to blame for her rape. Her rapist, and only her rapist, was responsible for the act and the trauma that ensued. And yet, the words *sexual assault survivor* carried for her such weight. The words, and the meanings she placed behind them, became entangled with her feelings about sex and relationships. There was a maximization of the word—it seemed bigger than her experience. It seemed like more than she could claim while she was steeped in self-blame.

While Beth's experience was around the maximization of word meaning, the minimization of the word can deeply affect survivors, too. Specifically, the word *rape* is so often minimized by people in the unseen wake of survival that it can feel like a hailstorm of sticks and stones. The word *rape* is minimized through common phrases used on and around college campuses today, as portrayed in Sweetie's description:

It's incredibly hurtful and annoying to see...people's away messages online, like, that test just raped me... You're like no, it didn't, and if you had any fraction of knowledge of what it was like to be raped, you would NEVER be that insensitive to post something like that at all. And so it would just make me angry that people were that insensitive and ignorant and uneducated.

Survivors of rape are steeped in a minimization of their experiences. It is when such intense trauma is likened to gas prices, or the difficulty of taking a test, that many survivors are struck to their very core.

Probably the most powerful word for a survivor of sexual assault, though, is the rapist's name. Hearing his name can make her stop cold, forget what she was doing, and transport her back to the space and the time of the rape. Chloe recollects her experience hearing the name of her rapist:

When I heard his name [back] then it would give me a twisting feeling in the pit of my stomach. At that point I would automatically tune out whatever else the person was saying and re-play the events of the assault in my head, not on purpose of course.

The sound of his name could also make her feel as though she was watching the rape, as if it were playing on a movie screen. Either way, by hearing his name, Chloe was back in it, being raped, seeing herself being raped, helpless to stop it again and again.

Rapists come with many names. They come with names that their parents gave them and titles that have been bestowed upon them throughout their lives. Football star. Student Government President. Hometown Hero. Best Friend. Fraternity Man. Honors Student. It is the names they were given at birth that have deeply affected the lives of the women they raped. Sweetie had to listen to her rapist's name being broadcast over loud speakers and met with explosive cheers from devoted college football fans:

The sounds that bothered me most were hearing people talk about how awesome the football team and players were and hearing the games announced each weekend home game. My dorm was close to the stadium and we didn't have air conditioning so I often had windows open and could hear his name being announced when he would have a good play or make a tackle. That was always really hard.

Imagine that—she is in her room, trying to do homework, and is bombarded moment after moment by his name, exploding out of a loud speaker, followed by erupting cheers. The noise is deafening and inescapable. On game days, it is almost impossible to escape the sounds of the announcers and fans anywhere on campus, but Sweetie has an auditory

front row seat. She would have to leave campus entirely to escape the sound, but she does not have a car. Instead, she sits in her residence hall room and tries her best to think about other things—anything but being raped by the college man who is cheered on by thousands of fans. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

The living body, under these circumstances, could not escape the determinations which alone made the object into an object and without which it would have had no place in the system of experience. The value predicates which the reflecting judgment confers upon it had to be sustained, in being, by a foundation of fittingness and a meaningful relationship between the gesture...and the tone of a speaker. But this reciprocal relationship of expression which presents the human body as the outward manifestation of a certain matter of being-in-the-world, had, for mechanistic physiology, to be resolved into a series of causal relations. (p. 55)

The object here, of course, is the massive crowd of screaming fans rooting *for* Sweetie's perpetrator, the *for-ness* of their rooting, rooted in elation. Without the rape these sounds would have perhaps been innocuous or even positive for Sweetie. After having so many pieces of herself damaged and broken by the man, however, the sound of his admirers created another stopping in her life. Her movement toward healing was stopped by the very gestures of his followers, heightened through television coverage. Her movement toward wholeness, again, stopped by the very tone of the speakers, the devotees, amplified through stadium speakers. These sounds laid the foundation of Sweetie's meaning on the matter. This so-called "reciprocal relationship" was one of "causal relations." As the excitement of the crowd increased, so did Sweetie's anxiety and feelings of unsettled distress.

Sweetie was further barraged by his name in print and in conversation:

It was pretty unavoidable because there was coverage everywhere including the school's newspaper and just hearing people talk on campus. It was and is awful to hear about him publicly, largely, because most people idolize him [as an athlete].

I get that people don't understand and they don't know what he has personally done so people don't often think of what someone is like "off the field."

On the field countless fans adore him. Off the field, he is a hometown hero, a philanthropist, a great guy...to everyone but Sweetie. To Sweetie, he is a monster. And Sweetie is likely not his only victim. Acquaintance rape is often committed multiple times by the same perpetrator (Lisak & Miller, 2002). Even today she still cannot fully escape the television coverage of his successful career. For Sweetie, her perpetrator is always there—his presence has a periodic, but constant emergence and is therefore deeply linked to her way of being in the world.

Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

What we have pointed out earlier with regard to the existential Constitution of the “there” and in relation to the everyday Being of the “there”, pertains to the most primordial phenomenon of truth, nothing less. In so far as Dasein *is* its disclosedness essentially, and discloses and uncovers as something disclosed to this extent it is essentially ‘true’. *Dasein is ‘in the truth’*. (p. 263)

Sweetie’s way of being in the world is “in the truth” of her perpetrator’s constant presence. It is the very inescapability of him that keeps her truth tethered to him. She is there in his presence whenever he unexpectedly comes up in conversation, comes over the event speakers, the news, and on television. He is there, a constant reminder to her of the trauma he inflicted upon her. *Theirs* is an intertwined *there-ness*, always *there* and keeping her tethered to the past.

Aeryn had to drop out of her extra-curricular activities and her major because her rapist was president of many organizations they had in common. Even after he graduated, she changed her major so that she would not have to be confronted by his presence—

reminders of him through his friends, classes he took, clubs in which he served as a leader.

He was a senior [when he raped me] so by the time I was a sophomore he was gone, but all of the people that were his friends or...people who knew him, they didn't even have to be his friends! His name would come up and [it was] like, yuck, ick! I don't want to be in a club where his name is [even written] on stuff!

Her world was turned up-side-down, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, when she was raped by the charismatic student leader. She entered college expecting to explore her life passion through coursework, internships, and extra-curricular activities. It was through her passion for politics, however, that he preyed upon her. After being raped by him, being part of that world, part of the next generation of politicians, was simply not possible, not feasible. There were too many reminders of him. Even today, removed from the world of politics, she runs across his name periodically because of his status as a high-powered attorney. Like Sweetie, she still cannot escape her rapist's name. His presence in her life continues to periodically, unexpectedly, be thrust upon her.

Chloe still hears his name in social circles. Sweetie cannot watch NFL games because she will see him and hear his name. For Sweetie, Aeryn, and Chloe, seeing names prompted recollections, gave them direction, moved them in different directions. It may not be direction each woman would have chosen for herself, but rape, and subsequently his name, could then and can still create directional change in many ways.

For Chloe, it is not just the sound of his name that emotionally moves her. The word rape, even today, has the power to evoke tremendous negative feelings.

I will always struggle with the word "rape." I hear it, I feel a pit in my stomach and my ears immediately perk up. It still seems like such an angry, loaded and overly-powerful word.

His name can derail conversation, it can cause her to be stopped in her tracks, it can compel her to change majors, it can change her campus involvement, it can change focus from something to do with school to him, the rape, the trauma. It can stop the healing. His name has power over her. Words have power.

Rememberings of the Rapist

The men who have raped these women are college men. They live on the same campuses, they eat in the same dining halls, they take the same classes. One of the hardest things to understand about the experience of sexual assault survival for women in college is that there is nothing in particular that distinguishes their rapists as different from any other men on campus—at least not on the surface. And it is that surface that the rest of campus and, indeed, the world sees. So when a woman on campus says, that guy—the one you go to class with, hang out with, see all the time—he raped me—it is hard for people on the outside to understand and to put faith in her words. She sees that guy—the guy who looks no different, and she knows what he is capable of—that he is capable of doing one of the worst things you can do to another human being. She knows because he did it to her. Everyone else? They haven't seen him actually doing anything like that, so they stare in disbelief at her, while trying to defend him at the same time. She wishes that the skepticism could be directed at him, that the questions, the anger, the blame, could be directed at him, but that is not the experience. And that affects how she lives and breathes and exists on campus.

She hears people say that she is the crazy one, that she is the one ruining his life, that she is the one trying to bring down a pillar of the community—instead of a glimmer

of sensitivity for her. It is through seeing him and experiencing reminders of him that she continually relives the heinous act he committed against her. As Pink relates:

Heinous [is the word I would use to describe] the act of any assault. I cannot wrap my head around what kind of monsters people are capable of being able to hurt someone in such a primal and personal way.

For Pink, the word *heinous* encapsulates her feelings about rape. It is hateful, and shockingly evil. The monsters, in the form of both the rapist, and the reminders of him, are out there on campus, waiting to continue the torture of the survivors who are already existing within so much pain.

Sweetie encountered her monster in a bar some time after he raped her. He trapped her in a corner and acted as if raping her had been just a small mistake, a misunderstanding. He apologized for raping her—admitting to doing it—and then asked if they could begin dating. It was a fundamental minimization of what he did to her. It terrified her and infuriated her at once.

I was feeling ambushed, confused, and angry. I was cornered in the bar down a dark hallway - it was scary and I had no way out. I didn't think he would hurt me right there in public like that but it was frightening to be confronted by him like that. I was mad that he felt he could just come up to me like that, apologize, and then tell me he wanted to date me and that what happened was a misunderstanding. To be honest, it's hard to even remember the details of what he said and what I said but I remember it wasn't a pleasant exchange. I was grateful when it was over and appreciative of the support I found in [a friend] and then later that night from my mom.

Sometimes hearing his name and seeing him could happen in one night—multiplied (re)iterations of the rape.

Chloe often experienced this kind of (re)iteration, especially as she and her rapist continued to be in the same social circles:

There were a lot of nights that I would be hanging out with my friends and either he would show up, someone would be talking about him or anything else that would remind me of him would leave me in tears. I felt like he had control over my emotions at that point. Because I was upset and my friends would spend time trying to make me feel better or I would feel like I had ruined their night, I felt like he had control over their emotions as well.

For many survivors, there is no way to escape because they will always carry their own remembrances. As Chloe points out, “I would try to spend time with friends or exercising but no matter what I did there was something that made me think about him.” Chloe felt, as many do, that it was nearly impossible to get away from the remembrances, the (re)iterations of the rape.

At the time it felt like everything reminded me of him. From the buildings on campus we had once had lunch in, from the mutual friends that I so closely associated with him, to the bed he tried to rape me in down to even the pictures hanging on my bedroom wall. He was a big part of my college experience and was a close friend so a lot of things reminded me of him or reminded me of something that reminded me of him.

What is it to remember? To have a memory? To be *in the mind* or *mind-ful*? In being mindful, one is present to the immediate thought, placing all attention upon it. So, in order to remember something, it is to be fully focused on it, for it to be at the forefront of thought. And what is it to bring rape into that kind of focus? It is a shocking, halting moment, or an ongoing vivid awareness. Carman (2008) conceives:

Remembering is possible only on that of forgetting, *and not vice versa*; for in the mode of having forgotten, one’s having been ‘disclosed’ primarily the horizon into which a *Dasein* lost in the ‘superficiality’ of its object of concern, can bring itself by remembering. (p. xx)

For survivors of sexual assault, remembering and forgetting are often at odds.

There can be a deep desire to forget what has happened, as if by forgetting the horror of it

will go away. This cannot be so, of course. The reality of the trauma will be with the survivors forever. Sooner or later, the memories emerge.

Nonetheless, the desire to forget is strong. Ledray (1994) writes:

He had gone. Afraid to move, Carol was still gripping the sheets tightly up around her neck. Her first thought was that she had to hide what had happened. "If no one knows, it will be less real. It's over, so I'll just forget about it and go on like nothing happened." But she couldn't block it from her mind. (p. 145)

The remembering of something must have been precluded by a forgetting. It is in that forgetting that the mind can find some peace, a peace that is jolted away and replaced by incredulous fear when the memory of the rape, the rapist, surfaces. It is a feeling of being shocked. The remembering can be overwhelming.

There was a sense of shock and overwhelming-ness that Sweetie experienced as she caught sight of her rapist coming toward her on campus. It was a jolt of memory, one that rang through her body like a giant tolling bell in very close range.

One time, I was walking across campus shortly after the rape - maybe a week or two. And I was passing a pretty narrow path with lots of people and my perpetrator walked right by me (in other direction). I literally collapsed...just like my legs gave out right after he passed and I fell down. I just quickly got up and walked away as fast as possible...I think my mind just went blank. I remember just feeling numb and like I literally couldn't stand in his presence - just felt weak. There wasn't a significant lead up because it was after turning the corner on the path so I didn't see him too far ahead.

When I speak to people about rape on college campuses, they often assert the misconception that rapists are more likely to be strangers jumping out of the bushes than friends sitting next to you in class. Pink describes rapists as monsters, never quite knowing where they might come from. Like remembrances and (re)iterations of rape, Pink shares it as a fact of life. Monsters are out there; that's just the way it is.

I don't know which thought is worse, that people are inherently bad or others breed evil. I know that there are monsters out there, I have had more than enough experience to know they exist but it's always scary to not know when/if you will come across them again. I define a monster as someone who has no regard for hurting others, they either enjoy or ignore other's acute pain. I know as many good people are in the world. I know there are equally bad people out there. It used to be a scary thought but now I just take it as a fact of life. (Pink)

Through (re)iterations of the rape, the word, his name, and of him, sexual assault survivors in college are faced with remembrances of trauma every moment of every day and every night. There is no escaping it. There is only a waiting to get out to the other side of the divide.

The Divide

Would I ever heal?

No I would not.

I would become someone else. (Stern, 2010, p. 57)

The divide. A great chasm that separates here-ness and there-ness, cutting two pieces that were once one. There is a now and then, a present and past, an experience of two lives that are tethered together by the trauma that split them apart. There is a sense of becoming *someone else*.

Separate Selves

Before the assault, I would have probably [described myself as] young, happy, daughter, sister, friend, student and perhaps right after my emotions would have been...instead of happy...victim, anxious, depressed. (Sweetie)

There is a *before and after*, a separation of selves that happens for survivors of sexual assault after the rape has begun to take its toll. Survivors speak of feeling like a different person than they were before the rape. The happiness that was present before has gone away and been replaced by victimization, anxiety, and depression.

Chloe speaks of having to find a new way of being in the world after experiencing rape in college:

At the time right after the assault nothing felt natural. It was as if I was learning how to interact with people and the environment all over again like someone that has been kept in seclusion for years. When I said 'what felt natural' I meant that I eventually went back to being my old self and I didn't have to try so hard. It was kind of like when you are learning to ski. At first all of your movements are really purposeful. You have to think about how to turn and where your feet go. That what is was like after the assault. As time goes on and you get better at skiing it comes more natural, you don't have to think about what direction to turn your feet, you are just more comfortable on the skis.

Chloe struggled with who she became after the rape—so different than the person she was before: “After the assault I found it hard to see the positives in [relationships with friends and family] or my school work and felt like I was failing miserably.” It was difficult for Chloe, who had been a high-achieving, highly social college student prior to being raped, to make peace with the new person the rape created in her. They were so different, and yet they were intertwined.

How can two strangers occupy one self? And what is it to live in that intertwined body, selfhood and otherness in one? Ricoeur (1992) writes:

It is the result of the change of orientation of the celebrated dialectic of the Same and the Other when it comes in contact with the hermeneutics of the self. In fact, it is the pole of the Same that is the first to lose its univocity, through the fragmentation that occurs when the identical is split by the dividing line that separates *ipse* from *idem*. The temporal criterion of this division, namely the twofold valence of permanence in time, depending on whether it designates the immutability of *idem* or the self-constancy of *ipse*, deserves to be recalled one last time. (pp. 317-318)

The rape, then, becomes a “great change of orientation” for survivors, wherein the self that is known well before the rape becomes othered by the rape itself. Or is it that the self after rape is the other? There is no need to clarify the difference because they are both

true; one is one and the other is the other, always, depending only on the perspective from which you view the experience. The rape survivor before the rape is the same as she has been before, and the rape survivor after the rape is the same as she has been after. Each to the other, however, is *other*. Regardless of sides, the two must find a way to be together, and not let the otherness be a stopping. For some time, though, the otherness will be a stopping, until they begin to find their way toward a peaceful togetherness: same/same and other/other as one. Chloe says:

It did absolutely feel like I had to figure out a new way of being in the world and interacting with other people. How would I ever be able to date someone again? How would I trust anyone? After all he was once one of my good friends and I trusted him. It definitely felt like there was a hole and I couldn't pinpoint exactly what it was and I don't think that I actively ever did anything about it. I think that time sort of healed that wound.

From the trust before, to the distrust after, Chloe's world became defined by a great chasm between her two lives separated by rape. For her, the rape created "a great hole," and on either side stood *self* and *other*. Over time she began to heal, but in college the chasm became her stopping. There was no bridge yet built to cross it—no way to join the *separate selves* together.

On the other side of the place where no bridge existed, Chloe's world *there* seemed so *different*, and her world *before* seemed so *different*, and those differences were accentuated by the rape in between. It was as if the rape had muted all things around her being(s) as they *stood* on either side, and that her being seemed to *stand out*, just as pain seems to tint the color of all things. Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) writes:

A certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red. The color is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relations with the surroundings: this red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates

or that dominate it...that it repels or that repel it...Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things. (pp. 132-133)

Chloe's way of being in these two places—before the rape and after the rape—were then made more strange to her by the way they were juxtaposed with her surroundings. The backdrop of her life became washed out and faded while all of her ways of being were brightened-to-blinding and agonizing to see. Like the constellation, there were connections devised by the mind, but to the naked eye, they were as far away as two stars in space. Dominant and dominated, repelling or repelled, they were left to be apart. She would not find the “tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them”, she would not find the “possibility” of her future until her future became there with her.

Choosing Sides

The real friend is the person who, no matter what, *sides* with *you*. When the choice is between *you* and *another*, for the real friend, there is no choice. There is only *you*.

When so-called friends begin to side, especially for those friends who choose to side with the rapist, the heart of the survivor is cut in two—it is sectioned, it is broken, it is *sided*. From the Old English, *side* means “flank.” Combined with its action, to side, to cut, one finds the cutting off of the sides, as in a side of beef. This cutting, this siding, is painful for the survivor of sexual assault. Like a sharp knife slicing her, allowing her to keep only her core, taking from her all of the flesh that protects her from the elements, the act of *siding* against her can be devastating.

For Chloe, this division of friends happened her senior year, after her rape, and after years of friendship with those involved.

It seemed like after things came out in the open within that group a sort of natural divide occurred. They were no longer "our" friends; they were his friends or my friends. While with only one exception, the people that wound up in the group of "his friends" have never said anything to me or treated me badly. To this day it is still hard for me to be around them because they strongly remind me of what happened.

At first, Chloe did not know there was a divide. Friends spoke in whispers behind her back, assessed the situation for themselves without knowing what happened. Chloe told only a small number of very trusted friends, so it was unthinkable that others might know. To Chloe, her secret was safe with her closest of friends, but that was not the case. The secret was told, trust was broken, divisions became clear, and the pain cut Chloe to the bone.

I vividly remember one instance about a year after the assault where I was at a birthday party for a friend. It was really late and most people had gone home. I was about to fall asleep on the couch when I overheard a friend of his arguing with a friend of mine in the kitchen. I couldn't hear how the argument started but I definitely heard him say "I think Chloe is a bitch because she said that my friend raped her and he didn't." At this point I was unaware that anyone other than the few close friends I had confided in even knew about the situation. I remember feeling like my heart was beating out of my chest, I was sweating and shaking. I couldn't think straight. I locked myself in a bathroom for 3 hours to get out of the panic attack.

The division, the cut, the siding, caught her off guard. Word was out, and people were siding. The slashing left her raw, and pained, and in need of a place to escape. She found that place with new friends who provided refuge in their unawareness of the sides. To them, there was only one side—the side of loyalty and friendship. Chloe explained that “hanging out with new people who were unaware of the situation, didn't know him and certainly didn't pity me was a nice change.”

Escape is not always possible, however. On a college campus that was, for Chloe, divided into “me and him”, it took more than making new friends to escape. There were always reminders. There were always sidings, as if her places on campus were divided into “us versus them”. Chloe never wanted the division, but, like he forced himself upon her, so was the border between them:

It felt terrible. It felt like once again, the situation was out of my control. A lot of our mutual friends stopped talking to me because the inaccurate story they heard led them to believe I was lying and that I was trying to make their friend (him) out to be a criminal. Looking back now, I know that they could not have been that great of friends anyway but back then it shattered my world.

The life she knew was shattered with a realization of how fragile it was after the corrosive effects of rape. It became the thinnest of glass thrown down upon the rough and rugged rock.

But maybe in the breaking, one might put on the brakes, and a stopping may be a pause that leads to movement. For in the breaking, in the shattering of something beautiful, there is the loudest of noises that those within earshot cannot ignore. So in this pause, attention is brought to the trauma and pain which may not have happened had the clamor not reached so far and wide. Perhaps somewhere within the din of broken silence, a movement back together might be found.

Control

For sexual assault survivors, power and authority over their own lives have been taken away. In taking her body—that one most intimate, private, personal possession—for himself, the rapist asserted his own power and authority and took hers away. Control—gaining it, losing it, having it at all—can be a central part of the sexual assault survivor’s experience. It is akin to autonomy and empowerment; it is “a sense of

separateness, flexibility, and self-possession...[to know] one's self interests...and make significant choices" (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988, pp. 140-141). To have that control taken away is a loss of these things, and therefore a loss of self.

When the survivor has lost control, or had control of her body taken away, she can feel that her ability to "reduce the...severity of" her response to the rape has been taken away as well. As Chloe articulates, for her "the control issues started when he physically took control over me that night." And what does that mean? What did it feel like for Chloe, for the others, to have control taken, lost, and broken? These I will explore below.

The Taken

For many survivors, it is the act of having control *taken* away that is central to the experience. Feeling out of control—powerless—is an overwhelming, consuming state of mind. With respect to what contributes to the feeling of being out of control, Sweetie says "I think anything could do that - I mean even stress in school like trying to keep up with school work and feeling like there was too much could bring on those feelings." She goes on: "It would stress me out. In using school work as an example, I felt like I was failing, 'drowning' in the work, and it made me anxious that I couldn't keep up."

For Chloe, when control was taken from her, she was powerless to do anything about it. It affected her physically and emotionally; she felt as though he had taken control of her body and emotions, and that he would not let go, even for months and years after the rape:

At first he physically took control over me during the sexual assault. He was bigger and heavier and I could not get away. He had an emotional control over me by making me feel guilty as if it were my fault. When I felt like I didn't have

control over my emotions I would cry at the drop of a hat over anything that reminded me of him!

Physically, control was taken. Emotionally, control was taken. What else is left if these things are lost? An emptiness is left where she used to be whole.

In the most important *ways*, Chloe's control was wiped *away*. For Chloe, the experience was one of hopelessness and helplessness. She was often "immobilized by fear" (Ledray, 1994), stuck and stopped by the sense that she might never be okay again.

Ledray writes:

Once a rape has ended and the woman has survived, an intensely personal second struggle begins for her: to recover, to take back control over her body and her life, and even to forge a stronger identity as a result of what has happened. (p. 4)

It was the struggle of her life—for her life—and for the rest of her life in college, she would be plagued by what he did to her. Unable to physically will herself out of bed, unable to emotionally hold back tears, Chloe was left powerless to the world around her. The input did not matter—coursework, friends, walking on campus, driving around—she found that she could not manage her own stoppings or goings. It terrified her. It stopped her movement toward healing:

It was tough to realize that because it made me feel helpless. It made me feel like if I couldn't change that situation what would happen if I were ever in that situation again? What could I do if I couldn't control it?

In the stopping there was a fear of doing. In the fear of doing, nothing could be done.

Within Chloe's state of being *stopped*, nothing could have been done differently to stop the rape, so why do anything at all? It was a loss of agency. It was a loss of self, and direction, and command.

And in the loss of self, and direction, and command can emerge a desire to reclaim these things. When agency has no great depth or breadth, however, one may be left to control one's life in ways that could put existence in jeopardy. Sweetie reflects on her experience with control:

I didn't really realize this as much of a negative thing at the time, but I would sometimes take MORE than my prescribed dose of anxiety pills and not disclose that to the doctor. I didn't want to appear like I was failing which is so silly to me now because if I needed more I don't think I would have been judged but maybe at the time I was afraid of that so I self-medicated.

In desperation to regain control, or to appear in control, Sweetie might have lost the one thing she struggled daily just to keep—her very life. By taking MORE, she was controlling LESS, and that less-ness chipped away at her life. The desire to appear in control, to enact some level of control over her life, led her to feel as though she could not be honest with others about her internal truth—her true experience. She was wary of trusting her doctor with what she perceived as her own imperfection. So, she feigned perfection on the outside, while inside she remained lost.

For Beth and Lulita, the feeling of *lost-ness* came with their *taken* sexuality—taken by their rapists—which led them to re-take it for themselves in ways that did not fill the loss of control they experienced during and following the rape(s). Both women sought to reclaim their respective sexualities by having more sex with more partners than they would have otherwise.

The Lost

[I was] grieving what I lost about myself and all the time I spent coping with something that this guy took from me.
(Aeryn)

There is a feeling of lost-ness after control has been taken in such a violent and traumatizing way. And in that lost-ness there is a feeling of loss—feeling lost, and grieving a loss. There are so many losings in survival. When control has been taken, the lost-ness overcomes the sense of control, unsure where it is or how to get it back, or even that it is possible to get it back. It might seem strange to anyone outside the experience. One may ask, “If she felt in control of her life before the assault, how can she feel so out of control after? Can’t she just regain it? Can’t she just bring it forth again?” But it is lost, she is lost, and she grieves the losses.

Grieving the losses.

When I was in my mid-20s, my friend Tad was killed in a car accident. He was a wonderful husband to my dear friend Danielle, and a brand new father to a sweet baby girl named Veda. To celebrate his life, we went to the woods—a beautiful arboretum that stands alone among the corn and soy fields of rural Michigan. It was a stunning day, and as each person spoke to his memory, the sun sparkled off soft ripples on the lake behind them. After Tad died, Danielle went to a place of such deep mourning that it became very hard to find her. I was there *with her* all the time, every day, every week, but most of the time I could tell that she wasn’t there *with me*. I think that baby girl was the only thing that kept her alive after Tad died.

This kind of deep loss, deep mourning, is not too different than the place one goes after being raped (Herman, 1992). There is a lost-ness, an un-find-ability that comes with having something so precious taken away so quickly. There is no warning. There is just loss and grief.

For Sweetie, her experience of loss and grief after being raped was not unlike the feelings that consumed her after her father died. She lost her father when she was very young, but even today there are feelings of sadness that he is no longer here. She experiences parallel feelings related to her rape survival:

Similar to grief, the pain never goes away but it does lessen over time and you learn how to support yourself and how to get support from others. It's not that different from my father's death when I was 10. It was the worst thing in the world and still is a tragic experience that affected my life. But at this age, the pain hurts a little less than it did when I was 10. Certain times of year are still tough (e.g., the holidays, my wedding), but that is to be expected. Same thing with sexual assault. Certain times of year (the anniversary of rape or hearing about perpetrator on TV/news during football season) can make the wound feel more fresh, but I don't think about it all the time anymore.

Chloe could not identify the core of the:

I am not exactly sure how to articulate what I was grieving. Perhaps the loss of control, the loss of innocence, etc. I think that now the grieving means the same thing to me except that I am able to look back on it as a whole experience.

Childhood loss is felt more deeply than any other loss at any other time in one's existence. There is an intensity, a long lasting-ness, that latches on to the soul and hangs on for the duration of a lifetime. Childhood feelings are carried into adulthood and continue to be seen through the eyes of the child within. Children are profoundly affected by the loss of people in their lives—parents, grandparents, siblings, friends—and they can also be profoundly affected by divorce. It is a loss of family, and in that loss of family comes mourning.

For Chloe, the feeling of mourning, like in the dawn of morning, was the slipping-away of a distant dream. Once so clear, the dream becomes hazy, and then falls away to nothing sooner or later. After being raped, Chloe noticed a mirroring of the feelings she had when her parents divorced—a deep loss of family, indeed. It affected her to her core:

I think in both cases...they were traumatic experiences that I have gone through. In all three situations you deal with grieving, acceptance of reality and moving on.

It was a tugging at her senses, a pulling back to that time in her life when she lost her family as it had always been. Like her family, her life was still present after the rape, but it would never be the same. She could never go back to that time, just as the child within her could never go back, either.

Witte-Townsend (2002) writes,

When it happens that a visit from the past assaults our senses and draws us suddenly away from the present, such as a childhood memory can catch us unaware. In the creak of a door when we enter a room, the rustle and scent of paper when a forgotten box is opened, or when the light catches the sky in a particular way and our eyes suddenly see a scene that stood before us in a time long since past, we may meet ourselves again. Thus, our own childhood lingers within us and may be released by any of a thousand gentle sensory intrusions. (p. 169)

So it is, too, for survivors of sexual assault when the loss of life before the rape tugs at the memory of childhood loss. It “catches us unaware.” It is the flash of bright sunlight that changes this moment to the childhood moment, to the moment of having your soul thrust out of you by the weight of a man pressing down.

Feeling lost.

Power and control that have been taken feel subsequently lost, unable to be found. Gone. For Pink, the sense of lost-ness came in a feeling of chaos, of being away from center. The taken and the lost are part of the chaos, part of the sense of away-ness from center. For her, there was a sense of stormy ups and downs, of losing her grounding, of feeling up in the air.

Being [lost] means chaos. I always say I'm either spiraling up or spiraling down, I don't think I know how to stay still. I feel like I have no other choice than to constantly live a life in motion. Center for me is having positive motion opposed

to negative. Being able to see the positive, not being overwhelmed, and not letting one bad day turn into many. Centered is being healthy, not waking up with illness, dread or depression. I go many months that I'm happy and on top of the world and then I fall into ruts where I feel like I'm chasing an accident with an illness with a bad attitude with bad luck. Centered means being able to brush things off without feeling like it's the end of the world.

The chasing, the ups, the downs, the constant movement—Pink finds her peace and chaos at once. The chaos, in some ways, has become her way of being in the world, and so there becomes a found-ness in the lost-ness for her. There becomes a sense of knowing the chaos, such that if the chaos stopped, if the movement stopped, she would feel away from center. The movement pulls her toward her center, and the movement pulls her away. Perhaps there is a lost-ness in the movement.

Lost-ness is triple-fold: lost to self, lost to loved ones, and lost to spirit. In terms of self, you are lost in that even if you find your way up to the next ledge, you may not find stable land or a way out. You are lost to your loved ones in that they do not know where you are or even if you are alive. And if you are lost in a perpetual state of direction-less-ness, or stuck-ness, then hope and heart may be lost to yourself, too.

Rape survival is much the same. Rape may cause such a physical, mental, or emotional change in you that your family begins to feel that they no longer know you. When you cannot find your own direction, you begin to feel lost, yourself, to yourself. And as that sense of lost-ness grows, it can crush the spirit of survival.

When the spirit of survival was lost for Chloe, she was sometimes able to find herself through a lost-ness of her choosing. Locked in a physical darkness, sometimes the darkness that plagued her would subside. She describes:

Sometimes instead of crying I would get myself so worked up that my heart would race, I would shake and I would be extremely irritable. Sometimes sitting by myself in a dark room would calm me down, sometimes it wouldn't.

Chloe was lost in the heart-racing, body-shaking, irritable self that was a stranger to her. She was lost to herself. He had taken so many pieces of her, and had hidden them far away such that she may not ever be able to find them again.

Standing Up, Looking Forward

Here on this ledge, I could be trapped for the rest of my life. And if I remain here for the rest of my life, I will not last long. It is too precarious. Every singular moment is the moment I could fall. No. I will not let it happen. I *cannot* let that happen. I inch my feet as close as I can to my body, and I press my back against the wall even harder than before. My hands are cold now as the sun sets and the wind picks up. I can barely feel my fingers as they inchworm under the palms of my hands and up and under the sides of my back. It is up to my legs and the palms of my hands. My fate rests in these pieces of me.

I start to push up, but I slip...only an inch or two, but enough to send rocks and dust over the edge. That could be me, but I cannot think of that now. My only thought now has to be about the top of the next ledge. I hope it is bigger than this one. I hope it leads to something good, something with a bigger, more stable foundation. I hope it leads to some kind of finding, to some kind of *being found*. I want to be a *being found* instead of a *being lost* in this precarious place, just inches from death.

And so I inch up and up and the small , sharp cuts in my skin become long gashes. I can feel my back becoming wet and I can only hope that it is sweat. Up and up I go by the tiniest increments because I can no longer see. The sun has set and I am in the dark. I

am halfway up, though. There is no going back down. There can only be movement up. I give myself permission only for upward movement.

And somehow, I find myself standing, and the next ledge is right there. I barely need to pull myself up. I feel my way forward on my hands and knees, tentatively, and the space seems to be quite large. I can stretch my body all the way out, and I cannot feel another drop off. I have no way of knowing anything about my place in the world other than that I am tired...so tired. I tuck my freezing fingers under my knees and pull them in close for warmth. I will sleep for now, I will remain *stopped* for now, and when the sun comes up I will see what morning brings.

As I sleep, I find myself comforted by long stretches of peaceful, quiet blackness. I am suspended in it. Like a womb, it seems to give me nourishment and strength for whatever I may face once the sun rises again. And then, far in the farthest distance of my dream, I hear the quiet tapping of running feet. They are moving quickly, toward...what? I want to know. I want to be in movement toward whatever it is. I want those distant feet to be my feet. And perhaps they are. Perhaps after so much *stopping*, so much stillness, all I need to do is wake up...and *move*...

**CHAPTER 5:
DIRECTION(MORE): THE THINGS THAT MOVE US**

When the Japanese mend broken objects they aggrandize the damage by filling the cracks with gold, because they believe that when something's suffered damage and has a history it becomes more beautiful. (Barbara Bloom, shared by Pink)

I know the sun has risen because my eyelids, still covering my eyes, give only the sense-image of red illumination. Waking from the cold of night to the warmth of day, I find myself (a)wakening, open to new ways of knowing and being. Like frozen grasses released from icy encasement in the Spring, I feel my body relax and reposition. After days of being *stopped* on the ledge, I am now ready to *move*.

I open my eyes and see that I am surrounded by open-ness. Beyond my feet lies a deadly freefall into the great abyss. To my left and right and beyond my head, though, is a vast expanse of dry, open ground. It is cracked and dusty from the unrelenting sun, but it is solid. These cracks may not be filled with gold, but that does not keep me from seeing them for the beauty that lies within. This earth, as broken as I am, is yet held together by a solid core. I will “aggrandize the damage” and find a beautiful foundation here.

I see in the distance a stretch of trees, where the parched earth is healed and given what it needs to sustain life. That is where I want to be, and so I begin to *move* toward it. The quiet, distant, running feet from my dream are now my own, and in a flash they are pounding against the burning rock. I send dust in small bursts behind me as my movement gains momentum. My body is depleted, but I find that I cannot keep from running. I need to be among the trees, surrounded by the living, the breathing, the growing.

As I arrive on the edge of the dense forest, all of my senses find relief. The hot rock dust that burned my nose is replaced with something wetter, more floral. The sun that was beating down on the top of my head, scorching my scalp through thick, curly hair, is concealed by a canopy of thick leaves. In stark contrast to the deafening wind across the open land, amid the quiet of the trees I can hear water trickling somewhere. I allow the sound to guide me. I am so thirsty. My need for that clear, cold liquid rises up as if I am holding back tears. I find the source. I kneel on the mossy bank. Relief, as an exhale through parted, cracked lips leaves me just before great gulps of fluid are poured in. I remain on the bank on all fours, panting, belly full and cold, until I can continue.

One day, I will be okay. One day, my broken-ness will be filled with gold and I will find it beautiful because it is a part of me. It might not happen today. It probably won't happen in college. Even when I am years away from college, having graduated or dropped out, having gotten away from the place where he did this to me, I will probably be okay most of the time, but not all of the time. There will always be moments of not being okay, but they will no longer *stop* me. I will, one day, have the agency, the strength, the power to *move* past them. I will be on the *move*—on top of my own *movement* within survival. I will mend my own broken pieces with gold, and I will know that I am more beautiful than I have ever been.

But does that make it okay? Does my survival mean that years of my life were not devastated by some college boy who seemed to be perfectly safe, but instead became the embodiment of danger? Are his actions somehow negated by the fact that I know now how truly beautiful I am...most of the time? What about those of us who barely held onto the pieces...to the college degree...to precious, precious life? No. My beauty today does

not resolve his sins. My beauty today only proves that his sins could not keep me on that floor. More or less, I will be okay. But that will never make it okay. That will never make it okay that he raped me. The broken-ness may be mended, and I will be okay. There will be movement toward healing, and while healing is not a destination, I will keep moving in that *direction*.

Chapter 4 addressed survival's *stoppings*—the lived experiences that halt healing and prevent progress. This chapter addresses survival's *movings*—the lived experiences that encourage healing and cultivate progress. What is the experience of movement when it is encouraged, when obstacles are removed from its course, and when it is able to gain momentum? What is it to move, or to be moved? What is it to have direction? Is it as simple as taking a step forward or back? Is it an action that is pressed upon us, or one that we make of our own volition?

The survivors' experiences of movement were far-reaching. They had positive and negative connotations. Some survivors were emotionally moved by the support given by a friend. Others were stopped by the ignorance and cruelty of words used against them. Some were compelled, or forced, to move physically—to change classes, residence hall rooms, student activities, jobs. Some movement was disruptive. Some movement was empowering—a taking back of time and space and volition.

And so I ask again the question, what is the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college, and how does it manifest in movings and direction-more-ness? To answer this question, I must look to the survivors, themselves. To Aeryn, Beth, Chloe, Pink, Sweetie. It is their words, the meaning they make from their experiences, that guides us to a new and deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

With Direction (More or Less): The All En-COMPASS-ing-ness of Survival

With a belly full of clear, cold water, I walk on. The forest grows darker as I move into the center, but somehow I am not as afraid as I used to be. Somehow, because I have made it this far, I know I can make it the rest of the way. I know I can make it home. I know I will survive.

The all encompassing-ness of survival stops and moves us. In the moment, it may feel as if the direction-less-ness is the only piece that is all en-compass-ing, but when the direction-more begins to emerge, it becomes clear that the all en-compass-ing-ness of the thing is really just a more complicated way of surviving. Levin (1985) writes:

A motility that is *thoughtfully in touch* with its encompassing and underlying field, a motility free of emotively toned dualities, enjoys a life-world whose 'ground's a great initial gift, 'the path a great self-authentication, and the goal a great self-freedom.' (p. 112)

As the movement forward takes us into the far reaches of survival, the great self-authentication and the great self-freedom may become the new *Dasein* for survivors of rape in college.

There will be stoppings and goings in survival, and for a while it may feel like the stoppings overtake the goings, or dark-ness overcomes light-ness. And what of the illumination, the direction, that comes with moving? Or does movement come with light? What is the light-ness of motion, the enlightenment of motility? How are we, in shining a light upon the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college, uncovering the direction-more-ness of it? Levin (1985) questions and submits the following regarding the development of centeredness:

What comes to light, then, when we focus, through the lens of this analysis, on the deepest accessible structures of our motility? Can we contact these structures in

process of formation? Can we follow their emergence? I submit that we will eventually contact a sensuous-emotional field of motivating energies, a primordial field of tensions, pulses, and waves of attractions and aversions, whose intertwining intensities manifest a very strong inveterate tendency to constitute bodily centers of ego-logical (subjectively- and objectively-polarized) compartments, centers, that is, of purposive, ego-serving behavior, while providing, at the very same time, the layout of an opportunity for the development of a Self whose centeredness is achieved, rather, through the openness of its solicitude. (p. 96)

As such, there is an emergence in the moving forward through igniting the living body.

Survivors come alive in this time, when movement forward becomes possible, when any movement at all is permitted by what had been an oppressive state of being. The body begins to smell and taste and touch—to become aware—to become awakened by the movement forward. In the movement, the body begins to find its center, and survivors begin to find *themselves* again. Once the healing begins, there will be movement forward, but it may be slow, and it may be stopped, and when it stops it will begin again.

Sometimes it just needs a nudge.

Chapter 4 engaged the meaning of the word encompass as it connects to the lived experience of stoppings and direction-less-ness, and the sense of envelop-ment that the word evokes. Within it, there is a sense that something is all around, perhaps suffocating. Chapter 5 draws out the meaning in a more positive sense and explores the ways in which survival is all-encompassing in affirming ways. For most of the participants, college never gave them a sense of relief. Here, movement may be slowed by the weight of rape's burden, but there is an emergence of light. Here, the stoppings give way to a feeling of empowerment, and the feeling that victory can come at the end of a long darkness.

Something that is all en-compass-ing, that which may seem most overwhelming and impossible to overcome, may also bring about a return to power, a directional orientation, a *compass*, perhaps greater power than the person in possession of such a compass might have had before. Sexual assault survival is a powerfully painful road from direction-“less-ness” to direction-“more-ness” that brings the compass-possessor to a place of reclaimed power.

Just...Move...

As the day goes on and I grow hungry, I am yet fueled by a powerful force that makes me just...move. I do not know where the movement comes from, because I know that I should be in much worse off. I am willed on...how?

[It is like] not giving yourself a choice sometimes. Literally not knowing how or why to get better. I remember crying in bed, not knowing how to end my pain and I made a clear decision. I moved my feet, put my left [foot] on the floor and then the right. I stood up, felt overwhelmed, and stared at my feet, and literally put one in front of the other. (Pink)

Movement, like the forest floor, takes us in and out, up and down as we follow the path. We can choose the direction, the direction can choose us, and the path can come from within—invisible to anyone else. Movement can be solitary, it can be alongside others, it can be with just one partner. It is movement that radiates the all-encompass-ing-ness of emotions, of healing, of all that we were, all that we are, and all that we will become.

There need not be a rhyme or reason to movement; there need only be one foot in front of the other. Aeryn, Chloe, and Pink speak about being at their lowest points and just moving forward, almost blind, without feeling, without really being there. Like moving in the dark, you cannot see where you are going; you are trying to find your way, so you move slowly, cautiously, as though drugged or sleepy.

I could feel super great and get up in the morning and go to the gym and then go to class and then come home and then do my homework and go to bed, or I could feel like death's door and I would still do all those things, so my activities of living during the day stayed pretty stable throughout college, really. But maybe some of the more internal thoughts and feelings that I was having were the things that changed a lot more. I could get up and go to school and take care of myself and all that kind of stuff. I'm somebody who has a lot of experience just going into autopilot. (Aeryn)

Going into autopilot is a way of directing one's energy into something else. As opposed to using that energy to fly the plane, a pilot can switch a plane into a mode in which it keeps moving forward without anyone really paying attention. She (the pilot) can use her energy to do something else connected to the responsibility for the flight's safety from lift-off to touchdown. For survivors, survival is of greater importance than deeply absorbing the mundane world around them. Everyday activities are placed on autopilot, so that general survival may be maintained.

For Chloe, the experience felt both like a grey cloud overhead and a brick wall in front of her. The grey cloud kept the sadness within her, and the wall stood in the way of the life she hoped for:

It just kind of felt like I was going through all the motions, but I wasn't feeling all of the feelings outside my experience. I wasn't feeling the stress of getting good grades because I didn't care. I wasn't feeling the happiness of spending time with my friends or the sadness of leaving them, because I had this grey cloud following me around. I was doing all of that stuff, but it was emotionless to me. It was almost like the feelings of the assault and dealing with that came first before anything else. It was kind of like a wall, like nothing else could get through.

And, yet, it was a movement forward. It was not complete stagnation. Something stood between real feeling and real coping, but it was real movement. The wall that felt like it was holding her back in every way was not keeping Chloe from everything. Perhaps her

general movement toward anything at all was an indication that she had the spirit to make it through.

H'Doubler (1940/1985) in a classic text writes,

To be born and be active and alive is to be endowed with a quickening “life-force” that animates us throughout our individual lives. The direction this force takes is to protect and preserve life, and to propagate its kind, manifesting behavior of moving toward or away from, with or against the forces that exist in [the] environment. Thus, life’s experiencing comes from the interaction between [person] and nature...life becomes a drama of adjustment to the conditions of existence. (p. xxv)

Through the darkness of victimization, survival is a kind of rebirth. It is through that rebirth that the survivor’s life force is sharpened, made more keen. She is more aware of her environment, of the dangers that exist, and she knows how to get out with breath still stirring, blood still pumping. She has learned how to preserve her own life in the new-natural environment.

In survival, she learns to fine-tune her way of being in the world. In survival, she finds a new way of being. H'Doubler (1940) goes on to write:

All that [humankind] has accomplished has been executed by bodily movement. The very fact that [humans are] endowed with effective stepping movements and can go places has been and always will be influential in the cultural advancement of the human mind as well as an assurance of [human] survival. (p. xxv)

And so it is through the movement that survival takes up permanent residency within the soul and spirit of the survivor. It is woven into her very human-ness, by her very ability to travel from place to place. It is in the movement that she finds an “assurance of survival.”

For Chloe, this assurance came through promises that she made to herself. It was through the promises that she found the energy to *go* and to *do*. Promises became her

little ways of getting herself into the shower, dressed, and out the door. They were the dangling carrot in front of the hungry rabbit:

Through my process of healing I would often say to myself things like, “If I can just get through this I will never have a drink again” or “if I can get myself out of bed and to class today, I will sleep all day tomorrow.”

She did whatever it took to put one foot in front of the other. The drinking served to numb her pain for the first few hours, but within the night would weaken and crumble the floodgates. Each time she drank, her sadness erupted in ways that her friends could not understand because they did not know what had happened to her. The groggy, sickening day after such a night would leave her wishing she had not imbibed, wishing she could have kept the floodgates closed. And she desperately craved sleep. It was a motivator to get through, because after *this* (whatever *it* was that she was trying to overcome in the moment), she would give herself permission to put her head down on the pillow and drift away.

It was the stepping forward for Beth, too, that moved her toward survival. Lost in her own sea of trees and shadowy images, she found her strength by walking forward and moving toward the perimeter of the forest:

[To me, survival is] taking the necessary steps to...come out on the other side...finding ways to put yourself back together again...feel whole...attempt to feel like you did pre-assault.

And while the feelings, the way of being before the assault, may not be found again, a new way of being can be discovered. It takes the trauma, envelops it, and does its best to stifle the overwhelming sadness that comes with it. In the walking, in the stepping, the forward momentum takes Beth, and the others, toward survival. It is all about survival—

whatever it takes to get you through. Like being stranded in the woods, lost and starving, one must find the will to go on or face being destroyed by the circumstances.

Sometimes it is not a stepping movement that brings survivors to healing. It is the smaller movements. Out from under blankets—feet to floor—food to mouth. These minute movements became mammoth advancements between the here-ness of victimization and the there-ness of survival.

I think that in the beginning you literally are in survival mode. You have to think simple things out. How do I get myself out of bed? How do I force myself to eat? (Chloe)

Survival can begin with a single movement...just...move. It is forcing, compelling yourself forward even when all you want to do is remain still and waste away to nothing. The nothingness is so alluring—the quiet away-ness of it, the way in which it is so removed from the reality of pain and suffering connected to the rape. One foot in front of the other. Just...move...

Moving

Just as I am growing hot and thirsty and restless, I find myself hearing the faint lapping of water, as if on a shore. I find a small pond in a clearing within the trees. I am itchy in my sweaty clothes, and so, without even thinking that I should be modest, I strip naked and dive in. As I look back and reflect on the moment, I believe that this body of water, given access to my every little bit of skin, is my rebirth. I am possessed by the freedom of survival and the elation that I have made it through the hardest days; the tentativ-ity of my darker days is simply *let go*. I drag my dirty clothes in to the cool, reflecting blue from the sunny sky, and give them the same cleansing I give myself. I

lower my head beneath the water and listen to the sweet quiet as the water fills my ears. I rub my scalp with my fingertips to release the sweat and grime.

Imagine gentle currents of energy, flowing freely through and beyond your body forming warm pools of movement in the space just around you. Your hands are brought to lie in this softly pulsing current. They wave around in the waterspace, leaving invisible traces of their movement hanging in the air. The current spreads down into your legs, which begin to bear your body's weight alternately, subtly shifting your body from side to side through the liquid space in a slight sway. Your knees become involved, bending alternately as they adjust for the arrival and departure of your body's weight. (Ness, 1992, p. 1)

I emerge from the water, clean and fresh and new. Even my clothes, after they have dried on the sunny bank, feel soft and sweet against my skin.

Survival is this way—from water to warmth—with gentle currents of energy welling up around you. The positivity of the energy sustains you at times, giving you buoyancy and breath above the water. And when the water threatens to take you down into its breathless depths, your body attends, bending knees, kicking, making use of what you have to keep yourself alive. In survival, there is movement toward the surface, the air, the sky. There is a way in which an awareness of the body and its power returns. There is agency in this time of survival. There is control over the movement toward and away from things as they serve to shore you up or break you down. You are able to choose more readily in this time because survival gains strength over victimization.

Away from his people and places.

It got much better with time and definitely [got better]
after I left school. (Aeryn)

Day after day in the woods, how I desperately craved the comfort of my own bed, the warmth of my own shower, the choice of food from my own kitchen. I felt that getting back to a place that was only mine in whatever way I chose it to be was when I

would finally be able to fully fall into my new way of being. Stronger and more confident in my ability to survive, I was eager to get back to a place where I could further rebuild the pieces that were still broken. Even though the woods were no longer terrifying to me, I still needed to leave them behind.

There is something to be said for just getting away, leaving the physical space where the victimization occurred. First, it happens by leaving the room, escaping the four walls. Chloe shares:

I think for me survival started literally right after the assault. Survival began with picking myself up off the floor and running as fast as I could out of that house.

Once those four walls are behind you, though, and you walk through the door, there is the wild world of campus life, containing reminder after reminder of him. Revictimizations emerge from every courtyard, out of every classroom. After leaving campus, she could finally begin to heal. For Chloe, while she remained on campus, part of survival meant finding a new group of friends. Having to leave old friends behind was hard, because so many of them had chosen him over her. It was a stopping that became a moving:

I was hating life at the time. For me, I dealt with these issues all my senior year. I think the shift came when I started hanging around a new crowd (he was part of my old crowd) but mostly it came with graduating and moving away from [my university]! I didn't have to worry about running into him or any of his friends.

By getting away from friends who did not believe her, and who thought she was actively trying to slander a man she used to love, she was able to cut the decay from a life she was trying to save.

The word decay denotes a natural state of being, like the tree that has fallen in the woods. It will not last forever; insects, animals, and the elements eat away at its entirety

and it disintegrates back into the earth. Campus, however, is not a natural place at all. It is a place populated by buildings that have been erected by human hands, and humans who have been hand-picked to be there. As such, it is a place that holds tight to history, and history is the very thing that survivors wish to escape. Casey (1993) writes:

Place as we experience it is not altogether natural. If it were, it could not play the animating, decisive role it plays in our collective lives. Place, already cultural as experienced, insinuates itself into a collectivity, altering as well as constituting that collectivity. Place becomes social because it is already cultural. It is also, and for the same reason, historical. It is by the mediation of culture that places gain historical depth. We might even say that culture is the third dimension of places, affording a deep historicity, a *longue durée*, which they would lack if they were entirely natural in constitution. (pp. 31-32)

Place, in the social sense, became Chloe's foe as it was once populated, socially, by her so-called friends. Place, in the historical sense, held all memories of him, of them—their carefree lives before the rape, and the horror that came after. The campus served to hold the antagonist/horror in place until, systematically, through her own agency, she stepped away from each negative piece.

By getting away from the physical space of campus—the green, the trees, the classrooms, her apartment, the bars they used to go to together, the place where he worked—Chloe's mind was able to clear more than it ever had since the rape. While she was still on campus, it felt as if she wore a blindfold as long and as wide as campus, the entirety of it blocking her view of what lay beyond:

The physical place that would bring on the worst anxiety attacks was the building he worked in. He worked really strange hours and I never knew if I was going to see him walking out of the building to his car. I had never really been inside the building but I strongly associated it with him. It was on a busy street in [my college town] and one I typically took to get to where I worked. After almost getting into a car accident due to seeing him walk out, I added an extra 10 minutes onto my commute and took a different route!

Lulita moved away from campus and never went back. She has no desire to set foot back on the college campus that changed her life so dramatically. Recently Lulita's sister, who shares her alma mater, attended a class reunion. She desperately wanted Lulita to join her, but Lulita refused:

My sister actually has the same alma mater behind me. She has stayed in very good touch with her college classmates. She just went to her reunion over Memorial Day Weekend. She's gone several times. I have never been. She asked me... "Don't you want to go? You should go!" And I said, "You know, I have to tell you, there is not a single inch of me, ounce of me that has any jealousy what-so-ever sense of 'oh you're going! I wish I were going'! There is nothing in me that has any will to go back.

Moving away from his people and places became an important part of the survival experience for each survivor in this study. His friends, his work, the location of the rape...in many ways, campus belongs to the rapist, to the history he imposed upon her, and she needs to move away. Getting away from campus can be the *moving* that becomes central to *surviving*. Again, the *stopping* shifts to *moving*.

Away from and out of self.

Now, filled with agency, filled with hope, I become obsessed with moving to the denseness of the forest. I am like an animal, singularly focused on her next meal. Indeed, I crave the openness of the sky as my starving body craves sustenance. The trees are closer together than they were before, but I am not afraid, I am not suffocated. I am furious. This woodland never seems to end! I do my best to embrace the woods. This is where I am meant to be—agitated, and struggling to survive.

Escape...getting out of the woods...I will know I have arrived when the cover of the trees is *uncovered* to reveal the delicious blue sky and the trailhead and my car...only that is just a dream, a foggy memory of where I was before I found myself lost amongst

the trees. As I am lost amongst the trees, I find my *Dasein* takes on the frantic “towards-this,” with *this* being the perimeter of the forest, outside of victimization.

Escaping the woods has become my preeminent assignment. Nothing else matters.

Heidegger (1962) writes:

When an assignment to some particular “towards-this” has been thus circumspectively aroused, we catch sight of the “towards-this” itself, and along with it everything connected with the work – the whole ‘workshop’ – as that wherein concern always dwells. The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself. (p. 105)

The assignment is thusly circumspect, as I have been on the outside before, although I can only vaguely remember what exists there. I have the sensory memories of peace and warmth, but the details are foggy. It is in the “towards-this” that I find part of the totality of my *Dasein*, my way of being in the world, because it is by way of this frantic walk that I can clearly see who I am right here and right now. My “workshop” is illuminated—the entirety of my being, wherein lies all of my concern and anguish over what has happened to me and how I show up in the world because of it. My own world “announces itself” to me in this way, and harkens me to slow down. By seeing clearly my frantic movement I am able to slow down and catch my breath.

For Chloe, the assignment became climbing the mountain. Figuratively and literally, it was by being in the climb that she was able to re-center and find her peace:

To me, being outside is a reminder that the world is bigger than I am. When I am climbing mountains, skiing down them or simply just spending time outside I actually take moments to look around and enjoy the beauty of where I am.

There is a way in which connecting with the greater world, the mountains, the forests, and the soft, wet earth can impart a feeling of smallness and bigness at once. With

smallness comes a sense that I am but a tiny molecule in this grand world, and I may find some hopeful perspective in that. In the bigness, there is a sense that no matter how bad things can feel, we are all connected to something as majestic as the mountain and as pure as the snow, but it takes time to get there. Berman (1987) writes:

Time – it can be seen in small or large chunks. It can be experienced as waiting, as anticipating, as reflecting, as dwelling in the moment. It can be seen as a psychological space waiting to be filled or a space full of too much. It can be seen as significant or unimportant. For the imaginative person, though, time is sacred – precious, whole, and matters greatly. (p. 175)

And so it is that the time it takes to reach great heights after being beaten down into the depths of victimization can take the form of bigness and smallness, too. The solace comes in knowing that it *can* come, whatever size it might be. The tiniest moments may be filled with such revelations that they propel the grandest movement forward. The grandest gestures may only produce an inch, but that inch—*inch by every inch*—can become the very effort it takes to find your way out of the forest.

(Re) Claiming

At one time, these woods claimed me. I had no direction. I was direction-*less*. All of my ways of being in the world had been stripped away, leaving only my barren core. From there, it was up to me to rebuild a stronger self, to reclaim the pieces that had been cast aside and reconfigure them around my being. Now I have reclaimed the woods. Now I have reclaimed my body. For the survivors in this study, the reclaimings were, at one time, considered *stoppings*. Now, as they move forward in survival, they become *movings*. Survivor agency rises up to transform power; it is moved away from the rapist and the rape, and is reclaimed by the one from whom it was originally taken.

When the body is taken against one's will, it is cut from the victim and reaped by the rapist. There becomes a disconnect between body and self, and we have seen this emerge in the lived experience for the women in this study. For Beth, her body and her virginity stopped having the meaning and importance it had before the rape. For Sweetie and Chloe, there was a loss of control of body—a physicality (collapsing at the sight of him), and emotionality (crying, anxious, and unable to control the bodily manifestations of it) that could have otherwise been controlled or managed were it not for the cruel taking of their bodies.

What is it to take something? From the Old English, *tacan*, and the Old Norse, *taka*, the etymological origin of the word means to “grasp, lay hold.” The rapist grasped and held her—laid claim to his victim. What is it then, for all of it (power, control, body, influence, life) to be (re)claimed by the survivor?

What is it to claim something? To (re)claim it? Reclaim, from the Old French, *reclamer*, means “to call back, appeal to.” In survival, in the (re)claiming, there is a calling back to that which has been lost, a summoning of the pieces of a life gone missing. The survivor is able to rescue herself and restore herself to her previous natural state, or at least to a state that is in some amount of balance with a new and empowered self. She is able to demand or obtain the return of *herself*. She is able to regain possession of who she is. She is able to take the power back into her own hands. In survival, there is a (re)claiming of voice, strength, body, (re)actions, (found)ation, and control. There is a (re)claiming of life. There is a (re)claiming of self.

Within the reclaiming of self, there is a reclaiming of the social, as all human beings within themselves are connected to the other selves around them. Anton (2001) writes:

Every person up to this point in history...has come into worldly existence through other persons. All living creatures come into being through other entities like themselves. It is by others, in the plural, that any lived-body comes to exist as a living breathing entity. In this most basic sense others are the source of my existence. (p. 53)

For a survivors of sexual assault, it is also true that her way of being in the world has “come into worldly existence through other persons.” There was, of course, birth by her mother and the ways in which she was raised or nurtured in that home-space. Once she came to college, though, she entered into a new space and was changed by those around her. The worldly existence of her trauma, too, was born into the world through another person. It is from that person, and from that world, that her *self* becomes reclaimed.

(Re)claiming (Re)iterations

(Re)iterations of the rape through words and names is a powerful part of the lived experience. (Re)iteration is a painful reliving of the rape itself—the visceral feelings, the smells, the sounds of the actual trauma. Yet (re)iterations can be reclaimed as survivors move from traumatization to tolerance to triumph over words that once had so much power over them.

Of words.

Words can become *stoppings* for survivors, yet they also become *movings*. At different times and different points of survival, words have different kinds of power. For Lulita, more than 20 years after experiencing multiple rapes in college, words like *survivor* and *victim* matter less than do their meanings. For her, the power behind

naming who she is, what her experience is, matters much less than the actual experience—what it feels like to be in her own skin today:

As a feminist, as a women's studies scholar, I have to say that I do understand the power of language but I personally am not one of those people who thinks that language is the all-defining...I care less whether you call me woman or girl, I just don't want rape to happen. I care less whether I'm a rape victim or a rape survivor, what matters to me is that I'm recovering...I can say, "I'm a rape survivor, I'm a rape survivor." But the bottom line is if I'm not on the road to recovery and becoming whole, does it really matter?...I understand the power of language, but...I don't want to get stuck there because then language has the power to do things and I want to take away that power. (Lulita)

For Lulita, words become part of her narrative in that they exist in a benign manner of being; she is only moved by the actions behind the words. If they are filled with hatred and actions following them that are so infused, then yes, Lulita is moved. If, however, the words are not intended in a negative way, Lulita can see past them and into a speaker's intended meaning.

However, Lulita recognizes that the word *rape* is different. She recalls that in college the word struck a very painful cord, especially when minimized. However, now, her reaction to the word is lessened:

I think when I hear the word "rape" used inappropriately, it does push my button, but it doesn't cause that kind of visceral pain like it used to. Now, watching a movie that depicts sexual assault or [domestic violence] does illicit that pain.

Images of rape and domestic violence carry heavy weight for Lulita. In hearing the word rape now, she is still stopped, she is still affected, she is still moved to react. However, the "visceral pain" is no longer present. This lifting of the weighted word gives Lulita the space in which she takes time to create shifts in her two worlds—the flesh world and the electronic world:

I am a PC gamer, including playing some online games. When online, which is dominated largely by male players, oftentimes fellow players will use "rape" to metaphorically describe an experience in the game when they have been beaten, etc. I get mad when people use the word so lightly like that, clearly not understanding what it is like to truly be raped, and I will often say something - the anonymity of online gaming allows for this in many ways. In many instances, I have gotten the male player to reconsider their use of the word.

Meaning matters more when the word carries weight from the moment of trauma's inception; the words that come after are not as rooted in the breaking of spirit and soul. Over the years, Lulita has released herself from some of its pain, some of its power over her—but not all. She is pulled toward a place of speaking out.

And so what is in the meaning of words and titles as they explain humans' ways of being in the world? And who decides the significance of these definitions? How are they claimed? What do they say to the self? To the world? Dreamer (1999) writes,

I doesn't interest me what you do for a living.
I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

I doesn't interest me how old you are.
I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dream, for the adventure of being alive....

I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own, if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful, to be realistic, to remember the limitations of being human. (p. 1)

Is it from the self or from the world that these meanings emerge? It is from the self *and* the world that the lived experience is inextricably intertwined. Some find that no anger, rage, or violence wells up in them at the sound of consonants and vowels combined and voiced. Others find that the very same consonants and vowels create sounds that hurt the

heart and cut the soul. Whose experience is the right one? They both are, as they are both lived.

Of his name.

For Chloe, his name no longer has the power over her that it once had. When she was in college, hearing his name would take her back to the rape, to a visceral in-the-moment (re)iteration of the experience:

For a while, when I was kind of under the false impression that nobody else knew what happened, people would say the name and I'd have that little out of body experience to myself and just kind of pretend that everything was totally normal, but it always made me feel like I was right back in that room [being raped], you know, like I would have flashbacks. I would almost start to smell his cologne, you know kind of all of my senses would kind of go crazy. I would like hear his voice. That was in the beginning, and then once things started to settle in more I would become visibly upset and a lot of times I would excuse myself and sit down and try to calm myself down. You know those things *eventually faded*.

Those very painful things faded with time. They are still with her, still painful, but she is stronger now. She has her breath back; she is in control of it, even when his name tries to knock it out of her.

For Sweetie, the struggle is not over, yet 10 years later she is in a much better place. She describes it as a place of hope:

This past Easter, we were at a restaurant for lunch and we were waiting in the bar area for our table and he was on the TV. And it was like, are you effing kidding me? You're going to ruin my Easter, too, now? You've taken enough away from me! Let me have my gosh darn Easter Sunday! So times like it creeps up, and you're just like, really? It's annoying. It's frustrating. So, you know, and if he wasn't in the public, I don't know if that would have crept up as often, but it definitely does because of who he is and that he's on TV and things like that, so there are still some tough times, but the hope that things do get better and that they will get better, that's big.

There are some ways in which he will always be in her life, especially as she has no control over the news coverage of him. She has no way of knowing when his name, his

face, his being, will be pressed against the TV screen, and pressed into her moment— with friends, with family, with self. Like emotions that conceal themselves until they are uncovered, even in his absence, Sweetie’s perpetrator’s presence looms. Leder (1990) writes:

Our emotional life exhibits certain aspects of depth disappearance, that mode of absence characteristic of the visceral. In this case, depth disappearance is manifested specifically in the area of control; the emotions at least for most of us, escape to a degree from our willful command. (p. 136)

Sweetie’s emotional life, as it pertains to her rape and her perpetrator, has found a way to fade into the background. It is no longer present every moment of every day. It requires stimulus to bring those emotions to the surface as he is no longer part of her “willful command.” It has become an innate part of her to not tend to his presence on any regular basis. However, when he is thrust upon her visually or audibly, his presence finds presence again, without her “willful command.”

(Re)claiming Voice

I used to have a recurring, terrifying nightmare. I don’t remember anything about it now, except for a mounting fear, my own soundless scream, and the terror I felt when I realized that I had no voice. I could not call for help. There was a horror in the voice-lessness. What my dream-self did not recognize, though, is that even without words, I could have found a way to voice my fear, and even if I found sound to make words, I may have remained voiceless. Words released into the ethos can mean nothing at all without strength, substance, and support to carry them on. Angelou (1969/1994) writes:

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still

and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom...

... A caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing. (pp. 194-195)

And so, out of the “nightmare scream” eventually comes the voice—a voice powerful enough to move the world. Maya Angelou, herself, emerged from rape a *voice-less* child, and yet became one of the most treasured and *voice-full* writers, speakers, actors, activists, and playwrights the world has seen and heard. Like the caged bird, sexual assault survivors find their ways toward *voice-full-ness* even through the bars of trauma’s cage. It is with those first and “fearful trills” that the idea of freedom from imprisonment begins to grow. Even with “wings clipped” and “feet tied,” survivors can, and do, find ways for empowerment to grow so large that the cage can no longer contain it.

Silence and noise can both become forward movement, toward the finding of voice. There is a way in being moved toward healing by a silence within. One of Pink’s favorite poems speaks to this: “Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow’” (Radmacher, n.d.). Sometimes, in its attempt to explode a fearful tone, a roar emerges only as a small voice. Sometimes there is a consciousness thrust outside the body, outside the voice, in order to preserve what little is left of self in survival. There can be a reclaiming of words that have been silenced, words that gained too much power after the rape, words that do not deserve any power at all. These words are usually about him, about the rapist—his name, his title, and people, places, and things associated with him.

For Aeryn, part of her reclaiming voice was a reclaiming of the word rape:

When I discuss the issue with other people, I almost always use the word rape instead of sexual assault. I think people listen to that word and take it more seriously than sexual assault for some reason, and I think it's generally an issue you should listen to.

What is it that is so powerful about the word *rape* and so commonly preferential about the words *sexual assault*? Is it that *rape* seems to evoke the intensity and reality of the act, while *sexual assault* softens the proverbial blow? Is it that *rape* has the power to evoke anger, rage, and violence, while *sexual assault* rarely turns a head?

The term *rape* does carry more weight than its less controversial sibling. It evokes the full-scale imagery associated with the act. It brings to mind the perpetrator—cute and cunning, large and imposing, either way unrelenting in his quest to take her in spite of, perhaps *because of* her protests. It brings to mind countless scenes—the fighting back, the listless tears, the fearful confusion, and the motionless body that is frozen in fear and confusion.

The term *sexual assault* sugar coats the trauma and lessens the sour taste it might otherwise leave. It brings to mind myths that shield the world from rape's realities. It paints rape as a bad date, as regretted sex, as a false allegation made by a scorned girlfriend out for revenge. It paints rape as “horsing around,” which are the exact words used by the infamous Penn State convicted sex offender, Jerry Sandusky to describe his years of raping young boys who attended sports camps at the university (Candotti, 2012). During the Sandusky trial, attorneys, the media, and the public to used the term *sexual assault* almost exclusively to describe the (at that time) alleged crime. Why? *To soften the reality that a major figure in college football was capable of such atrocities.*

It is important to note that I have used the words rape and sexual assault interchangeably throughout this work. Is that, then, an example of a softening of the crime? No. Here, in the context of this dissertation, the severity of the crime and survivors' subjection to it are placed squarely on the page. In this work, one finds an interchange of the terms, both *rape* and *sexual assault*, emerging through a showing of the painful lived experience. In contrast, a diminished understanding of rape comes with the exclusive use of the term *sexual assault*, especially in the absence or skirting of the crime's true weight and horror.

It is then through a shifting from sugar coated to sour that voice may be found for victims and survivors. For Pink, reclaiming voice came with educating others about rape—sharing the truth about it:

Knowing that I could offer even the most rudimentary education or access to resources made me feel empowered and useful. I was able to turn a bad situation into a positive and for that I am eternally grateful. I know that until I die, I will be able to hold on to moments when students said I helped them or made a positive impact.

Pink also found that it was important to, in her words, “put it all out there,” in terms of her experience. She refused silence, and in turn, found voice:

I live my life as an open book and don't believe in secrets. I feel that I have nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of or stigmatized by...I believe that a large component of my healing came from the honesty and candor I gained discussing sexual assault on a personal level.

Pink's “open book” provides voice like the spine of a new release as it is flexed open and poured through. The words, unseen before by public eyes, are like those printed on crisp white pages, the black type starkly contrasting the white paper. Flipping through, the smell of the book brings back many college memories, as though seeking knowledge in

the campus library. The book is the keeper and sharer of so many voices with so much to say. The words reclaim the many voices silenced by rape.

(Re)claiming Strength

I remember that small moment of hesitation as a long pause. When I looked into [a reflection], I saw a different woman than the one who had called Victoria in tears. I saw a woman who smiled...and felt the small tug of a future that held – she knew not what. I saw a part of myself that I had not seen since the rape...I had believed that any reconstruction of myself that resembled what had existed before was impossible. But here was a shard, a remnant of a woman who felt curious about the future, rather than fearful of it. Life had not just flowed around me, like a stream around an immovable tangle of debris. I had moved with the stream. (Raine, 1998, p. 156)

I came to a shallow stream and without thinking, took off my shoes and stepped in. Immediately my foot slipped slightly. I caught myself, but still, my foot grazed something sharp—a rock wedged next to the softer, rounder stone for which I aimed. I felt the pain of it as quickly as it subsided. When I looked down through the crystal clear water, I could see a trickle of blood swept away by the current. It was enough to make me hesitate, but not stop. It was a beautiful reminder of the *lifeblood* I have coursing through my body. Because I have life, I have strength. It was the image, the reflection that I needed to see to know how far I had come. Before this, I knew that I had survived, but it was the moment that I began to really *feel* like a survivor. That quick cut reminded me that I, too, “move with the stream,” and that my body and blood are here, present, strong, and connected with the world around me.

There can be a reclaiming of the strength and power lost after rape. With every slip there may be a catching of the self, and momentary pain may emerge, but there is the recognition that life is bigger than all of it. Even when the catching does not come quickly, the body holds enough strength, enough *lifeblood* to sustain it through the

sharpness of pain. The cuts and bruises, inside and out, no longer bring *being* to a complete stop. As the water moves, so do we—through and over and around all things.

Wordsworth (1884) writes:

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In the years that bring the philosophic mind. (p. 39)

Nothing can bring back the life we had before rape. However, it is in the strength remains in the tissue of our bodies, over the synapses in our brains, that takes us forward. Forward we go into a new life that brings the future together with the past and into today. Through the strength that emerges from trauma, we can find a way to be all of these things at once, and to make our way toward peace.

The (re)claiming of strength is a return to the source of the trauma, of resisting the force of it, and not allowing it to be all-consuming—not anymore. It is a resistance of the attack, the daily barrage of pain and suffering that has become life after rape. Strength is measured by the people around us who support us—they are our army at full strength, supporting us through, helping us to survive the battle. It is a vigorous movement forward, away from victimization, and it is an acknowledgement and celebration of the high points that survival brings.

Pink has had both losings and gainings of strength within her survival experience. As she was regaining and reclaiming strength in college, she inspired others:

I honestly don't know where my strength comes from. People have told me my whole life that they are amazed at my life experiences and my positive attitude. I will have a good life and I will make a positive impact in my community. It was this unwavering that allowed me to put one foot in front of the other and to know that my life was not doomed because I had been assaulted twice.

She shared with me her favorite lyrics from what she calls her “strength ballad”: “I found the song to be kind of my fight anthem after [I was raped in college]. I think it goes back to the ‘courage doesn't always roar’ quote”:

Everytime you get up
And get back in the race
one more small piece of you starts to fall into place. (Rascall Flatts, 2007)

Pink explains that this piece of the song “always resonated with me. It meant the more I took control over my life and decided to take an active rather than a passive role in my healing, the more I would come back to who I am.” It was a finding of strength to stand up, and with each act of standing came a small piece of the healthy, peaceful Pink. Piece by piece, she was finding her peace.

For Aeryn, regaining strength meant focusing on school and finding pride in accomplishing great things:

Knowing that I was smart was so helpful. I was good at things at school. It gave me self esteem, I enjoyed going to class. It intrigued me, challenged me, helped me explore my own mind.

She had proof that she was smart—there were grades, there was praise from the faculty. Even in her darkest hours, in her moments of self-blame and self-doubt, she could turn to those things and know that she had the power to do good and purposeful things—and to do them well.

We cannot all find our strength in the doing because there needs to be some strength to initiate the action. When one is so devastated by rape that she cannot move,

cannot get out of bed, the movement must come from somewhere inside. Onlookers cannot see this movement, but survivors can feel it. Ultimately, Pink found an inner strength movement with God:

I honestly believe it has been my faith in God and His protection and care over me that has been the key to my survival and success. I'm often told by my friends they don't know why I'm so happy or thankful given my past, but I've never seen any other choice than just putting one foot in front of the other, and holding on to my belief that others and God are innately good.

And there is real strength, real power in finding the good in people after being abused as a child, after being raped in college, after having friends and family turn their backs on you. It is real power, real strength, to maintain the sense that there is good in the world. It is in the (re)claiming of that strength that the essence of the lived experience resides. It is in the understanding of the (re)claiming that we come to know what it is to live in the hearts and minds of rape survivors.

(Re)claiming Body

Our bodies are our own, but have they always been? Before birth, they were connected to and completely dependent on our mothers' bodies. And then we were born—still reliant on the adults in our lives, but having taken that first step into our own. As we let out that first scream, a most joyous sound to those around us anxiously anticipating our healthy arrival, we could officially say, *today is our newest day*. It was the first time we saw the brightness of light, felt the coolness of air, and brought breath into our tiny lungs. Our bodies become our own. It is our first bodily (re)claiming.

In rape, the body is taken against one's will and is reaped by the rapist. In the reaping, there is a death. In the death, there is a cold, darkness of night, perhaps a deep slumber, in which life becomes a distant and foggy memory. Tyner (n.d.) writes:

The midnight cold is creeping in
The frozen darkness pricks my skin
Too long before dawn to come and rescue me
The echoes of its footsteps fall
And blood and tears run though the walls
I'm hanging on, but he as come for me.
Starlight shines
On this hell of mine.

And yet the hell of death and dying can become a kind of peace. It is a (re)claiming of things past and gone and created new—reconnected and redefined as something that exists in this new day. As in all death, there is rebirth. Whether one believes in a spiritual rebirth of a soul into another body, or the scientific rebirth that today's decay nourishes tomorrow's flowers, there is connected truth.

The (re)claiming of body, of life, comes through the essence of the use of the body for survivors. How do they choose to be in their bodies as they heal? What does it feel like to move within the (re)claimed body, the (re)claimed life? For survivors, (re)claiming body emerges through movement and embellishment.

In sexual assault, the body is taken—the movement of it, the pleasure of it, the love of it. In the reclaiming of it, the survivor finds ways to be mind-ful and care-ful with the body she inhabits, the body that is inextricably connected to who she is and how she feels. Estés (1992) writes:

[We] speak of the slings and arrows we received throughout our lives because, according to the great “they,” our bodies were too much of this and not enough of that. In our telling, we sing a mourning song for the bodies we were not allowed to enjoy. We rock, we dance, we look at each other. We are each thinking the other is so mysterious – looking in such a beautiful way, how could anyone have thought otherwise? (p. 201)

The problem emerges from the ways in which we are taught to hate our bodies. It is this hatred that is compounded by so many things around us—the glorification of emaciated

bodies, the incessant message that we must strive to be smaller than we are meant to be. These messages are then sealed by rape and stamped as a truth that has no business calling itself truth at all.

Somewhere in the teaching and learning, and in the internalization of body discarding, there emerges the body (re)claiming that is essential for the rebirth of spirit and soul. It is up to us to (re)learn the loving. I say (re)learn, because so many of us never learned it in the first place. When an unloved body's inhabitant has distaste for it, and then finds it desecrated by something as horrifying as rape, the love takes that much longer to return. Because, really, it is not returning. It is being found for the first time. These are the words of survivors reclaiming their bodies, not allowing them to be defined by anyone else, not allowing them to be disliked or diminished by anyone else. These are the stories of body reclaimings.

Sexuality.

A movement, a touch, a breath, a heat that rises up from just a glance...it is a way in which the world, before the rape, used to wash over the skin. It was lost for some time, spun like a tightly wound metal wire, incapable of opening. Now, the reclaiming, the opening, the releasing feels...so...good... Sexuality is awakened. Re-coil-ing is released. Body is reclaimed, and in its reclaiming there is movement forward toward healing.

Abram (1996) writes,

So the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded. As we return to our senses, we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies – supported, that is, not just by ourselves, but by icy streams tumbling down granitic slopes, by own wings and lichens, and by the unseen, imperturbable wind. (p. 65)

Like being in the woods—feet in the icy, clear stream, part of the earth, wind, and water—the body is alive. It is alive within a whole world of living, from grass to trees to sky, and to all who live within it and around it.

For some rape survivors, however, this movement toward reclaiming sexuality can be complicated. The path to survival is not always one that feeds the soul. Sometimes there are ways in which, just to survive, a part of you can die. For Lulita and Beth, becoming sexually active with multiple partners after their rapes was a way of being in survival:

Sex itself is such an in-body, or body related experience, so you know, I went through this period in my life...as many survivors go through, where I was very sexually active with multiple partners...I think initially, sex with others was a way to try to reconnect with a sense of emotion, to simply CONNECT with others, to feel loved and liked. It was the only "language" of connection/intimacy that I understood at this point in my development as a young woman, in large part because of this defining experience of sexual assault. The experience of sexual assault/abuse had so numbed me. But eventually, it started to feel dirty. (Lulita)

The connection, through indifference from Beth or intensity from Lulita, in their individual lived experiences turned to revulsion about their own behaviors. At the time, however, when words could not express her pain or her deep, aching need to connect, sexuality became the only “language” Lulita could speak. Abram (1996) writes:

It is this dynamic, interconnected reality that provokes and sustains all our speaking, lending something of its structure to all our various languages. The enigmatic nature of language echoes and “prolongs unto the invisible” the wild, interpenetrating, interdependent nature of the sensible landscape itself. Ultimately, then, it is not the human body alone but rather the whole of the sensuous world that provides the deep structure of language. (p. 85)

It is in the “invisible” space of victimization that one may reach for any language that is in any way familiar to find one’s way back into life. It is in that sexual connection,

whether the survivor deems it clean or dirty, healthy or sick, that movement forward may begin. It is that unknown, wild place within our hearts and minds that guides us in what may seem like mysterious ways. In one moment, the very thing that sustains can sicken us. It may, however, be the very thing that moved us forward either way.

Movement-meditation.

Movement in silence, as in a run on an early, damp autumn morning, allows the body to fall into an inward rhythm that needs not words. The mind, an otherwise kinetic bundle of thoughts, can find a way to rest as the body is in motion. There is an unspoken exchange between the two, where the one agrees to take on the activity for a period of time. There is joy found in the movement of the body, a (re)claiming of the muscles, and joints—getting the blood pumping, feeling the calm it can bring to the spirit. Lynch and Scott (1999) write,

If you become silent during your physical activity, you have the chance to experience as you move across the terrain what we call stillness in motion, a dreamy, meditative state with brief moments of quietude. Just as a cloudy pond becomes clear when free of agitation, your mind, filled with emotional debris, gains clarity from this period of reverie or stillness within. It is a peaceful state, an inner environment where your suppressed thoughts begin to surface and visions begin to blossom, where a mystical oneness with the beauty of nature takes place. (p. 178)

For Aeryn and Pink, the movement through space, the movement of body, is a (re)claiming. For them, it comes through running. For Aeryn, the physicality is an accomplishment. It is a recognition of her body's capability, of her strength, of her resolve:

Oh, I could talk about running all day! I love it. Only outside. Treadmills are for hamsters. I love being outside, early in the morning usually, being alone with myself with nothing to do. Listening to my music and enjoying the weather. I love challenging myself to distances, times, and sometimes the challenge is just getting

outside when it's 15 degrees at 6 a.m. I love feeling that, no matter what else happens today, I accomplished ___ number of miles. I did that. I was successful. I always feel better afterwards. I love the stopping, feeling myself breathing heavy, stretching, sweating, seeing what I've done with my body. I have my best thoughts running. It's like daydreaming only you're not wasting time! Sometimes I just love walking around in my running clothes inside to remind me of the feeling.

It is the tactile nature in every aspect of running that, for Aeryn, brings her such peace and joy. Outside, being with nature, she is able to connect with the world, and be in recognition of her movement forward—both physically and emotionally. Like the proverbial “ground” that must be covered when (re)covering from trauma, Aeryn’s feet can cover great lengths of literal ground in one morning’s run. She can see the results in front of her. It gives her a feeling of accomplishment that can be more immediately satisfying than the ethereal results of therapy and emotional healing. The early morning light casts rapidly shifting shadows over her eyes as each individual leaf stutters the sun’s rays. She is able to navigate her way along a path of both darkness and light. They are both part of her now.

Hove (2002) writes:

It is quite dark where I stand. But I’ve been practicing the walking meditation this morning long enough to have witnessed the sunlight first mark the tiles and begin its creeping movement along the hall that intersects the one I am using, at right angles. I am simply walking up and down the long hallway. There is another meditator, too. Each of us has his own pace, moving first one way then the other. (p. 204)

Each survivor finds her own rhythm, her own way between the patches of sun and shadow. Walking meditation, running meditation, yoga, sitting, standing—whatever ways each woman finds to work toward balance, whatever her pace, it is her own.

For Pink, finding a way to feel safe while she was running was an integral part of the experience. She wanted to be able to get outside and have the freedom to challenge

and celebrate all that her body could do, but she was afraid to do it alone. For her, the companionship of a dog made running feel safer:

Getting a boxer/great dane was a lot to take on (he was like Marley [from the book] *Marley and Me* as a puppy) but I wanted a large dog for protection and companionship. I now feel comfortable running in the park by myself because I take [my dog] with me. He offers me a sense of security and freedom to do things alone without having to always look over my shoulder.

Finding a way to feel secure in the movement, Pink opens her own way into a place of peace. The way to that place is blocked, locked away, when the mind cannot let go. When the mind and body are both in a state of motion, neither may rest and so neither may heal. For Pink, the meditation cannot be reached without her dog by her side. He acts as a barrier, keeping worries and fears blocked from consciousness so that her mind may find the sense of restful reflection it needs to heal.

For Aeryn, running is her way of handling stress in her life:

Running is probably my #1 coping skill. It helps me to manage my stress, anxiety, clear my mind, connect back with my body and just "be" with myself in the world. It's my zen. I think running or any physical activity is one of the best things for someone with a trauma history. You are doing something positive with your body that has nothing to do with anyone else. It forces you to be in the moment, calms you, helps you feel good about yourself and your body, reduces stress, I went to the gym or running nearly every day in college, still do!

In the movement of running, there is a healing—a directionality toward a place of bodily safety, security, and celebration. The body as *vessel-of-trauma* is suspended, and the body as *vessel-of-triumph* takes its place. If this shift in being is practiced for long enough, soon there will be very little room left in which the trauma can return. It will be displaced by the triumph, elbowed out by the spirit of survival.

Change.

There is power in changing one's image, of taking control of the way you are seen and perceived. Having had one's body taken, there can be a reclaiming of the body externally. For Pink, reclaiming her body comes by way of make-up and tattoos:

Watching me get ready for a day in college would have been both disheartening and relieving. I knew that the people I saw that day would see the image I projected rather than the real me but this also made me feel safe and protected...I knew I [didn't want] to walk into [a classroom] feeling less than or not together and have people wonder if I looked unkempt because I was a victim that wasn't coping well. I actually hoped that people who wonder [would] see someone put together, presentable and happy. I wanted to offer others a view that life goes on, you don't have to give up on everything, including yourself...Creating a well-placed mask both constricts and frees you at the same time.

The mask Pink wears is used to disguise her true sense of un-wellbeing as she heals. It is grotesque, not in an overtly negative sense, but in the true meaning of the word, "a style of decorative art characterized by [a] fanciful or fantastic human." And Pink is fanciful and fantastic, indeed. Her mask allows her to access the mythical and magical energy that exists within her. It summons great power. It is a covering to protect her from the elements. It is a device that allows her to breathe in an atmosphere that is otherwise toxic to her spirit and to her sense of *wellbeing* in the world.

Pink's mask includes decorating her body with tattoos. Marking her body with remembrances of her triumphs moves her forward toward healing. She considers her traumas badges of honor, and as such, wants to wear remembrances of them that she and the world can see. Each one of her tattoos has special and powerful meaning to her. She describes her tattoo that consists of the words "Dum Spiro Spero," meaning "As I breathe, I hope":

It struck me that something as powerful as hope was as simple and unconscious as breathing...After I got that tattoo I felt my hopeful spirit was captured...I then decided to get my "Stand with Grace" tattoo. I felt that my three tattoos (my lucky number) captured my spirit to keep going and not get bogged down (Carpe Diem), my constant strive to remember to be hopeful (Dum Spiro Spero) and my thankfulness to God for giving me strength when I don't think I have it to take action to be active in my own life (Stand with Grace).

Pink's tattoos are outer expressions of her hope. By permanently capturing reminders of her strength, voice, and ability to overcome by imbedding them in her skin, the energy and power behind them are with her, always:

My tattoos are like my experiences. Permanent changes to who I am that make me more beautiful. I love looking at my tattoos, I love why I got them and I love that they represent the puzzle pieces that are me. I also like that my first was a purple heart and they seem to get more optimistic and hopeful with each one.

As each one of Pink's tattoos was etched into her skin, it became a triumphant medal of honor for making it through the trauma of sexual violence. Each has deep meaning and carries with it the intense, painful, and victorious moments.

These moments—pain and pride—have been part of Pink since childhood. It was a childhood that at one time, for her, was covered in blood. Everywhere she looked, everything she touched, became drenched in her own self-inflicted bloodletting. She was wounded, and as such, began to see the fluid of her soul smeared across every surface, every item on her path:

I started hallucinating. I saw my right wrist constantly bleeding. At times it was better and sometimes worse but it never went away, worse, somehow my brain kept track of everything I touched with my imaginary blood and within a couple days my life was covered in it. I found out this symbolized my life force, trauma, and feeling like I was losing my life. As I dealt more with my childhood experience my "wound" began to "heal". Eventually it closed and the hallucinations stopped. I got my tattoo there [on my wrist], facing myself as a constant reminder of my struggles but also to remind me to stay positive and I can get through anything.

A single tattoo lingers in the place where she once saw blood gush from her body. It covers the (un)real wound—her truth, her reality—a veritable bandage holding in her very lifeblood. Her life that once felt “lost” is now found, while the (re)membrance is there for her to see.

For Pink, there is no beginning or end to Dum Spiro Spero. It is not contained or compartmentalized to childhood or college or life after graduation. It is just another part of the continuity of her life. It is her tribute to her life as she lives it—once wounded, and now full of breath, and full of hope. By giving herself these remembrances of honor, of valor, of triumph, Pink can see, bodily, every day, a (re)claiming. It is through the tattoos, with the tattoos, that she is reminded of her strength, not only in *body*, but in all of her *being*.

Lulita had a different way to reclaim her body from her trauma, from her attacker. Lulita’s reclaiming was about her hair—the ways in which he used to control her with it by wrapping its great length around his arm, trapping her, owning her. The length of her hair became entangled with the experience of his ongoing terrorization. Lulita remembers:

One thing he would do is he would take my hair and kind of wrap it around his arm. He really liked my hair...and so there was a sexualization of my hair...I think I *needed* to cut it off...When I started going through my recovery, I cut it off, I went pretty short. Part of it was because...my abuse was sustained over time. My attacker would actually come find me throughout the first couple of years of my college career, so it didn't just end, it kept going.

And so, for Lulita, her attacker’s possession of her hair, literally using it to tether her to himself, became something that she needed to reclaim. By repossessing her hair, by choosing for herself what to do with it, by cutting it to a length that could not be wrapped

around anyone's arm, taken into anyone's possession, she began to regain control of her body and herself.

Lulita's bodily reclaiming also came in the sense of her *smallness*, her physical size. During her rape, diminutive meant dominated and diminished. Her shrinking spirit became weaker and weaker as his overriding force became greater and greater. When his presence was wiped clear of her space (by the matter of being expelled from school for academic dishonesty), her healing began. The end of her junior year brought with it a reclaiming of her smallness, a growing power that would come to be barely contained by her physical frame. Today she is larger than life, regardless of, and perhaps in spite of, the literal amount of space she fills:

There are other issues around feeling small. During my attack some of the things I remember [were] how big he was and how heavy he was and feeling extra small and extra tiny and extra fragile, and the whole process of learning how to take up space and not apologizing for it.

Of this kind of spatiality, in this relation of body-to-world and how one perceives oneself as a being in the world, Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

If my body can be a 'form' and if there can be, in front of it, important figures against different backgrounds, this occurs in virtue of its being polarized by its tasks, of its *existence towards* them, of its collecting together of itself in its pursuits of its aims; the body image is finally a way of stating that my body is in-the-world. (p. 101)

As such, for Lulita, her sense of small-ness in relation to the big-ness of her attacker was a point upon she rested with a certain background—a backdrop of victimization. The background of her small-ness, the backdrop of victimization, forced her into that space. As time moved on, as healing and survival moved on, Lulita became able to see herself against a different background—one that enhanced her own desire to take up more space

in the world and “not apologize for it.” The two—the small and the big —repel each other. As the magnetism of her new-found power grew, so did her survival spirit. The smallness of Lulita was marked, then, by its “existence towards” healing, and through that healing gave herself permission to grow.

(Re)claiming (Re)Actions

For every action, there is an equal and opposite (re)action, as described by Newton’s Laws of Motion. For those women who are raped in college (action), something equally powerful will follow (reaction). Their (re)actions are varied and diverse. Eating disorders, cutting, drinking, overworking, and drug abuse are only a few of the (re)actions (Herman, 1997; Lauer, 2002; Ledray, 1994). (Re)claiming harmful (re)actions takes on a two-fold layer of the lived experience. First, in taking action in another direction (in other words, a *re-action*), survivors move through that which holds them back and move forward toward a lightness and freedom from the trauma. Like the walking and running meditations, this movement is a simultaneous rest-and-realization, powerful sustenance to the healing body and mind. Second, by taking control over (in other, words *re-claiming*) that which once had controlled her, she finds agency toward her own chosen way of being in the world.

And it is in that (re)action—*actionem*, meaning “a performing, doing,” that is *done again* in a way that shifts whatever it might have been before. Like on the well-worn path of a mountain trail, the hiker never quite hits the same footprints she left the last time up, and she would not want to. She has become somewhat different, she has learned some other ways of being in the world. The walk is never quite the same because

today is always different than yesterday, and the world, and the mind, and the body and spirit are always changing.

Healing actions bring forth changes in the way things are by way of force or agency on behalf of the survivor and the environment around her. Survivors come to healing through performance. That which has been natural becomes unnatural. As the brokenness of victimization loses its foothold and begins to fall away, that which has come to feel unnatural can begin a slow and steady climb up and up and up. That is the action, that is the reaction.

Comforting.

Out in the woods I hear a far-off thunder. The wind begins to swirl around me, kicking up leaves and small branches. I hold my hands around my eyes to protect them from debris. Before I can find shelter, the rain begins. Fat, hard drops smack down on my head and hands. Any exposed skin is pelted by the glassy beads. The trees here are not close enough together to protect me from the storm. For now, I find a thick tree, crouch down among its protruding roots, and wrap my arms around my knees. I have only two comforts now—the sense of myself as self-protector, and the knowledge that the storm cannot go on forever.

Hoover (2011) writes:

In the beginning there was comfort.

You and I and everyone we know started life suspended in the warmth of a mother's womb. For most of us, it was a homeostatic Jacuzzi paradise, everything safe and peaceful. Nourishment and oxygen arrived dependably via umbilical cord. We hovered in the cozy amniotic waters, balanced, temperature-controlled, cushioned by a mother's flesh against the bumps and scrapes of the outside world. No bright lights, all loud ambient noise filtered down. Nothing hurt, nothing made us afraid. Primordial comfort. (p. 3)

For Pink, there is one way of being in that comforting place that trumps all others, and that is being curled up with her dog—the dog who was with her when she was raped. In the warmth, the fur, the familiar, Pink finds shelter from internal storms. They are storms that manifest at times in spite of herself, but she knows where to find refuge:

Having [my dog] is soothing and comforting. It allows me to calm my racing mind and slow my racing heart when I find myself anxious or panicked. She has been a God-send to me. Watching her open up to my boyfriend after hating men for years (particularly after my assault) means anyone can heal at some point regardless of how damaged they started off as.

Small, warm, furry, and devoted first and foremost to Pink, the little canine brings relief from her mind that might otherwise spin out of control—a place of calm to balance (dis)comfort. There is movement toward shifting (re)actions, of being in a place that is already on the other side of the shift. In the comfort, there is a new way of being. And from within the peace there may be a rising up, an empowerment, a belief in self. There is the finding of the power within.

Knowing.

As I lay on my back under the stars, I *know* that they are massive balls of gas in the far reaches of space. I also *know* how they make me feel as they are so far away in the universe. I feel like the center of the universe and tremendously insignificant at once. If they are *knowing* beings, and how can we really know if they are or are not, it is likely that they have no *knowledge* of me. I am so tiny in their view of Earth that I am not seen. These are different unknowns, and different ways of knowing.

In the knowing about things—about sexual assault, about rape—there can be a sort of anchoring. It is a way in which survivors may become still and rooted for long enough to gain their bearings. Once they find their bearings, they may move forward

again, knowing the direction that will take them back to the safety of shore. Chloe first began to see movement toward healing in the knowing, in the accepting of what she was going through, in the calling it rape:

To me the acceptance was admitting that I was a victim of sexual assault. It was admitting that he did something wrong (and illegal) and that it was not my fault. It was *knowing* that I could have done a million things differently that night but it still did not change the fact that he took advantage of the situation.

It is in the knowing and the naming that one might move from feelings of insignificance to feelings of power. Knowing is a claiming of power. Naming is a claiming of power.

Names and words have the power to slow or halt healing altogether, *naming* can also be moving, healing, and surviving. Estes (1992) writes:

Naming a force, creature, person, or thing has several connotations. In cultures where names are chosen carefully for their magical or auspicious meanings, to know a person's true name means to know the life path and the soul attributes of that person. And the reason the true name is often kept secret is to protect the owner of the name so that he or she might grow into the power of the name, to shelter it so that no one will either denigrate it or distract from it, and so that one's spiritual authority can develop to its full proportions. (p. 122)

For Chloe, it is in the naming that the moving begins. She knows what it is and she can begin to wrap her brain and being around the meaning of it. For Chloe, knowing what happened to her (what it really was, the acknowledgement of it, the naming of it) opened a door to connecting it with things she had already learned:

I think that education gives me a sense of control over my situation. Instead of looking at the assault like 'he did this to me and there was nothing I could do about it,' I can now look at it as 'he did this to me and because I had to live through this I can use my experience to help other people'.

Herman (1997) would call this her survivor mission, for what is a mission but an all-encompassing charge, from self, from another, to accomplish something great. And after enduring sexual assault and the extreme challenges that follow, a survivor mission

may be the most important mission of all. Reaching back into the world, reaching out to others, and doing good so that the endured horror will not be in vain.

O'Donohue (1997) writes:

There is a lovely idea in the Celtic tradition that if you send out goodness from yourself, or if you share that which is happy or good within you, it will all come back to you multiplied ten thousand times. In the kingdom of love there is no competition; there is no possessiveness or control. The more love you give away, the more love you will have. One remembers here Dante's notion that the secret rhythm of the universe is the rhythm of love, which moves the stars and the planets. Love is the source, center, and destiny of experience. (pp. 35-36).

The concept is attractive, indeed. After experiencing the trauma of rape, a survivor may find that any goodness she puts out into the world is given back to her "ten thousand times." Of course, this is not why she does it. She wishes to soften the world for rape survivors in the future. She wishes to help create communities of care, she wishes to educate the world and to end rape. It is the *knowing* that her anguish was not in vain. It is knowing that she can make the world a better place because she *knows* what it is like to live through the trauma.

For Aeryn, *knowing* was a central part of *surviving*. For her, empowerment emerged out of becoming educated on the topic and was a key to surviving the trauma:

I think it's helpful to learn about things that I'm feeling in an intellectual context because it helps me to understand myself and others better and with a more informed background. I also feel that it's helpful in working with others who have experienced some of the things that I had and supporting them in learning to understand what they have gone through and to know that so many others have been through many of the same things before and as much as they can, much of what they are feeling is understandable, common and part of the way our brain learns to cope and survive.

It is the knowing of self—both as the center of the universe and the insignificant spot in that same vast space. It is a being aware of one's place and power in the world. It is being

aware of self, of others, and of powers both in and out of one's control. It is finding community in the sameness and similarities of other rape survivors, and sharing that there is always a light shining in the dark night sky.

(Re)claiming (Found)ation

A wondrous radiant blossom, awesome for all to view,
Both for immortal gods and also for mortal men.
From this plant's root a hundred heads had sprouted up,
And scent most sweetly spread; all Heaven wide above
Beamed, as did all Earth, and the salty swell of the Sea.
And she [Persephone], being struck with wonder, reached out with both of her
hands

To grasp this beautiful plaything; but broad-pathed Earth gaped wide
On the Nysion plain where the lord, the Receiver of Many, rushed forth
With his deathless horses, Kronos' son who has many a name.
He seized her against her will, and aboard his golden car
Carried her off, lamenting; she uttered a piercing scream. (Homer, trans. 2008)

In *Hymn to Demeter*, the earth opens up and swallows Persephone whole. She is raped by Hades, who then traps her in the depths of Hell. The foundation below her gaped wide open and then closed above her, imprisoning her so that none above might hear her cries. Raine (1998) writes:

The story begins with Persephone gathering flowers in a meadow. It was not a bird's song that caught her attention, but a flower – a narcissus with a hundred blooms “which Earth grew as a snare.” The moment she reached for the breathtaking flower, the earth gaped open and Hades, lord of the underworld, thundered into the light, driving a chariot drawn by immortal horses. In an instant, Persephone is snatched up and dragged below. She screams for help, but no one hears her – only the echo of her voice is left, “throbbing through the barren air.” (p. 237)

The luring of Persephone by a flower—a “snare” of beauty that draws her in for the earth to swallow her whole—is often the same experience of survivors of sexual assault, though the common rape mythology shares a different story. It tells us that rapists are frightening in image, that we should know them when we see them, and that they are

typically strangers to us. The reality is that rapists tend to be more like the beautiful and cunning flower, with the capability to draw in unwitting victims (Lisak, 2002).

At the end of the story, redemption comes for Persephone just as it comes for the survivors in this study. Persephone rises up through the earth, reclaiming the foundation of ground beneath her and making it whole again. Persephone's rise from hell was not an easy one. Once above ground, the leaves of the landscape dried and shriveled, signified by her return in autumn. But the emergence of such pain lasts just one season, and then the earth makes way for the healing blanket of winter.

The similarities between Persephone's story and those of survivors abound. For survivors, time spent in the season of autumn is as different as each individual woman. But at some point, the seasons resume. Persephone, and all survivors, remains with the pain and memory of abduction—abduction of innocence, abduction of sexuality, abduction of virginity, abduction of life. Through the searching and finding, survivors may regain the power they once had, and they may better recognize the power they have had all along, especially with family, friends, faculty, and staff who can be there as part of the foundation they so desperately need to reclaim.

Finding friends.

The painful autumn season in which Aeryn's trauma took place was also a time of quiet decay for her. She did not understand the foundation that was eroding beneath her because she did not understand what had happened to her:

In college, I didn't even realize, (or rather let myself realize) I was sexually assaulted until well after the event(s) occurred. It wasn't until a wonderful friend of mine at the time was talking about her participation in [our campus peer education program] that I began to ask that question of my experiences. Later on, she oh-so delicately asked me, "Do you think you might have been raped?" That

was the first time I began to even think in those terms. Gradually, I began to cope with what I had experienced, I began to identify in many ways as a survivor.

Denial stopped her from dealing with the experience; it lived in the back of her mind until the moment she was able to allow it to come forward. She had lost her footing, but friendship helped her find it again.

Friends are always an important part of the foundation for survivors; they can make or break the foundation upon which survivors stand. After being deserted by her so-called friends immediately following her rape, Sweetie began to rebuild her foundation of friendships within the group of volunteers who worked on sexual violence issues on her campus:

It was also absolutely amazing to be surrounded with trusted friends that showed me care and compassion everyday not only in squeezing my hand before a seemingly difficult presentation but also in how they anonymously defended me when people who say things out of line, or when they would seamlessly take over when I couldn't finish my thought, or checking on how I was doing after we left the group or classroom. Seeing complete strangers (before we joined) care so much about the topic and wanting to help others and the community was such a stark contrast of what it was like to deal with "friends" who completely betrayed me and abandoned me... I am incredibly grateful to the people who stuck by me.

(Find)ing footing, feet planted on a firm (found)ation. When grounding is firm, survival may move forward. Without a solid (found)ation, survival rests on unstable ground. For survivors of sexual assault, that foundation is made up of family, friends, faculty, and staff. Just as these people can serve to shatter the foundation for healing from sexual assault, so, too, can they serve as the very foundation. Yet in order for people to become a constructive foundation, they must first be *found*, identified, and rallied together.

Finding family.

From the Old English *findan*, meaning to “come upon, meet with,” the word

“finding” leads to the (found)ation that may be created with family members. It is through the coming upon, through the meeting with, talking to, *being* with, that the foundation may be found. As such, survivors may find their foundations by searching, by learning, and by coming to know themselves better. So, too, do they find the family members who will be there to support them in the ways they need.

Pink says “[after I was raped] I learned who my friends were, how much my family cared for me, and how strong I really was.” Indeed, it was the people in her life that helped to give her solid footing, or served to knock her down. Aeryn sensed that the people in her life had that power, and was careful with whom she shared her story:

I didn't tell anyone I didn't know would be supportive. I still haven't. It's not a risk I want to take. I have enough supportive people in my life and I'm comfortable with that. When a friend said to me once, "I'm so sorry that happened to you" that was probably the best response I ever got. Simple. Direct. Didn't ask stupid questions or get angry at him for me. Just saying, that was bad. I'm sorry.

What happens when the foundation is missing? What if it cannot be found? In Aeryn's case, even to this day, she is able to sense who will be a part of her foundation and who will not. When her footing was not stable, she could not afford to share her trauma with someone who might weaken the ground beneath her. Now that she is sure that the land beneath her is stable, she still will not risk its degradation. A shift in words, a tip in meaning, and the ground beneath her risks deterioration, whereas such simple words can shore it up. “That was bad.” “I'm sorry.”

Finding faculty and staff.

The university can be seen as a two pillars of support— faculty and staff. Chloe's first finding of foundational support was, indeed, with both faculty and staff. When the two pillars worked together for her, Chloe's support multiplied exponentially. By way of

the far reaches of these pillars and their abilities to create support and enact change, Chloe found her first respite from hell:

I worked closely with the victim advocate on campus and she was able to contact my teachers for me. This was a big relief because I don't know that at the time I would have been able to tell my story to that many people! Some teachers then asked me to stay after class to figure out how to "cut me slack" and some just forgave missed assignments without ever saying anything. I did feel slightly embarrassed that I was unable to keep on top of my school work.

The telling and retelling of one's experience can loosen the foundation. The thought of telling and retelling her story kept Chloe from approaching her faculty members. It seemed to her that she should be able to stay on top of her school work. Without the help of a staff victim advocate, she would have been on shaky ground. In her questioning of self, she presumed the questioning of others.

Sweetie found pillars of support on and off campus: "Again, relating the trauma of sexual assault to the trauma of my father's death, I was the one who wanted to talk. I could talk about my feelings for hours and needed to talk." If someone was willing to listen in a nonjudgmental way, she was willing to talk. People who were there for her in that way became a big part of her foundation. Therapy also helped her find her (found)ation; through a strong connection with her therapist, she unearthed meaningful ways of knowing *herself*:

It wasn't my first time in therapy - I had done it before when my father passed away so I sort of knew what to expect and also knew it was something that had helped me before. I really enjoyed my therapist and felt like I clicked well with her. The relationship was very easy and comfortable. I don't remember when I started going less often but I knew I could always go back if I was having trouble or just wanted to check in.

An openness to sharing her experience exposed Sweetie's foundation of strength. It had been locked away by the trauma, but it was found again by talking, by sharing feelings,

by speaking words. Her therapist was open to meeting her wherever she might be upon that foundation—finding the stronger parts, rebuilding the weaker. As if she was a net beneath Sweetie’s foundation, the therapist was there whenever Sweetie might slip through a crack. That net was central to her salvation.

Lauer (2002) writes:

Words are my salvation – words that others have penned so carefully, words that others have whispered softly in my ears, words that have eased my suffering, words that helped me know I cannot only survive, but thrive – and this is what I give you. (p. xiii)

And it is the gift of words spoken to survivors by friends, family, community, that can mean the world—the difference between life and death. Sweetie took solace in the words of a staff member who worked in the area of sexual assault:

[She was] a huge part of my healing process and how [she] helped change the anniversary date from the dreaded [anniversary of the rape] to [the following day] eve - just calling it something different really helped.

A shift in foundation is sometimes all it takes to move the foundation from the edge of a cliff to more stable ground. This shift, for Sweetie, was small, but significant. A shift in naming—naming the day, naming the anniversary. By taking away the power of that day by way of its original name, Sweetie was able to take a few steps back, reestablish her balance, and know that she was in control of the thing and that the thing was not in control of her.

(Re)claiming Control

I have no control over my surroundings in the woods. The woods have no control over me or the weather. With so much out of control, how can one even begin to imagine (re)claiming it?

Perhaps in the (re)claiming, there is not a *taking* of control in terms of possession or domination, but instead the sense of *being part of* something greater than oneself. Instead of becoming a rigid dam opening and closing only on its own terms, control may be more like the foot in the stream, aware of slippings and watery movings, able to move with the world around it.

Being out of control is a tipping, dizzying, confusing place to be. One moment you're in a trusted place with a trusted person and the next moment you are a *being*, physically and metaphorically ripped apart. There is no escape from the outer edges of a hurricane. There is no stabilization. There is only *loss* of control. For survivors of sexual assault, control is everything. It was forcibly taken from them, and there is great pain in the continued loss of it as victimization sets in and survival is slow to surface. As it emerges, however, the (re)claiming begins.

It means having ownership and control of my thoughts and body. I have thoughts, physical responses, feelings about my experiences that come up for me regularly. But I've been able to gain the control to say, okay, I'm feeling this way, thinking this way, etc. and I'm going to allow myself to be that way, think these things right now, or...I'm going to move away from this because it's not helpful, rational, etc. (Aeryn)

As Aeryn began to heal, she finds control in the engaging and dis-engaging with her world, as does Chloe:

To me, power means having control over the situation you are in. Not necessarily control over other people but control over your own emotions and how you react to your circumstances.

One can manage this way of being in the world. While she has no way of directing the forest or the weather around her, no way of telling the trees to fall this way or the wind to gust that way, she could take control of her self, her body. She found her own agency,

choosing to either go for her own shelter, or fully embrace the power of the sun, the rain, and the snow.

It was that very embracing of environment that became part of Sweetie's lived experience, too; only her trees were on the campus green. Her wind blew around academic buildings where it gently moved clotheslines hung with t-shirts that were painted with the powerful words of rape survivors. Just like purposefully watching a sad movie in order to have a good cry, Sweetie would attend certain events on campus because she knew how they would affect her. She wanted to experience that effect, but she also wanted to have some control over when the cry happened and what coaxed it out:

The day is hard to describe in words because it is very emotionally overwhelming but in a good way. You know when you'll purposefully put on a sappy movie, like *The Notebook*, when you "need a good cry"? It's kind of like that. It's a big release. You see the profound impact that sexual assault has made on so many people's lives and the varying stages too - some shirts are angry, some are sad, some are inspiring and hopeful, some were made immediately after an assault and others made many years later. But the expressions and emotions present on each one are very powerful and unique to each survivor and his/her experience.

Standing among the t-shirts at the Clothesline Project is an all-encompassing experience. Hundreds of t-shirts surround you—everywhere you look there is a t-shirt that stands as a tribute to someone's trauma or triumph—or both. It is a (re)claiming of control for countless survivors—the ones who create t-shirts and the ones who are inspired by the sight of them.

Movement: From Victim to Survivor

I would have to say that [in my experience] any woman who has lived through sexual assault and come out on the other side, that she has successfully survived.
(Beth)

In an effort to escape the storm, I find myself searching for shelter. *Discovering* no adequate *covering*, I crouch beneath a mass of draping vines. They do not provide the protection I need. Instead, they capture the heavy rain and dump it on me each time it pools and becomes too heavy to hold. With nowhere else to go, I stay put and endure the periodic splashes in lieu of the constant heavy downpour of the open sky. I'm not sure which is worse, but I'm in it either way, and I must tolerate it until it recedes. When it moves on, I will have survived again.

What is it to come out on the other side? How can we know what the other side is? It is what it is for each survivor—it may be opening up to love for Beth, or feeling like there is no longer a “victim” sign around her neck for Aeryn. It might be sleeping through the night for Chloe, or the symbolism behind the most recent tattoo for Pink. There is a murky trajectory—one that does not always follow a clean path. The other side looks different for all of these women, but it is in the *getting through* survival, the *living in* survival, that they each find themselves having arrived, having survived.

For Pink, the path to survival was riddled with stoppings, each one as shocking as the next. The first failing came from people she expected to help her. Above anyone else, she thought they would offer help, sensitivity, and attention, but instead she was left feeling judged, chastised, and alienated. She thought they would have the training, the expertise. She grew up believing that when you are a victim of a crime, you go to the police for help:

The cops and the prosecutors utterly failed. They actually traumatized me far more than my perpetrator. They told me “I have a good feeling nothing happened.” They didn't even ask for a last name or address, had no plans to give me a case number, and didn't go to his house for two weeks after the fact. The fact that there was DNA evidence and the prosecutor didn't take my case is still

baffling to me. It is part of the reason I am now applying to law school so I can add some positivity to advocacy work in the legal arena.

It was almost as if they were trying to stop her. It was almost as if they did not want her to heal, to move forward, to survive. As they had decided that any woman who reported a rape was lying. Their “good feeling nothing happened” left Pink with anything but *good feelings*. It was disheartening. It crushed her...at first. But years later, her response is incredible. She turned the nightmare of rape, compounded by the nightmare of the police response to her, into an unstoppable drive to make change. This stopping eventually moved her toward activism in college and later, through the law. The very entity that tried to stop her is the one she will join and do her best to change from the inside out.

For Chloe, the trajectory started when she acknowledged what happened to her. The power of the acknowledgement plunged her into the deep, watery, suffocating pool of victimization, which was where survival really began. Here we see stoppings beget movings, however small, however slow:

I didn't want to be a ‘victim.’ What I didn't realize at the time was that I didn't have to be a ‘victim,’ I could have been a ‘survivor.’ At the time I just wanted to not have experienced the assault.

There was a grim newness in awakening. It was the seeing of reality after living in a dream that never felt quite right. It was a bittersweet moment—the relief of knowing, the sadness of knowing.

And so there is a shifting from not knowing to knowing. And then, sometime later, there is a shifting from the aching pain to the sense that there is some goodness to come:

I think that moment that shift happened to me was after a...presentation in which I read [my story] to a 100+ class of women's study students...Comment cards

[were left] so students could let us know what they thought of the presentation. A girl responded to my [story] saying that I really helped her and she knew what I meant because she had just gone through the same thing. I think the shift was directly related to the feeling of being able to help someone else with the knowledge I had gained through living that experience. (Chloe)

For Chloe, there was a stigma in being a victim, and choice in being a survivor. She wanted to escape her victimization. When she finally started seeing her experience for what it was, however, she knew that she could move into a place of survival.

And it is in that shifting that we begin to explore the body's turnings, situatings, and configuratings as they pertain to the movement forward in survival. As Levin (1985) writes:

Consider the pre-given configurations of meaning with which our ego-logical motility-body finds itself always already invested: consider, e.g. the pre-cultural meaningfulness in our turning-to-face, our taking-a-stand, our fallenness, our uprightness, our flexibility, our unconscious favoring of right or left, our attitudes towards up and down, the above and the below, and our bodily felt differentiation between what is in front of us and what is behind. (p. 100)

Exploration begins with the early edge of victimization to the far reaches of survival. It is in the turning-to-face and the taking-a-stand that survival emerges out of victimization. It is in our uprightness, and our flexibility. It is in acknowledging what is in front of us and what is behind. It is an emergence of motility, movement toward the light-ness.

From the Early Edge of Victimization

I was victimized,
someone violated me,
I was hurt.
(Sweetie)

The earliest edge of victimization is a precarious place to be. Like standing on the rim of a cliff, with one's back to the vast downward fall, one slip of footing could mean certain death. It could mean being lost forever at the bottom of an unreachable depth.

What is it to be victimized? To be violated? To be hurt? The word *victimized* takes on a different meaning than the word *victim*. To be a victim, one stands alone. The perpetrator is not acknowledged—there is just the person and the label. Standing alone, the world has placed *being a victim* solely on her shoulders as if she is the one who both did it to herself and now lives with the pain. There is no one else in the picture. The phrase, *to be victimized*, however, overtly recognizes that yes, there is another being who has done this *to* her. Someone else has done the *victim-iz-ing*.

These are two of the ways survivors can be steeped in victim space—one of self-blame, and one of movement toward a place of clearer understanding. The movement from one to the other is the beginning of movement within survival. It is a way of *being* in the *movement of healing*. Heidegger (1962) writes:

The world is already presupposed in one's Being alongside the ready-to-hand, and in one's thematizing of the present-at-hand...that is to say, all these are possible only as ways of Being-in-the-world. Having its ground [gründent] in the horizontal unity of ecstatical temporality, the world is transcendent. (p. 417)

Present-at-hand is the way of *being in the movement of healing*. As one is present in one's way of being in the world, one may take on the movement of survival. It is all of these things, *being–movement–healing*, that together make up the transcending victim, who moves to transcending victimization, who continues forward on the path of survival. Upon the path of survival, which lasts a lifetime, one maintains the temporality of time and space that is this *transcendence-within-movement*.

Whether it is mental movement, as when the body is still, or the stillness of mind when the body is in motion—or whether it is the stillness upon stillness of body and mind

together, or the multiplying of energy when body and mind are in motion together—it is the following of one’s deepest desires. Dreamer (2001) writes:

Show me how to follow your deepest desires,
spiraling down into the ache within the ache,
and I will show you how I reach inward and open outward
to feel the kiss of the Mystery, sweet lips on my own, every day. (p. 18)

It is in movement that outward opening and sweetness may be reached. It is a way of being in the dance, the celebration of life so high, only accessible because there have been such lows. The dance is a movement home—bodily home, spiritual home, at peace with oneself.

Finding and voicing our soul’s longing is not enough. Our ability to live in a way that is consistent with our longing – our ability to dance – is dependent upon what we believe we must do. If our intention is to change who we essentially are, we will fail. If our intention is to become who we essentially are, we cannot help but live true to the deepest longings of our soul. (Dreamer, p. 1)

This being-movement-healing brings us to the “deepest longings of our soul.” We long for peace. We long for hope. We long for the days before rape when we could breathe easily and worry less. But we are no longer that way. We are rape survivors, and the tightness of breath and the worry may always be somewhere within us. However, there is so much more within us, too. We can find it when we open to the essence, and the all-encompassing, of who we are today.

For Sweetie, the acknowledgment of being a victim was the beginning of the road to her essence. The bigness of it has grown smaller, the all-encompassing nature of it has made room for other ways of being in the world, and she finds peacefulness in her movement about her space. It is like a pool of water that becomes dirtier and dirtier as it is isolated from sources of fresh replenishment. Sweetie says “someone *violated me*, I

was hurt.” There is a knowing in these words of the *other*—of the one who did it—of the man who raped her—of the blame that is due *him*. There is an inherent moving away from self-blame to knowing that it was an action against her, not an action against herself by her self. She is not to blame. She recognizes that. She moves forward from the *stoppings* of victim to the *movings* of survival.

And so Sweetie lived through it all, beginning on the early edge of victimization and moving along the never-ending path of survival. It is a path that gets easier to travel—muscles and mind are strengthened and the terrain becomes less treacherous. From the earliest edge of victimization, where she could tip backward and fall away, to the far edge of survival, off of which she can take flight. Even in the flying away, she will take with her a life in survival.

In those earliest moments, at the earliest edge, the experience is so intense and so horrible, and the path that follows is long and arduous. No one can understand it unless they’ve been through it—the moment-by-moment fear, numbness, brokenness, and disconnection. It is in the temporality of the movement between the ways of being—named or unnamed—that the lived experience can be known. Heidegger (1962) writes:

We shall point to temporality as the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call “Dasein”. If this is to be demonstrated, those structures of Dasein which we shall provisionally exhibit must be interpreted again as modes of temporality. In this interpreting Dasein as temporality, however, we shall not give the answer to our leading question as to the meaning of Being in general. But the ground will have been prepared for obtaining such an answer. (p. 38)

So it is in the movement, in the time it takes, in the temporality, that *Dasein* emerges. We come to know the lived experience of sexual assault survival through the transference from one bodily way of being to another, including all of the time and space in between,

and all that may come after. It is in the wholeness of the journey that the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college comes to be known. The phenomenon is non-linear; each path follows the curves of individuals' survivals.

As Aeryn reflects on the path she has walked through her sexual assault survival experience, she refuses labels and delves more deeply into her own understanding of what happened to her:

I think at first I felt like a confused person trying to figure out what happened to me. Then I think I felt more injured, sad, probably a bit more like the "victim" but I've always hated labels in general and think I avoided them in a number of contexts. I think in time that I came to see myself as someone who had experienced something terrible, but that it didn't have the power to define me by making me into a survivor.

The words fall short, but the experience runs deep. From victimization to survival, the language can only begin to scratch the surface of understanding.

To the Far Reaches of Survival

I do not believe that there is any set of words that I could use to describe all survivors of sexual assault. Rather I would describe each survivor by who they happen to be and their unique set of characteristics/attributes. Except for the word "survivor" – I would use that to universally describe myself, and all survivors of sexual assault. (Lulita)

I do not use one set of words to show, to *uncover*, what it is to *live* rape survival in college. I use the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, which, by its very nature, calls forth the multitude of words, and the meanings made behind the words—the experiences, and the meanings made behind the experiences. It is in the delving into origins and meanings that the uncovering begins. I hold up the nuances of life for each participant, the changes, the differences within the similarities for each woman. Survival's reach is far—it lasts forever, for the rest of life, itself. And once the light

begins to shine, once the fog begins to lift, once the sadness of victimization is wiped away by the emergence of peace, there is life on the horizon.

On the horizon one may glimpse the far reaches of survival. On the horizon, there is hope. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

I direct my gaze upon a sector of the landscape, which comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there. Now, with them, I have at my disposal their horizons, in which there is implied, a marginal view, the object on which my eyes at present fall. The horizon, then, is what guarantees the identity of the object throughout the exploration; it is the correlative of the impending power which my gaze retains over the objects which it has just surveyed, and which it already has over the fresh details which it is about to discover. (p. 68)

It is this focus on the horizon that allows each piece of survival to come into clarity, each in its own right; each is juxtaposed against the other in order to be known better within the context of the life being lived. It is out there on the horizon, the place we never quite reach, that we may find our own truths along the journey. Indeed, survival must be found within the journey, and not the destination, because the horizontal destination can never be reached. As we inch forward, it inches away, and yet in the inching forward we have still gained movement, progress, insight.

Levin (1985) writes:

When motility, ontologically speaking ‘an ultimate continuity,’ is (i) thoroughly integrated with the four lamps of vision (i.e., when our motility is in touch with, and arises from, the stratum of a synaesthetic intertwining), then ‘(ii) the felt knowledge of reality becomes more and more intense, (iii) cognition attains its fullest measure, and (iv) reality reigns alone.’ The existential ‘goal,’ which is ‘self-freedom,’ is then ‘perfectly present in the light of the path,’ a path which would be appropriate to call a path of ‘self-authentication.’ (p. 113)

It is in the insight that one is able to watch the fog lift, to see the open skies ahead.

Survival is finding a pace—an “ultimate continuity” upon which to walk—and in doing

so, one may find peace in each step to come. This is not to say that each step will be on stable ground—this is only to say that with continuity comes a knowing that when today's road is littered with slips and falls, tomorrow's road can bring the healing that is so desperately needed. It is a knowing that the healing will always be there. That the very fact that the sky is dark today means that it will *clear*—maybe not tomorrow, but it *will clear*.

And it is in that clarity that freedom emerges –freedom from the confines of victimization. There is a freedom in knowing that there can be a day in which rape is not the thing I wake up thinking about and the thing that keeps me up at night. There is a freedom in knowing that rape will not always be woven so tightly into my daily fabric—it will become the looser hangings-on around the fringe.

For Lulita, the fringe becomes the afterthought while the center of her fabric remains the essence of her:

Earlier in my adult life, I would say that sexual assault survival meant that I had come to terms with being a survivor and no longer being a "victim" by moving on with my life. However, BEING a survivor was a central aspect of my identity and self-view. Now, at this stage of my life, I would say that "survival" means that I have become more than a survivor - I am now ME first and foremost, of which being a survivor is just one aspect of who I am and what I have experienced.

And in that time between the first two and a half years of college and now, she has walked miles of survival, each with its own distinctions. In a valley of between-ness, survival can feel like an inescapable expanse. One can trudge through the landscape, affected by the elements, oscillating between fear and detachment. These survivors have reached the other side. They have survived.

On one side of the valley, there is a great height of life before the rape. In the eyes of the survivors, it is a distant land. It seems like a dream, like another life. Now, after so much time on the journey, it looks so small, so far away, as if it was someone else's life. On the other side of the valley, there is a great height of life after the rape. There is a before-ness and an after-ness of survival—a reminiscence of what once was a more naïve and safer place to be, and what is now a harsher, darker, more realistic place. But deeper darkness evoke brighter light. Life before may have the lightness of a watercolor—thin, watery, dreamy, beautiful, blissful, dreamy, Life now is more like an oil painting—thick, layered with the deepest and richest of colors, and broader inclusion of the darkness and the light. The two paintings may be representations of the same landscape, of the same life, but they are seen so differently by the very medium through which they were depicted.

What is it to get to the far edge of survival? The place where the sun shines and the trauma is distant, and only periodically does dread come to the forefront? What is it to get to that place where you can look out onto the vast expanse of the world and feel like you can fly? Where is that point? And what is the point of knowing it?

That point exists in different ways and spaces for each woman, all the while existing in the sameness of survival—of having lived through rape in college. *The point* is knowing that the light, the relief, the healing rarely happened in college for the women in this study. There were glimpses of it, but it never fully came into sight. *The point* is knowing that college is not the place that it can be. It is not a shoring-up, but instead is a crumbling down, and the crumbling is exacerbated by the acidic pool in which survivors so often have to swim.

Beth explains:

Survival began the day after the assault, but I don't think I was doing positive or constructive things to help in my survival. It wasn't until I [got involved in sexual assault prevention] that I started to positively influence my survival and recovery (so to speak) [but] *ultimately* survival really came together when I met my husband, we started dating and got married.

For Beth, survival was a mountainous summitting. At the bottom of the mountain there was the muddiness of watery run-off that made the movement forward so hard. The water and mud were the mucky choices that she now wishes she hadn't made, but which, in the moment, got her through. She was able to push through. Halfway up her mountain she begins to find community, and can sometimes glimpse the apex through the trees. It isn't until after college, though, that she is able to pull herself up to the top. And it is there that she does so alongside her life partner who she knows will support her through the ups and downs.

All of the participants in this study are now in very good places in their lives. They are powerful. They are unstoppable. While the struggle in college was murky and muddy, the emergence from it became cleansing and clearing. They made it through the devastation of rape, each of them to different degrees. They have, for the most part, healed from the traumas. It is a never-ending road, but they've found strong footing, and they are more often better than worse.

Turning the corner.

Hiking high into the woods, the trees are dense around me, the path below me narrow. There is only the feeling of my ascent that tells me I will, at some point, reach the top. And when it happens, when I turn the corner and climb the final steps to the top of the grey rock mountaintop, I feel like I am on top of the world with every possibility at

my feet. Turning the corner is grand. Turning the corner is survival. There is a shifting from the darkness into the light, from the beaten down to the uplifting, from the sadness to hope.

For Aeryn, that continued pain came again and again with continued interaction with her rapist. She went through horrifying things with him, scary physical losses and emotional cruelty. And now? Now she emits a strength that is impossible to miss. She is a force, pushed up through the suffocation of exploitation:

This guy called me the next day after raping me asking me to hang out that night. I look back now, like, wahhhh? At the time, I just thought, oh, well, he's calling me, so this is like, dating? So I did, vaguely [date him], I guess for a few weeks. He treated me like dirt, continued to date other girls, all sorts of stuff I would have never tolerated before or after, but I think I needed in some way to believe we were dating, because dating an asshole was much easier to understand, rationalize and deal with than being raped. I remember one time I left his apartment (always hung-over because getting me drunk – I was 18 still – was always a part of the equation) and it was pouring rain and he refused to give me a coat or umbrella. I ended up breaking up with him finally when I had a miscarriage, previously not even knowing I was pregnant. Again, prior to this guy [I] never thought about practicing anything but safe sex. So, [the miscarriage] happened at his apartment actually and he was LIVID because I got blood all over the sheets. So, that was the final crazy Jerry Springer moment when I was like, I'm done with this bullshit. This is crazy.

There was a seeing-what-it-was after a clinging-to-what-it was not. It was abusive. It was painful. It was physically and emotionally threatening. It was *not* dating. It was *not* okay. At some point in the madness of his cruelty, she gained clarity. She endured pain after pain with him, and emerged on the other side so strong. She turned the corner to her power-revealed. She turned the corner and the world was hers again. Her world was still a place of struggle, but the struggle walked alongside the power, which seemed from there on to have the upper hand. Her power took struggle from her hands and held it at an

arm's length. There was no more room for him, for her rapist, within her—her power had pushed him back out.

For Sweetie, the turning was more gradual. There was no grand revelation—instead, there was a slow, steady emergence of survival that she did not recognize until it was fully upon her:

I don't think I can pinpoint the moment, which is funny because to me it does seem clear present vs. past. But I'd say over time, *survivor* just resonated better. I think therapy and time is what made that transition to survivor from victim. Maybe it was more quick and immediately after [the assault that] I saw myself as a victim but then once I started therapy and learning more about sexual assault, freeing myself from the guilt, blame, and understanding how to move on from the experience, I learned the skills and tools I needed to survive the horror.

And it was along the steady climb that she found the tools she needed for the measured movement forward and the eventual emergence of survival. As for Sweetie and so many others, survival is ongoing, and a constant reinvention.

For Beth, the turning point was the Clothesline Project. As she sat on the floor of a university classroom building, blank t-shirt laid out in front of her, paints and markers in hand, the courage rose up in her to put it out there, to name it, and to name him. And in the naming of him, she began to release the horror that he had inflicted upon her:

After making the T-shirt with the Clothesline Project, I felt like I was ready to begin a new chapter and not have relationships so contingent on “I’m a sexual assault survivor.” Although I wanted to be careful and cautious with any relationships moving forward, I wanted to live my life as normally as possible. I no longer wanted to feel like I was labeled or “broken” because of what had happened... Without explicitly telling the guy what I would have liked to say to his face, I was able to shout it out on my T-shirt. I got my feelings out there.

What would it have been like for her to tell him to his face? The image of his rage wells up, of his defensiveness, of his active-ness, of the fear that he elicits in her. Instead, her t-shirt, sitting in front of her, blank, motionless, became a manifestation of him and what

she wanted to say to him. Without having to see him again, without the fear of him being close enough to reach out and touch her, to harm her again, she found a way to release into the universe the indecency that he had pushed upon her. And in getting her feelings out there, she was able to turn the corner, to see the light, to free her spirit from him, from the rape, from her trauma.

Inspiration.

What is inspiration? From the Latin *inspirare*, to “inflammate, blow into,” the word evokes the image of fire. Contained fire, as in that which is gathered around for warmth and community, and raging fire, as in that which engulfs whole forests, whole communities. It is the spark that ignites both, and the ways in which it is stoked, breathed upon, blown into, that dictates its intensity. Inspiration is a *breathing-in* of one’s own energy and the energy that others have to give. It is the give and take within the fire. It is a welling up. It fuels an ability to go on.

For Pink, hearing stories from other survivors gives her a sense of connection to something larger than she is, and from that she gains inspiration. Knowing that other survivors are out there, she feels not quite so alone, and her flame is fueled. For her, the fire is faith:

I...love hearing from survivors their moments of hope or change because I am fascinated by how different they are to each person. For me it would be driving in my car, feeling the sun and realizing that I was brimming with joy and thankfulness. Other times it was sitting in a...presentation and feeling moments of pride when the subject was discussed rather than guilt or shame. For me, it was dancing around my room and realizing [that the] “gloom and doom” [version of myself] that was always waiting for the other shoe to drop wasn’t there.

Most days, the “doom and gloom” that came with the rape and engulfed her victimized self is gone. The ways in which the doom brought her spirit down, and the gloom made it

hard to see, were lifted. Now she can enjoy moments of joy that are not overshadowed by the trauma of her past. She can see the clarity of life as it stands before her, through new eyes, loving eyes. They are eyes that have come to see herself in loving ways.

O'Donohue (1997) writes:

To the loving eye, everything is real. This art of love is neither sentimental nor naïve. Such love is the greatest criterion of truth, celebration, and reality. Kathleen Raine, a Scottish poet, says that unless you see a thing in the light of love, you do not see it at all. Love is the light in which we live. Love is the light in which we see each thing in its true origin, nature, destiny. If we could look at the world in a loving way, then the world would rise up before us full of invitation, possibility, and depth. (p. 65)

And it is in this new way that Pink is able to see herself—through her own loving eyes, and reflected back in the eyes of other survivors. As she inspires them, they inspire her, and her soul is filled with a love that had once been taken. She has the capacity to reclaim it for herself, and to wrap herself in the inspiration of it.

Survival is a way of taking the horrible things that happened, to *see them in a new light*, to find ways to learn from them and to teach others, as described by Pink:

Survival means changing your view from seeing the experience as taking something from you, and replacing it with the clarity and gratitude of seeing what you have gained from it. You must go through the pain and hurt of questions like "why me?" and "will I ever be the same or whole again?" You must grapple with why someone would choose to do that to another human being, and more specifically you. [I went] through periods of victim blaming and incredible bouts of self-doubt.

From a losing of self to a gaining of clarity, Pink finds gratitude in the inspiration that fills her today. From the brokenness of "why me," to a place of restitution, she finds an emergent wholeness through strength and optimism. And it is through that powerfully inspiring strength that she is able to know now that she was not to blame for what

happened to her. She comes to embrace the fact that the blame rests solely on the shoulders of both of her rapists—the one from her childhood, and the one from college:

I did nothing wrong. I did not choose to be raped. I did not choose to make either man do what he did. I will not apologize for whatever innate characteristic I have that is so threatening to them. Whatever they saw still shines bright and cannot be extinguished. They can take nothing from me.

She refuses to allow the memory of what happened to her rule her, take her away from who she is becoming. She is becoming independent; something inside her is no longer dependent upon the rape to *be*. That part of her being is melting away. It may remain inside her as shallow water. From time to time, the water can rise, but it no longer has the volume to drown her.

For Sweetie, that inspiration comes through hope. When asked if there was anything else she thought people should know in order to understand the lived experience of sexual assault survival in college, she shared:

Well, the positive! You know the support and things, but just that I feel like a totally different person today than I was immediately after. I never would have imagined my life could turn out this way after that. That I would be happily married, and I would be in a great job that I love - that I not only finished college but went on to graduate school, and all of the positives in my life. And so, I guess for other victims, and other people, I would want them to almost see me as a success story, as someone who lived through it and is so happy and content with her life right now, got to a place where she's okay. I still do have bad days...I don't mean to make it sound like 100% over it, because I'm not. [I still see him on TV sometimes, and it really affects me], but the hope that things do get better and that they [women who are struggling with sexual assault survival in college now] will get better, that's big.

Passage of time.

As time has passed
I am reminded of it time to time
and there are certain things that make me reflect on it
but my life certainly is not consumed by it
anymore. (Chloe)

With the passage of time, she no longer feels consumed. Like a once-raging fire that burned a forest to ashes, she has doused the flames, stopped them cold. Now something beautiful of her own creation may rise from the ashes. In the creation, she finds herself conserved. Like the forest in jeopardy of destruction—like the earth and sky and sea—restorative strength rises up in defense. She is in *recovery*, she *re-covers*, she *covers up* and smothers the raging fire that threatened to kill her. It no longer has the power to take away her *life*—to stop her from living. The forest may regenerate; its temporality shifts. A new history is made that incorporates the trauma of the past, but knows the new life that lays ahead.

This is her *Dasein*. This is her way of being in the world. Heidegger (1962) writes:

In the everyday understanding of *Dasein*, all history is known merely as that which happens ‘within-time’; but throughout the course of our existential-temporal analysis of historicity, this understanding has been ruled out of order... The time ‘in which’ entities are encountered should be analysed *in principle*, since not only history but natural processes too are determined ‘by time’. (p. 456)

Her *Dasein*, her *lived experience*, happens within a time that is known only within her. It is not a time that moves forward as do the mechanical, precise hands of a clock. Instead, it is a time that moves forward and back, that makes frequent stops *in time*, and *at times*

moves far too quickly for her to keep up. It is a messier, more natural process, like the burning of the forest and its inevitable resilience and re-growth. Heidegger continues:

[Dasein] 'reckons with time'; and regulates itself *according to it*. And here again what remains decisive is Dasein's way of 'reckoning with its time' – a way of reckoning which precedes any use of measuring equipment by which time can be determined. (p. 456)

The *passage of time* is unmeasured and un-measure-able *at times* for survivors. It is woven together, *past-present-future*. It is a "reckoning" with today and yesterday, and what one may hope for in tomorrow.

It is with the passage of time that healing may begin. The lived experience of passage of time is a succession of events from past to present to future. It is a period of apprenticeship where she is learning from herself and from her world how to be this new version of herself. It has been a prison sentence, a locking away of spirit, wondering when it would be over and if she would be considered for early release. It is an accumulation of *stoppings* and *goings* that make up who she is today, that give her the strength to *be in survival*.

Being-in survival finds its place in the temporality of survival. Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

If Being is to be conceived in terms of time, and if, indeed, its various modes and derivatives are to become intelligible in their respective modifications and derivations by taking time into consideration, the Being itself (and not merely entities, let us say, as entities 'in time') is thus made visible in its 'temporal' character. (p. 40)

As such, it is that we come to know our way of being through temporality, among other things, and that temporality comes to know itself here as the stoppings and goings of

survival. It is as we are moving through time, and stopping within time, that we come to know the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college.

The clock ticks as each moment passes and time moves forward. There is no stopping the passage of time. Sometimes it *feels* slow, and sometimes it *feels* fast, and it is in the feeling that being is found. For survivors of sexual assault, that the fastness and slowness of time is closely intertwined with their lived experiences. As in the night, when sleep will not come, or in the day, when class seems never-ending, the rapist's presence in the mind or even in the classroom grinds the passage of time to a crawl. A moment of joy can be cut short. The moment is gone in an instant. In a flash of light it has gone too fast.

In truth, we cannot slow time, and we cannot speed it up, no matter how hard we *will* it otherwise. Chloe shares her awareness of this very thing:

My experience of survival was a slow, long process. It was little things like finally getting myself to walk across campus on a certain path, finally being able to spend time with mutual friends, or mustering up the energy to answer emails. It was also bigger things like being able to tell my story.

For Pink, that passage of time is sometimes stuttered by flashes, reminders, of the way survival used to feel. Anymore, survival is a relatively easy place to be—a solid foundation on firm ground. As time goes on, there is relief, but the pain can rise unexpectedly:

I always say the struggle gets easier, [but] it doesn't go away. I have learned to cope but occasionally it still feels like I'm punched in the face with my emotions.

For Sweetie, the passage of time means the lightening of a proverbial weight once tied to her being. It held her back in college, but now she is free of it, more or less:

I think I've always had the mentality that this too shall pass, things will get better, everything works out in the end. Probably starting when my dad died when I was little, people told me it would get better and I would laugh again and be able to smile at the memories we shared. It sort of was ingrained in me that there's a rainbow after the rain.

It takes time. Survival takes time. The horror passes, the pain becomes bearable, and the laughter and smiles return.

Metamorphosis.

Being able to go through a personal metamorphosis from an ashamed and stigmatized "victim" to a proud and impassioned "survivor" has been life changing. (Pink)

Near where I live is the home of North Carolina's only endangered butterfly. The delicate Saint Francis' Satyr butterfly thrives in the most unexpected place—in the artillery impact zone on the grounds of Ft. Bragg (North Carolina State University, 2002). The impact zone is a tremendously dangerous place, a reality that we literally *feel* from our home just off post. When the 18th Fire Brigade from Ft. Bragg or the Marines from Camp LeJeune are in gunnery training, shooting artillery shells out of guns the size and shape of cannons, our windows rattle in their frames. I can feel each explosion in my chest and in my bones—a physical jarring that shakes everything inside of my ribcage. It is an all day, all night affair for a week, sometimes two weeks at a time. There is no escaping it. Sometimes it feels and sounds like huge pieces of furniture are being dropped on the second floor of our house.

If this is my experience of the artillery zone from five to ten miles away, I cannot imagine what it is to be a tiny butterfly inside the area. How do the delicate creatures thrive there? How do they make it through their metamorphoses? But the Saint Francis' Satyr butterfly doesn't just make it through—the artillery zone is the only habitat in

which it can survive. It is the very destruction created by artillery shells that make the area so hospitable to the diminutive insect, to their metamorphoses, to their becoming what they are supposed to be.

The plight of the Saint Francis' Satyr butterfly is not entirely unlike the college sexual assault survivor experience. There is a long darkness for the women, almost like being trapped in a cocoon, only they don't know when, or how, they will emerge. There is a sense of being ensnared, and of having very little space in which to move. Like the endangered butterfly in the artillery zone, survivors go through a more figurative bombing from within the bubble, within the cocoon of campus life. The really interesting thing, though, is that many of them come out on the other side quite strong and resilient.

Of course, it must be said that the women in this study are unique in that they made it through the bombing, though they did not begin to truly heal until they were outside the artillery zone that was campus. What about those who did not make it through the unfriendly fire? What about the women who were caught in the explosion, who did not make it out? We are not exploring their lived experiences here, because (one might conclude) they were exponentially worse than those of the women participating in this study. There are many women who leave campus, who fail out, or even take their own lives before they can make the changes necessary to survive the gunnery. We do not have their voices here. They are the butterflies who were struck and destroyed by artillery practice—the practice, for some college men, of annihilating the bodies and souls of young women.

Pink shared a similar experience to the butterfly, especially after the attacks she endured from friends, police, and others. Her metamorphosis was slow, marked by moments of clarity and moments of blurred sight:

I think it was a slow transition with moments of clarity. I would feel myself getting stronger [while I was educating other students on campus] when I wouldn't be as hurt by mean or ignorant comments. When I didn't have to take everything personally, and didn't have to fight everyone. I realized I had changed when I participated in my first survivor garden and the word peaceful struck me and for the first time really resonated with me and I was happy despite the rain we were standing in.

There is something to be said for the resilience it takes to make it through such a terrible time. Regardless, Pink came through it with a very strong and positive outlook on life: “While it took me quite some time and significant assistance, I now describe myself as a survivor rather than a victim.”

For Beth, her metamorphosis was a movement from self-doubt and self-blame to openness to love and life. They were changes that she was able to feel only after leaving her college campus:

[After college] I was able to get over initial thoughts/questions about “What did I do wrong?” “Should I have acted differently with him?” and stopped blaming myself. I was able to realize that sex could still be a meaningful and important part of a relationship. I was able to acknowledge that all men weren't going to be like him and that I would find someone who would truly care for me. Now, I am happily married to a wonderful man who shows me how important I am to him, and we have a very happy, and healthy, sex life and we have two beautiful little boys.

And so, like the Saint Francis' Satyr butterfly, there can be a way to survive and thrive, even after the ongoing attack that remains present long after the rape.

Chloe's metamorphosis came from a place of darkness—of hopelessness and helplessness—to a place of regaining power and strength:

Sexual assault survival meant something very different to me after I first experienced it than it does to me now. To me then, words such as guilt (as if I had done something wrong), hopelessness (not knowing how to move forward), helplessness (feeling like I was out of control) and depression come to mind. After five years of thinking about and dealing with these issues, sexual assault survival means having the power and strength to cope with, overcome and learn from a situation that no one should ever have to deal with.

For Chloe, making it through the metamorphosis means having strength, and “Strength means having the ability to overcome.” As such, strength is everything it takes to live through rape and everything that comes after. It is power, force, and vigor. It is the moral resistance to the negativity under which the world tries to bury survivors. It is the endurance one needs to run a marathon for life. It is the power to resist the force and attacks of victim blaming. It is the way in which survivors can be the embodiment of force, a force with which to be reckoned.

Maybe it is in the splitting of the selves that one attains strength in numbers. In the sense that a survivor feels as though she is some combination of the person she was before the rape and the person after the rape, perhaps it is that splitting of strength that can come back together, having multiplied the force. It is the stamina to withstand the darkness of cocooning, to live through the metamorphosis, and to emerge a fierce entity, able to withstand the war.

New normalcy.

The word “normal, by way of meaning perpendicular”, comes from the Latin *perpendicularis*, meaning to “stand at right angles to the plane of the horizon.” A revisiting of the concept of horizon helps uncover connections to the phenomenon. Casey (1993) writes:

The single most prominent feature of the far sphere is the *horizon*. As uncontainable in any simple delineation, the horizon is a boundary, not a limit. The “horizon line” is a fiction foisted upon perceptual experience by the graphic requirements of depicting recession in depth. In fact, we experience the horizon of the far sphere not as a line but as itself a sphere (or more exactly, as the inner surface of a sphere). The horizon of the far sphere includes the enormous concave dome of the sky as well as the land or sea that spreads out before us as it draws into remoteness. Were it a mere line, the horizon would be something we could in principle attain, but it is at once too massive and too elusive to be reachable. (p. 61)

To be normal is to stand at a right angle upon a distant sphere or, in other words, to stand strong and tall upon the world that at times can feel so far away. It is in her posture against that which might otherwise bend her will, and in the strength that allows her to remain upright in the face of that which might bring her down, that a survivor finds survival. The horizon, as delineation and not limit, can serve symbolically as the boundless opportunities awaiting a survivor once she can stand tall enough to see them. It does not need to be her tallest point. No—it needs only to be the sort of standing that may give her some height to see above the trauma and out onto the skyline. In this sense, it is attainable for those who are just beginning to pick themselves up off the ground by way of hope.

Normal, to whoever may seek it or find it, is both fiction and reality, although it is perceived as fully real by the individual. There is a depth in this reality that goes to the core of each survivor. It is the sky and land and sea as they recede into the distance. It is having known them up close at some point, embracing their memory, and understanding that you will be with them again whenever the time is right. Survival, as the horizon, may be “at once too massive and too elusive to be reachable”, yet it is attainable in so far as each survivor may find her own reality within it.

Additionally, it is in this concept of the “far sphere” that the “normal curve” resides. A “normal curve” is a “symmetrical bell-shaped curve or a normal distribution.” This understanding of the word *normal* juxtaposes—and at the same time adds to an understanding of—the phenomenon when it is paired with the idea of a normal curve. As the curved bell chimes at the end of a meditation, so too does the bell curve sound out the lived experience. Close to the foundation, blossoming up into a soft, centered equilibrium, normalcy after rape has to find its own way of being in the world. It cannot be as it was before. It can only be what it is today.

As Chloe find her own normalcy, she is able to say, “It feels like I can see clearly”:

As time goes on survival means making sense of the situation and learning how to cope emotionally. As even more time passes survival means learning about yourself and figuring out what to do with all of this information.

It was, and is, a standing upon the curve of a world that was once an inhospitable place. The learning comes in seeing the horizon—what is out there for her—and happens as she walks toward it. Normalcy, as finding clarity within “all of this information,” means that there is a lightness of being, one that is as bright and pure as the cloudless sky. There is a sorting-though and a picking-out information that is helpful, and that which is not. Some of the pieces may be harmful; they may have been a strong part of the past. Finding normalcy may mean that those pieces can now be brushed away, allowing only their faded memories to remain.

For Aeryn, finding normalcy on the horizon of survival means moving past the labels and an identity that centers on the rape:

I think success after sexual assault means being able to live your life without needing a sign around your neck that says, "I'm a rape victim, please treat me accordingly." And it's less about other people needing that sign around your neck and more about YOU not needing that sign around your neck. You can go to the store, walk home from a bar alone, go out on a date, even have sex without having to feel like you've got that sign around your neck weighing you down and flashing in front of everyone else. Obviously that doesn't mean you don't think about it, or talk about when you *want* to, but it's not that you *have* to.

Discarding the signage, discarding the labels, can be an integral part in moving toward normalcy. Perhaps it is the weight of the sign that slows the forward movement. Once the sign is gone, the weight is lifted, and one may find an opening contentment in alone-ness, in being with others, and in lived sexuality. There is freedom to discard the sign, and freedom to pick it back up as well. It is the power to know that decision is in your hands. The sign is yours. No one else can decide what you do with it.

Pink finds her *new normalcy* in the happiness she finds in healing through dance:

Healing [is] a different path for everyone, there is no one solution. Healing for me was getting back to being an upbeat, energetic, happy girl that loves to dance around and be carefree. I will never be as carefree as I was, but I am truly happy and still love to dance.

And so to be carefree is to be free of these things, which means to be free of suffering, to have one's mind quieted, to have anxiety lessened, to feel relieved from the 'painstaking and watchful attention' that once engulfed life after rape. It is a letting go of a charge, of the need to supervise one's senses, one's way of being in the world. It is a way of being that is free of such intensive self-protection. Like the Aeryn's sign around her neck, Pink may choose to leave her cares along the path to the horizon, too. They will remain there, part of her path, and she may go back to retrieve them whenever she wishes.

For Sweetie, a certain amount of normalcy was found while she was still in college. In college, she was able to find the light-ness of survival and relief from the

torment she felt for the two years following the rape. In college, four years become a lifetime, and each year a quarter-life:

Since my sexual assault happened my freshman year, I think so much of those first couple years was very "different" and I can't imagine how that would look without that experience. But I really felt more "normal" my Junior and Senior years. I still made decisions that were colored by my experience (for example, to skip going to football games), but I think I was in a much better place emotionally and was more stable. And perhaps those last two years were more like a college experience for someone who hadn't been assaulted? I don't know - it's hard to say.

And so, with the passage of time, the feelings of victimization begin to pass. From the curvature of the once-wicked world to the ways in which one may find a way to stand tall upon it, each survivor may find her own way to a new normalcy. With grounding on the outside, and a swelling confidence within, she finds her own bell of truth in this fresh way of being in the world.

I wonder—has it moved him?

He committed the crime. The rape. Has it affected *him* at all? I have moved so far on this survival journey. Has he *moved*—or *been moved*—at all? Does he wake up in the middle of the night, wrapped too tightly in sweaty, suffocating sheets, wondering if the nightmare is true—wondering if he is truly capable of such a crime? Is he distracted, doing the most mundane of things, by flashes, by images of the pounding and the ripping that he inflicted that night? Is he afraid to date again because he wonders if it will happen to him? Or does he laugh it off—just another night in college—just another girl to screw. Does he even consider it at all?

Sweetie wonders. She sees him on TV and wonders. She sees his name in the newspaper and wonders. She hears his name on the radio and wonders. Through all the fame and fortune, does he have *any* inclination what he's done to me?

One of the things that...I've struggled with and thought about...is how much it has affected my life. And how all encompassing, how big it was, and I always wanted to know how it has affected him. I always wanted that. I wanted to know you know, how hard or painful? It couldn't be as bad for him....It just always made me mad that they [rapists] can just hurt you. Or that he would know how bad it was for me, I guess is what I'm trying to say. It wasn't mutual sex, and [I wonder if] he thinks I'm just so pleased [I had the chance to sleep with him]. I want him to see that you've damaged somebody. You affected their life in ways that you would never understand. Just to kind of get that.

And even above her own feelings, the ways in which she was crushed by him, she wants him to know how much his actions hurt her mother, too. What must it have been like for her mother to know that her daughter, off to her first year in college, was raped before her college experience could even really begin? Sweetie wants her perpetrator to know what the experience was like for his *secondary victims*, too.

It is through knowing and feeling her mother's pain—the ripples of pain that her rapist caused her and all the people around her—that moves Sweetie to want to speak up and speak out in case they are *not moved* by what they've done. She wants to push her rapist and other rapists to know that what they've done has caused movement in horrible directions:

I want perpetrators to know that the actions they make have multiple reactions and ripple effects, and even secondary victimization. I would love for my mom to have the opportunity to tell him how it affected her life. And tell him how hard it was to see her daughter suffer (voice cracks, holding back tears), you know times like that I wish that education component could somehow happen, too, because I don't think they get it...And I don't know if that would stop them from reoffending, or if that would stop people from offending period, but I want guys, people, to know that it ripples, like I said before.

It may have felt like one drop in the ocean to him, just one more new freshman girl, new fresh meat for him to consume, but to her that drop caused an ocean of pain. It crashed

down on not only her, but on all of the people who cared about her. It is hard not to wonder—do the ripples of his actions ever reach *him*?

Chloe thinks about it, too. How would it move *him* if she could say something to him? How would it move *her* if she could do so? She wants him to know what he's done, she wants him to know the truth about her experience, and she wants to set the record straight. For almost a decade she has had to sit with the knowledge that he believes she is a liar. He believes that she is slandering his name to anyone who will listen. He says this to people when the issue of the rape is brought up. But Chloe wants him to know the truth—that he hurt her deeply, twice, and that reality has changed her life forever:

I think he is fixated...I don't think he quite understands what he did. And he's not necessarily going around and lying about it, because he doesn't think he did it. So sometimes I think about, well, what would it be like if I educated him about what he did? And I'm sure it wouldn't go over well, and I'm sure he doesn't want to talk to me because he thinks I'm out there lying and smearing his name all over the place, but I think if I could talk to him I would just explain to him, I don't think he is a terrible person, I don't think he is a serial rapist, I think that he is a guy who got drunk and didn't know his limits, didn't know his boundaries, and wanted to do something, and wanted to take control over a situation, and I happened to be the victim of it. I don't think he is a guy who is trying to go out there intentionally doing this to people, and so that gives me the feeling, well, what if I can just educate him? [Laughs with a hopeless tone.] But I know that's probably not realistic.

She wants him to be moved. Somewhere deep inside of her she believes that she may be able to keep him from doing this again if he only knew the reality of it. She exudes a deep understanding *for him* and the ways in which he misunderstands the situation. He raped her, and then sometime later attempted to rape her again, and her truth lies in a sympathy for him:

If I were to be stuck in the same room with him, I might try to talk to him about it. I wouldn't make the effort to, but given the situation, I might try. It's hard to know

that someone out there in the world hates your guts. You know? Especially for something that, he doesn't know [is] real.

And so it is that Chloe has moved, or been moved, from one room to another. She began in her college bedroom, where he raped her. She moved to her small, dark bathroom, in order to calm her anxiety. And now, in her mind's eye, she has created another room—one in which she could sit with him, one in which he would be *forced* to listen in an environment so very different from the one in which he *forced* himself upon her. Could he be moved if he could sit still for just a moment in the final room of her creation? This wondering is an essential part of her lived experience.

Aeryn, too, is moved to make sure her perpetrator knows what he has done. “I’m sure he has zero concept of it.” She goes on to wonder about what might have happened if she had tried to use the student judicial program to hold him accountable in some way:

It’s not even about retribution or wanting to make him pay or whatever, [it’s] just wanting to make him understand, which is ultimately the most futile thing that you can ever hope for somebody who caused you harm (laughing) because it's like .0005% of people who do bad things to other people actually really are able to [understand what they’ve done]...He could go to prison for 30 years and I don't think he would ever be able to really understand and appreciate and feel bad about or any of those things [he did to me]. Sort of knowing that you're probably not going to get [him to understand, so] maybe you can make him suffer a little bit [laughing], sort of like your second best hope or whatever. It's something that I've thought about and also just for, again, the positions of power, I would bet every dollar that I have in the bank that I was not the first girl and I was not the last either, so there's that sense of wanting to protect other women and things like that, but how successful I would have been with that is, like, who knows. [She shrugs.]

Because of his position of power, Aeryn’s rapist continues to have access to and power over the women in his life. He has taken what he had in college and now lives it on a grander scale. Once he had a small residence hall room, and now has an impressive

home. Once he had college leadership positions, and now has wealth and status. Aeryn's heart *breaks* for the women who are *being broken* by him today.

Letting Go and Moving On

After great pain, a formal feeling comes

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,'
And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before'?

The Feet, mechanical, go round –
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone.

This is the Hour of Lead –
Remember, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go – (Dickinson, 1890/1998, p. 372)

Like the timeless breaking of Aeryn's heart, the pain of survival spans centuries.

It has and it will, for the past and future imbalance of men's power over women ensures that rape—on campus and otherwise, man on woman and otherwise—continues. It will be so until we—family, friends, faculty, staff, students—move into a new way of *being in the world* with and for ourselves, each other, and survivors.

“After great pain, a formal feeling comes.” It is a pain followed by the mechanized formality of numbed movement through space. It becomes prescribed by way of its detachment from the survivor's natural way of being in the world. This is the deathly *chill* and deadening *stupor* of Dickinson's poem. It is the ghostly walkings of women who are not quite part of their world.

But I would say that there is something yet between the *stupor* and the *letting go* of which Dickinson writes. That short line between the two as they appear in the poem above, upon closer examination, contains a lifetime of *being in survival*. There is a *coming to know* a new way of living in the residual trauma. There is a *weaving together* of the life before and the life after rape. There is a *making peace*—a *knowing* that peace will be disrupted, but that it can be found again.

Then, at some point, there can be a letting go, and a falling, although this fall is not accidental. It is chosen, and it will be outlived. There is no more precarious ledge, no pebbles slipping, plunging to the bottom of a great and cavernous depth. There is no constant pressing anxiety that she might be the next to follow—down, down, down to certain death. No. This is her decision. Where she wants. When she wants. It comes at a time when she knows she can and will be caught either by the strength of herself or supporters or both. It happens when she feels that she will find firm footing upon (land)ing. From the floor, to the forest, to freedom, a *letting go* becomes a *moving on*.

**CHAPTER 6:
THE WAY OUT OF THE WOODS: READING THE COMPASS,
CLEARING THE PATH, SHARING MY BEARINGS**

It is here that the story ends and begins again—from floor to forest, from letting go to moving on—as one is not meant to find finality in hermeneutic phenomenological understanding. For me and the participants in this study, walking the woods became a conversation between who we are today and who we were in college. I began this *walking-through-the-pages* with song lyrics shared, and so, too, will I finish. The song, a conversation between who I was in college and the woman I am today, becomes a way out of the woods; it is a bringing together of the victim self and the survivor self. What might these two selves say to each other if they could find a way to share space and time? Or is it true that they will always share space and time? Might the conversations we have yesterday and today pick up again tomorrow? Hermeneutic understanding allows the conversation to continue long after the last page of this work is turned.

When van Manen (1997) refers to the closing of phenomenological work, he speaks to it in the sense that there never really is a closing. In the closing there are openings, and from those openings, further openings. This is the crux of hermeneutic phenomenology. It is a reaching of great depths by openings at the highest heights. It is from these depths and heights that we may be moved to great action. Van Manen writes:

Whereas hermeneutic phenomenology has often been discussed as a “mere” descriptive or interpretive methodology, it is also a critical philosophy of action. First, human science is concerned with action in that hermeneutic phenomenological reflection deepens thoughts and therefore radicalizes thinking and the acting that flows from it. All serious and original thinking is ultimately revolutionary – revolutionary in a broader than political sense. And so to become more thoughtfully or attentively aware of aspects of human life which hitherto were merely glossed over or taken-for-granted will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting in social situations that ask

for such action. (p. 154)

It is through phenomenology that great social change may happen. Specifically, for the purposes of this study, there is a need for social change around the area of sexual assault. It is my hope that this work rings clear and true as a call for revolution. Let it elicit the pained hearts and guttural drive it will take to truly make college campuses more supportive places for survivors of sexual assault.

Indeed, the movement toward making college campuses more supportive for survivors is just a stop-gap on our way to the real revolution—a time and space in which sexual assault is eradicated on college campuses. Until then, I hope that this work serves as part of a call to campus professionals to attend to this one piece: support. It is simply the right thing to do.

So, as I find my way, as I emerge from the research, I bring with me the strings, the essence of the lived experience for participants in this study. I fine tune and play them as sweetly and strongly as they call me to do. I put words to the music, and I hope that it will be enough for readers to feel with and for the survivors of sexual assault who have walked this long path with me.

Finding our way out in music and lyrics—this is the way of phenomenology. Walking with a song just under my breath, keeping time to the padding of each footstep—this is my way out of the woods. Like the experience of playing or hearing a compelling song, the experience is immersive; it is visceral, and it is moving. It gets under your skin and into your heart and it never really goes away. The poetics of phenomenology bring the reader along with the prose, helping her or him feel the

phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). Music, either as part of a phenomenological exploration or simply standing alone, can be these things, too.

Through the section of this chapter entitled “Reading the Compass,” I revisit the study—the music that came to mind as I walked the woods. I will recover some ground: Why was I drawn to this work? What surfaced from within it? By way of “Clearing the Path,” the second section of this chapter, I bring to light the existential possibilities that are brought forth by this exploration. In the final section, “Sharing my Bearings,” I reflect on the ways in which engaging in this research has become a part of me—how it has become my evolutionary, revolutionary *Dasein*—my new way of *being in the world*. Through the lyrics of *Ballad to a Younger Me* (Monahan-Kreishman, 2012), I lead through this, the final chapter of my doctoral dissertation work on the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. The song is the musical compass as we walk these final steps to the edge of the forest.

Ballad to a Younger Me

*Let's walk on, you and I, and we'll open up the sky
In the silence of the woods while all the noise is on the inside
With the giving and the taking and the crying and the hiding
Hold on, you held on, and I'm alive*

*Chorus:
You deserve the truth
You will see in time
Let this be enough, I know you will survive*

*In the darkness of the night, you were left behind
With the voiceless and the lifeless and the ones who tried to find
A way back to the living, all the while, feeling blind
Life before and after, one in time*

*Under lightness of the day, and the dark and starry night
In the all encompassing, will I retain my sight?*

*You look at me and wonder: Will I ever feel complete?
You ask where is the truth; will I be freed?* (Monahan-Kreishman, 2012)

Reading the Compass: Where Have We Been?

*Let's walk on, you and I, and we'll open up the sky
In the silence of the woods 'cause all the noise is on the inside
With the giving and the taking and the crying and the hiding?
Hold on, you held on, and I'm alive*

It is through the song, as it becomes part of heart and mind, in the woods that we reflect on where we have been. It is in our ways of *being* as they have *been* that we reflect the uncoverings within this work. In song and stories we have explored the way in and out of survival. It is within the stories that we find true movement. Pipher (2006) writes:

Stories are the most basic tool for connecting us to one another. Research shows that storytelling not only engages all the senses, it triggers activity on both the left and the right sides of the brain. Because stories elicit whole brain/whole body responses, they are far more likely than other kinds of writing to evoke strong emotions. People attend, remember, and are transformed by stories. (p. 11)

It is within the wholeness of who we are that we come to experience with the survivors what their lived experience was and is. In the beginning of this work, there was my story. I shared it as my *turning-to* this work—an intuitive showing of what it was for me in that time and space. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the sharing, indeed the infusing, of personal story is critical (van Manen, 1997). It is the way into the work—the reason one is drawn to the research. I was drawn to this research by way of my own rape in college, committed by someone I thought I knew well. It was the damage that I suffered and the long walk back to some semblance of repair that compelled me to uncover what the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college really *is* for them, for us.

The phenomenon called to be opened up through human science research—through the inquiry of the deeply feeling soul. It called out for meaning. It called out for

understanding. It called out for a visceral showing that could incite readers to make change on their own respective college campuses. It is through this opening that I came to uncover the connectedness of time, space, body, and survival. As Gadamer (1960/2002) writes:

A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as “history of effect.” Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event. (pp. 299-300)

And so it is that the phenomenon is further uncovered by way of examining its historicity. I am connected by way of being raped more than 15 years ago. The participants in this study are connected by way of their openness to and participation in the exploration. We are all connected by way of our respective college campuses, by the women, who throughout history, were raped by the men they met there. It is this “history of effect” that is both the grounding and the opening of the sky—it allows us to glimpse the past as we delve into the depths of today.

The Opening

Let's walk on, you and I, and we'll open up the sky.

If you're a survivor and you go into this work [with college students] and you need to respond to sexual assault, we're not machines. It has to touch. So how do you do it in a way that it doesn't become about you? Yet how do you do it in a way that you bring all of you to the table? (Lulita)

How do we do it, and what exactly are we trying to do? Are we trying to survive? Are we trying to find ways to open up survival? Are we not-so-simply on a quest for the *authentic self*? How are we to find our authentic professional selves as we explore with students the ways in which they, too, may find their authentic selves? We do it by walking with them. We do it in partnership. Phenomenology is a partnership between

researcher, participant, and reader (van Manen, 1997). This is the place where we begin to open up the sky.

Walking in the woods with my younger self as she struggled to make meaning from rape—rape by someone she trusted, rape in college, rape. RAPE. Let us never allow the power of that word to fade as it is the embodiment of those first moments of survival. Without the rape there would not be *this*—the pain, the destruction, the loss of life, and the long, arduous passing into all that is to come.

This is where I began, and this is where I come to an ending of sorts. How do I do this work, with college students, with sexual assault survivors, as a sexual assault survivor? How do I find a way to respond that creates time and space for survival? How do I do that in a way that is true and honest to who I am, yet does not become about me? At the final edge of the forest, we will find the sky. When we find it, what will we see? When we open up to it, what mysteries does it reveal? It will reveal the big picture. It will be an uncovering of all that we have explored—we will see it all laid out before us. We can look up, take it in, be moved, and move on to a better way of *being with and for survivors*.

Walking...fighting...opening...this is where the women in this study began. We walked together in the woods. We fought for our lives. We opened up the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. What has been learned by walking with Lulita, Pink, Beth, Chloe, Aeryn, and Sweetie? What have we learned from the stories shared?

We have been moved by the stories, and this is the essentiality of phenomenology. It is in the being moved that we may be moved to do something to

change the state of things as it relates to this deepened understanding of the phenomenon. The question, then, is what do we know now about this lived experience that can open for us, as student affairs professionals, a new way of understanding and new directions for our work with students? Where will the path lead us, now that we know what we know?

There is a certain protocol for addressing rape on college campuses, but we will not recover that protocol here. Here, we are meant to find the deeper meaning behind individual experience so that we may consider that deeper meaning when working with student survivors. This text is meant to open possibilities for faculty, staff, friends, and family of survivors, and even community advocates and educators, in order to create more supportive communities for survivors of sexual assault in college. What possibilities open when we tend first to the person and then to the protocol? How is it that we know how to tend to the person first? What does it mean to tend to the person first?

This is the emergence of essential movement that comes out of phenomenological exploration, and for sexual assault survivors it is particularly salient. Survivors, from whom all power and all control have been taken, must take back or be given power and control, or both (Ledray, 1994; Rothschild, 2000; Warshaw, 1994). How better to do that than to tend first to their individualities? Who are they and how do their individualities flavor how we tend to them, and help them tend to themselves?

Between Silence and Noise

In the silence of the woods while all the noise is on the inside.

As survivors, the sensation of silence from the world around us feels harsh and cold and rejecting against the deafening noise held internally. The mind-in-survival can be a noisy place to be. It can be excruciating. It is the place you most want to flee, and yet it is your prison. There is no way out. The volume is turned up to its highest decibel and there is no way to hear, while everyone else in the woods, on campus, speaks in whispers only audible amongst themselves.

Van Manen (1997) writes, “phenomenologists like to say that nothing is so silent as that which is taken for granted or self-evident” (p. 112). In the space on campus surrounding victim/survivors, what is taken for granted? What is left unsaid in the silent surroundings that push survival’s internal volume to deafening highs? There is an internal voicelessness that happens within the deafening noise in that no matter how loud she yells, she still never feels heard. It is a movement away from authentic self and toward a place of unheard, yet vociferous, way of being. Eddy, who called this phenomenon *essencorship*, (2008) writes,

The power of *essencorship* is amazing. What is *essencorship*? I have coined this word to fill another silence in my life, the silence of one’s essence that occurs when the voice of “the public” is louder and stronger than the internal voice of truth. (pp. 16-17)

Essencorship is the censorship of one’s true nature, or way of being in the world. This is the tension within which survivors live. There was life before the rape, and a certain way of being within it. There was life in the moment of rape, which was the beginning of the

ripping away of self. And there is life after rape, which is a grueling slog to every next moment, every next breath, every next step.

Essencorship is an encapsulation of survival's many *stoppings*, as discussed in Chapter 4. It is all the ways in which the world keeps survivors from moving on. It is the (un)reality of people around them who *push against* instead of *walking with*. It is the agitated dis-integration of mind-body-spirit. It is the constant barrage of rape's (re)iterations through memory, word, and the embodiment of the rapist, himself. It is the division of friends, and it is control both lost and taken.

And while the stoppings exist within the silence of the world, as in the hushed and gossiped whispering lies, and in the absence of acceptance of rape's horrific realities, each rape survivor in this study had a remarkable story to tell about *movings*, as discussed in Chapter 5. The discussion began by opening multiple (re)claimings: (re)iterations, of voice, of strength, of body, of (re)actions, and of (found)ation. Openings moved on to the different ways in which movement, itself, was *a moving* from victimization to survival.

Perhaps the most compelling of the movement was that survivors could not truly begin to heal until they *moved away* from campus. This is where I believe there is the most room for opening possibilities for change. What are the possibilities for us as student affairs professionals to create more caring, healing environments for survivors such that they may reach survival's coveted peacefulness *while* on campus? As individuals follow unique paths in their own time, how can campus professionals create space from which there can be more positive sendoffs? What are the possibilities for creating space that survivors no longer find toxic, but instead, find to be a source for healing? What would it mean for healing to take root in and upon the grounds where rape

was inflicted upon them? Might the roots displace and loosen the grounding upon which rapists find firm footing? What are the possibilities?

Possibilities exist in the changing of the *they*, as it exists within survivors and on campus. Between the silence and the noise is a movement toward authenticity—a blending together of the trauma of rape and the promise of tomorrow. Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

Dasein make[s] no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity. This process can be reversed only if Dasein specifically brings itself back to itself from its lostness in the “they”. But this bringing-back must have that kind of Bring *by the neglect of which* Dasein has lost itself in inauthenticity. When Dasein thus brings itself back [Das Sichzurückholen] from the they”, the they-self is modified in an existential manner so that it becomes authentic Being-one’s-Self. (pp. 312-313)

It is in the stoppings by the ‘they’ and even the movings by the ‘they’ that trap the self in authenticity. Helping students to find their true *Dasein*, their cores, their essences will help them to move to places of healing, places of peace that might otherwise not be achieved while in college. *They* were first the rapists, who thrust inauthentic selves—self-doubt, shame, and blame—into their victims. *They* were then faculty, staff, friends, and family whose inabilities to understand strengthened the inauthenticity growing within the survivors. *They* then grew to encapsulate all of campus, perhaps all of the world, such that the inauthenticity felt inescapable. It is in the moving-away-from *they* and toward authentic selves that puts each survivor on the paths to Being-one’s-Self.

The Holding On

*With the giving and the taking and the crying and the hiding,
Hold on, you held on and I’m alive.*

Sometimes you need to just put one foot in front of the other but there are other times you need to get mad enough that you fight back. (Pink)

You will get through this. You will graduate college. You will realize who your true friends are and they will be there for you throughout this. Let them help. Your life will go on. You will go to grad school, make new friends, and even get married one day! You will get to the point where the assault is in the back of your mind, not the front. Be patient and ask for help! (Chloe, in a letter to her college self)

I am alive because she held on. This is what each of us wants our younger selves to know today—this is what we try to tell them. Hold on. You will get through this.

Through the giving and the taking and the crying and the hiding, she held on, and I am alive. I was a Being-towards-death trying desperately not to be sucked into that forever space, and grasping at anything I could hold. My younger self—she held on. For dear life, she held on to the tiny scraps of Self that were left after it took so much of her away. As a Being-towards-death, herself, she tries to hold onto life. She sees life far in the distance and crawls away from death, hoping that she may grasp life and hold on.

When one leaps away from something, one must hold onto something new, as the previous thing is now out of reach. The thing from which one leaps, presumably, is the very thing one desires freedom *from*—here, this is *the giving and the taking and the crying and the hiding*, all of which are part of the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. And when one is able to reach the new way of being, a more authentic way of being, one must hold on tight. Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

Having been thrown into Being-towards-death, Dasein flees – proximally and for the most part – in the face of this thrownness, which has been more or less explicitly revealed. The Present leaps away from its authentic future and from its authentic having been, so that it lets Dasein come to its authentic existence only by taking a detour through that Present. The ‘leaping-away’ of the Present – that is, the falling into lostness – has its source in that primordial authentic temporality itself which makes possible thrown Being-towards-death. (p. 399)

It is in this leaping away that one finds the strength in desperate clinging to hold on to life. For the younger college self, it is this new way, this more authentic way of being that clears the path for the survival of who we are today. Without our younger college selves holding on, we would not be here today. Without our college selves holding on to our potentiality-for-Being, we would fall into ‘lostness,’ into the great, dark hole, without a sense of space or temporality. Without the *holding-on* we would have been in ‘lostness’ forever.

So, she holds on to her potentiality-for-Being instinctively. She does not really, cannot really, have the words of her later self, sent upon a letter from the future. She can have only her instincts to guide her. But is that all she *can* have? Is there not the possibility of *more* for her? More support, more care, more comfort so that the holding-on and the living may be not just more bearable, but perhaps may pass the threshold into contentedness? Perhaps we, as student affairs professionals, may find our own ways, each individual student within her own *Dasein*, to clear a path toward survival.

Clearing the Path: Where Might We Go?

*You deserve the truth
You will see in time
Let this be enough
I know you will survive*

*In the darkness of the night, you were left behind
With the voiceless and the lifeless and the ones who tried to find
A way back to the living, all the while, feeling blind
Life before and after, one in time*

Clearing the path to survival finds meaning in each professional’s way of *being-with-students*. Finding and becoming our own authentic selves *with them* may allow for them to find their own authenticities as well. There is an inherent tension here as the two

ways of being currently exist. For student affairs professionals, educated and trained within a social sciences paradigm, it may take time to move into a paradigm of *messy being*. There are no diagrams or steps to delineate the lived experience—it is simply lived as it is by what it is (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

Van Manen (1997) writes:

When we compare the pragmatic consequence of behavioral social science with phenomenological human science we note that traditional behavioral research leads to instrumental knowledge principles: useful techniques managerial policies, and rules-for-acting. In contrast, phenomenological research gives us tactful thoughtfulness: situational perceptiveness, discernment, and depthful understanding. (p. 156)

It is this depthful understanding that is needed for students who have experienced sexual assault. It requires professionals to *pause* and *feel*, two things for which we typically do not have time in our busy lives. It is in the pausing and the feeling, however, that we find the perceptiveness and discernment about which van Manen writes. He continues: “Knowledge is like the living: *things are always more complex!*” (p. 156). And so we must find ways to pause and feel—to *be with* our students (understand their ways of being in the world) so that we may *be for* our students (advocate for them as individuals with individual *Dasein*) as they take their long, painful, meandering paths toward authentic Being, and healing after *being raped*.

Being *With*

What does it mean to *be with* students who have experienced sexual assault survival in college? How is it that we might find a way toward our own authentic selves in order to allow for survivors’ authenticities to emerge? Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

Dasein as Being-with lets the Dasein of Others be encountered in its world. Being-with is in every case a characteristic of one’s own Dasein; Dasein-with

characterizes the Dasein of Others to the extent that it is freed by its world for a Being-with. Only so far as one's own Dasein as the essential structures of Being-with, is it Dasein-with as encounterable for Others. (p. 157)

It is in the very way of being authentic that we may come into authentic *being-with-others*. This is the essence of *Dasein*. It is a way of coming to know that which is outside of self as self, as we are all connected *beings in the world*.

If we look closely at who we are and discover that we are not within the realm of the authentic self, how is it that we may move toward the authentic self in an effort to better *be with* self and other? What does it mean to begin a way of *being in change* toward Dasein? hooks (1994) writes, "There can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches. I respect that pain" (p. 43). Being respectful of pain, felt by self and survivor, opens the path to *Dasein*. Respecting, understanding, and feeling the pain with another person—such as a student rape survivor—moves both professional and student toward a heightened place of self-knowing. This self-knowing opens possibilities for creating a multitude of caring spaces on campus for survivors to simply *be*—wherever *Dasein* may be for them.

Our pain, as professionals, must be *tended to* so that we may *attend to* students. Collegiate sexual assault survivors, especially in the moments after they begin to truly experience victimization and survival, can feel intensive, gut-wrenching pain all day, all night, and so on into *infinitum*. The participants in this study have had many years on the earth to become one with their own pain so that they may genuinely *be with* others who are in it. *Being with* survivors means finding a way to be present, be attentive, and truly

feel what they are feeling. By connecting deeply in this way, we are able to open up the truth and time they need in order to survive.

Truth. *You deserve the truth.*

What is the truth, and who is deserving of it? How might we go about hearing truth? Speaking truth? Who is the *we*? Truth is found in the authentic self, wherever that might be, whenever that might be. As student affairs professionals, we might go about *hearing* truth by *being* in our own truths and coming to *know* the truths of others more deeply. Truth is in *Dasein*. *Dasein* is in truth. It is in clearing the path and opening ourselves to hearing the truth so that we may best act upon it—that is the real challenge in *being with* survivor-students.

What is in the knowing of others' truths? It is in the opening of connections, in the listening, and in the responding. Levin (1989) writes:

How often, and how well, do we listen to other people? Do we in fact *know how* to listen to others in an open, welcoming, receptive way? Are we able to hear, to greet, what others tell us, no matter how painful it may be, no matter how threatening to our ego, no matter how demanding on our capacity to care and be compassionate? (p. 85)

How do we listen and how do we respond? Are we aware of the ways in which students might trigger pieces of who we are? Do we feel it when something inside us burns with anger in response to a student simply *being* who she *is*? Do we look to her to *stop being*, or do we look into ourselves to start being authentic, to start being who we need to be for our students? Indeed, is it not up to us to help her to move toward authentic being instead of becoming one more stopping in her quest for *Dasein*?

In the opening of the student-professional relationship, especially while we are still on our individual, personal, professional quests for *Dasein* or authentic self, it is

essential to find tact within one's way of being. Enacting tact allows the relationship between self and other to remain intact, thus maintaining the opening for finding truth.

Van Manen (1991) writes:

Pedagogical tact can only work when the pedagogue's eyes and ears search in a caring and receptive manner for the potential of a child, what this child can become. This requires a perceiving and listening oriented to the uniqueness of the child, using a multiplicity of perspectives, considerations, and vantage points to try to gain a vision and pedagogical understanding of a child. (p. 172)

This quotation is not meant to liken the survivor to a child; rather, the intent is to enlighten the concept of tact-ful-ness in one's way of *being with* survivors. It is a calling to us, as professionals, to keep our *eyes* and *ears* and *hearts* open with care, kindness, and genuineness. Each survivor is unique, and therefore needs a unique kind of attention. It is in this way that we may, again, continue to clear the path toward peaceful survival.

Time. *You will see in time.*

We live a life that is the life we lead, so...is there something I could have said to myself when I was 16 or 17 that maybe what happened to me wouldn't have happened to me, or would have happened to me in a different way...[writing a letter] would come from a protective place, wanting to change the past, from the future [and]...I don't think life happens that way. I think the bottom line is that I didn't get information I may have needed, and even if I had maybe [him raping and stalking me] would have still happened. (Lulita, reflecting on why she did not want to write a letter to her college self)

What is time? How do we *tell it*? What would we *tell it* if we could? Would we tell it to slow down or speed up? Would we tell it to stop? Would we tell it to reverse, so that we might have another chance at a different outcome from one or many, fateful, horrifying events? For the survivors in this study, time was an essential piece of their ways of being in the world. For all of them there was recognition that there is no *turning*

back time. There is no going back. There is only going forward, and the experience of time therein.

How might we, as student affairs professionals, be *sensitive* to time as it is experienced by survivors in college? What do I mean when I say to my younger, college self, “you will see in time?” Do I mean that if she waits long enough, she will gain clarity on her situation, on her way of being-in-survival? Do I mean that she will see what it is to be ‘in time’ in that there is a timeliness component to survival? Is it ever too late to find survival? And am I telling her that she will, definitively, make it ‘in time’ to survive? Or, is my message to her that she will see into time, knowing what is to come, and gain insight about what to do with it? When I tell her that she will ‘see in time,’ I mean to tell her all of these.

The question is this: How does knowing time help us to know survivors? What are the possibilities for sensitivities that open up by way of this knowing? What possibilities for connection and for the creation of time and space for survival on campus can come from this level of self and other reflection? For student affairs professionals who may have tendencies to exist in exhausted states of *not-enough-time*, are we in a state of being ever *without-time*? And in this recognition of being without time, might we gain clarity into our way of being-with survivors?

Might we, as faculty and staff, do our best to move toward a feeling of *within-ness in time*? Find a *presence* of mind in order to *be present* for student-survivors? Would it not serve us better, even in our own quests for authentic self, to make time to pause for ourselves, as well? That our senses of timely within-ness might begin with ourselves and then grow to embrace those around us? Is opening to that embrace—physically or

metaphorically—the path that might best be cleared for survivors walking toward survival?

Survival. *Let this be enough, I know you will survive.*

It's going to be okay. Take a deep breath. And a few more. You've been raped and it's not your fault... It's a long road that you're only just starting. You need to take some time to mourn what was taken from you. And then, when you're ready, you [can]...do something about it. (Aeryn, in a letter to her college self)

I've proven to myself that some man can't create my identity and rob me of myself. I [am] proud to be able to stand up on my own two feet and live through the experience and keep going. (Beth)

For now, let it be enough to breathe. Let it be enough to see another day. Let it be enough to hear me say that you are going to be okay. I cannot make this promise to all women who have experienced rape on campus. I can only promise it to my younger self, and to the younger selves of those who have found better places as they grow older, like the women in this study. Not everyone finds her way here, though. Not everyone finds a way to *being enough*...loved enough, pretty enough, funny enough, strong enough...enough of anything. We say to ourselves "if only I had been more this or that, maybe this wouldn't have happened to me". I hope that it can be enough to know that it was not your fault. No matter who you are, if you are a rape survivor, it was not your fault. Someone else did it to you. You did not do it to yourself. I hope that can be enough for you to know for now, in order to move forward, in order to move on. You are more than enough.

What meaning is brought forth from survival, from the reassurance that she will survive? In that this is a message to my younger self, I can say certainly that she will. For the women in this study, they can tell their younger selves that they will survive as well.

Sweetie, who is incredibly strong today, shared that she would likely not be here if it were not for the support of her mother. It is powerful to consider the people who got us through. There is something to be said about *self* on the long path to recovery, but there is something to be said about *the other*, too. There is power in *the other* when the *self* feels it has nowhere to go.

Who are the others who might make the difference between life and death for survivors? Who are the others who might step in, step up, and be there when they are needed most? What kind of self-exploration does it take in order to be there for the others? How can we, as student affairs professionals, be sure that we provide space and time for survival among those who are raped by fellow students on our college campuses?

I hope that this research can incite change and help assure that more women who are raped *survive*. In this work, it is the stories that have helped to make that connection, helped the flame spread far and wide. It is through the stories that we might find our way to action. Pipher (2006) writes:

A writer's job is to tell stories that connect readers to all the people on earth, to show these people as the complicated human beings they really are, with histories, families, emotions, and legitimate needs. We can replace one-dimensional stereotypes with multidimensional individuals with whom our readers can identify. (p. 6)

It can be easy in our busy-ness and our exhaustive-ness to turn off the pieces of us, as student affairs professionals, as pedagogues, that connect to humanity. Many of us found this work because of a connection to humanity, but there are times when the work itself calls for a *turning-off*. Just as we turn off lights to save energy, we do the same for ourselves when our energies have been drained. But we need light. Our students need our

light. Without our light, how might they find their way? As they are trapped in their darkest of times, how might we set the spark, fan the flame, and shine light on those who need it most?

It is my hope that these stories will be the sparks each of us needs to find the light of care that exists in all of us. Pipher (2006) writes, “Good writing facilitates the making of connections in a way that inspires openheartedness, thinking, talking, and action” (p. 7). I hope that this writing will do the same—that it will fuel an “openheartedness, thinking, talking, and action” and sensitive way of being in the world. It is in this that we, as student affairs professionals, open ourselves to students in ways that will help us be with them .

Being *For*

What is it to *be for* sexual assault survivors in college? In *being with* students, I discussed a sense of closeness to the individual. For student affairs professionals (I’ll add, too, faculty, friends, and family) it is also a sense of finding their own way to the authentic self. It is through that authentic self that we may be open to the lived experience of survivors, and therefore open up the space, time, and care they need to find peace on campus. It is an opening to the possibilities of healing while staying, and therefore making the staying (the going to class, the being social, and so on) not only bearable, but a (re)claiming of *Dasein*, a move toward authenticity, for more than just a few of the most resilient survivors.

Being for opens the line of sight further to include the possibilities of creating the space, time, and care that survivors need, not just on an individual level but along the campus landscape. What would it mean to survivors for the entire campus community to

be behind them in their healing? What would it mean for survivors that the care we give to them is not limited to the few on campus either whose job it is to do this work, or who have taken a special, personal interest in it? Faculty, staff, friends, and family could be part of the movings I discussed in Chapter Five. Structures and settings could be given new life in light of what we have gained from this new knowing. It is the unlocking of a potential for the opening of sky and earth. It is the great geographic landscape growing larger and more pure such that survival may benefit by its freshest of air and purest of water, further opening the sky and the earth. It is the world's embrace, untainted.

Left behind. *In the darkness of the night, you were left behind.*

About ten years ago, I took a group of women on a weeklong hike on the Appalachian Trail as part of a college spring break trip. For the duration of the week I remained purposefully at some distance behind the group so that if any of them needed assistance, I would happen upon them soon enough. It required my walking to be excruciatingly slow, so as not to outpace the slowest student. It made the trip frustrating for me. If only *she* was capable of walking at a faster pace, *my* experience would be more enjoyable. By the end of the trip, though, I knew that my staying behind mattered more to this student than she had let on. She was able to push herself to do something new and frightening, because she knew she would not be left behind. Knowing that I was there for her helped her to succeed. It was a good reminder that we do this work with students to help them push themselves to grow and learn. It was a good reminder that it was not about me.

For sexual assault survivors on campus, there is a great sense of being left behind. There is an overwhelming feeling that as the world goes along forward, I am stuck back

in this, the darkest of trauma. I am frozen to this spot. I will never be able to catch up. There is a sense of absence—from campus, from life, from being, and there is a sense that no one cares where you've gone. Leder (1990) writes:

An absence is the being-away of something. The lived body, as ecstatic in nature, is that which is away from itself. Yet this absence is not equivalent to a simple voice, a mere lack of being. The notion of being is after all present in the very word *absence*. The body could not be away, stand outside, unless it had a being and stance to begin with. It is thus never fully eradicated from the experiential world. Otherwise I would not even know I had a body. (p. 22)

In the sense of being left behind as others move on, there is a sense of being absent from it all—from life as it is supposed to be in college, whatever 'supposed' means for each survivor. They have moved from presence to absence both in feeling and in being. They “stand outside” of everything they wish to be a part of. However, if in the absence there is a presence, then this may be the kernel that we can cling to in order to make campus life more bearable for survivors. In other words, if there remains some agency, some sense of *self* in the survivor, even as she is *in absence*, then we might find that self and bring it forward.

So how might we, as student affairs professionals, find the *absent self* and bring her out of the *left behind*? What are the possibilities for survivors if we are able to find a way to *go back to where they have been left*, and to bring them back to the place they wish to be? Or is it that we need to find a way to reduce the gap between the two, perhaps by finding a central place where both the *moving on* and the *remaining behind* might come together? How might space, place, and time be re-imagined on campus to make it a more hospitable environment for survivors?

It is by way of opening the conversation between pedagogy and advocacy that we may find directionality toward healing in the ways they overlap. If the two are given the space to be in conversation with each other, advocacy may open insight into the world of the survivor, while pedagogy can make movement toward empathy as human beings come together on campus in a new way of knowing. As the campus community comes into a *knowing* that embraces a survivor's *way of being*, there may be a shift in the way the community is with survivors.

The word advocate comes from the Latin *advocare*, meaning, *to call or to voice*. As such, it is in the calling out to survivors that their voices may be found and heard. When voice-less-ness becomes voice-full-ness, or finds itself somewhere along the path between the two, that which now tends toward voice-full-ness may share what has been found along the way. It is in this sharing with advocates, and the advocates sharing (within the confines of confidentiality) either with pedagogues or as pedagogues, a new way of knowing with the community. Thus, through new knowledge, a new empathy may be born.

As the pedagogues and pedagogy bring forth this new way of knowing, there may be room made for shifting *ways-of-being* on campus—ways-of-being that are in communal support of rape survivors. In this uncovering, there is a new knowing of rape victims as oppressed beings on campus, oppressed under the pressing weight of rapist and subsequently community. Freire (1993) writes:

The pedagogy of the oppressed [is a] pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary

engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade. (p. 48)

The creation of this new pedagogy, as it is shared with the campus by pedagogues and advocates, then, must be a pedagogy born from a partnership with victims/survivors. It is a pedagogy that must come from them, must be based in their lived experience, so that the campus community may come to know it truly as it *is*. It is through this pedagogy that survivors may find a way to *Dasein*, to authentic self, while they are on campus. This pedagogy can be transformative, and it must also be transformed as time goes on.

As the ways of being and knowing on campus shift, the pedagogy must shift with it. As the song lyrics in this chapter opened, we seek to open up the sky. For survivors, who remain left behind, in the darkness, this kind of conversation between pedagogy and advocacy can move survivors out of the shadows and into the light.

The voiceless and the lifeless. *With the voiceless and the lifeless and the ones who tried to find.*

You'll feel hopeless, helpless, tired, weak, scared, alone... but things get so much better. You have to trust me. (Sweetie, in a letter to her college self)

It is the voiceless and the lifeless that the advocates must find, or who must find their way to the advocates. The *advocare* who call to those who have been left behind, in doing so, bolster rising survivor voices. But it is not only the advocates and the pedagogues who are needed for the changing tides it will take to make a difference for survivors on campus. No—with advocates, pedagogues, and survivors huddling together in the middle of the dense forest, support and nourishment for them all must come from

the earth and the skies. From the top down and the bottom up, the entire campus community is needed to make this change.

From the top and from the bottom, the voices of victim/survivors must be heard. It is in the hearing that we may listen closely to what they really have to say. It is in the listening that we may hearken the transformative wisdom they have to impart. Levin (1989) writes:

Hearkening requires the disciplined practice of *Gelassenheit*, i.e. letting-go and letting-be, as a mode or style of listening. In learning *Gelassenheit*, the art of “just listening,” listening without getting entangled in the ego’s stories and preoccupations, one learns a different way of channeling, focusing, attending. (p. 48)

What would it mean for the president of a university to be in and with the disciplined practice of *Gelassenheit*? What possibilities are opened by and for the entering first year student as she learns a *letting-be* way of listening? What may emerge from the ego-less entanglement of faculty and staff (I ask of myself, too, as I am within your ranks)? What visions may become clear for support staff by way of “channeling, focusing, attending?”

It is through these *attendings*, as they are each singular *a-tendings*—tending to each individual with the focus that she deserves—that we may open up that which must be most *attended to*. As I am attending, here, to voicelessness and lifelessness, I must ask—what are the centralities that hold her there? What are the possibilities for opening her stoppings as they rise up here? How is it that voice and life are kept *in stopping*, and what are the possibilities for helping them to move, rise up, sound out, and *be in this world*?

It is from these questions that we return to the stoppings. What are the pieces of her lived experience that keep her from moving forward into healing? What possibilities

open up when we are able to hear her stoppings? It is in the victim blaming and the shaming that the most powerful stoppings occur, and it is in those times that they are not recognized for the destruction that they cause. They cause a weakening of her strength, a muting of her voice, a dulling of her senses, and a holding-back of her agency. If these stoppings are allowed to live on as they are—brutal destructors for survivors and lighthearted comments and jokes to those removed from her—then we have failed. If the brutal destruction is, as it is now, met only by laughter and complacency, we might as well prepare for the multiplication of souls lost to mental and physical, and spiritual death.

We need to find a way, as a campus community, for deeply feeling listening to work its way into our busy campus days. We need to find time to pause and consider the lives around us, and by *we*, I mean *all of us*. Everyone who touches campus life in any way, from community members and families, to students, faculty and staff of all ranks—we all need to listen more closely. We must put away our preconceived thoughts about what we think might be said, or what brilliant things we are about to say—we just need to stop. And listen. Stop. And listen. And really hear the lived experience that goes on all around us everyday.

A way back. *A way back to the living, all the while feeling blind.*

You can report this. To the college. To the police. You probably won't get very far with the latter, but the former may be enough to make sure this guy has to take responsibility, in some way, for [what he did to] you. Maybe protect other girls, probably not. Maybe keep him from being in a position of power, probably not. Maybe even force him to understand what he did wrong, but probably not. But first is first... you need to understand what happened was not ok. You didn't do anything wrong... Take control back [for] yourself and maybe even [take] the opportunity to make a difference for someone else. (Aeryn, in a letter to her college self)

We, the survivors and me, just wanted to find our way back—back to living the life we once knew, back to a time when innocence was still ours and we did not know about the ways in which our bodies would be broken one day. We wanted to take back control and take back our lives. We wanted to find our way to the living that we saw others doing around us everyday in college. And we did—we found our way back to the living even though we were feeling our way through the darkness—blinded by all that had happened. It is in the blindness that we might see things as they really are, how they feel, where they are soft and where the edges are sharp. It is in the darkness of feeling one's way, which we may find the most powerful way of all.

For me, the way back came in the most unlikely of forms—the fraternity houses and fraternity men. That was the last place I thought I would find myself in thoughtful conversation about rape. Being in conversation about recovery and prevention with fraternity men—talking about being there for survivors, about preemptively ending violence—this is where I found my way out of the trauma. Van Manen (1991) writes:

It is important to contrast the openness of this sensitive capacity of tact to the inclination to see and hear only what one wants to see and hear about a child. The latter orientation leads to inflexible judgments, stereotyping, classifying – seeing only the external behavior of children and not their inner lives and their individual intentions and projects. (p. 172)

I do not insinuate here that fraternity men are children. I mean rather the opposite. The fraternity men I have worked with over the years have taught me incredible things about the level of care they have for the women in their lives. It is true that not all of my pedagogical experiences with fraternity men were good or easy. I hope, however, that the conversations were as powerful and transformative for them as they were for me.

Van Manen's words call for a suspension of disbelief some may have for the transformative nature of human existence. Rape survivors, fraternity men—how is it that these two groups may find a way of *being* the other's salvation? It is here that the argument again turns personal, because I am a rape survivor, raped by a fraternity man, for whom fraternity men became my salvation. I am grateful that I was led, by sense of insight or great denial (I do not know for sure), to look past what I may have “wanted to see and hear” about these men. One of them raped me, this is one of my many truths. However, that external behavior of one does not erase the “inner lives and individual intentions” of the others.

So it is by way of this lived experience that I propose the next question of possibility—opening conversations with men. Some of this work with men is being done already—just as is advocacy and education work. The question, however, lies not with existing programs or the creation of the next big thing, but in the possibilities that emerge simply by opening the conversations. What meaning can be made for survivors, and also for collegiate men, when conversation is encouraged between the two on the subject of rape?

The possibility lies in lifting the veil that keeps us all in blindness, in denial, of the great realities of our world. Just as we do not like to acknowledge the realities of war, neither do we care to see the realities of rape. Our denial keeps us in blindness, but that blindness also keeps survivors from seeing the possibilities that may be open to them. I suggest here that by opening dialogue we may move away from the sense of blindness with the openness of sight.

One in time. *Life before and after, one in time.*

You deal with your stuff, you figure it out, you learn to move on, but things like [rape] are with you forever... I don't think about rape and being raped every day... but I'm going to have to deal with it my entire life. My husband is going to have to deal with it his entire life... It never really goes away. (Chloe)

We come full circle, back to the bringing together of life before and after rape. It is the quest for *Dasein*, it is the movement toward authentic selfhood. This is the centrality of the question—as beings within universities, how do we wish to be with and for survivors as they make their way to *Dasein*? And in clearing the path toward *Dasein*, may we all not find our way there, as well? By attending to a single being in need of light or care or space or time or whatever it is she may need, so too may we find greater humanity in ourselves. As she finds wholeness, so wholeness is shared with her world. It is within the wholeness of *Dasein* that being-whole may be found. Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

When and how has our existential analysis received any assurance that by starting with everyday-ess, it has forced the *whole* of *Dasein* – this entity from its 'beginning' to its 'end' – into the phenomenological view which gives us our theme? We have indeed contended that care is the totality of the structural whole of *Dasein*'s constitution. But have we not at the very outset of our Interpretation renounced the possibility of bringing *Dasein* into view as a whole? (p. 276)

It is survival's way of being in before-ness and after-ness that come together as one way of authentic being. Through the care of others, *Dasein* finds its way into the structural wholeness of self. This, of course, is a feeling of wholeness that may not be fully witnessed by the other. As Heidegger posits above, *Dasein's* wholeness may not be viewed by others *fully*. But this is the point—*Dasein* does not need to be fully seen by others. Rather, it needs to be felt by self and shared with others. In this there is a finding of authentic self and a sharing of authentic self so that the phenomenon might become one in time.

The quest for authenticity is one that seeks to bring together all parts of the *human-being-in-survival*. It is her past victimization; it is her present way of healing or feeling healed, and it is the long path she has walked in between. The question, though, is this—how do we, as student affairs professionals, clear the path for this kind of searching and finding? How do we help survivors find their way to the world of healing, which exists only as she is a being in the world? Heidegger (1927/1962) writes, “*Dasein*, when understood *ontologically*, is care” (p. 84). Without care, she has no way of being, and with no way of being there can be no world. Heidegger (1927/1962) continues:

The ontological signification of the expression “care” has been expressed in the ‘definition’: “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (the world as Being-alongside entities which we encounter within the world).” In this are expressed the fundamental characteristics of *Dasein's* Being: existence, in the “ahead-of-itself”; facticity, in the “Being-already-in” falling, in the “Being-alongside”. (p. 293)

This is the wholeness that we seek to know, to understand, and to cultivate so that care may be part of it in every way of being. *One in time* as it is being explored here comes with and through this ontological definition of care.

This wholeness may come to be known only when the wholeness of campus comes along for the *before-ness*, the *during-ness*, and the *whatever-may-be-after-ness* of survival. It is only by being along-side survivors, by walking among survivors as they travel the terrain that we may come to truly care for them. These phenomenological openings lend themselves to a searching for ways in which they may *be* on campus. It is by opening the door to the lived experience in all areas of campus, that the kind of wholeness I discuss here may be reached. It cannot be kept to the confidential meetings of therapists and victim advocates, or the few whose direct job it is to tend to these things. These conversations—those that take the time and care needed to deeply come to know the lived experience—need to take place in the president’s office and during New Student Orientation. They need to be held within residential communities—general, greek, living-learning and otherwise. They need to include all faculty, staff, and students, including support, maintenance, and cleaning staff. They need to bring together students, faculty, and staff who live off campus, as the campus community spills out of and around the university grounds.

I know that these conversations are happening in *some of* these places already on some college campuses, and I know that *few of* these conversations get to the depth I implore us to reach. I know this because I have attended many of them on campuses where I’ve worked. These meetings, however, are rarely focused on the depth of lived experience. These are outcomes-based meetings. I propose here a very different way of coming together. I propose a coming-together so that we may come to know better and come to care better. From there, the rest will come, for the whole is the sum of its many specific parts.

Sharing My Bearings: (Re)Searching for Myself Along the Way

*Under lightness of the day, and the dark and starry night
In the all encompassing, will I retain my sight?
You look at me and wonder: Will I ever feel complete?
You ask where is the truth and when will I be free?*

I am a *being* in research, in exploration, in healing, in search of *Dasein*. For the duration of this study I have been, and now truly will continue to be, a being-in-research (re)searching for myself. I am the instrument of the research while also the embodiment of the research. As a woman who was raped in college, I am deeply and personally connected to the phenomenon at hand, and it is through the research and the uncovering of the lived experience of others that I came through a (re)searching of my own. As I uncovered layers of the phenomenon among my participants, I uncovered layers of my own trauma and recovery as well. I can only hope that the same will be true for others who read this research. Whether or not they are survivors, I hope all who come to this research will feel it deeply, layer by layer.

Van Manen (1997) writes that “Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human” (p. 12). He continues,

As we research the possible meaning structures of our lived experiences, we come to a fuller grasp of what it means to be in the world as a man, a woman, a child, taking into account the sociocultural and historical traditions that have given meaning to our ways of being in the world. (p. 12)

This work has been and will continue to be transformative for me. It is, in many ways, the culmination of my healing, as it has been with me, in one form or another, throughout the doctoral experience. The work I’ve done on campus with and for sexual assault survivors is here. The work I’ve done in prevention with the fraternity men is here. The academic

work was, and continues to be, at the center of it all, and this is the culmination of my academic work at the doctoral level.

In many ways, my authentic self has always lived here, within the poetics and the lyrics and the mossy forest floor. With the instrument of music and the body of the earth close at hand, I have found my way by (re)searching for Self among Others. It was by walking through this research that I (re)found many pieces of myself that had been lost along the way. I have gained new insight into my survivor-self. I have picked up the dusty guitar again and am writing and singing and playing. I found an earthy grounding that I had been missing for so long. I had covered it with layers of they-self, but I'm finding my way out of being defined by *the other*. As the they-self is pushed away, I am left with the essence of who I am—how I have changed, and, too, how I have stayed the same.

Day and Night

Under lightness of the day, and the dark and starry night.

I am called back to the woods often, now that I have found my way out. I have conquered many fears that lurk in the shadows there, and I maintain a respect for their majesty and the wild allure they hold. Lying on my back in a forest clearing, I look up at the stars. I enjoy the mystery of them and the magic they hold. I wonder—is it possible to tell the future by them? Is there a fixed plan for each of us that is already laid out and may be glimpsed among them in some mystical way? Or is the future created? By the stars, am I able to say that I don't like the path as it reads and so I will choose my own direction? There is no singular path, and there are no singular truths; therefore, I do have agency in my destiny if it is laid out by the stars. It is a coming together of agency and

mystery. Like the stars in the sky, a great new knowledge has come out of the mysteries shared by the women in this study. They have shared with me their journeys of sameness and change, and my own experience has followed along on the path beside them.

Down the path in the woods, and along my (re)search travels, have I been transformed by what I have seen and learned along the way? One might say that I am *like night and day* from the time I began this research, and by that they would mean to say I have changed quite a lot. This metaphor comes from the sense that the night is so vastly different from the day. I argue, however, that as with all things, the world is more complex. If we really are to examine the night and the day, would we find so much difference there? Would there be sameness, too?

I believe that I am *like night and day*, in that I am *like the night*, and I am *like the day*. By that, I mean to say I have been *changed* by the (re)search, but I have maintained a *sameness*, too. I am the same person, drawn to music, drawn to poetics, drawn to the lives of women as they are in victimization and survival. The (re)search, in my searching again, in my going deeper, has helped me double down on these and impassion my commitment to them.

What is the night? Is it languishing and damp, as in hot and muggy summer, or is it crisp and blue and cool as visible breath escaping lungs? Is there a far off chirping, humming buzzing whose origin is covered by the darkness or a rustling of dry leaves by feet you cannot see? Is there a loud and startling howl, erupting with great power and hunger? Are there a million glittering stars above or the smooth washed covering of impenetrable midnight clouds? As you breathe in, can you smell the pure nothingness blanket of snow, or do the buds begin to share the scent of quiet sleeping summer?

It is all of these things, and so am I. Like the darkness of the night, I can be thick and fiery hot, in determined fury. I am also cool and quiet ensuring respite undisturbed. I am the hushed rustling, yet unrelenting, reminder of the work left to be done and I am a great and booming, frightening wail when the rustling is not heard. I am bright and crisp of sight and I, at times, feel blurred and clouded over. I am the cold slumber of contemplation and the rebirth of a promise to a sisterhood I never meant to join.

What is the day? Is it the wall of heat that stops breath short upon walking from the cool inside to the burning-out? Or is it the frozen reverse throat-catching icy dryness after being in the warm indoors? Is it the clarity of visual sight provided by the bright and yellow sun, and the yet still illumination through the rain? Is it playful children's laughter and passing cars and singing birds? Is it the full color lighting of the world in greens and pinks and browns and blues? Is it the blinding shining brightness, bouncing off the snow? Is it the dampened muted colors, just before a storm?

It is all these things and so am I. I can have a sustained icy coolness. I can work so hard and care so much that I find myself burning-out. My emotions can run so deep in connection to the trauma that I felt, that others still feel, that dry or wet or hot or cold it can get lodged in my throat and cut my breath short. I find I have the clearest sight on some things, only to find a storm roll in, and that clarity becomes dampened, muted. I find myself sometimes blinded by the immensity of the problem of rape. Alive and alert, night and day, compassionate and impassioned, I find sameness and difference and renewed drive toward the work there is left to do. I find myself *being in both* all that is day and all that is night.

Retaining Sight

In the all encompassing, will I retain my sight?

How do I maintain all that I have learned throughout the (re)search? How do I stay true to how I am now that—one foot in the day and one foot in the night—I know these things? Now that I have heard and made phenomenological meaning from the voices of the women in this study, how is it that I keep myself, my colleagues, deeply connected and deeply moved by it all? If we lose the deep connection, if it fades some time after reading or hearing these things, we will lose everything—voice, life, *being*.

Van Manen (1997) writes:

Phenomenology is a philosophy of action always in personal and situated sense. A person who turns toward phenomenological reflection does so out of personal engagement. (p. 154)

I am deeply, personally engaged in this (re)search. As hermeneutic phenomenology, is, this work brings my experience together with the experiences of my participants in a highly connected way. I am so close to this work. It is in me and all around me at once.

And for these reasons I am compelled to find ways to maintain a personal commitment to the work and ways in which I can maintain a sense of urgency among my colleagues. Van Manen (1997) continues:

Phenomenology is a philosophy of action especially in a pedagogic context. Pedagogy itself is a mode of life that always and by definition deals with practical action... What the phenomenological attitude gives to educators is a certain style of knowing, a kind of theorizing of the unique that sponsors a form of pedagogic practice that is virtually absent in the increasingly bureaucratized and technological spheres of pedagogic life. I have called this knowing and acting, “pedagogic thoughtfulness” and “pedagogic tact.” (p. 154)

A pedagogical commitment to changing the world for sexual assault survivors on campus sounds like an insurmountable goal, and the enormity of it is very real. However,

not every way we tend to the issue must be so grand. In small ways, everyday ways, big differences can be made. As van Manen says, it is a “mode of life,” in which one comes to be an embodiment of care. As each individual becomes the embodiment of care, the community becomes such, and a multitude of small, meaningful, caring acts create great change and comfort for survivors.

Please hear me clearly: I do not mean to insinuate that student affairs professionals are *uncaring*. On the contrary, I believe that we are some of the most caring beings on the planet. This is why I was called to the field! However, I also know that not many of us know deeply the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women on campus, and I see that as a very serious problem. I hope that this work can help the already caring professionals in our field better recognize and better understand not only the lived experience, but what survivors really need to survive.

As van Manen points out, we live in “the increasingly bureaucratic and technological spheres of pedagogic life.” These are some of the very real ways in which we are held back from the work we are called to do. Add to this that we are overworked and often underpaid, especially for the number of hours we spend tending to student development; sometimes we need to be told to stop and feel. One can only exist on automatic and rote action for so long, although it is a practical way of making it through particularly dense periods of work. If we can re-center, though, and find again our “pedagogic thoughtfulness” and “pedagogic tact,” perhaps learn new ways of using those pieces of ourselves to better serve survivors, we will be fulfilling our roles in making college campuses true communities of care.

Toward Being in Whole-ness

You look at me and wonder: Will I ever feel complete?

The song lyric, as it appears above, is asked from the perspective of my college self as she wonders if she will ever feel whole again. The rape has left her with a gaping hole in her heart, and she wonders if it can ever be filled? What does it mean to be complete? None of the survivors in this study found themselves encompassed by survival, anymore. In our beginning conversations, I came to know them as they see themselves today. Not a single one of them brought forth rape as their primary way of being in the world today. Ten to twenty years after being raped in college, they are not only temporally far away from it, but they are spiritually, emotionally, and physically away from it, too. Does that mean that it does not affect them today? Of course not. At times they are thrust back into victimization and survival without a whisper of warning. It will always be part of them, but it is no longer wrapped around them, steeped through them, and the first and final way that they find themselves in the world.

In their own words, they are so many things today: Army wife. Daughter of Taiwanese immigrants. White European Mutt. Unitarian Universalist. Mom. Social justice activist. Christ follower. Daughter. Cancer survivor. Inspiring. Wife. Stubborn. Neat freak. Partner. Bookworm. Horrible at singing, apologizing, spelling and directions. Sister/girlfriend. Computer gamer. While at one time in their lives the experience of survival was all encompassing, not one of them mentioned being a rape survivor when I asked, *“tell me about yourself”* today.

It is still a salient part of their way of being in the world. It still comes to them in unexpected ways, during unexpected moments. It still affects them. They are forever

changed by being raped in college by another college student—a friend, a boyfriend, someone they had newly become interested in. It took years for them to get to a place of peace about it—and peace is not always what they have—but their lived experience is no longer centered on or absorbed in *being-in-victimization* or *being-in-survival*. These pieces have *blurred* into the background while others have become the *focus*.

In turning back to my college self, I am not quite sure what to say. There are times in which I feel that gaping hole in my heart widen, like I am back in that time and space of victimization. At other times I feel as though it has mended itself fully. I want her to know that she will be okay—even with the pain that returns periodically, I will *feel* an everydayness of *being-whole*, even if there are missing pieces that I may never regain.

Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

Everydayness is precisely that Being which is between' birth and death. And if existence is definitive for Dasein's Being and if its essence is constituted in part by potentiality-for-Being, then as long as Dasein exists it must in each case, as such a potentiality, *not yet be* something. Any entity whose Essence is made up of existence, is essentially opposed to the possibility of our getting it in our grasp as an entity which is a whole... one may even question whether "having" the whole entity is attainable at all. (p. 276)

And so I say to my younger self, will you ever be complete? You will feel complete by way of your walking toward authenticity, and that will become enough. You will be on the path and you will find a sense of peace in that, in the seeing completion on the horizon, but knowing that attaining it will mean the walk is over. Know that as time goes on, the everydayness becomes much more bearable, even enjoyable. So if that is what you mean by "complete" then yes. But once you find this place where I am now, you will be searching for another wholeness—one that is on the horizon, and so wholeness is found *being in* the movement toward it.

Continuing the Questioning

You ask where is the truth; will I be freed?

Here, at the end of the path, at the end of the (re)search, I find that I am at no ending at all. I am standing on the edge of a new beginning, where new questions have yet to be asked. Where do we go from here? Now that we have explored this piece of survival, what pieces have been opened up? But first we begin by trying to answer the final question (for now) posed by college self in the above song lyrics. By answering her questions, we may also answer the others. *Where is the truth? Will I be freed?*

I know from where she asks these questions. She asks them from a place of entrapment within the walls of trauma's anxiety. It is a place where shortness of breath and walls closing in upon her are the norm. Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its *Being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being – that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its *Being-free for (propensio in...)* the authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is. But at the same time, this is the Being to which Dasein as Being-in-the-world has been delivered over. (pp. 232-233)

It is in the *taking hold of herself* that my younger self, along the way to being where I am today, will find some semblance of freedom. There will be few other people, places, or things for her to take hold of, so she will become quite reliant on herself. She will have to be in order to survive. As Heidegger says, she will be “brought face to face with her *being-free for,*” in that she will come to know the importance of becoming free, and she will gain a small insight into how to get there. That insight will grow, and she will be delivered over into her new sense of freedom. This is the freedom in which I live today. It

is not perfect; it is not pure, but it is within my authentic self. In the truth of her authenticity, she will find her way to freedom.

And in that, there is the freedom to move the questioning forward. She is, as now I am, on stable ground, and I may look to the horizon again for what is to come next.

Gadamer (1960/2002) writes:

Every experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally fuses with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form a unified flow of experience. (p. 245)

The horizon, *before* I came through the (re)search, contained different things than it does today. Then, the horizon was a symbol of the completion of this work, and the knowledge that may be gained from it. Now, *after* the (re)search, there is a new horizon, still just as far away, but now informed by all that has come before me. The *beforeness* and *afterness* of the (re)search are now in one place, within me, and the horizon becomes my new goal.

As for the questions that exist on the horizontal line between earth and sky, they are abundant. I have examined closely the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college, and there is certainly more to uncover there. With each new voice there comes new insight, and so this calls for engagement with more women on the matter. What is the lived experience of sexual assault survival for other groups of students on campus? What openings might we find if our group was not representing White, Italian American, Native American, and Taiwanese American voices, but more narrowly investigated women of more similar backgrounds and ethnicities? What about affiliation on campus? What would sorority women have to say about their lived experience? What about lesbian and bi-sexual, and transgender women on campus? And what about men of all ethnicities, sexualities, and sexual orientations? This study has

only begun to question the lived experience of sexual assault survival on campus.

Gadamer (1960/2002) writes:

The essence of the question is to have sense. Now sense involves a sense of direction. Hence the sense of the question is the only direction from which the answer can be given if it is to make sense. A question places what is questioned in a particular perspective. When a question arises, it breaks open the being of the object, as it were. Hence the logos that explicates this opened-up being is an answer. Its sense lies in the sense of the question. (p. 362)

We continue on the path and on any number of new directions. We have questions. We have a sense, and senses, of the lived experience of sexual assault survivors in college. This sense has given me the direction toward questions above and question that have not yet been wondered. I will continue this questioning because I am committed to this work. I love this work. Van Manen (1997) writes:

To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, but we will come face to face with mystery. (pp. 5-6)

This work has become a loved one to me, deserving all of my time and energy to keep her live and thriving. I have desired the knowing of her since before she was born, and now that she is here I wish to know her more.

And so we will end on the mystery that exists in the forest, in every shadow and at every sound. It exists in the stars and the sun and the twilight *in-between*. It is time to leave the woods. I will close by saying this to my younger self, as she remains in a struggle for our survival: *We walk together, you and I, along the path and into a sunny clearing. We have explored the darker side of survival, and we have watched the light emerge. We have heard the pain of others, of the women who chose to walk this path with us—this path of understanding. Thank you. Thank you for being strong, for making it*

through. For getting up off that dirty, beer stained floor and moving forward. I will be forever grateful to you for getting me through it. Through your power, we will find our truth and our freedom.

**APPENDIX A:
TEXT FOR ELECTRONIC LETTERS TO PARTICIPANT NOMINATORS**

Dear _____:

I am requesting your assistance with soliciting participants for my doctoral dissertation research. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college and to understand the meaning they make from that experience.

I am writing to you because of your possible connections, either as an advisor, colleague, or counselor/therapist to women who self-identify as survivors of sexual assault in college. The key criterion for participation is a willingness to share the experience of what surviving sexual assault in college is like and to be interested in reflecting on that experience with me as the researcher. They must have stayed in college for at least one year following the incident(s), and have been away from college (graduated or withdrew) for a minimum of three years. Another important factor is that the participant be available for these conversations through the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012.

Given the sensitivity of sexual assault survival for some women, I would prefer that you, instead of I, make initial contact with any women you know who self-identify as survivors of sexual assault in college, to let them know you would like to nominate them for the study. Please inform potential participants that participation is voluntary, and they may choose to withdraw at any time.

Please send the names of any potential participants who would be willing to share their experiences of what is its like and what it means to them to live through sexual assault survival in college. It would be helpful if you could share as much contact information as possible, such as name, email address, and telephone number. When I contact the potential participant(s) you nominate, I will let them know that you were the nominator.

Names of potential participants may be forwarded to me via email to mmonahan@umd.edu or if you prefer, by telephone at 301-335-9593, my cellular phone number with private voicemail. Please forward any names to me by [insert date approximately one week from date letter sent]. If I have not heard from you by then, I will follow up by phone. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about my study or potential participants.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with identifying potential participants.

Sincerely

Mollie Monahan-Kreishman
Doctoral Candidate
Dept. of Counseling and Personnel Services
3214 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
mmonahan@umd.edu
301-335-9593

Francine Hultgren
Professor and Department Chair
Dept. of Teaching, Learning, Policy and
Leadership
2311 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
fh@umd.edu
301-405-4562

(Adapted from Eddy, 2008)

**APPENDIX B:
EMAIL TEXT FOR INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY
(IDENTIFIED BY RESEARCHER)**

Dear [name of possible participant]:

In our past work together, you have self-identified as a survivor of sexual assault in college. As such, I write to inquire about your interest in participating in a research study I am conducting that is exploring what it means to be a woman in college who has survived sexual assault. Are you comfortable enough with sharing your experience that you might be willing to participate in this study?

Participation in this study requires that you engage in in-depth conversations with me about your experience. The conversations will primarily take place over email. In addition to email conversation, we will engage in one “face-to-face” conversation (which may need to be conducted over the telephone or using videoconferencing such as Skype.com), and one online forum discussion with other participants (pseudonyms will be used to protect privacy). These conversations will take place through and the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 academic semesters, including the winter session that falls in between. The face-to-face conversation will be transcribed so that I may best reflect on what is said. Your participation will remain confidential, as you will choose a pseudonym and pseudonym email address to be used for the purposes of this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time.

Sharing experiences is important to me as I, too, am a survivor of sexual assault in college; I hope you will consider being part of this study to assist me in doing so. **If you are willing to be considered for participation in this study, simply respond to this email message with your name and the best way to get in contact with you regarding the scheduling of our conversations.**

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me at mmonahan@umd.edu or by phone at 301-335-9593, my cellular phone number with private voicemail. My research is being conducted under the direction of Professor Francine Hultgren, Chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership; she is also available if you have questions about this research study. Thank you for your interest in participating in my study and sharing your experiences of being a sexual assault survivor in college.

Sincerely,

Mollie Monahan-Kreishman
Doctoral Candidate
Dept. of Counseling and Personnel Services
3214 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
mmonahan@umd.edu
301-335-9593

Francine Hultgren
Professor and Department Chair
Dept. of Teaching, Learning, Policy and
Leadership
2311 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
fh@umd.edu
301-405-4562

(Adapted from Eddy, 2008)

**APPENDIX C:
EMAIL TEXT FOR INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY
(IDENTIFIED BY NOMINATOR)**

Dear [name of possible participant]:

You have been nominated by [Name of Nominator] as a potential participant in a research study I am conducting that is exploring what it means to be a woman sexual assault survivor in college. The person who nominated you believes that you are comfortable enough with your experience and that you might be willing to share what it means to you to be a survivor of sexual assault in college.

Participation in this study requires that you engage in in-depth conversations with me about your experience. The conversations will primarily take place over email. In addition to email conversation, we will engage in one “face-to-face” conversation (which may need to be conducted over the telephone or by using videoconferencing such as Skype.com), and one online forum discussion with other participants (pseudonyms will be used to protect privacy). These conversations will take place through the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 academic semesters, including the winter session that falls in between. The face-to-face conversation will be transcribed so that I may best reflect on what is said. Your participation will remain confidential, as you will choose a pseudonym and pseudonym email address to be used for the purposes of this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time.

Sharing experiences is important to me as I, too, am a survivor of sexual assault in college; I hope you will consider being part of this study to assist me in doing so. **If you are willing to be considered for participation in this study, simply respond to this email message with your name and the best way to get in contact with you regarding the exchange of scheduling of our conversations.**

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me at mmonahan@umd.edu or by phone at 301-335-9593, my cellular phone number with private voicemail. My research is being conducted under the direction of Professor Francine Hultgren, Chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership; she is also available if you have questions about this research study. Thank you for your interest in participating in my study and sharing your experiences of being a sexual assault survivor in college.

Sincerely,

Mollie Monahan-Kreishman
Doctoral Candidate
Dept. of Counseling and Personnel Services
3214 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
mmonahan@umd.edu
301-335-9593

Francine Hultgren
Professor and Department Chair
Dept. of Teaching, Learning, Policy and
Leadership
2311 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
fh@umd.edu
301-405-4562

(Adapted from Eddy, 2008)

**APPENDIX D:
CONTACT INFORMATION, PSEUDONYM AND PSEUDONYM EMAIL
ADDRESS**

To help protect your confidentiality, we are asking that you choose a pseudonym and create a pseudonym email address for the use of this study. PLEASE USE YOUR NEWLY CREATED PSEUDONYM EMAIL ADDRESS TO RETURN THIS FORM, so that we may do our best to ensure the protection of your privacy. This document and the Participant Consent Form are the only two documents that will include your actual name. These two documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the home of the student researcher and will be destroyed within one year of the completion of the study.

Actual Name: _____

Actual Email Address: _____

Postal Address (to receive the hard-copy consent form and postage paid return envelope):

Phone Number: _____

Does the above telephone number have private voicemail where messages regarding this study may be left?

Yes No Please do not contact me by phone

Pseudonym: _____

Pseudonym Email Address*: _____

*Please be sure to use your pseudonym in the creation of your pseudonym email address. For example, if your pseudonym is Jane, you could create the email address jane.thestudy@gmail.com. Please do not email from work computers, as supervisors will have access to the interaction.

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INTEREST FORM

Please use **YOUR NEWLY CREATED PSEUDONYM EMAIL ADDRESS** to send this form to the doctoral student researcher, Mollie Monahan-Kreishman, at mmonahan@umd.edu.

Pseudonym: _____

Pseudonym Email Address: _____

How old were you when the incident(s) happened in college? _____

Did you graduate from college? ___ Yes ___ No

If so, what year? _____

If so, how old were you when you graduated? _____

Did you withdraw from college? ___ Yes ___ No

If so, what year? _____

How old were you when you withdrew? _____

Did you ever re-enroll in that college, or enroll in another college?

___ I re-enrolled in that college

___ I enrolled in another college

How long were you in college following the incident(s):

At the college where I was sexually assaulted:

___ 1 Year ___ 2 Years ___ 3 Years Other:

At another college or university:

___ 1 Year ___ 2 Years ___ 3 Years Other:

Have you gone through a healing process that will help give you tools to support a deep exploration of your experience of sexual assault survival in college?

___ Yes ___ No

If yes, please briefly describe it here (was it therapy or some other healing process), including

the tools you use to cope with your experience of sexual assault in college:

Are you familiar with and comfortable using the following forms of communication:

Videoconferencing (such as Skype or Google Talk):

Yes No No, but I'm willing to learn in order to participate in the study

If Yes, do you have a preferred program? Yes No

What is the preferred program called? _____

Online Forum (such as Blackboard or Google Groups):

Yes No No, but I'm willing to learn in order to participate in the study

If Yes, do you have a preferred program? Yes No

What is the preferred program called? _____

Do you have access to using the above technologies in a secure setting that is private, such as an office with a locked door?

Yes No

If no, are you willing to secure such a location in order to participate in the study?

Yes No

PLEASE RETURN THIS INTEREST FORM ELECTRONICALLY TO: Mollie Monahan-Kreishman at mmonahan@umd.edu. Please use your newly created pseudonym email address to send it.

(Adapted from Eddy, 2008)

**APPENDIX F:
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Project Title	<i>Walking the Woods: The Lived Experience of Sexual Assault Survival for Women in College</i>
Purpose of the Study	<i>This research is being conducted by Francine Hultgren and Mollie Monahan-Kreishman, at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have self-identified as a survivor of sexual assault, and the incident(s) happened while you were in college. The purpose of this research project is to examine the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college and how they make meaning of their experiences.</i>
Procedures	<p><i>The procedures involve in-depth conversations about your experience surviving sexual assault in college.</i></p> <p><i>The primary mode of communication between you and the researcher will be email. Once the email conversation has reached the depth of exploration necessary for phenomenological study, the participant and researcher will engage in a private, face-to-face conversation about the participant's lived experience. The private, face-to-face conversation may need to take place using the telephone or a videoconferencing program such as Skype.com.</i></p> <p><i>All conversations, including email, telephone, videoconferencing and online forum must be conducted from a private, closed, locked location. You must secure such a location on your end prior to the beginning of the study. The researcher will conduct conversations from a private, closed, locked home office.</i></p> <p><i>The email and face-to-face conversations will be open-ended and based on a few guiding questions. The content of conversations will be about your experience as a sexual assault survivor in college.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, you will be asked to participate in an online forum once all email and face-to-face conversations are complete and my interpretations of them are made. By participating in the online forum you will be provided an opportunity to interact with the other study participants on the thematic areas that I will draw from our conversations. During that time, you will be able to confirm and correct my interpretations of your lived experience so that I may represent it as you live it, feel it, and know it.</i></p> <p><i>Your identity will be kept confidential during all conversations and interactions.</i></p>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<i>There may be some risks from participating in this research study, including emotional distress. You will be asked to discuss your experience as a sexual assault survivor in college. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. We hope that, in the future, other</i>

	<i>people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the experience of women sexual assault survivors in college.</i>
Potential Benefits	<i>This research is not designed to help you personally, but some survivors find that participating in activities that address the issue of sexual assault can be part of their own healing process. Additionally, it is our hope that this study will help faculty, staff, family members and friends of survivors gain empathy for survivors of sexual assault and, in turn, create more supportive campus communities for survivors.</i>
Confidentiality	<p><i>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym and a pseudonym email address. This is the name and email address that will be used throughout the research project to identify your conversations.</i></p> <p><i>The audio/video recordings and transcriptions of face-to-face conversations and copies of email and online forum conversations will be kept in a locked cabinet and password-protected computer at the home of the student researcher. All computer files, including transcripts, related to your conversations will only be identifiable by your pseudonym. Only the researcher will have access to the audio/video recordings. The recordings will be destroyed within one year of the research being completed. Your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible in any reports or articles that are written based on this research project. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
Medical Treatment	<i>The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.</i>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to withdraw from the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact one of the investigators:</i></p> <p><i>Francine Hultgren</i> <i>Professor and Department Chair</i> <i>Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership</i> <i>2311 Benjamin Building</i> <i>University of Maryland</i> <i>College Park, MD, 20742</i> <i>fh@umd.edu</i> <i>301-405-4562</i></p>

	<p>Mollie Monahan-Kreishman Doctoral Candidate, UMCP mmonahan@umd.edu 301-335-9593</p>	
Participant Rights	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 </p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	PARTICIPANT NAME [Please Print]	
	PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE	
	DATE	

Please return a hard copy of this form with your original signature directly to the doctoral student researcher USING THE ENCLOSED POSTAGE PAID RETURN ENVELOPE as soon as possible.

**APPENDIX G:
GUIDING QUESTIONS TO BE USED IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL
CONVERSATIONS**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me what sexual assault survival means to you.
3. What language do you use to describe yourself? Do you use the same language in describing other survivors of sexual assault?
4. How would you describe your sexual assault survival experience in college?
5. When, where, how did survival begin for you?
6. What does survival mean to you?
7. Describe what it was like for you to be a sexual assault survivor in college.
8. How do you describe yourself in relation to the sexual assault?
9. What dimensions, incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you in terms of sexual assault survival on campus?
10. Are there any changes you associate with the experience?
11. Did survival affect your worldview?
12. Can you imagine a different life in college? One without sexual assault and the experience of survival. What would that look like?
13. What feelings were generated by the experience?
14. What thoughts stood out for you?
15. Were there any bodily changes or states you were aware of?
16. Do you have other dimensions of the experience to share?

APPENDIX H:
SCRIPT FOR PRELIMINARY CONVERSATION WITH PARTICIPANTS

1. Before we begin, I want to check in about your pseudonym. Have you chosen one? What is it? Have you created an email address using it for the purposes of this study? What is that? Thank you. I will use that information to refer to you in all of our current and future interactions related to this study.
 - Do you have any questions? Feel free to ask any questions you have at any time during this conversation and all conversations/interactions in the future.

2. First, thank you for participating in this study. Uncovering the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college is important to me, primarily because it is important information to share with the world, but also because I am a survivor of sexual assault that happened in college. My lived experience will be shared and published along with the things you share with me throughout our exploration. I believe that if I am going to ask you to share so deeply, I must ask the same thing of myself. My hope is that this research will help faculty, staff, family and friends of survivors to be more empathetic, understanding, and supportive.
 - Do you have any questions at this time?

3. Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college and how they make meaning of their experiences.
 - Do you have any questions about that?

4. Execution of the study:
 - We are engaging in the first step of the study now – a preliminary conversation in which we will make sure our videoconferencing technology is working properly (unless we are able to meet face-to-face in person), including my recording capabilities. If it turns out that videoconferencing is not an option (in the case of having this conversation at a distance), we will consider interacting over the telephone. I need to use the same form of communication with all participants. We will overview the study, discuss the consent form, and you will have an opportunity to ask any questions you have before we begin our first phenomenological conversation.
 - Our first interactions will be over email. We will engage in a back and forth dialogue, which is meant to bring forth your voice and your perspective on your experience. We will continue the email interaction until we reach the depth of understanding necessary for phenomenological inquiry.
 - When will we know we have reached the “depth of understanding that is necessary”? We will know that we have achieved this depth once we start

seeing major themes emerge that are supported by deep, rich descriptions by you (the participant).

- We will then have one conversation, face-to-face, that will last one hour. In the best-case scenario, we will conduct this conversation in person. If that is not possible to do with *all* of the participants, we will conduct this conversation using the telephone or videoconferencing such as Skype.com. We will use a mode of communication that is consistent for all participants.
- Once face-to-face conversations have been conducted with all participants, they will need to be transcribed and interpreted.
- Once the face-to-face conversations are transcribed and interpreted, I will connect the interpretations with those that I made throughout our email conversations. After I have come up with the major phenomenological themes associated with our conversations, I will post them on an online forum. There, you will be able to interact with the themes and each other (using your pseudonyms) in order to correct, confirm, and add to the dialogue and understanding.
- After that, I will take what we have uncovered, and write it in the phenomenological tradition. That means that the writing will be descriptive, sensing and visceral. It will engage the use of metaphor and poetry. The goal of this type of rendering is for readers to come very close to feeling what you have felt, even though they have not lived your experiences.
- Do you have any questions?

5. Potential Risks/Discomforts: Participating in this study may bring on some emotional distress for you. As such, I have provided you with some sexual assault resources available to you on a national level and in your area. Have you received a copy of the resources? I would also like to talk through with you what you would like to do (and for us to do together) if you experience emotional distress while we are in conversation. Some survivors use different coping mechanisms and grounding techniques. What are the techniques you employ when you are feeling emotionally distressed by memories and feelings associated with your sexual assault? Keep in mind that the purpose of this study is to uncover a very deep understanding of the lived experience of sexual assault survival for women in college. Feel free to answer in ways that will help to reveal that depth, but keep in mind that you do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the lived experience of sexual assault for women in college.

- Do you have any questions?

6. Potential Benefits: This research is not designed to help participants personally, but some survivors find that participating in activities that address the issue of sexual assault can be part of their own healing process. Additionally, it is our hope that this study will help faculty, staff, family members and friends of survivors gain empathy

for survivors of sexual assault and, in turn, create more supportive campus communities for survivors.

- Do you have any questions?

7. Confidentiality: We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym and a private email address using that pseudonym (which you have already done and shared with me at the beginning of this conversation, or prior to this conversation). This is the name that will be used throughout the research project to identify your conversations. The audio/video recordings of face-to-face conversations and copies of email and online forum conversations will be kept in a locked cabinet and password-protected computer at the home of the doctoral student researcher (me). All computer files, including transcripts, related to your conversations will only be identifiable by your pseudonym. Only the researcher will have access to the audio/video recordings and the recordings will be destroyed within one year of the research being completed. Your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible in any reports or articles that are written based on this research project. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park, or with governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

- Do you have any questions?

8. Pseudonym and Private Email Address Using Your Pseudonym:

- We've covered this information, and you are in possession of the Pseudonym and Private Email Address form – do you have any questions about this?

9. Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

- Do you have any questions about this?

10. Questions about the study: Do you have any further questions?

11. Send me the signed Consent Form: We are having this conversation today because you have indicated that you received the packet/email from me including the Participant Interest Form, the Contact Information, Pseudonym and Pseudonym Email Form, the Consent Form, the pre-paid return envelope (for the Consent Form) and local/state and national sexual assault services available to you. You have

received all of the documents I've listed here, correct? Please sign the Consent Form and send it back to me in the pre-paid envelope I provided. Once I receive your Consent Form, you will receive an email at the account you created for this study. This email will prompt our first interaction for the study. If I do not hear from you within three days of my email, and any future emails, I will contact you (with your permission) using another one of the forms of contact you have provided to simply note that I have sent you the message. I am also happy to send you a text message each time I email you, if that would be helpful. The text will simply say, "I just emailed you."

- Do I have your permission to use another form of contact if I do not hear from you within three days following my email?
- What is your preferred contact for this interaction (call, text, email)?
- Would you like a text message each time I send you an email?
- (I will note this preference on the private paperwork associated with each participant.)
- Do you have any questions about this?

12. Okay, if you do not have any further questions, we will say goodbye for now! Thank you, again, for your willingness to participate, and you will hear from me by email at your pseudonym email address very soon.

**APPENDIX I:
STATE/LOCAL AND NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS AND
COUNSELING RESOURCES**

Participation in a study about your personal experience with sexual assault in college may cause psychological distress. As a result, we want to provide you with local/state and national resources for sexual assault crisis and counseling. The following resources are available to you should you ever find yourself in need of additional support during your participation in the study. These resources will continue to be available to you even if you choose to withdraw from the study. These resources are not affiliated with the study, and are available to everyone, regardless of their affiliation with the study. They are local/state (specific, here, to the area in which you live) and national resources that can help you gain access to the support you may need.

STATE SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS AND COUNSELING RESOURCES:

If you are in IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL 911

Colorado:

Rape Assistance & Awareness Program
Denver, CO 80218
Business: 303-329-9922
Hotline: 303-329-0031
Website: <http://www.raap.org>

Hawaii:

YWCA of Hawaii Island SAVE
Hilo, HI 96720
Business: 808-961-3877
Hotline: 808-935-0677
Website: <http://ywcahawaiiisland.org>

Maryland:

Victim Assistance & Sexual Assault Program
Rockville, MD 20850
Business: 240-777-1355
Hotline: 240-777-4247
Website: <http://www.vasap.org>

North Carolina:

Interact
Raleigh, NC 27605
Business: 919-828-7501
Hotline: 866-291-0855
Website: <http://www.interactofwake.org>

Durham Crisis Response Center
Durham, NC 27701
Business: 919-403-9425
Hotline: 919-403-6562
Website: <http://www.durhamcrisisresponse.org>

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS AND COUNSELING SUPPORT:

If you are in IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL 911

RAINN: Rape and Incest National Network
National Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
Online Hotline: <https://ohl.rainn.org/online/>, and click “Get Live Help Now”
How the Online Hotline Can Help:
<https://ohl.rainn.org/online/resources/how-ohl-can-help.cfm>
General information: www.rainn.org

All rape crisis centers listed here were obtained through RAINN: Rape and Incest National Network, www.rainn.org.

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