IMAGINING BEYOND:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ONE WOMAN’S TRANSFORMATION FROM
CHILDHOOD RAPE THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF CREATIVE EXPERIENCE.

By

JESSICA BLACK

Integrated Studies Project

submitted to Dr. Carolyn Redl

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta

November, 2013
Abstract

Rape as a routine experience in early childhood is something few people are willing to consider a possibility but the experience of moving beyond such a past remains even more unfathomable. This autoethnographic study takes a careful examination of the psychological and physiological impacts of the experience of rape in childhood where the perpetrator is a primary caregiver and the acts lead to permanent mutilation of the body of the child. From this perspective the reader is then led on an expedition of transformation through a series of theoretical epistemologies. First looking at feminism then geographically moving eastwards to consider Indian logic and Buddhist emptiness; the reader explores a variety of means and methods of perception by which an individual can find strength and power at the very heart of the most traumatic of realities. The study includes an investigation of the use of created or generated archetypes as a means of interacting with one’s own mind and imagination in concretized form. The suggestion arising from my research and personal engaging of such mentally created entities is that they can have an impact on the psycho-physical structuring of the individual who calls upon them. The applications of these evocation methods hold promise in future psychological and consciousness studies and in transforming various human sufferings through insight. This paper then concludes with a dissection of the difficult theory of trauma enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle to demonstrate trauma itself as a mode of experiencing that which is beyond.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval Page</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and thesis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine Pain: Growing up with rape as a normalized event</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist ideologies on the meaning of rape</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded view: Indian Logic and Buddhist Emptiness</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Reality: evoking archetypes as a method of self-transformation and healing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering the Archetypes: Going into the suffering event(s) to extract the power in the problem</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for the beyond: The difficult theory of trauma enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Cited</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction and thesis:**

Can individuals who have suffered extreme interpersonal violence with concurrent physiological impairment from those events recreate the meaning of their situation and actually find strength at the heart of their experience(s)? Historically, people who have experienced rape in early childhood seldom voice their experiences from a place imbued with positive strength or power derived from the experience. There is a need for alternative internal scripts to be cultivated around the issue of sexual violence on a global scale. The personal is political or rather the personal becomes collective. Meaning itself is most typically constructed by an individual and then expands outwards to the collective who in turn takes from the given interpretation and cultivates her or his own meaning. What are desperately needed across cultures are stories of those who have recovered from their experiences of sexualized violence and moved beyond the victim/survivor dichotomy.

Too often people are encouraged to consider rape as taboo and are given little social room for the creation and expansion of transformative methods. Even the language used to describe the process of survival is laden with the need to cut oneself off from the experience. Words such as ‘recovery’ or ‘getting over it’ suggest a required silence or covering over of the problem as a means to its solution. Bounded to this polarity, an individual is unable ‘to get over it’ because tremendous power is tied up in the experience. To truly excavate their living power, these stories need to be dug into, through and then ultimately beyond.

This paper has four key aims. First, it is an in-depth analysis of several potential psychological and neuro-physiological impacts of rape as a chronic trauma in early childhood. Secondly, expansive views of perception and their impact on experience will be expressed from feminism, East Indian logic and the use of archetypes. Thirdly, these archetypes, assisted by Buddhist philosophical ideas both in and beyond a Buddhist context, are implemented in a directed process by which others may choose to acknowledge and redirect the power imbued in their suffering experiences. Fourthly, the theory of traumatic enjoyment is addressed and assessed as an inner search for what seemingly resides beyond reach of the individual. Thus this research paper will speak to shifting power structures in a level of experience which often remains unspeakable. Of course every individual is different but any method of coping and transforming suffering can serve to aid and inform the meaning by which others can re-appropriate their own experiences.

**Methodology:**

Discussion of experiences such as rape in early childhood can evoke profound levels of emotional intensity. The following analysis of one such narrative thus requires a methodology
capable of addressing not only the deeply personal but also the emotional reality of that experience. Autoethnography is precisely such an evocative research methodology that seeks to explore personal experience in the context of a given culture or even across cultural backdrops. As stated by Carolyn Ellis, a leading theorist on this form of sociological research, “autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” (1) This approach challenges dogmatic ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially just and conscious act. Qualitative methodology, specifically autoethnography, grants a means to approach and understand my lived experience. Autoethnography is a dynamic methodological approach to research which invites the lived experience and the researcher into the process.

As a result of autoethnographic methods veering away from the rigid confines of objectivity in scientific study there have been a number of concerns raised about its validity. The key concerns appear to be that autoethnography lacks a basis in traditional logic/scientific reasoning; is not creative or fluid enough for the artistic community and is not formulaic or rigid enough for the scientific community and gets targeted for its lack of structural functionality. Some qualitative researchers see autoethnography as expansion of tendencies in the social and scientific community that have been adhered to so strenuously that they have produced a dogmatic methodology. Qualitative researchers such as Leon Anderson have repackaged traditional status/credibility markers to create new prescriptions under which autoethnography can and should (in his view) take place. He asserts:

> analytic autoethnography refers to ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. (Anderson 375)

While Anderson’s criteria establish a sense of validity for autoethnographic researchers, his view is not my preferred definition of criteria to include for all areas of this research methodology. One of the cornerstone aspects of the autoethnographic view is questioning the nature of whose voice is valid and whose is invalidated in the process of research. Traditionally people with direct experience of a researched phenomenon have been considered too emotive or ensconced so deeply in their experience that they maintain an objective stance needed to perform research. This oppression is all the more difficult to overcome if the phenomenon experienced is of an already taboo nature. Authoethnography is enabling these ‘direct experts’ to have a voice but Anderson’s requirement of
valid autoethnographic researchers to be visible (i.e. established as a published researcher) serves to more fully invalidate those who have not traditionally had a voice in the social research arena. Ironically, while Anderson is attempting to validate the methodology he may be seen as invalidating a specific group of autoethnographic researchers.

A variety of persons in social research address the complicated question of validity. Ellis adds that “[a]s witnesses, autoethnographers not only work with others to validate the meaning of their pain, but also allow participants and readers to feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change their circumstances” (6). This is one reason why I chose the autoethnographic approach because I wanted to journey honestly through some of the current literature on the long-term impacts of childhood rape and to look specifically my own experience of trauma to find words for the transformation and transmutation of brutality that could ultimately occur, not just for myself but so others could also validate the meaning of their own pain and gain new perspectives from which they could find strength in their own stories.

The aim of this paper is not simply to retell a story of a life informed by trauma but to offer at least one mode of reforming/restructuring such experiences as a felt expression which can then form similar and new techniques in the minds of other traumatized persons. The most effective way to demonstrate this potential transformative view is by an exploration of my personal thoughts and actions which are best expressed using autoethnography. It is the form which “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist” (Ellis 3)

Also autoethnography appears to be most powerful when it is employed creatively to deconstruct or reframe the marginalized or traumatic experience. Such studies include coping with a non-visible disability (Morella), dealing with vicarious trauma and burn out (Trif), understanding cross cultural identities decolonized from race, gender, or religion (Kumar), and exploring the social construction of adult rape (Moll). All these studies demonstrate the capacity to introduce readers to unimagined worlds via experience. Due to the personal and subjective nature of this methodology, readers actually have the opportunity to know these topics at a much more information engaging level than they would with traditional scientific research.

Prior to undertaking this autoethnographic research analysis, I wrote a memoir dealing with the same events explored here. Thus one advantage in using the autoethnographic method is that much of the emotional analysis had already been done and the data was already readily available in great depth. By engaging with outside literary and research references, I explored areas of knowledge
previously unknown to me such as the potential physiological changes that can occur in body of the chronically traumatized individual.

After amassing my recollections in my memoir and cognizant of the transformative power of narrative, I searched for other stories similar to mine. But in my searches of other autobiographical narratives, I was overwhelmed by the negativity emphasized in the abusive situation and the lack of endeavor to offer any description of genuine transformation or transcendence; however, they all explore the emotionality and complexity of issues that tend to follow such developmental disruptions. Autobiographical accounts such as Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You by Susan Silverman, I Never Told Anyone by Ellen Bass, My Father’s House by Silvia Fraser and The Day I Stopped by Martha Ramsey all gave accurate and descriptive accounts like mine of the sexually abusive scenarios but the authors were so ensconced in the unpacking of their experiences that little was done to look through and beyond their experience.

The initial two themes of the piece were the rape narrative and the escape out of the rape narrative. Much of the initial focus was in gathering information detailing the psycho-physiological impact of chronic trauma and moved towards a focus on ideologies from traditional eastern philosophical perspectives with an emphasis on Tibetan Buddhism. The intent was not to propose Eastern ideas over Western ones in some abstract cultural battle but rather to show how the direct experience of one individual was informed and ultimately reformed by the space between these ideologies. My study differs from other studies that examine the impacts of personal trauma by offering new perspectives and expanding the boundaries of experience to encompass new notions of reality itself. I tried to create an intriguing study that is universal enough to offer insight to others who feel their lives have been shattered by intense suffering.

**Routine Pain: Growing up with rape as a normalized event**

Rape is often equated to be the most disturbing of envisioned experiences for any woman and the most devastating reality for numerous women. One survivor of rape writes: “It already is bigger than everything else. It lives in front of me, behind me, next to me, inside me every single day.” (Whitney 87). By extension for the young child or infant without language their experience is literally unspeakable and they must reach into the unimaginable to cope. The need for ongoing support from one rape experience in adulthood is often enough to produce negative aftereffects that can last for months or even years after the event. “Some rape survivors have post-traumatic stress disorder for years and need continuous counseling and support.” (Healing Our Past Experiences)
Many traumatic events, such as a rape or a natural disaster, are of relatively short duration in time. However sometimes trauma is an ongoing experience that is repeated for years. Numerous researchers suggest that the current PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) diagnosis does not fully encompass the increased psycho-social harm that can occur with such prolonged and extensive trauma. Often additional symptoms arise in chronic trauma such as actual “changes in the (survivor’s) self-concept and the way they adapt to stressful events.” (National Center for PTSD 1) This is why there has been a recent extension to the diagnosis of PTSD which is called Complex PTSD to more aptly address the constellation of potential issues related to the experience of persistent trauma.

My experiences of rape as a young child who was barely out of infancy was both terrorizing and formative. The compounding factors were that I was only five years old when the rapes began, they lasted eight years, my attacker was my biological father and the total number of attacks is estimated at over 200. Additionally, there was enough physical force used in his attacks to incur genital damage to the posterior fourchette. This was a discovery made after a prolonged internal battle with the belief that my sexual dysfunction was purely psychological in origin. According to one set of findings, while severe physical injury is less common in sexual abuse cases in children, injury to the posterior fourchette is the most common genital injury (in 70% of women & girls presenting with genital injury) to incur from rape. (Sommers, 277)

According to Jaelline Jaffe et. al, the severity of a given trauma is indicated by several factors including:

- the severity of the event
- the individual's personal history (which may not even be recalled)
- the larger meaning the event represents for the individual (which may not be immediately evident)
- coping skills, values and beliefs held by the individual (some of which may have never been identified)
- the reactions and support from family, friends, and/or professionals … (2)

Given that my scenario would rank very high in each of these traumatic factors, one might assume that my childhood would have been extraordinarily traumatizing. But I had no capacity to cope with the psychological and physiological elements of the excessive pain and intensity, and thereby internalized it as a portion of my self-concept. My experience of rape was so frequent that it became normalized. This was in part due to my young age and thus my inability to even partially understand what was happening to me. However it was also due to the fact that my rapist was my father. Both
patriarchal conventions and natural childhood bonding assumed my father should be a role model. These factors normalized his actions in my worldview, even while I experienced excruciating pain.

Then upon reaching adolescence and adulthood, I encountered a world wherein rape is not simply abnormal but among the most heinous of events that an individual can endure and realized the depth of betrayal to which I had been subjected. Here I could begin to understand the full impact of my early experiences and untangle the meaning of what had become translated into an internalized betrayal. I explore my reaction to these events in the written chronicle of my own experience.

Here is the thing, when you are raped repeatedly as a very young child- it certainly isn’t sexy or even sexual but to you, it is not rape either because you don’t even have the words to define your own experience; so what it really becomes in the mind is a state of massive confusion, particularly if it is done by someone you are supposed to love. You come to own the experience as a part of the self but because of the unbearable physical pain you also remove yourself from the experience. The whole event or series of events thus becomes a denied part of the self which is a far stronger wordless fear than being able to stand up and put a name and distance between yourself and what is happening to you. Or rather knowing that your rapist is a rapist and thus doing something very wrong to your person because in this scenario the perpetrator becomes you. It is paradoxically an inseparable separateness and a connection to being disconnected. (Black 30)

Additionally, I continued the legacy of abuse on myself long after my father’s intrusions ended. At fourteen, I scratched at my developing chest until it bled, knowing breasts to be an indication of growing up and that my father was attracted only to me as a prepubescent. At twenty two, I took a pair of scissors to my wrists, doing what I perceived was not serious damage but just digging into my own flesh until I got blood. Instead of identifying directly with rapist or victim, I unconsciously came up with a clever but admittedly disturbing way to relive/recreate my early experiences by saving my deepest emotional reactions (both positive and negative) for stories of rape, and child abuse in any book, TV show, or movie I could find. Perhaps this unconscious dual fascination and repulsion was as an attempt to reclaim my own power or simply a modeling of behavior (habitual) to which I was exposed. Davies and Frawley-O’Dea describe a similar state within the mind of the victim and the quality of continuation of abusive modalities of being: “Always juxtaposed alongside the survivor's identification as victim, running parallel to it- though less consciously available- is her equally strong identification with the perpetrator of her abuse....The enacting survivor takes up where the perpetrator left off, turning fury and frustration against herself
As described in the text, *Abnormal Psychology* by Butcher et al., young children are sometimes especially vulnerable to the development of psychological problems because they lack a realistic view of themselves or the world around them. They are also generally unaware of their own internal and external methods of coping with problems effectively. Problems may appear larger than life for children who are often without the ability to reflect on the future possibility of being alleviated of the problem. Parents are supposed to provide a buffer between the child and the real world but family stresses can leave the child vulnerable. In fact the role of the parents is so great in the mind of a child that several psychological problems can arise simply through neglect or rejection of the child on the part of the parent. Thus clearly for the chronically abused child, stress levels are high and the young individual must attempt to adjust in atypical ways in an effort for survival. I explore a similar reality in my memoir;

The truth is that in order to survive his attacks over such a long period of time, I actually identified with him. Now here is where the story gets difficult to tell because for me it has never been the graphic details of the physical acts into which I was forced that cause the deepest disturbance but rather the psychological positions I was coerced to take in and beyond these scenarios. (27)

Enmeshed in the quagmire of experience were also very clear questions of identity via biological/environmental circumstances. As I express in my writings; “(f)urthermore, how do you reconcile the fact that your rapist is your own father and thus the inescapable essence of whom you are as well? This is someone who you can always smell on you, no matter how many showers you take because his sweat glands helped to form your own; someone who has forced you to bleed his own blood.” (27) I sought (perhaps even rather desperately at times) to find a way to move away from notions of determinism or a predestined fate from both environmental and genetic influences; I was willing to assert their influence but contested that they were the only mechanisms at play in the structuring of the individual.

These aspects led me on a search beyond the paradigms of thinking offered by my own socio-cultural framework which seemed inevitably tied to an ultimatum regarding the dual notions of nurture vs. nature (environment or genetics) as the creators for selfhood and personal identity. Neither of the notions, nor a mix of them seemed entirely relevant to my own situation and I would eventually come to question the foundation of selfhood itself to find my own answers. Through this search which took me literally to the other side of the world, I found new cultural perspectives which
cumulatively gave me a unique perspective from which to reach both into and beyond my own milieu of thinking and being.

Yet even these tumultuous elements of identity tied to my father still failed to root out the depth of the past situation in the present moment to which I needed to gain access if I was genuinely to transform it. What remained unaddressed was the physiological response to the traumatic moments. The adrenaline rushes and intensity of experience that in those very same moments of greatest terror left me feeling more alive than I had ever felt before or since. This is the aspect in myself I could not rectify, my unconscionable pull to repeat/recreate the abuse scenarios, even vicariously to get back to that feeling of being fully alert and completely alive. One explanation offered is that the states of erotized hyperarousal could not be modulated when confronted with the early stressful encounters. Thus the very foundation of my sexuality felt not simply corrupted but inverted towards expressing hatred, not love.

One thing we have come to know about adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse is that they have an enormously difficult time modulating even mild-to-moderate degrees of arousal. It is often irrelevant whether such arousal presents in the form of anxiety, fear, pain, pleasure, or anticipatory excitement. The slightest trigger can catapult the patient into a maelstrom of breathless, physiologically mediated hyperarousal that proves to be disorganizing and unmodifiable in the short run. Such hyperreactivity is one of the unquestioned long term effects of traumatic childhood abuse. This process appears to be controlled by a complex system of emotional, maturational, and physiological factors. (Davies & Frawley-O'Dea 135)

Since Davis and Frawley-O’Dea more research has pointed to further physiological implications specifically in the area of neurological research involving discovery of brain alteration or damage among victims of chronic child abuse. Teicher, a neurological researcher, suggests that child abuse fundamentally alters the limbic system. Looking at areas of the brain that possess a greater density of stress receptors such as the hippocampus and the amygdale, that function in the creation/retrieval of memories and the emotional content of memories respectively, Teicher found damages to this region of the brain in some victims of chronic abuse. According to Teicher, “damages to this region including abrupt onset of tingling, numbness, or vertigo; motor-related manifestations such as uncontrollable staring or twitching; and autonomic symptoms such as flushing, nausea or the ‘pit in your stomach’ feeling one gets in a fast rising elevator” (Teicher, 70). This notion of permanent physiological reactions being tied to prolonged abuse in early life is deeply
troubling because the abuse survivor, having already forcefully lost control of their body, must now deal with recurrent losses of control in a body that no longer seems to belong to them.

Prior to knowing about hyperarousal in traumatic childhood abuse, I wrote about this in my autobiographical piece. “Since the age of twelve, I get a visceral reaction like an explosion of energy and a serious case of the shakes every time I come in contact with such abuse stories.” (31) Even more explicit to my persistent involuntary reaction is that;

In adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, these states of emotional and physiological hyperarousal have by dint of constant pairing and fundamental learning paradigm become intensely sexualized as well. Those arbitrary triggers that have become conditioned stimuli for traumatic levels of responsiveness, particularly those that elicit fear or anxiety reactions, will also generate states of intensely eroticized hyperarousal. In response to images that evoke frightening possibilities or the anticipation of pain, such reactions set the groundwork for a reciprocal and synergistic identification of fear, hyperarousal, and sexualization of the entire situation, that often spirals desperately out of control, creating havoc in the patient's life...

Yet, such a connection between the fear and anticipatory anxiety that accompanies chronic abuse and later eroticization of similar trigger situations is virtually unavoidable. (Davies & Frawley-O'Dea 36)

Other sources support Davies & Frawley-O’Dea’s idea of potential traumatic sexualization both in cases where either force or compliance is used by the perpetrator. In particular, the notion that fear can become associated with sexuality seems to leads to a gamut of atypical sexualized compulsions and/or outright avoidance of later sexualized encounters.

Experiences in which the child is enticed to participate are likely to be more sexualizing than those in which brute force is used. However, even with the use of force, a form of traumatic sexualization may occur as a result of the fear that becomes associated with sex in the wake of such an experience. … Children who have been traumatically sexualized emerge from their experiences with inappropriate repertoires of sexual behavior, with confusions and misconceptions about their sexual self-concepts, and with unusual emotional associations to sexual activities. (Finkelhor and Browne 2)

Thus what occurred at the hands of my father meant that for me desire became linked with the most undesirable of actual circumstances. By a betrayal even greater than his, my own body physiologically responded to imagery/circumstances to which I am abhorrently opposed. Therefore even long after his attacks were over, I sought unconsciously to continue them while at the same
moment being terrified of the physical pain involved. This approach-avoidance stance is one that has held me quite literally petrified and completely avoidant of intimate relations.

One final suggestive link between abuse and reactive states of hyperarousal;

Children who have been exposed to severe, prolonged environmental stress will experience extraordinary increases in both catecholamine and endogenous opioid responses to subsequent stress. The endogenous opioid response may produce both dependence and withdrawal phenomena resembling those of exogenous opioids... Depending on which stimuli have come to condition an opioid response, self-destructive behavior may include chronic involvement with abusive partners, sexual masochism, self-starvation and violence against self or others. Therefore, although we have shown how the anticipation of self-mutilation triggers a state of hyperarousal, disorganization and erotic overstimulation, the abusive act itself can come to serve as a conditioned stimulus for the release of endogenous opioids, which will in effect tranquilize and relax the out of control patient. (Davies & Frawley-O’Dea 144)

The combination of findings on hyperarousal fear states and the conditioned release of opioids resulted in the discovery of the physiological link that had informed and reformed my psychological outlook. Yet, if body and mind are linked then wouldn’t the influence go both ways? Just as the biological/physiological realm can inform the mental/spiritual realm, the mental/spiritual realm can inform the biological/physiological. And thus my search began for the effective and persuasive positive mental states.

Davis & Frawley-O’Dea and Teicher make important discoveries about the impacts of child abuse. However, their evidence of brain and nervous system damage seems to suggest a deterministic helplessness for victims of chronic child abuse. Yet, other psychologists working with adult survivors of childhood abuse make different more open-ended claims. Sarah Kendall, who wrote a clinical guide for therapists working with such adult survivors, claims that while there is evidence of specific changes in the brain in adults who were maltreated in childhood, the brain is currently considered to be plastic and malleable throughout the life of the individual and thus ever able to be changed and transformed. She writes that

children who experienced abuse do have the capability to be resilient and lead healthy lives, but it is, in part, up to how the victim chooses to perceive the event as well as the presence of social support in that person’s life that will determine his or her ability to be resilient. Encouraging the victim to refocus his or her attention to more positive activities is also crucial, but this may or may not be possible without a strong social support system. (21)
Kendall’s view states that a social support system is pivotal in strengthening resilience and healing processes. I did not have a traditional support system but I discovered an internal source of strength and structured my support network from the constructs of my own imagination. As I saw it, there was hope if I could find strong enough supportive thinking to restructure my mind and open it towards different modes of being first beyond my reality and then ultimately within it.

**Feminist ideologies on the meaning of rape**

The capacity for creation or recreation of meaning takes one on a journey of questioning increasingly subtle assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of self. In my questioning of meaning, feminism was a perspective which first gave voice to this notion of one’s ability to recreate meaning. Rape as a text in popular media, including autobiographical stories, could be the quintessential method for maintaining a phallocentric view in Western culture, specifically because of the deterministic mode of inescapability within which it is most frequently portrayed.

Authors of autobiographical rape narratives often feed into the deterministic nature of this phallocentric view because other perspectives are generally absent. In her book, *Lucky*, Alice Sebold depicts herself near the end of her story;

\[
\text{I had tried to be like everyone else. During my junior year, I had given it a go. But that wasn't the way it was going to be. I could see that now. It seemed I had been born to be haunted by rape, and I began to live that way. (189)}
\]

Here the reader is presented with a disappointing conclusion to an intense struggle wherein one woman is subjected to violence, then succeeds in getting justice, but completely fails to step outside her own phallocentric patriarchal culture in which she has no choice but to be permanently marred by the negativity of her experience.

In her text on *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Film*, feminist writer Laura Mulvey appropriates psychoanalytic theory to show how phallocentrism is structured into film and thus imbedded into cultural norms. “The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestation is that it depends on the image of the castrated [lacking] woman to give order and meaning to its world.” (585) And furthermore, “man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as the bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning.”(586) Hereby rape as the ultimate visualized representation of the phallocentric text becomes clear. Rape is used to re-establish gender differences keeping women tied to their position
as the bearers of meaning rather than the creators of it. Thus men retain the dual power in the attack itself as well as the systemic society in which these narratives are expressed (or silenced).

Open to criticism is not Sebold’s vocalization of an emotional stance/reaction to a terrifying life experience but the whole context in which that vocalization is framed and it is a framework that fails to see past the very sociolinguistic context into which it is set. Hence the language ultimately becomes the reality because the author does not define it in any other way. Sebold is never able to get beyond her experience because the meaning is ascribed to her through interactions in her world. Sebold helps recreate the patriarchal message by way of her inability to reassert a differing meaning with the value-added status of actually being a rape victim. Sebold brings all women into her inescapable rape narrative which serves as the ultimate controlling discourse not of gender difference but of patriarchal supremacy.

Meaning creation can only occur when one examines the interactions of experience, with sociolinguistic, belief and cultural contexts within which the experience occurred. This enables recognition of contextualized perspective and creates the space to structure a different interpretation. This lack of observation of the external factors that constructed Sebold’s experience of rape and its aftermath meant that she was unable to create an internal and external meaning to her own experience. In so doing (or failing to do) she inadvertently tied the reader’s identity to the same inescapable experience without a method of transcendence. This subtlety in gender polarity and sexualized violence is reiterated by Kramer when he says;

[I]t is precisely in the realm of representation, of images charged with value, pressure, feeling, images recognized and misrecognized, conscious and unconscious, that actual sexual violence is grounded and in which its antidote must likewise be grounded. When men abuse women they act from a sense of entitlement: they do what a man has a right to do. The sense, the right, may be abhorrent, but it is too pervasive to be explained away as abnormal. Rather it honors the norm of a cultural order in which gender polarity, precisely because it is never quite true, must compulsively reestablish itself as the truth.

(8)

Intriguingly, Mulvey’s clearly antagonistic view of the presentation of woman as bearer of vs. maker of meaning in popular texts and Kramer’s notion of gender as a series of social constructs actually create the awareness and thus the space for the very reversal of this stance. Herein resides the possibility that a woman can recreate the meaning of her situation even in a scenario as devastating as rape. Furthermore, by recreating the meaning of experience, not only does the
situation step out of the realm of the unspeakable/unbearable but the whole paradigm of phallocentrism is seriously challenged.

For a very young child, subjected to repeated rapes, the situation is literally unspeakable because of the child’s inability to comprehend what is occurring. This in turn frequently leads him or her to a whole series of internalized meanings some of which can seem so deeply rooted and fundamental that they are attached to the individual’s concept of self. One large study that analyzed the impacts of childhood sexual abuse on mental health found a series of links between sexual victimization and later negative impacts on mental health in adulthood. Spataro reports that “[i]ndividuals in the child sexual abuse cohort had twice the rate of major affective disorders.” (419) but perhaps even more relevant to notions of disrupted self-concept and sexual abuse; “individuals in the child sexual abuse cohort had almost five times the rate of a primary diagnosis of personality disorder.” (Spataro 420) In addition “anxiety disorders and acute stress reactions were the most frequently recorded diagnostic category among victims of child sexual abuse. Included in this broad category of anxiety and stress disorders are post-traumatic stress disorders. Individuals in the child sexual abuse cohort were more than three times more likely to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder or an acute stress reaction. (Spataro 419) Moreover, other studies have shown that the greater the severity of the offense against the child, the great the impact on the child’s mental health in adulthood. Those who have experienced abuse involving penetration are overrepresented among some mental disorders according to David Fergusson and Paul Mullen’s *Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Evidence Based Perspective*. Often the raw data can seem overwhelmingly in favor of lifelong victimization but are there other options to reconstruct the meaning of the experience and create something that steps outside the common framework?

**Expanded view: Indian Logic and Buddhist Emptiness**

No one is claiming that abusive experiences such as a series of rapes in childhood will not have consequences but if we cannot move beyond our own historical, social and cultural theoretical frameworks, we double doom these individuals to not only living through a tragedy but then telling them they are doomed to repeat that tragedy throughout their lives. In *Treating the Adult Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Psychoanalytic Perspective*, Davis and Frawley-O’Dea note

In attempting to integrate a conceptual frame with a clinical-experiential substrate, it is critical to remember that the abused child's life represents an ongoing compromise with reality…. Rather they are an accommodation, a mode of relating to experience that allows
unspeakable events to occur and not occur simultaneously. Although survivors can dissociate and repress the particulars of their past abuse, the specific modifications in ego structuralization described continue to permeate the individual's psychic adaptation and interpersonal relations on all levels. (129)

In the previous section, I identified such ideas with a phallocentric view which regards the self as needing to withstand traumatic breaches. Yet, it is the negative implication asserted in the above quotation in which the accommodation created by the individual who has been abused in childhood will be a compromise which here is implied as a somehow ‘lesser reality’ than Reality with a capital R. This clearly assumes that there is some form of objective reality to which the abused child simply does not have access and perhaps never did. But the assumption of an objectified/objectifiable reality is merely that, an assumption that does not play out in identical forms across cultures. Again I reiterated this in my memoir:

At one point, I intuitively felt that if I was going to deal with this haunting, I mean really deal with it, I would need a whole new perspective. I would need methods for creating an immensely larger view of the world than I currently held in order to hold the reality of my past without being crushed by it. I was simply not yet mentally big enough to deal with it. India had become the archetypal land for deeper spiritual or inner meaning in my mind and was also literally one of the furthest places away from my Canadian home which became both a literal and symbolic scene of dramatic change. (9)

What I sought in my travels to Asia was not simply another view to accept unconditionally but one through which I could examine some of the foundational principles in my own background. One of the most intriguing questions presented itself in the notion of the reality of a given statement or phenomenon. In Western epistemological thought, philosophical notions are validated if they possess internal logical consistency. Hence any given component of a philosophical or scientific statement is in possession of two discreet possible modes of being; either valid or invalid (‘x’ is either true or ‘x’ is not true). These are the only two possibilities in Western formal logic, i.e. it is dichotomous. As noted by Charles Tart, Western thought assumes that “logical inconsistencies in the expression of something indicate its invalidity.” (92)

East Indian logic accepts additional positions beyond true and false. According to Targ and Hurtak, it identifies four lemmas to verify reality or the nature of what is real. Their claim is a given statement or phenomenon (x) is either true or false (just as Aristotle proposed at the founding
principle of all the Western sciences) or ‘x’ is both true and false, or ‘x’ is neither true nor false. (46)

With specific reference to the fourth lemma (neither true nor false) Targ and Hurtak write

> It negates the logic of all the lemmas or logical relationships that have preceded it. Entirely open and unbounded, the fourth lemma ensures a way out of a problem by dissolving the boundaries and restrictive ‘scripting’ for a person restricted by dualism. The fourth lemma is neither affirmation nor negation. It represents complementarity and the nonconceptual aspects of the world. (48)

Thus this notion of the additional two aspects with particular emphasis on the fourth completely opens up possibilities in mind and awareness in a number of ways beyond the polarities of good and evil, true and untrue. It also gives potential credibility to a whole variety of views that cannot be verified within the current mind set of Western culture. But the fourth validity statement of neither true nor not true allows us to question the essence of reality itself as some objective external thing we move towards or through. And here we are left to wonder if it is in fact something we collectively or individually create and recreate in each moment.

Emptiness has traditionally been a Buddhist concept clearly associated to the notion of the fourth lemma of the Indian logic. Emptiness refers not to nothingness but is simply the lack of an inherently existing self. The individual still exists but not as an independent, solid, self existing entity (Thurman 134), thus it neither is nor is it not. In other words, the self is posited here to be an illusion rather than the foundation upon which all else is added. But by extension, all phenomena (both people and things) are posited to be illusion which means “they do exist but not inherently; that is they do not exist at all from their own side.” (Preece 172) If things existed inherently they would always need to remain precisely what they are. For example, an apple could only ever be an apple and a tree would need to remain a tree. Yet, changeability or the impermanence of statehood; that is mutability, is the very essence of the reality in which we exist. We know an apple is first a seed and a tree can become a log or be made into paper. We also exist as mutable beings which we tend to think of as solid and real but are in fact constantly in flux and therefore illusory. This performs a key function in that by positing both the internal world (i.e. that of the self and the individual imagination) and the external world as illusion- the two worlds essentially collapse into each other and are thus united beyond their seeming duality. As a result, events in the imagination become just as potent as events in the physical world.

Eastern thought is not alone in stipulating emptiness. Particularly with regards to the emptiness of the self, Western philosophers and psychologists have also posited emptiness of self (or the equivalent under different terminology) particularly with regards to the self. For example, in his
book *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, Nikolas Rose attempts to analyze the psychological processes by which we attempt to change ourselves. But he does so through deconstructing and thus destabilizing our underlying notions of a solidly existing self and the institutions involved in creating such concrete notions. Michael Talbot gained fame with his hypothesis that the self and environment we assume to be solid, discreet entities may function as more of a holographic image. He spends much of his book entitled *Holographic Universe* exploring how many unexplained phenomena across cultures would be feasible under this view. For eastern and western thinkers alike the view of emptiness both in and beyond the Buddhist philosophical framework is a theoretical construct and not unquestionable fact.

Emptiness is the most complex and subtle of Buddhist concepts, specifically because it is not a concept at all but rather is indicative of an experience that can be hinted at through various different associations. To describe it is like explaining the taste of chocolate; at some point the individual must gain the direct experience to know it. Emptiness is the very basis upon which the imaginary can be brought forwards from the mind into reality, for it characterizes all phenomena both mental and physical as being essence-less from its own side.

If [s]he firmly places himself or [herself] in Emptiness and then arises there from, [s]he is able thereby to empower the appearance of anything [s]he wishes. [S]he is, then, the owner of the universe, for [s]he understands and is able to manipulate the very processes that create the cosmos: [s]he can dissolve reality at will and re-create it as a divine mansion filled with deities; [s]he can produce real effects upon ordinary appearances by the merest projection of a mental event. To know a thing is to own it, and to create from Emptiness is to know it in its essence. (Beyer 75)

Emptiness is not presented as a form of nothingness but as a felt perspective from which all things can then be created. In deciding how we represent these creations we must necessarily enter into a world of myth and the imagination. This in turn brings forward the notion of working with archetypes and the modalities by which these metaphorical entities can have an impact on the life of the individual.

**Empowering Reality: evoking archetypes as a method of self-transformation and healing.**

Archetypes are regarded as visual symbols or metaphors that convey specific qualities or attributes of psyche. In cross-cultural myth and Jungian psychology, archetypes are often depicted in the form of beings or entities. But they can be constructs from any arena of thought. For instance Woman as the Bearer of the Bleeding Wound is a patriarchal archetype defining woman in terms of
lacking. Carl Jung’s usage of archetypes included actual interactions with these forms as beings described in the *Red Book* where he claims to have explored the elements of his own unconscious.

Another philosophical scholar on the power of myth, Rollo May in his book *The Cry for Myth*, points to a functionality of myth beyond morality in describing its power to uplift the human spirit, communicating essential messages to deeper layers of our individual and collective selves. "People use myths and symbols to transcend the immediate concrete situation, to expand self-awareness, and to search for identity" (87) I was drawn towards the compelling idea of cultivating a relationship with an archetypal character which did possess infinitely positive characteristics with the dual understanding that I would actually be thus empowered to access a deeper element of consciousness, not necessarily by becoming something/someone else but rather becoming more in touch with my humanity. One Buddhist author, Vessantara, reminds us;

The archetypal Buddha is you: not the picture or the image. These Buddhas [or archetypes] do not come from miles away. They come from the deeper levels in your own mind… You must be cautious; you are dealing here with living forces. In fact you are dealing with your deepest and most sacred potential as a human being; this potential is common to all human beings. It is your capacity to develop beyond all suffering and to become an embodiment of love, compassion, wisdom and true freedom… The figures can have as much impact on you as a real person would. (33)

Ann Hawins concurs with Vessantara. In “Pathology & Enabling Myths,” contrary to asserting falsity to elements of the imagination such as archetypes, Hawkins states that “scholars who study myth emphasize its other meaning: that of a deeper or more profound truth… the mythic offers a unique perspective on experience, a set of depth meanings of [enduring] significance that transcend the limits of what can be known through ordinary thinking.” (Hawkins 229) For Carl Jung, several archetypes or figures reside in the collective unconscious that are equally universal to all humankind but whose form changed to fit the disposition of the individual person. There are “as many archetypal images in the collective unconscious as there were in typical situations in life” (Douglas 108). These figures are actually seen to be energy accessible to all humankind and stemming from its source, the collective unconscious. “Archetypes can be seen as pathways along which our energy flows from the collective unconscious into consciousness and action”(108) Furthermore Jung saw an archetype to be an energetic principle that “orders and structures reality” (108) and “propels a person’s actions and reactions in a patterned way” (108).

Specifically in conjunction with the view of emptiness; the experiences of the mind or the inner worlds of the individual are not relegated purely to the diminished notion of that which is
unreal. These imaginal experiences are not regarded as hallucinations or mere fantasy because “their reality is that of the human psyche. They are symbols, in which the highest knowledge and the noblest endeavor of the human mind are embodied.” (Moacanin, 77) The visualization of the objects of the imagination “is the creative process of spiritual projection, through which inner experience is translated into visible form.” (Moacanin, 77)

Complementing the idea of empowering an image towards a dynamic reality in the psyche is the image of Tara. Tara is regarded as an embodiment of infinite compassion in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. My original rationale for taking an interest in these deities, arose from the appeal of their immense beauty and compassion. Both male and female Buddhas are presented as glorious beings of light - not flesh and blood. They were seen as immensely powerful, out of this world and purely loving. I saw them as being ‘safe’ because their love could never hurt me in the same way as others I had known who claimed the same level of love for me. Also I was increasingly drawn to the female deities because their presence felt even more removed from any possible pain infliction - they were the safest love object of all; love to me came to mean that which was furthest removed from any possibility of physical intimacy. What was unrecognized by me at the time was that I was filled with a deep desire to love another, to be in a relationship but an intense dislike and a fear of the commonly expressed forms of human intimacy.

Moreover, these entities also held out a hope that I could become something other than what I was. They indicated that there were other realities that could be engaged and experienced. To me they were the widened perspective I needed to not merely cope or survive with reality but to be able to create a resplendent one. In the midst of my chosen archetype, Buddha Tara, my imagination evoked by a knowledge of her qualities and attributes, my past dissolved in the immense power of the archetypes’ compassion. These entities, to which I could attach such beautiful qualities, were ultimately my road back to others.

Again, I do not suggest a reification in this deification of the universe. My view is just one philosophical deconstructionist framework from which a series of hypothetical substrates are being both questioned and while others are posited. Presenting it here as a subjective view, once again moves away from the right/wrong, superior versus inferior presentation modality and creates the space to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of emptiness even beyond the confines of Buddhist thinking. The deities and philosophy are archetypal products of the cultural imagination. Whether one chooses a female Buddha, or Jesus Christ or even the more secular Superman, it is the potency invested in the image that gives it its power in the mind of the individual. This process of constructive deconstructionism encourages the individual working with an archetype to be creative
rather than dogmatically adhering to a specific rigid format/theory/image or tradition to retain the
dynamism of the entity as well as to genuinely achieve effectiveness in the specifics of the sought
after transformation.

Additionally archetypes initially are empty formations but they contain a sense of possibility
of specific perceptions and actions, and when activated they can become a powerful force in the life
and behaviour of an individual. “Indeed, the archetype may take an autonomous reality of its own
and take control over the entire personality.” (Moacanin, 92) The image must therefore be dissolved
at the end of a meditation session; to witness both the creation and dissolution of the image and thus
to protect against the very tangible possibility of over identification with one’s own mental creation
while forgetting the emphasis on the overall aim to experience all phenomena as a creation of mind.

Empowering the Archetypes: Going into the suffering event(s) to extract the power in the
problem

After the introduction to the compassionate form of Buddha Tara, my own power or energy
was still too tightly bound to the restructured (negative) elements of consciousness I had evolved in
order to cope with my earlier experiences. So I sought some means of transposing the energy into the
image to give it a felt presence, but was cognizant of potential consequences;

The relationship to the deity [or archetype] comes, therefore, from
within, and is felt as a deep inner resonance, or as an energetic quality
that pervades the body. Once this is awakened, it enables the energy
bound up in them to then be addressed and potentially transformed.
When we practice [such evocations] the dark aspects of our shadow
will almost certainly be evoked and it requires great courage, honesty
and humility to face and transform them. (Preece 14)

Over a period of years, I worked with the image of Buddha Tara creating and evoking her
compassionate protective presence in my imagination. I joined the desired associations of wisdom,
power, love and compassion with the particular image of the archetype deity and her relevance grew
in my mind and imagination the more I continued to meditate upon her. Through association and
repetition, she came to have a certain presence in my life with the joint recognition that this presence
although nowfelt, stemmed from my own imagination. Thus it was a kind of delusional or magical
thinking which was purposely engaged experimentally to see how ‘real’ such thinking can become or
alternatively to how thinking about any external reality may be a delusional or magical thinking
based assumption.

Eventually, I reached a place wherein I could evoke Buddha Tara in my imagination with the
same level of intensity that the most negative of intrusive memories or upsets would appear. This
gave a manner of control over my own mind but it also meant a continual effort to maintain balance. But something more was needed, a direct means of extracting the power from my own shadow side and re-associating that level of power with my chosen entity and her infinite positive qualities.

Tsunltrim Allione, an American woman who ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist nun over 30 years ago, created a method of working directly with our more challenging energies/habits and traumas. She describes creating an effective exercise of interacting with mental negativities envisioned as demonic forms to cultivate deeper understanding between the individual and his/her own mind/mental functioning. (1) She reveals the functionality of her method:

Those who have used the method report that chronic emotional and physical issues such as anxiety, compulsive eating, panic attacks, and illness were resolved or significantly benefited from this approach. … Sometimes the results have been instantaneous and seemed nothing short of miraculous, while other effects have been more gradual and subtle.” (Allione 2)

Allione’s central idea is that within the extremely negative lived experience, an immense amount of power can be subsumed and when we cut ourselves off from such stories, they continue to hold our power. Yet in looking at them, we are able to refine our notions of what that power really means and in the process redefine the stories themselves in ever increasingly potent helpful ways.

James W. Pennebaker in a series of studies investigated writing as a means of expressing thus reducing the impact of traumatic events on psychological and physiological structures. (Pennebaker & Chung) His research found a suggestive link between personal writing about suffering and healing including improved behavioural, physiological and psychological functioning. (Pennebaker & Chung) This is particularly true when emotive aspects about the traumas were included and not just the facts of the traumatizing event.

Subsequent studies of Pennebaker’s methods have targeted specific traumas such as Brown and Heimberg’s Effects of Writing about Rape and their study of college age rape victims. This study found that decreases in self-concealment were associated with decreases in both social anxiety and dysphoria. Thus, rape victims may have to be willing to share their stressful experiences to experience symptom reductions.” (Brown and Heimberg 788) The issue of self-concealment, the tendency to hide/avoid information that is too disturbing or challenging for the individual, is an important one and not uncommon in any issues of victimization particularly those of a sexual nature.

Allione describes a five step process for envisioning transformation of negative internal forces:
In the first step we find where in the body we hold our 'demon' most strongly. This demon is...anything that is dragging you down, draining your energy. ... In the second step we allow the energy that we find in the body to take personified form as a demon right in front of us. In the third step we discover what the demon needs by... becoming the demon. In the fourth step we imagine dissolving our own body into nectar of whatever it is that the demon needs... In this way we nurture it... Having satisfied the demon, we find that the energy that was tied up in the demon turns into an ally. This ally offers us protection and support and then dissolves into us. At the end of the fourth step, we dissolve into emptiness, and in the fifth and final step, we simply rest in the open awareness that comes from dissolving into emptiness. (3)

Because the process is symbolic, it is not necessary to make rigid associations with the various steps involved but rather to make a genuine attempt at contacting deeper levels of our minds. As Stephen Beyer states “If the depths of our minds conceal strange forces capable of augmenting or conquering those on the surface it is in our greatest interest to capture them.” (86)

In my own process of undertaking this consciousness experiment, my envisioned demon came in the form of an anaconda snake-like creature with three heads. The main head was the abuse itself which was not the most distressing quality of the form. The more challenging aspects or personas symbolized as heads resided in the gut and heart of this envisioned demon. What should be noted here is that this imagery was purely imaginative imagery that went through a process of temporary concretization to allow me to travel deeper into my own consciousness to find a way to codify what these deeper thoughts were.

The final demonic head actually proved the most difficult to face and it resided in the very heart of the demon evocation. This was the fact that I was actually drawn towards stories of sexualized violence in a clearly attraction-aversion reaction. Historically, admitting my obsession made me feel that I was the same as my father or rather as though through his actions and temperament he had infected my being. Yet upon a precise inspection, I realized that there were certain aspects in each of these violent stories to which I was most drawn and these had nothing to do with the any actual violence presented. The key story element that I always found most intriguing was the precise moment in each tale where the victim reveals his/her experience to a compassionate other (at least typically) and thus her (or his) story is sincerely heard for the first time. That intense emotional moment of compassion in action is what had always fed this eagerness. I realized immediately that the mental entity from whom I was running in a furious attempt to reclaim my own life (the demon) and the mental entity to which I was running towards, Buddha Tara (the Buddha of
Active Compassion) in a furious attempt to create something gorgeous in my life; were essentially the same! This was a complete collapse of any appearance of duality or polarity of opposites (love versus hate or compassion versus contempt). The instant I had this profound insight, the snake demon exploded at its heart and only Buddha Tara remained.

The process was neither destructive nor creative but one of complete transmutation. There was a direct discovery of the underpinning neutrality of the energy (the ‘neither-nor’ logic perspective) involved in the compulsive thinking. That neutral energy or power which had been unintentionally invested in the negative fascination was viscerally extracted and reinvested into a vessel to which I had already psychologically associated qualities of infinite active compassion. So I was left with a concentrated, compassionate energy now aimed at sharing the possibility beyond the suffering and beyond being haunted. I would still seek out to hear or share narratives of sexualized violence but from a new position of strength and compassion for these individuals and a joy at the knowledge that I could help others move beyond even the most incomprehensible of realities.

This final integration of power is reiterated by Allione when she states that;

Paradoxically, feeding our demons to complete satisfaction does not strengthen them; rather it allows the energy that has been locked up in them to become accessible. In this way highly charged emotions that have been bottled up by inner conflict are released and become something beneficial. When we try to fight against or repress the disowned parts of ourselves that I call demons, they actually gain power and develop resistance. In feeding our demons we are not only rendering them harmless; we are also, by addressing them instead of running away from them, nurturing the shadow parts of ourselves, so that the energy caught in the struggle transforms into a positive protective force. (3)

Part of this experience was finding a crossover point and required making a seemingly impossible link between Buddhism & rape which turned out to be pure compassion. Only then could the energy be genuinely transferred. Having increased the potency of the Buddha Tara image with this energy enabled my childhood story to move out of its central position in my consciousness and be replaced by the quality of genuinely felt compassion steeped in showing others this same modality as an applicable technique beyond culture or tradition.

**Searching for the beyond: The difficult theory of trauma enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle**
Given the collapse of the duality/polarity between hate and compassion by empowerment of the compassionate image, surely it must be possible to rejoin body and mind into a singular vision. In his paper entitled *Trauma and Hysteria in Freud and Lacan*; Paul Verhaeghe makes a particularly disturbing claim which is at once horrifying and yet strangely fascinating to trauma victims enmeshed in post traumatic stressful states. He claims “indeed the most uncanny thing about trauma, and probably also the most traumatizing aspect of a trauma, (is) namely the experience that something in the body enjoys the situation, a kind of enjoyment from which the subject shrinks back in horror” (Verhaeghe 104). Unfortunately, Verhaeghe provides little rationale for this profound statement which raises so many questions.

In *The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma*, Bessel van der Kolk examines how some traumatized people (particularly children) often unconsciously but compulsively expose themselves to or recreate experiences which reenact the original trauma. This repetition compulsion is typically not understood by the traumatized individual to be associated with earlier negative life experiences. Kolk states;

> Trauma can be repeated on behavioral, emotional, physiologic, and neuroendocrinologic levels. Repetition on these different levels causes a large variety of individual and social suffering. Anger directed against the self or others is always a central problem in the lives of people who have been violated and this is itself a repetitive re-enactment of real events from the past.” (van der Kolk 5)

Anger is certainly one rationale for the repetitive re-enactments but Van der Kolk fails to address another significant quality. An intensity is experienced during a traumatic event that is characterized by an exaggerated sense of aliveness. Not only has it been felt and described by many during traumatic incidents but these individuals admit yearning to re-experience the intensity. Zemler notes,

> Living through trauma and surviving it can be an ecstatic experience; imagine a runner’s high amplified a thousand times. It is amplified over any thing I may choose to do partly because of the absolute danger I am in and the lack of control or safety nets, or assured outcomes. People who are raped, shot at, in explosions or who watch their friends die can feel this. (1)

In an explanation of this sense of intense aliveness, the author also addresses repetition compulsion.

> This is the ‘Feeling Alive’ feeling that many trauma survivors recount. When we return to our ‘normal’ lives, we miss this feeling of absolute Aliveness. We feel that something is missing. We feel less than fully alive. We may even have a need to feel alive again, as we did when we experienced all of that trauma (Zemler 2).
Until I had dealt with the negativities I had experienced in childhood, nothing felt more intense than my own story or the elements of my own story that were played out in the narrations of other people’s stories of sexual violence. And there was a sense of missing that intensity or aliveness when I avoided such knowledge so I was drawn to repeat the trauma as a means to recreate this level of aliveness.

As contentious as many of his theories became particularly around hysteria in women, Sigmund Freud did theorize an answer to this dilemma of intensity and compulsion in his early psychoanalytic theory. Freud’s basic psychoanalytical meaning of the trauma is defined as an event with three key elements: “1) its intensity, 2) the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it, and 3) it can leave long lasting effects on psychic life of the subject” (Tiketler 2). In *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud saw trauma as an actual influx of excessive excitation which corresponds to the notion that the level of intensity is high for people who encounter traumatic situations. (Smith 169) Thus for Freud, when there is too much excitation there is literally a traumatic breach. In Freudian terms, the ego acts like a shield which protects the psyche from external stimuli. It is the ego which can be metaphorically punctured by trauma as it involves a situation in which too much excitation is let in and the general level of energy circulation must be restored or reduced in order to restore the pleasure principle (Tiketler 4).

Thus, the excitation level could be seen as one potential link to a bodily enjoyment of trauma that reaches beyond the pleasure principle. According to Freud, in “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria”, the inability to deal with the level of excitation elicited by a traumatic incident leads to pathological defense mechanisms such as repression and this was viewed as the foundation of his traumatic theory or neurosis (Smith 1448). Another point of agreement in terms of traumatic enjoyment that stretches beyond the pleasure principle is found in the fact that Freud (“Psycho-Analytic Notes On An Autobiographical Account of A Case of Paranoia”) saw this excitation in essentially sexual terms, meaning that traumatic situation results in an overflow of libidinal energies that the organism literally cannot bear (Smith 2435). The modern recapitulation of this view are uncontrolled hyperactivity responses and the release of natural opioids mentioned previously in this paper.

However, the trauma is seen as something so ultimately intense that the individual cannot respond to it. Thus a paradox is created because

some drastic event occurred to an individual, but also it hasn’t happened because one cannot really think of it as one experienced it. It is an experience which no one can claim as his or her own. It is an
event that cannot be ‘integrated into self’. So, on the one hand, one is filled with horror and one does repress some aspects of it, but one also wants to return so that one can respond, do better, dominate, master the experience (Tiketler 3).

By repeating it, one aims to dominate it, to understand it, to see it and to anticipate it and thus retroactively prepare for its shock. The event has dominated oneself before; then there is an attempt to master an event that has dominated oneself. This experience is a disturbance in one’s life, not just because of the interruption of the pleasure principle but it destroys the conditions that work for the pleasure principle. Eventually, it shakes the wholeness of the subject. Verhaeghe echoes this notion of an indescribable experience:

> Traumatic neurosis comes on top of that, and entails a strange interaction with the internal conflict; just think of phenomena like automutilation and repetition compulsion. This strangeness has everything to do with the fact that something within the patient enjoys it, and this against the conscious desire of the patient. This enjoyment is situated beyond the pleasure principle and thus literally incomprehensible (103).

The experience almost demands attempts at commandment and breaks through the pleasure principle into the beyond. Considering that there is even an element of enjoyment buried at the depth of one’s trauma breaches the rational and is vigorously repelled with every intellectual effort of the traumatized individual. A Lacanian structural approach to trauma provides access to another potential line of reasoning on precisely why this ‘enjoyment-beyond-pleasure-principle’ may exist when discussing trauma. Jacque Lacan was motivated to explore the notion of an event that occurs and is fundamentally impossible to integrate into one’s sense of identity, one’s ‘selfhood’; in other words a traumatic event. With this notion, he proposes the idea of trauma as an individual experience to one which resides at the foundation of existence itself. This becomes particularly true when examining the relation between the Lacanian notion of the Real and its link to trauma.

In his *Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, Lacan introduces the notion of the Real. This concept indicates “the state of nature from which we have been forever severed by our entrance into language” (Felluga, 1). Also “Lacan makes several claims about the impossibility of the Real” (Raffoul 47). The reason that the Real is said to be impossible is that it cannot be expressed in language and for Lacanian thinkers, it is the very entrance into language that establishes our firm separation from the Real (Felluga 2). Yet the Real continues to be influential in our lives in a behind the scenes manner because it is the fundamental ground upon which we both construct our imaginary
and linguistic structures and against which they ultimately fail. Thus for Lacan, it is not essentially any given trauma that is traumatic but rather the notion that the experience breaks through from the Real and shatters some aspect of our ego ideal (the internal image of who one most wants to become). In other words, he believes that it is the realization of the immateriality of the self that is ultimately traumatic.

Consideration of both Lacan and Verhaeghe’s notions being indicates a quest to return to the Real. For Lacan, the ego ideal is created to assist in one’s socio-linguistic interactions in the world and breaking out beyond that fabrication of self is terrifying because we are forced to see ourselves as lacking any discernible solidity and existing as an ideal only (Felluga 2). Thus for Lacan this ideal is our salvation from the endless abyss of the Real. And yet, if one considers the possibility that there is even a tiny element of the enjoyment of trauma imbedded somewhere in the unconscious yearning of the traumatized, beyond the pleasure principle; this could be indicative that there is a quest not to repeat the trauma itself but to return to the state in which one had a glimpse of the Real. Not everyone would be comforted by the notion of a transparency of self but to me it was a very inspiring idea because it meant I could see self as a concept rather than self as solid immutable essence. This meant that I could change myself in an endless possibility of ways and that there was nothing fixed or unchanging in my entire being.

For Lacan, the Real “erupts whenever we are made to acknowledge the immateriality of our existence, an acknowledgement that is usually perceived as traumatic (since it threatens our very ‘reality’), although it also drives Lacan's sense of jouissance” (Felluga 1). This indicates that there is some correlation between the Real and jouissance; the latter of which is Lacan’s term for fundamental joy or creativity. Lacan sometimes described the Real as “a state of nature as a time of fullness or completeness that is subsequently lost through the entrance into language” (Felluga 2). At this point, the philosophies of the East, specifically, Buddhist are relevant for depicting the nature of fundamental loss and the subsequent potential implication for enjoyment of trauma, what may await one who is willing to face the abyss head on and look deeply into this “most traumatric aspect” (Verhaeghe 104) of their own trauma.

The notion of emptiness in Buddhism and the notion of the Real in Lacanian thinking are very similar in scope, but they also differ. For the purposes of simplification, the two terms will be used as parallels. Yet, while Lacan seems to be reifying something solid and central in the beyond, Buddhism deconstructs our notion of any solid existing reality that exists out there.

In Buddhism, emptiness is the essence of all things in the manner that “all things are devoid of any intrinsic and absolute existence. They come into being due to the aggregation of multiple
causes and conditions. Not only is their material existence dependent upon other factors, even their very identity as they are is contingent upon other factors, such as language, thought and concepts that together make up worldly convention” (Tirado 75). Here worldly convention is known as relative reality whereas ultimate truth refers to emptiness.

According to Lacan, “the recognition that one has no ego and that there is only an ego ideal is at once ‘irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning’” (Lacan 251) whereas the Buddhist notion of emptiness what must be precisely pointed out as the traumatizing factor in one’s encounter with emptiness is not the voidness of identity itself (which is identified as traumatizing to Lacan) but rather the fabrication of a self; the ego ideal is the traumatizing element. Thus ego construction in Buddhism is the traumatic inducing factor and emptiness (or the Real) is the collective destiny and highest possible experience. The idea shifts not only the limitations we automatically erect around the notion of a solid self once we enter into the world of language but the very notion of a self upon elements which ultimately do not need to remain constrained by such a term.

Here is where one can truly grasp the depth of Verhaeghe’s initial statement: the idea that something in the body enjoys the trauma is suggestive that it is not the encounter with the Real that is traumatizing but rather the rupture of the limitations of selfhood that is trauma inducing, therefore our individual and even collective attempts to engage in repetition compulsion serves to reconnect us to our beyond-ness. Perhaps the body is responding joyfully to this reconnection without our conscious desire for this reconnection during a time of great distress. In my circumstances, the traumatic breach was significant on a number of levels as though the very foundation of my world had been torn away including my sense of trust, physical comfort in my own skin, my sense of family and my sense of safety in the world. However, in this falling away of my world, I was left with a tangible understanding of the fragility and transparency of that world. With this understanding came a sense of endless possibility that stretched out into the very beyondness to which Verhaeghe is asserting.

Verhaeghe also states that “trauma demonstrates in a painful way that… there is a beyond.” (104) However, with his broaching of the subject of trauma enjoyment that resides in the beyond, he is also making the claim that there is an aspect of the self that (albeit) unconsciously enjoys the breach into the Real/Emptiness which indirectly implies that the contact with the Real is not exclusively traumatic and that another factor such as the construction of a self could be a theoretical possibility for the traumatic sensation. Another way of depicting the usefulness of this seemingly semantic switch of the trauma inducing factor from ego breach to ego creation is by examining the pragmatic aspects of the view of ‘emptiness of selfhood’ and how it can even help to overcome the
traumatic aspects of the event that summoned it forth. “This concept directly challenges the very notion of an independent, inherently existent self and therefore offers an initially uncomfortable but possibly groundbreaking palliative to some of the most pressing psychological difficulties in the human condition” (Tirado 74). Thus the idea that even a small part of an individual actually enjoys any aspect of an undeniably traumatic event seems a cruel and untenable suggestion that would be particularly indigestible to the victim. However, upon closer examination of Freud’s theory of gains, Lacan’s concept of the Real and the Buddhist view of emptiness, an intriguing possibility arises with regards to the potential meaning behind the idea of an enjoyment of trauma beyond the pleasure principle as temporary rupture of selfhood. It is selfhood itself that is the irreducibly traumatic element, rather than an external element.

Also a significant counterargument may arise here in considering the psychology of human resiliency. Early research, such as Benard’s *Fostering Resilience in Children* (1995), claimed that people are born predisposed to certain traits in personality which extends to our individual capacity to cope with environmental circumstances to greater or lesser degrees. Yet, over the years, the notions of human resiliency have evolved in the minds of psychologists and now include a subset of elements such as the Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Goldstein 20) which emphasizes three aspects; the individual, the family and the community. Through this framework we’ve come to understand that all three aspects of this model work together to either promote or deter resilience in the upbringing of an individual. Thus while some factors that promote resilience are individualized such as positive emotionality (Lengua 146) others are family related such as family belief systems and flexible structure (Walsh 130) and still others result from the community such as high levels of positive peer relationships (Criss, et. al. 1223). These elements work in conjunction to augment the chance of an individual creating and maintaining resilience against life challenges. Yet clearly they do not stem solely from the individual but are the result of a combination of circumstances.

Also, the terminology used in the psychology of resilience must be carefully worded and explicated because often the labels once dispensed can arguably take on a life of their own. As Michael Chandler et al (24) aimed to point out the definitions we give to resilience are powerful in their own right. If we establish that resilience is the result of some superhuman feat of overcoming obstacles, then those who feel they are not up to the task when faced with a trauma, may turn fatalistic and believe that they do not have what it truly takes to overcome their own circumstance. Because of this belief, they do not try and as a result their prediction matches their result. Therefore we must be cautious of labeling resilience as something beyond our power, either as individuals or as groups.
For me the suggestions of Emptiness combined with the notion of trauma enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle represented a second subtler non-dual experience between the unstated orientation of my body and mind. It seemed as though my body and mind were attempting to go in two separate directions. My physical body was attempting to find a way into my traumatic experiences to possess them and react in retrospect thus finally have the capacity to move past it. At the same time, my mind was trying to find a way out and beyond the traumatic experiences which reined over a reality that felt unbearable to me. Thus I sought a reality that dealt in ideas and a beyond filled with unknown wonders. But here both could be seen as conjunctive attempts to get beyond and to a beyond that ultimately collapsed the physical and the mental in one cohesive human being.

We must also recognize here that repetition compulsion itself is merely a construct, a psychoanalytic one that is structured to explain the experiences of certain people. It happens to be the best explanation that I have come across to explain some of my behavior. Repetition compulsion also has some correlates to the physiologically automatic responses of the brain. Returning to the idea of endogenous opioids which is the body’s system for soothing, Bessel van der Kolk, (2005), describes how individuals who were neglected or abused in childhood may require a higher degree of environmental stimulation to activate the endogenous opioid system in order to regulate their state of hyperarousal. He says “These victimized people neutralize their hyperarousal by a variety of addictive behaviors including compulsive re-exposure to situations reminiscent of the trauma.” (van der Kolk, p.4)

However, the entire emphasis here is getting beyond the very notion of constructs to recognize that they are purely ideas which can be both helpful in providing potential explanations and harmful if we adhere to them too closely or dogmatically. Any given individual can see that they are actually a process of constructs that are constantly in a state of flux- being created and transformed in every moment. Due to the impermanent nature of notions or concepts of oneself, individuals have the capacity to recognize that they thereby cannot be ultimately defined by any constructs and at this point one opens up to the multidimensional creative possibilities of life itself.

Furthermore, in my own mind; it is not the ideas themselves or an Eastern versus Western perspective that changed my positioning from one of feeling trapped in a deterministic fate of being tied to my rapist to a sense of unending possible options in determining my own identity. But it was the very existence of differing ideologies across cultures and how these ideologies could be cultivated and become a living experience which offered me the alternate mode of being that I sought. Thus even though structures of my thinking might change, for example, one day I may no
longer wish to call upon Buddha Tara; the very notion that they can change will likely keep me from backtracking to a (permanent) negative view of myself or my life.

**Conclusion:**

The overall aim of this autoethnographic research paper was to examine how the experience of a series of rapes in childhood can be move from being formative to being transformative. Four key themes were prevalent throughout this paper; an in-depth analysis of several potential psycho-physiological impacts of rape as a chronic trauma in early childhood. Secondly, expansive views of perception and their impact on experience were expressed from feminism, East Indian logic and the use of archetypes. Thirdly, the archetypes were shown to be implementable in a directed process by which one may choose to acknowledge one’s own negative experiences and repossess/redirect the power imbued in that experience. Fourthly, the challenging theory of traumatic enjoyment was addressed and assessed as an inner search for that which seemingly resides beyond reach for the individual. What I know to be true is that people who have experienced horrific events have a capacity far deeper within them and when they find whatever support they need, they can move beyond the victim-survivor dynamic. In my experience beyond the depths of depravity there are far greater depths of beauty, compassion and love accessible to those willing to delve into the profundity of existence. Considering where I am now in my life I am actually appreciative for my experiences because they presented a serious challenge that filled my life with unexpected adventure and insight and have ultimately brought me to a deeper level of compassionate peace that I would never have likely even sought out or touched upon if I had not experienced all that I did.

**Work Cited:**


Pennebaker, James W. & Cindy K. Chung. “Expressive writing, emotional upheavals, and


Trif, Elliott Munnell, "A Dance/Movement Therapist's Experience of Vicarious Trauma and


