My life was over, my life had just begun: rape recovery through survivor testimony, and trauma prevention with early humanist education

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My life was over, my life had just begun: rape recovery through survivor testimony, and trauma prevention with early humanist education

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Program of Study Committee:
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First, I must thank my mother, Barbara Pruiett, who—long before I was born—loved and wanted me as her daughter. I hope to continue to give you reasons to be proud of me. And I will forever appreciate all that you sacrificed for me, in order to give me a better life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Part One: Where We Have Been

In the beginning, there were two kinds of women: virgins and wives. Both were considered property. Virgins belonged to their fathers, and wives to their husbands.

In Babylon, under the Code of Hammurabi, when a man raped a betrothed virgin, he alone would be punished. However, if the victim was a married woman, she suffered the same punishment as her rapist. She was found guilty of adultery. Both rapist and victim were bound and thrown into a river. Later, a married Hebrew woman received the same conviction; she and her rapist were stoned to death at the city gates. But if the Hebrew girl was a virgin, and she was raped within the walls of the city, the elders assumed she was willing in the act. Their basis for this rationale was the belief that her screams would certainly have drawn help to save her. Therefore, her (presumed) silence indicated her guilt.

The rules changed, though, outside the city walls or in the work field. In more secluded locations, a girl could not be blamed, as no one would be able to respond to her cries. In this case, the rapist must pay his victim’s father fifty shekels in reparation for the damage to his property. If she was betrothed, the man was slain. In either case, the girl would no longer be viable for market and most likely have to be sold as a concubine. Otherwise, the victim could choose to assuage her rapist’s punishment, pardoning his execution. The alternative to his death: she could marry him (Brownmiller 19-20).

This practice—determining guilt based on the victim’s sexual past—held fast throughout the years. In Saxony though, the victim no longer had to marry her rapist.
Instead, he must remit payment to the victim, rather than her father. In some cases, she inherited his land and money after his execution. This was the first step toward regarding rape as a crime against the victim, against the woman herself. After the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror modified the punishment from death to blinding and castration. Henry of Bracton recorded the law: “Let him lose his eyes which gave him sight of the virgin’s beauty for which he coveted her. And let him lose as well the testicles which excited his hot lust” (25).

In like fashion, the law fluctuated and with each change either advanced or regressed. Even as the woman became absolved of the crime against her, the responsibility to convict her rapist was left to the victim. Ironically, this indicates some progress, as Bracton tells that a “raped virgin’s appeal and a wife’s appeal in the matter of a husband ‘slain within her arms’ were the only suits a woman could bring to the courts of the king.”

She must go at once and while the deed is newly done … and cry to the neighboring townships and there show the injury done to her to men of good repute … and her clothing stained with blood, and her torn garments … let her make her appeal at the first county court… Let her appeal be enrolled in the coroners’ rolls, every word of the appeal, exactly as she makes it, and the year and day on which she makes it. A day will be given her at the coming of the justices, at which let her again put forward her appeal before them, in the same words as she made it in the county court, from which she is not permitted to depart (26).

Sometimes this practice protected rapists, as these guidelines present holes through which they can slip. If he claimed to have an alibi because he was elsewhere at the time of the attack or if there were discrepancies between her initial report to the county court and the
account given to the justices. Furthermore, the law sometimes supported the act of rape, as in certain parts of Germany, France, Italy and Poland the *jus primae noctis* or *droit du seigneur* gave the “manorial lord the right to take the virginity of the bride of any one of his vassals or serfs unless the bride and bridegroom paid a specific amount” (28).

With another turn in the thirteenth century, the Statutes of Westminster enforced by Edward I asserted the Crown’s interest in rape prosecution. If a woman did not prosecute within forty days, the Crown automatically appropriated the right to prosecute. This transfer of responsibility from the victim to the state signifies a change in the general perception of rape. For the first time, rape was seen as something beyond a private crime, a mere transgression against the victim’s family fortune. The threat of rape became a matter of interest in public safety. Furthermore, the Statutes “extended the king’s jurisdiction to cover the forcible rape of married women as well as virgins, with no difference in punishment to offending males” (29). Under this new decree, any man convicted of raping a woman—single or married—was guilty of committing a felony, a crime punishable by death.

Whereas Hammurabi and Hebraic rape laws revolved around the desecration of a man’s property, today’s rapist isn’t concerned with the economics involved. In the modern Western world, the intent of sexual assault is not “to ‘take,’ but to humiliate and degrade.” From the midst of the second-wave of the feminist movement, Susan Brownmiller published *Against Our Will*, the legal definition of rape involved “forcible penetration of the vagina by the penis, however slight.” Rape is thus defined as a heterosexual offense, in which the male’s genitals invade those of the female. Brownmiller objected to this, calling for legal reform and a “gender-free, non-activity-specific law governing all manner of sexual assaults” (378). She addressed a further inconsistency between treating statutory rape and incest; the
court punished the former more harshly and the latter with a lesser sentencing. Though it would seem incest would be a worse offense, as it involves exploiting the bonds of trust between family members, which typically signify protective relationships between a father and child or older brother and younger sibling. However, since both crimes involve underage and, therefore puerile victims, the issue of consent should be moot. Because of this, Brownmiller calls for no distinction in the law, as the difference indicates the perpetuation of the archaic belief that children are the property of the patriarch. Given that underage victims of either statutory rape or incest are at an obvious disadvantage in both their physical and mental states of development, the question of resistance shouldn’t apply as it does for adult rape cases.

Adult victims shouldn’t have to prove they attempted resistance, but they do, and usually by displaying extensive bruising for the court. Brownmiller highlights the fact that, in cases of assault and robbery, victims “are not required to prove they resisted, or that they didn’t consent, or that the act was accomplished with sufficient force, or sufficient threat of force, to overcome their will” (384). Rape is an act of sexual assault and arguably one of robbery, albeit more physically invasive in most cases, so the inconsistency between the penalties for the crimes indicates an irrational double-standard. In addition to the presence of bruising to determine resistance, the courts consider the victim’s sexual history. Brownmiller says, “the crime of rape must be totally separated from all traditional concepts of chastity, for the very meaning of chastity presupposes that it is a woman’s duty (but not a man’s) to refrain from sex outside the matrimonial union … The phrase ‘prior chastity’ as well as the concept must be stricken from the legal lexicon” (386). In essence, a rape is a rape, regardless of the victim’s sexual past.
During the fourth quarter of the twentieth century, the FBI asserted that rape is “the most under-reported crime,” Brownmiller emphasizes that many reported attacks were determined to be “unfounded” (upwards to 20%, according to the 1965 FBI Uniform Crime Reports), based on lack of sufficient evidence or the belief of false accusation. This is probably a testament to the commonly held belief that “the cry of rape is merely the cry of female vengeance in postcoital spite” (313). The innocence of the accused is preserved and conviction depends upon the victim’s ability to provide sufficient proof of his guilt.

Therefore, the official stance for the victim seems to be reverse of that of the rapist, as she is presumed guilty until proven innocent. Though already forced to endure the trauma of sexual violence, the victim must remain vigilant, ready to fight the arduous battle of bureaucracy yet before her.

After suffering and surviving a rape, the victim must report the crime. Immediately, she enters the realm of phallogocentric discourse, a term combining Klages’ 1920’s theory of logocentrism—reason-centered—and phallocentrism—centered on men—coined by Derrida to describe the way in which the masculine-reason perspective is the foremost determining factor in construction of meaning. Contemporaries of Susan Brownmiller, the Œcriture Féminine school of literary theory stands beside Derrida’s philosophy of phallogocentricism. In her own 1975 article, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous says “woman has always functioned ‘within,’ the discourse of man, because it’s the language of men and their grammar” (15). Adrienne Rich elaborates on this, going so far as to say “This is the oppressor’s language” (Brownmiller 334).

Brownmiller points to the lack of female representation in the police department. She said there should be 50/50 integration of women into law enforcement. Female police
officers are equally effective in controlling a potentially dangerous situation and in performing an arrest, and they do so “without resorting to unnecessary force that deserves its label, ‘police brutality’ (388). Integrating women into every governmental department and business would provide equal representation in all arenas, and would further the feminist cause. Overall, perception is the key to change, as Brownmiller says,

once we accept as basic truth that rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of the would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear, we must look toward those elements in our culture that promote and propagandize these attitudes, which offer men, and in particular, impressionable, adolescent males, who form the potential raping population, the ideology and psychologic encouragement to commit their acts of aggression without awareness, for the most part, that they have committed a punishable crime, let alone a moral wrong.

The myth of heroic rapist that permeates false notions of masculinity, from the successful seducer to the man who “takes what he wants when he wants it,” is inculcated in young boys from the time they first become aware that being a male means access to certain mysterious rites and privileges, including the right to buy a woman’s body. When young men learn that females may be bought for a price, and that acts of sex command set prices, then how should they not also conclude that that which may be bought may also be taken without the civility of a monetary exchange? (391)

Some of the societal influences mentioned by Brownmiller are what I call the Four Tenets of Rape, and what she refers to as “the deadly male myths of rape” (312):
All women want to be raped.

No woman can be raped against her will.

She was asking for it.

If you’re going to be raped, you might as well relax and enjoy it (311).

When young men are raised in the environment that fosters the kind of power resulting from these beliefs, along with the good-old-boy adage of when a woman says “No” she really means “Yes,” their script is already written to be hungry for control over beautiful and vulnerable (because the two are indivisible) women. Brownmiller discusses this theory of rape-script in-depth:

The theory of aggressive male domination over women as a natural right is so deeply embedded in our cultural value system that all recent attempts to expose it—in movies, television commercials or even in children’s textbooks—have barely managed to scratch the surface. As I see it, the problem is not that polarized role playing (man as doer; woman as bystander) and exaggerated portrayals of the female body as passive sex object are simply “demeaning” to women’s dignity and self-conception, or that such portrayals fail to provide positive role models for young girls, but that cultural sexism is a conscious form of female degradation designed to boost the male ego by offering “proof” of his native superiority (and of female inferiority) everywhere he looks (389).

Everywhere he looked during Brownmiller’s era, women were portrayed as objects, but not just on street corners and in pornographic movies and magazines. Ordinary movies, mainstream magazines, television shows, billboards, music videos, commercials, products, and various other paraphernalia from pop culture depicted women—or parts of women—as
pretty little playthings, scantly clothed with come-fuck-me looks. After a short interval of exposure to this, it’s understandable that they might begin to wonder if that was all women were good for. After steeping in this culture for a lifetime, they must no longer wonder, but just accept that women—as they allowed themselves to be portrayed—were only good for one thing.

The human brain, a curious organ, works like a computer as our environments continually program us. The omnipresent ‘nature versus nurture’ debate seems to lack perception of the ways in the very studies in psychology efficaciously help write or reinforce the scripts of socialization. For instance, before Freud, men felt dominant and asserted themselves as if they were superior to women. When Freud produced his incontrovertible evidence of male dominance, they backed their claims with his biased and distorted data.

Though the assertions gleaned from the findings of his male-focused research became the psychoanalytical foundation we stand upon today, Freud never considered the possibility that focusing too intently on the male sex organ might have some adverse effects, especially when neglecting certain issues—such as controlling the sexual urges that lead to violence—in the study and treatment of mental illness. Of course the notion of controlling sexual urges harkens back to that Victorian ideology from which Freud sought to divorce modern scientific thought. Moreover, the concept of restraint didn’t mesh well with his new philosophy, in which the penis became the Copernican object in the world of mental development. Despite all of his theorizing, Freud never explored “the real-life deployment of the penis as weapon” (11).

Brownmiller says, “Men have always raped women, but it wasn’t until the advent of Sigmund Freud and his followers that the male ideology of rape began to rely on the tenet
that rape was something women desired” (315). Bolstered by Freud’s theories, Helene Deutsch— the authoritative voice of not only the first female psychoanalyst, but also the first to specialize in women— invented the construct of female masochism, which simply states that women want to be hurt. This theory has been used in court against rape victims by sex-crime experts called to testify for the defendant. But Deutsch goes even further, seeming to even take pride in the sexual triumph of man over apes:

> It is no exaggeration to say that among all living creatures only man, because of his prehensile appendages, is capable of rape in the full meaning of the term—that is, sexual possession of the female against her will … Every time I see one of the humorous pictures in popular movies showing an anthropomorphous ape or a powerful bear-like masculine creature with a completely helpless female in his arms I am reminded of my old favorite speculation: thus it was that primitive man took possession and subjected her to sexual desire (222). 

One can almost hear the smile in her voice as she fondly envisions the first time man raped woman. As the saying goes, with friends like this, who needs enemies? With women like Deutsch planting notions like female masochism in the burgeoning realm of psychoanalytical science, it is miraculous to see that feminist movements have made any progress at all.

I’ve addressed the effects of Freudian thought on the process of socialization of young men. Given what we know about Deutsch, an early representative in the field of psychoanalysis, we now have to take an honest look at young women. Some believe that power cannot be taken, but must be given away, and that may very well be so. But Brownmiller asserts that “women are trained to be rape victims.” She says even before we

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learn to walk, we learn to be afraid. As girls, we’re vulnerable, and we learn fear from fairy tales, which are “full of a vague dread, a catastrophe that seems to befall only little girls” (309). A parable of rape, Red Riding Hood instructs us to watch for wolves (bad men) lurking in the shadows of the forest, and if something horrible should happen to transpire, then a big, strong huntsman (a good man) will save us from inescapable doom. Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and Cinderella all teach us the art of passivity. Kisses from princes saved the first two from eternal sleep. A prince saved Cinderella from a life-sentence of slavery, though it seems she merely traded up in the field of domesticity—from servant to wife. The message is clear, Brownmiller says,

Thus is female sexuality defined. Beautiful passivity. Wait, just wait, Prince Charming will soon be by; and if it is not Prince Charming but the Big Bad Wolf who stands at the door, then proper feminine behavior still commands you to stay immobile. The wolf is bigger and stronger than you are. Why try to fight back? But don’t you worry, little girl. We have strong and kindly huntsmen patrolling these woods (310).

Indeed classic legends do not celebrate women triumphant in defending themselves, preferring instead to form myth of the beauties whose honor great men fought to protect. The stories handed down which feature a strong woman usually end with her death. “A good heroine is a dead heroine, for victory through physical triumph is a male prerogative that is incompatible with feminine behavior. The sacrifice of life, we learn, is the most perfect testament to a woman’s integrity and honor” (327-8).

News reports claiming the death of a rape victim happened as a direct result of her resistance only work to support this message. As Brownmiller states, “They report on an
especially brutal rape case and announce to the press that the multiple stab wounds were the work of an assailant who was enraged because the woman resisted” (402). But another fact runs contrary to what folklore tells us: more than half of all cases of sexual assault are the act of acquaintances. The resulting logical conclusion, then, would seem that girls should fear the devil they know, rather than focusing on the shadows in the bushes. Remarkably, both of these factors—the victim’s lack of resistance and her acquaintance with her attacker—are grounds for her case to be ‘unfounded.’

Armed with the misleading information from the stories she heard growing up, the young late-twentieth girl faced the world of adulthood to, preferably, get married. To become a wife, she must be won over by a man who values her as a prize, worthy of winning. Their entire lives girls prepared to become this trophy, this grand prize: “A lot of preparation goes into playing a capturable trophy, and a lot of schooling is provided for us along the way, in case we have missed the many signposts.” In order to become that ‘capturable trophy,’ schooling came in the form of beauty magazines, cosmetic commercials, and movie stars. Alfred Hitchcock said, when asked about the desirable qualities in the actresses he cast in leading roles, he replied, “a certain vulnerability” (333). Indeed, throughout the cinematic ages, the “child-woman who was beautiful and vulnerable” had become the standard role model of the movie industry by Brownmiller’s time. “Vulnerability was inextricably tied in with being sexy, from the moody Ava Gardner to the wispy Mia Farrow. The few grandes dames who did not fit the stereotype, survivors from the spirited forties like Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, got little work beside the unpleasant character part of ‘superbitch’” (334).

Sadly, with actresses like Marilyn Monroe, Jean Harlow, Judy Garland, and Jayne Mansfield, and too many others, the sex idol often became self-destructive, “offering a
glamorous lesson in the art of victimology.” Tragedy, divorce, alcoholism, miscarriage, and suicide were fodder for tabloids, presented “by the popular media as tinsel tragedy, glittering items for public consumption” (335). The headlines read, ‘Blonde Ex-Showgirl Slain in Hotel Suite’ and ‘Blonde Tied to Bed, Strangled.’ To be sure, these eye-catching headlines intrigue, and Brownmiller says they are “rape dressed up to fit the male fantasy, lurid and ‘sexy’” (337). From these sensational stories, the association of sex and violence was only furthered by the belief that feminine beauty played a part in the murder: “The myth that rape is a crime of passion touched off by female beauty is given great credence, and women are influenced to believe that to be raped, and even murdered, is a testament to beauty” (341). Even more disturbing is how the glorification of the murdered sex toy becomes part of—and even reinforces—the male fantasy, due to their explicit and erotic quality.

When the young girl survived her socialization into the marriage market, she was expected to represent the beauty of a starlet with the virtue of a saint. As fine consumers reaching adulthood, the young men wanted to collect what they’d been promised since infancy: those fine creatures, those products from billboards. And the task for women was to deliver. When they finally captured their prize, young men took their trophy wives with the goal to be the first to have her. Returning to the creed of the ancients,

when a husband ‘deflowered’ his wife on their wedding night, in terms of his pragmatic ideology he was breaking open a pristine package that now belonged to him—private property—and he wanted tangible proof of the mint condition of his acquisition. The blood on the sheet and the cry of pain were the proof he demanded (319).
To ensure his product would be fresh and untainted, patriarchy had sets rules in place to regulate her for safety. For all intents and purposes, a husband fenced in his property. If a woman stepped outside her boundaries, then she should expect to fall victim to the preying rapist. As Clinton Duffy, the infamous San Quentin warden of the 1940s said, “Many break the most elementary rules of caution every day. The particularly flagrant violators, those who go to barrooms alone, or accept pickups from strangers, or wear unusually tight sweaters and skirts, or make a habit of teasing, become rape bait by their actions alone. When it happens they have nobody to blame but themselves” (398). A logically sound argument, I think. Because obviously, women can rape themselves.

To transfer blame, rapists often use this stance of ‘she was asking for it.’ Thanks to Nietzsche’s theory that woman is the “one who doesn’t give but who gives only to take” (17), the common belief amongst adolescent males across the board is that women will go to great lengths to manipulate, (cock)tease and seduce men. Then, when a woman is raped, her behavior comes into question. That way, the focus shifts from the rapist to the victim. Often as a result of their already unstable socialization—which taught them to be mere objects for the amusement of men—women blame themselves before anyone else can. A victim spends much of her ‘recovery’ time questioning her own actions, wondering what she did to provoke the rapist, was it something about her clothes, her smile, her tendency to overly trust men? But why should she blame herself? The answer: just as she knows what a man wants because she grew up in the same airbrushed shadow of women on billboards and in magazines, she has also learned the same Four Tenets of Rape, which state:

All women want to be raped.

No woman can be raped against her will.
She was asking for it.
If you’re going to be raped, you might as well relax and enjoy it.

Part Two: Where We Are Now

From its proposal during the second-wave of the feminist movement, our generation has expanded upon the idea of the ‘rape script,’ which inadvertently leads women to think of their participation as voluntarily or, at least, that they can intentionally halt a potential oncoming attack. Fairy tales teach girls not to be vulnerable like Sleeping Beauty—who pricked her finger—and Snow White—who accepted the poisoned apple (O’Keefe 19).

From Sharon Marcus’s “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words,” we learn “to speak of a rape script implies a narrative of rape, a series of steps and signals whose typical initial moments we can learn to recognize and whose final outcome we can learn to stave off.” According to Marcus, the act of rape involves a “scripted interaction” between a man-as-rapist seeking to “maneuver another person into the role of victim,” a woman “neither already raped nor inherently rapable,” who basically audition for the part of victim (Haag 34). The idea of a preexistent rape script places responsibility on a woman to have precognition of her assailant’s intentions and recognize his degree of power over her, bestowed upon him by her participation in their mutual social script (Mardorossian 752).

We see this pervasive idea in the broadcast arena, where spectators eagerly ingest the personal stories of ‘special guests’ willing to divulge the details of their private lives. In the early nineties, “The Home Show” sought Syracuse rape victims to feature on the morning talk show. Tracy, a female student, and her male friend accepted the invitation, but were

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2 They chose Syracuse because of the unusually high number of rape reports.
disappointed by the experience. She had originally volunteered because she hoped her story might help other lost and confused victims, struggling in the aftermath of their sexual assault. Dana Fleming, the female co-host, focused the interview on the rape, asking Tracy whether she had done “anything that in any way could have provoked him [the rapist]” (Alcoff and Gray 275). Here, the victim attempted to reach out, to build a community, but the female host subverted her intentions, instead laying the blame on her. Tracy tried to shift attention onto the issue of the common assumption of the victim’s responsibility. Lindy, her male friend, made an effort to emphasize the part men play and their responsibility for rape. Unfortunately, the hosts did not probe either of their positions for further discussion, instead preferring to inquire as to what parents could do to reduce the risk of rape when their daughters left for college. They then deferred to an “expert on rape prevention counseling” to discuss the difficulty women have communicating their sexual desires. The ‘expert’ then proclaimed that “sex can be more pleasurable for men when it is done with a willing partner” (276).

The example of this morning talk show interview illustrates many factors representative of the problems with the rape script. Not only does the victim become an object offered up for the audience to scrutinize, but her personal agency is commandeered when the ‘experts’ do not allow her to engage in any form of supportive or beneficial discussion. In addition, this particular instance indicates ignorance, as it becomes apparent that neither the hosts nor the ‘rape expert’ knew how to approach the subject in a both an intellectual and productive manner.

Quite possibly the worst effect of this encounter took place when the female co-host essentially urges Tracy to fault her own actions. Certainly, as aforementioned, victims often
assume they could have done something to prevent their rape; they blame themselves for the attack and torture themselves wondering if they could have done differently. But Mardorossian tells us “this retrospective response is a coping mechanism in reaction to the rape as well as to social responses to sexual violence and not a testimony of the victim’s participation in gender socialization before the assault” (753). The questions that arise reinforce this self-blame. Did she fight back? Was she successful? Did she try to subvert the script? The truth, Mardorossian tells us, is that “the assumption that rape is successful because of women’s passive compliance with a sexual and linguistic script is problematic on two counts: first, because it implies that women who get raped do not in fact strategize prior to the rape and therefore that their rape necessarily signifies their submission to the role of victim; second, because focusing on women’s reaction or lack thereof during an attack necessarily takes the focus off the rapist and places it—along with the ‘responsibility’ for the outcome of this scripted interaction—on women and women alone” (753).

After years of public education, the general expectation is “that women should now know better than to let themselves get raped” (Mardorossian 753). This ideology has led the psychiatric domain to invent the scenario of the “victim personality” (Alcoff & Gray 262). In 1985, the American Psychiatric Association created the term “masochistic personality disorder.” The definition, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, states that masochists—implying women—gravitate towards “people who ‘disappoint’ or ‘mistreat’ them and choose to remain ‘in relationships in which others exploit, abuse, or take advantage’” (263). While this theory conveniently settles the debate over victim responsibility, wherein the field of psychology seems to effectually wash its hands of
the whole matter, the notion of the ‘victim personality’ does absolutely nothing to actually help the victim.

Indeed the consensus among contemporary feminists is that today’s theory deals inadequately with rape, as sexual violence has become a taboo subject and “academia’s undertheorized and apparently untheorizable issue” (Mardorossian 743). In her essay “Experience,” Joan Scott urges feminist theorists to examine more closely the “workings of the ideological system” (745), whose cinematic representations perpetually depict women as powerless and subordinate to men. Unfortunately, this examination usually begins and ends with this look at women in the mass media, probably because the film industry has been the main disseminator of the ‘ideology of rape,’ with endless displays of women as objects. Much is said of victimization in postmodern discourse, but the inquiry always stops “short of examining the social meaning grouped under the category ‘rape’” (746). In fact, some writers do a disservice to the feminist cause, claiming that victims “owe their victimization not to the experience of rape but to a feminist propaganda that has brainwashed women into thinking of themselves as victims.” Mardorossian points to The Morning After, in which Roiphe downplays the actual rape crisis, declaring it to be a matter of perception, as she says many women misinterpret “confusing and unsatisfactory” sexual encounters as date rape (748).

Mardorossian highlights the problem with most of these approaches:

It is the worst kind of theory, unresearched, undocumented, polemical, nonacademic, but it is theory nonetheless. And in a field that has not been theorized anew for the

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3 Mardorossian lists such “media friendly conservative writers” as Katie Roiphe, Camille Paglia, and Christina Sommers as examples.
last decade, theorizing of any kind, even of the worst kind, is bound to attract and fascinate. (749-50)

Even *unfounded* theory draws attention, possibly because of its ridiculous, train-accident-like inaccuracy, but then this ‘theory’ becomes accepted fact, and is integrated into cognizance by popular opinion and assimilated into standard knowledge. The effect this unfounded theory has is to reinforce victim-blaming, because it compounds on the guilt and shame they already felt by blaming their faulty *perception* of the rape experience, the product of feminist propaganda (749). In short, this notion tells us that victims are lying, unintentionally of course, but lying all the same.

The forum of popular media runs counter to scholarly discourse in most cases, and no better example exists than that of daytime television. In 1993, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray, two professors from Syracuse, examined current rape theory in their article, “Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?” Alcoff and Gray, themselves rape survivors, sought to reintroduce the discussion of rape into the feminist discourse. However, the image of rape, incest and sexual assault on talk shows and talk radio, in books and magazine articles causes damage to the cause (261). When such a serious issue becomes fodder for entertainment, all significance of the matter is lost. Further damage is done when the integrity of the victim is questioned by the populace that has developed immunity from over-exposure to the issue. The audience acts as voyeur, and their morbid fascination with the woman’s experience becomes the main concern. Every element of the production—from camera angles to intensity of emotion—is catered to the audience tastes. The goal is to find

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*4 Ironic that unfounded theory holds more weight than an ‘unfounded’ report of rape. But the scale is weighted in favor of the so-called experts, the theorists who only talk about rape. Victims, having only experienced rape, cannot then be considered experts.*
the perfect combination of elements to illicit the desired response from the crowd, in essence, to ‘produce’ feelings for the audience. These constructed emotions, though, must be “tempered with a dose of moderation: too few feelings will make for a boring show but too many may frighten and alienate viewers and induce them to change the channel. The mediation of a coolly disposed expert can serve as a mechanism for displacing identification with the victims to reduce the emotional power of the survivor presence” (278).

The devil’s in the details and the crowd hungers to know minute specifics. Survivor stories are popular in the pornography industry. Historically, *Penthouse* and *Playboy* have featured famous rape victims in their glossy pages. In the late eighties, Jessica Hahn—the victim in the highly publicized case involving television evangelist Jim Bakker—posed for both magazines for undisclosed quantities of money (262). The caption of the November 1987 issue of *Playboy* reads, “Jessica Hahn Born Again in Words And Pictures.” Undoubtedly, though, the print contained only those words of her story that intrigued and titillated the magazine’s predominately male demographic.

Ten years later, Nancy Naples reveals the difficulty for rape survivors to find “appropriate institutional sites in which, or sympathetic confidants with whom, to share their experiences” (1154). The feminist movement has successfully created its own avenues for women to share stories and create networks between survivors and all women, with newsletters, journals, support groups, and demonstrations (Alcoff and Gray 268). However, these modes of communication have their own unique limitations—namely with circulation—in terms of number and ‘kinds’ of people reached. For instance, the average

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5 Along with her picture, another cover story of the September 1988 issue, is “Why Condoms Flunk: An On-Campus Report”
man would most likely select an issue of Men’s Health over an International Feminist Journal of Politics. For that matter, most women probably prefer Women’s Health to the Feminist Journal. However, the available forums provide an outlet for “previously excluded survivor speech… in ways that do not seriously threaten patriarchy” (270).

Some, including sociologist Norman Denzin, find risk in releasing one’s personal story into public space, where “nothing is any longer private or sacred” (Naples 1172). Most argue, though, that the personal is unavoidably political, as the two entities are inseparable. Still many others feel an established feminist praxis is central for an oppositional movement against the oppressive structure of hegemony in society (1179). The goal, then, is to build a theoretical feminist discourse as a way of forcing ourselves into the dominant structure. Instead of claiming only a ‘room of our own,’ women need to pull up a chair and take a seat in their room, forcing them to start seeing from our perspective, to see society as it truly is.

The rape script, and its emphasis on the mechanics of language and nonverbal communication, effectively shifted the focus away from the violent act itself, repositioning onto the rhetoric involved. One side argues that violence is “blind and anonymous,” the other says women are “free creatures rather than victims” (Haag 24), and what remains amounts to an entangled mess—the results of trying to rid a tree from root disease by clipping the branches of the bush growing next to it. This preoccupation with the wording causes confusion as to the very definition of rape. According to the 1984 survey of thirty-two colleges by Koss and Russel, “one in four women are victims of rape on campuses” (Mardorossian 749). The FBI presents a one-in-eight statistic, prompting accusations of statistical distortion by the feminist movement. However, disputants seemingly ignore
discrepancies in legal definitions of sexual assault. “Legal definitions of sexual assault vary from state to state: some include only vaginal penetration by a penis, while others consider forced oral sex or penetration by objects or fingers as part of the definition” (749). The consequence resulting from this statistical debate is a decentering of the gravity of the issue. Regardless of whether fifteen or fifty percent of women will be raped, pinpointing exact numbers will not erase, or even change, the social problem of rape.

Rather than zooming in on statistics or even the rhetorical implications of the word ‘victim,’ or attempting to determine whether violence is blind, or merely nearsighted, we must pan out to take a look at the national, even international, level. The root of the rape problem lies in the American preeminence of violence. New York Times writer James Reston warned that “the violence at home and abroad has the potential for polarizing, then fracturing, American society” (Haag 25). The Vietnam War and the blatant disregard for human life—of both Americans and Vietnamese—set the ideal temperature for an atmosphere of violence, leading Richard Wright to claim the “machine gun in the corner” as the “symbol of the twentieth century” (25). The United States government holds the right to use people like tools of warfare, and this kind of mentality tends to spread and catch like a disease. The second-wave feminist movement operated in this era, and they fostered noncompliance, encouraging “a seizing control of our own lives” from the institutions with the power to “beat your essence” and those with the potential to end your life (26).

In the late 60’s, Julius Lester called for revolution, as it “is the ultimate cry of humanity, that humanizes those who before were dehumanized,” and revolution requires ‘tension,’ which M.L. King says “is part of the work of the nonviolent resister… some tension which is necessary for growth” (Haag 28). Along with the feminist movement of the
mid-twentieth century, equal rights activists and black militant groups sounded their political instruments. Cognitive-behavioral psychologist Albert Ellis believed the sexual revolution “would ‘humanize’ social relations” and “feminism would obliterate the ‘objectification’ and ‘dehumanization’ evident in the sexual marketplace” of his era (28).

Black Panther Party leader, Eldridge Cleaver, proved Ellis wrong when he wrote in *Soul on Ice* about the acts of rape he committed, beginning with black women in the ghetto “for practice,” and progressing to white women—his idea of the “symbol of freedom”—as “an insurrectionary act” (29). Cleaver imagined whites had lost connection from their bodies and blacks had become alienated from their minds⁶. He pointed to the popularity of boxing, in which whites bet large sums of money on which black man will rise triumphant above the other, among other sports as one of the main causes of this striation between the races. Of course, he seems to make a valid point, as the advent of sports as former gladiator competitions—in which they fought to the literal death—when spectators want their own team to win, they essentially want them to (metaphorically, in most cases) *kill* the opposing team. The culture of sports, then, perpetuates violence, for the players and the fans. Cleaver asserted that “sports reproduced an abhorrent and ‘savage mishmash’” (31).

Indeed, when viewing the nightly news, we witness many accounts of alleged rape in the sports world. These accounts range from the professional level (i.e. Kobe Bryant and Ben Roethlisberger) to the collegiate (as with the 2007 case of Abe Satterfield and Cedric Everson). But the sports arena is just one of the many places where violence festers; war,

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⁶ In his essay “Becoming,” Cleaver says “*Brown v Board* was a major surgical operation” which attempted to graft “the nation’s Mind back onto its Body,” as an “attempt to save its soul” (Haag 30).
corporate crime, and other activities in which the patriarchal hegemony either tolerates or actively participates act to propagate the ideal atmosphere for violence in all forms.

Part Three: Where We Are Going

Commonplace to the 1970s, domestic and sexual violence were not yet identified as criminal activities. Women began to demonstrate against rape, battery, and assault, which applied pressure to change on the culture of dominance. The feminists proved that women were more than “the sum of their traumatic experiences, [and] that they had the capacity to act and organize even as they were dealing with the psychic effects of rape or domestic violence” (Mardorossian 768). The women’s liberation movement, as part of the second-wave of feminism, created consciousness-raising (CR) groups where “women learned to move beyond discussion of privately experienced problems into political action” (Naples 1154). These CR groups initiated the movement to end violence against women, as members worked to raise public awareness of spousal abuse as well as other forms of sexual and physical abuse. They also drew attention to the prevalence of child abuse. Activists sought the legislative help of politicians to protect the rights of victims and punish abusers. Along with the police, they developed community response strategies, and with aid from public funding, established hotlines and expanded safe houses and shelters for battered women.

Judicial changes, including longer sentencing for offenders, and survivor networks were a few of the major effects of this movement, along with the incest recovery industry (Naples 1155). Organizations like the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) ran counter to the progress made by CR groups. Founded by the parents of psychologist Jennifer Freyd, who—as an adult—privately accused her father of abusing her as a child, the FMSF
claims psychotherapists influence their patients, prompting them to falsely remember and report abuse (Haaken 120). The FMSF has “raised a large amount of money and attained public visibility and notoriety in a relatively short period of time when contrasted with the time that it took for the problems of childhood sexual abuse to reach a similar level of public discourse” (Naples 1163).

Along with the other active entities of the backlash movement, the FMSF drew support because CR groups and victim reports of incest and abuse “challenged the hegemonic myth of the nurturing nuclear family” (Naples 1155). Any idea that threatens the standard of the great American family is bound to encounter opposition, as the intimate environment of domestic life has historically been considered sacred, a setting associated with protection, nurturing, and affection. Of course, the dominant view is not that the act of incest endangers the sanctity of familial harmony, but speaking of the act. Citing McNaron and Morgan from Voices in the Night: Women Speaking About Incest, “if we begin to speak of incest, we may realize its place as a training ground for female children to regard themselves as inferior objects to be used by men.... By beginning to speak about it, we begin to threaten its continued, unacknowledged presence" (15). Further opposition arises due to the fact that speaking of incest reinforces the notion that women are ‘weak’—or at least that is the conclusion most people draw, consequently erasing the progress made by feminists over the years.

Speaking out is necessary, though, for multiple reasons. Drawing attention to the very presence of sexual abuse, at home and away, forces the public—both personal and institutional—to acknowledge the problems with sex and violence. According to Alcoff and Gray, “speaking out serves to educate the society at large about the dimensions of sexual
violence and misogyny, to reposition the problem from the individual psyche to the social sphere where it rightfully belongs, and to empower victims to act constructively on our own behalf and thus make the transition from passive victim to active survivor” (261-62). Giving voice to victim silence also serves to create a community in which survivors can congregate, find resources for recovery, and—for those interested—take part in social-change activities.

Melba Wilson, author of *Crossing the Boundary: Black Women Survive Incest* expressed her gratitude to fellow writers like Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, and Joan Riley for “having the courage to break the taboo of silence, an outgrowth of which was to reach out to women like me, who needed their stories in order to find the strength to tell our own” (Naples 1169). Speaking out requires courage as Carol Barringer states that, in doing so, the survivor must defy the threats of her perpetrator as well as forfeit the “very protections that have enabled her to survive—the forgetting, the denial, the numbness” (1166). In most cases, a victim has internalized the perpetrator’s voice and silenced herself not just verbally, but emotionally as well.

Whereas speaking out serves to create a community for survivors, breaking the silence alone usually does not have a larger sociopolitical effect. As Deborah Gerson adds, "speaking truth to power does not topple it” (Naples 1155), the mere act of talk will not change the structure that maintains the atmosphere of violence. According to bell hooks, speak-outs and other dialogic-based strategies “do not necessarily provide the context through which participants can recognize how social structural dynamics such as capitalism, colonialism, and racism shape their experiences” (1176).

In Part One of this introduction, we discussed the proposal of the ways women become programmed (like computers), the earliest version of the rape script studied in Part
Two. The existence of a rape script is only possible due to the predominant phallocentric discourse. Acquiescing to the notion, though, reduces the position of women to mere discourse, which amounts to mere talk. And change necessitates more than talk; what is required, in the immortal words of Elvis, is “a little less talk and a lot more action.”

However, the action for our generation consists of mostly inwardly-focused therapy, primarily survivor rehabilitation based on the ever-growing recovery industry. In Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest, Louise Armstrong notes the “transformation from ‘breaking the silence’ as a political act to the more consumer-oriented and inward-turning recovery industry dominated by the media, psychiatry, and social work professions that now characterizes much of the discourse on incest and childhood sexual assault” (Naples 1167). Armstrong shows how the emphasis on the supposed symptoms (namely eating disorders and alcoholism) overshadows the “social structural dynamics of patriarchal power that provide the foundation for the persistence of incest and child sexual abuse in contemporary society” (1167). The popular twelve-step approach to recovery falls short because it tends to gloss over individual experience (1172) and explicitly discourages collective political engagement (1173). Recovery-based organizations—such as Victims of Incest Can Emerge Survivors, or VOICES in Action, Inc. which publishes newsletters, sponsors conferences, and provides referrals for therapy and self-help groups—lack the kind of broad-based movement that would engage survivors in oppositional politics and resistance strategies required to give strength to the range of voices of victims’ narratives and experiences. This lack is due to the connection these organizations have to the dominant structure, which prevents the kind of “collective empowerment” required to “effect more systemic social change” (1167).
Furthermore, Mardorossian claims the therapy-based focus makes “women’s behavior and identity the site of rape prevention,” which “only mirrors the dominant culture’s proclivity to see rape as women’s problem, both in the sense of a problem women should solve and one that they caused” (755-6). This form of apparent navel-gazing seems to obscure the institutional, cultural, and economic practices that perpetuate social inequalities. In other words, absorption in one’s own self distracts public concentration from seeking social adjustment. In addition, the patriarchal hegemony would have women believe that the discomfort they experience is a mere side-effect of their “inner and complicated compulsions,” which can be easily remedied by “personalized self-help rather than political transformation” (758). Feminists recognize these silencing techniques as further indicators of the far-reaching societal system of male dominance that extends back to the “ancient structures of asymmetrical discursive relationships” (Alcoff & Gray 265).

We witness asymmetrical relationships when ‘experts’ are called in to either validate or redirect the story, as with the “Home Show” incident in Part Two. Expert discourse often gains authority over that of the survivor, as the former has acquired knowledge through “presumably objective truth claims,” whereas the latter has experienced the trauma of rape, a more subjective perspective and, apparently, more biased (Naples 1159). Indeed, survivor discourse is often less linear and formulaic than the patriarchal. Most rape narratives fluctuate, ranging from “self-blame to anger directed at the assailant [and] relatives.” Because of this, accounts can be confusing for an uninitiated audience, as victims’ feelings “are far from continuous or consistent, and no scenario of rape, no matter how saturated with evidence of the crime, guarantees victims’ definitive adherence to one script over another” (Mardorossian 764-65). Indeed, traumatic experiences can be debilitating, therefore the
memories are “less apt to be encoded through ordinary linguistic memory” (Haaken “Sexual Abuse” 118), and interpretation is in the mind of the beholder. Rather than discount their experience, the audience should acknowledge their expertise, and respect the need to disclose their stories after they “have long suffered with their memories and pain in silence and isolation” (Naples 1178). As Alcoff and Gray state, “we are fluid, constantly changing beings who can achieve great clarity and emotional insight even from within the depths of pain” (282).

Much like VOICES in Action, "Looking Up," is a group founded by survivors. However, they have a slightly different philosophy, as they believe “each individual is already in possession of the qualities necessary to create a life filled with growth and satisfaction” (Naples 1174). They offer nontraditional programs that provide survivors with the opportunities “to speak the truth, be heard and believed, be accepted without judgment, to know that isolation has been enforced and can now be broken, to understand that the abuse and its effects [are] the fault of offenders and not victims, [and] to catch the first glimpse that life can be worth living” (1175).

Salvation can be found in giving voice to the experience, in merely speaking, and in the production of narrative itself. When a survivor takes control of her story, she subverts the authority of experts and usurps control from her rapist. The non-verbal expressive avenues available for conveying personal rape narratives include various forms of art, including painting, sculpture, dance, drama, music, fictionalized stories, poetry, memoirs—the possibilities are virtually endless. “Rape is a reality that feels anything but real to the victim, yet this very same unreality can become the basis of a representation the speaker can manipulate and gain control of, that can command an audience’s attention and be made
intelligible in other than the available cultural terms” (Mardorossian 765). In *Heretic Acts*, Janice Haaken argues that, rather than seeking to derive literal truth from these works, viewers should “recognize how feminist memorial projects mobilize a wide range of psychological and social meanings, some of which are woven unconsciously into the fabric of memory” (39). When these productions, these representations of the experience of rape, become available to others, we see how the creation of new spaces authorizes survivors “to be both witnesses and experts, both reporters of experience and theorists of experience. Such transformations will alter existing subjectivities as well as structures of domination and relations of power. In such a scenario, survivors might, in bell hooks's words, ‘use confession and memory as tools of intervention’ rather than as instruments for recuperation” (Alcoff & Gray 282).

Other methods of empowerment can include “confrontation with perpetrators of abuse through personal letters and other methods, including legal action” (Naples 1160). And, of course, if the victim chooses, she can always use her voice. In spite of the limitations of dialogue-based programs, feminists must recognize that the very presence of rape necessitates such strategies. Public opportunities to give personal testimonies provide a forum vital for collective dialogue, where survivors can identify the conditions and structures that enable abuse. Breaking the silence by going public “endures as a foundational strategy through which survivors can challenge the continued denial of abuse that occurs within the patriarchal family and other institutions in contemporary society.” Such occasions present valuable opportunities for personal empowerment—the “necessary stepping-stone toward building a more inclusive movement” (1178).
Survivors must recognize the need—their obligation—to share their experience, regardless of format. “To counter both the backlash against the survivors' movement as well as the depoliticized recovery movement,” Armstrong argues, “there needs to be a greater awareness on the part of adult survivors that their experience is part of a greater social problem, and that they could play a role that can make a difference to children now” (Naples 1167). In order to make a difference now, victims must not only participate in the forums currently available, but also identify and develop new methods “in which emotional expression can activate the subversive potential of our rage” (Alcoff & Gray 286). In other words, to help others—as well as themselves—survivors must find ways to channel the anger and the pain, for the betterment of society. In bell hooks's view, “the realm of the personal can become politically efficacious and transformative and need not obscure the conditions of the production of experience, if women do not merely ‘name' their experiences but also ‘place that experience within a theoretical context.’” In this case, “storytelling becomes a process of historization. It does not remove women from history but enables us to see ourselves as part of history.” When the narrative of experience fuses with theory, then, as hooks suggests, “The act of speaking out can become a way for women to come to power” (Alcoff & Gray 283).

In the following poem, Emily Levy implores survivors to give voice to the experience of sexual violence “in ways that cannot be contained, recuperated, or ignored,” as she has done within this very work titled, "157 Ways to Tell My Incest Story" (Alcoff & Gray 288):

Tell it in Spanish
In Sign Language
Tell it as a poem
As a play
As a letter to President Reagan
Tell it as if my life depended on it....

Tell it as a court case
As a congressional debate
As if the power of children were respected
Tell it as domestic terrorism
As a national sport.
Tell it as a jump-rope game...

Tell it as graffiti
As a religious service
Tell it as a classified ad...

Tell it as a TV commercial
As a science experiment
As a country western song.
Tell it as ancient history
As science fiction.
Tell it in your sleep...

Tell it as a map of the world
As if I were still forbidden to speak the words...
Tell it so it will never happen again.

Though some scholars argue that rape theory should not be grounded in personal narrative, I believe there is no better way to begin discussing the issue. In her *NYT Magazine* article, Alice Sebold states, “We must hear, not assume, the experience of rape victims because our best and only defense is knowledge.” Ignorance is dangerous, and plugging our ears will never lead to progress.

In the next three chapters, we will look at the stories of three survivors. Chapter Two discusses Alice Sebold’s memoir, *Lucky*, and the redemptive power of storytelling. In Chapter Three, we examine the true-to-life account that Laurie Halse Anderson gives of Melinda Sordino, a fictional rape survivor who finds healing through experimentation with art. The analysis in Chapter Three focuses on *Memory Slips*, an autobiography by Linda Katherine Cutting, who was molested by her minister father since before she could
remember. We see her journey through therapy, as professionals guide her through art and writing, and her ultimate personal salvation with music. We will listen to the stories of these women. Then, I will conclude with a discussion of the various treatments through art therapy and the ways society can and should change in order to ensure the only true cure—prevention.
In her article, “Towards a New Feminist Theory of Rape,” Carine M. Mardorossian states, “We need a feminist politics that addresses the psychological and individual effects of victimization without, however, locating the solution to victimization in individual or psychological narratives” (Mardorossian 772). Her reason for stating this was the “Home Show” incident, that “produced an emotional moment of a survivor's self-disclosure to get audience attention, focused a discussion of rape on women's behavior, and created or re-created a scenario where older women are skeptical and judgmental of younger women and where older men are paternalistic protectors. Tracy became an object of analysis and evaluation for experts and media-appointed representatives of the masses, [the hosts] Collins and Fleming” (Alcoff & Gray 276). Mardorossian has a point, especially when the victim is in the hands of the hegemonic media which skews information to suit its own purposes.

However, if we neglect the individual narratives, the victim becomes lost in the statistics. Let me illustrate my point.

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) website states that “every two minutes, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted.” According to the National Institute of Justice and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “1 in 6 American women will be victims of a completed or attempted rape in her lifetime” (13). “This equates to an estimated 2.1 million women who are raped and/or physically assaulted annually” (59). According to the World Health Organization, victims of sexual assault are:

- 3 times more likely to suffer from depression.
- 6 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.
13 times more likely to abuse alcohol.

26 times more likely to abuse drugs.

4 times more likely to contemplate suicide (rainn.org).

Reading these numbers render you speechless; in fact, there is no way that you can possibly comprehend the immensity of what you just read. That is the point of statistics. They take the edge off of the problem. With such a HUGE issue like rape, you are overwhelmed. It seems like there is nothing you can do. And these numbers mean nothing without names and faces attached. As Alice says in Lucky, “Without a name attached to my story, it remains fiction, not fact” (235).

My purpose here is to explore the incredibly personal stories of three rape victims, two of which are real and one that seems real. Unlike the hosts of the “Home Show,” however, my purpose is to analyze their stories in order to glean the message she wants to convey. I don’t want to commandeer their narratives. I will not add to or take away from them. I merely want to translate their thoughts and feelings to those who have not been raped.

Our foundational work is Lucky, a memoir by Alice Sebold. She is also the author of The Lovely Bones, which sold two million copies during its first year in publication and remained at the top of the bestseller list for over a year. The volume of copies sold paired with longevity of The Lovely Bones’ popularity illustrates the sense of urgency, the need for victims—including friends and family of victims—to be able to communicate, if only by reading someone else’s fictional account, about rape. Sebold’s books show the power of breaking that barrier of silence, which keeps victims in isolation, from entering into a social community where they belong and can be heard. The popularity of her books speaks to the
desire to maintain anonymity, though as her audience can read these narratives/stories, and participate in this community support group from their safe, and comfy reading chair.

Long before writing her bestselling novel *The Lovely Bones*, Alice Sebold was raped in the park near the Syracuse campus where she attended college. *Lucky* is her autobiographical sketch, detailing the attack and its effect on her life. A clear line can be marked through her life, dividing Alice-before from Alice-after. Sebold places much weight on the semantics of her story, and the process of telling it. In that way, the story comes to life, a variation of metafiction, more akin to the movement better known in the art world as metarealism. This has the effect of drawing the audience’s awareness to its role in the story. But it goes further, as Sebold draws the reader into the story, superimposing her into situation, bringing her along for support and to witness the trauma Alice endured.

One of the most important scenes in the book takes place when Alice was a child. In the following passage, we can glean much about Alice’s psychological workings, as well as insight into her early family life.

Fires are something that seemed part of my childhood, and they beckoned to me that there was another side to life I hadn’t seen. Fires were horrible, no doubt, but what I became obsessed with was how they seemed, inevitably, to mark a change. A girl I had known down the block, whose house was struck by lightning, moved. I never saw her again. And there was an aura of evil and mystery around the burning of the mill house that gave flight to my imagination every time I passed.

When I was five, I walked into a house … with my father and grandmother. The house had been ravaged by fire and was set far off from the road. I was
frightened but my father was intrigued. He thought that we might scavenge things inside that would add to the boxlike home he and my mother had just moved into…

In the front yard some distance from the house was a half-charred Raggedy Andy doll. I went to pick it up and my father said, “No! We only want salvageable things, not some child’s toy.” I think that was when it struck me, that we were walking into a place where people like me—children—had lived, but didn’t anymore. Couldn’t …

“What about upstairs?” my father asked.

My grandmother attempted to dissuade him. “It’s black as night up there; besides, I wouldn’t trust those stairs.”

I’m a good stair tester. I always watch for this in movies where there is a fire and heroes rush in. Do they test the stairs first? If not, the critic in me cries, “Fake!”

My father decided that since I was little I could risk it best. He sent me up the stairs as he and my grandmother worked to dislodge the railings. “Call out what you see!” he said. “Any furniture or such.”

What I remember is a child’s room strewn with toys, most specifically Matchboxes, which I collected… There were children’s clothes in the open closet, singed along their hems; an unmade bed. It had happened at night, I remember thinking when I was older. They were sleeping.

In the center of this bed was a small, dark, charred cavity that went through to the floor. I stared at it. A child had died in there…

Out of the fire grew narrative. I created for this family a new life. I made it a family like I had wanted: Mom and Dad and a boy and girl. Perfect. The fire was a
new beginning. Change. What was left behind was done so on purpose; the little boy had grown out of his Matchboxes, I imagined. But the toys haunted me. The face of the Raggedy Andy on the path outside, his black and shiny eyes. (Sebold Lucky 35-6)

The information provided in this passage grounds Alice Sebold’s entire autobiographical account. These paragraphs tell much about Alice’s childhood, and the construction of her worldview. Nicely condensed in this startling vignette, Alice illustrates the unimportance of her childhood, her apparent insignificance to her father. She discusses the hidden, how people can disappear like the burnt child or the girl whose house was struck by lightning, and the unforgettable images the mind cannot conceal. She tells about the change resulting from destruction, and the world where “children” cannot live. To deal with these things, the triviality of her childhood, the inevitability of change, and the fear of the hidden and the known, Alice shows her coping mechanism, the importance of crafting stories, of creating life through narrative. When used as a guide to reading Lucky, these factors lend valuable insight into the experience of one woman’s rape account, including a glimpse into her life before and after a violent sexual encounter.

In her childhood home, Alice Sebold states “only the unconscious touch slipped by inside my house” (42). Alice frequently sought intimate contact with her family, artfully inducing her distracted mother to stroke her hair, until her mother would realize what was happening then tell Alice “to sit up or go read a book” (42). Along with scarce physical affection, verbal compliments were also precious commodities. Often, intended praise had an adverse effect, as such awkwardly worded statements from her father, “you look just like a Russian ballerina, only too fat,” left Alice to ponder the true meaning of such ambiguous
comments: “The implication being, I guess, that I was supposed to know they thought I was beautiful. The result, of course, was that I only thought I was ugly” (28).

This detachment caused Alice to constantly worry about losing her mother, who often locked herself in her bedroom. Sometimes, though, Alice would “crawl into bed with her and make up stories” to attempt a connection (38). She was likewise forbidden from ‘disturbing’ her father in his study. Furthermore, he traveled to Europe yearly, in what Alice saw as an effort to escape their family problems. From him, she knew you could “learn a language of another country and then you [could] go to that country: a place where the problems of your family will not follow. A language they do not speak” (162).

The distance widened with age, and when Alice is raped, her father questions the validity of her claim. After hearing the rapist lost the knife during her resistance, he asks, “But how could he have raped you unless you let him?” (59) With herculean patience, she explains “most women who are raped, even if there was a weapon, when the rape is going on, the weapon is not there in her face. He overpowered me, Dad. He beat me up. I couldn’t want something like that, it’s impossible.” What truly seems impossible, though, is that anyone—least of all the victim’s father—could even consider that she actually desired such a brutal attack, especially when she had been wounded to the extent that, after the first sight of herself in the mirror, she knew she would be unable to formulate a cover story to disguise what happened.

However, she wanted the comfort that comes only with familiarity. In order to preserve the world she knew, Alice concealed the story of her rape from her family. “They had no idea, because I had not told them, what had happened to me in that tunnel—what the
particulars were. They were fitting together the horrors of imagination and nightmare and trying to fashion what had been their sister’s or child’s reality” (61).

Needing someone to share her story and ease her pain, Alice approaches her mother. Perhaps Alice perceived a level of confidentiality that did not truly exist. Her mother once shared the details of her alcoholism with her daughters. From this, Alice thought she would understand, and acknowledge her experience was “real and that they had an effect on [everyone], that things like this shaped a family, not just the person they happened to” (76). However, when she tries to discuss the attack, her mother responded with little sympathy, telling her that she was not the one to talk about it with. When Alice replies, “I don’t have anyone else,” her mother makes an appointment with Dr. Graham, the family psychiatrist. A few moments into the session, Dr. Graham asks why she is there. Alice tells her, “I was raped in a park near my school.” Dr. Graham’s response: “I guess this will make you less inhibited about sex now, huh?” Alice then ended the appointment, walking out of her office. What Alice took away from that appointment was that “no one—females included—knew what to do with a rape victim” (78).

Consequently, she retained the burden of that knowledge, as she felt the continuous need to dress her experience for her ‘audience,’ to shelter her mother, father, sister, and friends from her pain, to prevent their discomfort. Her sister observes Alice while watching television, attempting to gauge her reaction to violent shows. As a result, Alice feels that she must constantly reassure her sister that she is, in fact, “okay” when she senses Mary’s growing concern (60).

Being alone under this microscope caused Alice to want Mary to ‘fall’ as well. They “lived unhappily on either side of the word.” Alice tells us, “She was one, I wasn’t one. At
first my mother had joked about how the rape might put an end to her lectures on virginity, so now she would lecture me on chastity” (150). Her mother’s inclination to joke about Alice’s “chastity” proves as distasteful as her father’s tendency to question her innocence, though she probably intended to use humor in the way Sherman Alexie describes as “an antiseptic that cleaned the deepest of personal wounds” (164). This level of denigration led Alice to see her sister’s major as Arabic, and her own as rape. However, Alice’s English, her actual major, provided the strength she needed to continue with her life, to find her voice, and to fight back. Her ability to master language illustrates the power of words, and the importance of expression.

Her family’s flippant stance caused Alice to search for more suitable definitions of virginity and chastity. Alice says, “When the definitions didn’t provide me with what I wanted, I manipulated the language and redefined the words. The end result was that I claimed myself still a virgin. I had not lost my virginity… it was taken from me. Therefore, I would decide when and what virginity was” (150). Conflicting with this, though, was the anxiety Alice experienced as a result of concealing the truth. “I need to say the word,” she says. “It’s not ‘the thing that happened to me,’ or ‘the assault,’ or ‘the beating,’ or ‘that.’ I think it’s important to call it what it is” (68). And what it is, is Rape.

Unfortunately, the stigma attached to the ‘word’ only amplifies the anxiety associated with it. She worried nice boys would never be interested, because she “was all those horrible words used for rape; changed, bloodied, damaged goods, ruined” (69). As a result, Alice spent much time thinking about the way others perceived her. She wondered, “Does this person see me or rape?” (97) Her suspicion proved to be warranted, though, because her own story often came back to her as it circulated around campus. Alice discusses the idea of
primary versus secondary storytelling, and she learned it was unacceptable for her to tell her own story, as it causes discomfort for her listeners. However, her narrative became a free-for-all for others to tell. “Sometimes I listened to see what they knew, how the game of Telephone had translated my life.” Because Alice lost the rights to her own account, and because tales change with each mouth they pass through, the rumor mill effectively transformed her identity: “Magically I became story, not person, and story implies a kind of ownership by the storyteller” (97).

After the attack, the boys in her life display a sense of entitlement, illustrating their apparent proprietorship in her story. Steve, the first boy Alice dates afterwards, has an obsession with Don Quixote. He fictionalizes Alice, reinventing her as Dulcinea, and considers their relationship some sort of heroic quest. Alice, however, does not want to play along: “I was not a whore who, by virtue of his imagination and sense of justice, he could raise to the height of a lady” (80). When she returns to college later, Alice reinterprets Don Quixote for revenge. In her version, Sancho is the hero and “Quixote drowns in a curbside puddle, unable to realize it is not a lake” (160). This revision is meant to counterbalance Steve’s, as a personal act of retribution intended to reclaim her identity.

The next, Ken, had a unique perspective, because he had been romantically interested in her before the rape, so he knew her before and after. He finds difficulty in reconciling Alice’s attack with his perception of her as a potential girlfriend, an inamorata. Rather than deal with reality, he rewrites the story to help himself cope: “I have decided it is like a broken leg and like a broken leg, it will heal” (107). Ken’s stance, this tendency to lessen the intensity of the situation, effectually distances her from him. His self-protection repels Alice, causing her to detach from him.
In court, Alice regains ownership of her narrative. Though finally able to tell her story, she finds difficulty beginning and stutters, “a shaky start to the most important story I would ever tell” (173). She had difficulty beginning the story because she understood that “it was how [she] said them that could win or lose the case” (174). Indeed, it was the power of rhetoric that Gail, her female attorney, used at the pretrial grand jury selection. “She used a courtroom manner. She made a lot of eye contact with the jurors, used hand gestures, and spent time enunciating key words or phrases she wanted them to note and remember. Her pattern of questioning was meant to calm both me and the jurors” (142).

In response, the defense aimed for a case of mistaken identification, attempting to divert the focus to an issue of race. When asked to point out her rapist in court, Alice defies their expectations by identifying him by his clothes rather than his skin color. When Paquette, the defense attorney, asks why she marked the wrong box during the line-up, Alice acknowledges this as “the single most important question of [her] case” (177). The reason she gives for the mistaken identification: Fear.

I marked the box because I was very scared, and he was looking at me and I saw the eyes, and the way the lineup is, it is not like it is on television, and you are standing right next to the person and he looks like he is two feet away from you. He looked at me. I picked him. (177)

Unprepared and intimidated by the man her rapist was allowed to choose to stand in the line beside him, Alice chose the wrong man because he looked at her with hatred in his eyes, while the rapist stared at the floor. When the opposing counsel asks whether she articulated that while in the line-up room, she says, “I didn’t say a word” (193). Therefore, her fear led to silence.
This passage also illustrates the misleading quality of television, as Alice states her experience did not fall in line with her expectations. This instance is one of many where reality and the fictional portrayal of the media collide. The morning after the rape, Victor, a friend’s boyfriend, approached Alice, asking if he could hug her. He also asked if the rapist was black. Also being black, Victor apparently felt responsible, and wanted to somehow make amends. People gathered around, watching as if a scene from a movie. Alice wondered, “In their version of the story, where did they fit?” (25) The night before, when she returned to her dorm afterwards, the Resident Assistant shut Alice into the office, a room walled with windows. She remarked on the way it felt for the other students to watch her, as if on television. They stood with their faces pressed up to the glass, “silence and eyes” (15). The onlookers observed from a distance, curious of the new experience and hoping to reconcile what their prior knowledge of news stories and gossip with the reality of Alice, the real-life rape victim standing before them. They take note of the contradiction between what they assume to be true and that which they witness, and their inquisitive perspective is also tainted by fear.

In court, Alice overcomes the fear she experienced in the line-up room, and she easily identifies her rapist: “I knew the man who raped me sat across from me in the courtroom. It was my word against his” (178). This notion of the battle between words and the power they hold echoes throughout her account. The rapist, via his lawyer, uses words as weapons against her. During the trial, Paquette, the defense attorney used vigorous questioning in an attempt to tire Alice. “All the gate and tunnel questions, the rapid fire on where I was coming from, going to, how many feet it was or wasn’t. He was trying to wear me out” (183).
Paquette’s attitude comes into play, and nonverbal communication joins the arsenal: “all of what wasn’t said in every move of his—his insinuations, what he implied” in his gestures and tone of voice (183). At this time, when her rage and anxiety become inflamed by his grandstanding, Alice recalls Gail’s words: “If you ever get lost or upset, just tell, as best you can, what happened to you” (185). Once again, words are her only defense, the only thing that can save her. During the rape, she underwent what she calls “a fight of words and lies and the brain” (6). Alice describes how she clutched at whatever would keep her alive: “I began to combine truth with fiction, using anything to try and get him to come over to my side” (9). And along with spoken words, retaining facts can lead to deliverance. As she memorized every feature on her rapist’s face, Alice learned that “memory could save, that it had power, that it was often the only recourse of the powerless, the oppressed, or the brutalized” (106); the only thing to tether her to reality, she says, “in those moments, where I could easily have slipped away, facts were my life” (141).

It is the same in court as he tries to manipulate the situation by twisting her own words, “the only thing [she can] do is stick to [her] story as he pinned [her] down” (189). Alice takes control of the situation, and asks to look over her written statement to find the discrepancy. Paquette pointed to the place in the police statement where she first had a feeling the man was her rapist, but that was when she’d only seen him at a distance from behind and thought it was him from his mannerisms—before seeing his face—that he was her rapist. However, when she saw his face, she was sure. The opposing counsel had dissected her statement, extracting a segment to employ for his purpose by removing all context. Alice had given her original account in chronological order, and the rapist’s lawyer tried to use what she had first said to prove incongruity with her court testimony. However,
Alice not only points to his supposed error, but also regains what she had lost in the preceding struggle by proving she could match him, wit for wit.

While on the witness stand, Alice must fight against mind-numbing legal rhetoric. Though she does not directly address the fact, she stands alone against her rapist and this attorney, most likely court-appointed, a man trained in oratory. As diligently as she tries to maintain composure, striving to remain mentally and verbally strong, the pressure becomes intense. When asked how many black people she sees in the courtroom, Alice answers, “None.” Thinking it was obvious, her rapist being the only black man in the room, because she assumed he meant, beside the defendant, how many black people do you see in the room? With pitiless sarcasm, Paquette makes light of her error and smiles with triumph. Alice no longer feels powerful: “I was guilty for the race of my rapist, guilty for the lack of representation of them in the legal profession in the City of Syracuse, guilty that he was the only black man in the room” (195).

Mastine, Alice’s counsel, counters by “working Paquette’s former territory, going back to strengthen weak lines” (198). Circumnavigating the mine field of misleading information planted by the defense, Alice’s lawyer helps clarify the story. He asks how many young black men she sees on a daily basis. Though uncomfortable with “separating the students [she] knew by their race, pooling them into columns, and tabulating their number,” Alice answers that she sees many black men daily (198). It was a small triumph, but one nonetheless.

After the trial, Alice says Paquette was mean. Gail replies, “That’s his job. But you held up under him” (199). This summation nicely illustrates the injustice of the legal process to which Alice is subject. The wording draws the first point, you held up under him. Gail’s
Freudian slip could not be more accurate. The rapist forced Alice to lie under him and then, metaphorically, under his attorney. Although she proved valiant in her effort against the opposing team, this process subjected Alice to another traumatic event. She became a dual victim: first enduring a brutal rape, then being obliged to repeat the details. Alice had to relive the experience with each recalled memory, in graphic detail for the purpose of self-defense. Ironically, during her first opportunity to fully disclose her story, she must face constant contention from Paquette while her rapist listens and watches her the entire time.

On more than one occasion, Alice’s skill with words seems her only means to fight back. After the trial, she writes a letter in regard to his sentencing and parole chances. She appeals to their sensibility, how it will “look good” for them to keep him behind bars to protect the “people who elected them and paid their salaries” (201). Another time before, Alice felt her writing led to communication with her rapist. Tess Gallagher encouraged her to write a poem, beginning with “If they caught you,” then made her read it aloud to the class twice. The other students did not know how to respond; they “buried their response in words like brave, or important, or bold.” One or two were angry that they had to respond, felt the poem combined with Gallagher’s admonition that they react was an act of aggression on her part and mine” (100). Shortly after she wrote the poem, titled “Conviction,” Alice saw her rapist for the first time since the attack. She felt the very act of writing this poem had conjured him. She said, “I had issued an invitation to my rapist” (113). Certainly, after a graphic description of all the ways she would hurt or kill him, the last stanza reads: “Come to me, Come to me,/ Come die and lie, beside me.” (99)

“Conviction” serves primarily to liberate Alice from these emotions, kept so quiet for so long. Articulating her own feelings helped break the barrier of silence, which allowed her
to communicate with others, who’d had similar experiences, thereby creating a community through narrative, her written words. So many women have survived sexual assault, and often they remain quiet. In her 1989 *New York Times Magazine* article, “Speaking of the Unspeakable,” Alice Sebold says, “Women disassociate themselves from rape because the vast majority of people still believe that a woman who has been raped is filthy, better off dead, irrational, or got what she was looking for.”

Alice experiences conflicting emotions over her power to communicate through narrative, and again the idea of primary versus secondary comes into play. When her story is *told* by others, she has no power. She says, “I didn’t exist. I was just a catalyst” (*Lucky* 109). But being a catalyst isn’t always a bad thing, if her story urges others to break their silence. After hearing about Alice, her friend’s mother, a 45-year-old woman, tells her two sons about her rape at the age of 18, breaking her 27-year silence (73). By telling her story, she inspired Alice to tell hers, leading to the empowerment of others.

Maria, who had been raped by her father and brothers, tried to commit suicide. When she read Alice’s poem in class, it drew emotions to the surface Maria tried to keep deeply concealed. She said, “Your poem said all the things I’ve been feeling inside for years. All the things I’m so afraid of feeling” (148). Whereas Alice’s role as catalyst does not bode well in Maria’s awakening, shattering these glass sound barriers is necessary. Alice heard of others, women who had hidden in the shame of their rape, for fear of becoming like a student on the University of Pennsylvania campus:

A girl had been gang-raped at a fraternity that year. She had filed a complaint and charges. She was trying to prosecute. But the fraternity members and their friends made it impossible for her to stay in school. By the time I visited Penn’s campus she
had withdrawn. In the elevator of my sister’s dormitory was a crude ball-point pen
drawing of her with her legs spread open. A group of male figures were waiting in
line beside her. The caption read, “Marcie pulls a train.” […] I wondered where she
was and what would become of her. (55)

Lila, a girl Alice often refers to as her soul mate, is raped in their shared apartment
their senior year. Afterwards, Lila just wants her life back. Though Alice cannot understand
why, Lila decides not to pursue prosecution. This causes a rift between the two women,
leading to their separation. When Alice sees her at graduation, Lila is with new friends,
laughing and acting as if nothing horrible ever happened to her. Rather than stand alongside
Alice or the girl from Penn, Lila disassociates with the trauma and the tragedy.

Alice continuously reiterates the power of storytelling, and how communication
continually breaks down barriers, like the illusion of perfection. Before she was raped, all of
the girls in her campus dorm shared their ‘first time’ stories with each other. Alice realized
very few girls had not had sex; she was one of only two virgins. She talks about reputation,
and the prevalence of the negative perception of ‘experienced’ girls. When telling their
stories, they remove that illusory curtain of perfection—of innocence and purity, and the
world as it is stands bare, revealed to Alice for the first time.

This alternate reality becomes apparent to Alice, “I had changed. The world I lived in
was not the world that my parents occupied. In my world, I saw violence everywhere. It was
not a song or a dream or a plot point” (80). She sees the injustice in this violent world,
“Everything was wrong. It was wrong that I couldn’t walk through a park at night. It was
wrong that I was raped. It was wrong that my rapist assumed he was untouchable.” She
begins to relate to the other people that were aware of this violent world. In a particularly
tense moment, after she reports seeing her rapist on the street, the police officer—frustrated at not finding the man—loses his temper on another man that offends him. “That officer lived on my planet. I fit into his world in the way I never again would fit into [the old world]” (110). She even relates to her rapist: “I share my life not with the girls and boys I grew up with… I share my life with my rapist. He is the husband to my fate” (53).

With the innocent world eliminated, Alice’s emotions become raw. Being aware of violence caused her to react to new people with great distrust and suspicion. It is not surprising that she relates to the people she meets in the judicial system, as she is able to safely tell her story without having to mask any of the details for the comfort of her audience. In fact, Alice took up to the officers that held nothing back. She grew comfortable with “men like Murphy. Their quick, exact talk. Their no-bones-about-it demeanor” (164). This provides an important juxtaposition to other men in her life, such as her father, who “liked to be in control of a discussion and if he wasn’t, he usually opted out” (164). Alice determined trustworthiness by the way people in her life dealt with the facts, and how they reacted to her story.

Alice remarks on Tricia, the counselor from the Rape Crisis Center, who’s “approach, a sort of comforting ‘I’m here for you’ stance, was not one [she] trusted” (29). Tricia “was too interested in drawing me out. She wanted me to feel. I didn’t see how feeling was going to do me any good” (116). On the other hand, Tess Gallagher, Alice’s poet professor, was her “first experience of a woman who had inhabited her weirdness, moved into the areas of herself that made her distinct from those around her, and learned how to display them proudly” (116). It seemed, even though things were not deemed ‘normal,’ Alice did not want them to change. In spite of her mother’s numerous imperfections, including a severe anxiety
disorder, Alice said she preferred her to the perfection of the *Stepford Wives*, which terrified her. She “thought of [her] mother as Katharine Ross, the only real woman in town where every wife was replaced with a perfect automated robot of a wife” (38).

Alice was accustomed to abnormal people, and had not grown comfortable with her identity before her rape. During the rape, Alice loses herself. When he begins, she escapes into a part of her brain where poetry and comforting things reside. When the rapist says, “Nice white titties,” the words make Alice “give them up, lobbing off each part of [her] body as he claimed ownership—the mouth, the tongue [her] breasts” (8). She relates to a girl who had been raped and murdered in the tunnel. She sees a hair bow and imagines it belonged to the girl: “At that moment I signed myself over to him” (6). After the rape, he forces her to kiss him. Alice asks the audience, “Did I say I had free will? Do you still believe in that?” (13) When she speaks directly to reader, it is clear that she wants us there with her. While she tells her story, Alice wants her audience to listen.

When the rapist realizes she was truly a virgin, he says, “You’re a good girl. I’m sorry for what I did.” Alice tells readers, “I’ve always hated it in movies, the woman who is ripped open by violence and then asked to parcel out redemption for the rest of her life” (13). But she forgives him. And in the aftermath of the rape, she becomes preoccupied with being a ‘good girl.’ She tries to do everything right and be an ideal victim: “I felt like I had as a child” (136).

At home, Alice tried to recover from the rape. Watching television, she identified with the overweight women on Richard Simmons’ show. “They were the walking, talking ostracized who had done nothing wrong.” She knew how they felt, ugly and alien in their own bodies. After an argument with her father, she cried, “I started crying but couldn’t stop”
… “Later, I didn’t want to talk about it; I was putting the rape and trial behind me” (203).

Because the comfort of her family depended on maintaining the barrier of silence, Alice felt she must remain taciturn. After the trial, Alice tried to assimilate back into her old life. She looked for normalcy: “I wanted what I knew, the house I had left that fall for the first time in my life, and the father I recognized” (50). She wanted to move on with her life. “That summer I began my makeover. I had been raped but I had also been raised on Seventeen and Glamour and Vogue. The possibilities of the before-and-after that I had been presented with all my life took hold” (202).

A boy took pictures of Alice the night before she was raped; the police took pictures of her after.

So, in the “before” photos taken by Ken Childs, I am at first posing, then giggling, then laughing openly. For all my self-consciousness, I also got lost in the giggling silliness of our crush. I balance a box of raisins on my head, I stare at the writing on the back as if it were a gripping text, I prop my feet up on the edge of his dining table. I smile, smile, smile.

In the “after” photos the police took, I stand shocked. The word shock, in this context, is meant to mean I was no longer there. If you have seen police photos of crime victims, you will know that they appear either bleached or unusually dark. Mine were of the overexposed variety. There were four types of poses. Face. Face and neck. Standing with identity number. No one tells you at the time how important these photos will be. The cosmetics of rape are central to proving any case. So far, in appearance, I was two for two: I wore loose, unenticing clothes; I had
clearly been beaten. Add this to my virginity, and you will begin to understand much of what matters in the courtroom (23)

Returning to the beginning where Alice, as a child, created a story for the family whose house caught fire: “Out of the fire grew narrative. I created for this family a new life […] The fire was a new beginning” (36). Fires, she says, “seemed, inevitably, to mark a change” (35). The force of destruction necessitates and even forces creation. Alice, who became a phoenix through writing, worked through her trauma by creating her memoir. Sadly, she believes, “No one can pull anyone back from anywhere. You save yourself or you remain unsaved” (61). She does not seem to be aware of the influence she has on others, the redemptive power of her story. In her NYT Magazine article, she says, “We must hear, not assume, the experience of rape victims because our best and only defense is knowledge […] The voices of rape victims and their families can be powerful.” And her profound autobiographical account opens the avenue for communication, giving voice to the unspoken stories of many women. This proves the redeeming power of narrative, and how words can lead to liberation.

As Alice returned home the day after the rape, she said, “My life was over; my life had just begun” (33). The concept of life after death interested Alice, and in The Lovely Bones, Alice Sebold writes a story about a life, only chronicled after death. In this speculative fictional work, Alice seems to have worked through her own losses, of virginity, of identity, and of life as she knew it. As she considers what could have been, if her rapist had killed her, Alice finds redemption by creating a life—even though she ends it in the
novel. This harkens back to the old way of thought that a woman must be saved, should she ‘fall.’ And the only way to be saved is by creating life.

As Alice Sebold began to recover, she found a lifeline in teaching. She first taught at an art camp for gifted students. Then, as after graduate school, she taught writing courses. Her students kept her alive, their stories filled her days, and she fit in with them but her story paled in comparison to theirs, “the tragic stories of my students’ live medicated me” (234). In her NYT Magazine article, Alice urged people to “talk about rape and to listen to articulate victims when they had a story to tell” (233).

In the next chapter, we see how an art teacher unwittingly fostered Melinda Sordino’s—a freshman rape victim—self-initiated therapeutic journey through experimentation with various media of art. Laurie Halse Anderson’s Speak, though a work of fiction, presents a realistic and incredibly personal account for our analysis. From this, we gain insight into the complex psychological workings of a young woman who has survived rape and must now deal with the resulting trauma.
Chapter Three: *Speak*—A Thousand Words

According to the “Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women,” completed by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2000, 32.4% of women surveyed had been raped between the ages of 12 and 17; 54% of the female rape victims were younger than age 18 (iii). From these statistics, we can logically conclude that adolescents are more than familiar with sexual assault. However, *Speak* has proven to be a controversial book, and is often banned from the classroom. Anderson says,

I am shocked whenever anyone challenges *Speak*. This is a story about the emotional trauma suffered by a teen after a sexual assault. Throughout the entire book, she struggles with her pain, and tries to find the courage to speak up about what happened so she can get some help. Isn’t that what we want our kids to do—reach out to us?

Some people in America get all weird whenever anything that is remotely sexual in nature comes up for discussion… They find it easier to avoid the discussion. These are the kinds of people who try to remove *Speak* from the classroom. When they do that, I become angry. Education is supposed to prepare children for the world. While it would be nice to pretend that sexual assault does not exist, a quick glance at the statistics proves otherwise. Teenagers know that sexuality exists, they know what rape is, and way too many of them have suffered it. Rape is discussed on the front page of newspapers. It is the topic of movies. Rape survivors speak out publicly about their attacks. Avoiding it by removing a book that deals with the subject in a thoughtful, literary way is ridiculous and harmful (madwomanintheforest.com).
Speak is not an autobiographical account, but it sounds like one. Laurie Halse Anderson so successfully tapped into the mind of high school freshman, Melinda Sordino, that many readers believe Melinda has to be teenage Laurie. When Melinda appeared to her, even Anderson herself was astonished by the depth of Melinda’s character. She had been reading Reviving Ophelia, and awoke from a nightmare and heard the crying of one of her daughters. She “went into each of their rooms to check on them but found them sleeping soundly, quiet. Yet the cries of a girl, increasingly hysterical in nature, persevered. It was only when the cursor blinked that her tears subsided” (Glenn 38). Anderson says Melinda was “born out of terror,” and seemingly communicated through her author as medium.

Even before we learn of Melinda’s rape, we know she isn’t a typical teenager. Written in 1999, before the widespread use of cell phones for texting, and years before the invention of online social networks like MySpace and Facebook, Melinda has different priorities than most of her peers. She’s not an avid television viewer—though she does watch some—she spends a lot of time thinking, reflecting, and analyzing those around her. A freshman in high school with the spirit of an artist, Melinda is more intelligent (she knows what the hypothalamus is) and has a more mature perspective than most of her peers.

Melinda has become selectively mute, and only chooses to speak to certain people. She cannot even defend herself when a group of her peers verbally attack her for calling the police during the summer party—which she only did after being raped, but the traumatic shock prevented her from reporting that to the operator. “You don’t understand, my headvoice answers. Too bad she can’t hear it. My throat squeezes shut, as if two hands of black fingernails are clamped on my windpipe. I have worked so hard to forget every second of that stupid party, and here I am in the middle of a hostile crowd that hates me for what I
had to do. I can’t tell them what really happened. I can’t even look at that part myself.” As a result, “an animal noise rustles in [her] stomach.” In the screams of the crowd, Melinda screams “to let out the animal noise,” but “no one hears” (28). Over time, it becomes “harder to talk. My throat is always sore, my lips raw. When I wake in the morning, my jaws are clenched so tight I have a headache” (50). Keeping silent begins to take a physical toll, holding the trauma inside; she has trouble sleeping, and begins sleepwalking (130). Indeed, Melinda experiences the foremost symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as Trauma and Recovery lists them: chronic insomnia and/or anxiety, intractable depression, problematic relationships (157).

So much of Speak shows how Melinda tries to be what others want or expect her to be. “I am getting better at smiling when people expect it” (32). She is unable to be herself: I am a good actor. I have a whole range of smiles. I use the shy, look-up-through-the-bangs smile for staff members, and the crinkly-eye smile with a quick shake of my head if a teacher asks me for an answer. If my parents want to know how school went, I flash my eyebrows upward and shrug my shoulders. When people point at me or whisper as I walk past, I wave to imaginary friends down the hall and hurry to meet them. If I drop out of high school, I could be a mime (33).

During embarrassing moments, Melinda longed to disappear. When the humiliation begins and she cannot escape, she blames herself, “I didn’t try hard enough to swallow myself” (39). To abscond the society of high school, she hides. Sometimes she hides in the bathroom, washing her “face in the sink until there is nothing left of it, no eyes, no nose, no mouth. A slick nothing” (45). She also hides in a forgotten janitors’ closet. Covering the mirror is first improvement she makes, and she does so with a poster of Maya Angelou.
Most of the time there, she spends watching “the scary movies playing on the inside of [her] eyelids” (50). The three verbs she chooses to conjugate in Spanish: “to hide: esconder, to escape: escaper, to forget: olvidar.” Her closet enables her to do all three, if only temporarily: “My closet is a good thing, a quiet place that helps me hold these thoughts inside my head where no one can hear them” (51).

Alternately, Melinda experiences conflicting emotions. She fluctuates from needing “to leave, transfer, warp [her]self to another galaxy” to wanting “to confess everything, hand over the guilt and mistake and anger to someone else.” Here, the animal returns, “There is a beast in my gut, I can hear it scraping away at the inside of my ribs.” The beast holds her hostage to her secret, to herself: “Even if I dump the memory, it will stay with me, staining me” (51). Feeling defeated and permanently scarred, Melinda resigns herself to silence.

Over the course of the story, Melinda takes queues from others that seem to be able to gain power with their silence. Fellow student David Petrakis demands a more democratic environment for their history class, and silently protestes by defying the commands of the tyrannical teacher, nicknamed Mr. Neck, who has said, “I decide who talks in here” (56). David “says a million things without saying a word,” and Melinda resolves to study him because she has “never heard a more eloquent silence” (57). She regulates her responses by how it would affect others, as she constantly pretends to listen and poses in such a way to make it appear she agrees with parents. She even questions her past decision to tell them she discovered the myth of Santa Claus, as it “broke their hearts” (70).

Throughout time, she begins to question her sanity, asking “Did he rape my head, too?” (165) Heather, her fair-weather friend, tells Melinda that she “is the most depressed person” she has ever met, and she thinks Melinda needs “professional help” (105). Melinda
theorizes, searching for “a great theory that explains everything” (42). She decides what happened was, “when I went to that party, I was abducted by aliens. They have created a fake Earth and fake high school to study me and my reactions...The aliens have a sick sense of humor.”

Sports, and the aggressive tendency they encourage, become a topic for thought. “The same boys who got detention in elementary school for beating the crap out of people are now rewarded for it.” And the cheerleaders are “much better at scoring than the football team” (29). Needless to say, she does not identify with the cheerleaders, saying that if she ever formed her own clan, they would be known as “the Anti-Cheerleaders. We will not sit in the bleachers. We will wander underneath them and commit mild acts of mayhem” (30).

The Marthas—a group of girls christened after Martha Stewart—provide further contrast to Melinda’s personality. Consumed with their image of philanthropy, the Marthas work on craft projects and coordinate their clothes (42). Heather is a new pledge to the group. Heather wants to redecorate her bedroom, which is incredibly tidy, nearing anal-retention, and “screams ‘Heather!’” Melinda wishes her own room had a “little whisper of ‘Melinda’” (33). Not even her own bedroom—her only personal space—feels like it belongs to her. Furthermore, she isn’t asking for her sense of self to be all-consuming, doesn’t want to be engulfed by her own identity. She merely wants to inhabit a place where she can just be.

Family life isn’t much better, as they rarely communicate: “My family doesn’t talk much and we have nothing in common, but if my mother cooks a proper Thanksgiving dinner, it says we’ll be a family for one more year. Kodak logic. Only in film commercials does stuff like that work” (58). Melinda knows families function differently from the image
portrayed on television. She sees the reality, but she also expresses the disconnection between herself and her parents. And she realizes they it could all fall apart at any time. This is indicative of PTSD, as well, always anticipating the next traumatic event.

As a child, Melinda pretended to be an adopted princess, whose parents had been killed. She thought, “Any day my real parents, Mr. King and Mrs. Queen, would send the royal limo to pick me up.” But she was reluctant to go as a child. “Now, when I really want to leave, no one will give me a ride” (147). When their biology class dissects frogs, she begins to identify with their specimen, as she lies, vulnerable “on her back. Waiting for a prince to come and princessify her with a smooch?” Melinda experiences flashbacks and cannot handle the thought of cutting the frog. Consequently, she passes out. The symbolism of her passage into unconsciousness effectually signifies an awakening, in which she realizes the fairytales of her childhood were essentially myths. And her seeing the typical legend in reverse—in which the kiss of a prince will turn the frog into a princess—shows her acceptance of the untruth of the fable.

Because she cut her head when she fainted, Melinda visits the doctor for stitches. As the doctor checks her for concussion, staring “into the back of [her] eyes with a bright light,” Melinda wonders if she “can read the thoughts hidden there.” Mirroring the still silence of the frog, she only wants sleep. “The whole point of not talking about it, of silencing the memory, is to make it go away. It won’t. I’ll need brain surgery to cut it out of my head” (82).

Along with childhood lore, Melinda talks about the fantasy found in fashion magazines:
Of course I want to be a model. I want to paint my eyelids gold. I saw that on a magazine cover and it looked amazing—turned the model into a sexy alien that everyone would look at but nobody dared touch.

Instead of gold eyeshadow, she buys a bottle of Black Death nail polish, which is “gloomy, with squiggly lines of red in it” to match her raw-bitten nails. She thinks she might need a shirt to coordinate, “something in a tubercular gray” (83).

As she reads *The Scarlet Letter* in English class, Melinda relates more to the fallen heroine Hester than the magazine covergirls.

I wonder if Hester tried to say no. She’s kind of quiet. We would get along. I can see us, living in the woods, her wearing that A, me with an S maybe, S for silent, for stupid, for scared. S for silly. For shame (101).

But the acknowledging the myth of fairytales cannot reconcile or rescind the trauma she’s experienced. This causes her to split into ‘Multiple Melindas,’ the first wants to be a normal teenager, the second “watches the bushes along the sidewalk for a lurking bogeyman or worse.” Melinda Two states, “The world is a dangerous place” (132). And she’s learned to be careful, to not trust too easily.

Melinda finds interest in sociopolitical matters. Political conversations surface in almost every class. In algebra, when the teacher tries to apply math to real life with a question about breeding guppies for profit: “Class ends in a debate between the animal-rights activists, who say it is immoral to own fish, and the red-blooded capitalists, who know lots of better ways to make money than investing in fish that eat their young” (84). In English, the teacher assigns topics for essays that include lowering the driving age to fourteen, “How I Would Change High School,” and “The Perfect Job” (85). In the chapter titled, “First
Amendment, Second Verse,” she gives an update on the situation between Mr. Neck and David, whose father is a lawyer. David brings a tape recorder to class. As a result, Mr. Neck “teaches the class straight.” The subject—the Revolutionary War—interests Melinda. Furthermore, she can relate: “The colonists wanted a voice in the British Parliament. No one in power would listen to their complaints” (67). Melinda commiserates when she meets with her parents, the guidance counselor, and the principal to discuss her plummeting grades. The adults, or authorities, all talk about and around her, but none of them express a general interest:

“Why won’t you say anything?” “For the love of God, open your mouth!” “This is childish, Melinda.” “Say something.” “You are only hurting yourself by refusing to cooperate.” “I don’t know why she’s doing this to us.” “She’s jerking us around to get attention.”

The principal asks about her grades, the guidance counselor asks about their family dynamics. And her parents begin to blame the school.

What have you done to her? I had a sweet, loving girl last year, but as soon as she comes up here, she clams up, skips school, and flushes her grades down the toilet. They send messages mixed with anger, blame, and accusation, but no one seems to show genuine concern for Melinda. She wonders, “Would you listen? Would you believe me?” She doubts they would, so she remains silent (114).

Melinda thinks her parents would’ve divorced, had she not been born. And she questions their perception of her, “I’m sure I was a huge disappointment. I’m not pretty or smart or athletic. I’m just like them—an ordinary drone dressed in secrets and lies.” She believes they see themselves in her and that is why they are disappointed. “I can’t believe we
have to keep playacting until I graduate. It’s a shame we can’t just admit that we have failed family living, sell the house, split the money, and get on with our lives” (70).

Then, come Christmas morning, Melinda unwraps an art set, a sketch pad and charcoal pencils. This is a near-turning point, as she almost tells them about the rape. “Tears flood my eyes. They noticed I’ve been trying to draw. They noticed.” And as she wipes her eyes and builds up courage to tell them, they “wait with unsure smiles” (72). They miss the opportunity, though, and the moment passes.

Throughout the narrative, words seem to be used as agents of control in Melinda’s world. At school, the authorities tell the students what to say, do, and think. We’ve already seen Mr. Neck assert himself as dictator of conversation in his classroom. Melinda’s “fizz-ed” teacher, who’s excited at the prospect of her playing on the basketball team, tells her to shoot free-throws one after another, so Melinda does as she is ordered (75). Another example is when a girl tells the English teacher she doesn’t see how Hawthorne used symbolism in The Scarlet Letter. She asks, “How do you know what he meant to say? I mean, did he leave another book called ‘Symbolism in My Books’?” The teacher replies, “This is Hawthorne, one of the greatest American novelists! He didn’t do anything by accident—he was a genius.” The girl tells the teacher, “I thought we were supposed to have opinions here. My opinion is that it’s kind of hard to read, but the part about how Hester gets in trouble and the preacher guy almost gets away with it, well that’s a good story. But I think you are making all this symbolism stuff up.” Instead of helping her understand the complex messages in the literature, the teacher returns the argument, “Do you tell your math teacher you don’t believe that three times four equals twelve? Well, Hawthorne’s symbolism is just like multiplication—once you figure it out, it’s as clear as day.” She then assigns a “five-
hundred-word essay on symbolism, how to find hidden meanings in Hawthorne” (102), punishing them with writing, with a topic they have absolutely no knowledge of, without providing any sort of scaffolding for them.

Furthermore, when Melinda makes an attempt at verbal communication, it backfires. Because she felt Maya Angelou would want her to warn former friend, Rachel, about the rapist, she opts to write a note with her left hand7 (152). Then, in the library, she and Rachel correspond by note, first with Melinda revealing she was raped the night of the party. Rachel responds with sympathy, until Melinda names her rapist. Then, because she is going to prom with him, Rachel responds in anger:

“Liar! I can’t believe you. You’re jealous. You’re a twisted little freak and you’re jealous that I’m popular and I’m going to the prom and so you lie to me like this. And you sent me that note, didn’t you? You are so sick” (184).

It is understandable, then, when people ask why she refuses to speak, Melinda silently replies, “Maybe I don’t want to incriminate myself. Maybe I don’t like the sound of my voice. Maybe I don’t have anything to say” (157). The problem is: Melinda does have something to say. But “words are hard work” (85). Perhaps this is how she became attracted to art.

On the first day of art class, Mr. Freeman announces that art “will teach you how to survive.” He says, “This is where you can find your soul” (10-12). She soon finds he might be right, “Maybe I’ll be an artist if I grow up” (78). And art is the one place Melinda finds self-expression. When Thanksgiving dinner failed, Melinda made a memorial for the turkey,

7 Much like Linda does in Memory Slips. Her only way to communicate was in writing with her left hand, which looked childish, making her feel ashamed.
because “never has a bird been so tortured to provide such a lousy dinner” (61). She excavated the bones from the garbage and took them to art class for a sculpture; Mr. Freeman praised Melinda for her ingenuity. He said, “You are caught up in the meaning, in the subjectivity of the effect of commercialism on this holiday… Be the bird. You are the bird” (62). When Mr. Freeman asserted she is the bird, Melinda first responded, to herself, “Whatever.” But as she began to work, finding spare remnants from past art projects—forks and knives, a melted palm tree, and a Barbie head—to use in her work (63), she decided to put herself into her work. As he watched, Mr. Freeman analyzed her sculpture, and as he spoke, Melinda changed the composition. Her final choice prompted Ivy to call it scary, “in a weird way. Not clown scary…[but] like you don’t want to look at it too long” (64). Mr. Freeman announced, “This has meaning. Pain” (65). Melinda had successfully projected her own pain into her art, the only way she was able to express herself.

The class drew slips of paper to determine their subjects for the entire semester. Melinda drew ‘tree.’ Looking in the mirror, she wonders if she could put a face in her tree, “like a dryad⁸ from Greek mythology…two muddy-circle eyes under black-dash eyebrows, piggy-nose nostrils, and a chewed-up horror of a mouth.” Here her self-description only includes negative terms, relating her nose to that of a pig. She also does not express a connection with the tree, or with herself, as she says, “Definitely not a dryad face. I can’t stop biting my lips. It looks like my mouth belongs to someone else, someone I don’t even know” (17). She no longer feels present in her own body, as she’s become dissociated with the body that has been violated. To avoid her own reflection, she removes the mirror from

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⁸ Dryads are, literally translated, the nymphs of oak trees, so it is symbolic when her father has the dead limbs removed to save the oak tree in front of their house.
the wall and places it in her closet, facing away from her. Later, though, she finds sanctuary
in her closet, even sleeping in it at times. This signifies a desire to reunite with her image,
her body, and herself. But she’s not ready yet.

In art class, Melinda paints trees struck by lightning: “I try to paint them so they are
nearly dead, but not totally…one picture is so dark you can barely see the tree at all” (30).
At this point, she feels like the trees—almost dead from rape’s fatal blow, and so dark she
can barely be seen. When Ivy, a fellow student, says she doesn’t want to paint the subject
she drew—clowns—because she is afraid of them, Mr. Freeman tells her “fear is a great
place to begin art” (31). Art is also a great place to deal with fear.

Melinda works to carve a pine tree into a linoleum block, but finds it difficult. “The
problem with the block is that there is no way to correct mistakes. Every mistake I make is
frozen in the picture” (54). Again, her comments about her art reflect her own feelings. She
views the rape as her mistake, or blames herself because she went to the party in the first
place. And she feels like she can never erase or correct her ‘mistake.’ The effects of the rape
are permanent; at this point, she cannot see it any other way. And when she feels as if she
has failed at every other method, she moves on to drawing. “I try to draw a branch coming
out of a tree trunk for the 315th time. It looks so flat, a cheap, cruddy drawing. I have no
idea how to make it come alive” (56). This desire to bring the tree to life is progress from the
lightning-struck trees, and indicative of Melinda’s desire to come back to life, yet she is
unaware of how to proceed.

Mr. Freeman says her imagination is paralyzed, so he introduces her to a book filled
with works by Picasso: “He whispers like a priest. ‘Picasso. Who saw the truth. Who
painted the truth, molded it, ripped from the earth with two angry hands.’ And then he leaves
her with the book, saying “You must walk alone to find your soul” (118). But here is one instance where Mr. Freeman is wrong. At times she reaches out to a few friends and creates art with their help. In biology class Melinda doodles on her own for a bit, then David draws a branch on her page. She connects the branch to a tree. Her evaluation: “It looks pretty good, better than anything I have drawn so far in art” (110). In this way, she begins to examine the consequences of trying to recover on her own. When Melinda feels she was mistaken to take art class, Ivy reaffirms her ability.

“You’re better than you think you are,” Ivy says. She opens to an empty page in the sketchbook. “I don’t know why you keep using a linoleum block. If I were you, I’d just let it out, draw. Here—try a tree.”

They draw together, this time Melinda begins by drawing the trunk, then Ivy adds a branch, which Melinda extends too far, making it long and spindly. Melinda starts to erase it, but Ivy stops her and says, “It’s fine the way it is, it just needs some leaves. Layer the leaves and make them slightly different sizes and it will look great” (146).

Melinda begins to identify with her subject. She envisions a strong old oak tree with a wide scarred trunk and thousands of leaves reaching to the sun. There’s a tree in front of my house just like it. I can feel the wind blow and hear the mockingbird whistling on the way back to her next. But when I try to carve it, it looks like a dead tree, toothpicks, a child’s drawing. I can’t bring it to life. I’d love to give it up. Quit. But I can’t think of anything else to do, so I keep chipping away at it (78).

Again, she has trouble with the carvings, but she’s beginning to form a connection with her subject. Indeed, the tree in front of her house has some dead branches that—after ‘listening
to the tree’—her dad diagnoses as ‘sick’ and need to be cut off to save the rest of the tree (167). Of course this act of ‘listening to the tree is noteworthy because he doesn’t seem to be able to listen to his daughter. The knowledge of the tree’s disease seems in some slight way cathartic for Melinda though, as she “rake[s] the leaves out of [her] throat” to ask for some flower seeds to plant—signifying her desire for new life (168).

A week later, she awakens to the sound of a chain saw. The arborist is trimming the tree:

He sets to work pruning the deadwood like a sculptor…The chain saw gnaws through the oak, branches crashing to the ground. The air swirls with sawdust. Sap oozes from the open sores on the trunk. He is killing the tree. He’ll only leave a stump. The tree is dying. There’s nothing to do or say. We watch in silence as the tree crashes piece by piece to the damp ground. The chain-saw murderer swings down with a grin. He doesn’t even care. A little kid asks my father why that man is chopping down the tree.

Dad: “He’s not chopping it down. He’s saving it. Those branches were long dead from disease. All plants are like that. By cutting off the damage, you make it possible for the tree to grow again. You watch—by the end of summer, this tree will be the strongest on the block” (187).

Melinda becomes angry and rides away on her bike. Without a clear destination in mind, she finds herself at the farmhouse where she was raped. She remarks that the specific site is a place where “you could bring a kindergarten class for a picnic.” She touches the tree she was raped under, her “fingers stroking the bark, seeking a Braille code, a clue, a message on how to come back to life after [her] long undersnow dormancy.” She sees that she has
survived and acknowledges the state of her confusion and mental chaos. And she asks, “How can I find my way? Is there a chain saw of the soul, an ax I can take to my memories or fears?” Like the tree in her yard, Melinda wants to be rid of damage parts: “A small, clean part of me waits to warm and burst through the surface” (188).

Much like the woman in a movie she once saw, who’d been burned over eighty percent of her body, Melinda is ready for ‘a new skin.’ She wondered what a new skin would feel like, “was she completely sensitive like a baby, or numb, without nerve endings, just walking in a skin bag?” She decides that she just “needs to hang on long enough for [her] new skin to graft.” Without knowing her story, Mr. Freeman told her to find her feelings, but she cannot avoid them: “They are chewing me alive like an infestation of thoughts, shame, mistakes.” She resolves to make herself normal and “forget the rest of it” (125). Initially, she’d been unaware of how to inject her feelings into her art; Mr. Freeman said, “When people don’t express themselves, they die one piece at a time” (122). With the resulting liberation after her tree’s pruning, Melinda decides to care for the small seed inside, the person she used to be, that wants to find a way out (189).

Near the end of the school year, her rapist attempted a second attack. During the attempt, Melinda cut her hand on the mirror in her janitors’ closet. She had broken the mirror to use as a weapon to defend herself against the rapist. She also screamed, alerting those outside, who happened to be the women’s lacrosse team (195). On her last day of school, Melinda works on her final attempt at carving a tree.

My tree is definitely breathing; little shallow breaths like it just shot up through the ground this morning. This one is not perfectly symmetrical. The bark is rough. I try to make it look as if initials had been carved in it a long time ago. One of the lower
branches is sick. If this tree really lives someplace, that branch better drop soon, so it doesn’t kill the whole thing. Roots knob out of the ground and the crown reaches for the sun, tall and healthy. The new growth is the best part (196).

This segment is important, because the tree is Melinda as she finally begins to heal, both physically—as she still has the bandage on her hand—and emotionally. She recognizes that one of the lower branches—denoting a branch formed in the tree’s youth—is sick, and that, without the branch, the tree will be able to grow and mature. Not being vital to the tree—as her virginity was not vital to her identity—shedding the dead branch will keep the tree alive. And the visible roots, the symbol of her family, are knobby and not pretty, but she recognizes their necessity. The top of the tree, Melinda’s future, is “tall and healthy” and has much promise because of the new growth present. But before she is finished, she perceives something is missing:

My tree needs something. I walk over to the desk and take a piece of brown paper and a finger of chalk… I practice birds—little dashes of color on paper. It’s awkward with the bandage on my hand, but I keep trying. I draw them without thinking—flight, flight, feather, wing. Water drips on the paper and the birds bloom in the light, their feathers expanding promise (197).

The bandage reminds her of the journey ahead, the awkwardness and the struggle, but she keeps trying. The birds—who represent promise, movement, life—come to her without thought. And as she draws them, she realizes, “IT happened. There is no avoiding it, no forgetting. No running away, or flying, or burying, or hiding.” After all of her attempts to abscond the truth of what happened to her—RAPE—Melinda is finally ready to let go and allow herself to move on.
It wasn’t my fault. He hurt me. It wasn’t my fault. And I’m not going to let it kill me. I can grow.

Then, with her project finished, Melinda hands it over to Mr. Freeman. As he examines it, he says, “You’ve been through a lot, haven’t you?” And she describes how the tears dissolve the ice block in her throat, allowing her to speak. “Words float up. ‘Let me tell you about it’” (198).

Many theorists believe that “victims have been relegated to the backdrop of the movement, cast as a uniform group of individuals driven by an emotional and incapacitating response to their own experience” (Mardorossian 770). But Melinda Sordino—though fictional—proves them wrong. Her reaction and emotional response differs greatly from those of Alice or Linda, our friend in the following chapter.

When asked if she thought Speak has made a difference, Laurie Halse Anderson replied, “Absolutely. But it wasn’t the book. The readers of SPEAK changed our world. Many of them came away from the book with a new understanding of sexual assault and depression. They dug deep and found the courage to speak up about their own pain. They reached out and asked for help. They spoke up. The teachers and administrators who were smart and bold enough to put a contemporary piece of literature into the classroom are changing the world, too. They put the book where it could open minds and hearts. Speak is a great example of the power of Story.”

Another question posed to Anderson: “You deal with the delicate subject and the blurry lines of date rape in Speak. Sometimes date rape occurs when a woman tries to speak and is ignored or feels she should not speak up and say what she really feels. Why do you
think girls and women have a hard time saying what they feel? And why do men sometimes have a hard time hearing them when they do speak?”

Anderson’s answer: “Great question! Let me give a clear answer. There is no blurry line of rape. If a girl/woman says no, and the boy/man has intercourse with her, it is rape. This is not rocket science—if she says ‘yes,’ it's not rape, if she says ‘no,’ it is. But you have to say it—SPEAK UP!”

Here Anderson imparts good advice. But as I mentioned, this is not an autobiographical account. Laurie Halse Anderson, having not been in the situation herself, cannot know firsthand the complicated emotions that come into play during an assault. Anderson doesn’t account for those victims who cannot speak up, or have tried and have been ignored. Although Melinda was young, there are younger victims. "Memory Slips" is Linda Katherine Cutting’s autobiographical account of a woman that was raped by her father for an unknown and extended period of years as a child. Like Melinda, Linda found forms of art therapeutic in her healing process. Ultimately, though, it was her experience with the one constant form—the piano—that led to her salvation.
I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from
the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

—Matthew 11:25

Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for the kingdom of God
belongs to them.

—Mark 10:14

Linda Katherine Cutting cannot recall the time her father, an ordained minister, first
molested her or even the first beating she suffered at his hand. Even after multiple suicide
attempts and institutionalization, it took years for her to admit that the abuse had ever
happened. She repressed the memories to such an extent that it took the suicide of her
brother—who’d also been beaten—to bring many of them floating back to the surface of
consciousness. Throughout her formative years, silence was upheld as a virtue. Her father
said he loved her mother “because she knows how to keep silence in a thousand different
languages” (Cutting 128). Unsure of the meaning of his statement, Linda recalled I
Corinthians 14:34, where Saint Paul says, “Let the women keep silence” (The Holy Bible:
New International Version).

Linda’s mother did more than silence what she must’ve known, she ignored and even
lied about her husband’s actions, telling a friend of the family, “my daughter doesn’t lie, but
if I believe her, I’ll have to leave my husband, and I can’t live without him” (Cutting 144).
More than ignore the problems, her mother sometimes blamed Linda for what she knew had
happened. After finding Linda in bed with her father at the age of two or three, her mother
screamed, “Go away, just go.” But where could she go? “Heaven,” Linda says, because she
was “already dead in [her] father’s bed” (98).
She also lied to herself and came to believe Linda didn’t need her: “My mother told me that once I learned to walk and talk I didn’t need her anymore. ‘You didn’t need anyone, she said, ‘you were so independent’” (143). But Linda did need her mother; when she heard her on the phone with Betty, her mother’s best friend, Linda wanted her mother to talk to her the way she talked to Betty (52). To gain her mother’s attention, Linda adopted Betty as her “outer shell, a second skin…She’s not really part of me inside. I don’t lose control or consciousness when I’m putting on Betty. She’s more like a piece of clothing I wear in public, a mask” (53).

The piano was Linda’s escape from her father’s abuse and her mother’s negligence. She plays to travel to some far part of herself, disconnected from the victim she cannot face. In order to get a piano at home, Linda had to “promise not to tell anyone about all those times when Daddy came to see [her] at night” (155). During a beating, Linda apologized: “If I say I’m sorry, if I don’t talk back or tell anyone what goes on in our house, my father will buy me the piano. There I can make all the sounds I want. I can cry out with my hands and no one will know it is animal pain coming out as music” (162).

The extent of the isolation, as a result of this abuse, effectively alienated her from the church. Unable to reconcile the God her father preached about, and the One who allowed the abuse to happen, Linda experienced “an aloneness that doesn’t just put you outside of your own family, but outside the family of God” (133). As a figure of religious authority, Linda’s father formed a divide between his children and the God they were taught to love, honor, and obey. This kind of schism caused the loss of not only their personal identity, but also their spiritual identity. The consequence for Linda: “good and evil are as bound together for me as religion and sex” (135).
The extent to which Linda was forced to maintain silence led to her inability to speak. The depth of her repression led to problems with memory. At times, language and memory were bound into one. During ‘memory slips,’ or flashbacks and sudden recall of certain memories, she experiences “these silences [she] hasn’t been able to break” (146). In these moments, Linda cannot find her voice, so she sometimes speaks in a childlike tone.

I’ve thought a lot about the reasons my voice may come out small and childlike, the sentences simple and monosyllabic. Speech develops at an early age. If your speech has been silenced from an early age about events over which you had no control, then maybe when the ability to speak about these events returns, it is a child’s voice because they are a child’s questions (147).

When she asks her therapist a question that had worried her for quite some time, “Will Mommy die?” Her “voice is small and vulnerable, like a little girl’s. [She is] ashamed that [she] said ‘Mommy’ and not ‘Mother’.” Her shame mutes her voice when the therapist asks why she thinks her mother will die:

I can’t speak again. Whether it’s fear of hearing the strangeness of my own voice, or fear of the answer, I’m not sure, but my voice has gone back inside (145).

When a friend became worried about Linda’s silence, she gave her a pen and paper to write her thoughts. But her writing was too fast for her thoughts, so she wrote with her left hand in order to join the speed of her writing with that of her thoughts. “Since the writing is more labored and takes longer, it’s easier to get the thoughts down. But it looks like a child’s scrawl, and I’m ashamed to have anyone see it” (146).

The child inside is often ashamed to be heard. But Linda needed to be heard, and believed. “The thing I needed most from my mother—to have her believe me—she couldn’t
give” (144). After witnessing the head-turning effect of Tourette’s syndrome, Linda remarked, “If I’d yelled ‘Fuck!’ when my father came into my room at night, I wonder if my mother would have paid attention” (206). She decides her mother would’ve washed her mouth out with soap, rather than acknowledge what was occurring.

The abuse stopped when Linda began to change, her hair turned from blond to brown, and she hit puberty. She finds a picture of herself at this time, and reflects on the time “when she lived in a land without gender,” and her father had stopped wanting her even before her breasts had developed. Her mother said she was ugly, but in this time, “just for a while,” Linda says, “I was me” (229).

But the fear held fast. He had once thrust an altar candle into her face and declared, “If you tell, you’ll burn in hell” (228). Through her ‘breaking silence’ group, she learned the costs of keeping silent. “Suicidal feelings, self-mutilation, eating disorders,” just to name a few. Linda thought of the possibility that her father might have other victims, besides her and her brothers. She speaks of this for the first time in the group, eventually deciding to tell the church of his transgressions. Feeling guilty with the verse “Honor thy father” echoing in her mind, she doubts her decision (Ephesians 6:2). When she learns that her mother had blamed the janitor, Mr. Perch, for abuse Linda knew her father had to be responsible for, she decides to continue with her allegations. “If I hand over my memories, he will erase them” (Cutting 166). Linda knows if she allows her father to continuously control her mind, she will have lost the only part of herself over which she had any control.

She knew Mr. Perch was not a child molester. Once when he found her cowering in the church basement, Mr. Perch had washed her father’s semen from her hands and, gazing into her eyes, told her, “Daddies shouldn’t do this to their little girls” (131). Linda’s father
pinned the blame anywhere he could. After she first confronted him, having remembered some of the abuse, he blamed his daughter’s therapist, accusing her of planting false memories (103).

*His* accusations were false, though, and she hadn’t been brainwashed. Her experiences were real. Regardless, Linda didn’t have much success with the majority of her therapists. An early counselor informed her that little girls often have sexual fantasies about their fathers (64). Though she knew it wasn’t her imagination, the doubt intensified. Years later, Linda stopped talking after telling her therapist about her father’s French kisses and the counselor asked if it was real or fantasy.

After her brother’s suicide, Linda visited a different therapist, a Holocaust survivor whose family had been killed. He told Linda, “Stay alive so you can tell” (3). The severity of the pain, though, made her want to forget. But forgetting the trauma event causes a “hole in the mind…it’s intrusive, unpredictable, [and] creates a state of helplessness” (73). For Linda, it leads to suicidal thoughts, insomnia (41) and night terrors (39). She quotes from *Trauma and Recovery* which states “healing requires the reconstruction of memory; the unspeakable must be spoken and heard” (Herman 177). This means reshaping reality, and in offering her story, she hopes for redemption (Cutting 3). For herself and for her readers who can sympathize with her.

Part of Linda’s recommended treatment involves a regimen of various art therapies. In art therapy, the purpose is “to draw what you can’t yet talk about [and] words will follow” (51). Indeed, her drawings speak, maybe not with words, but they give voice to an unspoken message. Linda draws Betty’s ghost “with a white chalk line that looks like Morse code”
The message here is obvious, as the mention of Morse code conjures the most common association with S.O.S. In other words, Linda is asking for help.

The process of art also provides an outlet for her fears and anxieties. Unable to return to her house after a period of institution, Linda told her therapist, “I may not have demons, but the house does” (228). The therapist advises her to exorcise them; art was the method she advised. Linda began by drawing her house, and placing a ‘ghost’ in every window, her brother’s, ex-husband, and herself at various ages. The one thing she doesn’t draw is her piano, in spite of the numerous hours she played in the house. “There is music in the walls there, but the music has no ghost. Maybe it’s the one purified element here that’s meant to live on.” When she exorcised the ghosts from her house, Linda realized the music was the one thing she didn’t want to purge. In her drawing, she sends the ghosts heavenward, floating out of the windows. Then, she draws the house empty, and herself locked outside. This time, drawing alone doesn’t work.

Her art therapist gives her a computer paper box and some magazines to construct her house. She pastes all kinds of pictures to the outside of the box, but the inside remains empty. So, she fills it with dreams of relationships, mothers and children, an old couple embracing, a mother and father bathing their child together. The only inanimate object is the piano she places in the box. The piano was the only constant in her life. She made the box her house, “a safe place to contain the past and perhaps to begin the future” (233). When she finishes her house, she writes the following narrative:

Ice queen, who are you?

“I am the mirror, your mother, yourself. I give you the part of me that needs nothing, feels nothing.”
Who is the man behind the door?

“There is no man. He’s a figment of your imagination.”

He’s there. I see him through the door. He’s holding a searchlight.

“I choose what I see. That is my power.”

That’s not power. It’s blindness. The little girl in your lap—do you see her?

She’s reaching out her hands. She needs you.

“The child is dead.”

Then you killed her, didn’t you? You killed her, and now you don’t even see her.

“Seeing only makes people afraid. I’m not afraid of anything.”

I’ll force you to see. I’ll close you inside my box, hold your face to the poison and make you drink.

“I am the poison.” (234)

But when she finishes writing, Linda feels nothing. Her therapist tells her it’s evocative, but it isn’t finished. When Linda asks what it needs, she responds, “It’s not what the writing needs. It’s what you need. The dialogue is a good beginning, but maybe you should try writing whatever feeling the ice queen is helping you avoid” (235). Fear, she tells Linda. The ice queen helps her avoid fear.


My mother was always threatening to die. I feared her death the way she feared her mother’s death. Her mother was always dying, always threatening to die. I fear my own death less than I fear my mother’s (235).
Another therapist peers into the box, sees the numerous pictures of mothers holding their babies, and the one without a baby or a mother. She asks, “So this is the suicidal one.” Then, she says, “She looks like she needs a mother. You’re going to have to learn to mother her. You’ll have to learn to mother yourself” (237).

Linda thinks of all of the mothers she’s had, the biological and all of the surrogates, the therapists, friends, teachers, and mothers of friends. But again, only her piano was always there for her.

It occurs to me that maybe that’s where I’ll begin. I’ll go home and touch the keys, listen to my own sound the way a mother would listen for her infant’s cry. Music is the language I understand best, where there are no words for the longing, where comfort comes at the fingertips, where a simple vibration disturbs the stillness in the air, lets you know you are not alone.

I need music. But I know I also need words. Giving a voice to what was once unutterable has saved my life (237).

Indeed writing has become a lifeline for Linda, and a little black journal travels with her at all times. If she does not record her thoughts, she becomes afraid that she will disown or forget them. The written account provides a source for corroborating her narrative, sort of an expert reinforcement: “My journals are my defense against my mother’s voice inside me that says, ‘This didn’t happen. You just imagined it.’ My journals are my place to say ‘Yes, it did.’” (100) Linda even considered becoming a writer, if she learned to write well enough. “A book of days could lead to a book of years, and I could write the story of my life. It could end happily ever after, two kids and a station wagon instead of two feet under a train” (220). It seems she believed the act of writing could lead to the ideal life, or at least something
closer to the American standard—with two kids and a station wagon. Though she gave consideration to the notion of publication, Linda’s writing was sacred to her and she generally needed it to remain private. She often wishes, while surrounded by her writing group, that she were in her “quiet room, writing in solitude” (124).

While writing about their dreams in the group, Linda begins to feel “the old longing to write a beautiful poem,” but she feels she isn’t and never will be a poet. As if she can read Linda’s mind, the therapist says, “The point is not to write the perfect poem, [but] to learn from your dreams.” After editing her numerous beginnings, Linda transcribes something not quite a poem, but that “contains some truth” (125).

You are the landlord
and I am the fool
for believing that anyone or anything
ever belonged to me.
The lowest of God’s creatures loves me best.
And you, God’s servant,
dressed in black,
inged round the neck with white,
have stolen my soul.
Still, like a dog,
I always come back.

When she finishes reading her poem to the group, the therapist asks Linda to name it.

“Betrayal,” I whisper.

And then I imagine him, the childless priest behind the screen, the screen we Protestants were never allowed.

“Father, I have sinned,” I would say.

“What is this sin, daughter?” he would ask with kindness. And since I would be Catholic, not Protestant, and the priest could not be my real father, I would no longer be afraid.
“I told, Father. I told.” (126)

This passage illustrates her association with religion. In her thoughts, the screen that separates her from the Catholic priest places some distance between him and Linda, protecting her from him. The priest cannot touch her, so she speaks freely with him. Because he is not her real father, she has no need to be afraid. But she feels like she must confess, since she disobeyed her father and revealed his sins.

Linda sits silent through most sessions of the Source group, which provides spiritual support. This form of therapy is difficult for Linda, for obvious reasons. Her religious views are defiled and her spiritual outlook has been corrupted by her father’s abuse. When the leader asks the group to find a word that means God to them, Linda chooses ‘truth.’ Then, she asks them to write what they wish God meant to them. Linda writes: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I don’t have to stay. Soon I’ll be walking out of here. I will probably fear everything. God will go with me. But my dog and my piano will comfort me” (159).

Linda attends a Quaker meeting, which provides a unique contrast to the ceremony in hypocrisy that her father conducts each Sunday. The meeting is silent, with no music or minister, nothing to force a connection between God and the followers. “There are only people breathing together, praying or waiting for the Holy Spirit to move them.” And the introspection she experiences during the meeting becomes her only “formal connection to God” (165).

Playing the piano seems to provide a further connection to God. The abuse stopped, for the most part, when she received the piano—the bribe for promising not to tell. The music she produced was another form of speaking, another form of voice. And when she
finally plays in concert again after recovering from the breakdown she suffered following her the suicide of both of her brothers, Linda will “speak, hoping the words will take [her] home” (238). She feels grateful to be returning to the concert stage with this old friend, knowing that it too, has endured change, the passage of time, and a number of moves. Tonight I am finally free to make music for its own sake.

The doors open. I walk out on stage, hear the applause, and feel a slight flutter in my stomach. I take a deep breath, bow, then sit, adjusting the bench until I am calm. I wait for the silence, the music that fills my memory. When I finally feel I can take my time, I begin (240).

This ‘coda,’ the conclusion to Linda’s memoir, shows the extent of her connection to her piano, and the quieting quality the music has on her mind. The way the music calms her memory. And she has found freedom from her abuse, though it may not be lasting, but it provides some temporary relief—however slight—to “make music for its own sake.”

This is the nature of therapy. The effects can be lasting, but most survivors still struggle with the residual pain of trauma. In the conclusion, we will examine the forms of art therapy. Then, we’ll talk about the one true cure—prevention—and the societal changes such a cure necessitates. Then, we will conclude with a sort of story time, listening to a multiplicity of victims’ voices and experiences.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Part One: After Rape—Treatment with Art Therapy

In “Bridging the Black Hole of Trauma: The Evolutionary Significance of the Arts,” Sandra L. Bloom, M.D. posits that all methods of artistic performance have the effect of mending the damage done by dissociation. Bloom identifies mental disorders as a fragmenting of the mind, as the ancient native tribe of the Navajo believe “to be sick is to be fragmented. To become healed is to become whole.” According to Plato, Asclepius—the ancient Greek god of healing—could facilitate “love and reconciliation between the most antithetic elements in the body.” Followers of Asclepius, the therapeutes, performed rituals of poetry, songs, music, and theater to serve the god. The modern mind can be healed with these artistic ventures, Bloom asserts, as the act of creating art serves to mend the two hemispheres of the brain, which trauma had torn asunder.

The origins of trauma trace back to when man was hunted. Before the age of civilization, humans were not predators, but food for the various carnivores roaming the earth. In order to survive, humans adapted, bonded and fought together. We developed a form of communication and, eventually, language. We also developed a capacity for information retention. Encoded alongside the retained information was the emotive response associated with that data. The stronger the emotional impact at the time of the original event, the more likely the memory will elicit the same reaction (i.e. fear).

Bloom says that, like a computer processor frozen by excessive information, “traumatic experience produces a psychological overload that the brain and body are unable to adequately manage and continue functioning normally.” Dissociation is the innate defense
mechanism employed to cope with this overload. Although beneficial for short-term survival, via escape from emotion, dissociation “produces fragmentation of vital mental functions, and the result is diminished integration and therefore impaired performance.” If the trauma occurred during childhood, when the victim was unable to either flee or fight back, the enduring effect is separation from emotion entirely. The paralyzing quality of trauma effectively disconnects the language areas of the brain. “Memory functions shift, so that verbal memory—the memory we draw upon when we are thinking—is diminished or shut down entirely… The result is that we lose language—we lose the capacity to put the most terrifying aspects of an experience into words and therefore we cannot ‘remember’ those aspects of the events, meaning we cannot put them into words.”

The human brain makes order of reality through language. Therefore, when those areas are disabled during the traumatic event, we cannot logically organize the experience for memory retention. The outcome is a ‘haunting’ of sorts, in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, and behavioral reenactments. These continue until another occasion arises which enables the mind to restructure the memory so the trauma becomes incorporated with a new meaning. If this opportunity never occurs, the victim—who is now traumatized by the defective machinations of her own mind—is likely to develop destructive behaviors, as she struggles to cope with the initial ordeal. These behaviors include, but are not limited to, addiction, compulsive behavior, anxiety, depression, and phobia, and can lead to a myriad of other disorders of neurosis and psychosis.
The dual-brain theory, first introduced into the neuropsychology field by Roger W. Sperry, who shared the 1981 Nobel Prize in Medicine for his work with split-brain research⁹, proposes that the right-side of the brain deals with the emotional or nonverbal aspects of communication, as well as music, drawing, singing, poetry, and special constructive, and the experience and expression of negative emotions, whereas the left-side controls language and verbal communication.

In her book, *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman, M.D. discusses the difficulty for most survivors to speak of their traumatic experiences. Since she believes an essential step to recovery is constructing the trauma story, Herman maps out the process of reconstructing the traumatic event as “a recitation of fact” (177).

Out of the fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation, patient and therapist slowly reassemble an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical context… As the narrative closes in on the most unbearable moments, the patient finds it more and more difficult to use words. At times the patient may spontaneously switch to nonverbal methods of communication, such as drawing or painting. Given the “iconic,” visual nature of traumatic memories, creating pictures may represent the most effective initial approach to these “indelible images”… The ultimate goal, however, is to put the story, including its imagery, into words… The patient’s first attempts to develop a narrative language may be partially dissociated. She may write down her story in an altered state of consciousness and then disavow it. She may throw it away, hide it, or forget she has written it… The recitation of

⁹ “The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 1981 was divided, one half awarded to Roger W. Sperry ‘for his discoveries concerning the functional specialization of the cerebral hemispheres,’ the other half jointly to David H. Hubel and Torsten N. Wiesel ‘for their discoveries concerning information processing in the visual system’ (nobelprize.org).
facts without the accompanying emotions is a sterile exercise, without therapeutic effect. As Breuer and Freud noted a century ago, “recollection without affect almost invariably produces no result.” At each point in the narrative, therefore, the patient must reconstruct not only what happened but also what she felt… Throughout the exploration of the trauma story, the therapist is called upon to provide a context that is at once cognitive, emotional, and moral. The therapist normalizes the patient’s responses, facilitates naming and the use of language, and shares the emotional burden of the trauma. She also contributes to constructing a new interpretation of the traumatic experiences that affirms the dignity and value of the survivor (177-9).

Psychotherapy does not get rid of the trauma. The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism. In the process of reconstruction, the trauma story does undergo a transformation, but only in the sense of becoming more present and more real. The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling. In the telling, the trauma story becomes a testimony. Inger Agger and Soren Jensen, in their work with refugee survivors of political persecution, note the universality of testimony as a ritual of healing. Testimony has both a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual, and a public aspect, which is political and judicial… Richard Mollica describes the transformed trauma story as simply a “new story,” which is “no longer about shame and humiliation” but rather “about dignity and virtue.” Through their storytelling, his refugee patients “regain the world they have lost” (181).

Indeed, one survivor of childhood abuse has devoted her entire life not only to her own recovery, but also to the rehabilitation of inmates convicted of rape and assault. Jane
Orleman believes in the personal and political nature of art, and the message of testimony conveyed in such work. The multidimensional imagery in her compositions functions to translate her experience of private trauma into “the public discourse of gender politics by suggesting confluences between familial and cultural patriarchy” (Marstine, “Self Revealed”).

Orleman believes that “one can interact with the past in such a way as to change the future, both personally and collectively” (Marstine, “Challenging the Gendered Categories” 634). To find her own salvation, she has spoken to groups of both survivors and perpetrators. And to heal her own pain, she speaks through her paintings. Orleman has worked with a therapist to integrate the narrative of her experiences, as well as her dreams, into her life so that her art functions not only as an outlet for her anxieties, emotions, and fears, but also to order them, making them less invasive. In essence, Orleman’s art allows her to circumvent the permanent dissociation suffered by so many adult-child survivors. She says that her art “refers to the ability to join hands with one’s true self and interact with the past in such a way as to affect the future.” Her paintings are the product of her own excavation through her inner layers, and “the exhibition and publication of [her] images sets them free, allowing them to travel from [her] sphere to [the viewers], going from the personal to the collective. I offer you my images, my dreams and my reflections.”

About The Offering, Jane Orleman says, “I am sacrificing my face, the mask that has protected me, to
nourish those who follow. In our discussions about this imagery, Dr. W. [Jane’s therapist] brought up the concept of service. He spoke of how important it has proven to be for people recovering from emotional traumas (and addictions) to share their gift of health. What is given freely to others deepens in one's self.”

Jane became inspired, herself, by the artist and Holocaust Survivor Charlotte Salomon, whose self-portraits offer a testimonial to the viewer. Holocaust studies theorist Michael Rothberg declares that testimony differs from confession because a “testimonial demands that a survivor use the personal voice so that she cannot be discredited as passive victim” (Marstine, “Challenging” 639). A confession acts as request for absolution, as if the victim were guilty of the very crime committed against her. Testimony redirects the focus and, therefore, the blame from the victim onto “the cultural norms that condone trauma” (639). In Orleman’s paintings, the voice of the child is not only apparent, but forceful, as Jane’s memories and insights play out on canvas, breaking the silent objectification of the child-as-victim and the adult-as-survivor.

*Deep Dark Secret* shows the literal translation of a victim, unable to escape the chains that bind her to her own home and the abuse she must endure. The setting upstairs, with the comfortable chair, and the idyllic scene visible from the parted curtains provide stark contrast to the naked and vulnerable child. As viewers, we are confronted with the existence of abuse, even in seemingly normal homes. We are forced to “ask ourselves how abuse may have invaded our own seemingly ordinary lives and the life of our community” (Marstine 639).
Jane did not publicly identify herself a survivor until after the death of her mother in 1989. When she began psychotherapy in 1990, Orleman felt “liberated to explore her childhood’s trauma directly,” which opened her for self-discovery. Her therapist, Dr. Andrew Whitmont, “helped her to articulate her memories and to repossess her body” (638). Her told her to begin by recording her dreams and role-play with art by painting her memories (651). Together, they then worked through the unspoken messages in both her dreams and her paintings. As Jane says about her book *Telling Secrets: An Artist’s Journey Through Childhood Trauma*, “the dreams associated with the images in this book are usually from the night before or after starting a new painting. The interconnections of the dreams and images are not always readily apparent to me. It is the process of viewing the art and dreams in retrospect that has yielded glimmers of enlightenment… I see dreams as parables told to us by the personal and/or collective unconscious. As such, others can find their own meanings in my dreams just as they might in a story or a poem” (reflectorart.com). This notion of interpreting other victims’ dreams like poetry further speaks to the mutually therapeutic nature of art in all forms.

As an alumnus of Central Washington University, Jane’s work was featured in an exhibition at the Sarah Spurgeon Gallery in 2000, entitled “Self Revealed: A 30-Year Retrospective.” For the first time, Orleman was able to display her paintings without fear of censorship. Her previous shows had been protested, as picketers proclaimed her work was too graphic, too obscene, as “the speech of incest survivors has been especially restricted on the grounds that it is too disgusting and disturbing to the listeners' constructed sensibilities” (Alcoff & Gray 266). But Jane feels that protecting viewers from her art has the effect of

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10 Her father had died several years earlier (Marstine 638).
placing the blame on her—the survivor—as if she committed a greater crime by visually chronicling her abuse. Michael Rothberg, who studies Holocaust testimonial writing, describes the philosophy behind Orleman’s work as “traumatic realism,” which represents “a site of extreme violence as a borderland of extremity and everydayness.” Works of traumatic realism effectively transmute the event of tribulation into knowledge—as opposed to speculation—which then reprograms and transforms its audience, forcing them to “acknowledge their relationship to posttraumatic culture” (Marstine 639).

Jane Orleman is often referred to as “that child-abuse artist” by academics and critics (635). Marstine claims that most artists who are also survivors avoid rape depiction, because they don’t want to be labeled as victims (640). However, just as she waited until her mother died to go public with her story, it is equally possible that people in other survivor-artists’ lives prevent them—at least in their own minds—from reporting the abuse. In a dream description, Jane tells of children who held a secret. “Someone was shooting them one by one, so they wouldn’t tell. A high-powered rifle was used so that death took them unaware. A teenage girl, who couldn’t speak, wrote music to tell the secret. Just as she was conducting the symphony to play the piece she was shot. I had the sense of both doing the shooting and being shot.”

In Daddy Enraged (left), Jane illustrates an interpretation of this dream by painting her father’s reaction to her divulging the secret of abuse. “Dr. W. guided me through role-playing with my three aspects of self. I simply couldn’t take the role of my angry self. So when I got
home, I decided to let her paint again. For the first time, I painted a ‘child view’ image in a life-size scale. I have been going through yet another spiral of emotion centered on my father. I am seeing how very wrong it was, and is, for anyone to be beaten. No one has the right to beat others, especially helpless children. Like the girl in the dream, I have found a way around the taboo on telling. But I also have to be alert to ways that I try to shoot myself down by demeaning my efforts” (reflectorart.com).

The girl that wrote music could be Linda Katherine Cutting who—like Jane Orleman—also faced breaking the vow of silence she made to her father. (Thankfully, Linda survived through the telling, in order to transmit Memory Slips to us.) Indeed, Dr. Herman tells that “survivors who grew up in abusive families have often cooperated for years with a family rule of silence. In preserving the family secret, they carry the weight of a burden that does not belong to them.” When they finally break the silence, “they renounce the burden of shame, guilt, and responsibility, and place this burden on the perpetrators, where it properly belongs” (200). Unfortunately, this undertaking is difficult in most cases and even terrifying to some victims, but a necessary step nonetheless. Jane Orleman says, “The first step in stopping child abuse and domestic violence is to acknowledge those crimes.” And, much like the personal and political nature of Orleman’s art, a victim must acknowledge the abuse, not just to herself, but also to the world.

When a victim is able to articulate her story, whether through written or spoken words, painting or performance, she participates in a liberating experience that transcends herself. In the process, she gains a clarity that aids in the reordering of her own reality, which quiets the mental and emotional discord she has experienced. The process of telling and repeating her story of trauma lessens the intensity of the emotions associated with
memories of the event. Dr. Herman says this happens because “it has become a part of the survivor’s experience,” but only one part—and not even the most important or most interesting part—of the victim’s life story (195).

The act of telling the story mends the parts of the victim’s life back together. Maya Angelou’s telling of her childhood experience in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an example of how the storytelling writing process can be cathartic: “The almost novelistic clarity of *Caged Bird* results from the artistic tension between Angelou’s recollected self and her authorial consciousness. Implicit in this dual awareness is the knowledge that events are significant not merely in themselves, but also because they have been transcended” (McMurry 25). In his writing group studies, Pennebaker discovered that people benefited from writing because, through the process, they progressed from “poorly organized descriptions to coherent stories by the last day of writing” (165). Bloom believes this is because writing engages both hemispheres of the brain. Since writing began in the form of pictures, not alphabetic symbols or signs, the act of writing focuses the verbal (left) and the nonverbal (right) hemispheres into one integrating process (“Bridging the Black Hole”).

Mexican artist Diego Rivera used numerous historical sources to paint an accurate depiction of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico. In essence, he brought life to those texts, and his paintings brought life to the experience for generations to come. For sure, women can paint the event exactly as they experienced it, but art frees them to revise their trauma, enabling them to act in a revision of their own story. Either way, the various forms of art enable survivors of trauma to articulate their experience without facing the difficulty of

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11 Colette Deble is an artist who questions the phallocentric tradition in the history of painting by repainting the great representations of women, and Jacques Derrida says she “speaks through painting, images, and color” (Dely 11).
verbalizing it. If victims use nothing but one color, they can convey a message. The act of mixing and working with the medium, then applying it to canvas engages the entire body, and “if the terrible truth of rape and torture is hidden in the female body, if the violated body carries the truth inside” (Marciniak 872), then survivors should use the whole body to create. If they so desire, they can drop the brush and paint with their hands and fingers. In this way, they can also form a physical connection with their work. They can experiment with the different kinds of paints—oil, acrylic, watercolor—then drawing—pencil, charcoal, pen and ink—and add color—chalk, oil pastels, marker, colored pencil. They can try other modes, such as sculpture—either clay or carving—three-dimensional models, jewelry, landscape, collage, and on and on. All forms of art, including writing, bring life to experience. Visual and performance arts provide an alternative, but can also be complementary to the written work. For some, words won’t come after trauma; for others, emotions won’t. Many researchers as well as victims believe that one cannot recover if the words and the feelings never come. Many victims believe their silence or numbness protects them from the “emotional, financial, and physical difficulties that such disclosures can create.” Alcoff and Gray state, “Disclosures can elicit horrifying flashbacks, insomnia, eating disorders, depression, back pain, suicidal thoughts, and other assorted problems, which the survivor often has to hide from co-workers and cope with alone” (281). But, as we’ve seen, keeping it inside in silence can cause, and most likely, will cause the same problems. The general consensus is that repressed memories fester. Not purging the trauma has a negative effect on victims and, in some cases, can be more damaging than the original traumatic event.
In his study, “Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process,” James Pennebaker determined that keeping silence and concealing secrets of traumatic events is detrimental to the victim’s overall health.

Active inhibition is a form of physiological work. This inhibitory work, which is reflected in autonomic and central nervous system activity, could be viewed as a long-term low-level stressor. Such stress, then, could cause or exacerbate psychosomatic processes, thereby increasing the risk of illness and other stress-related disturbances. Just as constraining thoughts, feelings, or behaviors linked to an emotional upheaval is stressful, letting go and talking about these experiences should reduce the stress of inhibition… Individuals who conceal their gay status, conceal traumatic experiences in their past, or are considered inhibited or shy by other people exhibit more health problems than those who are less inhibited (164).

This follows along with what Laurie Halse Anderson tells us, that you can’t block pain. “It’s like a river—block it one place and it floods somewhere else. Try and hide from your pain and it’ll hurt you in a different place” (Glenn 43). Dr. Herman reiterates this, as she tells us that because people who suffer from PTSD experience heightened levels of alertness, this increase “persists during sleep as well as in the waking state, resulting in numerous types of sleep disturbance. People with PTSD take longer to fall asleep, are more sensitive to noise, and awaken more frequently during the night” (37). Many rape survivors suffer from PTSD, given the particular nature of their trauma, which involves the physical and psychological, as well as the moral violation of a victim (57).

If trauma endures unmanaged, the survivor’s distress channels into misguided action, further fragmenting the victim:
Trapped in time, while the world moves on around him, the victim is neither alive or dead. He cannot escape the trap alone, the biological reverberations have set up a snare which grabs at him and refuses to let go. So, he does the only thing left to do—he speaks in the only voice he has—in the language of the nonverbal brain. He acts… One man tries to jump off a building, another woman repeatedly runs razor blades across her breasts, another buys an assault weapon and sprays bullets across a crowded street (Bloom).

The original trauma, then, breeds further suffering with destruction, desperation, and helpless rage. “Traumatized people are doing what they are biologically evolved to do: engage their social group in a healing dialogue, a shared experience of pain” (Bloom). And we see this throughout the history of literature, as with the title character of Samuel Richardson’s eighteenth century Clarissa. After being drugged, then violated, Clarissa “could only waste away and die. When her death was imminent she cheerfully ordered an exquisitely etched coffin and kept it in her bedroom. ‘She writes and reads upon it, as others would upon a desk’” (O’Keefe 19). It was as if her only option was suicide, and even her writing was done on her coffin.

With Lucky, Alice speaks to a classmate named Maria, who has been hospitalized following her suicide attempt. Maria’s father and brothers had repeatedly raped her during her childhood years. She told Alice, “Your poem said all the things I’ve been feeling inside for years. All the things I’m so afraid of feeling” (148). Maria did not have any sort of community, any support system to help her survive. Even when she tried to tell her mother, “she said she didn’t want to hear it. She promised she would not tell my father as long as I never mentioned it again. She’s not speaking to me” (147).
We see this lack of support in *Speak*, when Melinda runs an open paper clip across her wrist: “Pitiful. If a suicide attempt is a cry for help, then what is this? A whimper, a peep? I draw little windowcracks of blood, etching line after line until it stops hurting. It looks like I arm-wrestled a rosebush” (87). And when her mother sees the next morning, her reply is, “I don’t have time for this, Melinda” (88). She tells her that “suicide is for cowards” and leaves the matter in silence.

Both of Linda’s brothers commit suicide, which send repercussions that threaten to destroy her foundation. And, after she tells about her abuse, she worries that her father will kill her.

I decided to take my life first, with an overdose. I wasn’t successful. I spent a month in the hospital. While I was there, I received a long letter from my mother. She wanted me to know that all four of her children had experienced a happy childhood, and that clearly, since I had attempted suicide, I was demon possessed (228). None of these women had support, not even from their mothers. In fact, as aforementioned, when Linda reports the abuse, her mother responds by saying she’d rather not believe Linda than have to leave her husband (144).

Many throughout history have spoken against victims taking their own lives, as Augustine said, “When a woman has been ravished without her consenting and forced by another’s sin, she has no reason to punish herself by a voluntary death” (Brownmiller 328). However, for many survivors, suicide remains to be a tempting permanent escape from the pain: “The suicide rate for incest victims is two to three times higher than rates for the depressed… Suicide attempts among rape victims occur ten times more frequently than the population average” (Schiraldi 44).
During World War II, if a Jewish man raped a German woman, she was encouraged to kill herself. Still today some Muslim countries sanction the union of victim and rapist in marriage. However, “when such a match fails to occur, the shamed family often resorts to the ‘honor killing’ of the rape victim” (Mardorossian 763). Therefore, if certain cultures endorse suicide and even homicide, it seems logical that so many victims would see death as their only option for exodus. And if they lack a healthy support system, the isolation can quickly lead to overwhelming despair and irretrievable loss.

The goal, then, is to heal the broken self, and this requires a shared experience. Promoting productive experiences in which survivors participate in art exhibits and literature readings—rather than destructive acts of violence, which propagate further acts of trauma—can lead to the strengthening of their own disposition, as well that of their cohorts.

Marstine asserts that Jane Orleman is a part of the new feminist art therapy “that acknowledges both the cultural and biographical elements that influence a client’s struggles and that encourages social activism as a mode of healing” (651). In the process, a victim must “articulate the values and beliefs that she once held and that the trauma destroyed. She stands mute before the emptiness of evil, feeling the insufficiency of any known system of explanation. Survivors of atrocity of every age and every culture come to a point in their testimony where all questions are reduced to one, spoken more in bewilderment than in outrage: Why? The answer is beyond human understanding” (Herman 178).

The best cure for disease is prevention. Rather than ask why, we should focus on the how, asking instead: how do we prevent this from happening?
Part Two: Before Rape—Prevention, The Cure

More than anything else, every rape victim wants to return to her former self and reclaim her pre-rape identity. We witness this in *Lucky*, when Alice desires to return to the way life was before. Her parents purchase white night gowns, and she spends much of her time wearing these garments as if they could redeem her lost identity, as if the raiment could mend her broken virginity (58). In *Speak*, Melinda recalls childhood memories, when her family took a trip to an apple orchard:

One time when I was little, my parents took me to an orchard. Daddy set me high in an apple tree. It was like falling up into a storybook, yummy and read and leaf and the branch not shaking a bit. Bees bumbled through the air, so stuffed with apple they couldn’t be bothered to sting me. The sun warmed my hair, and a wind pushed my mother into my father’s arms, and all the apple-picking parents and children smiled for a long, long minute (66).

Melinda also longs to return to a time when she had the perfect balance of freedom and protection: “I want to be in fifth grade again… Fifth grade was easy—old enough to play outside without Mom, too young to go off the block. The perfect leash length” (99). With *Memory Slips*, Linda doesn’t remember the time before the incest began; after she tells on her father, she wants to recant her testimony so they might become a “big, unhappy family again” (164).

Recovery, according to *The PTSD Sourcebook*, means “a return to your former state of functioning” (51). Of course, this definition implies that victims can never experience a full and complete recovery, as it is impossible to reverse time and undo the damage. Healing, however, means “to make whole” (51). It is possible to heal, to mend the self that
was broken by trauma, and to gain a new, stronger identity in the process. As Alice said, one can undergo a “death-and-rebirth phenomenon in the span of one year” (204). Regrettably, the process is never that simple.

The general idea in health care says prevention of disease is always preferable to treatment. Such is the case for the social disease of rape (and when I say this, in absolutely no way do I mean for it to be used as an individual defense, as the concept of alcoholism-as-disease is often used. I am referring to rape as a social disease, a problem that stems from society and affects everyone). It is preferable to increase the focus of our energy and resources on preventing the occurrence of rape—for the victim to avoid the trauma—rather than just on treating the damages resulting from rape—for the victim to try to recover. That being said, because rape does exist, we also have to consider more effective ways to treat the trauma that results from rape. Here we must consider the role of identity and socialization in the prevention of rape.

In spite of the distance of almost four decades between Brownmiller’s monumental book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, the overall message remains essentially the same. Theory deals inadequately with the experience of rape, and the majority ignores the national disparities in education, family life, socioeconomic status, media portrayal and degradation of certain races, and numerous other factors. Recovery is based on inner-change, and therapy focuses on the self. To actually prevent rape from happening in the first place, a larger, more global change is required. Rape prevention requires extensive change to the systems involved in the perpetuation of abuse. Thus far, no one seems to have been able to present a viable, comprehensive solution to these problems. And most participants in the discussion give contradictory statements when they assert that speaking out hurts the cause,
by focusing so intently on the inner self, but then they all seem to concur that communicating the experience is necessary for these changes. It seems, then, that they believe talking just isn’t enough. But as I said, they don’t present any concrete solutions or suggestions for overhauling the whole thing, in order to change the system, and the majority of theorists are, themselves, doing nothing more than talking about the current situation.

What's more, the majority is fighting amongst themselves, quibbling about the various degrees of badness, as with Frye and Foe, who say “the closer the incursion comes to the center of a person’s identity, the worse the act is” (Haag 52). Likewise, they debate over rhetoric: whereas the so-called right-wing believe “women are like other rugged individuals and should be rescued from the indignities of ‘victim feminism,’” the left-wing supposedly “stylize the victim, exaggerating her vulnerabilities and indignities to enshrine her as a singularly damaged subject” (61). The effect of these intra-feminist debates is “paralyzing opposition,” a stand-still, and stagnation (63).

But their oppositional—sometimes even combative—stance follows in line with the national policy of using violence as diplomacy, wherein we strike at our ‘enemy’ in conflict rather than find a mutually beneficial resolution. (The argument could be made that most American conflicts with other countries stem from wanting what is not rightly ours, and our determination to acquire what we want, whatever the cost). In fact, the lines between war veterans and rape victims are solidly drawn, as the same system that perpetuates the violence of war also disseminates rape. And as Mardorossian states, “Representing women as the peacekeepers of rape culture will only result in making them responsible for the war they could not prevent” (758). Alice articulates almost this same statement: “Violence only begat
violence. Couldn’t they see it left all the real work to the women? The comforting and the near impossible task of acceptance” (Sebold 222).

In fact, following her rape, when Alice reads *Trauma and Recovery*, she finds herself “reading about [her]self [and] also reading about war veterans” (238). While staying at a rural artists’ colony in California, she bonds with a World War II veteran named Bob Willis. She says that war had given Bob a “sixth sense that turned on when [he] felt danger near” (238); rape had done the same for Alice. She could sense what a person perceived of her, as she had developed an acute sensing mechanism (97). She also recognizes the symptoms of PTSD in herself. She fills her dream journals with graphically vivid images of the Holocaust (228) and begins to find comfort in violence. “New York meant violence to me… All this violence had reassured me… Surviving this year by year was an honor mark that people wore proudly” (242).

It is not uncommon for rape survivors to relate to war veterans. Women that work in shelters and crisis centers “often describe their work as analogous to war. But war mobilizes people against impersonal, demonized enemies” (Haaken 117). Rape is incredibly personal, as it involves trespassing into a woman’s innermost private territory, where she is not a willing party as she did not enlist to participate in the act. However, the nature of violation often has the same isolating, enduring effects. Since the aftermath of rape virtually equals that of war, perhaps we should train women in the same way—so they can function on autopilot in the event of an attack.

In 1975, Susan Brownmiller said, “What women need is systematic training in self-defense that begins in childhood, so that the inhibition resulting from the prohibition may be overcome” (403). In her article, “Putting Your Body on the Line,” Pamela Haag reconfirms
this, emphasizing the importance of physically training young girls, including definite “mental and ideological revision.” She highlights an instance in 1972 when thousands of raped women in Bangladesh were proclaimed “national war heroines” (36). Her proposal involves a process of preparation and visualization, where women develop contingency plans that will help them respond automatically, should the situation ever arise. Haag feels this is effective because, if the brain is running on autopilot it cannot be paralyzed by fear. “It’s the fear of being struck that is paralyzing, not the reality. In a confrontation you probably won’t be aware of any injury until it’s all over” (37). Indeed during an attack, adrenaline rushes and endorphins run high, so pain receptors would be all but numbed.

However, some feel that “women will only get hurt struggling against a man,” and Haag confirms this: “Struggling will only get the woman injured. Fighting may work” (36). The key is to know how to fight. Arguing against the rape-script, Leslie Tanner, Susan Pascale, and Rebecca Moon believe self-defense training will inscribe “will, anger, and revolt ‘into the muscles’ and the body” (Haag 36). This paraphrases what Susan Brownmiller said, that self-defense educates girls to effectively exploit their body’s natural weapons (52). Susan Griffin states that women need to learn “how to defend themselves, to shoot guns and to learn karate” (46).

In Jane Orleman’s painting, Locked in Fear, she shows the response her ‘child self’ gave when asked “how she felt about her defense capabilities.” For years, her therapist had mentioned “Take Charge,” an organization that teaches “full force self-defense.” She had always thought it sounded like “a great idea for someone else to
do,” but after seeing her child-self’s response, Jane decided to give it a try, as a “challenging way to celebrate her 54th birthday.”

Jane says this about the resulting painting, *Turning the Tables*:

“I don't feel threatened in my world today. The decision to ‘Take Charge’ is a gift I am giving to my child self. I want her to feel safe and powerful. She exhibits confidence and good form in this image painted towards the end of the course. There were fourteen women in the class. All of us knew what it was to be assaulted and have no means of defense. Some were totally panicked to be touched by a man. We had two courageous and compassionate men, highly athletic instructors, who played the part of assailants. They were well padded. We learned to deliver full force blows, placed in such a way as to put them out of action. We had a marvelous female instructor right beside us, coaching and encouraging every step of the way. When panic stopped us, she helped turn that terror into action-full force self defense. Three past graduates filled out the instructional team. They gave support and kept us moving. With their skills and each woman's commitment, the class bonded as a group in the first session. I was the oldest by fifteen years and not in the best of shape. Although we each had handicaps to overcome or work within, there was never any doubt that we would all emerge triumphant.”

Indeed too much attention is spent on the ‘after’ phase of rape. Furthermore, psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists examine the female mind as if we hold the key
to stopping our own abuse, as much of the scholarship on male violence has focused their studies on women. “Experts examine women’s physical and mental health, attitudes to gender ideology, personalities, religious beliefs, interpersonal skills, previous experiences with violence, and last but not least their ‘low self-esteem.’ They explain the issue of male violence by invoking the victim’s psyche and create new categories such as ‘self-defeating personality disorder’ to explain the rape away” (Mardorossian 753). They propose the theory of a rape-script. But if a script really does exist, it is because it has been written for us. The true script differs from the one that proclaims every woman is inherently rapable. The concept that runs counter is the continuum theory, which shows that lesser actions like verbal harassment, though minor, are still measures in the progression towards rape. Using this theory, we can magnify the script until the parts of the whole problem become apparent, so that we may have the ability to modify and revise. The study of cultural memory shows that society selectively transfers the norms, conventions, and practices that will affect the appropriate personal identity in each member of the group, traits that the authority finds necessary to ensure its continuation, as “what a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender” (Hirsch & Smith 5).

Regrettably, current movements work towards change in ways that subvert the hegemonic structure without causing too much disruption to its foundation. As Alcoff and Gray said, “in major U.S. media, previously excluded survivor speech is now included in ways that do not seriously threaten patriarchy” (270). Martin Luther King, Jr. would take issue with this tactic, as he felt social change necessitates some pressure, “some tension which is necessary for growth” (Haag 28). Change demands some threat to patriarchy.
Let us examine ways to alter current ideals of gender identity by changing our methods of socialization. Let us discuss the introduction of a more humanist education, one that fosters growth and improvement in character, rather than breeding future Donald Trumps and Hugh Hefners. Our canon of literature says a lot about our cultural values; therefore, the books our children read provide an important insight into the desired cultural memory, political ideas, and social norms of citizens (O’Keefe 21). However, typically girls become more involved than boys with reading, as many male children find it to be an “activity that is girlish in that it earns approval from one’s elders that requires sitting still for long periods of time” (26).

Boys are expected to exhibit virility, especially during adolescence, and may feel that showing interest in a book with a girl in the title role, no matter how good that book might be, would not be considered “manly.” On the other hand, it is considered acceptable in [our] male-oriented society for adolescent girls to read books featuring boys (Allen 8). Let us alter the contemporary perception of hero. Rather than hold to the war-hero, the icons of Gilgamesh, Odysseus, and Beowulf, let us shift the emphasis from the overpowering nature of physical might onto the mental and moral strength of the character. In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell defines a hero as “someone whose visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is born” (Lehr 30). Most notably, Campbell avows that his definition applies to females, as well as males. Stories with strong female
characters have to do with behavior, morality, and social conflicts. Regardless of the gender of the character, these issues apply to boys as well as girls (Allen 8).

As fiction “creates as well as reflects codes of behavior,” we must scrutinize the texts our children study (Brown & St. Clair 2). In Plato’s Republic, Socrates declares that men and women must “share a common education,” as well as “bring up their children in common and have a common responsibility… Women should take part in all the same occupations as men, in peace and in war, watching and hunting them like watchdogs,” as there is “nothing unwomanly in this natural partnership of the sexes” (224). Whereas Socrates felt a woman could be a guardian or ‘watchdog’ just as easily as could a man, a male protagonist can be “gentle, thoughtful, caring, and as openhearted as he is open-minded” (Lehr 30). Indeed, it is important to provide readers with a variety of unique characters, who are both positive and realistic, regardless of gender. Author Thomas A. Barron has written three young adult novels featuring a female adolescent protagonist. While developing his character, he takes care to ensure she is believable and balanced, which is to say not too masculine and not too feminine. Of course some would probably argue that such androgyny in a character would have the effect of alienating those readers who are either very masculine or feminine. However, the circulation and sales of certain popular children’s novels, such as Sara Pennypacker’s Clementine series—the namesake of which is a precocious and sometimes misfortunate young girl—seem to contradict their argument. As an imperfect gender-neutral character, whose own mother says that—compared to her brother—she’s “the hard one” (17), Clementine apparently appeals to all children. Barron says his character must be “strong as well as vulnerable, wise as well as innocent, thoughtful as well as passionate, capable of raging as well as of forgiving. She could not be a two-dimensional character; she must be
wholly herself, fully integrating qualities that might seem on the surface contradictory. She must glory in her independence, as well as in her gender, affirming herself naturally and gracefully” (Lehr 33).

As we discussed in the introduction, standard fairy tales teach us that heroine must be passive and submissive, whereas the more aggressive females are evil step-mothers and witches. Hirsch and Smith state, “Identity, whether individual or cultural, becomes a story that stretches from the past to the present and the future, that connects the individual to the group, and that is structured by gender and related identity markers” (8). Altering that story, as our contemporary children’s narratives do, can change social standards of identity and gender. Furthermore, when children learn to evaluate those fairy tales in terms of their implications, those tales actually can remain as a vital part of the didactic canon. “Feminist studies and memory studies both presuppose that the present is defined by a past that is constructed and contested. Both fields assume that we do not study the past merely for its own sake; rather, we do so to meet the needs of the present. Both fields emphasize the situatedness of the individual in his or her social and historical context and are thus suspicious of universal categories of experience” (Hirsch & Smith12).

Therefore, let all children read accounts of abuse and survival, as well as the literature of the oppressed. Studies show that inner-city minority groups of children benefit from narrative like The House on Mango Street as they can relate to the characters’ and their problems (Schaafsma & Tendero). But why should they be the only ones to read these stories? Let the children in Manhattan read the same stories as the children of East St. Louis. Let Caucasian boys read I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Guide them through analysis, to find the keys to empathy for humankind. As Freire said, “Establish trust with dialogue” (90).
Make space for open dialogue, and reassure them of the safety to speak. “Books,” writes Marcel Proust, “are children of silence,” written and read alone. But they don’t have to be read alone. When children read and discuss with their peers, they gain insight beyond their own.

So let us bring to their attention the greater world out there—beyond their television set—and expand their perspectives to comprehend the dangerous side-effects from concentrating all of one’s energy on the attainment of power and wealth. Let the literature facilitate their moral development. The road to success must include community service, but beyond the current concept, something that encompasses social action. Visiting cancer patients, playing chess with the elderly, and reading to a child with Down’s syndrome will deepen and enrich their existence, and prove the importance of looking beyond money and control.

Let us teach our boys—our future men—to feel and discard the archaic perception that to feel is to be weak. Let us also teach them to be able to identify, control, and manage those feelings, to balance emotion with rational thought. Let us help them to find outlets for their anger, their hurt, their rage; let them channel it more productively, in ways that make them feel more complete. In Peace is Every Step, Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh shares his insights on emotion:

In us, there is a river of feelings, in which every drop of water is a different feeling, and each feeling relies on all the others for its existence. To observe it, we just sit on the back of the river and identify each feeling as it surfaces, flows by, and disappears.

There are three sorts of feelings—pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. When we have an unpleasant feeling, we may want to chase it away. But it is more effective to
return to our conscious breathing and just observe it, identifying it silently to ourselves: “Breathing in, I know there is an unpleasant feeling in me. Breathing out, I know there is an unpleasant feeling in me.” Calling a feeling by its name, such as “anger,” “sorrow,” “joy,” or “happiness,” helps us identify it clearly and recognize it more deeply…

Instead of acting as if we can dispose of parts of ourselves, we should learn the art of transformation. We can transform our anger, for example, into something more wholesome, like understanding. We do not need surgery to remove our anger. If we become angry at our anger, we will have two angers at the same time. We only have to observe it with love and attention. If we take care of our anger in this way, without trying to run away from it, it will transform itself. This is peacemaking. If we are peaceful in ourselves, we can make peace with our anger. We can deal with depression, anxiety, fear, or any unpleasant feeling in the same way (Schiraldi 56-7).

Rather than punishment, let them learn self-discipline. Use the Socratic Method to lead them to discover what they did wrong and how they can change their behavior in the future. More importantly, encourage them to explore thoughts and emotions that led them to make a bad choice. Let the children articulate the experience, including the positive and negative aspects. In this way, they become responsible for their own actions.

And when punishment is necessary, for instance when a man does rape, rather than merely cage, forget, or even worse, abuse him, let us study him instead of his victim. Let us discover the formula for prevention, using the rapists as the key factors in the equation. Let us reexamine our laws, and also our punishment procedures. There is currently a discrepancy between the punishment of the crime and recovery for the victim. For instance, after the
rapist is convicted, the victim is left asking, ‘What am I supposed to do now?’ So she relives the trauma, fears all men, protects and isolates herself, turns inward, participates only therapy, blames herself, asks what’s wrong with her, feels unclean, unhealthy or broken, that she’ll never be good enough for a ‘good man,’ and she takes on the persona of ‘victim’ (Brownmiller 376). Art can serve as a mediator, where perpetrators view the artistic product from their victims’ therapeutic endeavors (Hirsch & Smith 8), as well as listen to survivors like Jean Orleman, who are willing to visit prisons and talk to perpetrators in person. When this happens, they begin to see how a victim can die, if even just a part of herself, when she is violated.

Let us participate in art together, and learn to appreciate the beauty and truth in artistic expression. And with writing, let men know they have more outlets and modes of nonverbal communication than violence. Victims of rape find intrinsic connections with art; indeed most everyone can benefit from the connections that spring from viewing a provocative painting or hearing a moving symphony. As Linda stood before a Rothko painting at the opening of the East Wing of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. it moved her deeply: “I was looking at a Rothko painting, staring at colors so vivid they seemed to pulsate, the way orange at sunset moves and shifts into purple and pink. It was an orange you could almost taste, sink your teeth into, blood orange. It filled me with wonder, and stirred something deep and primal inside me. I feared the danger of that kind of beauty, beauty that made me so quiet and unable to move” (Cutting 108). And when Mr. Freeman handed Melinda a book containing a collection, she experienced something very similar:

I don’t like the first chapters. Besides all the naked women, he painted these blue pictures, like he ran out of red and green for a few weeks… The next chapter steals
my breath away. It takes me out of the room. It confuses me, while one little part of
my brain jumps up and down screaming, “I get it! I get it!” Cubism. Seeing beyond
what is on the surface. Moving both eyes and nose to the side of the face. Dicing
bodies and tables and guitars as if they were celery sticks, and rearranging them so
that you have to really see them to see them. Amazing. What did the world look like
to him? (119)

As for me, on a Valentine’s Day trip with my husband to Minneapolis, we visited the
Minneapolis Institute of Arts during an exhibition for local artist, Margaret Wall-Romana.
The show was titled “Paintings Before and After Words,” and I thought that was perfect, as it
followed in line with my thesis subject. The first painting I saw, named Becoming, had an
effect that was a mixture of Linda’s paralysis and Melinda’s ‘I get it!’

Before looking at the
title plaque, I saw death and
rebirth, a creation that rose
from out of a mess of dead
matter. Hope from out of
trauma. When the pain from
violence burns out, the
smoke evaporates and clears.
I saw raw flesh, and a
mixture of other bodily
material. Then, when I saw it was named Becoming, I felt this meant childbirth. The
violence of the infant leaving the womb, being torn from the protective environment, its
cocoon. They say the closest a woman gets to death is childbirth. To give life, a piece of the mother must die.

Afterwards, I picked up a pamphlet, written by Christopher Atkins. In it, he articulated exactly what I felt in those few moments, as I stood before this painting.

Some art can inspire feelings that are impossible to put into words and in doing so, remind us that art is about response and reaction. Art can be a sobering reminder of human mortality. Wall-Romana’s paintings are filled with, but do not illustrate, this double-edged awareness of life and death.

I knew in this moment that Margaret Wall-Romana is an artist with promise, as her work spoke to me of an inner truth at a level few canonical artists ever have.

The PTSD Sourcebook tells us: “Think of yourself as a beautiful house, lovely outside and in. The house is a place of joy and comfort—a secure place from which you explore the world. Around the house is a sturdy fence with a gate. You also have strong doors and windows. You can open the doors and gates to invite in welcomed guests… You keep them closed to keep out danger. Trauma blew open your doors and burst into your house” (55).

We discussed the house that had been damaged by fire in the analysis of Lucky, as Alice said, “Fires are something that seemed part of my childhood, and they beckoned to me that there was another side to life I hadn’t seen. Fires were horrible, no doubt, but what I became obsessed with was how they seemed, inevitably, to mark a change” (35). The fire is trauma.

When Linda returned home from the institutionalization after her brother’s suicide:

I opened the door to my house and smelled smoke. I saw black everywhere. The inside of my house was shrouded in soot. The oil furnace had imploded, covering the walls, the ceilings, the rugs, the furniture, the piano, all my books, clothing, and
concert gowns with a black oily powder. The fire on the inside of my house matched the fire that was smoldering inside me (Cutting 228).

The house represents the body, the safe place, the inner sanctum. And the rape, the trauma burnt that house down. So, too, let the other house burn down, the one that houses the system which perpetuates violence and oppression. And we will rebuild it, only with greater care this time. During the 1967 riots of Newark and Detroit, writer Julius Lester said, “In those fires was some kind of hope… As we destroy, let us not forget that it is only so we may be more human” (Haag 28). From out of the smoke and ashes, we can create a better house, where the child in all of us can grow and feel respected and safe. Where we can speak, and be heard.

Part Three: Listening To a Lullaby, Sung With Our Own Voices

Kate Millet said, “The knowledge of another’s experiences places vast moral responsibility upon you, since the very knowledge, if deep and authentic, constitutes great obligation” (Haag 49-50). This was the case for Susan Brownmiller who first believed rape was only the crime of a “diseased, deranged mind.” She experienced a change in perception, when one evening in 1970, the discussion among her friends turned to rape.

I learned that evening… that victims of rape could be women I knew—women who, when their turn came to speak, quietly articulated their own experiences. Women who understood their victimization whereas I understood only that it had not happened to me—and resisted the idea that it could (8).

That evening, Susan Brownmiller realized rape was a serious matter. As Millet said, she was struck by a sort of “violence by proxy, an absorption of other women’s stories” (Haag
49-50), which compelled her to write Against Our Will, the purpose of which is “to give rape a history.” Her final statement: “Now we must deny it a future” (Brownmiller 404).

Hélène Cixous proposes that, when “women return from afar” from “without,” then “we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather of a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another... personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history” (10). And, if we rewire our minds, by altering the way we educate and socialize our children, then we can effectively rewrite history to include the voices of the oppressed, the formerly silent and ignored.

There is a misconception that “adults who were sexually abused [as children] see sexual abuse everywhere ... that they are ‘too sensitive’ because of what happened to them.... The result is that ... the survivor's reality is seen as fantasy. The truth is not that sexual abuse survivors are ‘too sensitive.’ It simply is that we know what abuse looks like, what it feels like, and what effect it will have on the abused” (Alcoff & Gray 280). Indeed, victims come up against various sources of opposition when they tell their stories. “If the survivor does not cry when she tells her story, she will not be believed; this is true in places as disparate as police stations and TV talk shows” (285). When she gave her initial report to the police, Alice was almost falling asleep, as she had been awake overnight and had just endured a brutal sexual assault. But her nodding off caused the police officer to doubt her claim.

Even I experience difficulty trying to determine the truth in some stories. In the middle of my own work for this project, I began to research recent rape cases. Two instances, brought to my attention by my husband—an ardent sports fan—are the accusations against Ben Roethlisberger and Kobe Bryant. Although the two cases are vastly different, I personally questioned the truth in both accounts. Even though I had been immersed in the
issue of rape for months, I still didn’t wholly believe their stories. After all I have said about not considering a victim’s past, or whether she did or did not resist, and my anger towards people that blame victims, I find myself questioning whether a drunk girl should hang all over an NFL quarterback (or anyone else) in a skanky nightclub, or whether a girl would brag and joke at a party about being raped by an NBA player.

This is because of one important fact that I have yet to mention, a fact that is sad, but that remains true. Some women lie about being raped. Lying about rape causes difficulty for those of us who have been raped and for victims who try to convict their rapists, as the police, judges, jurors, media, and the court of popular opinion cannot ascertain the difference between the true account of rape and a lie. So they begin to think everyone lies. And the most devastating consequence of the lie, as seventeenth century jurist, Lord Chief Justice Matthew Hale said, “Rape is an accusation easily to be made and hard to be proved, and harder to be defended by the party accused, tho never so innocent” (Brownmiller 369). Just as real sexual assault steals a part of the victim, a man falsely accused of rape never can fully regain his stolen innocence.

Women that have worked with victims can testify to the vast variety of survivors, which begs the questions of scripts, roles, and a uniform type of victim. One counselor’s account:

I met women who fought or talked their way out of a rape and felt their victimization more keenly than women who had been raped and badly injured. I saw women who were bruised and beaten for having resisted; prostitutes raped by pseudoclients whose violence both they and the hospital staff considered a side effect of such a line of work; teenagers, raped after passing out at a party, blaming themselves for drinking;
others who, while undergoing the evidence collection kit and various bureaucratic procedures in the hospital emergency unit, were shocked by the magnitude of the institutionalized response to an experience they had only thought of in interpersonal terms; and still others who were cracking jokes and holding conversations about errands they had to run even as they were being administered the morning-after pill and treated for the venereal disease they had contracted during the rape (Mardorossian 754).

One thing I have learned through this process: women need to assemble, congregate, and infiltrate the masculine world. Virginia Woolf said that we need to have a room of our own. Likewise, Hélène Cixous tells how she has been amazed “more than once by a description a woman gave [her] of a world all her own which she had been secretly haunting since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity” (3). Cixous articulates a desire to share this experience with that woman: “I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women” might inhabit this world (4).

I have also learned how important role models are to survivors, to have strong women to confide in and lean on when in the midst of the effects of trauma. We may have suffered the rape by ourselves, but we don’t have to go solo through the healing process. Linda’s therapist tells her she’ll have to learn to mother herself. But she doesn’t have to, and Linda thinks of all of the mothers she’s had, her therapists, friends, teachers (Cutting 237). We don’t have to mother ourselves. We have each other.
Here are some victims’ testimonies.

1. It was like a delayed terror reaction. Like, when I started thinking how easily he could have just killed me behind the building, I was shaking. I didn’t want to tell my husband and I never did report it to the police. I just went into this whole terror thing. I was afraid to take that same way home again and I was afraid to go on the subway alone at night. I was just generally shaken (Brownmiller 361).

2. Somewhere along the line society had told me that if you’re a woman and you stick your neck out by being conspicuous you’re going to get it. The rape confirmed it. Before the rape I used to go all over the city with my cameras, I was never afraid for my safety. Afterwards I stopped taking pictures, or if I did go out into strange neighborhoods, I made sure that I had a male companion. But at some point you have to say that you’re not going to be stopped by it. It’s a war and you can’t let them win. Otherwise you’d just have to stay indoors (362).

3. I was black and he was black. The encounter caused a tremendous change in my overall attitude towards men, and especially towards black men. For three months I was afraid to go out with a black man. I was afraid to be out on the streets alone at night. Until I met that man in the alley I thought I was really in control of my life. It taught me I wasn’t (362).

4. I don’t think I slept for a week. I lay on a cot in my sister’s apartment with my clothes on. I thought of committing suicide. I had to quit my job—first of all I was a nervous wreck but also I was afraid he had spotted me going to and from work. I tried to stay still and make time move forward. I felt the course of my life had changed and nothing would ever be the same again. My being raped moved
something in me so deeply that I could no longer look at it: I’d had a fear of men all of my life (362-3).

5. It hits you where you’re most vulnerable. Even though I had been very strong during my encounter, I felt more vulnerable in every way. About six months to a year later some of the vulnerability disappeared. It was replaced by rage. Oh, I wish now I had hit him. Or killed him (363).

6. After that, it was all downhill. None of the girls were allowed to have me in their homes, and the boys used to stare at me on the street when I walked to school. I was left with a reputation that followed me throughout high school (364).

7. I never told my mother to this very day. I wish she was here, maybe I could tell her now. I pushed it to the recesses of my mind. I never really dealt with it ‘til a year ago—when my friend and I went to St. Thomas and she was raped. And then all the anguish and all the pain that all women have suffered all these years came out of me, and I was able for the first time to relate to another woman’s pain (364).

8. I went to the police station and said, “I want to report a rape.” They said, “Whose?” and I said, “Mine.” The cop looked at me and said, “Aw, who’d want to rape you?” (364)

9. When they let me go I ran down the street and found a milkman who told me where the police station was. I was calm and coherent. Too calm, I guess. I got disgusted with their questions and slow typing and asked to type my own version of the report. The policeman said, “You’re so clear and detailed—what are you, a sociologist or something?” (364)
10. They finally told me they thought I was lying. They said I’d probably been having sex with my boyfriend and probably was afraid I was pregnant. They also theorized that my boyfriend had set me up for it. They wanted to know if he’d ever asked me to have relations with his friends (366).

11. They trotted out my whole past life, made me go through all these changes, while he just sat at the defendant’s table, mute, surrounded by his lawyers. Of course that was his right by law, but it looked like I was the one who was on trial (372).

12. I don’t understand it. It was like I was the defendant and he was the plaintiff. I wasn’t on trial. I don’t see where I did anything wrong. I screamed. I struggled. How could they have decided that he was innocent, that I didn’t resist? (373)

13. Crushed under his heavy weight, my neck arched, my face suffocating. I feel him drive into me. The car is too warm. I feel like I am vulnerable and alone. He drives himself into me, thrusting into a person he doesn’t know, doesn’t care to know. I feel like dying in his numb arms. His mind cannot say my name. I am a body, a vehicle for his sick pleasure. I push and plead, begging him to stop his invasion. Pushing, I extricate myself from his folds and crevices with pain. He grabs for my naked body as I pull on his unbuttoned shirt and curl up in the front seat. The windows are filled with the expulsions of my silently screaming breath. He sits up, gets dressed, and we drive. The quiet and rural darkness surrounds my pounding head and makes me feel a little more safe. He never says a word, just looks ahead with silent anger. The blackened forest, hidden behind my sullen heart, shelters me from his piercing gaze. I want to scream out, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, but I am afraid. His silence is plain and seething with disgust. His quietness hurts me and smashes the picture perfect image I
built of him, like a shrine inside my mind. God, I hate my sweet surrenders, my silent accepting ways. I am the stupidest person I know. I close my eyes, press my sweating forehead against the cool, windswept pane of glass and pretend that I can sleep (Shandler 58-9).

14. Olivia I is dead, too, because of the stepfather and what he did to her with the pink thing, and because the mother walked on her. She was four years old. From Olivia I, there’s just me left. I’m her child mirror-image (Chase 174).

15. My husband and I were having sex for the first time in our new house. I was focusing on the overhead lamp and realized it was just like the ceiling lamp in my bedroom as a little girl. Suddenly my husband became confused with my father. I became like a child, fighting back and weeping (Maltz 146).

16. I began a sort of unconscious lying to myself when engaged in sex. Steve’s pleasure was all I focused on, the point of the journey, so if there were bumps and memories, painful flashes of the night in the tunnel, I rode over them, numbed. Happy when Steve was happy, I was always ready to pop right out of bed and go on a walk or read my latest poem. If I could get back to the brain in time, like oxygen, the sex didn’t hurt as much... If you can’t do, mimic. Your brain is still alive (Sebold 207).

And there are many more stories, many more voices to be heard. My goal for this project was to name the problem—rape—and attempt to find a solution. Most of the current social theory on rape emphasizes what the woman can do to prevent an impending attack. How she must protect herself and never leave herself open and vulnerable. And theory focuses on treatment, helping the victim heal after the attack. But the focus should shift onto
prevention. But not via the victim. The only lasting plan for prevention comes with a complete social restructuring. Raising our children with different values. Educating them in a more humanist fashion. Connecting them with others in a way that doesn’t emphasize competition with dominance as the ultimate goal.

History shows that ancient law treated the crime of rape as destruction to women as property. So much of law throughout time has focused on the legal definition of rape, the rhetoric behind the act. The emphasis shifted from the damage to women as ‘property,’ to the degree of damage—in terms of its physical display, via bruising and lacerations, on the body as object. Neither addresses the psychological damage, the unseen trauma that results from rape.

Most psychotherapists subscribe talk therapy and the recovery industry recommends active involvement with fine arts. Studies show that both can be effective. But little scholarship exists on the power of using the victim’s voice—through her art and writing—to change the hegemonic structure and reform and re-socialize our youth.

So much of education revolves around history as presented from the perspective of the ‘winners.’ But the voice of the oppressed is much stronger. And subverting their experience with ‘expert’ testimony only reinforces their silence. Alloting expertise to victims of rape, social persecution, and racial injustice is empowering. And placing power into the hands of those who have been on the receiving end sounds more intelligent than preserving the current ideology of ‘those in power stay in power.’ Most think that if the oppressed rose to power, they would be violent and vengeful, as a result of having been so long oppressed. But I believe they—more than anyone—would know the importance of
community and the necessity to distribute power and listen to the multitude of voices—as opposed to the current ‘dog-eat-dog’ principle and ‘every man for himself’ mentality.

Rape affects everyone. When a victim remains silent, she suffers alone. But when she shares her story—through writing or music or painting—everyone benefits. Though her pain may never disappear, and her recovery may never be complete, she can heal. And she can help others heal, as well. And her story, her art, her voice may be able to prevent rape from happening to someone else. This community mentality empowers survivors. When so many voices combine, it becomes possible to erase the sound of silence that reverberates from the trauma of rape.
Afterword

Because this wouldn’t be complete without telling the reason I chose to undertake this project, I will give my own narrative.

I was sixteen when I had my first memory recall. I was in bed and it was dark (I had slept with a nightlight for years, and the bulb had blown). I couldn’t sleep because it was too dark. I closed my eyes and I suddenly became terrified by the way my lips felt. They were dry and I could feel the creases of the skin. It is something that is very difficult to articulate, but it was the way my lips felt during my abuse. I began to cry, without even realizing it. I felt silly, an overemotional teenager, and I tried to put it out of my mind.

But I couldn’t. The next few days, I couldn’t sleep (in spite of the new light bulb) and I’d lay awake, experiencing sheer terror. I had suffered from insomnia for over five years and, before that, I’d sleepwalked and had night terrors. Over the next three years, I would catch shards of memories at the most awkward times. But the memories didn’t come when my father tested them. He would call me in while watching some Dateline or 20/20 special on sexual abuse. Yet another young woman would give her account while a reenactment played out on the screen. He would watch me, checking for signs of remembrance, though I didn’t know it was him at the time. Once, he looked me straight in the eye and said, “If you ever try to accuse me of molesting you, you better damn well hope I never get out of prison.”

I realize now that my first sexual experience with my boyfriend had triggered the onset of memories. I had lost my virginity (a second time) just weeks before the incident involving my lips. For me, the recall process has been fitting together the pieces I can no
longer keep restrained. The memories found me, and now I must deal with them. I know that my long hair, much like Alice’s, was used as a restraining device, as he held me in place face-down. Even still, if I am pinned in that position, I have an acute anxiety attack.

Throughout my teenage years, I wrote poetry and I painted to deal with the confusion and anxiety that arose from the recall of the abuse. Though I never addressed the issue, at that time, just the act of creation saved and preserved me. Essentially, though, I remained silent about the experiences with incest I’d endured.

The first person I told was my ex-husband. And I regretted telling him, because I seemed weaker to him afterwards. Two days after the birth of our second daughter, he raped me. He wanted to have sex, but I told him that I was still in pain after the birth, which required an episiotomy. My stitches hadn’t even begun to heal. I was still bleeding. I told him that I did not want to, but he persisted and began having sex with me. It felt like a knife entering my body, scraping my tender scar. I began to cry silently. The pain made me tremble, I felt so raw. I told him that it hurt and asked him to stop multiple times. He said he’d be quick, that he’d be gentle. He finished and I felt like I would vomit. The next day, I told him that I was bleeding even more. He said, “You were already bleeding.” I told him that the blood from the baby had become darker and this was bright red blood. He then said that if it had to do with us having sex, then he was sorry. I began to feel like I was violated, and the “incident” affirmed that he didn’t care about me, and didn’t love me the way a husband should. When Natalie was three weeks old, I began working out for up to 3 hours a day. I wanted to be strong. I wanted to make sure that I could never be hurt again. While I was strengthening my body, I also toughened my mind. My feelings for him changed and I felt myself beginning to separate from him, if only mentally for the time being. I also
decided to return to school and get my Bachelor’s degree. When Natalie was 6 months old, I started back at Simpson College. And when I began graduate school, my marriage was over.

My father had become my husband. And I left them both behind.

I also met my soul-mate in grad school. Which is funny, because before I met him, I laughed when anyone even used the term ‘soul-mate.’ Jason was the second person I told about my father. He was the first person I told about my ex. Even though I had not let myself believe it, Jason labeled what my ex had done as rape. And he said it was wrong. He promised he would never let that happen to me again. Now I know what love is supposed to feel like, and what sex should have always been for me.

I’m in no way recovered from the abuse that I’ve endured. And I wouldn’t claim to be completely healed. But I will continue to use my life, in hopes that someday we can all live without rape. This project is just one step of many, in my life mission to change the world in whatever way I can, to form a more caring and nurturing humankind.
Works Cited


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