



## The Experience of Male Rape in Non-Institutionalised Settings

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### Abstract

*The aim of this article is to describe the phenomenon of male rape from the victims' perspectives. The methodology employed relied on transcendental phenomenology in order to create the rich descriptions of the lived experiences of three male survivors of rape. From the descriptions elicited from the formulation of an open-ended question, it was discovered that the phenomenon of male rape has a dominant structure that is related to the destruction and reconstruction of the masculine self. The research also revealed several textural themes that include the characteristics of the assault, treatment and support that victims receive, the effects of the assault on the self, disclosure, the learning and life changes brought about by the assault, the victims' feelings towards their assailants and the effect of the assault on the victims' relationships. This study hopes to facilitate further descriptive research on the phenomenon of male rape in order that greater knowledge be gleaned and applied regarding its prevention and healing processes.*

### Introduction

Rape and sexual assault are two of the most prominent criminal acts in today's society. They are two forms of assault that are soul-destroying to the victim. Petrak (2002, pp. 1-2) writes that, although few would argue that the aftermath of a rape or sexual assault is traumatic for the victim, it was only with the advent of feminism in the seventies that the legal, medical and psychological requirements of rape and sexual assault victims became a point of focus. Feminist interest in rape and sexual assault also gave birth to a discourse around sexual violence that had far reaching effects in defining and describing rape within the context of male violence against women. Females are, however, not the only victims of rape and sexual assault.

Male rape appears to be an ever-increasing phenomenon that has only recently been recognised as a criminal act. Research regarding the impact of this type of assault on men, as well as the services that are provided to men, is limited (Petrak, 2002, p.

2). This suggests that male victims of rape and sexual assault are being left out in the proverbial cold when it comes to gaining access to support services that might help them.

Male rape is characterized by myth, taboo and stereotypical thinking, which, in essence, is detrimental to men who have been raped. Although society at large is slowly becoming more aware of the concept of male on male rape, it is still generally believed by experts that statistics vastly under-represent the actual number of males aged 12 and over who are raped each year. It is further estimated that, while approximately only one in fifty women who are raped report the crime to the authorities, the rate of under-reporting for male victims is considerably higher (King, 1992, p. 1; Pantazis, 1999, p. 371; Petrak, 2002, p. 3).

The lack of tracking of sexual crimes against men and the lack of research on the effects of such crimes on their male victims would seem to indicate the attitude of society at large - this attitude being that, while it is

to be acknowledged that male rape occurs, it is not to be regarded as an acceptable topic for discussion (Pettrak, 2002, pp. 2-3).

### **Defining Rape: Some of the Controversy**

The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1981, p. 1240) defines rape as "The offence of sexual intercourse with a woman forcibly and against her will". This definition indicates the gender-based nature of the dominant view that rape is something that can only happen to women. It further supports the contention that rape is predominantly viewed and discussed within the context of violence against women. Viewing rape within this context presents some controversy when the victim of a forced sexual act is male.

The above definition would not allow for such an act to be considered as rape, as it does not include the word male or man. Although slowly wending its way into consciousness, at present the phenomenon of male rape does not seem to be receiving the attention or concern that it deserves. This under-representation may be due to the lack of a clear definition as to what constitutes male rape.

### **Definitions of male rape in South Africa**

In South Africa at present, the common law crime of rape is defined as unlawful intentional intercourse, meaning penile-vaginal intercourse by a man with a woman without her consent (Pantazis, 1999, p. 369). South Africa is a country that constitutionally guarantees equality on the basis of gender and the right to freedom and the security of the person (Pantazis, 1999, p. 370). The South African Law Commission has thus recommended that rape be redefined as a crime that can be committed against a man too.

A further reason for the widening of the definition of rape to include the rape of males is that the constitutional court of South Africa declared the crime of sodomy as unconstitutional, effectively rendering the current law ineffective in dealing with offences against males. Furthermore, the current definition of rape in South Africa only allows for a limited punitive scope when dealing with sexual offences against men. One is a conviction for indecent assault and the other is a conviction of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm. These options are, however, not considered to be as serious as a conviction for rape, suggesting that the sexual autonomy of men is considered to be less valued than that of women (Pantazis, 1999, p. 370).

In order for South Africa to meet its constitutional

obligations of equality, freedom and security, the current definition of rape that could be considered to be female-centric needs to be refined in order to recognise the possibility of a male raping a male. Presently there is a working committee that is striving to meet this end.

For the purposes of this study, rape was defined in line with the definition that has been adopted in the United Kingdom as "Vaginal penetration of a woman, or anal penetration of a person of either gender, without their consent, or with wilful disregard to their consent" (Rogers, 1995, p. 303).

### **Characteristics of the Assault, Victims and Assailants**

Although there is some debate around the characteristics of the victims and the assailants that are involved in the context of male rape, it appears that there are no specific groups of victims or assailants. The characteristics of the perpetrators of this form of assault and their victims seem to be varied and diverse. Hodge and Canter (1998, p. 229), however, maintain that two distinct types of male sexual assault are apparent.

The first involves assaults by heterosexual males that tend to target strangers. A further characteristic of this form of assault is that, although the victims' age is not a factor, their vulnerability is. This type of attack is further characterized by a possible need to humiliate and control, which could be motivated by feelings on the part of the offender of unresolved sexuality, gay hatred or difficulties with peer acceptance (Hodge & Canter, 1998, p. 229).

According to Hodge and Canter (1998, pp. 229-231), homosexuals, more in line with the common conception of male sexual assault as a sexually motivated offence, carry out the second form of assault. This form of assault is one that is more likely to involve individuals in an established relationship and can entail a higher degree of psychological manipulation rather than physical control. The victims of this form of assault are generally between the ages of 16 and 25 and subject to manipulation by older offenders. Hodge and Canter also point to sexual assaults by heterosexual offenders as being slightly more common when compared to homosexual offenders. A seemingly frequent and serious offence, male rape is a crime that does not discriminate on the grounds of age or sexual orientation, thus rendering all males potential victims.

### **The effect of male rape on the victim**

There appears to be no single atypical emotional

response that male victims of this type of assault will endure. The emotional responses exhibited can range from appearing calm and rational to expressing anger, depression and hysteria. Some men may even withdraw and appear non-responsive. Given that individuals react to trauma primarily in terms of their own identity, culture and background, each of the behaviours described above should be considered a normal response.

According to Rogers (1997, pp. 5-6) evidence suggests the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in male rape survivors following their assault. Moreover, Brochman (1991, pp. 38-39) indicates that it is not uncommon for a male rape victim to blame himself for the rape, believing that in some way he was responsible for the attack and gave permission to the rapist. Additionally, men appear to share a fear similar to female victims of rape regarding other people believing the myth that they enjoyed being raped. Some men may also believe that they were not raped or that they gave consent because they became sexually aroused, had an erection or ejaculated (Katz, 2001, p. 22).

Male victims of rape frequently develop sexual dysfunctions and ambivalence about their own sexuality following their assault. Consequential to anal trauma that might be caused by the act of sodomy, an act befitting assault of this kind, heightened fear and anxiety around contracting HIV/AIDS is a very real concern for male victims of rape (Katz, 2001, pp. 28-29; King, 1990, p. 1345).

The arena of interpersonal relationships is another area of the victim's life that seems to suffer under the effect of the rape (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984, p. 578; Katz, 2001, p. 31; McMullen, 1990, p. 38; Myers, 1989, p. 211). The manner in which these disturbances manifest in social relationships is, however, varied. Relationships are often influenced on an individual basis and to varying degrees of severity. Diminished trust and a heightened sense of feeling threatened by other men can stunt the development of intimate same-sex relationships for male rape victims (Anderson, 1982, p. 148; Goyer & Eddleman, 1984, p. 578; McMullen, 1990, p. 38; Myers, 1989, p. 211).

Goyer and Eddleman (1984, p. 578) posit that sleep, appetite and digestive disturbances are the most commonly experienced physical difficulties that occur with the victims of male rape. Anderson (1982, p. 154) observed that the physical difficulties experienced by these victims could be grouped into stress related symptoms which include tension headaches, ulcers, eating difficulties, sleep

difficulties, colitis and stomach complaints. These psycho-physical symptoms were further categorised into hypochondriachal symptoms, which include a general over-concern with physical problems. According to Roos and Katz (2003, p. 66), suicidal ideation and the act of suicide are also common occurrences among victims of male rape, particularly amongst those victims who are unable to access supportive networks.

In addition to physical and emotional difficulties, struggling to connect with their religious faith is another important theme experienced by victims of male rape (Roos & Katz, 2003, p. 65). Katz (2001, p. 171) suggests that victims appear to experience a "schism" in their religious relationship for a period of time followed by a desire to reconnect. Although the victims may feel the need for absolution, their subjective perceptions of themselves following the assault as unworthy seem to prevent them from gaining access to their faith.

### Support for the Victim

Gender stereotypes seem to exert a powerful influence over the provision of services to males who have been sexually assaulted. Vearnals and Campbell (2001, p. 282), however, indicate that, due to legal changes and increased public debate in the United Kingdom, a variety of specialist organizations with more refined protocols for dealing with male sexual assault victims are now experiencing an increase in people disclosing male sexual assault.

Davies (2002, p. 210) maintains that support services also need to extend help to the partners of male sexual assault victims in order to help them come to terms with their own grief and anger regarding the situation. Much research has been conducted on the reactions of a male partner to the rape of his female spouse. Orzek (1983, p. 143), for example, maintains that the male partner is usually the quickest to react to the rape of the female victim in offering support. These male partners may, however, also experience their own psychological crisis that includes factors such as shock, blame and guilt.

Although research into the reactions of the partners of male sexual assault victims does seem to be lacking, anecdotal evidence suggests that the assault is often met with negative responses such as disbelief and grief. Thus, although forming part of the support structure, partners of male sexual assault victims should be afforded the opportunity of treatment and support in their own right (Davies, 2002, p. 210).

## Research Methodology

### Qualitative research design

Exploration of the literature investigating the phenomenon of male rape reveals a predominantly positivistic and hence quantitative approach to the research. There seems to be a lack of research that embraces an interpretative epistemology and, consequently, of studies that recognise the experience and meaning of the phenomenon of male rape. It thus seemed appropriate for the method of investigation chosen for this study to accord with a transcendental phenomenological methodology, which would seek to describe rather than explain the phenomenon of male rape. This methodology emphasizes the discovery of the essences of an experience through focussing on meaning rather than facts.

The chosen transcendental phenomenological method differs somewhat from the more frequently applied empirical phenomenology that seeks to determine what an experience means for the experiencing person through the derivation of general and universal descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 16). In contrast, this study culminated in a composite description of the phenomenon of male rape that incorporates a synthesis of the texture and structure of the experience through the incorporation of the characteristics of heuristic research.

Moustakas (1994, p. 17) maintains that heuristic research includes a process of internal searching, "through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience". He further advocates that the self of the researcher is present throughout the process and that, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences a growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes thus include creative self-processes and self-discoveries.

The application of the phenomenological method in this investigation was undertaken within a heuristic context. The presence of the self of the researcher throughout this investigation was acknowledged.

### The aim of the study

The aim of this study was to describe the experience of male rape victims who have been raped in a non-institutional setting. This aim was derived by an intense interest, on the part of the researcher, of the perceived difficulties endured by men who have experienced male rape, purely by virtue of their gender. It is this perception that gave rise to the research question that asks: How do men who have been raped in a non-institutional setting perceive and describe their experience of the rape?

This research question, in turn, led to the broad and open-ended prompt question posed to each of the participants in this study: "Will you please describe, in as much detail as possible, the incident and experience as best you can? Try to include any thoughts, feelings and sensations that are significant for you."

### Criterion for participation

The primary source of data for the phenomenological researcher is the subject or person being interviewed. Following the relating of experiences, the researcher then studies these experiential descriptions and processes them through a series of operations to a final understanding of the experience being investigated (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, pp. 35-38). The goal of phenomenological research is therefore not to explain the phenomenon under investigation, but rather to describe it within the parameters of meaning that emerge from the revelation of the actual experience of it.

Stones (1988, p. 150) maintains that participants that are largely suitable for phenomenological research are those that (a) have had experiences regarding the phenomenon to be researched; (b) are verbally fluent and able to communicate their feelings, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the phenomenon being researched; (c) have the same home language as the researcher; and finally (d) express a willingness to be open with the researcher.

Participants for this study were approached with these criteria in mind. A further criterion that was necessary for inclusion in this study was that each participant be over the age of 18 in order for consent to be given.

### The process of participation

Participants were located by means of both purposive and snowball sampling. By employing purposive sampling, two participants were located with the help of a research assistant at the production house of a local talk show, which produced a feature on male rape. The research assistant was telephonically contacted who, in turn, contacted the male rape victims that were on the show in question. Two of the participants agreed to be involved in the study. The third participant was located through what Neuman (1997, p. 207) calls snowball sampling, through word of mouth via a contact person at the university.

Although the opportunity of feedback, in the form of receiving the final integrated text, was provided by the researcher, all participants felt this to be unnecessary given their satisfaction with the dimensions of their participation. Given this, the only

procedural follow-up to the interviews was the receipt by each participant of a letter of thanks for his participation.

Participant One is an Afrikaans-speaking heterosexual male in his thirties. He was raped multiple times during a vicious attack that occurred while he was in his twenties. Participant Two is also an Afrikaans-speaking heterosexual male. He is in his forties and was raped twice at the age of fourteen by two different individuals. Both participants agreed to be interviewed in English given that both were fluent in this language. Participant Three is an English-speaking homosexual male aged twenty-six. He was raped multiple times during a violent assault at the age of twenty-one. The interview with Participant Three was also conducted in English.

### **Ethical considerations**

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, Kvale's (1996, p. 56) ethical guidelines were applied:

- Participation in the study was voluntary and the participants could withdraw at any time.
- Ensuring confidentiality, the researcher undertook to protect the identity of the participants by referring to them as Participants One, Two and Three.
- Informed consent was obtained from each of the participants, all of whom were informed of the purpose of the research.
- Contact numbers and the offer of debriefing were respectively offered, should the interview procedure have left any of the participants with emotions or other difficulties that they might wish to deal with.

### **Organization and analysis of the data**

The phenomenological method, it appears, is not set and predictable, but is instead fluid and flexible. The lack of universal or commonly accepted procedural methods within the field of phenomenological research, along with the apparent sparseness of available material which could provide a guide when undertaking phenomenological investigations, makes phenomenological research difficult. There are, however, broad steps within the transcendental phenomenological method that guide the research process (Moustakas, 1994, p. 81). These include the phases of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and, finally, the synthesis of texture and structure, which is here applied.

### **Phase one**

Using the epoche, a methodological device developed by Husserl as one of the most basic and fundamental requirements for the utilisation of the transcendental

phenomenological method (Giorgi, 1985, pp. 10-12), the suspension of all previously held preconceptions, biases, theories, beliefs or habitual modes of thinking was enabled in order that consciousness be explored effectively.

This allowed for the experience to be considered as a single entity in and of itself. It also facilitated the perception and description of the experience of the participants by the researcher in its totality and brought forth the description of its essential constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colours and shapes. This way of perceiving the phenomenon under investigation thus called for looking, watching and becoming aware without importing pre-judgement (Moustakas, 1994, p. 82).

### **Phase two**

Phase two involved the collection of data through an interview process that was undertaken by the researcher. This was done by means of a long interview, which entailed an informal interactive process, with each of three participants who had experienced male rape. This process utilised open-ended comments and questions in order to elicit the experience from the participants (Moustakas 1994, p. 104).

### **Phase three**

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, the transcripts were read repeatedly in order to gain what Stones (1988, p. 153) calls "an intuitive and holistic grasp of the data". Once a sense of wholeness was achieved, the identification of the essences of the phenomenon or the movement from objects as fact to objects as exemplars was undertaken (Ehrich, 1999, p. 221). This process Stones (1988, pp. 152-153) describes as searching for statements that are made which are definable and self-delimiting in the expression of a single recognisable aspect of experience.

Identifying natural meaning units was achieved through horizontalisation or considering every statement made during the interview as having equal value. It is from these horizontalised statements that the invariant horizons or meaning units come to the fore (Moustakas 1994, p. 122). Once the horizons were identified, they were then listed.

This phase of the process of analysis was therefore characterized by a division of the data into parts based on meaning discrimination. The data was broken down into naturally occurring meaning units or horizons, where each particular unit conveys a particular meaning that spontaneously emerges from

the reading. Once the horizons were identified, repetitive and overlapping statements were removed (Moustakas, 1994, p. 128). The remaining statements were then clustered into themes and these themes in turn were then grouped into major core themes for each individual. An individual textural description was then created from these core themes for each individual participant in order to describe the phenomenon's general features.

#### **Phase four**

This phase involved the construction of an individual textural description for each of the participants. This included making use of verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews. The construction of the structural descriptions included what Stones (1988, p. 153) terms a "rigorous reflection and transformation". The researcher thus reflected upon the horizons and the common themes in order to arrive at an accurate expression of the intended meaning of the subject's experience.

#### **Phase five**

From the total group of individual textural descriptions, the composite textural description was then developed. The horizons or invariant meanings and the themes of each of the participants were studied in order to depict the experiences of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 138). From this, a composite structural description representing the group of participants as a whole was constructed (Moustakas, 1994, p. 141). This form of description is a way of understanding how the participants, as a group, experienced what they experienced.

#### **Phase six**

The final phase in the research process required the researcher to synthesise and integrate the insights contained in the transformed horizons into a consistent description of the structure of the phenomenon. The integration of the composite textural and composite structural descriptions provided a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience. This required the intuitive integration of the fundamental composite textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of male rape as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 144).

The process was completed bearing in mind that the essences of an experience are never completely exhausted and that the fundamental textural-structural synthesis merely represents the essences at a particular time and place, as seen from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an intuitive and reflective study of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 144). It is thus within a

situation-specific heuristic frame that the present description of male rape emerged from the synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions presented here.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **The unexpected assault**

Male rape is a surprise event, a random and haphazard occurrence in the life of the victim that challenges and deconstructs all previously held constructions of the world and the self. It is an event that through violence ushers in a period of change.

The experience of male rape began for Participant One while on a business trip from George to Pretoria. While stationary at a stop street, he was approached by a "tall white male" who, under the guise of asking for directions, "pulled out a pistol and said 'If you move I'll kill you!'". After driving around "for about an hour or two", Participant One was ordered to stop the vehicle, get out and to take his clothes off. Two more assailants arrived and, after tying Participant One up, he was repeatedly raped. The assault appears to have wrestled control from him, highlighting the desire to be "in control of the situation again".

Lending credence to Kaufman, Divasto, Jackson, Voorhees and Christy's (1980, p. 222) suggestion, the majority of the descriptions elicited in this study seem to indicate that multiple assailants take part in the assault and that they cause tremendous physical trauma for the victim. Moreover, the descriptions would also suggest that issues of power, control and humiliation are motivating factors on the part of the assailants in carrying out the assaults.

#### **Effects of rape on the self**

The world and the self as they were previously experienced are turned upside down and nothing is as it was. It is a happening that threatens the very existence of the victim. In a manner, it propels the victim into a period of transition where who he is in this world needs to be redefined and reconstructed and definitions of what it means to be a man are questioned. The experience of male rape thus initiates a period of significant turbulence for the victim, in which the process of reconstructing and redefining the self unleashes a torrent of emotions as a firm footing and stable place in this world are sought.

Fluctuations between feeling happy and relieved at escaping and extreme anger at what they experienced were described by all participants. After the assault Participant One became "extremely angry at them because they had done this". He became angrier still when he saw his father cry for the "second time in his

whole twenty-six years". His assailants had not only hurt him, but they "were hurting the people" that he loved.

The descriptions provided by the participants concerning their experiences of male rape would seem to indicate that the assault was initially met with fear, numbness, shock and disbelief. This is evident when Participant One, for example, describes his feelings during the assault as "shock definitely" and feeling "numb". Further, their experience of feelings of self-blame and self-recrimination appears to be consistent with Brochman's (1991, p. 40) contention that it is not uncommon for male rape victims to blame themselves for the rape. Consistent with findings by Huckle (1995, pp. 187-191), all participants in this study experienced flashbacks, recurrent memories and nightmares that are consistent with post-traumatic stress.

The assault raises questions for the victim around his own sexuality. Participant Two, for example, had many questions concerning his own sexuality: "I've been raped twice by men, aren't I gay?" This seems to support Lisak's (1994, pp. 545-548) view that ambivalence about sexuality often arises for victims following their assault. The realisation of being powerless and of losing control over their life and body can threaten the victim's perception of who he is as a man, effectively suggesting the message of not being man enough (Stanko & Hobdell, 1993, pp. 407-408).

Other sexual difficulties that appear to be evident include reduced sexual desire and erectile difficulties, which have been suggested by Myers (1989, p. 212). Katz (2001, pp. 26-28) relates these difficulties to changes in the victim's body image, self-concept and sense of self, which affect the victim's ability to engage comfortably with others in his social world.

Spinelli (1989, p. 84) points to the self as something that is continually under construction, particularly in situations that are psychologically strenuous. Spinelli maintains that, in the process of reflectively constructing the self, subjective factors such as the individual's past experience, present mood and future expectations are all interpreted bearing an external stimulus in mind. In the case of male rape, the rape is an external stimulus laden with fear, pain, helplessness, powerlessness and the violation of personal and bodily space. The rape becomes the primer for the victim's subjective factors, which are interpreted within the context of the rape.

The rape can therefore be considered to be a threat to the victim's previously held identity and sense of self,

leading to its deconstruction. This process can be described as arresting the marching of time. During this process, time stops and the development of the previous self discontinues. For a period everything appears stagnated. Hope and happiness are lost and the future is non-existent. This period offers nothing new. Things connected with the pre-rape existence are no longer important. Life loses meaning and the future is bleak. This is a time of isolation and loneliness. Anger and hatred are internalised and the self is chastised. Others are pushed from personal space and the victim chooses to be alone and to face the assault alone. Death is a serious consideration and reminders of the assault are ever present.

According to Participant One: "I kept praying to God to 'please let them kill me'" because he did not "want to survive this..." and death seemed a much better option "than being raped".

The experience of male rape is also paradoxical in a sense. It places the victim between a rock and a hard place, in a double bind. Facing the assault alone essentially turns the victim in on himself. In maintaining a silence, the victim is kept stagnated and the reconstruction of the self is inhibited. Silence thus robs this process of redevelopment of any momentum. It is only through disclosure and access to information that the change process is facilitated.

#### **Disclosure of the rape experience**

In overcoming the threat of self-destruction a new self is reconstructed, incorporating the rape within the context of past experiences, present mood and future expectations, allowing the individual to experience the world in new and different ways. This would seem to support Katz's (2001, p. 31) finding which indicates that victims of male rape experience enduring changes in their sense of self as well as symptoms that result in their feeling that their old self or part thereof has died or been irrevocably lost.

Disclosure guides and coaxes the victim towards connectedness and being, encourages forward movement and helps give birth to a new self. It is not only a new self that begins to emerge, but also a new life filled with new meaning. Shaking off the shackles of the rape allows the victim to rediscover hope and to be able to embark on a new voyage, a new experience of living life once again through the desires and decisions of his own self. They can once again be happy with their sense of being in the world.

Participant Three only began to disclose two and a half years ago. Disclosing brought him a sense of "huge relief". Beginning to share his experiences of what happened to him with others allowed Participant

Three to “let go of it”, and to “put it somewhere else”. Through talking about the rape, Participant Three “learnt from the experience, grew from it and understood what had happened”.

### Support agencies

Although the experience of support agencies varied for the participants, some consistencies with previous research are evident. One participant, for example, encountered disbelief when attempting to report his assault to the police, supporting the findings of Mezey and King (1989, pp. 207-208), which suggest that men who report sexual assault to the police are often not taken seriously. Difficulties such as these may be maintained through the traditional views of masculinity that have given rise to prejudicial beliefs about male victims of sexual assault (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992, p. 93).

All of the descriptions provided by the participants include some commentary on the treatment that they received by hospitals, doctors and other health professionals following their assaults. Encounters with hospitals on the whole seemed to provide the victims with a sense of security and calm, helping them to regain a sense of control over their lives. The rape examination, however, appears to have aroused in the victims a sense of distress and feelings of being violated all over again. Due to the limited reporting of male sexual assaults, victims seldom seek out help, and it is therefore difficult to determine which type of intervention or approach is most appropriate when dealing with male victims of sexual assault (Vearnal & Campbell, 2001, p. 283).

### Life change

Male rape can be experienced as a tremendously powerful change agent in the lives of the victims. With the emergence of a new self comes a new experience of the world and of being in the world. These experiences can be welcomed or rejected. Male rape may very well usher in the development of a new and acceptable self and world, but it may also promote the development of a self laden with guilt and regret, robbed of happiness, opportunity and success. The experience of the rape can hurt so deeply that it is never overcome. It grasps at freedom, space and the self, holding the victim firmly within its clutches, keeping him stagnated and devoid of movement, eternally focused on the rape and its repercussions.

Participant Three describes the anniversary of his rape as resulting in “dreams” and “trance”-like states, like a “panic attack” where his experience of the rape is relived over and over again. For Participant Three, the rape is something that is ever present, something that

he will “never be 100% over”, and something that continues to “haunt” him. This reliving of the rape experience supports the findings of Roos and Katz (2003, p. 64).

Although the shackles of the rape can be removed for some, others can remain chained forever, with the experience a constant companion for those who have undergone its initiation. Even those who experience more positive outcomes remain wary of its presence and the enduring threat that it presents to their health and happiness.

### Conclusion and Future Research

Among the primary observations evident in the descriptions obtained in this study is that the rape has tremendous power in the arena of change, radically altering the victim’s existence and ways of being in the world (Katz, 2001, p. 38). It is apparent from the research that the victim of male rape experiences the assault as either the impetus that takes his life in a completely new direction or the vice that clamps him into a position of little movement. The rape therefore seems to have incredible power which forces victims to re-evaluate what is important in their lives and to make decisions that will take their life in a completely new direction.

The experience of rape for the victim involves the ultimate intrusion or invasion of his personal space, an intrusion that is not only physical, violating his bodily space, but an intrusion that runs deeper, so deep that it violates the very essence of his sense of self. The rape is an experience that, through forceful subjugation, humiliation and embarrassment, wrestles control of the victim’s life from him and places it into the hands of others. It is an event that destroys who and what the victim was, his old self, shattering it into a million pieces and scattering it to the four corners of the earth.

Through disclosure, life can be filled with vitality once again. It is in words that the new self is grown; it is in words that understanding lies if judgement, disbelief and stigma do not silence the victim once again. Through reframing and recontextualizing the rape, the victim can integrate what happened into a new self that takes back control. Within this context, rape, for some, can be understood as a powerful instrument for change, steering their lives in new directions, providing new opportunities, challenges and learning.

The experience of being a victim of rape, however, remains forever a part of the victim’s concept of self. It is recognised as ever present and a permanent threat

to well-being and health. For others, the rape remains the all-consuming object of their focus, a thief, an embezzler of life's successes, devouring happiness, healing and opportunity. Life for them remains empty and colourless.

In concluding this article, it seems pertinent to reflect further on the findings that emerged and their position relative to what is already known. This research undertook a review of the existing literature in an attempt to situate the study and to recognise areas in which further research would be beneficial. After engaging the literature review process and comprehensively searching for information relevant to this study, along with comparing the findings obtained in this investigation, the researcher feels confident that the comprehensive textural and structural descriptions of the male rape experience that were derived from the data provide an unprecedented and important contribution to existing knowledge.

This study utilised the phenomenological method in order to arrive at a description of the experience of male rape. In contrast to the majority of previous research studies in this field, it did not seek to delineate or prescribe behaviour. Instead, it sought to indicate opportunities and possibilities for increased awareness, action, understanding and insight. Moreover, this study described the phenomenon of male rape from a holistic perspective, embodying the diversity of psychological, sociological and biological dimensions. It consequently differs from prior research in its methods and procedures, which have allowed the researcher to arrive at an understanding

of the meanings, values and essences that describe the phenomenon of male rape.

This study was given breath through the researcher's discontent at the perceived prejudice that male victims of rape encounter, purely because they are men. The process of the study was driven by a call to give voice to this phenomenon and the conclusion arrived at through the personal descriptions of the experience. It is hoped that this study has achieved this somewhat.

#### **Future research**

Although this study is biased towards phenomenological investigations, the scope for future research extends beyond the descriptive. While most of the research concerning male rape is of a quantitative nature, the amount of research in the area could generally be considered as limited. This provides ample opportunity for further quantitative investigations that could, for example, explore the magnitude and design of male rape on both a local and international level. The phenomenon of male rape appears to be an emerging concept around which research is gathering momentum. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, research needs to continue on a phenomenological, qualitative and quantitative front. Pursuing research in this manner can only benefit the victims of such an assault by allowing them access to facilities and organizations that are better prepared to cater for their needs and to facilitate their healing through effective interventions and treatment strategies.

#### **About the Authors**

Gertie Pretorius, D Litt et Phil (Psychology), is a Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Johannesburg and the Deputy Head of the Department, coordinating the professional training at Master's and Doctoral levels in the Department. She is a keen researcher and has a holistic integrative approach to psychological research, believing that both quantitative and qualitative methods are necessary to uncover the multiple layers of the complex phenomena in psychology. The uncovering of meaning in idiosyncratic life events is a passion of hers and the use of phenomenological research methodology is therefore a preferred mode of academic being. Prof Pretorius has published widely on various subjects in Psychology.

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