

REVISION OF THE SELF; REVISION OF SOCIETAL ATTITUDES: FEMINIST  
CRITICAL APPROACHES TO FEMALE RAPE MEMOIR.

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## ABSTRACT

Rape is a social, cultural, and criminal phenomenon around the world. The statistics pertaining to rape, in the United States alone, demonstrate what a serious problem it is. Silence and shame have previously shrouded the thousands of victims of rape who have met with distant, cold, and often disbelieving reactions to their experience. Innate discomfort and fear of rape leads many to turn their backs on rape survivors and, as a result, far too many women have chosen to remain silent about their horrific experiences.

Lucky by Alice Sebold, Two or Three Things I Know for Sure by Dorothy Allison, and After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back by Nancy Venable Raine are all examples of the contemporary female memoir about rape; many are now being published and are beginning to break down this wall of silence by presenting graphic and sometimes disturbing, but extremely important details about rape and its effects. Each demonstrates the effects of such trauma both physically and mentally. Rape survivors, after their sexual assault, lose touch with the person they were before the experience, and usually spend many years enduring symptoms of denial, self-loathing, self-blame, and even suicidal feelings, exemplifying Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Only in facing the pain of their experience head on, revising their sense of self, and accepting that they cannot be the women they were before being raped, can they rebuild their lives. With self-acceptance and eventual embrace of their newly developed selves calm, inner peace, and resolution can be found.

Despite the outmoded theories of Sigmund Freud et al. that suggest rape is a fulfillment of women's deepest sexual fantasies, contemporary memoirs are detailing the

brutal reality of rape and the severe psychological impact this personal violation has upon its victims. Patriarchal societies around the world have had limited understanding of rape and the way in which it destroys lives, often choosing to ignore its reality. In adopting a narrative that speaks on behalf of all rape victims, a universal “I”, these memoirists, among others, are giving a voice to rape survivors and forcing its presence into the face of society.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the thousands of rape victims around the world, those who have been rendered mute by their experience. I especially want to mention Alice Sebold, Dorothy Allison, and Nancy Venable Raine, whose memoirs inspired great belief in their cause and, on more than one occasion, left me in tears. May the wall of silence be brought down.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, a woman is raped, somewhere in America, every two minutes. Every two minutes. Over the last two years, an estimated 787,000 women were victims of rape or sexual assault in the United States alone. The Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that seventy-two out of every 10,000 women in this country were raped last year. Fifteen percent of these victims were under the age of twelve. Statistics such as these are shocking and incorporate numbers we are barely able to comprehend. Each of those women could be someone we know and love. They could be ourselves. It is easy to disregard such horror and to allocate such tragedy to other people, because we want to believe sexual assault would never happen to us or to someone we know. Rapes afflict others. They flash before us as news reports we can ignore or choose to ignore. Of the available statistics, the hardest to comprehend is that only about 37% of rapes are even reported. Women live in fear of reprisal from their assailants and are convinced that their attackers will go unpunished by our legal system.

Men, as we know, are raped also. In leaving male rape out of this thesis, I am in no way suggesting that it is any less brutal or devastating for such victims, but female rape memoir, as a literary sub-genre, is being published in much larger numbers. However, many women feel that they have no choice but to be silent. Attacked by men within a patriarchal society, victims must then rely on a predominantly male legal system for conviction, a legal system that puts only a tiny minority of rapists behind bars. If cases even make it into a court of law, victims are confronted by defense lawyers willing to use every aspect of the victims' personal history to suggest they are lying about their

rape, insinuating that in some manner or another they provoked the horrendous attack they endured. Such victimization of those who are already victims has built a thick wall of silence surrounding rape, a wall that is only now starting to be broken down, in part by the publication of memoirs about rape and recovery.

Rape can be defined as forced, unconsensual intercourse, yet it is so much more complicated than that. Rape cannot be reduced to simply an act of forced sex; rape is an invasion of the body, the mind, and the soul, an awful consequence of our patriarchal society, where denial governs:

[I]t is happening for a simple reason. There is nothing complex and difficult about the reason. Men are doing it, because of the kind of power that men have over women. That power is real, concrete, exercised from one body to another body, exercised by someone who feels he has a right to exercise it, exercised in public and exercised in private. It is the sum and substance of women's oppression (Buchwald et al. 14).

The power Buchwald et al. describe here pertains not only to the physical power men have over women, but their power and status within society that, for centuries, has enforced minor, if any, punishment. It was not until February, 2001 that rape was finally recognized as a crime against humanity by the United Nations court of law at The Hague. Three Bosnian-Serb soldiers were standing trial for war crimes, and were convicted, not only of murder, but of the widespread rape of Muslim women in 1993. This case was a judicial landmark, because previously rape that occurred in times of war was considered another casualty of war, collateral damage in an already tragic situation. Investigations into war crimes that occurred in other countries, such as Rwanda, had not even dared to

touch on the rapes that had occurred, so for the soldiers' victimization of women to be discussed, and charged as a crime against humanity, was historic. The reason for the Bosnian Serb soldiers' brutality stemmed not only from a hatred for their Muslim neighbors, but also from the desire to emasculate and devastate the Muslim men against whom they were fighting. One of the tenets of patriarchal society is that men are the authoritative gender, those looked to for protection of women and children. By raping their wives, daughters, and mothers, these soldiers were undermining the Muslim men against whom they were fighting, as well as the women. Rape was used as a weapon, and its impact on all of society led The Hague to view it as a crime against humanity, while at the same time recognizing it as a violation of the female body: "The decision to prosecute is grounded in the determination that a raped woman's body is not analogous to a misappropriated piece of goods. It upsets the ideology of a woman as property [ . . . ] the ruling affirms the principle of embodied subjectivity" (Bergoffen 117). This statement undermines the notion that the female body is the property of men, an ideology and the Hague ruling recognizes the psychological and personal devastation women suffer in the aftermath of rape, not simply the physical violation that occurs. This recognition of women's personal dignity and the connection this has with their fundamental rights to sexual independence were groundbreaking. As Debra Bergoffen suggests, "in attending to the sexed realities of embodiment and in insisting that violating a *woman's* sexual integrity is a crime against humanity," the court recognized rape not only as a physical, highly sexualized invasion of a woman, but a penetration of her mind, her soul, and her psychological stability (117).



Memoir is an immensely powerful form of confession, story-telling, and reminiscence, used to portray this male power referred to by Buchwald et al. One person's story can affect readers in a much more influential and powerful manner than statistics spread out on a page. International legal recognition of rape's horror is essential for creating change, and personal memoirs coming out of this country increase understanding of how rape affects each individual who has the great misfortune of becoming a statistic. Considering the basic feminist principle that the personal is political, we see very sensitive personal experiences being relayed for the political and social purpose of raising awareness. The real brutalities of rape, and the psychological, physical, and emotional effects of it, are lost statistically. While shocking in their numbers, the experience of each rape victim, as well as that of her family and friends who are left picking up the pieces, cannot be truly recognized in such figures. I am focusing on memoir by female rape victims because each text has narrative patterns, demonstrates similar lines of reasoning, and charts a recovery from her assault that shows how the writers themselves have learned to revise the way they view themselves and live a relatively normal life. By reading their memoirs and learning their stories, we, as readers, may also revise the way we view victims of rape, no longer discarding them as provocative of such an attack, drug-dependent, or in some other ridiculous way, as responsible.

While stories of rape have been previously ignored and categorized as experiences stereotypically endured by the working class, narcotic-dependent, and marginalized in society, memoirs are now being published and widely read which show that it is a classless and unbiased experience. It can happen to anyone at any time. Rape is

not an incident involving a stranger lurking in an alley way where only “certain” women would find themselves. Rape is inflicted by strangers, yes, but also by husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers, boyfriends, and others known and loved by the victim. Susan Brownmiller explores the historical context of rape, asserting that it is in no way a contemporary issue: “from prehistoric times to the present [ . . . ] rape has played a critical function” and so, “when men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it” because they faced so few consequences (14). It is not only the psychologically deluded or sexually starved who rape, as many would feel. Of course, “[r]ape is always a symptom of some psychological dysfunction,” there is no stereotypical rapist, just as there is no stereotypical rape victim (Groth 4).

The effects of rape, too, are being fully explored in these memoirs, and the large numbers of people reading them suggest that readers’ desire to either empathize or understand is very much a reality. Lucky by Alice Sebold, Two or Three Things I know for Sure by Dorothy Allison, and After Silence: Rape and my Journey Back by Nancy Venable Raine, are just three of the many rape and trauma memoirs currently being published and widely read. No longer content to ignore such a social and cultural epidemic, victims of rape and readers alike are proving that the wall of silence that previously existed to shroud rape is no longer acceptable.

Patriarchal society has exerted a profound effect upon both men and women in our response to rape and sexual assault. While we may consider ourselves extremely sympathetic to those who experience such personal devastation, we often turn our backs; others are very quick to become suspicious of those crying ‘rape’ in the first place. Many of us have become unconsciously conditioned to question whether or not the act was

consensual, wondering what the victim might have done when the rape occurred to provoke such an attack; when victims of rape know their perpetrator, we often find it hard to view their experience as rape. Terminology such as “date rape” masks the true devastation of the attack. Whether we want to recognize this about ourselves as a society, or not, the fact remains that rape is widely ignored and misunderstood.

In the texts of Sebold, Allison, and Venable Raine, their rape and its aftermath are documented in graphic detail. Each writer describes the horrendous consequences of her experience, including the psychological, physical, and emotional effects. Each shows readers the kindness she received from others, as well as scorn by those who could not or would not accept that the victim had played no part in what happened to her. Disbelief is common among friends and family who, conditioned by the patriarchal society they live in, are better able to cope with ignoring the problem of rape than with facing it, and therefore, dismiss the writers. Sebold, Allison, and Raine all demonstrate the very long and painful journey they had to travel back from their attack towards a certain sense of normalcy; each experiences a state of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, consequently dabbling in drugs, promiscuity, or total denial. Each endures a time of existing rather than living, turning inwards and shutting out any help or guidance. Yet, all three manage to reach a point of acceptance where they realize with utter clarity that, while they will never be able to be the individuals they were before their rapes, they can rebuild their lives and revise the ways in which they view themselves and their experiences.

The concept of one’s self is an ambiguous and complicated one. In looking at these rape memoirs, we see multiple selves of each writer operating and alternating. Paul Eakin writes of “self or selves,” recognizing that we are made up of many different

entities, our selves fluid and ever-changing depending on our circumstances. He resists the tendency to oversimplify “self as a term,” because this “obscures the multiple registers of self-experience” that exist (22). Eakin discusses Ulric Neisser’s theory on our various selves, one in particular, “the conceptual self,” being “extremely diverse forms of self-information – social roles, personal traits, theories of body and mind, of subject and person – that posit the self as a category, either explicitly or implicitly” (23). The suggestion here is that our conceptual selves are those we remain aware of, those which change fluidly depending on our setting. Each writer presents a struggle to recognize their conceptual self after their rape, a struggle to recognize the person they were before their rape, the person they became in its immediate aftermath, and the person they embraced once reaching a point of enlightenment. Amidst this enlightenment they were able to let go of the person they used to be and accept themselves as women newly-defined by their rape. We see their multiple selves as wives, mothers, daughters, friends, lovers, and sisters. Their selves are dynamic, a characteristic of all our selves, whether we have experienced rape or not. Each memoirist experienced an era of denial, rage, anger, and self-loathing, because each found it impossible to recognize the person (a hybrid of many selves) that they became. Their acceptance of their rape and reconstruction of themselves came about when they were able to accept this newly revised version of their selves.

Adrienne Rich wrote of “[R]e-vision” as a term to describe her desire for a change in the way we read texts. She asks that readers “re-vise” the manner in which they read literature, viewing it from a fresh, more feminist perspective which challenges patriarchal views, in terms of what it teaches us about women, patriarchal society, and the world that we live in. I would argue that Sebold, Allison, and Venable Raine all “re-vise” the way

they view themselves in the aftermath of their rape and, in writing their stories, force readers to revise their attitudes towards rape and its victims. They urge us not to turn our backs and ignore the problem anymore, but to recognize this cultural psychosis of denial. Raine even quotes a stanza from Rich's poem, "Diving into the Wreck," in the opening of her memoir, as a metaphor for her own personal struggle towards acceptance: "I came to explore the wreck. / The words are purposes. / The words are maps. / I came to see the damage that was done / and the treasures that prevail." These few lines serve as a perfect metaphor for the journey each of these memoirists undertakes. After coming to the realization that they could no longer shut out what they had endured and bury it in drug use, promiscuity, or simple denial, they each had to face their rape squarely, which we do when we read their stories; in retelling their stories they were able to find some sort of buried treasure within, some sort of revised image of themselves as people and rape survivors, not victims of brutality and personal invasion.

Each personal narrative teaches us of the horrendous effects of rape, as well as the dire legal state in which our own society still exists, a society in which rape convictions are far too low and cases of rape are far too high. These writers are all more than aware of such statistics, Sebold being the only one who fought for a conviction, a fight that was barely won and at very high personal cost. In writing their stories, they are speaking out and fighting back much more loudly than they could ever do in a court of law.

Whenever I am asked about the topic for my thesis, friends, family, and colleagues all glance at me for a second, a question in their eyes as to why I am writing about rape. As Susan Brownmiller experienced when writing her groundbreaking text, Against our Will: Men, Women, and Rape, people wonder if I am a victim myself. They

cannot imagine that one would want to write about such a distressing and, quite frankly, depressing topic without having had personal experience. I choose to leave my personal experience out of this thesis, because my motive for exploring rape memoirs stems predominantly from passionate concern for the thousands of voiceless women around the world who have endured such horror. That an event could occur as often as it does, and affect the millions that it does, with such little attention, is shocking to me. That such a social and cultural phenomenon can exist with so little understanding or sympathy for victims, is an injustice, to say the least. Rape memoir is carving out a niche as a literary sub-genre, as more and more men and women are starting to speak out and write their stories. Only through reading such stories can we truly comprehend these experiences. As Susan Brownmiller writes in Against our Will: Men, Women, and Rape:

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. I learned that in ways I preferred to deny the threat of rape had profoundly affected my life, never one to acknowledge my vulnerability, I found myself forced by my sisters in feminism to look it squarely in the eyes (Brownmiller 8).

Brownmiller highlights here the common problem of denial when it comes to rape, a mental defense mechanism that is easier on most than facing it “squarely in the eyes.” The fact that such victims could be ourselves or our loved ones makes the publication and circulation of such memoirs essential.

Alice Sebold and Nancy Venable Raine were both attacked by strangers. Dorothy Allison was abused by her own stepfather under the watchful yet disbelieving eyes of family members. However, the attacks detailed by these writers are very different. Sebold's father could not believe that she had kissed her assailant, viewing such a move in the intimate and loving manner we tend to view kissing. He was unable to see that she was forced to do so in order to save her own life and avoid the fate of another Syracuse resident who had been raped, murdered, and dismembered just weeks before her own attack. Venable Raine endures comments from friends who felt it necessary to question why she had moved to a lower-income neighborhood in the first place, a suggestion that insinuates she had put herself in a vulnerable position. Many people she encountered during the time she wrote of her experience did not understand why such a topic should be discussed and analyzed: "Let's face it, people don't want to read about such terrible things" (5). Allison faces family members who choose not to believe her very brave decision to come forward and make public the fact that she had been sexually assaulted by her own stepfather. Such reactions by outsiders, both distant and close to the writers, are typical of those who find it uncomfortable and awkward. No doubt, this denial of rape's violent reality is a mental defense mechanism. If something is shut out and ignored, then it is not real, not a part of our own personal lives.

Autobiographical theory is growing increasingly interested in ethical boundaries of memoir, whether or not any topic should be restricted or limited, as writers are revealing more and more about themselves and their lives. Paul Eakin asks whether memoirs are now speaking courageously about topics previously deemed as unspeakable, or if such speech is culpable and "compounding the original trespass with unseemly

disclosure?” (143). Rape memoir is breaking a necessary silence and, whether we want to ignore its reality or not, the publication of these group of memoirs is essential in undermining a societal refusal to accept rape as part of our common knowledge and of the world in which we live.

The anxiety caused by confronting rape leads each writer to experience feelings of shame, a burden of shame that should be carried by their rapist or by those who turned away from them. Raine, Sebold, and Allison use the pronoun “our” to incorporate other rape victims into their stories and to universalize their experiences, adopting what Sidonie Smith terms the universal “I.” Each memoirist refuses to continue feeding people’s need for denial. Each highlights the existence within our society of a “profound collective anxiety about rape that borders on cultural psychosis” and, as a result, victims suffer an “isolation in the aftermath of rape” (Venable Raine 5). This isolation only ends for each memoirist when she lets go of her previous self, that which existed before the rape.

Rape occurs every two minutes in this country alone: in our homes, on our streets, and within our families. Reading memoirs by rape victims may not directly lower the atrociously high numbers of victims, but it can lessen our own prejudices, enable us to better understand what it is these women endure, and bring about a greater recognition of what is happening. Rulings by international courts of law, such as that detailed above, are vital in removing the limits, restrictions, and denial of our patriarchal culture. Adrienne Rich enforces the recognition deserved by rape victims in her essay, “Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” in which she discusses a “sexual domination perspective through whose lens sexual abuse and terrorism of women by men has been



rendered almost invisible by treating it as natural and inevitable” (45). In refusing to view rape as natural, we take our first step towards recognizing the thousands of rape survivors and breaking societal silence.

In charting their experiences with the rape itself - and the consequent fear, shame, isolation, depression, stress, and loneliness - Sebold, Venable Rain, and Allison are all making powerful statements. They urge readers not to accept rape, but rather to view it as less unspeakable. They salvage some dignity and strength from the wreck that has been their personal experience and, while none of these writers ask for pity or even sympathy, they beg readers for recognition and acceptance, not only of themselves but of all rape victims. In embracing their new selves, each writer finds great inner peace and healing. As Venable Raine states in her introduction, “The victims of rape must carry their memories with them for the rest of their lives. They must not also carry the burden of silence and shame” (6). “Throughout history, rapes have been treated as pardonable, sometimes even welcome, spasms of uncontrollable lust – a view that utterly ignores the woman who has been raped and silences her response. In our century, women’s voices at last are being heard on the subject,” (Buchwald et al. xv) and these voices are exemplified by Sebold, Allison, and Raine. The effect of their voices enables readers to better understand the violence inherent in rape and enables us to better understand it as a crime that requires punishment under the law and greater societal sympathy for survivors.

## LUCKY

As in the recollections of rape by other writers, Alice Sebold's assault is presented to readers of Lucky in a particularly brutal and graphic manner. Sebold spares us no disturbing details; she appears not to see the point in telling her story if she is only going to soften its impact on others. Sebold strives to offer subjectivity on a very difficult subject, while also staging some sort of social protest against the horrors of rape. As Sidonie Smith notes about memoir in general, "[a]utobiographical practices become occasions for restaging subjectivity, and autobiographical strategies become occasions for the staging of resistance [. . .] the autobiographer can lay out an agenda for a changed relationship to subjectivity, identity, and the body" (Smith 157). Sebold certainly writes in resistance against predetermined cultural assumptions about rape and survivors of rape, while writing subjectively as a form of therapy and emotional release; she also restages her own subjectivity in the aftermath of her rape. Unable to argue back with her rapist during her assault, Sebold, like Raine and Allison, writes her memoir as a method of shouting back at the man who forever changed her.

Lucky opens immediately with those moments in the dark tunnel of the Syracuse University amphitheater, where her rapist used both masculine strength and verbal threats to cripple her mentally: "I'll kill you if you scream [. . .] Do you understand?" (5). Sebold put up a vigilant fight, ignoring his threats by screaming regardless, and struggling physically as best she could: "I remember biting him, pushing him, I don't know what. Then I began to run," (5) but to no avail. In ignoring her attacker and not submitting to his demands, Sebold angered him further, although this in no way suggests

she would have been spared her ordeal had she done as she was told. In accordance with the usual psychodynamics of rape, Sebold's rapist displayed verbal threats and aggression: "the assault appears to constitute a discharge of anger; it becomes evident that the rape is the way the offender expresses and discharges a mood state of intense anger, frustration, resentment, rage," although, sometimes the aggression is reactive, meaning that when the victim fights back against her assailant, he retaliates by striking (Groth 21). Before overpowering Sebold sexually, taking her virginity, and inflicting lifelong psychological scarring, her perpetrator exemplified this "reactive aggression" by inflicting horrendous physical abuse upon her: "He pounded my skull into the brick [. . .] [h]e turned me around and sat on my chest [. . .] I was begging," yet still he "wrapped his hands around my neck and started to squeeze," (6) an act which caused Sebold to lose consciousness momentarily.

Despite such an awful physical beating, Sebold describes the worst of her ordeal as the reaction which followed: "People think that a woman stops fighting when she is physically exhausted, but I was about to begin my real fight, a fight of words and lies and the brain" (6). The fear that paralyzed Sebold in the aftermath of her rape was not a factor during the rape itself. Her words suggest a state of removal from her reality, as though she were able to separate herself from what was happening mentally, if not physically, doing whatever was necessary to stay alive. Judith Herman, in her landmark study, Trauma and Recovery, studies victims of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD.) She discusses dissociation, the ability to remove oneself mentally from what is occurring during rape, as common: "The person may feel as though she is observing from outside her body, or as though the whole experience is a bad dream from which she will

shortly awaken” which can lead to feelings of “indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity” (Herman 43). Yet, Sebold’s mental defense did not eradicate her vulnerability at the hands of her rapist: “He held my life in his hand. Those who say they would rather fight to the death than be raped are fools [. . .] You do what you have to” (7). Sebold’s physical pain was terrible enough, but what is so difficult to read is her naiveté about the male body, sex, and her own virginity. For her first sexual encounter to be so violent and fearful is horrendous, yet Sebold does her best to articulate the effects. Her description of her rapist’s desire for intimacy is the point at which, one could argue, the deepest levels of psychological violation occur: ““Kiss me”” he demanded. Sebold writes: “He kissed me again and this time, he inserted his tongue in my mouth [. . .] ‘Kiss back’ he said” (7). That Sebold’s rapist took her virginity without consent is bad enough, but her description of his kissing her, an act of intimacy and affection, then later crying and begging for her forgiveness is, arguably, the most chilling aspect of her ordeal.

To overpower Sebold mentally, her attacker switched instantaneously from a discourse that was, gentle and intimate, to one that was vile and debilitating: “He called me bitch. He told me I was dry” (9). He forced her to compliment him, so “[she] told him he was strong, that he was powerful, that he was a good man,” but Sebold informs us that what “remained unpossessed was [her] brain” (11). In order to survive the rape she had to keep her mind focused, while allowing her body to be totally consumed by the stranger. Sebold describes her rapist’s attempts to kiss her again in the aftermath of the rape. It seems that for him the act was not simply one of dominance and violence, but rather, a “date of sorts,” while for her, “[the rape] was happening all over again,” because his

kissing her is so immediately connected to the sexual assault (13). His viewing the time he spent with Sebold as a “date” links to the epidemic of “date rape,” that is, those which include “both arranged dates and pick-ups at parties and bars where there is an understanding that the victim and rapist are ‘together’ for focused interaction” (Sanders 50). Sebold’s rapist demonstrates mental detachment from reality in these moments in the amphitheater also, only they are not a defense mechanism for survival as they are for Sebold herself. We learn that Sebold’s rapist forced his entire fist inside her vagina, the fist being an image most associated with violence, power, and struggle. This violent image is juxtaposed to the imagery of kissing, which is linked to romance, love, and deep intimacy.

After managing to walk herself back to her dorm room, a place that tangibly represents the girl she was before her rape, Sebold immediately found herself altered and forever changed, already viewing herself as “that girl” (16). She already began to separate herself from those around her, from people who represented her previous innocence and virginity, and not the tarnished woman she felt herself to be. Internally, Sebold’s previous self was splitting off into new forms as a rape survivor, someone who had been physically beaten, and one who was no longer a virgin. Her physical surroundings force her to see this change. A friend of hers gave her a “small smile to acknowledge [her.] It was the first thing from [her] old life that [she] recognized on the other side” (17). Upon reflecting upon that night from a current position of recovery, the writer sees that moment as reflective of her old life, but may not have been aware of it at the time it happened.

Sebold entered the local hospital for examination the same night as her rape occurred, and - despite being surrounded by people one would expect to have some greater understanding of her trauma because of their membership in the medical profession - - Sebold experienced their reaction of distaste and discomfort towards her rape, a response she would endure from many in the months to come. After being given a prescription for Valium, Sebold writes that she threw the piece of paper in a wastebasket: “It felt good to do it. A sort of ‘fuck you’ to the idea that anyone could sweep this thing I’d suffered under the carpet. Even then I thought I knew what could happen if I let people take care of me. I would disappear from view. I wouldn’t be Alice anymore, whatever that was” (20). Sebold introduces readers to the notion that she no longer knew exactly who she was, referring to her old self in the past tense, as an entity that no longer existed. She could not be the person she was before her rape; to return to that mental, emotional, and spiritual state of mind would be impossible. Yet, she did not want to be judged or defined purely as a victim of rape although she could not yet define the person she had become. To be simply a victim did not portray the person that Alice Sebold was in light of her rape. In Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence, Anna Clark defines rape as structured by dichotomies: “the opposition of pleasure and pain, desire and repugnance, consent and rejection” (8). Yet, such simplistic dichotomies to describe the feelings experienced by assailant and victim are exactly what Sebold did not want to be reduced to in the eyes of the public. Sebold wanted to hold on to the young woman she had been before her attack and not become another anonymous statistic, tarnished and deflowered by a monster in a dark tunnel. How she was to overcome such personal and public definition was her greatest challenge, though.

Sebold's friend, Tree, represents many people in the author's life who felt great uneasiness around her: "She was uncomfortable around me; I was no longer like her but was other than" (20). Within a patriarchal society, women are already the "Other" that so many feminist and autobiographical theorists describe, yet as a female victim of rape, she has been ostracized even further by the white, male standard that has been deemed representative of our society. Some responded to her as they would to a film star: "Knowing a victim is like knowing a celebrity. Especially when the crime is clouded in taboo" (25). Sebold was defined only by her rape in her eyes and those of others from the moment she verbalized her ordeal. She recognized the manner in which it separated her instantaneously from others around her: "I had begun to notice that I was now on the other side of something they could not understand. I didn't understand it myself" (27).

After detailing her attack in such excruciating detail, Sebold analyzes aspects of herself, such as her looks, her clothing, and her behavior, it seems, to ensure readers that she was in no way responsible for what had happened to her. Herman discusses this issue of self-blame by victims; they feel as though they invited their attack somehow, although women do not have to place themselves in physically vulnerable positions in order to be raped: "Reviewing the rape scenario after the fact, many women report ignoring their own initial perception of danger, thereby losing the opportunity for escape [. . .]. Later, survivors who have disregarded their 'inner voice' may be furiously critical of their own 'stupidity'" (69). One could argue that, despite writing her memoir at a time when she believed she had overcome her own self-loathing and insecurity, she has not fully removed herself from self-blame or self-examination, because she presents readers with a lengthy analysis of her upbringing: "I only thought I was ugly. There was probably no

better way to confirm this for me than to be raped” (28). Yet she must know that rape is not inflicted on its victims because of their aesthetic beauty or lack thereof. She urges readers to understand that she always wore loose fitting clothing and “heels [which] did not exceed 1.5 inches,” (29). One senses that she needs to convince readers of her innocence in the ordeal. Clearly the reaction of those close to her in the days that followed has haunted her since. Even the policeman who took her statement and affidavit chose to ignore the details of the rape that had the most impact on Sebold, such as the manner in which her rapist forced his entire fist inside her vagina. He told her that “[a]ll that doesn’t matter [. . .] we just need the gist of it” (32). Whether this reaction stems from discomfort at such details or from a lack of regard for what happened remains unclear, but the fact is that such a response is arguably typical of those immersed within a patriarchal community that does not want to recognize such horrors and often doubts their validity. After making this police statement, Sebold felt that “[her] life was over; [her] life had just begun” (33). What is not immediately clear here, but what becomes so clear as one reads through any of these rape memoirs, is that Sebold refers here to the fact that the life she knew before the rape could no longer exist and a new life, one she could not have had any control over at that time, was beginning. Her new selves were emerging, but she did not have the vision (or re-vision) to recognize them yet. Sebold was to begin a very painful journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, because her rape had carved an extremely distinctive line between the girl, the virgin, that she was before that night, and the tainted person she felt herself to be afterwards.

Sebold possesses an undeniable strength, which is apparent in the opening lines of her writing. Her resistance to emotional collapse is simply amazing, but her depiction of



her mother's behavior during Sebold's girlhood leads one to further understand the extent of her resilience, as well as her concern for her family when they learned of her rape. She describes the effect upon her mother of being a housewife, a role totally defined by her patriarchal society: "My mother had always been nervous; she never acclimated to her prescribed role as housewife" (39); and, as a result of her nervous disposition, she began "having things we called 'flaps.' Flaps were our name for when Mommy went crazy" (40). If Sebold feared that her mother would reprimand her for the rape, she does not come out and write that explicitly. Yet, this nervous and angst-filled behavior in her mother is what Alice Sebold would have done everything to evoke; if she was nervous about informing her mother of her rape, fearing a series of "flaps," then one cannot blame her. Yet, her distress at informing her family of her rape must also have stemmed from the knowledge that they would view her as tainted, and that they, in their own deeply personal way, would be raped too. We learn, while reading such memoirs, that not only the immediate victims of rape suffer, but their families and loved ones also, making the effects of rape even more atrocious.

Sebold offers oral imagery within her work to represent the horror of her rape. That her rapist forced her to kiss him seems to be the aspect of her ordeal that haunts her the most, and she continually uses humor or metaphor throughout her writing when referring to the mouth. Her father asks her upon seeing her for the first time since her rape if she wants anything to eat. She replies: "That would be nice [. . .] considering the only thing I've had in my mouth in the last twenty-four hours is a cracker and a cock" (51). As readers, our response is one of utter shock and disturbance at her black humor in such a moment, yet we remain aware that the only way her family can confront her ordeal

is if she literally forces it upon them. She reminds her father, “‘I’m still me Dad,’” (51) more than aware of his absolute discomfort around her. She informs readers that her comment stemmed from a need to reassure her family that she was not going to physically or mentally collapse, when such collapse would have been totally understandable: “I wished [in my response] to slam-dunk the fact that no one needed to worry about this tough customer” (51). Sebold had clearly summoned a great deal of personal strength before her rape and desires a continuation of her former self with demonstration of this personality trait, a characteristic Dorothy Allison also expresses as a method of personal survival.

Sebold adopted a role of forced bravery to reassure her parents she was somehow still the girl she had been last time they saw her; yet she cannot be the same, and it is not until later that she recognizes this herself. Traumatic events fundamentally alter the person we once were, as discussed by Judith Herman: “They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others [. . .] Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community” (Herman 51). Sebold is severed from her immediate community, that being her family, because of this event, and, as a result, returns home to an immediate wall of silence and discomfort. Instead of sitting down and urging their daughter to talk about her ordeal if needed, they whisper behind closed doors and her mother “promises she would tell [Sebold’s father] what she knew when [Sebold] slept” (51). This wall of silence echoes the imagined wall seen in the dreams of Dorothy Allison. Sebold attempts opening up to her mother, admitting her fears about men and the transference of her loathing of her rapist onto

others: “‘I feel like I’ve lain under all these men,’” yet, her mother can only reply, “‘That’s ridiculous Alice’” (53). Sebold writes that her recognition of fearing men “was an early nuance of a realization that would take years to face [. . .] I share my life with my rapist. He is the husband to my fate” (53). Yet, she notes that she could do nothing but “perform” for her family, “thinking that it was for [her apparent resilience that she] was loved” (55). Fear or loathing of men are not similar responses in rape survivors, because the degree of loathing or fear varies with each individual. Studies performed by Joyce Williams and Carol Holmes found that “the two most adversely affected dimensions were trust and sexual attraction, while communication and general level of comfort [with men] were [. . .] the least affected” (82). While Sebold was told by her mother to stop being ridiculous when she expressed a feeling of having been with every man she passed on the street, her fear and loathing of men is understandable and, it seems, extremely common.

Alice Sebold demonstrates a high level of psychological repression in the aftermath of her rape as a way of shielding her family from the brutality of her trauma. She fears wrecking her sister’s straight A record because her rape occurred during college finals, lives in terror that she will induce another panic attack in her mother, and thinks only of protecting her loved ones. Yet, it seems that she does this not only out of love for them, but because if she faces the true brutality of what happened with them, then she cannot continue ignoring it herself, cannot indulge in the act of *repression*. Herman describes repression as “prenarrative” because when one undergoes repression, one is describing their experience in its untransformed state: “It does not develop or progress in time, and it does not reveal the storyteller’s feelings or interpretation of events.”

Repression of one's emotions and feelings leads to memories that appear in the form of "still snapshots or a silent movie" (175). If she shields them from the details, she spares herself in turn: "these are the things you do instead of collapsing" (56). The entire family "was on their best behavior" (58) because this was easier for them than "fitting together the horrors of imagination and nightmare and trying to fashion what had happened to their sister's or child's reality" (61). As a family, they presented a united front of discomfort with the phenomenon of rape, creating their own wall of silence in trying to ignore it, yet each was withdrawing and trying to compose a bearable version of events.

As Sebold notes, "You save yourself or you remain unsaved," (61) a line that could be interpreted as justification for her family's response to her rape, or a true commentary on the literal saving of herself that she had to perform. Sebold describes how she and her family "were clinging to the wreck," the metaphor also adopted by Adrienne Rich and Nancy Venable Raine, which Sebold uses to describe how "useless [it was] to pretend [she] hadn't changed" (72). Only after finally recognizing this change within her could Sebold begin to salvage herself from this emotional and psychological wreckage and re-write her self-image textually. Paul John Eakin uses the term "dysnarrativia" to describe the event of writing about trauma, and in turn, re-writing one's self image: "This sense of something missing, an inner chill or deadness, seems to be associated with a 'dysnarrativia' that bespeaks a damaged identity [. . .] we live in a culture in which narrative functions as the signature of the real" (Eakin 140).

In writing, Sebold demonstrates what Sidonie Smith describes as "the universal 'I'" of female memoir and autobiography. Unlike the often self-centered and very centrally-focused memoir of white, male writers, female memoirists like Sebold, Allison,

and Raine discuss a personal event but simultaneously universalize it, speaking for and about other female victims of rape. Smith describes the female writer of memoir:

“Affiliated physically, socially, psychologically in relationship to others, ‘her individuality [is] sacrificed to the constitutive definitions of her identity as someone’s daughter, someone’s wife and someone’s mother.’ The unified self disperses, radiating outward until its fragments dissipate altogether into social and communal masks” (Smith 13). This fragmented self within each female writer is reflected in language that portrays their multiple fragmented selves; they are speaking as women, rape victims, lovers, daughters, wives, and friends. Each adopts a discourse for each of these selves, echoing the heteroglossia that Mikhail Bakhtin conceptualized. They all recognize the high occurrence of rape, never suggesting their situation was any better or worse than another victim of rape, they discuss certain similarities of response, and the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that afflicts millions of people who have experienced trauma.

In Sebold, we see this universal “I” through the chapters in which she describes brutalities inflicted upon neighbors in her hometown, an elderly couple who were beaten and robbed, and an ex-boyfriend’s mother who confessed for the first time to being raped after Alice Sebold returned home and spoke publicly of her ordeal. Sebold, Allison, and Raine all gather a certain solace in learning of others’ experiences of rape and trauma. This case concerning her ex-boyfriend’s mother had a profound effect on Sebold because not only did it “provide [her] first awareness of another rape victim,” but it also presented her with her “first awareness of another rape victim who lived in [her] world,” one who, in opening up her own experience, proved to the writer “that there was power to be had in

sharing [her] story” (73). The power that is found in sharing one’s story is discussed by Sidonie Smith:

Survivor discourse and the tactic of speaking out may often involve a confessional mode of speech [but] effective voicing of certain kinds of trauma must go beyond the confessional to acts of witnessing [. . .] Victims must be remade as survivors through acts of speaking out, telling their stories in ways that move beyond a concentration on personal feelings to testimony that critiques larger cultural forces. What we need is not to confess, but to witness (206).

Sebold juxtaposes the sympathetic reactions of other trauma victims to the cold, and very uncomfortable reactions of those close to her who are unable to relate in any way. To even say the word “rape,” to verbally name it publicly, is likened by Sebold as being “akin to an act of vandalism” and one that placed her on “a planet where an act of violence changed your life” (68). Her analogy of feeling far-removed from her previous self, as though she were relegated to outer space, enforces to readers just how distant she felt from others and from the person she was before her rape. Because of such little understanding towards victims of rape exists, and because of the very patriarchal stereotypes that encompass girls who have been violated in such a way, violation that is parallel with those who behave promiscuously in the eyes of some, Sebold endured self-consciousness and paranoia that threatened her relationship with men: “*No nice boy will ever want me*. I was all those horrible words used for rape; I was changed, bloodied, damaged goods, ruined” (69). She accurately cites such words because most who live within a male-dominated society would view her in such a way, if only sub-consciously; yet in reading her memoir, and learning of her inner pain and feelings, we view her as

one subjected to horror that was outside of her control and as a young woman to be admired for finding courage, not as tarnished and damaged goods. Anna Clark discusses the notion of women's sexuality as men's property, a violation of which renders one as damaged, bloodied goods in the eyes of patriarchal society: "Women are not 'property,' of course; they are human beings with minds and wills of their own. Patriarchal ideology about rape attempted to force them to regard their sexuality as property, however, by using the threat of sexual violence" (Clark 7).

Sebold, in writing her story, recognizes the power of language as the power to heal, a recognition that is continually referred to throughout her narrative. She understands implicitly the power of discourse, having been raised by parents who seemed, somehow, to believe that problems did not exist if they were not talked about:

The urge to tell was immediate. It sprang from a response so ingrained in me that even if I had tried to hold it back, thought better of it, I doubt I could have done so. My family had secrets, and from an early age, I had crowned myself the one who would reveal them. I hated the hush-hush of hiding things from people. The constant instruction to 'keep it down or the neighbors will hear you.' My usual response was, 'So what?'" (74).

The Sebold family's tendency towards silence surrounding rape perpetuated societal silence about such a taboo topic, as well as their previous desire for silence concerning family matters. Shame was to be avoided at all costs, and even though Sebold's rapist should have been carrying such a burden, it was her family that was silenced by its presence.

Sebold recognizes in a very mature and instinctive manner that the only way she could begin to embrace her new self, the self that was born the day of her rape, was by knocking down this wall of silence using the power of language to recreate what happened. Sebold later turned to writing poetry as a form of expression, although she vividly recounts being told that “subjects like rape had a place in poetry but that [she] would never win the prizes or cultivate an audience at large that way” (205). This is just one example that enforces how unwilling society is to recognize rape, or even talk about it. As William Sanders notes: “Rape has a muddled history, because it has often been considered to be an ‘unmentionable’ crime in the Puritanical sense, kept hidden by victims and society” (19).

In the immediate aftermath of her rape, Sebold needed desperately to begin her recovery by simply talking through her experience; her mother, though wanting to be the recipient of such knowledge, could not hear such details. The result was that Sebold was sent to a psychiatrist. Dr. Graham, a woman and a supposed expert on victims of rape, demonstrated behavior synonymous with the most stringent and offensive patriarchal thought, her first question to Sebold being: “‘Well [. . .] I guess this will make you less inhibited about sex, huh?’” (77). This statement implicates rape as a sexual experience, but as all three memoirists argue, it is an act of violence. How a woman of such authority and expertise could respond in this way is shocking, yet it further enforces what we learn from all these memoirs, which is that victims of rape and sexual assault need a voice, though there are very few willing to hear what they have to say: “What Dr. Graham had said came from a feminist in her thirties. Someone, I thought, who should have known better. But I was learning that no one – females included – knew what to do with a rape



victim” (78). Women’s physical similarities and vulnerabilities do not mean that women innately can understand or want to understand one another’s experiences of rape. What goes unrecognized by Graham and so many others encountered by Alice is that the physical brutality of the rape, the act as both sexual and violent, was not the only cause for distress; if she came to terms with her rape, she would not necessarily have come to terms with sex because, as Raine argues vehemently, rape is not a sexual act: “I’ve always thought that under *rape* in the dictionary it should tell the truth. It is not just forcible intercourse; rape means to inhabit and destroy everything” (123). Sebold not only recognizes the other effects of rape besides physical brutality; she too clearly distinguishes it from sex: “I don’t have any sexual associations with [rape.] It was pure violence” (151). One could argue that Sebold must have some associations between sex and rape because her rape was her first experience with sexual intercourse, but she seems to be alluding to the total lack of intimacy in such an act, even if she was forced to kiss her attacker.

Returning to Syracuse the summer after her rape was a move by Sebold that was both impressive and essential for her own growth. She refused to hide from her fears, the place where she was raped, or her perpetrator, who still walked the streets of her college town. Yet, her return to college and all the innocence it had represented for her marked the beginning of her true recognition of her new self, the woman she had become as a result of her experience. The geographical significance of returning to Syracuse forced her to face the tangible reality of her rape; she could not ignore her rape if faced with so many of its associations. She moved away from the belief that she could be the Alice she was before that fateful night, which gives her a power she also found in telling her story:

“I became story, not person, and story implies a kind of ownership by the storyteller” (97). This seems to be a reference to her writing her story of her rape for her own well-being, but also her being a source of gossip for so many on campus, many of whom pretended to know her but did not. It seems disturbing that most shy away from the reality of rape but many want some association with rape survivors for sensationalist purposes. Nevertheless, Sebold attended poetry workshops, taught by the likes of Tess Gallagher, and began to talk about her ordeal with a select few who could be trusted.

Just as Sebold began to blossom emotionally, confront her pain, and encounter some sort of self-recovery, an event occurred that reverted her back to a rigid and fearful, yet very brave woman, another self: “On October 5, I ran into my rapist on the street. By the end of that night, I could stop calling him ‘the rapist,’ and start calling him Gregory Madison” (102). As a result, Sebold writes: “I was in the center of it all and simultaneously I realized I didn’t exist. I was just a catalyst that made people nervous, guilty, or frivolous. I was frightened, but more than anything, I was disgusted” (108). It is this disgust that fueled Sebold’s bravery and belief in herself through what must have been a truly terrifying time, a time in which she would have to re-live her rape many times, before she could re-vise who she was. Her feeling of being in the center of the event but not a part of it echoes her mental dissociation during her rape; she would continue to use this psychological mechanism as a form of defense for years to come.

The arrest and subsequent trial of Sebold’s perpetrator was the time when she recognized, most fully, that she “was a victim, not really a person” in the eyes of society (112). Her presence both unnerved and disturbed those around her, because she embodied rape and all it represented. She carried the burden of shame that should have been her

rapist's. Sebold's presence, embodiment of rape, and representation of assault are all an important presence in the text because they give real voice and visual imagery to the reality of rape. The aggressive manner in which both the police and lawyers interrogated her, the way her sincerity was doubted by all involved, and the knowledge that the capture of her rapist was such a rare event, placed Sebold under immense pressure. She forces readers to recognize the archaic and very prejudiced legal system that many survivors of rape have to confront and then convince: "until very recently, the law has been written and interpreted by men [. . .] conviction depends on finding guilt 'beyond a reasonable doubt.' Since conviction is frequently dependent on an alleged rapist's word against his victim's, it is often difficult to convince the judge or jury that rape occurred" (Wiseman 143). As a result, rape has been historically difficult to prove.

While viewing her rapist in a police line-up, the writer identified the wrong man after being distracted by another who purposely intimidated and misguided her. She was told by a police officer: "His friend gives you a look that's scary. He can tell when you are in front of the mirror and he psyches you out. Meanwhile, the suspect looks down like he doesn't even know where or why he's there. Like he got lost on the way to the circus" (140). What we learn in this moment is that, not only are men raping, but many are protecting each other from prosecution. This is so common that even the police are aware that it happens. Sebold's reputation, purely because she was a victim of rape, already stood tarnished, but to identify the wrong man in a police line-up made the chances of prosecution even slimmer. She is more than aware that, despite this huge error, the loss of her virginity at the time of her rape was the loss of a virtuous characteristic, yet one that she was willing to manipulate to her own advantage. She states: "my loss that night was

my gain today. Having been a virgin made me look good, made the crime appear worse,” because all Sebold wanted was “to win” and not to gain “[the jury’s] pity” (143). As readers, we see a new self of Sebold emerging when faced with a court battle, one that is hard, direct, and echoes the “tough customer” she describes herself as being. This self is far-removed from the timid poet who lost herself in college workshops after her rape. In prosecuting and taking a legal stand against her attacker, Sebold views herself as Madison’s “opponent” and no longer his “victim,” (160) a distinction essential for her own recovery. She is reminded immediately, however, of how low rape convictions are, making her strength and commitment even more admirable: “In rape cases, it was almost expected that the victim would drop out of the process even if she originally initiated it” (160).

By knowing that rapists protected one another, Sebold was forced to view the men of her patriarchal society as somehow aligned with one another. The writer learned that Detective Lorenz, the man who had taken her statement the night of her rape, had initially doubted the truth of her story, reading in the notes on her file that, ““It is this writer’s opinion, after interview of the victim, that this case, as presented by the victim, is not completely factual,”” (144) and Sebold began removing herself further from the men in her life, even those she was supposed to trust. It is shocking to learn that rapists are so prominent within our society that they are even categorized; Sebold’s is described as a “power” rapist, as opposed to an anger or sadistic rapist, power rapists being those “often unable to sustain an erection and [. . .] only able to do so once they feel they’ve completely physically and mentally dominated their victim” (166). That society is so aware of the different psychologies behind rapists, yet has a capture and imprisonment

rate of less than 2% is ridiculous. In his text Men Who Rape, A. Nicholas Groth performs an in-depth study of these three types of rapists. He defines Sebold's power rapist as one whose "[s]exuality becomes a means of compensating for underlying feelings of inadequacy and serves to express issues of mastery, strength, control, authority, identity, and capability. His goal is sexual conquest" (25). Such a man will likely rape again and that Sebold had to go to such personal lengths to ensure Madison did not subject another woman to the horror she endured is outrageous. The system needs to protect women, not rapists.

Sebold distances herself from men and her patriarchal society, finding a great bond with women, but especially, other rape victims. The "I" of her narrative is further universalized here as we see her speaking on behalf of all victims and not only herself. Maria Flores, a fellow Syracuse student, is one example and Sebold describes her continual rape by both her father and her brothers over a period of several years. Another is a friend of Alice's from college, who was raped in the apartment they shared, blaming the writer as though somehow "infected" because she had lived with a rape victim. These women, brutalized in such a way, are frequently juxtaposed with so many of the men we meet in Alice Sebold's life, including Gregory Madison himself and his defense attorney who was "snide," who questioned and doubted every statement she made, and who used Madison's race as a method for arousing jury sympathy: "I wasn't feeling powerful anymore," Sebold writes, "I was guilty for the race of my rapist, guilty for the lack of representation for them in the legal profession [. . .] guilty that he was the only black man in the room" (195). Sebold's problem with self-blame, so common among rape victims, is seen vividly at this point. Madison's race is a factor for Sebold, who clearly feels that

total truth and honesty is the essential requirement for writing this story. There is no suggestion of Sebold's being racist, yet she does admit in writing that "this wouldn't be the first time, or the last, that I wished my rapist had been white" (198). Again, she is disconnecting herself from the reality of her rape by wishing a different identity for her rapist, a man she would rather had not existed at all.

After maintaining the strength to withstand a trial, and seeing her rapist sentenced, Sebold found herself left with nothing to distract her from coming to terms, somehow, with her rape and from accepting her new, obviously fragmented self. It was at this point that she demonstrated what so many other victims of rape displayed: denial, avoidance of the event, and alcohol or drug dependency. Alcohol abuse was the first sign in Sebold of her serious repression: "I didn't like how drinking felt but I liked how it released me [. . .] The added bonus: I didn't remember much" (152). Drug abuse and alcoholism are extremely common among rape victims because "[d]epersonalization, derealization, and anesthesia are accompanied by a feeling of unbearable agitation and a compulsion to attack the body" (Herman 109). Most who experience rape are left feeling depersonalized and spiritually anesthetized, so there exists a tendency to "attack the body" with drugs and alcohol to numb this sense of agitation.

Sebold details her need for love and intimacy with a boyfriend, as well as her very understandable fear of both, in writing that is heart-breaking to read. Having experienced sex for the first time with her rapist, even if she refused to view the act as a sexual one, she found "starting over" extremely difficult. The only way she could do this was to view her first time with a man of her choice as the event when she lost her virginity; this is definitely another form of denial, but it was the only way she could endure the very

necessary experience. Sebold would say: “I think it’s better that I was raped as a virgin [. . .] I don’t have any sexual associations with it like other women do. It was pure violence. This way, when I do have normal sex, the difference between sex and violence will be very clear to me.” She admits that this was all said in denial: “[She] wonder[ed] who bought it” (151).

We see the writer trying to confront her fears and the reality of what happened to her by seeking a boyfriend, yet we also see her doing it in a cloud of alcohol, fear, repression, and denial. Sadly, her first chosen sexual experience is shallow, unromantic, and insensitive on the part of her lover, Jamie: “I wasn’t prepared for it. I wept. I wept louder than I ever could have imagined. I shook with it [. . .] I felt humiliated but I couldn’t stop. I don’t think he knew he was what I considered my first, but he was smart enough to know where the crying stemmed from” (157). Despite the obvious issues with this experience, Sebold found herself liberated in so many ways: “I had lost my real virginity. Everything had functioned, if not exactly perfectly, and I had been accepted by a man [. . .] Of course, I did what he told me not to do. I fell in love with him” (157). This initial experience does not enable Sebold to simply overcome the sexual apprehension that inevitably arose after her rape; it becomes a method of escape rather than an experience of love and pleasure: “I began a sort of unconscious lying to myself when engaged in sex. [My lover’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” (207). We recognize a mental detachment still present in Sebold despite her physical experience with consensual sex.

In considering the emotional journey Sebold undertakes throughout this narrative, one filled with such “bumps and memories,” and the way in which readers see her trying to rewrite herself and let go of her pre-raped self, we see her initial stage of fear give way to utter rage during her trial, and then when Madison is sentenced to eight to twenty five years, (the maximum for rape and sodomy,) her fear gives way to overwhelming sadness and emotion. She describes how she “started crying but couldn’t stop. [She] cried until [she] was spent, dehydrated, [her] eyes and the flesh around them a site map of broken capillaries” (203). Her inability to stop crying once she allowed herself do so for the first time suggests a recognition of her new selves and a slight release of her pain. Sebold still repressed her sadness and hatred, though, focusing instead on her body and developing intense self-loathing; “I hated my body. I used that hate to shed fifteen pounds” (203). That her body was the literal site for the abuse and devastation bestowed upon her makes her self-obsession with her physical appearance understandable. Sebold still, despite enduring such an exhausting trial, could not release her feelings of self-blame and self-hatred, her entire world defined by her rape and the man who tore away her virginity: “from now on this would be it. My life and the lives of those around me. Rape” (217). Sidonie Smith analyzes the female memoir and its literal connection to the body: “the autobiographical subject engages in a process of critical self-consciousness through which she comes to an awareness of the relationship of her specific body to the cultural ‘body’ and to the body politic. That change in consciousness prompts cultural critique” (Smith 131). In the case of Sebold, however, we see personal critique coming long before her cultural critique of rape as a phenomenon and of patriarchal society’s attitudes towards it.



Sebold's need to escape from rape as the essence of her existence is understandable, and in the Aftermath section of Lucky we learn of how she eventually replaced drinking with heroin abuse: "I loved heroin. Drinking had its drawbacks – namely, the volume needed to reach oblivion – and I didn't like the taste or the history – my mother had done that. Cocaine made me sick" (235). She found herself "in odd places," (235) and at one point feared AIDS, yet noticed even then her lack of concern at contracting such a fatal illness; this strongly suggests a sub-conscious desire for self-destruction. Sebold clearly felt dead within her own world anyway; literal death was a welcome escape and, although she "wanted to be better [she] didn't know how," (236) so the cycle of sadness and abuse continued.

After reading of herself within Trauma and Recovery, Alice Sebold was able to recognize herself as suffering from PTSD, and it was then that she began her final step towards recovery : "I had post-traumatic stress disorder, but the only way I would believe it was to discover it on my own;" her discovery of this led to her eventual recovery (240).

Sebold leaves readers with a strong sense of internal calm and tranquility. There is no final paragraph that describes her living happily ever after; we can only assume she went on to find happiness with her husband, although we do learn she managed to leave drugs and alcohol abuse behind her. She writes distinctively of herself as a new person, though, as if she had finally accepted her new selves after the rape and had let go of any hopes she held for still being the Alice she had been before that terrible night. Her final line of the text states, "I live in a world where the two truths coexist; where both hell and hope lie in the palm of my hand," (242) a line which does not sentimentalize her recovery or suggest that she will ever completely come to terms with what happened to her, but

which hints at a hybrid self made up of both heaven and hell. What Sebold seems to be saying is that she can either give in to the pain and hurt of her rape, following a path back to emotional hell, or she can approach the avenue of hope and enlightenment, a possibility that, as readers, we recognize is very real from reading texts such as Lucky.

## TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW FOR SURE

While Alice Sebold uses court records and Raine uses diary entries and to-do lists as forms of expression in their memoirs, Allison uses photographs. All are ways in which the writers present themselves as they were either before or after their rape, as a representation of their previous self or the multiple selves they have found within. Two or Three Things I Know for Sure is interspersed with photographs of Allison and her family, which serve to highlight her descriptions of her family and to shed even greater light upon the very patriarchal society in which she grew up. The faces that stare back at readers are those of aggressive-looking women, so evidently hardened by their experiences at the hands of men whose cruelty and demands were to be met and greeted without question. Allison reflects throughout her memoir upon the distinct differences between men and women in Greenville, South Carolina as it was in the 1950s, as well as the communal silence about rape of her immediate community. She describes the subservience of women as expected by men, and the very private battle these women fought in order to survive a lifetime of such an existence.

Allison attempts to explain why the men of her family, like so many others, were incapable of breaking both patriarchal and abusive patterns of behavior. Her photographs are an effort to answer these questions and explain to readers why she would meet such little support from family members when repeatedly raped by her own stepfather. Allison was raped, not by a stranger as Alice Sebold and Nancy Venable Raine were, but by someone she knew; yet her memoir proves that the effects of rape, whether by a stranger or a loved one, are the same, or as some would argue, may even be worse. She was raped by her stepfather as a child, so her memoir differs from those of Raine and Sebold

because of her very young age and her close familial relationship with her rapist. Abuse by stepfathers, according to a study by Finkelhor et al., is seven times more likely than abuse by fathers, because of the “absence of the incest taboo as well as role confusion in a reconstituted family” (Faller 59). Power struggles for such perpetrators are a large factor also, and enforce the hypothesis that most who sexually abuse are victims of such assault themselves: “in an effort to cope with a sense of vulnerability from the traumatic experience [he] takes on the abusive role. By victimizing others, he gains mastery over his own trauma. He is no longer a victim because he is a perpetrator” (Fuller 58).

Two or Three Things I Know for Sure opens with a description by Allison of her family that is told with an almost childlike tone, as she describes how she and her sisters shared the cheekbones of her mother and her aunt Dot, as though physically she had inherited a legacy of sorts from a family with little else to pass down: “Peasants, that’s what we are and always have been. Call us the lower orders, the great unwashed, the working class, the poor, proletariat, trash, lowlife and scum” (1). Allison writes that, in describing her family, she can tell a story and do it in any manner that she desires; “I can make a story out of it, out of us. Make it pretty or sad, laughable or haunting. Dress it up with legend and aura and romance” (1). Her ability, and, some would argue, her desire to add romance and humor to her life story are a defense mechanism of sorts that derives from her need to rewrite her own history. Allison, as an adult writing her memoir, seems to have accepted the abuse she endured as a child, but as a child when she hid with her sisters in the “red-dirt bean hills and row on row of strawberries,” (1) she had to make her childhood experiences a story in order to ignore the brutality of her reality. “Dress[ing]

them up in legend” enabled her to view those years almost as a bleak fairytale and nothing more (1).

Allison suggests that she and her sisters found great solace and escape within the fantasies of their minds, which may have been the only way they were able to cope with what they were suffering at home. Just as many children enduring domestic abuse are found to lie, Allison demonstrates her own need for a new reality, one created by herself and, if told enough, it became a believable means of escape:

When we were small, I would capture my sisters the way they caught butterflies, capture their attention and almost make them believe that all I said was true. ‘Let me tell you about the women who ran away. All those legendary women who ran away.’ I’d tell about the witch queens who cooked their enemies in great open pots [ . . . ] After a while deepest satisfaction was in the story itself, greater even than the terror in my sisters’ faces, the laughter, and, God help us, the hope (2).

The metaphor of fairytale characters used to portray the women of Allison’s community juxtaposes their poor lives with imaginary, legendary female figures. That hope was something viewed as negative suggests that it was dangerous because of its false nature. Allison and all the women of her family learned with age not to hope, because their mundane, monotonous, and miserable futures at the hands of abusive, terrorizing men were inevitable. They would be happier if they accepted it and miserable if they fought it. All Allison could do as a young child was create myths of powerful women who were able to kill off their enemies through childish methods of romance and revenge. As Raine and Sebold both endured periods of utter denial concerning their rape, Allison lived through an entire childhood of storytelling and fantastical creations, upon which she

reflects when writing this memoir, and all of which are based upon stories, passages, and frames of reference that analyze events from her past: “when I walked, I talked – story-talked, out loud – assuming identities I made up. Sometimes I was myself, did things that no one I knew had ever done, particularly things that girls were not supposed to do. In the world as I remade it, nothing was forbidden; everything was possible” (2). This demonstrates a form of denial seen also in the narratives of Alice Sebold and Nancy Venable Raine, but in this case, it is typical of childhood denial which can involve lying and story-telling as a form of seeking either attention or escape.

For each of the memoirists discussed, the use of language as a weapon against fear and oppression or as a simple means of escape is as much a part of their journey after rape as any other form of help or guidance they received. Each woman takes the time in her piece to emphasize the importance, for her personally, of language and discourse, of the imagination and the mind, and of the way in which escape was as necessary at one stage, as recognition and acceptance became later. Allison indicates, very early in her memoir, the importance of language for her while enduring domestic sexual abuse:

I know the use of fiction in a world of hard truth, the way fiction can be a harder piece of truth. The story of what happened, or what did not happen but should have – the story can become a curtain drawn shut, a piece of insulation, a disguise, a razor, a tool that changes every time it is used and sometimes becomes something other than we intended. The story becomes the thing needed. *Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is what it means to have no loved version of your life but the one you make* (3).

Allison creates very figurative language and imagery here, yet all three memoirs refuse to draw curtains against the brutal truth or provide insulation against rape. Allison wants to open the truth up, which is very different from her storytelling years as a child. She references “two or three things” she knows for sure continually throughout her text, and in this instance, is using the discourse of her family and the town she is from, a very Southern discourse, to highlight the importance of language and storytelling for herself. Language and her ability to write her story literally saved her but there is no final sense of full recovery; her journey is continual and ongoing, as Connie D. Griffin argues: “there is no final ‘place’ of arrival, but rather a continual narrative enactment of the journey of self-discovery, a fluid, ongoing process that, even in the narrative’s conclusions, opens out into yet another story of the shifting terrain of subjectivity” (322). Allison’s memoir is “a brilliant enactment of how one’s life stories can bury one or can provide a medium through which one may climb toward liberation from social, literary, and familial burial” (Griffin 322). Griffin suggests here that, in refusing to be buried by her story and experience, Allison leaves herself open to continual change within her on-going process of recovery and coping. There is no final place of arrival, because rape is not an experience anyone can ever fully overcome; survivors must seek acceptance and accept on-going change in light of their rape, refusing to become buried in who they used to be and what happened to them.

Dorothy Allison used storytelling as a form of imaginary escape throughout her childhood, but was actually one of the few who managed to get away from the fear and misery of her small town at that time by eventually leaving. She describes herself as “[a] witch queen, a warrior, a maiden, a mother with a canvas suitcase, a daughter with

broken bones” who managed to break free because she had to: “women run away because they must. I ran because if I had not, I would have died” (4). However, as Sebold kept running from her rape through drug and alcohol abuse, and Raine’s own denial caught up with her in the form of a near mental breakdown, Allison also recognizes how important it is to know when to stop running: “No one told me that you take your world with you, that running becomes a habit, that the secret to running is to know why you run and where you are going – and to leave behind the reason you run” (4). Allison ran, not only from her stepfather’s disgusting and dangerous sexual advances, but also from continuing the only legacy her family could give: one of “resilience and determination and the cost of hard compromise” (5). Silence and shame are part of this hard compromise. She notes that her aunt, her mother, and the many women before them had stayed, not realizing how trapped and unhappy they would become, “(b)ut it happened. It happened over and over again” (5).

This repetition of abuse by men is exemplified most clearly in a description of Allison’s mother. A photograph of her mother, innocent and so young, sits in the corner of a page upon which her history is detailed in just a few lines, yet she is presented as a victim of circumstance and patriarchal society, rather than as the sinner many viewed her to be: “[she] was beautiful, that hard thing, beautiful. Men wanted my mama, wanted her before she knew what it meant, when she was twelve, thirteen, still a child” (20). The photograph was taken when Dorothy Allison was in her womb, a fact that is shocking when one studies her “white socks and A-line skirt, hair in a Kitty Wells cloud, schoolgirl blouse, Peter Pan collar, and the hesitant smile,” her fear at being pregnant while only fifteen so evident in her young eyes. Despite Allison’s father being “as proud as he could



be to have that beautiful girl,” (20) he ran away and left her to raise their child alone, his abandonment so devastating to Allison’s mother that “she never trusted any man again – but wanted to, wanted to so badly it ate the heart out of her” (21). Beauty and aesthetics seem to be linked to sexism in this case, because of the fundamental disrespect that men can have for women, both beautiful and not. Those like Allison’s mother who exuded beauty were targeted by men before being discarded, as women who were not attractive to men were disregarded also. They are viewed as property and little else. Her next marriage was, tragically, to a man who would sexually abuse her own daughter. Her story is similar to thousands of others, yet Allison personalizes it by detailing her immediate familial history. Allison’s mother was devastated and emotionally scarred for life by this early experience with a man, her story a tragic repetition of what so many women have endured. She could not see him as a perpetrator of incest, thus, continuing the cycle of denial.

Physical beauty, as possessed by women, is something that Allison explores throughout her text. She never suggests for a second that beauty invites abuse or devastation by men, but she does insinuate that one is targeted more heavily if aesthetically attractive to the opposite sex: “Beauty is a hard thing. Beauty is a mean story. Beauty is slender girls who die young, fine-featured delicate creatures of whom men write poems” (37). Male power and dominance thrive and women like Allison’s mother, who are beautiful and attractive, find themselves caught in this web of patriarchal abuse and misuse, probably hoping in their young naiveté that these men will somehow rescue them. Their fate seems sealed because their innocent, youthful hope leads them to trust men who would only use them and then discard them.

Just as Sebold and Raine write their stories in relation to other women's suffering, universalizing their oppression and pain at the hands of men, so does Allison. She writes of her mother's past in a manner that is sympathetic, but she also seems to be looking for answers as to why her mother would become involved with a man like her stepfather. Allison describes, later in her memoir, a friend she met when living in Monte Rio, having finally fled from Greenville. As if to suggest to readers that her memoir is not simply supposed to chart her suffering, but rather the suffering of so many women at the hands of their insensitive and abusive husbands, fathers, friends, brothers, or lovers, Allison references her friend Lucy. Allison is subjective about the issue of rape, leading to what Griffin describes as "representational writing: what has so often been presented as a problem – that women's autobiographical narratives do not 'fit' into the traditional canon – in fact offers a salient solution to the dilemma of 'representational status'" (Griffin 325). Originally named Lillian, Lucy changed her name because her husband did not like it. By the time Dorothy Allison met her, Lucy was a drunk who desperately wanted to piece her life back together, but was escaping from her past through alcohol abuse. She had fled from her husband, because "[i]t was either kill the man or leave, and he wasn't worth killing" (22). The reason for her anger? She left him all of their possessions and "[o]n the worked-pine dining room table his parents had given them, she left him the reason she was leaving - the hospital bill for their stillborn daughter, the one he had insisted didn't matter. *'It wasn't as though it was a boy'*" (22). In describing this woman, who entered her life for only a short period, Allison demonstrates that, not only was her suffering far from unique, but that women are raped in many different ways. The level of emotional pain and anguish, as well as the need for escape from such deep-seated sexism

that Lucy demonstrates, is very similar to the pain endured by the authors of the rape memoirs I discuss. It is as though Allison is writing that what Lucy experienced was a form of rape, only her rape was mental and spiritual, what Janet Bode calls “little rapes,” her name for when a person violates your dignity and self-respect, your feelings, or your sense of being (Bode 10). Although she had geographically removed herself from the man who caused her such pain, she had not learned to stop running or to forget what she was running from, exactly what Allison references earlier as so important but which she took so many years to learn herself.

After detailing the stories of many of the women in her young life as victims of their poverty and the men they were related to or married to, Allison juxtaposes their resilience and heartache with the aggression and anger of the men she knew. She recognizes that they suffered also, and felt the same raw disappointment with life as the women felt, but notes how they failed to break any chains and continued their own legacy of fear and abuse: “The tragedy of the men in my family was silence, a silence veiled by boasting and jokes. If you didn’t look close, you might miss the sharp glint of pain in their eyes, the restless angry way they gave themselves up to fate” (28). Allison does not appear to demonize any of the men she describes, but seeks rather to understand them and their reasons for their behavior as part of a communal, ancestral cycle that can only be broken if recognized. Yet, without directly stating it, Allison depicts the women of her family as hard and angered by their inevitable fate also, although they do not retaliate sexually, physically, and verbally, as the men do: “*Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that no one is as hard as my uncles had to pretend to be*” (32). It seems the women had to harden also in order to survive their pain, suffering, and

disappointment: “My family has a history of death and murder, grief and denial, rage and ugliness – the women of the family most of all” (32).

Apart from Allison and her sister, the other women of her family are not directly described as enduring sexual abuse, but the writer describes herself as one of them, and suggests that their experiences are similar:

The women of my family were measured, manlike, sexless, bearers of babies, burdens, and contempt. My family? The women of my family? We are the ones in all those photos taken at mining disasters, floods, fires. We are the ones in the background with our mouths open [ . . . ] ugly and old and exhausted. Solid, stolid, wide-hipped and predestined. Wide-faces meant stupid. Wide hands marked workhorses with dull hair and tired eyes, thumbing through magazines full of women so different from us they could have been another species (33).

The association of herself and her relatives as women entangled in natural disasters says a great deal about their innate resilience and toughness, both mental and physical. Her comparison of them as work-horses with a dreadful destiny laid out before them depicts them as depressed, impoverished creatures; there is nothing delicate or feminine in this imagery. She highlights the relations for herself among femininity, sexuality, and sexual abuse: “Let me tell you what I have never been allowed to be. Beautiful and female. Sexed and sexual. I was born trash in a land where the people all believe themselves natural aristocrats” (32). It is as though the sexual perpetrators of abuse against the women in Allison’s community had to keep them mentally and spiritually battered by stripping them of beauty, femininity, and confidence. In sexually abusing them, this effect would have been guaranteed. The rhetoric of the men around her only enforced this

desire for control and domination: “Men and boys all the same. Talk about us like we dogs, bitches sprung full-grown on the world, like we were never girls [. . .] [t]urn us into jokes ‘cause we get worn and ugly. Never look at themselves. Never think about what they’re doing to girls they’ve loved, girls they wore out” (36). As a grown woman, writing of her experiences later in life when she has reached a level of self-acceptance, Allison seems here to be suggesting the reasons as to why such sexual abuse could occur on such a wide scale, although this is not to say she is justifying it. The language she adopts to do so echoes the sexist, male discourse of those she is analyzing. She will not excuse their abuse, though: “All the things I say about sexual abuse – about rape – none of them are reasons. The words do not explain. My theory is that rape goes on happening all the time” (44). Yet, despite her refusal to “explain” rape, she appears to be delving into her social setting and the very sexist, patriarchal attitudes of her male contemporaries and those who raised them in order to somehow understand it. To know of men who made comments that suggested their behavior was not tantamount to rape demonstrates why such sexual assault continues to occur on a huge level, especially by people known to the victims. One contemporary of Allison’s stated: “Hell, it wasn’t rape. She never said no. Maybe she said stop, but in that little bitty voice, so you know she wants you to love her, hell, love her for ten minutes or half an hour. Shit, who could love a girl like that?” (36). To be raised around such utter disrespect and lack of regard for women explains a great deal. Their rhetoric and lack of respect for women is indicative of what Martha Burt discusses as a “rape myth,” the belief by many men (and sometimes women) that rape does not really exist, it is simply very forceful sex that was provoked in some manner: “myths promote the idea that men cannot control their sexuality. The idea that

wearing revealing clothing is provocation to rape implies that rape results from a spontaneous, unplanned response to a sexually attractive woman. This myth once again presumes that rape is simply forceful sex ('assault with a friendly weapon,' as the joke has it)" (Burt 135).

Dorothy Allison ran from Greenville and the haunting legacy of her family, because she was so petrified that, if she stayed, she would "become them," the women who lived before her and continued to endure abuse from the men around them. She feared their hardness and bitterness, terrified she would become like them. Just as Sebold and Raine underwent a spiritual metamorphosis that brought them through the journey that follows rape, so did Allison, but it took her years of denial to reach that state of acceptance: "I am one woman but I carry in my body all the stories I have ever told, women I have known, women who have taken damage until they tell themselves they can feel no pain at all. That's the mean story. That's the lie I told myself for years, and not until I began to fashion the stories on the page did I sort it all out" (38). What Allison confesses here is her own level of denial throughout her younger years, and the power of language and writing, telling her story, that led to her own enlightenment and healing; this enabled her to see "where the lie ended and a broken lie remained" (38).

Unlike Sebold and Raine, who open their narratives with a very explicit and lengthy description of their rape, Allison takes us through the stories of her family before bringing us to her personal truth about rape: "Behind sex is rage, behind anger is love, behind this moment is silence, years of silence" (39). She writes of her rape by stating that "[t]he man raped me. That's the truth. It's a fact. I was five, and he was eight months married to my mother" (39). Her discourse is direct and to the point, a method she

describes as the only way she can bring herself to talk about it: “That’s how I always began to talk about it – when I finally began to talk about it” (39). Sidonie Smith discusses this issue of “talking back” in female autobiography by the marginalized and oppressed: “they enter precisely because they experience ‘alienation from their historically imposed image of the self’ culturally assigned them. With their entry there is mess and clutter all around” (Smith 20). Allison breaks down the wall of silence that has been built up over the years, the image of the self that has been imposed upon her by her stepfather, with bitter and retaliatory language. This becomes Allison’s savior, yet it had been a terrifying barrier for her for years, the literal act of speaking about what happened fuelling pain and rage; “I’d march the words out – all the old tearing awful words. For years, every time I said ‘rape’ and ‘child’ in the same terrible sentence, I would feel the muscles of my back and neck pull as taut as the string of a kite straining against the wind” (42).

The image of a kite is reminiscent of a normal childhood for most, yet the vision of Allison’s muscles straining tightly may be reflective of a physical reaction to her abuse when it was occurring, or a symptom of severe stress. When she begins to write of her rape, Allison begins a tirade of words that desperately seek acceptance, a need to believe that she was an innocent victim, and a desire to be “a woman who can talk about rape plainly, without being hesitant or self-conscious, or vulnerable to what people might be saying” (42). She states:

I need to say that my mama didn’t know what was going on, that I didn’t tell her, that when I finally did tell someone it was not her. I need to say that when I told, only my mama believed it, that thirty years later one of my aunts could still say to

me that she didn't really believe it, that he had been such a hardworking, good-looking man (43).

What we witness in Allison's writing here is her pledge to her readership. It does not seem as though she writes only for herself, as a form of therapeutic release, but rather that she is appealing to those that knew her over the years, those who doubted the validity of her story, and the thousands around the world who have doubted rape or been doubted themselves. She also highlights the common problem with rape concerning people's need to disbelieve in its existence. Allison's aunt told her that "[s]omething else must have happened. Maybe it had been different," to which Allison replies boldly: "How? [. . .] How could it be different for a five-year old and a grown man? Instead I just looked at her, feeling finally strong enough to know she had chosen to believe she needed more than what she knew. *Two or three things I know for sure, but none of them is why a man would rape a child, why a man would beat a child*" (43). The reaction of Allison's aunt is universal for so many who know and love victims of rape; the need to believe it as an untruth stems from an inability to face the horror of rape, the brutality against its victims, and the lifelong effects it has upon the psyche. Denial in the aftermath of rape is endemic: "An alarming number of women learned no one really 'likes' rape victims. Other women do not like them, because they are vivid reminders of the genesis of their fears. Male friends, lovers, and husbands are insensitive, for different reasons. Their sympathies may rest with the assailant, a man they might perceive as unfairly accused" (Bode 57). Allison carried the burden of silence and shame for too long, "[w]hile [rape survivors] desperately needed to discuss what they were experiencing, many believed it was their problem alone to bear" (Bode 55). In writing her memoir, Allison rejects this myth as a



rape survivor who feels alone, and recognizes others. She clearly needs to believe that, despite such a lack of support from family members, her mother genuinely did not know the abuse was occurring when it did.

Dorothy Allison spent years battling with the psychological demons her abuse placed within her: “My theory is that talking about [rape] makes a difference – being a woman who can stand up anywhere and say, I was five and the man was big. So let me say it [. . .] I’m not ever supposed to put together the two halves of my life – the man who walked across my childhood and the life I have made for myself” (45). This anatomical bluntness draws a clear line between herself as an innocent child and herself as a rape survivor. What we see here is a woman who so desperately needs to be heard, whose language seems to literally shout out of each page, after years of suppression, guilt, and self-blame: “It took me years to get past that rage, to say the words with grief and insistence but to let go of the anger, to refuse to use the anger against people who knew nothing of the rape” (43). Her natural tendency towards psychological projection of her anger onto the wrong people and “the dynamics of dominance and submission [which] are reenacted in all subsequent relationships,” (Herman, 138) crippled Allison for years, until she was able to grasp hold of her anger in a manner that was healthy, and eventually let it go. Instead of continually reverting between two dangerous extremes of overwhelming anger or desperate vulnerability, she found emotional release.

In coming to terms with her rape, in truly facing it head on, Allison let go of the person she could have been had she not been raped and the childhood she yearned for, letting go of her angry, embittered adult self: “Getting past the anger, getting to the release, I became someone else, and the story changes. I am no longer a grown-up

outraged child but a woman letting go of her outrage, showing what I know: [. . .] that evil is the act of pretending that some things do not happen or leave no mark if they do, that evil is not what remains when healing is possible” (44). After denying her grief and anger for so long, Allison was stifling herself spiritually but then, “[w]hen [she] finally saw it, the grief [she] had been hiding even from [her]self, the world seemed to stop while [she] looked” (50). Her storytelling combined with the power of language became “a piece of magic, magic in the belly, the doomed kingdom of sex,” her belly representative of her female anatomy, fertility and, tragically, the part of her body physically damaged by premature intercourse (68).

Allison’s sexuality is a theme she folds into her memoir frequently, although it is important to recognize that being a lesbian was not a reaction to what she experienced at the hands of her stepfather, but an element of her life that brought her love and support, both of which enabled her to overcome her pain. Her sexuality is judged as a consequence of sexual abuse by a therapist, however, a reaction that is stunning but also exemplifies much of society’s discomfort with sexual abuse and lack of understanding about it. Her therapist suggested that “[p]eople might get confused” because they “might think that sexual abuse makes lesbians” (45). Allison replied, “[o]h, I doubt it [. . .] If it did, there would be many more” (45). That a professional woman of such status could claim one’s sexuality was determined by one’s experiences is astounding, but each of the memoirs discussed in this thesis describes problematic, insensitive therapists each memoirist encountered during their journey towards recovery. Their insensitivity, though not representative of all in the field of psychotherapy, may have been the result of a patriarchal education system and male dominance in their field: “Unfortunately, many

counselors have internalized the myths about rape. Counselors' values and assumptions affect their counseling mode regardless of how value-free they profess to be" (Katz 75).

Nancy Venable Raine vehemently argues that rape is an act of violence and not an act of sex, refusing to link the two together in any way. Alice Sebold also had to consider her second sexual encounter as the time when she lost her virginity in order to remove the sexual element of her experience. As Maria Bevacqua explains: "The assertion that rape is violence [has] provided feminists with a whole framework in which to analyze rape, to remove blame from victims, and to develop a convincing argument to gain acceptance for their claims" (Bevacqua 58). Allison does the same thing, but in a much more subtle manner. She does acknowledge some link between sex and rape, but does so by highlighting the joyous feeling of anger as being similar to the physical pleasure of an orgasm. She describes her stepfather's fear when she and her sister backed him into a corner with knives, as "sexual and marvelous – hateful and scary but wonderful, like orgasm," (47) reminding readers that rape, while not a pleasurable sexual experience, is one that tinges everything with an edge of sexual violence. She writes, "I know. I'm not supposed to talk about sex like that, not about weapons or hatred or violence, and never to put them in the context of sexual desire. I'm not supposed to talk about how good anger can feel – righteous, justified, and completely satisfying" (47). Her discourse draws parallels here between sexual violence and an element of satisfaction similar to sexual pleasure in experiencing anger. She then feels self-righteousness in the face of oppression.

Allison's first sexual experience, after her encounter with rape, demonstrates her inability to remove her abuse from her adult sex life: "I knew that the first time I made

love to a woman that I could cry but I must not say why. I cried because she smelled like him, the memory of him, sweaty and urgent [. . .] Breathing her in prompted in me both desire and hatred [. . .] Sex with her became a part of throwing him off me, making peace with the violence of my own desire” (48). That Allison could not disconnect sex from her rape proves that she had not yet revised herself, or dealt with her turmoil. It is not until she had dredged through the layers of grief and denial and hatred, breaking down her inner wall and moving towards acceptance and inner peace, that she could enjoy making love without being taken back to her five-year-old self. Allison had to suffer many years of depression and anguish before reaching that point of change, though:

I know. I’m not supposed to talk about how long it took me to wash him out of my body [. . .] how many times I sat up till dawn wondering if it would ever change, if I would ever change. If there would ever be a time in my life when desire did not resonate with fury. *Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that change when it comes cracks everything open* (48).

Her change was not subtle but, rather, broke open and exposed every part of herself, her life, and her relationships.

The quintessential stereotype of rape victims is one Allison remains aware of throughout her memoir as everything she had been but had struggled against: “I know. I am supposed to be deeply broken, incapable of love or trust or passion. But I am not, and part of why that is so is the nature of the stories I told myself to survive” (69). She totally reclaimed herself and revised her self-image, remaining a fragmented self that could not fully remove itself from abuse, but which could state mental, physical, spiritual, and

sexual independence: “I took my sex back, my body. I claimed myself and remade my life. Only when I knew I belonged to myself completely did I become capable of giving myself to another [and finding] power in this body no one else owns” (70).

Allison details every part of her newly revised, yet still fragmented, multiple selves when she writes of how “somewhere inside [her] there is a child always eleven years old, a girlchild who holds the world responsible for things that terrify and call to [her.] But inside too is the teenager who armed herself and fought back, the dyke who did what she had to, the woman who learned to love without giving in to fear” (71). Here, Allison is directly presenting her different selves. We all have them based upon different periods in our life and experiences we have had, but one could argue we layer newer selves upon old ones; we never completely discard our younger selves or the person we were before certain experiences. Allison, for example, recognizes the teenage part of herself that is still present amidst the “dyke” and the “woman” she has become with age and experience.

Allison releases herself from the woman she would have been had she not suffered childhood molestation, and instead, embraces the woman she is as a result of it; she lets go of her fear to welcome all she has to offer as a result of her experiences. Allison analogizes her “rape victim” self as her “rapist’s creation,” similar to a coat that she refuses to wear; “I will not wear that coat, not even if it is recut to a feminist pattern, a postmodern analysis” (71). Allison rejects being a figurehead of such a cause, suggesting instead that she chooses to move on from her anger and into a life of love and family.

Ironically, while she may refuse this “coat,” she does adopt the feminist cause of awareness about rape in writing this memoir; her piece is a public statement against rape, a piece that highlights its devastation, and forces society to face it squarely. She rejects this coat that is her “rapist’s creation,” and, instead, breaks down walls of silence with her words, a wall that is part of a dream she describes at the end of her memoir, and one that is a frequent metaphor for her journey back from her rape. The wall she describes is metaphorical of the silence surrounding the issue of rape, but it is also an analogy for her adoration of language as a tool against this barrier. In describing the dream she had, in which she manually tore down a brick wall, she writes:

The last brick fell down. I was standing there looking up through tears. I was standing by myself in the rubble of my life, at the bottom of every story I had ever needed to know. I was gripping my ribs like a climber holding on to rock. I was whispering the word over and over, and it was holding me up like a loved hand (94).

This wall seems symbolic of her emotional breakthrough, as well as the many personas she adopted during her years of denial to protect her more authentic self. Although Allison may still describe her life in terms of a pile of rubble, one could argue that her dream is an interpretation of her own emotional struggle. She has had to literally tear down every image of herself she has ever had, every persona, all of her insecurities, and her anger, because only in stripping herself bare was she able to find the happiness she eventually found with her partner and son.

Connie Griffin highlights the importance of Allison's personal journey, as well as her analysis of growing up in South Carolina as a cultural and geographic influence upon her life:

Home, for Allison, is both a material and a metaphorical place [. . .] Difficult though it may be, self-understanding entails not only a geographical journey, but also entering into a complicated web of memories, of conflicting narratives, of the terrifying intertwining of love and betrayal that [she] experienced as a child [. . .] Telling her story, then, is one of the ways Allison comes to terms with 'deciding to live' (Griffin 326).

Just as Raine writes of saving herself from a shipwreck, Allison leaves us with an image of herself vulnerable and surrounded by the pieces of her life, yet her final words urge readers to believe the truth of rape, that it happens, and that it cannot be ignored any longer: "*I can tell you anything. All you have to believe is the truth*" (94).





## AFTER SILENCE: RAPE AND MY JOURNEY BACK

As mentioned earlier, Nancy Venable Raine's text, After Silence: Rape and my Journey Back opens with a stanza from Adrienne Rich's famous poem "Diving into the Wreck." Her work charts, with unrivaled detail, the way she pulled herself from her own physical, psychological, spiritual, and personal wreck after being brutally raped in her own home. Just as Dorothy Allison and Alice Sebold had to piece together the shattered parts of their lives to recreate a new, if fragmented version of themselves, so did Raine. Her obsessive focus upon rape, its statistics, traumatic effects, and the writings of accredited psychologists, leads to a memoir that presents readers with an excellent understanding of rape, its effects, and the very cold, misunderstood manner in which so many may respond to rape survivors. One could argue that Raine was mentally drawn towards any information pertaining to rape that would help her further understand her experience and revise her life in its aftermath.

After Silence charts Raine's varying stages of response to her rape in unprecedented detail. Her immediate denial is clear, followed by anger, then hatred, and finally acceptance of her experience. During each level of response to her assault, levels that take years to metamorphose, Raine presents us with four very defined selves that she develops in the aftermath of her rape. We encounter occasional descriptions of the woman and writer that she was before her rape. The time immediately following the event that forever changed her portrays a woman filled with fear and living in a state of perpetual denial. Raine at first was incapable of accepting her rape, or the altered state of her self. Her third self was, in her own words, an "as-if" woman, someone who acted as if she was coping but who, internally, was crumbling. Upon recognizing her own desire for

death and levels of hatred that terrified her, Raine entered intense psychotherapy, a frightening process that took a great deal of time, but which enabled her to find a fourth self, one that accepted the woman she was as a result of her rape, and gave up fighting to return to someone she could never be: a woman innocent and unaware of the horrors of sexual assault.

Raine's rape is charted in detail and language that is chilling; the experience literally haunts one for days after reading of it. The brutality of her rapist and his misogynistic language are juxtaposed frequently with the singing of a bird outside Raine's kitchen window, the last sound she remembers from her life before that day. The singing of a bird is reflective of beauty, innocence, and harmony in the writer's life, all of which are totally shattered by the rapist and his vulgar discourse and behavior. She informs readers of flashbacks she still experienced seven years after the afternoon she was sexually violated, and describes the intense fear she felt that never truly disappeared: "I lived with sudden fear the way others live with cancer" (1). That Raine recognized the anniversary of her rape as "more significant than her birthday" (2) proves that her rape is an event which has forever changed her: "it is more significant because it marked again the death of the person I had been for thirty-nine years [ . . . ] but on October 11, 1985, she died [and] [a]nother person was born that day" (2). We are informed immediately that Raine has recognized, as a memoirist reflecting on her past history, that she has let go of the woman she was before her rape, accepted that she cannot be that woman again, and rewritten herself and her life. Raine demonstrates total revision of herself, and her writing charts the excruciating journey she undertook back from her rape, in order to get to such a stage of acceptance concerning her newly-found selves. After living in a state of denial,

keeping herself frantically busy, and moving across the country, Raine's personal pain and devastation caught up with her: "after seven years I wanted more than silence and isolation. I wanted to celebrate the life of the woman who was born on October 11" (3) and not the one who existed before she was raped. Like Sebold, Raine describes herself as "lucky" because she had not been murdered when raped, viewing her existence after her rape as "extra time" (2).

Despite the estimated 9 million rapes that occurred in the United States between 1972 and 1991, Raine found herself stunned at the mere handful of published personal accounts that bore witness to the experience of rape. She acknowledges the "limits of language" when detailing such horror and describes these texts as "the limits of reality," but feels strongly that such a seldom documentation of rape is inexcusable, a reflection of society's desire to flee from its truth. Combined with the common denial surrounding her rape that she experienced from friends and family, Raine realized what a thick wall of silence surrounded this social phenomenon. Her inability to get through her experience alone did not lead to greater levels of support from those who wanted to ignore her rape: "To acknowledge my experience might bring up what they hoped I had forgotten – that terrible day, those hours of horror. They hoped to spare me that. For me to remind them that I had not forgotten seemed unkind, even cruel, because I knew they needed to believe that I had. Our rite was, therefore, silence" (3). Raine's refusal to accept this silence led her back to her first love: language. Despite finding it "brittle as the leaves" following her rape, writing of her experience was what finally saved Raine from her own wreckage, because she "could no longer consent to silence" (4). With a vision of "women, marching, openly and together, celebrating their anniversaries, speaking their

names, carrying flowers,” (5) Raine documents what happened to her, but simultaneously, universalizes her experience and her voice. She refuses the “isolation of the aftermath of rape [and] its life-altering transformations,” a silence that she describes as a form of “cultural psychosis,” and manages to revise her vision of herself, while also spreading the truth about rape to those who read her text (5). Raine recognizes that she cannot make rape acceptable, but seeks instead to make it “less unspeakable.” Like Allison and Sebold, she views the real shame of rape as the silence that shrouds it, and not the experience itself. She gives language to her experience as a way of reversing the way rape victims have been “rendered mute and cloaked in protective anonymity” by society: “I feel blessed by the darkness I have known. The victims of rape must carry their memories with them for the rest of their lives. They must not also carry with them the burden of silence and shame” (6). Raine recognizes that “[r]ape survivors, for different reasons, encounter similar difficulties with social judgment. They, too, must be seen as defiled. Rigidly judgmental attitudes are widespread” (Herman 58). It seems that Raine is “blessed by the darkness” of her rape because it has led her to more fully appreciate the life she has rescued for herself, nothing will ever again be taken for granted, and in writing, she is carrying a light for all victims of rape, speaking their truth, and raising awareness in others.

While detailing her rape, Raine uses language that is extremely chilling, within a narrative that continually switches from her present as a revised woman, back to the woman she was just before and during her rape. In dialogically relaying her rapist’s words while intertwining them with her own, Raine faces, head on, the brutal language that mentally crippled her for so long: “*Now I hear the words. These are the words I*

*hear: Shut up shut the fuck up you bitch you dirty bitch you fucking cunt shut up [. . .] I'm going to kill you if you don't shut up"* (9). Raine's rapist completely overpowered her both sexually and mentally; "Many times he did cover my face with the pillow and press it down so that I could not draw breath. Each time I expected to die, but he always relented just before I lost consciousness" (11). Sebold existed only physically during her rape, attempting to disconnect herself mentally, while Raine became displaced from her body; "Those parts of my body that hitherto had been reserved and private were no longer mine, but in this they were indistinguishable from the rest of my body, also no longer mine" (11). Raine, like Sebold and Allison, discusses rape as removed from sex, being instead an act of violence, because for rapists it does not stem from a need for sexual release. In Men Who Rape, Nicholas Groth defines rape as an act removed from sexual motive, even if the context is highly sexual: "Rape is always and foremost an aggressive act. In some offenses, the assault appears to constitute a discharge of anger; it becomes clear the offender expresses and discharges a mood state of intense anger, frustration, resentment, and rage" (Groth 12). Rape is about power, authority, and domination over victims, which is perfectly exemplified in the "cat and mouse" game her rapist performed after sexually assaulting Raine. She writes: "When he pretended to leave, I didn't move because I knew he was hiding in the small pantry off the kitchen. I could 'see' him standing there [. . .] I lay there, exposed and bound, waiting, bracing as best I could for the next attack" (11). This aspect of Raine's ordeal left me disturbed and haunted for several days after first reading it. To play upon Raine's fear of death or mutilation, a fear common in the large majority of rape survivors during their attack, is disgusting. This suggests that he is a "power" rapists like Sebold's perpetrator.

Raine felt nothing after her rapist fled out the back door of her home, entering a state of emotional “anesthesia,” which she initially found merciful (13). This state of numbness and denial, however, echoed the repressed state of mental being she would exist in for many years to come after her ordeal, as well as enduring the societal wall of silence around the issue of rape. Her lack of emotional outburst may have been welcomed by her family at first, but she describes it as “involuntary” (13) and the beginning of her personal “reduction,” (14) a shrinking of self that she would later fight unsuccessfully for years until seeking psychotherapy. Raine here is referring to the fragmented, frightened, and shrunken version of her former self that existed for a long time after her rape, because she was unable to see, until seeking psychiatric help, the newly formed selves that evolved out of her rape. In the hours following the rape, Raine felt little on an emotional level, yet, her terror overwhelmed her as soon as she allowed herself to feel it. Her use of metaphor and analogy throughout After Silence is almost overwhelming in its density, and her description of her terror at this point is just one example. She describes it as literally splitting open inside of her, “spitting out an uncharted island where [she] was now stranded. Its peaks and valleys, its shores and streams would take a lifetime to explore, but [she] didn’t know that. [She] stood on its shore bewildered” (15). Her analogy of the aftermath of the rape to feeling stranded on an uncharted island reminds readers who cannot relate to the experience of rape that her feeling of isolation and “otherness” was immediate. Raine knew instantaneously that she was no longer the woman she had been only hours before and never could be again: “The waking world as I had known it became nothing more than a thick permeable membrane that could not hold

back this other world occupied by horrors” (16). Her experience separated her from most around her, and placed her on a metaphorical island completely out of reach of humanity.

Raine, Allison, and Sebold all recognize language as the factor that finally saved them; in writing their stories they were able to rescue themselves and possibly others. Yet, initially, language itself was terrifying because literally saying the word “rape” made their ordeal all the more real, working against the state of denial in which they were living. When calling the police, Raine found herself in a state of “awful lonesomeness,” as though she was “falling inward” and needed immediate help. However, she states that “[t]o say that [she] had been raped, to use the word, required that [she] sort out the incubi from [. . .] whatever it was that had just destroyed [her] apartment, suggesting multiple, recurring nightmares were already beginning this early in the aftermath for her” (20). She immediately started to flash back to the violent words of her rapist and was rendered mute: “So much for words” (21). It would be many years before she would find their source of power.

As is so common for survivors of rape, Raine found an immediate lack of understanding from so many around her, including the police and medical workers she first encountered, those one would expect to be more understanding of her experience. She encountered no care or concern: “for a rape victim the hospital emergency room functions as an extension of the police department, and the medicine being practiced there is primarily forensic” (23). Raine recalls the desire, while having her rape kit performed, for “real” wounds, “the kind that bled,” because internal, psychological scarring was harder to cure or initially to see. Amazingly she still “did not resent the fact that with all of their training, skill, and good manners, no one in that place of healing

could hug [her,] even in passing” (25). Whether this was a reaction to her as somehow “soiled,” or because her experience was frightening is unclear, but her newly fragmented, other self had already been established this early in the aftermath of her rape; she did not yet know it.

Despite the cold and distant reaction to her rape by so many, including a therapist, she did find many who were able to relate to her experience because they had been raped also. She universalizes her experience in After Silence, and her narrative “I” by describing so many of the amazing women in her life who had overcome the same trauma and grief as she had. She recognizes that they “shared an exile, not an island” (14) and, yet, that exile was still a source of support and hope. Raine describes the attitude so many had toward her book as a display of “narcissistic exhibitionism,” (125) but she felt so strongly that “individual stories like [hers] could play a small role in changing attitudes about rape, which were still enmeshed in societal anxieties” (125). Charlotte Pierce-Baker details this need to break rape silence in her memoir, Surviving the Silence, writing that “women have survived by keeping quiet, not solely out of shame, but out of a need to preserve [their] image. In our attempts to preserve [. . .] pride, we have often sacrificed our own souls” (Pierce-Baker 844). Raine highlights the preservation of silence due to shame much more than Pierce-Baker does, but reflects the notion of survival and presentation of public image. Societal attitudes became more and more apparent to Raine as she met other victims of rape. Her friend Victoria, a woman who is projected as strong, determined, and large in her recognition of her new self created by her rape, still asked Raine to change her name for the purposes of writing After Silence. This request exemplifies that the layer of shame around rape was not limited to Raine.



Raine's initial feelings of disconnection from others, however, are all reflected in the analogies and metaphors of herself as removed, distant, neglected, and without shadow. She writes of her "sense of fragmentation," feeling that she suddenly "had no past" (31). She again uses an island to represent her new self: "I was like a coastal island submerged by a storm surge. I had no shore, no definition, no borders" (33). Her sense of simply existing and not living in the immediate aftermath of the rape is clearly recognizable to readers: "nothing is more desired or more impossible than forgetting" (26). Raine viewed herself at that time as barely coping, especially at night: "[She] crawled into the cement; in the morning [she] chipped [her]self out with a toothpick" (27). Raine's lack of personal definition and overwhelming feelings of isolation from others were exacerbated by reactions from friends and, often, family, her imagery of chipping herself from cement being cold, thick, heavy, and exhausting.

After seeking lodging in the home of a family, she felt as though her new landlady viewed her living in Boston as the reason for her rape, "as if my choice of residency explained it away" (86). A friend, who could not understand her inability to return to her former self after her rape, told her she was "overreacting" (89). Raine was told, "'It's been over two months [. . .] It's time you got a job and stopped dwelling on what happened'" (89). The result of this assertion that Raine was dwelling on the event, and not reacting in an understandable manner, left the writer with intense self-loathing. Raine wants recovery for herself, but does not know how to find it, her friend's comment serving as a harsh reminder of this: "The rapist had planted this seed of self-hatred and my solitude, like a drought, had kept the seed dormant. But now the rains had to come" (89). Raine felt as though the person her friend referred to was someone other than

herself; she “wondered who [her friend] was talking about” when she referenced Raine (89). We see here that she was not consciously aware of this second self yet. Although her friend’s response to her depression is offensive, it is typical of the reaction so many gave to Raine, Sebold, and Allison. Raine writes: “The unconscious responses of others [. . .] as they defend themselves against their own unconscious fears can reinforce the conflicts and defenses of victims” (262). Such language does not truly stem from a belief that these women were overreacting, but, one could argue, from a fear of life so transformed by an event so far out of their control. They could be any of us. All readers, all women, could have experienced what they did and the recognition of rape is bad enough, but being confronted with its aftermath is possibly even more frightening for outsiders than the rape itself. As Judith Herman states, “Rape survivors, for different reasons, encounter similar difficulties with social judgment. They, too, may be seen as defiled. Rigidly judgmental attitudes are widespread, and the people closest to the survivor are not immune” (Herman 67). It is for this reason that such a memoir is essential, because it proves so powerfully that the effects of rape are horrendous, but also that we are all capable of rescuing ourselves if we learn to revise who we are in the wake of great tragedy and let go of our previous selves. This can be said for survivors of any trauma.

The societal attitude towards rape victims as being somehow to blame is internalized as self-blame by rape survivors. Raine not only documents her personal experiences of distrust and simple insensitivity by those close to her, but she offers a more generalized analysis of societal attitudes that exacerbate this self-blame to further universalize her experience. She notes that “[u]nless a woman is on the Vatican’s short

list for sainthood, public exposure can be brutal” (91). We only have to view the current rape charges against Kobe Bryant to see that much of society immediately wants to doubt the anonymous victim. He is offered every opportunity to publicly declare his innocence, while his wife stands by his side and his victim remains silent. No decision has been made in that case yet, but the anonymous accuser has already had her personal sexual history relayed all over our television screens and critiqued by media moguls who feel they are able to determine her level of sincerity, having never even met her. Perhaps if she were a virgin at the alleged time of rape, as Sebold was, she would garner a little more public sympathy. Raine’s tone is sarcastic and ironic which further highlights the force and often ridiculous nature of public opinion: “perhaps I was raped because I had ‘bad karma’ from a ‘previous life’ [ . . . ] There was even the suggestion from a close friend (a friend no longer) that I had ‘asked for it’ by moving into an apartment that was in a working class neighborhood,” (91) a statement which echoes that of her landlady.

Judith Herman correlates the issue of self-blame with judgment by our predominantly patriarchal society, which instantaneously blames victims and solidifies the wall of silence, perpetuating the low numbers of rape victims who come forward and speak out. Herman writes:

Conventional social attitudes not only fail to recognize most rapes as violations but also construe them as consensual sexual relations for which the victim is responsible. Thus women discover an appalling disjunction between their actual experience and the social construction of reality. Women learn that in rape they are not only violated but dishonored [ . . . ] they are blamed for betraying their own moral standards” (Herman 67).

Legal decisions surrounding rape are a large focus of Raine's narrative also. She studies closely the ways in which immediate societal suspicions of those who "cry rape" lead to such low conviction rates and rates of rape being reported: "Many women who are sexually assaulted do not report the crime to the police because they suspect they will not be believed or because they want to avoid the social stigma attached to rape" (Odem and Warner xii). She cites a very famous case that occurred in 1978, the "victim" being "a woman with a name – and a legacy of terror" (92). She was raped in her Long Island home at knife point by Kerry Kotler. Three years later, he returned; "'I'm back,' he said. 'Let's do it again'" (93). Kotler was caught and convicted of rape, receiving a sentence of twenty-one to forty-five years in prison. However, the victim's underpants were kept as evidence. Due to DNA flaws that were the result of inadequate storage, Kotler was released from prison upon appeal. He raped again, and was sent back to prison, but received \$1.5 million for his "earlier wrongful imprisonment," despite having raped her twice. Prosecutors knew her underwear had been contaminated while in a storage unit, but because her rapist's DNA could not be found upon them, he was released from serving prison time for raping her, with more than enough money in the bank to appeal his later rape conviction. Another case cited by Raine is that in which a rape victim urged her rapist to use a condom for fear of contracting HIV. Because she convinced him to do so, a jury found him innocent because they viewed this move on her part to suggest the sex that occurred was voluntary and consensual. In possibly saving her own life, her rapist walked free. The fact that she repeatedly said "no" to her attacker should render such penetration involuntary, yet her jury, composed of both men and women, viewed it

as consensual. While such cases continue, and in doing so set bad legal precedents, rapists face very few consequences for their actions, if they are even caught.

The societal stigma attached to rape survivors is a telling one; far too often people choose to believe that the woman raped had in some way provoked her sexual assault or is fictionalizing consensual sex as forced. Even use of the word “victim” is problematic, because, while it may suggest innocence in what occurred, it also renders the woman raped as helpless and weak. Such a word asserts anonymity and does not depict fully the life of each individual that has been forever changed. The outrageously high statistics on rape only further dull this reality, because statistics alone can desensitize and do not depict individual stories on a personal level. Raine writes: “I want to give her a name, a face, a history. Whenever I see the word victim, I want to fill in the blank. It is enough, I remind myself, to remember that she is not a blank” (90). What Raine highlights throughout her text is that secrecy surrounding rape is perpetuated by the inability of so many rape survivors to verbalize their experience, and face it personally, let alone publicly. Yet, societal secrecy exacerbates this reticence further: “I know there is a good reason for the missing name. It protects her. The fact that this protection is necessary is proof, if ever it was needed, that there is still a widespread stigma for victims of rape, a stigma that is reinforced by the accumulation of unnamed names in our newspapers” (90).

Raine clearly separates rape as a violent experience from rape as a sexual experience at the start of her memoir, a belief initiated by the Feminist movement of the 1970’s. She links many people’s discomfort with rape as being due, in part, to their view that it is linked to sex, unlike other crimes that violate, such as burglary or murder: “Because rape is, among other things, an assault on sexual organs, it carries traces of a

dark, dirty kind of sex that other assaults do not,” which she directly links to “people’s resistance to hearing about the aftermath” (44). This distant reaction from both loved ones and strangers leads to the survivor’s very powerful feelings of “self-doubt” and “self-blame” which “linger for years” (44). Like so many feminists and rape memoirists, Raine totally tears apart Freud’s insulting theories that women’s deepest sexual desire, if only sub-consciously, is to be raped, a theory that has shaped attitudes towards rape and lowered rape convictions enormously: “The idea that women derive some sort of erotic pleasure from ‘forced sex’ has drifted down from the stratosphere of psychoanalytic theory into our attitudes toward rape like rain that carries imperceptible toxins down into the drinking water” (135). In Against our Will, Susan Brownmiller challenges this Freudian notion about rape and asserts that rape has been a weapon used by men for centuries to keep women submissive and in a state of perpetual fear. Whether viewed as a gross generalization or not, Brownmiller succeeded in undermining societal attitudes of sex and rape as closely linked which Raine promotes: “Severing sex from rape was a form of vigorous intellectual weeding, long overdue. As long as female sexuality was defined as fundamentally masochistic and rape was viewed as sex, female rape victims were trapped in shame that silenced them – and this very silence implied that they had reason to be ashamed” (Raine 136).

Raine’s denial and fear metamorphosed into anger as she came to the quick realization that only 2% of rapists are caught and that their average prison sentence stood at a year or less. Raine states: “it would be I, not the rapist, who would be given the life sentence” because “[r]ape was bad, but not that bad – it was only a-year-in-the-slammer bad. Right up there with dastardly deeds like passing bad checks” (51). Even if Raine’s

rapist were caught and served time in prison, his experience would be incomparable to the suffering she would endure for years to come. Her comparison of rape charges to bouncing checks highlights the antiquated state of our judicial system in its handling of rape.

Raine's fear continued to be triggered by events far removed from her rape, as is the case for so many survivors of intense trauma who experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Unable to face the brutality or reality of the event that forever changed them, the devastation reappears out of nowhere from within themselves, during times when they feel threatened in some manner: "Keys have nothing to do with rape. Rape has nothing to do with earthquakes. But these associations have a life of their own. Everyone who survives a disaster has them. They are time warps, curves in emotional space, as unpredictable as the shock that created them" (55). This enforces the terrible shock that infiltrates survivors of rape to the core of their very being; emotional outbursts appear from nowhere over the smallest of issues, such as losing car keys, which is totally unrelated to the trauma but which may echo feelings of being powerless.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an effect of rape that afflicts Sebold, Allison, and Raine. It is Raine, however, who analyzes it textually in immense detail as a disorder she suffered. She references Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery continually, because it clearly enabled her to learn a great deal about herself. Herman pursued extensive studies of Vietnam War Veterans and found that their behavior was almost identical to that of rape victims, defining PTSD in the following way:

Patients suffer from a combination of generalized anxiety symptoms and specific fears. They do not have a normal 'baseline' level of alert but relaxed attention.

Instead, they have an elevated baseline of arousal: their bodies are always on the alert for danger. They also have an extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event. The increase in arousal persists during sleep as well as in the waking state. [PTSD sufferers] take longer to fall asleep, are more sensitive to noise, and awaken more frequently during the night than ordinary people (Herman, 36).

What Judith Herman found during her study was that suffers of PTSD, including both war veterans and rape victims, had a nervous system that had literally been reconditioned by the trauma they experienced. As mentioned previously, all three of the memoirists I discuss display symptoms of PTSD and Nancy Venable Raine, especially, describes many events during the aftermath of her rape when she displayed fear and nervousness that many would find irrational. A visit to a crowded international food market, the loss of her car keys, and a surprise visit by her landlord's son were events that literally terrified her, caused her to experience an anxiety attack, and then sent her into a depression that lasted for weeks at a time. Many would not understand this sort of reaction; yet, if one considers PTSD and the severe fragmentation of one's nervous system, a fragmentation that reflects the shattering of one's inner self, one's spirit, that occurs after rape, her behavior is clearer.

The severity of Raine's trauma, as with that of Sebold and Allison, could never be undone, yet greater management of her fear could be adopted once she faced her new self and embraced it. She quotes Judith Herman frequently within her text: "Herman argues that remembering and telling the truth about dreadful events are 'prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims'" (139). Raine



finds that telling her story, combined with facing her newly defined sense of self, was the only way she could begin to journey back from her own silence. She reflects upon how “[i]t is the traumatized self that emerges from the dust” due to “a metamorphosis” from which “[t]here is no defense” because life must continue on (139). She recognizes that the life one finds is somewhat unfamiliar and “[t]he failure of society to acknowledge this may be the result of the trauma of the witness. Because society is not the same either. The damage cannot be confined because the self cannot be confined. We exist in relation to others” (139). Their trauma and suffering frightens much of the public, yet rape survivors are still a part of society. When one considers Paul Eakin’s autobiographical theory of the relational other, one sees here that Raine’s metamorphosis includes a transition from being defined by her rape and her rapist (her previous relational other) to being defined by others in society, especially by those who cope and continue their lives, or who have experienced rape and continued also. Eakin asks: “We tend to think of autobiography as a literature of the first person [. . .] Why do we so easily forget that the first person of autobiography is truly plural in its origins and subsequent formation?” (Eakin 43). He writes that “*all* identity is relational” despite the fact that “autobiography promotes an illusion of self-determination: *I* write my story; *I* say who I am; *I* create my self. The myth of autonomy dies hard, and autobiography criticism has not yet fully addressed the extent to which the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relation with others” (Eakin 43). Raine’s memoir, as well as Sebold’s and Allison’s, demonstrates how her story is not defined purely by her own will, but is very much crafted by her rapist, her relational other, also.

Nancy Venable Raine's anger eventually metamorphosed further into hatred, the next stage in her trauma process. She writes that it was unrecognizable for many years, but was probably the most powerful of her emotions: "I had not allowed myself to feel my hatred. Now my body felt huge and powerful. It felt good to be a monster, very good" (84). This was written in reaction to her imagining the opportunity to inflict pain upon her rapist: "I imagined the worst thing I had ever imagined: the man who raped me burning up alive. I imagined his screams of agony, his hideous pain. I saw the fat under his dirty skin crackling in the flames. A terrible pleasure consumed me. 'Die,' I said, over and over" (84). That Raine could imagine such brutality and gain a certain level of pleasure and satisfaction from such imagery demonstrates even more fully her newly formed self. Although few could blame her for such thoughts, they are, nonetheless, fantasies that she would never have had about another human being before her rape. Facing her hatred and anger was a healthy step towards liberation from her isolation.

Desiring her own death, as well as that of her rapist, led Raine to finally seek help and counseling from a psychotherapist who did not belittle her, or refuse to use the word 'rape,' as so many others had done, but one whose area of expertise was psychotherapy for victims of rape. Raine had reached a point of near insanity and describes emotional responses that mirror the description of PTSD we find in Judith Herman's text:

The physical sensation of terror, including, most horribly, the sense of separating from myself, returned [. . .] in the form in which I had experienced it that afternoon so long ago. It lasted for several days. I felt as if I had been attacked again because my body was responding the same way. Once the terror faded, I returned to a state of chronic fear. But in addition to the fear, I felt something

worse – self-contempt. I seemed to be a person who was grossly overreacting – not to something, but to nothing (228).

Raine recognized that the only change which had occurred in her life since being raped was marrying and moving across the continent; her fear and emotional paralysis remained intact. Yet, her intense dedication to psychotherapy, combined with several “pharmaceutical crutche[s]” (233) led to the slow, but sure recognition of what Raine describes as a “third self” (235). She committed fully to sessions with Dr. Deborah Rose, not only because she felt an affinity with her personally, but because her desire to die alongside her rapist was overpowering her; suicidal thoughts were no longer completely removed from her conscious mind. As a result, Raine left behind her original self, the woman she was before the rape, as well as her secondary self, the one who literally stayed in bed for days on end, unable to face the outside world. She recognized that she had “constructed a third being who could act *as if* she felt neither rage, grief, nor despair. She consulted with business clients [. . .] dusted furniture, planted bulbs, made soup. The as-if woman struggled to be a wife, a friend, and a mother to her husband’s daughter” (235). This “as if” woman is she who appeared to the outside world as though she is coping perfectly well, and had recovered fully from her trauma, despite collapsing internally and very privately. Raine’s “as if” woman disappeared occasionally and the woman who did grieve and could feel hatred would flare up every now and then, but was quickly suppressed. Raine often refuses use of a first-person narrative in her text, adopting instead a second or third person stance to reflect either the person she was before her rape or the person she had become in its immediate aftermath; “these

rhetorical moves mirror [her] psychological situation” (Eakin 95). She is totally disconnected mentally and this is reflected in her narrative’s third person point of view.

Raine experiences what Freud described as Thanatos, or a desire for death. Her old self died the day she was raped, but she could not see that initially and lived in a state of self-condemnation for not being able to retrieve the productive, successful woman who had coped with large and small day-to-day activities: “the old self is replaced by a numbed, wooden, deadened, distant self.’ Trying to function with this ‘wooden’ self – the as-if woman – was itself a source of grief for me. Living seemed only to remind me of my departed loved one – the awake, flexible, feeling, and connected self that I had lost” (254). This continual mourning for a self she could not retrieve left her wishing death upon her rapist and then desiring death for herself. Her recognition of such a suicidal tendency may be a result of her looking back upon this time with deep reflection; it is not clear from Raine’s text if she was able to see this at the time.

What her therapy enabled her to do was to form a new, revised, authentic self as a woman who had been raped and who did feel overwhelming emotion, but who could genuinely move on, embracing her newly revised sense of purpose and who she truly was. Raine discusses in great detail her connection with her “inner child,” which she recognized as a result of her psychotherapy. In embracing the young and needy side of herself, one that was willing to reach out for help and not shut herself off from the rest of the world, Raine was able to learn a great deal about the disjointed woman she had become, both to herself and her loved ones: “My mother had known me for thirty-nine years. But she did not know the woman I had become, the one who was divided from herself, the one who lived as-if. This fragmented woman was a stranger. I had lost contact

with my real mother and, increasingly, with the part of myself that had once provided comfort – my own maternal aspect” (241). Raine literally cites her own self as severed, attempting to stay together but constantly falling apart at the seams, and in continual transition: “I thought of my longing for my lost self [. . .] my fierce but futile attempts to reclaim the part of myself that the rapist had stolen” (240). She wanted so desperately to be the woman she had been before her rape, the description of her nurturing herself through her pain possibly suggesting she sub-consciously craved a return to childhood.

Raine learns through her therapy that she is newly formed and cannot return to her previous self; her emotional breakthrough comes as she realizes that those around her do not know her anymore because she does not know herself. She had become internally fragmented and, as a result, literally disconnected from those she cared about the most. In seeing this, Raine is able to start again and move forward, away from the rape. The therapy which made this realization occur was extremely painful. One of the first policewomen she encountered the afternoon of her rape, likened her being blindfolded and tied up by her rapist to her being a “trussed chicken” ready to be placed into a oven (32). Raine literally spent hours in therapy visualizing herself in such a vulnerable, degrading, and frightening position: “The shame of my naked helplessness, my raw, utterly passive exposure to the will of another human being set this image inside a transparent stone that could never be broken open and dissolved. The stone was cold” (250). Raine realized that her rape had “somehow ‘reorganized [her] entire personality’ and that [she] needed massive restructuring [. . .] psychotherapy with a specialist in rape trauma was to prove to be the right choice” (263).

Although a physically, spiritually, and emotionally exhausting exercise, Raine does exactly what Robert Frost stated in his poem, “A Servant to Servants,” one she quotes as an opening to chapter fifteen: “The best way out is always through” (232). Like Sebold and Allison also, Raine was forced to stop skirting her rape. Avoiding its reality was literally destroying her. She describes this time as a form of rebirth and chaos, “the chaos of creation. [She] did not know it at the time, but what she had to do there was create a new consciousness – in a sense, a new self [. . .] the image of the rape frozen in its center” (251). The suggestion here is that her rape cannot be forgotten or ignored; it remains her relational other, the event that defined who she is today. Her self does not appear fluid or interchangeable here, but literally “frozen” at the core, multiple and fragmented, but essentially changed by her experience. Raine’s rebirth is reinforced by her ability to literally feel again and to know she is understood as a rape survivor, not as a woman who is slowly moving further towards insanity because of an inability to “get over it,” as so many had told her to do. What makes rape such a heinous crime is the fact that, unlike other traumatic disasters, it is not caused by natural disaster, historical tragedy, or sheer bad luck. Rape is caused by another human being, intentionally and, as a result, “Rape trauma cannot be ‘compartmentalized’ in some part of the self, because no part of the self is safe from its searing devastation” (253). The image of “searing devastation” has connotations of heat, which juxtaposes with the idea of her rape being “frozen” within her very center.

The stories of other rape survivors that Raine references universalize her own experience, but they were also essential in her understanding of herself and her own reaction to what had happened. The emotional collapse of so many other thousands of

women who endured this social and criminal epidemic gave her the necessary proof she needed that she was not inferior for still being plagued by her rapist a decade after he raped her. Her act of writing her story only further spreads this knowledge to the many who cannot afford the thousands of dollars necessary to pay for expensive psychotherapy that Raine herself had the “luxury” of being able to afford.

What further helped Raine to cement this understanding of her new self was her ability to view her rapist as human, and not a monstrous, enigmatic, and all-powerful creature: “The only forgiveness I can muster is to call him human” (259). Combined with what can only be described as deep faith, Raine was able to revise her view of him also, recognizing shocking statistics on how many rapists are victims of sexual abuse themselves. Her ability to forgive is extremely admirable and, arguably, one of the hardest parts of her long revision process; yet, she had clearly reached a high level of sympathy, which freed her of the anger and hatred consuming her: “The rapist projects his unbearable feelings of helplessness, humiliation, pain, rage, guilt, and terror onto his victim, who then becomes the container for them, just as he had been made a container by his own abuser. Although rapists act like animals, they are, sadly and horribly, human beings” (255). Raine’s desire to inflict pain upon her rapist and castrate him for what he did to her would bring no solution to her devastation and she comes to this realization: “Even if castration always rendered the individual sexually impotent – which it does not – it certainly would not solve the underlying conflicts and problems in the individual that prompted the attack [such as] [h]is anger and rage” or his own childhood sexual abuse (Groth 10).

Raine strongly asserts herself as newly revised, ending her amazing memoir with rhetoric that is defiant of emotional collapse, that is triumphant. Having detailed her feeling of death the day she was raped, her recognition of the anniversaries of that day each year following, and then the rebirth that evolved as a combined result of her intense psychotherapy and writing After Silence leaves one mentally applauding her eventual sense of peace. Although long, I feel the closing of this memoir deserves quoting:

For many nights I had slipped out of bed before dawn, leaving its warmth and the comfort of Steve's slow, even breathing, to find a woman waiting at the desk where I wrote. I turned on the lamp and sat down [ . . . ] Then I slipped back into bed as the birds began to wake. Turning toward me in his sleep, but not waking, Steve gathered me back in his arms. And then one dawn, more than two years later, when I had finally finished this book, I saw that the woman at the desk and the woman in his arms were the same woman again. And there was a gift I hadn't expected. The years of remembering with words had given me back my birthday. I was born on July 26, 1946 (275).

The reference here to her original birthday suggests that Raine had returned to being the woman she was before her rape, yet she is stating, one could argue, that she has embraced all her newly revised selves, the self that has metamorphosed out of rape and faced it head on. She no longer views herself omnisciently or objectively, but subjectively as a newly-formed woman who has collected together her many fragmented pieces, her different selves, and embraced her rebirth. Her love for and reliance on language has been just one of her saviors: "I had come to realize that if remembering is to re-create, then the understanding of the past itself can be transformed by the present" (269).



## CONCLUSION

I need to assert one more time that rape is a social and criminal phenomenon. That thousands of women every year, in this country alone, are subjected to this cruel and unusual treatment, at the intentional hands of strangers, loved ones, and friends. That it is horrific. That they are then denied voice by the patriarchal structures of our society only exacerbates the tragedy of the situation. Rape takes a variety of forms around the world; it is used as a form of psychological weaponry during war, a form of maintaining submissiveness and the inferiority of women, and as a repetition of abuse that is occurring in homes everywhere, yet the effects are usually very similar: “The purpose of the rapist is to terrorize, dominate, and humiliate [the] victim, to render her utterly helpless. Thus rape, by its nature, is intentionally designed to produce psychological trauma” (Herman 58). Whether this intentional desire to inflict psychological trauma stems from misogyny, mental illness, or simply a lack of respect for women, rape is a horror inflicted upon far too many women. Most men who rape have endured some form of abuse themselves. A cyclical problem continues as years pass by and the statistics involving those who are affected swell by the day. A theory even exists that if a memorial wall for rape victims was made to mirror that of the Vietnam War Memorial, it would wrap around the circumference of the earth numerous times. The attitude of so many in society who wish to ignore this reality only further complicates the issue and that is why memoirs like Lucky, Two or Three Things I know for Sure, and After Silence are so vitally important.

Language and the written word are the first steps in ending the silence that encompasses rape. Survivors must be able to tell their stories and feel that no setting is

inappropriate, that no listeners' reactions should repress their own accounts; they must be allowed to talk about their fears, their experiences, and their recurring problems with trauma. Only in this way can their lives be reformed, or revised in some way, and only then can the true horror of rape be highlighted. It is doubtful that readers of such memoirs are would-be rapists, but recognition of this horror is the least such survivors deserve. To simply *know* of their experience, to express a willingness to *listen* may encourage their need to *feel* their pain as desired by psychotherapists, move back from the wreckage left in the wake of their rape, and find emotional, mental, and spiritual rebirth.

Trauma is a reality for millions. Everyone reacts differently to trauma, yet certain symptoms are recurring for most people, even if their form appears different with each individual. Groundbreaking research reported in texts such as Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery clarify the very serious consequences upon the mind that trauma such as rape can inflict. Herman's work allows all readers to realize the universal effects of fear, shock, and violation upon the human psyche that rape inflicts, and the effect this has on one's day-to-day life. Medical conditions, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, are very real, despite the lack of recognition they have received from so many within a male-dominated, Freudian-inspired world of mental health and medicine. Alice Sebold, Dorothy Allison, and Nancy Venable Raine all testify to the ways in which the millions of rape survivors around the world have suffered from PTSD and been left alone, silenced in the aftermath of their rape, with so many literally turning away because of the taboo nature of rape; people are rendered uncomfortable and distressed by such conversation because they fear being victims themselves or they fear that someone they love may be raped. To talk of something makes it real; denial is safer and less upsetting;

hence, rape has been left off tables of discussion. These memoirs, among so many others, are finally forcing us to face rape squarely in the face, to give identities to survivors of rape that are hidden in the vague statistics published every year, and to realize that this is a very real problem within our society.

Sebold, Allison, and Raine all express distress, fear, intense anger, and self-loathing in the aftermath of their sexual assault: “In the aftermath of traumatic events, as survivors review and judge their own conduct, feelings of guilt and inferiority are practically universal” (Herman 53). Herman discusses “survivor guilt” and claims that “[r]ape produces essentially the same effect: it is the victims, not the perpetrators, who feel guilty” (Herman 53). Denying the reality of rape only perpetuates this sense of guilt in survivors. Each writer demonstrates the problem of denial that all rape survivors endure, on average for a decade before getting psychological help, and details for readers the way in which they could only overcome the trauma of their rape by letting go of their former self, the self that existed before their assault. In struggling to be who they were previously, each hit an emotional brick wall, one that Allison relays through description of a dream in the closing of her text. We are left with an image of her surrounded by pieces of brick, structures which have been torn down. Each of these memoirists had to tear their own personal wall down, face their experience head on with the help of a therapist, and revise who they were, embracing their newly-formed self that metamorphosed from their rape. Their years of depression and denial were years when, as their memoirs show, their selves were multifaceted, fragmented, and torn apart. Each was a girlfriend, wife, mother, daughter, friend, or lover, yet their identity was fractured by their rape and multiple selves appeared. Each remained uncertain of who exactly she was,

feeling self-conscious, self-aware, and often, detestable. The burden of shame that their rapist should have carried was a torch given to each of these memoirists. Their stories show in great detail how they carried these torches for many years until they were able to revise their self-image, find an element of acceptance from within, and journey back from the despair they had harbored for so long. These memoirs show that each journeyed back screaming out against rape, willing to share very personal information, and carve a new niche in autobiographical literature, which had not previously possessed a sub-genre of rape memoir. These memoirs are social critiques, forces for change, and challenges to patriarchy, making their power felt, both socially and textually. The simple fact that they can undermine patriarchal sexism towards women or fundamentally alter a reader's feelings towards rape survivors is testimony to their importance.

From these texts not only do we learn a great deal about the psychological effects of rape and how Sebold, Allison, and Raine all recovered to a certain degree, but we are also forced to recognize the denial each experienced at the hands of friends, family, and anyone involved in their rape case. Our judicial system makes a mockery of rape with its disgustingly low rape convictions and prison sentences. Those in positions of authority, trained to handle victims of rape in the immediate aftermath of the sexual assault, whether as police officials, hospital workers, or later as psychiatrists, are often insultingly blasé in their responses. The stereotypes that women who are raped must face are, in themselves, reflective of society's desire to ignore rape. Women who report their attacks face a grueling process of examination, suspicion, and very low odds of justice. As Janet Bode highlights in Fighting Back:

While in an emotionally volatile state, a woman has to make a crucial decision [. . .] Should this offense be reported to the police? [. . .] The worse the attack, the more likely the woman will receive sensitive attention and a guilty verdict for the offender [. . .] Strong evidence of use of force, resistance, and penetration are required [. . .] The rapist must be someone other than her husband. If she knows the offender, and especially if she has had previous consensual relations with him, the possibility of any legal resolution decreases markedly [. . .] A victim must be willing to have her personal life examined. If she goes to court, this data may be made public. She has to reveal very private information regarding her life-style and sexual history, from the time of the rape back through puberty. (85)

One degrading, humiliating experience is added to another, and all of this information proves that rape is defined and categorized based upon the victim and her circumstances in each case. The severity of each attack is determined by those in positions of authority who were not, themselves, raped. Yet, as Alison's memoir demonstrates, knowing one's assailant does not make the experience of sexual assault any less traumatic; many would argue violation by a figure of trust, authority, and supposed love would be worse. Our determination of the severity of another person's rape within our court system, our modes of media, and within our everyday conversations, is evidence of the sexist attitude we still possess concerning this problem. Even our discourse for the forums of the experience is detrimental; terminology such as "date rape" seems, somehow, to attempt to soften the reality of such an attack. Rape discourse is loaded with reporting of stigmas and suggestive of victim responsibility or provocation. The power of language pertaining to rape is reflected in the very violent language used by rape memoirists. The violence

presented by these writers through their discourse is essential, though, because such a problem cannot be softened; the penetrative effects of rape must be known and the public must not be sheltered from its reality. The language of these texts demonstrates each writer's understanding of this necessity. Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia is demonstrated by each memoirist who adopts multiple voices, graphic personal imagery, and thick metaphoric patterns to convey their pain. Allison details her brick wall, Raine writes of being stuck in cement, slowly chipping herself out, while Sebold adopts a persona of one bloodied and passing on a disease of rape to those who become close with her. These images leave readers unable to deny the effects of rape upon survivors. The structure of Raine and Allison's memoirs, especially, are often fragmented and less linear than that of Sebold, as if to reflect the shattered selves they became after being assaulted. Sebold's text may be placed upon a linear time-scale, but it ends with a lack of resolution. One understands her allusion to being somewhat recovered and revised, but her story remains open-ended, as if to suggest that her new self (or selves) is still changing and coping, even if she has found acceptance and love.

Friends and family, those considered loved ones, unable to cope with the knowledge that someone so close has been violated in such a manner, can demand silence, or request that survivors of rape just "get over it," mirroring societal silence and discomfort. Yet, the very high numbers in which these, and other rape memoirs have sold, prove that there does exist a desire within our communities to learn more about rape and trauma. Many may read such stories for sensationalist purposes; a reviewer for Harper's magazine has even described such memoir as the latest literary vogue. However,

no matter what the motive for picking up such a text in the first place, the fact remains that the wall of silence is starting to be brought down.

Too many still maintain the belief that women who are raped are somehow to blame, having placed themselves in conspicuous situations, spent time with “the wrong sort of people,” or worn clothing deemed provocative. One could argue that much of this thought pattern stems from our patriarchal forefathers and foremothers: “Psychiatrists from Sigmund Freud to Helene Deutsch have asserted that the tendency for victimization and masochism is also a universal female condition. Less widely known theoreticians, such as L. Eidelberg, have further proposed that all women share a desire to be raped” (Bode 26). That anyone could suggest women want to be raped, even sub-consciously, is both preposterous and insulting. This belief suggests that many would rather digest such a ridiculous assumption about women’s sexual desire than face the horror of rape. Women do not “intentionally place themselves in dangerous situations to become victims and thereby be rid of their anxiety of the experience” (Bode 26). Women avoid such an experience at all costs, yet, increasing statistics pertaining to rape victims prove just how serious and common a phenomenon it really is. No woman, no matter what her class, race, religion, or birthplace, is immune from rape; all women are vulnerable whether consciously or not.

We cannot stop rape from happening, but we can help survivors shatter the wall of silence around rape by acknowledging, reading, and applauding those who voice their stories in memoirs such as these. Our reactions as readers may be those of horror, disgust, fear, or even contempt for rape survivors who write their stories. Our personal reactions are the result of the very real fear we experience when reading the graphic descriptions of

their assaults and learning of their personal fight in the aftermath. The reality of their texts causes readers to feel, and maybe even to relate, to their own fear and vulnerability, thus, rendering us horrified and disgusted. No matter how we respond, however, our increased knowledge and intolerance for rape are the critical outcomes.



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