LEARNING FROM RAPE CRISIS VOLUNTEERS: 
REMEMBERING THE PAST, ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

by

Lia Gladstone

A dissertation submitted in conformity with the requirements for 
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy 
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning 
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education 
University of Toronto

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Lia Gladstone
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Abstract

While research on sexual violence, rape crisis centres and volunteers is extensive, there are very few empirical studies that draw specifically on the experiences of rape crisis volunteers. Instead, most of the literature pertaining to rape crisis work focuses on the efforts of social workers or other paid staff. When rape crisis volunteers are examined, the focus is primarily on the context through which their work is performed, for instance, how a rape crisis centre operates in relation to other community organizations (Campbell, 1998) or whether a specific rape crisis centre upholds feminist philosophies (Maier, 2008). Studies are also usually restricted to the negative effects of rape crisis work (for example, how rape crisis workers experience anxiety, social withdrawal and vicarious trauma) or focus on what sustains rape crisis workers while working in a stressful environment (Baird and Jenkins, 2003; Hellman and House, 2006; Thornton and Novak, 2010; Wasco and Campbell, 2002). Using the life history approach, this study builds on previous research and explores the experiences of volunteers at rape crisis centres across Ontario, Canada. In particular, the following issues were examined: motivations to volunteer, personal challenges and tensions, as well as challenges with respective centres. Findings indicate that all participants in the study have directly and/or indirectly experienced a range of different kinds of violence. Also, participants noted a range of complex and interconnected motivations for their initial and ongoing involvement in rape crisis work, most notably, self-healing. Finally, most participants expressed hesitancy towards identifying as feminists and did not associate feminism and the anti-violence movement as being strictly related to women. Theorizing the experiences of rape crisis volunteers through the lens of standpoint theory offers a new approach to knowledge
construction in the area of rape crisis work and points towards the way that services, including training, can be improved for volunteers. Furthermore, the life history approach offers a unique way to understand the experiences of rape crisis volunteers in greater depth and breadth, since attention was placed on the volunteer process as well as other life experiences.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Diane Gérin-Lajoie, for her continual guidance. Without her patience, sense of humour and valuable insight, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Lana Stermac and Dr. Rupaleem Bhuyan, both of whom have challenged me to consider how violence against women operates in multiple contexts and how my positionalities have influenced the process of knowledge construction.

Thank you to my dear friend, Lydia, who spent a great deal of time working with me in the library, providing feedback and encouraging me.

Thank you to Michael, for editing my work and for making me laugh; his attention to detail and work ethic motivated me throughout the writing process.

Thank you to my family for their unconditional love and support, and for never losing sight of the fact that one day I would actually finish.

Finally, I am grateful to Francesca, Raven, Jordana, Kim and Stephanie, who took the time to participate in this study. Their compassion and commitment to the anti-violence movement will forever be an inspiration. This dissertation is dedicated to them.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

While research on sexual violence, rape crisis centres and volunteers is extensive, there have been very few empirical studies that draw specifically on the experiences of rape crisis volunteers. Instead, most of the literature pertaining to rape crisis work focuses on the efforts of social workers or other paid staff. When rape crisis volunteers are examined, the focus is primarily on the context through which their work is performed, for instance, how a rape crisis centre operates in relation to other community organizations (Campbell, 1998) or whether a specific rape crisis centre upholds feminist philosophies (Maier, 2008). Studies are also usually restricted to the negative effects of rape crisis work (how rape crisis workers experience anxiety, social withdrawal and vicarious trauma) or focus on what sustains rape crisis workers while working in a stressful environment (Baird and Jenkins, 2003; Hellman and House, 2006; Thornton and Novak, 2010; Wasco and Campbell, 2002). Using the life history approach, this study builds on previous research and explores the experiences of volunteers at rape crisis centres across Ontario, Canada.

Throughout this chapter I will present my research question and explain what has influenced by decision to conduct research on rape crisis volunteers. I will also provide a rationale for my study and describe how I am filling a gap in the literature on volunteerism and rape crisis work.

Research Question

My study explores the experiences of volunteers who work at rape crisis centres across Ontario and draws from the experiences of five women: Francesca, Raven, Jordana, Kim and Stephanie. More specifically, I examine different volunteer motivations, what it is like being a volunteer, as well as challenges and tensions that arise throughout the volunteer process. The following is my main research question:

What meanings do rape crisis volunteers attach to their experiences during their career as volunteers and how have prior experiences shaped their current involvement?

I am also interested in how volunteers cope under stressful circumstances, what kinds of supports volunteers find beneficial, as well as their opinions about the material and activities throughout the training process. In order to address these questions, I focus on the meanings that volunteers attach to three ‘moments’ in their lives: childhood/adolescence, adulthood, and the
duration leading up to and during their time as volunteers. I have chosen to organize volunteers’ experiences around these three moments not only as a way to contextualize the present, but to also shed light on the “linkage between historical past, present and future” (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 9).

**My Interest in the Study**

While a series of experiences inform my interest in the area of rape crisis work, I feel particularly compelled to focus on this research area after bearing witness to a woman being sexually assaulted in September 2008. At the time, I was in graduate school and my roommate passed the incident off as the particular woman’s fault, arguing that she should have known better than to be alone on the street at such a late hour. This explanation angered me. Not only did it reek of ignorance, but it also reminded me of how widespread rape myths are and how victim blaming continues to be perpetuated in various contexts.

As I began my next phase in graduate school and familiarized myself with the literature in Curriculum Studies and Women and Gender Studies, I began to notice an odd pattern: the topic of violence against women seemed practically invisible. There were very few readings on the syllabi in my Women and Gender Studies classes that sought to theorize violence against women and very rarely did this topic appear in any of my Curriculum Studies classes where professors often claimed to explore issues related to anti-oppression. In one class, which was explicitly labeled as a feminist class by the professor, I expressed my interest in writing about physical acts of violence committed against women for my final research paper. The professor, with good intentions, suggested that I think of violence in less literal terms and urged me to explore discursive forms of violence carried out against women. “Think about male dominance carried out in academia and discursive forms of violence directed towards women, rather than a woman being hit over the head” the professor advised. I left this encounter feeling confused. While I could certainly agree that discourse is powerful and shapes the lived realities of women within and beyond academia, what was it about physical acts of violence carried out against women that was so unappealing to my professor who was teaching a feminist course, and why did I see this in other academic feminist spaces? Why did it seem as if the topic was either ignored or examined quite narrowly?

My interest in the topic of violence against women is not limited to engaging in some of the debates within feminist theory (for instance, the different kinds of feminist frameworks that can be used to theorize violence against women). What interests me is the scope of this issue—how a violent act committed against a woman is not an isolated encounter that happens and is
gone forever; it is not an experience that is limited to the survivor of violence and the perpetrator—acts of violence effect family, friends and strangers (such as myself) in different ways and at different moments in time. Violence also indirectly affects those commendable individuals and groups who help survivors of violence—whether they are offering emotional, physical and/or legal support throughout the duration of a survivors’ healing process. What I find interesting is that those who work with survivors of rape—particularly volunteers—are virtually absent from the literature in Women and Gender Studies, and little empirical research has been conducted on this topic in a range of fields (Adult Education, Social Work, etc.). I have been curious about those who offer support to survivors of rape. Who are these volunteers? What are their stories? Why do they volunteer their time and energy? What motivates them? What sustains them? What kinds of experiences have led them to become rape crisis volunteers? It is partially because of these reasons that I chose rape crisis volunteers as my sample. I will address these points in further detail when I state the rationale for my study.

**Rationale for the Study**

While research on rape (Bevacqua, 2000; Brownmiller, 1975; Bunch, 1990; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1979; Connell & Wilson, 1974; Dworkin, 1983; Koss, 1987; MacKinnon, 1989, 1991), rape crisis centres (Campbell, 1998; Dobash et al., 2008; Fried, 1994; Gornick et al., 1985; Maier, 2008; Martin, 1990, 2005; Matthews, 1994) and volunteers is extensive (Allen & Rushton, 1983; Anderson & Moore, 1978; Clary & Miller, 1986, 1998; Reynolds Jenner, 1982; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Orr, 1992; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998), little is known about the meanings that rape crisis volunteers attach to their volunteer work along with their prior life experiences.

Most of the literature pertaining to rape crisis work focuses on the efforts of *advocacy workers or crisis counselors in training* (e.g. Clemans, 2004; Truell, 2001). When rape crisis volunteers are examined, the focus is primarily on the context through which their work is performed, for instance, how a rape crisis centre operates in relation to other community organizations (e.g., Campbell, 1998) or whether a specific rape crisis centre upholds feminist philosophies (e.g., Maier, 2008). Studies are also usually restricted to the negative effects of rape crisis work (how volunteers experience anxiety, social withdrawal and vicarious trauma) or focus on what sustains volunteers while working in a stressful environment (e.g., Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Hellman & House, 2006; Thornton & Novak, 2010; Wasco & Campbell, 2002). Additionally, researchers usually do not extend their inquiries beyond the topic of volunteer training (e.g., Hicks 1976; Rath, 2007).
Unlike most scholars who conduct research on rape crisis work (including Campbell, 1998; Clemans, 2004; Maier, 2008 and Wasco & Campbell, 2002), Jean Rath (2007) specifically examines the experiences of rape crisis volunteers. Through qualitative, unstructured interviews, Rath (2007) explores how the process of training impacts personal change, personal relationships, affiliations to feminism and changing motivations for rape crisis volunteers. Although Rath’s work makes a significant contribution to the field, her study remains limited to the topic of training and she does not consider how previous life experiences have influenced volunteers’ current involvement. In other words, Rath does not explore rape crisis volunteers’ experiences before becoming volunteers and instead focuses on one ‘moment’ in their lives.

My study builds on Rath (2007) by not only exploring rape crisis volunteers’ experiences during their time volunteering, but by also examining their lived experiences before becoming volunteers. As Rath (2007) points out, “little research has focused on the experiences of workers in rape crisis centres and there is a dearth of material that explores the experiences of volunteer counselors” (p. 19). Similarly, Shana Maier (2008) argues that “additional research needs to focus on rape crisis agencies to better understand how staff and volunteers view their work and how these views affect their ability to serve victims and engage in social change” (p. 98). While Rath (2007) and Maier (2008) importantly make a call for research to be conducted on rape crisis volunteers, something that is absent from Rath and Maier’s accounts, as well as other scholarly literature, is the need for research that examines rape crisis volunteers in greater depth and breadth. There is a need for researchers to not just examine how volunteers view their work both prior to becoming volunteers and during the volunteer process, but to also look at other aspects of volunteers’ life experiences.

By using the method of life history, I have attempted to broaden understandings of rape crisis volunteers and to consider their experiences beyond their involvement at their respective rape crisis centres. Although I will never fully ‘know’ a volunteer in her entirety, using the life history approach has provided me with the methodological tools “to understand an individual’s current attitudes and behaviours and how they may have been influenced by initial decisions made at another time and in another place” (Nelson Hagemaster, 1992, p. 1122).

Feminist standpoint theory is the lens through which I have examined my data, and this framework has informed my thinking throughout various stages of my study. Since I am interested in exploring the experiences of rape crisis volunteers and learning about their ‘standpoints,’ on rape crisis work, it is important to clarify how I am situating myself within this discussion. I am positioning myself as a White, able bodied, middle class, Jewish woman who is interested in conducting research that contributes to the area of violence against women. My prior
life experiences (including how I witnessed a sexual assault several years ago) have shaped my interest in this topic and have informed my decision to interview rape crisis volunteers. My curiosity of learning about and from rape crisis volunteers may stem from a potential desire to compensate for my lack of involvement during the time that I witnessed the assault, or to manage the feeling of helplessness that I experienced during this time. In a way, this study reflects my own process of grappling with trauma, and perhaps speaking with the volunteers is my way of living vicariously through those who assist survivors of violence. Although I have never volunteered at a rape crisis centre, I have always thought about becoming involved. This positions me as an ‘outsider’ compared to my participants’ own ‘insider’ perspectives as volunteers.

Throughout the research process, my own experience of bearing witness to violence has influenced the interactions I have had with participants (in terms of what they may have decided to disclose after I shared my personal experience), as well as the interpretations that I have made of participants’ experiences. In addition to my own experience of witnessing a sexual assault, other factors have influenced my position as an insider/outsider. These factors include my educational background, which also influences my class position; my age, which in some instances was similar to participants’ own ages, my visibility as a White, able-bodied, woman, along with many other markers. All of these components have contributed to what was said (and left unsaid) by participants, and have impacted the way that participants and myself have attached meaning to the research.

In the following section, I will discuss relevant scholarly literature that shapes my study. Specifically, I will provide a historical overview of literature on violence against women in North America, followed by an examination of existing research in the areas of rape crisis work and volunteerism.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will begin by providing an historical context of the feminist anti-violence movement in North America by focusing on the following kinds of violence: rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, pornography and prostitution. Although the feminist anti-violence movement in North America is not my central topic of interest, it is necessary to mention some key thinkers and their contributions in order to understand literature on rape crisis volunteers in a contemporary context. Next, I will outline some of the different theoretical approaches used to understand violence against women. In the section of my literature review that focuses on the historical context of the feminist anti-violence movement in North America as well as my section on theoretical debates and understandings, all scholars to a certain extent, are working within a feminist framework. Here I define ‘feminist frameworks’ as Nancy Naples (2003) does, to emphasize the need to challenge sexism, racism, colonialism, class and other forms of inequalities in the research process. In addition, I support Shulamit Reinharz’s (1992) assertion that feminist frameworks aim to create social change, strive to represent human diversity and investigate power relations. After providing a historical context of the anti-violence movement in North America and exploring theoretical issues, I will draw on scholarly literature that is relevant for my study. Due to the nature of my research, the literature is categorized into two general areas of scholarship that will together address pertinent issues for this dissertation: 1) volunteerism and 2) rape crisis volunteers. Literature on volunteerism and rape crisis volunteers has emerged from different historical moments and is comprised of different theoretical underpinnings (for instance, theories of helping and altruism have informed volunteerism while theories of violence and trauma have informed rape crisis volunteerism). However, both bodies of literature explore how individuals devote time and energy to assist others who are in need. The literature on volunteerism provides a general framework to understand a specific group of volunteers: those who are involved in rape crisis work. Models and frameworks on volunteerism discussed in this chapter include work by Gil Clary and Leslie Orenstein (1991), Gil Clary et al., (1998) and Allen Omoto and Mark Snyder (1995). These scholars discuss motivations, perceptions and general characteristics of volunteers. The literature on rape crisis volunteers examines challenges, risks and positive aspects of being a rape crisis volunteer. More specifically, I draw on studies conducted by Stephanie Baird and Sharon Jenkins (2003), Shantih Clemans (2004), Chan Hellman and Donnita House (2006), and Jean Rath (2007) in order to explore how rape crisis volunteers manage their stress, how they make sense of their training, and how behavioural changes may occur throughout the volunteer process. The following discussion lays the
foundation for understanding how my work fits within the volunteerism and rape crisis volunteer literature and establishes a framework for how I aim to fill gaps in the literature.

**Violence Against Women**

**Historical Context of the Feminist Anti-Violence Movement in North America**

**Rape**

The act of naming violence against women as a common problem faced by women in North America emerged out of consciousness-raising groups. Radical feminists in the second wave of the Women’s Movement established consciousness-raising groups during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Fried, 1994). These groups provided women with the space and critical tools to “become attuned to the evidence of male domination to which previously one paid little attention, or ignored altogether” (Eisenstein, 1983, p. 35). Heather Eisenstein (1983) and Barbara Susan (1971) describe how the purpose of sharing personal experiences was to identify patterns in diverse women’s experiences and identify how these experiences were symptomatic of broader societal structures. In doing so, women began to connect the personal to the political, and to name themselves as “the experts, the authorities, the sources of knowledge about themselves” (Eisenstein, 1983, p. 37). The knowledge from these consciousness-raising groups then became the basis for political mobilization. This awareness included an understanding that in order to form a powerful political movement, the movement had to answer to the needs of all women (Susan, 1971, p. 243).

While consciousness-raising groups can be considered a source of origin for the anti-violence movement in general, there are particular histories of feminist efforts to organize around different kinds of violence. Rebecca Dobash et al. (1998) and Amy Fried (1994) both situate the anti-rape movement in the context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, describing how feminists at this time were naming power issues between men and women as central to understanding the causes and consequences of rape. The first speak out\(^1\) on sexual violence took place in 1971, in New York City, and was sponsored by the New York Radical Feminists (Connell and Wilson,

\(^1\) A ‘speak out’ can be defined as “a gathering at which people relate their experiences or opinions about a specific topic or concern” (The Free Dictionary by Farlex). When women publically spoke out about their experiences of violence in the early 1970s, this was considered as a revelation to many women across the United States because domestic violence, rape, and incest were commonly regarded as ‘private’ issues. Many survivors of violence did not know the extent to which many other women were dealing with similar experiences.
1974). This event provided an opportunity for women to give testimony about their experiences and eventually inspired other community-based organizing, which included the establishment of anonymous phone lines and mutual support groups (Dobash et al. 1998, p. 71).

The work of Susan Brownmiller (1975) is often cited as highly influential at this time, particularly in terms of her theoretical explanation of rape. Brownmiller’s (1975) view on rape has been summed up “as a tool of men’s domination over women, an act with functional consequences” (Fried, 1994, p. 581). Scholars such as Gwen Hunnicutt (2009), Eliana Suarez and Tahany Gadalla (2010) as well as many others have since problematized Brownmiller’s approach, critiquing it for being overly simplistic. For instance, Hunnicutt (2009) critiques the concept of patriarchy with the goal of transforming it so that it can account for notions of difference. Similar to research conducted by Hunnicutt (2009), Suarez and Gadalla’s study considers how rape myths are correlated with racism, heterosexism, classism and ageism, and explores how a host of issues contribute to men’s domination over women. Suarez and Gadalla (2010) characterize rape myths as “false beliefs used mainly to shift the blame of rape from perpetrators to victims” (p. 2010). They argue that rape myths are not only pervasive in North American society, but “in many ways contribute to the pervasiveness of rape” (p. 2010).

Other theoretical contributions have been made by Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom (1979), whose study “represented the first attempt to describe and define the nature of women’s responses to rape” (Mezey, 1997, p 197). Andrea Dworkin’s (1983) speech, I Want A Twenty-Four Hour Truce During Which There is No Rape, has also been considered highly influential, along with Marilyn French’s (1992) groundbreaking book, The War Against Women, where she explores the oppression of women globally.

In terms of community-based contributions made in the area of violence against women, rape crisis centres “are the component of anti-rape efforts most rooted in feminist social movement” (Fried, 1994, p. 563). Gornick et al. (1985) state that “from their beginning, rape crisis centres were committed to a set of direct client services that consisted of crisis intervention, advocacy, and counseling. These were limited, low cost, and generally short-term services provided mostly to adult women immediately following rape by trained women volunteers, not professionals” (Gornick et al. 1985, cited in Woody & Beldin, 2012, p. 98). Woody and Beldin (2012) provide further information on what crisis intervention, advocacy and counseling consisted of:

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2 Arguments made by Gwen Hunnicutt (2009) are explored in greater detail in upcoming discussions.
Crisis intervention, as offered by early rape crisis centres, often meant emergency assistance (information, referral, support) through a telephone hotline. However, because a survivor might not have accessed a hotline, this assistance could be face-to-face when a ‘companion,’ later called ‘advocate,’ accompanied survivors to a police station, hospital or court (Gornick et al. 1985, cited in Woody & Beldin, 2012, p. 99). The second service, advocacy, besides providing face-to-face crisis information, support and referral, helped the survivor navigate with the various providers to get needs met in a timely and appropriate manner (O’Sullivan & Carlton, 2001; Wasco et al. 2004). The third rape crisis service, counseling (often undefined), was quite variable, being either short-term group or one-on-one counseling. It could be provided by peers or professionals and offered at the centre or elsewhere through either unscheduled or scheduled appointments. (p. 99)

Katherine Conroy (1994) notes how “rape crisis centres were overwhelmingly ‘staffed’ by volunteers. Some were high school graduates, some college students or graduates, few were social workers, and all were advocates” (p. 1). In other words, rape crisis work was entirely supplied by volunteers on an unpaid basis with women offering help to other women. Conroy (1994) goes on to explain how during the 1980s, “as the counselors at the rape crisis centres successfully advocated and lobbied for services, government at all levels began to supply money. As money became available, hospitals and social service agencies began to apply for funds, rape crisis services moved into emergency rooms, the service was bureaucratized, and social workers were hired” (p. 2).

Scholars and activists continue to disagree about the function of rape crisis centres and their power to change gendered practices and structures: “for some, rape crisis centres are social movement organizations, dedicated to creating broad social change. Others see them as highly co-opted social service organizations that are not particularly feminist in nature” (Fried, 1994, p. 563). Fried (1994) points out how many rape crisis centres typically focus on short-term measures of helping survivors rather than efforts to change gendered social structures. Suarez and Gadalla (2010) echo this sentiment, stating how “most rape prevention programs have been found to have only a short term impact on the participants which highlights the fact that attitudes and beliefs about rape are complex and resistant to change” (p. 2011). Jackie Anderson (1994) builds on this point, arguing that legal reforms, while critical for responding to rape and other violence, “can guarantee very little in the lives of women if the violence that permeates so much of our existence is allowed to continue” (p. 439). She goes on to explain how “the lens of reform does not see the hatred that underlies the offense” (p. 440).

A study conducted by Rebecca Campbell (1998), examines how rape crisis centres in the United States have become more institutionalized since their beginnings as grassroots
organizations. Campbell’s work explores how the nature of activism at these centres has changed over time. She interviews rape crisis centre staff about their involvement in social change activities, including public demonstrations, political lobbying and prevention programming. Similar to Campbell (1998), Maier (2008) explores how the feminist identity of rape crisis centres has changed over time as organizations have become less politically active. Maier (2008) supports many claims in Campbell’s (1998) work, but, unlike Campbell (1998), she fails to problematize what constitutes ‘activism’ and assumes that as centres accept funding from the federal government, they automatically become less politically active.

Adding to this, Rebekkah Adams (2008) describes several challenges encountered by workers at sexual assault centres and shelters across Ontario, specifically in terms of the ways in which power imbalances exist between clients and staff, as well as amongst staff members. Drawing on her own experiences, she outlines various structural issues within these organizations and she highlights the difficulties attached to carrying out feminist practice in these spaces. Also, Melanie A. Beres, Barbara Crow and Lise Gotell’s (2009) study examines the results of a survey of rape crisis centres and sexual assault centres in Canada that was carried out in 2005. They discuss the challenges faced by staff at centres who are trying to maintain their social activism in the face of budget cuts and privatization as a result of changing government policy and other political issues. Similar to research conducted by Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009), Rebecca J. Macy et al.’s (2010) study draws on the experiences of directors and staff at domestic violence and sexual assault agencies in North Carolina. Findings in this study revealed ongoing tensions between grassroots and professional bodies. Attention is also placed on identifying ways to address various challenges at these agencies. As well, in Naomi Wolf’s (1994) book entitled “Fire with Fire,” she draws attention towards the shortcoming of feminism for women in the United States during the nineties and provides an overview of the movement during this time. Wolf (1994) argues that feminism did not meet the needs of or serve as an inspiration for many women. She offers suggestions for the North American feminist movement in order to unite women and reignite activism. Wolf (1994) also describes the complexities attached to supporting particular feminist models within feminist organizations and proposes a model that combines the grassroots model with the professionalized model.

Besides the establishment of rape crisis centres, other actions have involved “Take Back the Night” marches, where women ‘talked back’ to the ways that women’s activities were limited in public because of potential violence from men. Community self defense classes additionally developed during this time. Both of these efforts responded to women’s fear of violence, but have been viewed very differently. Dobash et al. (1998) argue that these forms of action “implicitly
reasserts women’s responsibility for policing men’s behavior and suggest that it is the content of individual interactions that is the issue rather than gender inequality” (p. 72). Elizabeth Stanko (1995) distinguishes between feminist inspired campaigns and crime prevention campaigns established by governments. Stanko (1995) considers feminist campaigns to be radical since they explicitly call for a restructuring of society. On the other hand, Stanko (1995) describes how government and police campaigns simultaneously restore police and government power while emphasizing that citizens must take responsibility for protecting their own safety. Mobilization by feminists has also included working to change legal statuses and procedures, introducing advocates into police departments and prosecution offices, implementing education programs to transform beliefs among professionals and members of the public, and developing new codes of conduct on college campuses (Fried, 1994, p. 563).

**Domestic Violence**

Following the anti-rape movement, the battered women’s movement surfaced in the early 1970s. Like the anti-rape movement, “the battered women’s movement was influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, and the Women’s Movement” (Conroy, 1994, p. 1). Beverly McPhail et al. (2007) and Susan Murray (1988) both note that before the 1970s, male violence was considered a private issue, but activism against male violence developed as feminists came to see battery as created and sustained by the institutions of society (Murray, 1988, p. 91). More specifically, “as the types of rape seen at rape crisis centres expanded from stranger to acquaintance and marital rape, the counselor/advocates began to question the social construct that allowed for violence against women, and to realize the need for services for women trapped in violent relationships. The progression to a battered women’s movement was a logical one” (Conroy, 1994, p. 3).

Key contributors to this movement include Susan Schechter, along with Barbara Hart, who “crafted the initial concepts for civil protective orders and mandatory arrest (Kanuha, 1998, p. 8). Another important contributor was Beth Richie, an early Black feminist, “who challenged the African American community to consider domestic abuse as more than a White feminist concern” (Kanuha, 1998, p. 8.)

The Battered women’s movement responded to the problem of domestic violence by developing emergency shelters. Conroy (1994) explains how “in the early 1970s, if a woman left a violent relationship she was denied welfare because she was still legally married. If she went to a public shelter she was placed with fire victims, alcoholics and sometimes the mentally ill. The development of shelters specifically for battered women was a definite advancement” (p. 1).
These shelters started as grassroots feminist collectives and upheld a philosophy that focused on empowering women and promoting equal participation amongst all members. However, over time, many of these collectives became more bureaucratic and “with the status hierarchies came the unequal power dynamics and the compromise of feminist principles” (Murray, 1988, p. 91). While shelters, “may have offered a battered woman the first opportunity she has ever had to meet other women who have lived in fear of violence as well as a safe and supportive environment in which to talk about the abuse she may have never disclosed,” (Murray, 1988, p. 90) there were many problems with battered women’s shelters at this time. For instance, these shelters originally did not provide childcare services such as daycare and playrooms for the children of women using the shelters. Also, many shelter staff fixated on trying to ‘save’ battered women and could not understand why many women often returned to their batterers. Conroy (1994) explains how “because this was not understood, one of two things happened in the original shelters: there was absolutely horrific staff turnover as counselors and advocates burned out, or they began to subtly blame the women. They manifested this by having more and more rules governing the women’s behavior in the shelters: particularly having limits on how many times, and in what period of time, a woman could use the shelter” (p. 5). Additionally, feminist ideologies of empowerment often clashed (and continue to clash) with the actual needs of women in shelters and crisis centres. More specifically:

Most of the women who enter the shelter have children, are unemployed, and are on welfare. They enter the shelter because they have no immediate alternatives. If they do not wish to return to the battering relationship, and they do not have the option of staying with friends and family, their first needs are financial security and a place to live, in contrast to the priority of empowerment set by staff. (Murray, 1988, p. 81)

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and Jean Rath (2007) extend Murray (1988) by pointing out how many staff members and volunteers can occupy different socio-economic positions from women who rely on the shelter system (for example, staff may have academic credentials and think that they know better than other women in the shelter). Decisions made by feminists working at these shelters can have disempowering consequences for residents, even though feminist principles are behind the decisions.

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3 The first U.S women’s shelter opened in Minneapolis in 1973. By 1982 there were approximately five hundred shelters in this country (Murray, 1988, p. 76-77).
4 Macy et al. (2010) highlight existing problems with domestic violence and sexual assault services and state that Lee, Thompson and Mechanic (2002) argue that “violence services could be more welcoming to survivors of colour” (p. 27).
Nonetheless, Murray (1988) notes how within feminist organizations, including rape crisis centres and battered women’s shelters, various tactics have been used to minimize the differences between staff and residents. More specifically, attempts have been made to not reproduce a relationship of power and control similar to the one from which survivors escaped. For example, the idea that all women might end up in violent relationships has been used to unite staff and survivors under a common oppression (p. 83).

As well, many feminists are concerned about finding ways to ensure access for groups of women traditionally excluded from these forms of social provisions (for instance, Black women, women whose first language is not that of the dominant group, disabled women, young and elderly women, lesbians and women who work in the sex industry). Directly linked to this is ensuring that standards of support do not ignore the fact that different needs often demand different priorities in terms of resource allocation (Crenshaw, 1991).

**Sexual Harassment**

Soon after the birth of the battered women’s movement, resistance to sexual harassment built momentum. Mirroring the anti-rape and battered women’s movement, feminists emphasized how “sexual harassment was not about sex but about power and economic abuse” (Baker, 2007, p. 175). In other words, “it is about an individual controlling or threatening another individual,” (Lunenburg, 2010, p. 1) in order to reclaim and reinforce their dominance. Fred Lunenburg (2010) explains how “sexual harassment is more likely to occur when there are large power differences” (p. 2). He uses the example of workplace sexual harassment to describe how “legitimate power gives the supervisor the capacity to reward and coerce a lower-ranking employee. That is, supervisors control resources that most employees want, such as favorable performance evaluations, salary increases, promotions, and the like” (p. 1). While less common, coworkers can also sexually harass other coworkers. Typical manifestations include “withholding information, cooperation and support in team projects” (p. 2). Finally, Lunenburg (2010) highlights how:

women supervisors can be subjected to sexual harassment from male employees…typically, this is achieved by the employee devaluing the woman by highlighting traditional gender stereotypes, such as helplessness, passivity, and lack of career commitment that reflect negatively on the woman in power (Freeman, 2011; Reeves, 2011). The male employee may engage in such behavior in order to gain some power over the female supervisor or to minimize power differences. (p. 2)

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This point has been challenged by feminists in later years, including Beth Ritchie (2000) and Andrea Smith (2004). I discuss this point in upcoming discussions.
Carrie Baker (2007) explains how feminist organizing around sexual harassment emerged from activism against employment discrimination and feminist opposition to violence against women (p. 161). Issues around sexual harassment resonated powerfully with working women, especially working class women and women of color, who relied on their income for survival (Baker, 2007, p. 174-175). Baker also notes how the first speak-out against sexual harassment was in 1975, and that “many have credited Catharine MacKinnon as the pioneer of sexual harassment activism in the United States…she has been credited for proposing and popularizing the idea that sexual harassment is a violation of law” (p. 163). 6 Another significant moment highlighted by Anderson (1994) and Crenshaw (1991) is the Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas trial in 1991, where Anita Hill charged Clarence Thomas with sexual harassment. This trial unified women across the United States, but put many African American women in a predicament: support for Hill led many African American men to accuse African American women of becoming allies with White feminists and betraying their race.

**Pornography and Prostitution**

Pornography and prostitution also became sites of contestation and activism during the second wave of the feminist movement, although discussions surrounding their origins as social practices took place prior to the 1970s and 1980s (Shrage, 2004). The idea of considering prostitution as a form of work originated in 1973 by the U.S organization COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics). This organization focused on decriminalizing prostitution and argued that there would be less violence and stigma for prostitutes if prostitution was legalized (Farley, 2004). Many feminists during the 1970s echoed Brownmiller’s (1971) insistence that “there is a serious problem in our society when women with ambition must sell their bodies...there is a serious problem in our society when men think that access to the female body is, if not a divine right, at least a monetary right” (p. 76). Feminists supporting this view include Robin Morgan who infamously declared that “pornography is the theory, rape is the practice,” (Morgan, 1978), as well as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon. For Dworkin (1991), the cure to the problem of prostitution was political: power needed to be taken away from men. According to

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6 In the mid 1970s, two organizations were formed in the United States to focus primarily on sexual harassment: Working Women United, in Ithaca, New York and the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Baker, 2007, p. 161).

7 For an excellent discussion of Dworkin’s views on pornography, see her chapter entitled “Pornography and Male Supremacy,” where she highlights how women are subjected to acts of violence in the production of pornography (Dworkin, 1993).
this outlook, pornography was regarded as eroticizing domination and linked to violence against women. Feminist views on prostitution and pornography became increasingly polarized by the late 1970s, culminating in the ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s (Nagle, 1997). At this point, some feminists considered pornography to be harmless and a sexually liberating form of expression, while others were strongly against it. Parallels can be made to views on prostitution, with some feminists defending it as a form of sex work (Boris et al., 2010; Nagle, 1997), and others emphasizing its cruelty (Farley, 2004; MacKinnon, 2006; Raymond cited in Miles, 2004). These debates continue to be a source of tension for feminists worldwide.

Concepts and Definitions Related to Violence Against Women

According to Mary Koss (1993), rape is commonly defined as “carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will” (Bienen, 1981, p. 174, cited in Koss, 1993, p. 199). Koss distinguishes this definition from statutory definitions of rape, “typically defined as nonconsensual sexual penetration of an adolescent or adult obtained by physical force, by threat of bodily harm, or when the victim is incapable of giving consent” (Searles and Berger, 1987, cited in Koss, 1993, p. 199). Koss also describes sexual penetration as the following: “sexual intercourse, cunnilingus, fellatio, anal intercourse, or any other intrusion, however slight, of any part of a person’s body, but emission of semen is not required” (Michigan Stat. Ann., 1980, cited in Koss, 1993, p. 199). Finally, Koss highlights how “reform statutes are written in sex neutral language to allow application of the laws to male rape victims. To place greater emphasis on the behavior of the offender, reformed laws have replaced the word ‘rape’ with other terms such as ‘sexual assault’” (Koss, 1993, p. 199).

Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom (1979) identify four forms of rape: stranger rape, confidence rape, acquaintance rape, and marital rape. According to Burgess and Holmstrom (1979), “stranger rape occurs when the victim does not know the perpetrator; confidence rape is when the perpetrator gains access to the woman by winning her confidence through a ruse; acquaintance rape, which is often called date rape, occurs when someone who is known by the victim forces her to have sex and marital rape occurs within the context of marriage” (Burgess and Holmstrom, 1979, cited in Conroy, 1994, p. 2). Burgess and Holmstrom also importantly draw attention towards the need to see rape as an act of violence instead of primarily as sex (Holmstrom and Burgess, 1979, p. 321).

Germaine Greer (2000) advocates for the term “sexual assault” instead of rape in order to distinguish between the rape of a child or grown woman and states that attacks on children should
be seen as far worse than penetration of a grown woman (McGlynn, 2008, p. 83). This perspective conflicts with Janice Raymond (2004). In an interview, Raymond states that:

> We [members of the Coalition of Trafficking Against Women] make no distinction between the sexual exploitation of children and the sexual exploitation of adult women, in the sense that both, we maintain, should be actionable. Obviously there are distinctions between women and children. Women are not children and should not be treated as such. But it makes no sense only to make actionably the sexual exploitation of women when you consider the average age of prostitution worldwide is thirteen or fourteen. A girl’s violation doesn’t magically become a choice on the day she turns eighteen. (Miles, 2004, para. 4)

Another example to illustrate the complexities attached to defining rape can be found in Clare McGlynn’s (2008) critique of Catharine MacKinnon’s (1993) position on torture. MacKinnon (1993) argues for the need to recognize rape as torture while McGlynn emphasizes the need to recognize the different circumstances under which rape takes place. McGlynn highlights how recognizing circumstances may result in different criminal offenses depending on the kind of rape that is committed. McGlynn underscores the need to “retain the label ‘rape’ due to its gendered meaning and because we may lose sight of the commonality of rape and obscure the varied responses of women survivors by calling it torture” (p. 71). These dilemmas are reminiscent of Dobash et al.’s (1998) discussion surrounding the use of broad, inclusive definitions of violence in relation to narrow definitions. Dobash et al. (1998) explain how a narrow definition of violence “may sometimes have the advantage of increasing clarity about the nature and context of a specific form of violence, but may simultaneously lose the prospect of generalizing across a much wider spectrum of violences” (p. 4). Of course, assigning a particular act of violence a particular label has certain legal implications for how that form of violence will be dealt with: at the heart of naming an act as rape, torture, or sexual assault, are questions about which terms are effective for justice and social change.

### Theoretical Debates and Understandings Related to Violence Against Women

The previous discussion has begun to explore how violence against women has been named and acted upon since the beginning of the feminist movement in North America. Since that time, many feminist scholars and activists have identified violence against women as a political issue and political tool of control, and have argued that this violence stems from structural relationships of power, domination and privilege between women and men (i.e., patriarchy) (Mies, 1986). Many feminists have also argued that “confronting male violence is integral to reversing the dominance of men over women” (Anderson, 1994, p. 440). In the
upcoming section I will outline different theoretical approaches and concepts that have been used by feminists to understand violence against women, mainly the notion of patriarchy, the significance of taking cultural attitudes into consideration, human rights frameworks, as well as the relevance of victim and survivor discourses.

**Patriarchy**

According to Mitchell, Rundle and Karaian (2001), the term patriarchy refers to “a belief system that supports the sexist ways in which society is organized; by maintaining female dependence and subservience, male power, control and domination is upheld” (p. 350). Similarly, David Macey (2000) states that “the term’s literal meaning is ‘rule of the father’ but it is habitually used, particularly within feminism, to mean ‘male domination’ in a much more general sense. One of the first writers to use it in that sense was Kate Millett…Millett argues that patriarchy’s main institution is the family, a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole” (p. 291).

Bell hooks (1984) extends Macey’s (2000) characterization of patriarchy by arguing how:

> Under capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restricts women’s behavior in some realms even as freedom from limitations is allowed in other spheres. The absence of extreme restrictions leads many women to ignore the areas in which they are exploited or discriminated against; it may even lead them to imagine that no women are oppressed. (p. 5)

Hooks (1984) goes on to explain that:

> Patriarchal male rule took on an entirely different character in the context of advanced capitalist society. In the pre-capitalist world, patriarchy allowed all men to completely rule women in their families, to decide their fate, to shape their destiny…[under capitalism] men are socialized by ruling powers to accept their dehumanization and exploitation in the public world of work, and they are taught to expect that the private world, the world of home and intimate relationships, will restore to them their sense of power, which they equate with masculinity. (p. 121)

While hooks (1984) as well as the previous scholars mentioned explore the notion of patriarchy in a more general sense, Gwen Hunnicutt (2009) considers the direct correlation between patriarchy and violence against women. Hunnicutt (2009) highlights the work of radical feminists including Brownmiller (1975), Caputi (1989), Firestone (1972), Griffin (1971), Millet (1970) and Russell (1975), naming them as major contributors to theorizing violence against women. These feminists argue that the notion of patriarchy can explain violence against women and emphasize how male domination over women is central to understanding the basis of women’s oppression. Hunnicutt critiques the concept of patriarchy with the goal of “restructuring
and remaking the concept of patriarchy to show how it can be employed to explain violence against women” (p. 554). Hunnicutt’s main critiques of patriarchy as a theoretical concept to understand violence against women include the following: “a) the concept simplifies power relations; b) the term patriarchy implies a ‘false universalism’; c) the ways in which the concept of patriarchy has been employed have ignored differences among men, casting men instead as a singular group; d) a theory of patriarchy cannot account for violence by women or men against men; and finally, e), this concept cannot help us understand why only a few men use violence against women in societies characterized as patriarchal” (p. 554). Hunnicutt (2009) goes on to note how “historically, analysis of violence against women using a patriarchal framework romanticized the oppressed and vilified the oppressor” (p. 565).

Other scholars have also problematized the notion of patriarchy (Dragiewicz, 2008; McPhail et al., 2007; Stansell, 2010). For instance, Christine Stansell (2010) and Molly Dragiewicz (2008) emphasize that patriarchy is not monolithic—every man does not have power over every woman in the same way in every historical and cultural context. Instead, “patriarchal interests overlap with systems that reinforce class and race privilege as well as other valences of social stratification. Patriarchy is not therefore a single factor… but is instead the intersection of multiple factors relevant to all levels of the social ecology” (p. 123). Beverly McPhail et al. (2007) echo this point by explaining how “today, within the feminist framework towards violence against women, including the domestic violence paradigm, feminists speak of multiple feminisms and intersecting oppressions” (p. 832).

For Charlotte Bunch (1990), “violence against women is central to maintaining political relations at home, at work, and in all public spheres” (p. 491). Bunch (1990) suggests that the state promotes and maintains patriarchy through particular policies and laws. However, these policies and laws stem from the ideology of the state, which is patriarchal. In other words, patriarchy is the ideology of the state. Bunch (1990) argues how:

The physical territory of this political struggle over what constitutes women’s human rights is women’s bodies. The importance of control over women can be seen in the intensity of resistance to laws and social changes that put control of women’s bodies in women’s hands: reproductive rights, freedom of sexuality whether heterosexual or lesbian, laws that criminalize rape in marriage, etc. Denial of reproductive rights and homophobia are also political means of maintaining control over women and perpetuating sex roles and thus have human rights implications. (p. 491)

A key feature of patriarchy that allows the state to maintain control over women is the false link made between women’s biological composition and being marked as targets of violence. This makes violence directed against women seem ‘natural’ to a certain extent, and
therefore, inevitable. Feminists have debated about whether women encounter violence because they are women. For example, Hunnicutt (2009) insists, “one of the complexities of domination is that many women are not victimized because they are women” (p. 565). In other words, there is not anything essential/natural about being a woman that ensures victimization. Because “patriarchal ideologies carve out havens of protection for some women but not others” (Hunnicutt, 2009, p. 565), different women are effected by patriarchy in different ways, suggesting that a range of complex factors contribute to why women are victimized. This point of view strongly differs from Bunch (1990) who argues that “many violations of women’s human rights are similar abuses suffered by men, however many violations of women’s human rights are distinctly connected to being female” (p. 486). An underlying issue in this discussion relates to women’s biology. MacKinnon (1991) critiques Brownmiller’s (1975) position that violence against women, specifically men’s capacity to rape women, has to do with the different physiological makeup of each of the sexes. For MacKinnon (1991), “there is nothing biologically necessary about rape” (p. 17). Part of the difficulty of attributing biology to violence for MacKinnon, has to do with the problem of creating laws against rape. MacKinnon states “exactly how to oppose sexual assault from this vantage point [of viewing men as automatic predators and women as automatic victims based on their genital organs] is similarly unclear. Do we make a law against intercourse?” (p. 17).

Besides the way that the state constructs a false correlation between women’s biology and being targets of violence, Bunch (1990) has explained how “the distinction between private and public abuse is a dichotomy often used to justify female subordination in the home” (p. 491) and that “the assumption that states are not responsible for most violations of women’s rights ignores the fact that such abuses, although committed perhaps by private citizens, are often condoned or even sanctioned by states” (p. 488). Bunch’s (1990) discussion highlights the role of the state in protecting women’s rights. She argues that in order for violence against women to be eliminated and for changes to be made to women’s lives on a global scale, women’s rights must be considered human rights. Bunch proposes four different approaches that can link women’s rights to human rights, including the following:

1) drawing attention towards women who undergo general human rights violations and specific human rights violations because they are female. This may include documenting issues faced by women refugees; 2) focusing on economic injustices faced by women. This may include highlighting forms of violence that women suffer in their workplaces as well as women’s right to organize as workers; 3) creating legal means to counteract sex discrimination and strengthening current legal institutions for women; and, 4) using a feminist perspective to transform human rights in order to develop a more ‘woman-centered stance.’ (p. 493-497)
While Bunch (1990) embraces the use of a human rights framework, she highlights several problems attached to using this framework. She explains how “women’s rights are not commonly classified as human rights [in other words, the oppression of women is not seen as political]. This is problematic both theoretically and practically, because it has grave consequences for the way society views and treats fundamental issues of women’s lives” (p. 486). A specific example that relates to the complexity of using a human rights framework can be found in Susan Hawthorne’s (2005) discussion about the torture of lesbians around the world. Hawthorne states how under patriarchy, lesbian existence is denied or made illegal since lesbians are perceived as a direct threat to the heterosexual order. She draws attention towards the ways that lesbians are subjected to forms of violence, including “rape, beatings, humiliation, forced pregnancy, infliction of physical and mental pain, false diagnoses of mental illness, forcible confinement and detention, and death” (p. 40). Like Bunch, who explains how violence against women is not justified as grounds for granting refuge status to women in many parts of the West, Hawthorne describes how many lesbians who apply for asylum on the basis of political persecution encounter problems in various parts of the world. For instance, lesbians may have difficulty proving their status as refugees, since the worst abuses have occurred for them because they are lesbians, and revealing that they are lesbians may be considered illegal. If these circumstances cannot be revealed, the case is then weakened (p. 45).

Although Bunch highlights particular dilemmas attached to emphasizing the role of the state in creating and sustaining violence against women, she nevertheless continues to hold the state as primarily responsible. Unlike Bunch, McGlynn (2008) argues that there is too much of a focus on the state in discussions of rape and other forms of violence against women. She insists that violence against women “doesn’t just exist because of the state—violence is maintained by education, media, politics, economics, culture, and the law and state play a significant role but aren’t solely responsible (p. 83). Dobash et al. (1998) also draw attention towards “the contradiction of making demands on the state [while] at the same time implicating the state in the problem” (p. 73). They note how “a persistent theme in academic and activist debate is whether change should focus on services, agencies, the state, or more deep rooted social transformation, whether improving services leads to normalization rather than resistance” (p. 75).

_Cultural Attitudes and Human Rights_

McGlynn (2008) and Dobash et al. (1998) both suggest that in order to change the ways that women are subjected to forms of violence it becomes important to consider how socio-cultural attitudes towards violence are created and sustained in addition to holding the state
responsible. More specifically, Dobash et al. (1998) raise the question of whether more deep
rooted social transformation is necessary to bring about change rather than solely focusing on
state policies, while McGlynn (2008) highlights how informal and formal modes of learning, such
as education and media, form the basis of what is culturally constituted as acceptable forms of
violence. Linked to McGlynn’s emphasis on factors beyond the state and Dobash et al.’s point
about the difficulties attached to agreeing what ‘change’ may look like, Anderson (1994) argues
that a primary factor contributing to violence against women has to do with cultural attitudes
towards women that cast them as second-class citizens. For Anderson, a barrier preventing the
elimination of violence against women is rooted “in the hatred and blindness of those who benefit
from the lies” (p. 444). These ‘lies’ can be referred to as the rules that enable patriarchy to
operate, and ‘those who benefit’ can be both men and women. This leads back to discussions
around the function of patriarchy and introduces the complexity surrounding different attitudes
towards violence against women in cultures around the world. Again, this raises Dobash et al.’s
concern towards defining ‘change’ and how appropriate or transformative change may appear
quite differently according to particular individuals and groups.

Stansell’s (2010) discussion of the ways in which American feminists directed their
efforts towards the global movement against violence in the 1980s exemplifies this point. She
explains how during the 1980s, “feminist legislative and policy initiatives collapsed” (p. 49), with
Ronald Reagan in power and the rise of the new right. At this time, many American feminists
focused their efforts on sexual violence against women in the international domain. According to
Stansell, “the turn to international work—newly termed ‘global feminism’—was enthusiastically
endorsed and underwritten by U.S foundations and women’s groups from across the political
spectrum…it became, from the American point of view, a triumph in an otherwise vexed and
clouded period” (p. 51). Stansell goes on to state how, “American women were blocked and
stymied at home, but they could see themselves as powerful rescuers of their weaker, less
capable, endangered younger sisters abroad” (p. 52). A problematic tendency arising from this
had to do with the ways in which American women conflated the situation of women in liberal
democracies to women living under dictatorships, ignoring the economic, religious, class-based
contexts and political situations of each locale. Connected to this last point, Stansell illustrates
how attitudes towards particular cultural practices may or may not be defined as violent
depending on the context. She defends certain cultural practices, emphasizing their capacity to be
non-violent. Specifically, she states that:

Clitoridectomy, riveted popular feminist attention in the 1980s as a savage enactment of
men’s fear of female sexuality. Yet in reality, clitoridectomy was a complex social
practice embedded in rites of womanhood, and carried out by women; it varied across locales and regions, and was not always violent and coerced. As for prostitution, another subject conflated with violence, not all prostitution was violent, and not all commercial sex was coerced. (p. 52)

Stansell does not lose sight of the fact that a cultural practice can stem from violent patriarchal attitudes and function as forms of social and economic control, even if women are involved. However, Stansell’s point could be strengthened by drawing attention to the fact that “torture [towards women] is not what someone out there different from ‘us’ does…torture has happened and continues to happen now—around the world in apparently civilized countries” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 47). Additionally, the later part of Stansell’s comment differs from Dworkin (1991), who insists that prostitution in and of itself is an abuse of a woman’s body—without extra violence. In contrast to Stansell (2010), Dworkin (1991) makes a compelling argument against prostitution that can be applied to other forms of violence:

Societies can be organized in different ways and still create a population of women who are prostituted. For instance, in the United States the women are poor, the women are mostly incest victims, the women are homeless. In parts of Asia, they are sold into slavery at the age of six months because they are females. That is how they do it there. It does not have to be done the same way in every place to be the same thing. (para. 26)

Extending Dworkin’s point, Linda Rubin (2008) states how “culture cannot be used to justify violence (p. 108).” However, Rubin deepens Dworkin’s analysis by recognizing “the tough bind that is inherent in efforts to value cultural differences and not to impose Western standards on other cultures, while at the same time promoting a humanitarian view intended to eliminate violence” (p. 108). Rubin describes the trouble that transpires “when acts of violence are viewed as human rights violations in one culture and are seen as moral imperatives to maintain social order in another culture” (p. 107). She argues that feminist efforts towards social change must be culturally specific and must be developed and implemented based on women’s cultural perceptions of violence against women. Finally, Rubin highlights that “feminist efforts to advocate this form of social change are often stigmatized across many cultures, making progress slow and difficult” (p. 107).

Like Rubin, Bunch (1990) argues, “sex discrimination kills women daily. When combined with race, class and other forms of oppression, it constitutes a deadly denial of women’s rights to

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8 This discussion points towards debates surrounding women’s agency in practices like prostitution, where scholars like Farley (2004) and Raymond (2004) argue that prostitution is a violation of human rights.
life and liberty on a large scale throughout the world” (p. 489). Bunch offers a specific response to Rubin’s concern about the influence that patriarchy has on women globally and echoes Dworkin’s insistence that there is a need for violence against women to be seen as a hate crime. As previously stated, Bunch’s response to violence against women has to do with using “human rights as a useful framework for seeking redress of gender abuse even though its scope isn’t always agreed upon…the specific experiences of women must be added to traditional approaches to human rights in order to make women more visible and to transform the concept and practice of human rights in our culture so that it takes better account of women’s lives” (p. 487). This point is supported by Hunnicutt (2009), who underscores how patriarchy “must be situated within fields of hierarchy where old dominate young, men dominate women, men dominate men, white dominate people of color, developed nations dominate developing nations, and humans dominate nature” (p. 563). Bunch’s (1990) point is also supported by McGlynn (2008) who asks, “why is torture on the basis of sex not seen as a violation of human rights?” (p. 73) and McKinnon’s (1993) insistence that all rapes should be perceived as torture.

**Victim and Survivor Discourses**

In addition to debates about using terms like ‘sexual assault’ instead of ‘rape,’ terms like ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ have been and continue to be heavily contested among feminists because they raise questions about how women can be viewed as active and/or passive during and after violent encounters. Ansara and Hindin (2010) explain how “theories of abused women’s coping strategies have largely evolved from viewing women as passive to viewing them as actively engaging in a multitude of private and public strategies to manage, prevent and escape violence” (Campbell, Rose, Kub & Nedd, 1998; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Goodkind, Sullivan & Bybee, 2004; Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt & Cook, 2003; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995, cited in Ansara & Hindin, 2010, p. 1012). Ansara and Hindin (2010) distinguish between two theories of help seeking: survivor theory and the process model. They explain how survivor theory, which was introduced by Gondolf and Fisher (1998), directly responds to learned helplessness theory. Unlike learned helplessness theory, survivor theory focuses on “the ways in which women actively cope with violence, including repeated efforts to access a range of informal and formal sources of help in response to violence” (Ansara & Hindin, 2010, p. 1012). Process models of help seeking focus on continual efforts to reduce or end violence rather than “as an event that occurs at a single point in time” (Ansara & Hindin, 2010, p. 1012). In other words, learned helplessness theory tends to emphasize how women manage violence in their lives, while process models of help seeking emphasize how women reduce/attempt to end violence in their lives on a continual basis.
Connected to this, Fried (1994) explains how the term ‘survivor’ connotes greater power than ‘victim’ and renders the person who experienced violence as more than a passive object—the person is granted credit for having survived the violence and is encouraged in her efforts. Like Fried (1994), Rath (2007) explains how placing an emphasis on the term ‘survivor’ rather than ‘victim’ “is seen as an important historical shift in the Rape Crisis Movement. In the naming of ‘survivor,’ the emphasis is upon the positive abilities and responses of women who live through sexual violence” (p. 20). Unlike Fried (1994) and Rath (2007), Alison Convery (2006) argues how “there are important political implications in having victim status acknowledged,” (p. 15). Convery grounds her analysis in an examination of feminists’ engagement with victim discourse during the debates about ‘political correctness’ in the early 1990s. She sees the political dimensions attached to this label as recognizing the oppression that has been caused and validating victims’ subjective experiences. She also problematizes the static and monolithic qualities associated with ‘victimhood’ that automatically suggest elements of consciousness are barred from discussion. Maria Bevacqua (2000) extends this point by mentioning the usefulness of combining discussions of victimhood with exercises of empowerment, and how this does not necessarily involve ‘wallowing’ in women’s victimhood.

These issues point to questions around women’s agency as well as the circumstances of women naming their experiences of violence. Sara Murphy (2000) explains how it can be painful for some women to assign the name ‘rape’ to an act or series of acts. A parallel argument can be made about women labeling themselves as victims or survivors. While many feminists are quick to endorse the label ‘survivor,’ little attention is placed on the terrifying effects of taking on this label. Naming oneself as a survivor can “emphasize a state of powerlessness, the recognition of which may have in some sense been deferred and is perhaps the real trauma, the real devastation of sexual violence. This especially is evident in the cases where the woman or girl is in very real ways socially and economically powerless” (p. 9).

While it can certainly be painful for women to identify as ‘victims’ and ‘survivors,’ bell hooks (1984) takes this point further and raises the need to remember how:

Women who are exploited and oppressed daily cannot afford to relinquish the belief that they exercise some measure of control, however relative, over their lives. They cannot afford to see themselves solely as ‘victims’ because their survival depends on continued exercise of whatever personal powers they possess. It would be psychologically demoralizing for these women to bond with other women on the basis of shared victimization. They bond with other women on the basis of shared strengths and resources. This is the type of bonding feminist movement should encourage. It is this type of bonding that is the essence of sisterhood. (hooks, 1984, as cited in Gunew, 1991, p. 30)
For hooks, identifying as a survivor cannot be separated from the socio-economic circumstances faced by women in their daily lives. In a racist culture that constantly degrades, mistreats and marginalizes women of colour, the act of claiming the label of survivor is of sheer necessity. Hooks (1984) advises feminists to learn from women of colour and to gather strength from other women based on sharing stories of courage and resistance, rather than emphasizing the inevitability of violence.

**Intersectionality and Access to Support**

Linked to the previous point about women of colour often facing difficulty with being able to obtain access to resources and support, Patricia Hill Collins (1990), like hooks (1984) and Crenshaw (1991) stresses the importance for feminists to examine intersections between gender and other systems of oppression, such as race, class, national origin, sexual orientation, age and disability (Hill Collins, 1990) when discussing violence against women.

The ease and difficulty through which different kinds of women, and marginalized groups, access resources depends on a range of legal, structural, and ideological factors that are connected to the involvement of the state. For example, there are particular reasons why women hesitate to seek help from state run agencies and centres. Crenshaw (1991) states how language barriers often limit non-English speakers from seeking opportunities to access services. She also notes how immigrant women may be vulnerable because they may be married to undocumented workers and may fear that the security of their families will be jeopardized if they seek help. Crenshaw goes on to explain how women of colour who experience violence are often reluctant to seek help from police because the police force has been, and continues to be, hostile to people of colour. Rather than seek help from “informal sources of support such as family which are the most common sources of support sought by privileged women experiencing intimate partner violence” (Ansara & Hindin, 2010, p. 1012-1013), racially discriminatory housing practices along with being burdened by increased unemployment make women of colour less able to depend on support of friends and relatives for shelter (Crenshaw, 1991).

According to Ansara and Hindin (2010) another important factor discouraging rape victims as well as women who have encountered other forms of violence from reporting assault is the non-supportive reactions that they often encounter after disclosing the assault” (p. 2011). Ansara and Hindin (2010) go on to note how women may be reluctant to disclose their abuse because they are afraid of losing their children, and/or may be ashamed, in denial or worried that they will be negatively judged. These reactions emerge from the broader socio-cultural context. Rape myths, in particular, “allow men to justify rape and women to minimize personal
vulnerability” (p. 2011) and function as a way to silence women. However, as Michael Kimmel (2005) importantly highlights, “part of transforming a rape culture means transforming masculinity, encouraging and enabling men to make other choices about what we do with our bodies, insisting that men utilize their own agency to make different sorts of choices. To ignore men and to believe that women alone will transform a rape culture freezes men in a posture of defensiveness, defiance and immobility” (Kimmel, 2005, cited in Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 2005, p. 156). According to Kimmel, it is necessary for men to acknowledge the role they play in constructing and sustaining rape myths. Echoing Kimmel, Myriam Miedzian (2005) argues that “in order to significantly decrease violence, including rape, we must begin to protect boys from violent entertainment and to teach them, from the youngest age, to view themselves as future nurturing, nonviolent, responsible fathers” (Miedzian, 2005, cited in Fletcher, 2010, p. 11).

**Violence Against Women and the Anti-Violence Movement**

The previous discussion, which focused on the degree of ease and difficulty through which different women access support, relates to the importance of distinguishing between the movement to end violence against women in relation to the antiviolence movement, more generally. According to Frederika E. Schmitt (2006), the feminist based anti-violence emerged in the 1970s as a response to the women’s movement in the 1960s. Beth Ritchie (2000) explains that at this point in time, gender violence was considered the most extreme form of women’s oppression in the United States (p. 1134). She goes on to note that:

Arguably, a critical dimension of the public awareness campaign that has led to this expansion in resources for, and the credibility of, the anti-violence movement is the assertion that violence against women is a common experience, that any woman or child can be the victim of gender violence…this was part of a strategic attempt by early activists to avoid individualizing the problem of domestic and sexual violence, to focus on the social dimensions of the problem of gender violence, and to resist the stigmatization of race and class commonly associated with mainstream responses to social problems…this generalized construction helped to foster an analysis of women’s vulnerability as both profound and persistent, rather than as particular to any racial/ethnic community, socio-economic position, religious group, or station in life. (p. 1134)

Ritchie continues:

the assumption of ‘everywoman’ fell into the vacuum created by a white feminist analysis that did not very successfully incorporate an analysis of race and class. In the end, the assumed race and class neutrality of gender violence led to the erasure of low income women and women of color from the dominant view. I contend that this erasure, in turn, seriously compromised the potentially radical critique of various forms of social dimension. (p. 1135)
Andrea Smith (2004) expands Ritchie and argues:

Over the years, the anti-violence movement has become increasingly reluctant to address sexual and domestic violence within the larger context of institutional inequality and violence. For example, many state coalitions on domestic/sexual violence have refused to take stands against the anti-immigration backlash, arguing that this is not a sexual/domestic violence issue. (p. 1-2)

She adds:

…this narrow approach towards working against violence is problematic, because sexual/domestic violence within communities of color cannot be addressed seriously without dealing with the larger structures of violence, such as militarism, attacks on immigrants and Indian treaty rights, police brutality, the proliferation of prisons, economic neo-colonialism, and institutional racism. (p. 2)

Taking all of this in to account, as a response to being excluded from the anti-violence movement in North America, women of colour have made increasing demands for the anti-violence movement to move beyond a focus on gender. Smith (2004) highlights two initiatives that have emerged as a result of women of color being left out of the feminist anti-violence movement: a conference was created in April 2000, entitled, “The Color of Violence: Violence Against Women of Color” and was held at University of California, Santa Cruz. Also, a national organization for feminists of color called “Incite: Women of Color Against Violence” was created after the conference, “with the goal of advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organization” (Smith, 2004, p. 3). Part of what these groups were and are drawing attention towards is the importance of locating sexual violence against women of colour, indigenous groups and enslaved populations as being intertwined with nation building and colonial projects in the ‘third world.’ It is relevant to note the ways in which the absence of anti-colonizing theories and perspectives continues to shape the types of sexual violence that rape crisis centres recognize as relevant and within their scope. Put another way, groups including “Incite,” underscore the need to move beyond a consideration of the ways in which patriarchy shapes violence against women and instead, highlight the need to account for the ways that violence against women is used as a colonial tool in numerous contexts.

In recent years, the antiviolence movement has expanded to include other groups that have been traditionally excluded: same sex partner violence has been acknowledged (Comstock, 1991; Berrill, 1990; Jenness 1995; Renzetti, 1988, 1997), as well as violence directed against women with disabilities (Brownridge, 2006; Titchkosky; 2007), violence directed towards queer people (Halberstam, 2005), along with men (Benatar, 2012; Carpenter, 2006; Hines, Brown &
Dunning, 2007; Sivakumaran, 2007). Nonetheless, there continues to be various feminist critiques about how women who are not White, heterosexual or middle class are ignored in the anti-violence movement\(^9\) as well as the difficulties these women face when seeking help in violent situations (Crenshaw, 1991).

Issues related to the inclusion and exclusion of groups within the antiviolence movement connects to broader debates within the feminist movement. Specifically, there are ongoing tensions between feminists in activist and academic communities about whether marginalized groups, in addition to women, should be focused on or prioritized. These debates are complex and are often cited as a source of tension between second and third wave feminists (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997; Braithwaite, 2004; Gillis, Howie & Munford, 2004; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Mann & Huffman, 2005).

Now that I have provided an overview of some of the relevant research on violence against women in North America, because of the nature of my study, I will address literature on volunteerism. In the following discussion I will highlight relevant scholarship on volunteerism in a general sense, as well as scholarly work conducted on rape crisis volunteers, more specifically.

**Volunteerism**

Scholars have identified many forms of volunteering operating within different environments and have emphasized advantages and disadvantages that volunteering can have on volunteers and recipients. More specifically, research has been conducted on volunteers in non-profit sports organizations (Cuskelly et al. 2006), on student volunteers (Harder, 2011; Immaculada & Rodriguez-Bailon, 2011), on volunteer fundraising (Kim, Zang & Connaughton, 2010; Wood, Snelgrove & Danylenchuk, 2010), on celebrities and volunteerism (Wheeler, 2009), etc. Various definitions have been used to describe volunteers; some are quite narrow, while others are wide ranging. For instance, Bussell and Forbes (2002) state that “volunteering usually involves contributions of time without coercion or remuneration” (p. 245). On the other hand, Chris Tilly and Charles Tilly’s (1994) definition of volunteering “includes the myriad informal ways of helping out, such as running errands for an elderly neighbor” (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 694). Echoing Tilly and Tilly (1994), Colin Rochester et al. (2009) characterizes volunteering as “a broad heterogeneous and untidy field of human activity” (p. 6). According to James Derounian

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\(^9\) An example, among many, can be found in Hawthorne’s (2005) critique of the severe dearth of research on lesbians encountering violence. She argues that because lesbians are absent from activism and research that focuses on ending violence against women, lesbians continue to be tortured around the world.
(2011), Rochester et al. identify “hybrid forms of volunteering such as activism and acknowledge
the contradictory and nuanced nature of volunteering, including the scope of activities and the
motivations behind the volunteers themselves” (p. 98). Like Tilly and Tilly (1994), Derounian
outlines different kinds of volunteering identified by Rochester et al.: “volunteering such as
community peace keeping, advocacy, faith works, promotion of trade, etc” (p. 98). In line with
these scholars, Lesley McMillan (2004) argues that “there is no single definition of a volunteer,
nor is there a single definition or understanding of what it means to volunteer” (p. 127). McMillan
(2004) goes on to note that “in general, there have been few studies on volunteers and we still
lack knowledge about motivations for volunteering, who volunteers, and their experience of

While the scholars previously mentioned tend to highlight the benefits that volunteering
can have for volunteers (including satisfaction, companionship, personal development and social
need), Drake Bennett (2003) focuses on the ways in which volunteering masks structural changes
that need to be implemented by different levels of government. Bennett states:

Systemic government solutions rather than piecemeal acts of goodwill better address
many of the problems that volunteers tackle. If hospitals and libraries increasingly rely on
volunteers, it’s because reduced federal appropriations are starving institutions that
depend on public funding. In this context, well-intentioned young people who fill the gap
are enablers of the attack on public services. (p. A20)

He goes on to explain how:

…much of what’s done by volunteers has a tacit politics that volunteerism may
inadvertently conceal. If you volunteer in a soup kitchen or help the homeless, you should
also be working to eliminate the causes of homelessness. That enterprise, of course,
logically leads to social change and to politics as the necessary instruments of change.
But many volunteer organizations, either because of their tax status, their funding
sources, or their necessary nonpartisanship, take great pains to eschew politics. (p. A20)

In other words, Bennett sees volunteering as a ‘band-aid’ solution to problems in society
and argues that when volunteering becomes institutionalized, it takes the responsibility away
from governments to bring about change (for example, through funding efforts). In the discussion
that follows I will provide further definitions of volunteering, relevant concepts, as well as outline
theoretical models and frameworks that have been used by scholars to better understand
volunteers. Finally, I will provide a detailed account of rape crisis volunteers, as they are my
chosen sample.
Concepts and Definitions Related to Volunteering

Sally Orr (1982) defines volunteers as “individuals who freely contribute their services without remuneration, to public or voluntary organizations engaged in all types of social welfare activities” (Encyclopedia of Social Work, 1977, p. 1582, cited in Orr, 1982, p. 109). Similarly, Jessica Reynolds Jenner (1982) defines a volunteer as “a person who, out of free will and without wages, works for a not-for-profit organization which is formally organized and has as its purpose service to someone or something other than its membership” (p. 30). Reynolds Jenner (1982) believes volunteer work “may be used to fill three different roles: it may be the consciously chosen primary work; it may be a supplement to other, primary, work; it may be a vehicle for entry or return to employment” (p. 30). She goes on to state that supplemental and career volunteers “represent the typical volunteer” (p. 36). Gil Clary et al. (1998) and Allen Omoto and Marc Snyder (1995) explain that volunteers actively seek out opportunities to help others on their own initiative and may deliberate for extended periods of time about whether to volunteer, the extent of volunteering, and the personal costs of volunteering. Clary et al. (1998) note how volunteers “may make a commitment to an ongoing helping relationship that may extend over a considerable period of time and that may entail considerable personal costs of time, energy and opportunity” (p. 1517), and Omoto and Snyder (1995) add that “volunteers typically do not know those whom they help in advance…and volunteers are under no obligation to enter into helping relationships” (p. 672).

Linked to volunteerism, is the concept of altruism. Natalie Allen and Philippe Rushton (1983) explain how literature on human altruism is relevant to understanding volunteers, because volunteers are often labeled as altruistic individuals and may be more altruistic than non-volunteers. Altruism has been defined as “social behavior carried out to achieve positive outcomes for another” (p. 36). However, Gil Clary and Leslie Orenstein (1991) argue that volunteers are not ‘purely’ altruistic. While volunteers are often more likely to be concerned about the well being of others, their involvement in volunteer work is likely to result from a combination of altruistic and egoistic (self-gaining) motives.

Being perceived as altruistic may impact interactions with clients by leading to the belief that volunteers genuinely care about clients in ways that paid workers do not. More specifically, Orr (1982) draws attention to the unique role that volunteers occupy in terms of how they can act as a ‘bridge’ between clients and paid workers. She states how “often an informal contact, such as a phone call or informal meeting, can be handled effectively by a volunteer in a manner that is not possible by the social worker who is identified as an employee of an agency” (p. 111). Orr suggests that clients may be under the impression that a volunteer is more of a trustworthy
confidante than a highly educated and paid professional. While clients may cast volunteers in a positive light, Orr highlights how paid professionals often view volunteers quite differently. According to Orr:

…there is a widespread belief among some social workers that volunteers are ‘elites’ who cannot understand or sympathize with the needs of the poor and other deprived groups. This type of mistrust of volunteers can be traced to the aversion to the ‘lady bountiful’ image of volunteers of a bygone era and the widespread tendency to consider volunteerism and citizen participation as two separate activities. (p. 112)

Orr’s comments illuminate how volunteers are often marked as privileged, with a special status, because they have time to participate in unpaid work. This contrasts with the tendency to mark volunteers as genuine, caring individuals, who selflessly give back to their communities. Orr’s description also evokes a very gendered kind of volunteer, particularly one who is female. This relates to Leslie Thornton and David Novak’s (2010) research on women volunteers. Thornton and Novak (2010) situate their study within the historical context of shifts between ‘public’ and ‘private’ work. They highlight how “volunteer work, predominantly done by women, often disappears in societal understandings of work and evolves into what Lopata (1993) referred to as invisible careers” (p. 183). They go on to note how volunteering for women is complicated by its dual meaning as work and leisure” (p. 438).

Besides research carried out by Orr, other scholars have examined how the concept of altruism relates to volunteer activities. A study conducted by Gil Clary and Jude Miller (1986) revealed that telephone crisis counseling volunteers who reported having parents model altruistic behavior when they were children tended to participate in a greater degree of long term helping at an organization than volunteers whose parents modeled less altruistic behaviors (p. 1366). Their study builds on research by David Rosenhan (1970) who explored the impact of parental altruism on children’s activism and highlights positive changes in an altruist as a result of volunteering, for instance, “increases in empathy (Hobfoll, 1980), nurturance and self confidence (Scheibe, 1965) and self acceptance (King, Walder & Pavey, 1970)” (Clary & Miller, 1986, p. 1359). In addition, David J. Burns et al.’s (2006) study focused on the role of altruism and how it impacts college students’ motivations to volunteer. Findings suggest that altruism was a key feature for all students, although altruism was not equal among all participants: issues related to career and esteem were less strongly related to altruism, and issues related to social, protective, understanding and value functions were more strongly related to altruism.
Theoretical Models and Frameworks Related to Volunteering

Clary and Orenstein (1991), Clary et al. (1998), and Omoto and Snyder (1995) situate volunteering within a broader framework of helping and distinguish between planned versus spontaneous forms of helping. According to Omoto and Snyder (1995), planned helpers provide long term, continuing assistance to people in need, while spontaneous helpers encounter unpredictable opportunities to assist strangers. Clary and Orenstein (1991) place spontaneous and non-spontaneous helping “within the more theoretical framework of strong versus weak situations (Snyder & Ickes, 1985): strong situations are structured, offer highly salient cues for behavior and provide evidence for situational causes, whereas weak situations tend to be unstructured, do not offer salient cues, and are more likely to reveal dispositional effects” (p. 58). Clary and Miller (1986) mention that studies focusing on acts of helping that are non-spontaneous include Smith and Nelson’s (1975) study, Block et al.’s (1969) study, and Benson et al.’s (1980) study. These studies, besides Evans (1976), explored sustained altruism and interpersonal factors (p. 1359).

Clary et al. (1998) label volunteerism as planned helping. While there has been extensive research conducted on spontaneous, short term helping, (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998, p. 525) as well as long-term assistance, including stresses attached to sustained care giving, (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p. 671), Reynolds Jenner (1982), Omoto and Snyder (1995) and Penner and Finkelstein (1998) argue there has been little research on volunteerism. This is surprising considering the significant contributions volunteers make in service organizations. For example, Louis Penner and Marcia Finkelstein (1998) note how volunteers working in the United States in 1994 “worked a little more than four hours a week, and it is estimated that the annual dollar value of their efforts is more than $180 billion” (Independent Sector, 1994, cited in Penner & Finkelstein, 1998, p. 525). Nonetheless, the research that has been conducted on volunteerism is usually placed within one of two theoretical models: the volunteer process model or the role identity model (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). The volunteer process model examines the history of a volunteer as well as what happens to a volunteer over time. Supporters of this model believe that dispositional factors influence a volunteers’ decision to volunteer, including “a volunteers’ prior personal experiences, current circumstances, and current personal motives and social needs” (p. 525). The motives used in this model are an extension of Clary and Snyder’s (1991) functional analysis. A central tenet of the functional model (which is an extension of the volunteer process model) includes the idea that volunteering serves different purposes for different individuals. Building on Katz (1960) and Smith (1956), Clary et al. (1998) argue that the following variables apply to volunteer motivations when using the functional model: volunteerism may provide people with a way to carry out altruistic concerns for others; create opportunities to learn new
things and then carry out prior knowledge. Volunteering may also provide opportunities for individuals to socialize, or to be with friends, and “to engage in an activity viewed favorably by important others; career related benefits; may serve to reduce guilt over being more fortunate than others and to address one’s own personal problems; may centre on the ego’s growth and development” (p. 1517-1518). Penner and Finkelstein (1998) state that the role identity model of volunteerism “is a much more sociological model than Omoto and Snyder’s (1995). That is, it “de-emphasizes dispositional variables and uses role theory and the social structure within which volunteerism occurs to explain this behavior” (p. 526). This model assumes that as volunteers continue contributing towards an organization, their commitment towards the organization also increases. In turn, a volunteers’ notion of self changes and “the volunteer role becomes part of his or her personal identity (Stryker, 1980). It is this role identity that directly drives the volunteer’s behavior” (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998, p. 526)

**Volunteer Motivations**

John Anderson and Larry Moore (1978) examine how volunteers often identify particular motives for volunteering along with the ways in which personal characteristics link to these motives. They found differences between volunteers’ motivations in terms of their educational history, previous work history and whether they were a woman or a man. Also discovered was that motivational patterns may change as volunteers spend more time at organizations or agencies. In their study, many participants volunteered to feel useful or to help others in need. Few participants volunteered as a way to make friends, but those who did tended not to have previous work experience. Participants who reported personal development or self-fulfillment as motivations were most commonly university educated and worked for pay. Participants who volunteered to feel useful and occupy spare time were often unemployed and female; those who volunteered for self-fulfillment and personal development were often male. According to Anderson and Moore (1978) “it appears people volunteer for a variety of reasons but that the humanitarian reason—to help others and the desire to feel useful/needed—outweigh other reasons” (p. 123). They also suggest that the Judeo-Christian Ethic of relating righteousness with good works might relate to the reasons why participants are altruistic.

In a study on women volunteers conducted by Reynolds Jenner (1982), women of different ages, races, and socio-economic positions were interviewed in order to better understand their different motivations for volunteering. Reynolds Jenner draws on studies of women volunteers conducted by Bartless (1959), Minnis (1951) and Moore (1961). Participants in these studies listed their reasons for volunteering as having to do with feeling a sense of responsibility
to their communities, but Reynolds Jenner describes how these women volunteered “out of a need for group association and the sharing of common experiences” (Reynolds Jenner, 1982, p. 29). Reynolds Jenner goes on to cite a study by Ginzberg (1966), who found that educated women tended to engage in voluntary work because of “the social significance of the work, the nature of the activity, and a desire for association with others” (Reynolds Jenner, 1982, p. 29).

Like Anderson and Moore (1978), she found that many participants volunteered because they supported the organizations goals, in order to serve their community, and because they had a desire to be of service. Altruism and self-actualization were also listed as motivators along with personal growth as well as wanting to satisfy work related needs that were not being met. These later motivators suggest that volunteers did not volunteer entirely for ‘selfless reasons,’ leading Reynolds Jenner to conclude “volunteer work plays different career roles for different women” (p. 36). Unlike Anderson and Moore (1978), Reynolds Jenner does not account for the ways in which motivations may change for volunteers throughout the duration of the volunteer process. Instead, Reynolds Jenner assumes that volunteers “remain as workers because the experience satisfies work-related needs that are not otherwise met” (p. 35). This suggests that motivation is static for volunteers and ignores the ways in which factors within an organization may impact a volunteers’ sense of satisfaction or desire to continue volunteering.

Clary and Orenstein (1991) also focus on a helper’s motives and whether they are altruistic (show concern for others) or egoistic (self concerned). Crisis counseling volunteers were interviewed as a way to explore whether help was “based on concern for the welfare of the other or that of the self (p. 59). In order to address this question, Clary and Orenstein evaluated whether volunteers completed their level of service, and found that egoistic motivation resulted in less commitment because the cost of volunteering increased (for instance, more time and effort was required on behalf of the volunteer). On the other hand, altruistic motivation led to a greater degree of commitment and “involved a willingness to endure greater costs on behalf of the other and to be less concerned about the consequences for oneself” (p. 63). Therefore, the degree of being concerned for others correlated with a volunteers’ choice to remain volunteering. Clary and Orenstein also suggest that emotional aspects of empathy significantly effect a volunteers’ decision to help, but may have less of an impact on their choice of continuing to volunteer. They go on to explain how sustained helping may be more greatly influenced by moral judgments, having a pro-social orientation and internalized values. This point supports Anderson and Moore’s earlier claim that motivations may change as a volunteer continues his or her work. Findings in this study differ from Clary et al. (1998), who discovered that volunteers receiving
benefits often reported higher levels of satisfaction and tended to continue their volunteer work in the future.

In line with the Clary and Orenstein (1991) as well as Anderson and Moore (1978), Ram Cnnan and Robin Goldberg (1991) state how “although the motives that initially influence people to volunteer may differ from those that influence their decision to continue to volunteer (Gidron, 1984), it is important to understand the initial motivation of those who remain as volunteers for a long period” (p. 270). The goals of Cnnan and Goldberg’s study included conducting a literature review on general volunteer motivations and also comparing motivations of volunteers in human service agencies to non-volunteers. Findings in their study revealed that motives for volunteering are not distinct but overlapping. In other words, volunteers are often both altruistic and egoistic: “volunteers act not from a single motive or a category of motives but from a combination of motives that can be described overall as ‘a rewarding experience.’ They not only give but they get back some sort of reward or satisfaction,” (p. 281). This finding is consistent with Clary and Orenstein (1991), who argue that volunteers are not ‘purely’ altruistic in their motives. After conducting their literature review on volunteer motives, Cnnan and Goldberg conclude:

...what is known about motivation to volunteer is neither systematic nor consistent. The motivation to volunteer literature in general, and about direct service in particular, is mostly descriptive. Most studies examine only one program or aggregate volunteer data from a variety of samples (Ellis, 1985). Additionally, the concept of motivation itself is not defined uniformly in these studies. (Horton-Smith, 1981). (p. 270)

Cnnan and Goldberg report several other challenges attached to comparing data across studies on volunteerism, noting inconsistency in terms as well as the fact that most studies did not examine how motives overlapped (p. 275). Part of what makes Cnnan and Goldberg’s study important is that scholarship on volunteerism rarely explores methodological problems in such depth and few studies examine volunteer motivations across the literature in such detail.

Finally, research conducted by Omoto and Snyder (1995) highlights questions related to volunteer motivation and retention. They consider the following questions: is volunteerism only carried out by individuals with altruistic dispositions? If volunteers are not obligated, why do they volunteer? In what ways do personal and social resources promote long-term helping?. Like rape crisis volunteers, AIDS volunteers are usually comprised of individuals who “seek out opportunities to help, make sustained and ongoing service commitments, offer assistance in stressful circumstances, and do so without any pre-existing bonds to the recipients of their services” (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p. 684). Because of similarities between AIDS volunteers and rape crisis volunteers, including how both groups are cited as encountering far greater amounts of
stress, psychological disadvantages and sadness (Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Clemans, 2004), Omoto and Snyder’s (1995) study can serve as a useful parallel to research on rape crisis volunteers.

Omoto and Snyder (1995) divided their study into three different stages. In the first stage of their study, they examined what initiated volunteers to become involved in AIDS work; in the second stage they considered how volunteer experiences related to satisfaction and the amount of time volunteers would remain at an AIDS organization; in the third stage they explored how length of service influenced volunteers’ attitudes and fears. Omoto and Snyder concluded that the following factors can affect the amount of time an AIDS volunteer will remain volunteering: the extent to which the volunteer feels committed to the organization, the extent to which the volunteer feels positive about being a volunteer, as well as there being a correlation between the volunteer’s personal motives and actual experiences at the organization. Omoto and Snyder also found that “individuals who reported greater social support in their life circumstances actually served less time as aids volunteers” (p. 683). An explanation for this is that because AIDS volunteer work can be an added source of grief for volunteers, “they may quit volunteering as an attempt to re-establish a happier state in which they feel supported and accepted by their friends and associate” (p. 683). However, Omoto and Snyder reported that AIDS volunteers with little social support may continue volunteering as a way to meet people, make friends, and may “seek to preserve support by continuing their service” (p. 683). A finding that sharply contrasts with Anderson and Moore (1978) and Reynolds Jenner (1982), is that in this study, “it appears that the opportunity to have personal, self oriented, and perhaps even selfish functions served by volunteering was what kept volunteers actively involved,” (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p. 683). In other words, “it was egoistic, self centered motives rather than altruistic or other-oriented motives that were positively associated with length of service” (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998, p. 525). This finding also differs from Clary and Orenstein (1991), who found that egoistic motivation for volunteers resulted in less commitment to an organization.

**Rape Crisis Volunteers**

Little research has been conducted on rape crisis volunteers even though, as Maier (2008) explains, “including the voices of volunteer advocates is essential because most centres continue to rely extensively on volunteer labor” (p. 85). Hellman and House (2006) echo this sentiment by highlighting how “there is a limited understanding of attitudes and behaviors associated with volunteerism in high stress situations, such as those of sexual assault. Although many rape crisis centres typically have some paid staff, volunteer advocates are still critical providers of direct and indirect services for sexual assault victims and their families” (p. 117). McMillan (2004) also
points out that, “organizations that developed from political movements, such as refuges as rape crisis centres, have, with the exception of a few studies (Black and Dinitto 1994), been neglected in research on volunteers’ motivations” (p. 127).

As previously mentioned in the introductory section, most of the literature pertaining to rape crisis work focuses on the efforts of paid workers, including social workers, educated counselors, or therapists (e.g. Clemans, 2004; Wasco & Campbell, 2002). When rape crisis volunteers are examined, studies are primarily about the negative effects of rape crisis work (how volunteers experience anxiety, social withdrawal and vicarious trauma) or focus on what sustains volunteers while working in a stressful environment (e.g., Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Hellman & House, 2006). Some of the positive outcomes that can potentially result from becoming involved in rape crisis work are briefly mentioned in studies conducted by Clemans (2004), Rath (2007), Thornton and Novak (2010) and Wasco and Campbell (2002). However, as I illustrate in this section, a greater emphasis is placed on traumatic effects. As a result, little attention is usually given to the ways that volunteers can feel a sense of empowerment and/or satisfaction from their involvement in rape crisis work, and how volunteering can function as a form of self healing.

Beverly Black and Diana Dinitto’s (1994) study focuses on a sample of volunteers from rape crisis centres and shelters in Texas. Surveys were distributed to male and female volunteers, and findings revealed that altruistic and political motivations were significant factors contributing to volunteers’ decisions to begin and continue volunteering. Black and Dinitto found that women considered altruistic and political motivations to be more important than men, and that men’s satisfaction was linked to feeling accepted by staff at their agencies.

Similar to Black and Dinitto, Lesley McMillan (2004) discusses the motivations of volunteers who work at rape crisis centres across the United States and Sweden. Drawing from literature on social movement theory and the feminist anti-violence movement, McMillan concludes that there are multiple motivating factors for volunteers, and that they are both personal and political. McMillan argues that literature on volunteerism fails to incorporate the voice of volunteers at rape crisis centres and does not account for the fact that motivations may extend beyond altruism.

Baird and Jenkins (2003), Carlyle and Roberto (2009), Clemans (2004), Hellman and House (2006) as well as Wasco and Campbell (2002), among many other scholars, draw attention to the physical and psychological effects that helpers may experience when assisting survivors of violence.\(^{10}\) While each scholar investigates different aspects of rape crisis work, all are in

\(^{10}\) A study conducted by Andrea Galijette Skoglund (2006), which focuses on volunteers at a bereavement program at a military hospital in Texas, explores several issues that are relevant for
agreement that “working day to day with clients who have been affected by rape, sexual assault, and incest has a powerful effect on the workers” (Clemans, 2004, p. 247). Kellie E. Carlyle and Anthony J. Roberto’s (2009) study focuses on female volunteer counselors who trained at rape crisis centres in a large Midwestern city, and a medium Southeastern city, and explores the relationship between communication competence, anxiety and different components related to counseling self-efficacy. Findings in their study revealed that communication anxiety was negatively related to volunteers’ beliefs about their ability to effectively counsel people, and that communication competence positively correlated with self-efficacy. Towards the end of their study, Carlyle and Roberto highlight suggestions for rape crisis training programs, specifically in terms of how programs can improve issues related to volunteers’ communication skills.

Besides Carlyle and Roberto (2009), all scholars previously mentioned point towards the devastating affects that vicarious trauma can have on rape crisis volunteers and advocates. According to Clemans (2004), vicarious trauma was first conceptualized by McCann and Pearlman (1991), and “the phenomenon is relevant to all trauma workers” (Clemans, 2004, p. 148), although it has mainly been used to understand the psychological impact that conducting therapy with rape victims has on professional counselors (Wasco & Campbell, 2002, p. 121). Vicarious trauma “is defined as a transformation that occurs within a therapist after bearing witness to clients’ trauma experiences, which manifests via disrupted cognitive schema and intrusive imagery” (Pearlman & McIan, 1995, cited in Wasco & Campbell, 2002, p. 120). Features of vicarious trauma include that it is “cumulative, that is, it affects workers across clients; pervasive, that is, it affects all aspects of a worker’s self; and individual, that is, it is uniquely manifested in each worker” (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1195a, 1995b, cited in Clemans, 2004, p. 148). Besides vicarious trauma, Clemans (2004) and Baird and Jenkins (2003) describe how people who work closely with survivors of violence may experience secondary traumatic stress, or compassion fatigue. Stephanie Baird and Sharon Jenkins explain how “Figley (1983) defined secondary traumatic stress, which he later called compassion fatigue, as the experiencing of emotional duress in persons who have had close contact with a trauma survivor” (p. 73).

According to Baird and Jenkins, secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma both involve changes in a person who is exposed to someone recovering from a traumatic event, but secondary
traumatic stress arrives more suddenly and vicarious trauma is more gradual, covert and leads to permanent changes in cognitive schema.

Citing Pearlman and Maclan (1995), Schauben and Frazier (1995), as well as Johnson and Hunter (1997), Sharon Wasco and Rebecca Campbell (2002) state that female counselors working with sexual assault survivors have reported intrusive thoughts or memories, increased arousal, avoidance or numbness, distrust in oneself and others and changed beliefs with regards to safety (p. 121). Similarly Baird and Jenkins (2003) state how “painful images and emotions related to the client’s traumatic memories might become incorporated into the therapist’s imagery system of memory. This re-experiencing or avoidance of specific aspects of their client’s traumatic memories becomes tangible via flashbacks, dreams, painful emotions, or intrusive thoughts” (p. 73). Finally, Baird and Jenkins note how “compared to other counselors, sexual assault therapists report more emotional exhaustion” (p. 72). They draw on Lobel’s (1997) study of vicarious effects in therapists treating female survivors of sexual assault, where Lobel “found that 70% of the therapists experienced vicarious trauma seen in negative, long term changes in cognitive schema” (p. 74).

In their study on the stressful effects experienced by those who work with survivors of violence, Baird and Jenkins (2003) examined “the presence and degree of trauma related and burnout symptoms in both sexual assault and domestic violence agency volunteer and paid staff in relation to their job roles and their degree of exposure to clients” (p. 72). Although their study did not solely focus on rape crisis volunteers, its inclusion of volunteers is noteworthy considering that research usually focuses on paid sexual assault counselors (Cunningham, 1996; Kassam-Adams, 1995; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995; Schauben & Frazier, 1995, cited in Baird & Jenkins, 2003, p. 83). Baird and Jenkins discovered that “volunteers (but not paid staff) in counseling roles (compared to other roles) had more emotional exhaustion but also more personal accomplishment. Volunteers in crisis roles displayed the opposite pattern” (p. 79). Put another way, volunteers who saw more clients for longer periods of time often reported a greater sense of personal accomplishment. This contrasts with volunteers who saw fewer clients, and reported experiencing a lower sense of personal accomplishment and had quicker burnout. Baird and Jenkins label volunteer crisis workers as “more at risk than their counterparts who are paid staff” (p.82) and go on to explain the following:

Although volunteers have lighter caseloads on average than paid staff, they may also have less access to structural support mechanisms that would reinforce their feeling of personal accomplishment, such as case conferences, supervision, add daily contact with staff for the caseloads they do have. Thus, they may be more vulnerable to burnout. In addition, volunteers may be a more heterogeneous group, on average less educated, much
less experienced, and perhaps including individuals who are more easily affected by trauma-related situations than paid staff are. (p. 82)

Baird and Jenkins’ point about volunteers being more at risk than paid staff is echoed by Thornton and Novak who highlight how “volunteers sometimes ended up with a disproportionate emotional burden consisting of both their own feeling work” (Thornton & Novak, 2010, p. 446), which often involved delaying their own feelings of anger and sadness in order to offer support to survivors of violence. Like Baird and Jenkins (2003), Thornton and Novak (2010) draw attention to the differences between volunteers and paid workers in terms of available supports and expectations.

Along the same lines as Baird and Jenkins (2003) and Thornton and Novak (2010), Hellman and House (2006) highlight that “volunteers serving victims of sexual assault report a psychologically stressful environment and often experience vicarious reactions to the trauma of victims” (p. 118) and that this has a direct consequence relating to how long a volunteer will remain working at a rape crisis centre. Hellman and House (2006) are primarily concerned with volunteers’ perceived value of training, self-efficacy and victim blaming in relation to their commitment to a rape crisis centre. They explain that “to reduce the costs associated with recruitment, selection, training, and scheduling, the sustainability of effective volunteers for nonprofit rape crisis centres is important” (p. 122). These concerns are reminiscent of Orr (1982) who stresses the importance of agencies meeting the needs of their volunteers. Orr (1982) argues that agencies should tap into volunteers’ motives in order for volunteers to remain committed. Otherwise, it can be costly to re-train new volunteers and difficult for volunteers as well as paid staff to foster committed relationships with one another. Orr (1982) lists “the important tasks of socialization, developing a sense of belonging and organization building” (Brager & Specht, 1973, cited in Orr, 1982, p. 113) as necessary for volunteer retention.

Studies conducted by Clemans (2004), Rath (2007) and Thornton and Novak (2010), and Wasco and Campbell (2002) suggest the importance of viewing rape crisis work as an ongoing process that constantly changes as workers/volunteers encounter new clients, negotiate stresses in their personal lives and continue to develop a sense of identity as workers in rape crisis organizations. Because of these elements, Clemans (2004), Rath (2007), Thornton and Novak (2010), and Wasco and Campbell (2002) blur the distinction between ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’ effects of rape crisis work, placing attention on the ways in which ‘positive’ and ‘negative’
elements shift because of new experiences in rape crisis workers’ lives and contextual factors in each rape crisis organization.\(^{11}\)

In a study on social workers assisting survivors of violence, Clemans (2004) highlights how there are various challenges commonly faced by social workers supporting survivors of rape, including a reported increase in vulnerability, experiencing secondary traumatic stress, establishing tighter personal boundaries and feeling constant distrust. She goes on to explain how involvement in rape crisis work can lead social workers to utilize a range of coping mechanisms such as “activism, feminism, spirituality, and positive interactions with other staff members, [and] humor” (p. 156). Clemans does not expand on what she means by ‘activism’ besides stating how “it was a way that participants took action against larger social problems” (p. 156). It is also unclear whether participants felt that their involvement in rape crisis work functioned as a form of activism or whether being a rape crisis worker prompted other kinds of activism. Nonetheless, Clemans draws attention to ‘productive’ outcomes that may occur as a result of being a rape crisis worker as opposed to only discussing the debilitating effects that this work has on social workers’ physical and emotional well being. Here ‘productive outcomes’ may involve having an opportunity to be self reflexive about one’s place in the world, fostering relationships with other like-minded individuals and establishing political affiliations to feminism that may not have existed before. Therefore, Clemans suggests that coping mechanisms may lead to (or become) positive aspects of rape crisis work experienced by volunteers/workers instead of insisting that ‘productive outcomes’ are authentic and occur from the very start of the volunteer process.

Clemans also references a study conducted by Schauben and Frazier (1995a), who found positive elements of rape crisis work and “showed that the picture is more nuanced and complex” (p. 148). In Schauben and Frazier’s study, female rape crisis counselors declared “their own growth and change as a positive aspect of working with rape survivors” (Schauben & Frazier, 1995a, p. 59, cited in Clemans, 2004, p. 149).\(^{12}\)

Like Clemans (2004), Sharon M. Wasco, Rebecca Campbell and Marcia Clark’s (2002) study explores various self-care strategies utilized by rape crisis advocates. Findings reveal that

\(^{11}\) Although efforts have been made by these scholars to identify ‘positive’ aspects of rape crisis work, it is strikingly apparent that there is still a greater emphasis in the existing literature on negative consequences of volunteering in the area of rape crisis work.

\(^{12}\) A study by Campbell and Adams’ (2009) explores the potential benefits that survivors of sexual assault felt were gained by participating in community-based, face-to-face interviews. Participants in Campbell and Adams’ study stated that their decisions to become involved in research on sexual violence were related to helping other survivors, helping themselves, supporting research on sexual assault and to receive financial compensation.
rape crisis advocates drew upon personal resources (including cognitive, physical, social, spiritual, verbal resources) as well as support from their centres (including attending meetings and being able to have flexible hours). Similarly, Wasco and Campbell (2002) explore how a range of outcomes can be generated for rape crisis advocates when facing challenges in their work, some of which may be positive/productive. In their study, Wasco and Campbell “identify situations that are associated with feelings of anger and fear when doing rape victim advocacy” (p. 122) and found that “emotions, even those traditionally thought to be negative, (i.e., anger, fear) may be perceived as a type of growing pain for advocates attempting to integrate the violence they are exposed to into a meaningful understanding of their life and their world” (p. 128). More specifically, anger served as a positive source of energy for volunteers, in some instances leading to personal growth, a heightened awareness of threat of sexual violence for women, and motivation to continue working as a rape advocate (p. 127-128). Wasco and Campbell draw on studies conducted by Hercus (1999) and Iliffe and Steed (2000), who considered how anger can be a motivating force in work related to violence against women. Hercus (1999) discovered that anger can “drive feminist collective action and that participating in feminist organizations can channel passive emotions like depression or shame into active anger” (p. 121). Iliffe and Steed (2000) learned that domestic violence counselors “valued their anger as a mechanism for protecting themselves from feeling too much sadness” (p. 121). These findings led Wasco and Campbell to conclude the following: “some rape victim advocates, especially those who perceive their job activities to be instances of feminist activism, may find anger to be both, paradoxically, a difficult stressor and a valuable emotional resource” (p. 121). This point supports the suggestion made earlier, that rape crisis advocates face a range of experiences and emotions in their work, and that these experiences may be difficult to label as positive or negative since they may simultaneously have positive and negative effects on rape crisis workers (Clemans, 2004; Rath, 2007; Thornton & Novak, 2010; Wasco & Campbell, 2002).

Thornton and Novak’s (2010) study of volunteers at a rural rape crisis centre in the United States considers how volunteers experience and express emotion, including anger with other people, sadness for a survivor, fear around the unknown elements of helping a survivor, helplessness and frustration, lack of psychological closure with volunteering, and empathy (p. 442). This study extends Wasco and Campbell’s (2002) work on the emotional reactions of rape victim advocates by emphasizing the temporal nature of rape crisis work, and by looking at how rape advocates manage their emotions when interacting with survivors of rape. Thornton and Novak’s use of narrative theory as a lens to examine rape crisis work is noteworthy considering that the majority of empirical studies on rape crisis workers use a trauma framework (i.e., Baird
& Jenkins, 2003; Campbell, 2005). Narrative theory emphasizes how context in important to consider with regards to emotion work and labour, “fluid and shifting situations impact how volunteers and other characters perform their roles” (Thornton & Novak, 2010, p. 446). In this study, many of the volunteers counseled survivors of violence over the telephone through a 24-hour crisis hotline. Volunteers were often put in touch with a client without being physically present at the rape crisis centre. This means that volunteers could receive a telephone call from a client while they were at home, out with friends, on public transportation, etc. As a result, volunteers reported how they managed their emotions in both their private and professional lives, blurring the distinction between these two settings. Because volunteers were “on call while at home, out with friends, or in other situations usually not considered public,” (p. 441) they often experienced a heightened sense of nervousness and anxiety while waiting for a telephone call from a person in crisis. Feelings of anxiety also surfaced for some volunteers when they were anticipating how another service provider, such as a police officer or nurse, treated a survivor. In addition, listening to people re-tell their experiences of violence “for some, open[ed] wounds once healed” (p. 441). Even for those volunteers who were not survivors of violence themselves, the very act of listening to another person describe their pain influenced a volunteers’ well being. While this study mostly looks at emotions of pain and sadness, Thornton and Novak (2010) note that some volunteers spoke of optimism and relief. For instance, one participant, “talked about a sense of satisfaction with the action she took in a challenging situation” (p. 445). Another participant, stated how she “enjoyed being able to plant the seed for someone else’s self empowerment” (p. 445).

Rath’s (2007) study examines how rape crisis volunteers make sense of their training. Rath goes into detail about what rape crisis training is usually comprised of in terms of its goals, approaches to learning, and issues that are usually considered important for rape crisis work. Rath states how “almost all rape crisis centres include the following topics as part of their initial counselor training: counseling and listening skills, both telephone and face to face; police and court procedures and the law; health issues, including HIV/AIDS and women’s bodies; issues of sexual abuse and violence, including child sexual abuse” (p. 21). Five themes explored in the study include motivation to train, complexity and change, changes in personal relationships, personal change and feminism. In terms of positive aspects of rape crisis work, Rath states how “rape crisis training courses attract volunteers who are survivors of sexual violence,” (p. 24) and participants who identified as survivors of violence explained how “they saw becoming a rape crisis counselor as a positive late step in their own healing process” (p. 24). While training may be a positive step in healing, Baird and Jenkins (2003) stress how “therapists and counselors
having a personal history of sexual assault show more symptoms related to psychological trauma than do non-assaulted personnel” (Cunningham, 1996; Follete, Polusny, & Milbeck, 1994; Kassam-Adams, 1995; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995, cited in Baird & Jenkins, 2003, p.72). This indicates that the healing process for rape crisis survivors/volunteers may be ridden with psychological effects.

Other ‘positive’ effects of rape crisis work identified by Rath (2007) include participants believing they had developed better quality relationships with their male partners since the start of training. This finding differs from Clemans (2004), whose participants reported being unable to enjoy sex with their boyfriends, and struggled with feeling comfortable about sex. In line with Clemans (2004), Rath’s participants noted how they “underwent personal development and growth as the training progressed. All the women talked about change in ways that contained strong themes of continuity and a strong sense of self agency” (p. 26-27). However, unlike Clemans’ (2004) and Thornton and Novak’s (2010) findings, most of Rath’s participants did not describe themselves as feminist or consider their rape crisis work to be a form of activism. In fact, a surprising finding in this study is that “the majority of women taking part in this research did not report a specific desire to undertake volunteer work related to sexual violence…this is at odds with McMillan’s (2004) study” (p. 30). Rath attributes this to the stage the volunteers are at in their training. Rath also notes how many volunteers appear to join rape crisis training during “times of personal upheaval” (p. 31), which is not consistent with findings in Clemans or Thornton and Novak’s studies.

**Supports for Rape Crisis Workers**

Clemans (2004) suggests that support services, such as one-to one counseling, “may offer employees valuable and previously overlooked emotional support during times of stress, prevent vicarious traumatization, and provide a safe forum for support and discussion” (p. 158). However, studies conducted by Rath (2007) as well as Truell (2001) highlight how support services can be ineffective due to the power differential embedded in the counseling process. Rory Truell’s (2001) study on the negative aspects of students training to be crisis counselors indicates that students did not always know how much of their personal lives to reveal to peers and tutors. Truell notes how students often felt vulnerable because when they disclosed personal information in class, this information often went unnoticed. Students also constantly compared themselves to their tutors and felt incompetent. Rath’s (2007) study echoes these findings. Her participants admitted to withholding comments about their personal beliefs during group work because they
felt that their trainers would refer back to these comments when assessing their ability to become volunteer counselors.

Similarly, While Clemans (2004) and Truell (2001) offer insight into the potential problems attached to support services, it is important to consider how support services for rape crisis workers may be experienced quite differently from the vantage point of unpaid volunteers. Sarah E. Ullman and Stephanie M. Townsend’s (2007) study focused on women who worked at rape crisis centres in a large mid-western metropolitan area. Using semi-structured interviews, Ullman and Townsend explored challenges faced by rape crisis advocates, and situated these responses within the broader institutional issues that were faced at centres, as well as societal attitudes towards women who have experienced violence. Findings suggest that there are various problems encountered by survivors of violence when they are attempting to seek help at rape crisis centres. Similar to issues faced by rape crisis volunteers in the previous studies mentioned, some of these issues are related to inability of accessing services, funding and resource problems, as well as secondary victimization.

Throughout this chapter I have provided a detailed description of relevant scholarly literature that informs my study. The literature suggests that there are multiple facets of rape crisis work that are worthy of consideration, for example, training and motivations, etc. The literature also points towards the complexity of exploring the broad topic of violence against women due to the range of issues involved, including socio-economic positions of women who experience violence, social stigmas attached to being a survivor of violence, implications behind state intervention, whether to label violence against women through the lens of human rights, etc. While I agree with the majority of the literature on rape crisis volunteers that highlights the need to account for emotional and physical challenges faced by rape crisis volunteers, a major shortcoming of all studies (including studies conducted by Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Black & Dinitto, 1994; Carlyle & Roberto, 2009; Hellman & House, 2006; McMillan, 2004; Rath, 2007; Thornton & Novak, 2010 and Wasco & Campbell; 2008), is that theorists do not account for the ways in which different positionalities, including age, race, class, gender and sexuality, shape the experiences of volunteers. More specifically, I believe that these markers significantly influence how volunteers make meaning of their volunteer experiences. Besides failing to address these markers as separately implicating volunteers’ experiences as rape crisis volunteers, in most cases, theorists do not consider the intersections between these markers, which I consider important, and which particular scholars have emphasized in relation to theorizing violence against women (i.e., Ritchie, 2000; Smith, 2004).
I locate my study as being most closely aligned with McMillan (2004), Rath (2007) and Thornton and Novak (2009), who are concerned with examining rape crisis volunteers’ experiences more broadly than most of the other literature (for instance, they consider volunteer experiences in relation to feminism and consider notions of temporality). In my opinion, most of the other studies on rape crisis volunteers focus on rape crisis volunteers quite narrowly and restrict analyses to the causes and effects of volunteering with survivors of violence, rather than exploring volunteer experiences holistically. A holistic understanding of rape crisis volunteers is both necessary when trying to understand the internal functioning of rape crisis centres and is critical when learning about rape crisis volunteers, more generally.

In terms of how I locate myself within the literature on violence against women, I support Rubin’s (2008) insistence that “culture cannot be used to justify violence” (p. 108). Put another way, I believe that it is necessary to recognize commonalities faced by women in various parts of the world who have experienced violence, and to not shy away from naming forms of violence that operate outside of the North American context. Nonetheless, it seems that in a great deal of the literature that is produced by white academic feminists, there is such an excessive concern with being ‘politically correct,’ that there is a failure to address the needs of women who are enduring brutalities worldwide. I believe there is a need to listen to the voices of women who have experienced violence in a range of spaces in order to hear their standpoints, to represent these standpoints, and to provide these women with the tools to share their own standpoints, rather than being quick to defend a practice outside of North America as being acceptable because it is ‘culturally specific’, when in fact, it may be an act of violence against women. I also support Smith’s (2004) insistence that in order to understand violence against women as operating in multiple contexts, it is vital to address structural issues of inequality (including institutional racism, among many other issues). That being said, I agree with McGlynn (2008) who insists that the state should not be held primarily responsible for violences being perpetrated against women. Instead, McGlynn (2008) highlights the ways in which forms of media ‘educate’ individuals and normalize violence against women. Like McGlynn, I believe that without situating violence against women within a broader discussion that extends beyond the notion of the state, it becomes difficult to understand the complexities and devastating consequences that violence has on women and other groups.

In the upcoming chapter I will discuss my research methodology. I will describe the theoretical frameworks that shape my study and highlight the key principles, assumptions and criticisms attached to my chosen frameworks. I will also explain my research design, including data collection, recruitment and ethical considerations for my participants.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As previously mentioned, I have used the life history approach and I have conducted in-depth interviews with five participants that were structured around three moments in participants’ lives: their experiences in childhood/adolescence, adulthood, and the duration leading up to and during their time as volunteers. In the following section I will describe my theoretical framework as well as my research design, including the steps I have taken for data collection and participant recruitment.

Theoretical Framework

I have primarily drawn from feminist standpoint theory for my theoretical framework. However, a particular concept from the field of Curriculum Studies, specifically, the notion of ‘currere,’ has also shaped my study. Therefore, the upcoming discussion will explore a combination of these approaches.

Feminist standpoint theory is the lens through which I have examined my data, and particular concepts and ideas from this theory have influenced my analysis. According to Hartsock (1987a), a ‘privileged’ standpoint must be an achieved political struggle. In other words, women, and, as an extension, other marginalized groups, who come together to discuss the ways that they have been subordinated have the potential of achieving a standpoint. Although I consider all of the participants who have participated in this study to occupy different standpoints and different marginalized/privileged positions, I consider the volunteer training process to be a particular site where participants have accomplished what Hartsock refers to as a ‘political struggle.’ This is because participants have emphasized how training has provided opportunities for them to share their experiences of marginalization (and/or to share the experiences of people they have known who have experienced marginalization), and to situate theses experiences within broader societal structures. Additionally, as noted by most participants, training functioned as a space where experiences of marginalization were normalized, and where participants were encouraged to consider the complexities attached to various kinds of violence. Besides situating participants’ experiences and involvement in rape crisis work within the framework of standpoint theory, in the introduction, under the section entitled, ‘My Interest in the Study,’ I have shared some of my experiences and motivations to participate in this research as a way to offer my own ‘standpoint.’
Feminist Standpoint Theory

Unlike postmodern and poststructuralist frameworks, which reject “the very possibility of a truth about reality, and “use the situatedness of each finite observer in a particular sociopolitical, historical context to challenge the plausibility of claims that any perspective on the world could escape partiality” (Hawkesworth, 1989, p. 536), many supporters of feminist standpoint theory believe that truth is always mediated, but they do not entirely reject the notion of truth. Instead, truth is influenced by factors related to a person’s position and point in history: “class, race, and gender necessarily structure the individual’s understanding of reality and hence inform all knowledge claims” (Hawkesworth, 1989, p. 536). Feminist standpoint theory reflects the idea “that women occupy a social location that affords them/us a privileged access to social phenomena...women come, by nature or social experience, to be better equipped to know the world than are men and that a social science adequate for women must proceed from a grasp of the forms of oppression women experience” (Longino, 1993, p. 201-202).

Dorothy Smith (1987) explains that standpoint theory originated from the ideas of several feminists and can be traced to Sandra Harding (1986):

Feminist standpoint theory, as a general class of theory in feminism, was brought into being by Sandra Harding (1986), not to create a new theoretical enclave but to analyze the merits and problems of feminist theoretical work that sought a radical break with existing disciplines through locating knowledge or inquiry in women’s standpoint or in women’s experience. Those she identified had been working independently of one another and have continued to do so. In a sense, Harding created us. (Smith, 1987, p. 392, cited in Naples, 2003, p. 14)

Expanding on the work of Harding (1986), Nancy Hartsock (1987a) has argued that a ‘privileged’ standpoint must be an achieved political struggle. In other words, women—and, as an extension, other marginalized groups—who come together in order to discuss the ways that they are subordinated, have the potential of achieving a standpoint. This is something that is realized through analysis and reflection—it is not a natural attribute that all women have. Hartsock (1987a) originally believed that “while certain social positions (the oppressor’s) produce distorted ideological views of reality, other social positions (the oppressed’s) can piece ideological obfuscations and attain a correct and comprehensive understanding of the world” (Hawkesworth, 1989, p. 536). Hartsock expands Marx’s critique of capitalism in order to relate it to the ways that women are specifically dominated. She explains, “like the lives of proletarians in Marxist theory,

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13 The idea that other groups, in addition to women, occupy social locations that afford them privileged access to social phenomena has been taken up by feminist standpoint theorists and is how I am using standpoint theory to guide my research.
women’s lives also contain possibilities for developing critiques of domination and visions of
alternative social arrangements” (Hartsock, 1998, p. 228).

Similar to Harding (1986) and Hartsock’s (1987a), Smith (1987) has built an alternative
sociology that begins with the experiences of women’s lives. She has used standpoint theory to
make women’s work known, when it is often rendered invisible. Smith draws attention to the
social relations entrenched in women’s everyday experiences but goes beyond the individual
woman as knower in order to explore broader social relations and structures (Naples, 2003, p.
74).

Besides Harding (1986), Hartsock’s (1987a) and Smith (1987), who have developed their
understanding of standpoint theory from a Marxist perspective, which, as Naples (2003) points
out, is rooted within a Modernist paradigm, other standpoint theorists have been influenced by
postmodernism. For instance, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) forms a standpoint from the perspective
of Black women. Hill Collins (1990) defends her perspective against charges of essentialism by
stating how “despite African-American women’s potential power to reveal new insights about the
matrix of domination, Black women’s standpoint is only one angle of vision” (Collins, 1990, p.
“falls into the trap of essentializing Black women’s experiences to a certain extent—namely by
masking dimensions of class and sexuality among other axes of difference that fracture Black
women’s social location” (p. 71).

According to many feminist standpoint theorists, subordinated people, including women
“have a kind of epistemological privilege in so far as they have easier access to this standpoint
and therefore a better chance of ascertaining the possible beginnings of a society in which all
refers to “those who have the appropriate experience of oppression are capable of researching and
representing the experience” (p. 92). Bat-Ami Bar On (1993) adds to understandings of epistemic
privilege:

…epistemic privilege mostly justifies claims for authority, specifically the authority of
members of socially marginalized groups to speak for themselves, which is an authority
they do not have if everyone is equally capable of knowing them and their situation.
Through this justification they grant themselves the authority to produce their own self-
deﬁned descriptions of themselves and the world. And they demand that their voices,
voices that have been excluded through the process of social marginalization, be given
the respectful attention given to the voices of socio-culturally hegemonic experts. (p. 95)

Both Mannay (2010) and Bar On (1993) have challenged the ways that marginalized
groups have utilized the notion of epistemic privilege and they have problematized particular
goals of standpoint theory. For instance, feminist standpoint theorists often privilege women’s perspectives in order to replace masculinist thought and question truth claims of positivist research methods. However, Mannay says that “paradoxically, this means that feminist standpoint theory aligns itself within the tradition of positivist science, which it sought to critique” (p. 92) because it “grants an authority and hierarchy to certain groups and silences others” (Skeggs, 1997, p. 26, as cited in Mannay, 2010, p. 92).

Standpoint theory has been critiqued for having an “overly simplistic model of knowledge that tends to assume a ‘collective singular subject’ to posit a false universality, to neglect the multiplicity of structuring processes that shape cognitive practices, and to underestimate the disjuncture between problems or oppression and questions of truth” (Hawkesworth, 1989, p. 553). Furthermore, Naples (2003) explains how standpoint theory is haunted by the idea that claims of truth are rooted in the body. She argues that believing that there is a particular women’s perspective that should be privileged because it possesses heightened insights of reality suggests a uniform experience of women.

Responding to some of these critiques, Naples (2003) suggests that a potential answer to this dilemma could be substituting ‘women’s perspective’ for ‘feminist perspective.’ However, she is quick to point out that ‘feminism’ is diverse and contested and it is difficult to settle on a singular definition. Marianne Janack (1997) also emphasizes Harding’s (1993) attempt to problematize earlier accounts of standpoint theory. Specifically, Harding (1986) reconsiders the idea that those who occupy positions of power do not have critical understandings of the way that forms of domination operate. Instead, she says, “the experiences of marginalized peoples should provide the scientific problems and the research agendas—not the solutions—for standpoint theories” (Harding, 1993, p. 62, cited in Janack, 1997, p. 126). As well, Susan Hekman (1997) argues that feminist standpoint theory must be “recast as situated and engaged knowledge” (p. 362). From Hekman’s point of view, this requires “rejecting the definition of knowledge and truth as either universal or relative in favor of a conception of knowledge situated and discursive” (p. 357). She borrows Max Weber’s concept of the ‘ideal type,’ which, she explains “claims that no aspect of social reality can be apprehended without presuppositions” (p. 260). She also highlights Donna Haraway’s (1988) notion of ‘situated knowledges’ and asks the following questions:

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Given multiple standpoints, the social construction of ‘reality,’ and the necessity of an engaged political position, how can we talk about ‘better accounts of the world,’ ‘less false stories’? And, indeed, how can we talk about accounts of the world at all if the multiplicity of standpoints is, quite literally endless? (p. 358-359)

Although there are challenges attached to using feminist standpoint theory to guide my research, there is much to be gained. An aim of feminist standpoint theory is to offer perspectives that are typically ignored and to contribute to the formation of knowledge production in new ways. By using this framework, knowledge produced by rape crisis volunteers—which is often not represented in different areas of scholarship—can be recognized. Additionally, by presenting the life histories of rape crisis volunteers, some of the experiences of survivors of violence can also be made visible. This is significant considering how typically, survivors of violence are spoken for and about, rather than being able to have the opportunity to share their own experiences. In my study, all participants have either experienced different forms of marginalization directly and/or they are speaking from their experiences of interacting with survivors of violence. As a result, by including both volunteers’ experiences and a mediated version of the experiences of survivors of violence, different layers of ‘standpoint’ have become known throughout the research process.

Standpoint theory is useful for my research because it provides a mode through which participants can define what exists in the world (in many cases, this involves naming different forms of violence) and it has encouraged me to explore different kinds of commonalities that have surfaced in participants’ life histories. Standpoint theorists have urged me to consider how violence can be a shared experience among women, since male domination over women exists in all societies, in different manifestations. However, some participants have complicated the notion of violence against women being a shared reality that is specific to women. Nonetheless, standpoint theory remains an appropriate framework for this study because it values the experiences of those who have experienced marginalization, regardless of whether forms of violence and marginalization are labeled as specifically pertaining to women. Overall, standpoint theory offers an interesting approach to work through some of these tensions and has urged me to consider what kinds of commonalities have surfaced in participants’ life histories.

As previously mentioned, in addition to using standpoint theory, my study is also informed by what Pinar (1975) refers to as ‘currere.’ In order to explain how ‘currere’ relates to my study, I will provide a brief overview of the development of curriculum studies, and describe how ‘currere’ emerged out of a particular moment in this fields’ growth.
Curriculum Studies and ‘Currere’

Numerous scholars have addressed the question of how curriculum should be defined and what concerns ought to be considered significant for curriculum theorizing and practice (Apple; 2004; Deng & Luke, 2008; Dewey, 1938; Huebner, 1987; Macdonald, 1971; Tyler, 1949).

Writing in 1971, James MacDonald drew attention towards the way that curriculum theory was in ‘search of boundaries’ (Macdonald, 1971, p. 195) and how there was “no general agreement about what phenomena should or should not be included in curriculum theorizing” (p. 195). Macdonald highlighted how “definitions of curriculum are as narrow as ‘the subject matter to be learned’ and as broad as ‘all the experiences students have in school.’ Thus, writings called curriculum theory have varied on one pole from essentially epistemological statements to the other pole of statements of a ‘philosophy of living’” (p. 196). Lack of consensus among curriculum scholars continues to exist today, although, as William Pinar (1978) suggests, this is precisely what gives curriculum studies its strength and character. According to Pinar (1978), “for curriculum to become vital in American education, it must nurture each moment and synthesize different perspectives of curriculum” (p. 211).

The particular ‘moments’ and ‘perspectives’ that Pinar (1978) is referring to have to do with historical changes in the field of Curriculum Studies. Pinar (1978), like Zongyi Deng and Allan Luke (2008) among others, identifies three groups of curriculum theorists: traditionalists, conceptual empiricists and reconceptualists. Pinar describes the traditionalists as scholars and practitioners who are influenced by scientific techniques from business and industry and focus primarily on schools and teachers; conceptual empiricists generally believe education is not a discipline but an area to be studied by the disciplines and are interested in collecting empirical and hard data in educational settings (p. 208). Curriculum theorists who are situated in the reconceptualist tradition see the political dimension attached to intellectual activities and view curriculum issues as being related to culture (p. 210). Reconceptualists argue that “what is necessary, in part, is fundamental structural change in the culture” (p. 210). Pinar also explains how “the reconceptualists tend to concern themselves with the internal and existential experience of the public world. They tend to study not ‘change in behavior’ or ‘decision-making in the classroom,’ but matters of temporality, transcendence, consciousness, and politics. In brief, the reconceptualist attempts to understand the nature of educational experience” (Pinar, 1975, pp. x-xi).

William Schubert (2009) makes note of how “reconceptualization was born in critique and is exemplified in work in the 1960s and 1970s by Dwayne Huebner, James B. MacDonald, Ted T. Aoki, and Maxine Greene, among others” (p. 138). Schubert (2009) goes on to explain
how scholars associated with the reconceptualist tradition were brought together by Pinar (1974, 1975), and changed the field of curriculum studies by “embracing multiple texts or discourse communities (historical, political, or ideological, racial, gendered, aesthetic, biographical, autobiographical, phenomenological, poststructural and postmodern, theological and international) as well as institutional texts, which were the dominant focus of school based curriculum development” (p. 138).

Although there is much value to be had in drawing from all three of the traditions that were previously mentioned, I am situating my study in the reconceptualist tradition. In doing so, I primarily draw from Pinar (1975, 1976, 1978, 1992, 1994), and use Pinar’s (1995) definition of curriculum, which he describes as “a complicated conversation” (Pinar et al. 1995, cited in Schubert, 2009, p. 133), “…a ‘slippery’ category whose meaning is unsettled and even contested… the interdisciplinary study of educational experience…”(Carlson 1992, p. 2).

For Pinar (1992), understanding curriculum requires considering how knowledge that is taught in schools is an extension of ideas in broader culture. In order to improve the quality of education that students and teachers participate in, Pinar argues that students and scholars of curriculum must be “devoted to understanding cultural phenomena that shape who and what human beings become within or apart from schooling” (Schubert, 2009, p. 137). This requires exploring the notion of curriculum as inherently political (Pinar, 1994) and requires understanding ourselves as “racialized, gendered beings” (Pinar, 1992, p. 35). By situating the notion of curriculum in varying networks of power, Pinar recognizes “that knowledge is never ideologically and socioculturally neutral or disinterested, and it necessarily reflects historically located and performed human interests” (Deng & Luke, 2008, p. 69-70).

Pinar’s characterization of curriculum is rooted in the idea that we are living in troubled times. Dennis Carlson (1992) explains that the ‘troubles’ Pinar refers to are the legacies of racism and misogyny that pervade American (and I would add, Canadian education), the business and bureaucratic values that affect American (and Canadian) culture and public schools, and the overall anti-intellectual climate that does not allow teachers and professors to engage with students and have freedom over how/what they teach (p. 4). For Pinar, then, there are serious problems in North American society and, as an extension, in educative realms. Pinar is interested in changing these conditions. His views are similar to Maxine Greene (1971, 1977) who seeks to find ways to bring individuals to consciousness and achieve a state of ‘wide-awakeness’ in order to transform society. Greene encourages people to not take things for granted, to be made aware of a multiplicity of perspectives and to realize their potential as human beings. However, unlike
Greene who places an emphasis on using art as a way to bring about consciousness, Pinar proposes that individuals participate in the process of what he terms ‘currere.’

Currere consists of a series of four moments referred to as the regressive, the progressive, the analytical and the synthetic (Pinar, 1975). As noted by Cindy Kissel-Ito (2008), these steps include “retelling the story of ones’ educational experiences, imagining future possibilities for self-understanding and educational practice; analysis of the relationships between past, present, and future life history and practice; and new ways of thinking about education” (Pinar 2004, p. 35). Kissel-Ito (2008) also highlights how “although Pinar describes currere as a process of ‘steps,’ he recognizes that these "moments" may occur concurrently” (Pinar 2004, p.131, cited in Kissel-Ito, 2008, p. 341).

Yatta Kanu and Mark Glor (2006) explain how “the method of currere foregrounds the relationship between narrative (life history) and practice and provides opportunities to theorize particular moments in one’s educational history, to dialogue with these moments, and examine possibilities for change” (p. 104). As Pinar and Grumet (1976) have developed the term, it refers to education as the running of a course, or a course of study (Carlson, 1992). Thus, it is a process inviting “us to become ‘temporal’ subjects of history, living simultaneously in the past, present and future—aware of the historical conditions that have shaped the current situation, engaged in the present battles being waged over the course and direction of public education, and committed to re-building a democratic sphere” (Carlson, 1992, p. 1-2). The purpose of this method is to link the individual to the social and to provide an opportunity for an individual to understand the political dimensions of his or her life. As a result of this reflection, an individual may begin to view his or her life from a new angle and to contribute to making a more just society.

Being self-reflexive and autobiographical in educative endeavors can be considered ‘revolutionary,’ since, as Madeleine Grumet (1987) reminds us, “viewed against the background of bureaucratic, depersonalized institutions, storytelling [which is part of currere] seems pretty authentic, or at least expressive (p. 321). Nonetheless, there are particular problems that may arise from using currere. For example, Grumet (1987) points towards the danger of positioning the researcher/listener of currere as an expert figure who is deemed responsible for the storyteller coming to consciousness. Grumet highlights how if her role, as a person listening to someone sharing their experiences, “certifies me, as an agent of the state to peer into what is hidden from public view, if it is my look that discovers and appraises” (p. 324), then the purpose of currere has been confused. Extending Grumet (1987), Kanu and Glor (2006) caution how using currere can be ‘costly.’ In other words, we can “gain insight into the harm caused to others, self, the immediate environment and the world” (p. 108) which can have consequences—we can feel
overcome with shame, guilt and sadness. Further, the method of currere “entails the possibility for risk to the individuals involved in the process, for example, the risk of self exposure” (p. 112). Nevertheless, Kanu and Glor remind us of the danger of not reflecting, and urge those involved in education work (professors, researchers, teachers and students) to examine personal narratives in order to “envision what is possible rather than merely accepting what is probable” (p. 107).

I have chosen to incorporate Pinar’s idea of curriculum as currere into my work because I have been interested in how a range of factors influence a person’s experiences as they initially become and remain a volunteer. As well, in my introductory chapter, I have considered how understandings and experiences in my life have shaped my decision to become involved in this research. In doing so, I support Pinar’s acknowledgement of the critical role that temporality plays in educational experience. The notion of temporality has also been articulated by John Dewey (1938) and Dwayne Huebner (1987). For Dewey (1938), “every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences” (p. 38). Like Dewey (1938), Huebner (1987) considers how change and continuity effect the way a person learns. For Huebner, “human life is present made of past and future brought into the moment (p. 328). As previously noted, my study builds on Rath’s (2007) findings by not only exploring rape crisis volunteers’ experiences during their time volunteering, but also examining their lived experiences before becoming volunteers. In other words, I am been interested in rape crisis volunteers’ experiences throughout various moments in time and how they attach meaning to their volunteer efforts at different stages. I have been curious about how past experiences have influenced volunteers’ decisions to become volunteers, the interactions they have with other volunteers, whether relationships have changed with family members and partners since volunteering, if there is a greater sense of concern for personal safety since volunteering, opinions about the material and activities in training, and in what ways, if any, volunteers feel they have an impact on survivors of violence. In order to focus on the multifaceted, changing identities of volunteers and to examine volunteers’ educative experiences this extensively, considering the concept of temporality—a central part of Pinar’s currere—has been highly significant.15

I am using the life history approach, which shares many similarities to Pinar’s method of currere and supports ideas raised by Dewey (1938) and Huebner (1987). Life history researchers, like those who draw from currere, “examine how individuals talk about and story their experiences and perceptions of the social contexts they inhabit…they explore possible influences

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15 As I have previously mentioned, the notion of temporality has been explored in research on rape crisis volunteers. I specifically refer to Thornton and Novak’s (2010) study when discussing how temporality connects to rape crisis volunteers’ experiences.
and explanations, interpretations and alternatives, silences and significances” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 1). Another similarity is that those who use a life history approach and the method of currere “are interested in locating the life story as it is operated in historical circumstances and wider worlds of power and meaning” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 62). As a result of using either approach, “personal knowledge in this scheme is constituted by the stories about experience we usually keep to ourselves” (Grumet, 1987, p. 322). This is relevant to my work because the experiences of rape crisis volunteers are often left unheard in both broader culture and myths are often perpetuated about rape survivors as being incapable of taking control over their lives after experiencing violence (Koss, 1987; MacKinnon, 1991; Mardorossian, 2002; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Further, because there are very few qualitative studies that focus on a broad range of experiences for rape crisis volunteers (Campbell & Wasco, 2005; Rath, 2007), my study responds to Pinar’s call to ‘make the unknown known’ in academic spheres. My study also supports Pinar’s (1994) insistence that the role of intellectuals is to represent knowledge that is generally excluded in the official discourse, and that institutions of learning, such as universities, must engage in making excluded topics central.

**Research Design**

This study is qualitative and, as previously mentioned, I use the life history approach in order to explore the experiences of rape crisis volunteers. I have chosen to use a qualitative analysis because an emphasis is placed on “establishing the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants” (Creswell, 2003, p. 20). Since exploring the meanings that participants attach to their experiences as rape crisis volunteers is related “to understanding not one, but multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 199), it is appropriate to describe these ideas in an open-ended manner. A qualitative approach is similarly an appropriate choice since I have conducted a study with the goal of obtaining an in-depth analysis from a small sample rather than generalizing from a larger group.

Using the life history approach requires researchers to guide participants as they recall moments from their past and tell their life story through detailed interviews that are not tightly structured. Life history researchers “examine how individuals talk about and story their experiences and perceptions of the social contexts they inhabit…they explore possible influences and explanations, interpretations and alternatives, silences and significances” (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 1).

Strengths of using this approach include helping researchers “understand change over time, to achieve not a static view of human experience but a dynamic view,” (Yow, 2005, p. 13).
As well, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) note how “a particular life story or group of life histories, could lead us to generalizing or maybe even building a theory of how people see their own lives, or of what is important to people” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, cited in Atkinson 1998, p. 73).

There is a close relationship between life stories and life histories, yet researchers who utilize each approach have different objectives. Robert Atkinson (1998) defines life stories as “a qualitative research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person’s entire life…it is a method of looking at life as a whole and as a way of carrying out an in depth study of individual lives (p. 3). Researchers who use the life history approach are interested in the previously mentioned characteristics of life story, but “are interested in locating the life story as it is operated in historical circumstances and wider worlds of power and meaning” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 62). Goodson and Sikes (2001) go on to note how life history researchers believe “history supplies both contexts in which to locate the story and frameworks for interpreting it” (p. 105). In other words, “in life story, the intention is to understand the person’s view and account of their life, the story they tell about their life…in life history, the intention is to understand the patterns of social relations and constructions in which the lives of women and men are embedded” (p 88). Further, “the life history is collaboratively constructed by a life storyteller and life story interviewer/researcher” (p. 62).

Adding to this, Valerie Raleigh Yow (2005) states how “a life history has been defined as an account by an individual of his or her life that is recorded in some way, by taping or writing, for another person who edits and presents the account” (p. 225). Due to the nature of having a researcher record and edit a person’s story, Yow (2005) supports the claim made by Goodson and Sikes (2001) that life history is a collaborative venture. However, unlike Atkinson (1998) who simply refers to the life history endeavor as being “an active process that is unavoidably collaborative” (p. 40), Yow problematizes the notion of ‘collaboration,’ and provides the following critique:

Collaboration does not necessarily make the two people, interviewer and narrator, feel equal…the interviewer has formal knowledge, an agenda, and the ability to represent the narrator to a wider audience. Other than that, the power relationship is affected by age, race, sex, status, ethnicity, gender and knowledge. (p. 156)

Nonetheless, Yow draws attention towards the fact that:

…power may be unequal…both interviewer and narrator are seen as having knowledge of the situation as well as deficits in understanding. Although the interviewer brings to the interviewing situation a perspective based on research in a discipline, the narrator brings intimate knowledge of his or her own culture and often a different perspective. (p. 1-2)
Goodson and Sikes (2001) extend this point by emphasizing how “informants actually have considerable power to influence whether the research takes place, not to mention their control over what is available as data” (p. 108). Yet they caution, “if life history is undertaken in order to ‘give voice’ to people who would not otherwise be heard, and if it is the life historian who is in the position of providing the channel to enable those voices to be heard, then there is an inevitable inequality…researchers will have specialist knowledge and expertise that informants do not possess” (p. 102).

Besides the notion of collaboration being central to the life history approach, recognizing multiple truths is significant. Atkinson (1998) points out how “it is important to keep in mind that no one single interpretation of a life is going to be the ‘correct’ one” (p. 73). This is partly because, as Goodson and Sikes (2001) explain, “alternative interpretations are always possible, depending on the perspective, values and motivations of the storyteller” (p. 42). More specifically, life histories are based on what a participant chooses to reveal about their life and what the participant wants the researcher to know (Atkinson, 1998, p. 8). Life histories are also affected by what is remembered by a participant. According to Yow (2005), the “ability to recall depends on the individual’s health, on the topic under consideration, on the way the question is asked, on the degree of pain (or pleasure) required to dredge the topic up, and on the willingness of the narrator to participate in the interview in a helpful way” (p. 20). Yow also states that “people choose memories important to them: they repeat them over the years as they seek to reinforce meanings in their lives” (p. 38).

In addition to these factors, the role of the researcher influences the uniqueness of a life history. This is because “by nature of the method, no two researchers will record a life story in a completely replicable way, and no two researchers will analyze the life story data in a replicable way either, because there are many ways of analyzing data” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 59). Further, life history researchers will analyze the data “within the context of their own frames of reference and the particular stories that they wish to tell via their use of what informants say” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 51).

Another feature related to the life history approach is the concept of empowerment. Goodson and Sikes (2001) mention that “it has been frequently claimed that life history research can be socially empowering and an emancipatory experience for informants, an experience that can change their lives for the better” (p. 99). As well, participating in life history research may help participants to understand “long-term patterns, issues, struggles, or dilemmas they are dealing with,” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 12). There are certainly opportunities for participants to feel empowered and to consider their struggles, since “the process of reflecting during an oral history
interview can be a way to understand anew some things that happened and a means of coming to accept the things that have hurt,” (Yow, 2005, p. 159). However, “given that life history research is primarily concerned with the ways in which all and any life events potentially influence and impact upon all experiences, perceptions, beliefs, values and so on, it inevitably deals with personal, and therefore, sensitive topics.” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 96). Therefore, it is important to be aware that “recalling different memories will arouse all kinds of feelings and emotions” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 35). For instance, “engaging in life history work can sometimes be painful in that informants may find themselves revisiting distressing events” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 109). Participants “may look back on certain parts of their lives with regret, and for some, it could even by a painful process (Atkinson, 1998, p. 26).

Due to the fact that many participants have shared experiences of trauma and violence throughout their life histories, as a researcher, I have taken Goodson and Sikes’ advice into consideration, and I have been emotionally sensitive and have exercised caution. Part of the way that I have exhibited sensitivity and caution has involved being “on the lookout for signals about when to ask another question or when to ask more about what has already been said, or was meant to be said, and when to go on to a new topic” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 33). In other words, my role as a life history interviewer has required what Goodson and Sikes (2001) refer to as the capacity of ‘listening beyond.’ Goodson and Sikes (2001) stress that:

Life history is an approach best suited to people who are able to listen attentively and beyond what is actually being said, and who can ask pertinent questions in a non-threatening manner. It demands the willingness to share one’s own experiences, if this seems appropriate, and, of supreme importance, it requires the researcher to be the sort of person that people want to talk to. (p. 20)

As well as the practical advantage of being able to learn from participants and gather information about an individual’s life, Atkinson (1998) states that listening attentively “gives people being listened to the feeling that they really matter, that what they have to say is important” (p. 34). Yow (2005) adds that “there is validation for the narrator that he or she is worth listening to” (p. 158). Goodson and Sikes (2001) extend this point by emphasizing how “knowing that someone is sufficiently interested in your life to hear your story and work it into a life history can be empowering in that it can enhance one’s sense of self worth (p. 101). This is particularly important when life history research “reveals the actions of individuals who have no one to witness their heroism or provide for future generations the evidence of their tragedy” (Yow, 2005, p. 14). As repeatedly suggested by participants in their life histories, it seems that becoming and remaining involved in rape crisis work fulfils participants’ needs of having their
experiences normalized, both by other volunteers during training, and by communicating with survivors of violence on the crisis line. Therefore, participating in life history research appears to be another way for participants to potentially feel validated, or may function as a way for participants to search for validation.

In addition to the principles of life history being a central methodological component of my research, aspects of feminist research methodology also compliment this approach. In a comparable way to researchers who use the life history approach, a central task for feminist researchers is to uncover stories of people’s history that remain untold. This is because excavating untold stories can allow historically oppressed people to reconstitute collective identities (Fine, 2006, p. 92). Goodson and Sikes (2001) echo this sentiment by stating how “feminist researchers have been particularly vociferous in their support of the approach [of life history], owing mainly to the way in which it can be used to give expression to, and celebration of, hidden or ‘silenced’ lives” (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993, cited in Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 10).

Feminist research is interested in exploring participants’ realities, and learning about participants’ lived experiences without essentializing or isolating these understandings. According to Reinharz (1992) characteristics of feminist research methodology include that it is transdisciplinary, aims to create social change, strives to represent human diversity, frequently includes the researcher as a person and attempts to develop special relations with the people studied (p. 240). In addition to these characteristics, Reinharz emphasizes that feminist research is “self reflexive, collaborative, attuned to process [and] oriented to social change” (p. 269).

Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg (2005), highlight that “the familiar faces of feminist theory reappear in concerns about research methods” (p. 2011). For them, “these methodological and epistemological issues include concerns about how to understand the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other structural features of societies; about inappropriate essentializing of women and men; about phenomena that are both socially constructed and fully ‘real’, and about the apparent impossibility of accurate interpretation, translation, and representation among radically different cultures, especially in the glare of today’s dangerous media politics” (p. 2011). Harding and Norberg (2005) go on to state how research that draws on standpoint theories “can turn disadvantaged social positions into powerful intellectual and political resources” (Fine, 1989, p. 2013).

Similar to Harding and Norberg (2005), Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (1992), explain that it has generally been agreed upon that “feminist theories reject the universal subject, theories of that subject and its other, and the social structures and theories that contain the masculine and
feminine subject” (p. 5). In doing so, Luke and Gore argue that feminist researchers often “focus on the deconstruction of taken-for-granted historical structures of socio-cultural organization within which various versions of the ‘individual’ have been inserted and, importantly, the language and theoretical structures with which the individual and the social have been written” (p. 5).

For Michelle Fine (1989), it is important for feminist researchers to understand the politics of gender, power, and the violence inside distinct contexts, including women’s diverse consciousness, intimate relationships, feminist agencies, the battered women’s movement, and the institutional structures that sustain violence against women (p. 552). Fine adds to previous discussions about feminist methods by emphasizing the need to specifically consider how violence affects women’s lives.

I have incorporated methodological components of feminist research into my study by including Harding and Norberg’s suggestion of considering multiple factors contributing to how each participant understands their experiences rather than presenting experiences in isolation. Some of the factors that have been included in participants’ life histories include their educational backgrounds, sexualities, affiliations to feminism, etc. I have also positioned myself as a researcher, and I describe my initial motivations in this project as a way to respond to Reinharz’s (1992) insistence that feminist research should “include the researcher as a person” (p. 240). In addition, my study reflects Fine’s (1989) assertion that feminist researchers should seek to understand violence in a variety of contexts, since I have encouraged participants to speak about the ways in which violence has affected their personal lives as well as their involvement in rape crisis work at their respective centres.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to recruit participants for this study, I have used non-random selection methods including purposive sampling. Since “purposive samples intentionally focus on the target group to the exclusion of other groups” (Smith, 1988, p. 85, cited in Merrigan & Huston, 2004, p. 43), I located five participants who volunteer at rape crisis centres across Ontario. In addition to this criteria, I interviewed participants who are eighteen years or older, and who did not require parental consent. Priority was given to the first five individuals who wished to participate in my study and who had considerable experience volunteering at rape crisis organizations. The reason I interviewed volunteers who have not immediately begun volunteering is because I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of how a volunteer attaches meaning to their volunteer work; recruiting volunteers on a first-come-first-serve basis could have potentially attracted less experienced
volunteers who may not have volunteered long enough to be able to share rich descriptions their volunteer experiences.

After gaining ethics approval from the board of ethics at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/The University of Toronto, in February 2012, I e-mailed the person who is in charge of internal relations at Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (ORCC) “was established in 1977 to act as a communication network for rape crisis/sexual assault centres. It provides information sharing related to policy, funding and lobbying for centres, and it acts as an advisory body to governments, institutions and community groups” (Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, n.d). According to the OCRCC’s website:

The OCRCC works from a feminist, anti-racist/anti-oppression framework. This framework supports increasing the accessibility to rape crisis and sexual assault centres for Aboriginal women, women of the African Diaspora, other racialized women, women living with disabilities, women in rural/remote communities and LGBITTQQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Intersex, Transsexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning people] identified women. (The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, n.d.)

Due to the OCRCC having regular correspondence with various rape crisis centres/sexual assault centres across Ontario, I felt that contacting the OCRCC would potentially be helpful with participant recruitment. In my email to the person who is in charge of internal relations at the OCRCC, I explained the nature of my research and expressed my hope that volunteers at various centres across Ontario would be interested in participating in my study. The person in charge of internal relations suggested that I create an electronic poster, explaining my research study, and inviting rape crisis volunteers to participate in my study. She forwarded my electronic poster to undisclosed recipients on her mailing list, including coordinators and volunteers at various rape crisis centres/sexual assault centres across Ontario. She indicated to all recipients that if they were interested in participating in my study, they should contact me directly. Within thirteen days of having my electronic poster distributed, a total of nine participants expressed interest.

I emailed each participant individually, in March 2012, asking them to provide me with information regarding how long they had volunteered for and where they were currently volunteering. After receiving information from all potential participants, I met with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Diane Gérin-Lajoie, in the month of March, in order to decide which potential participants were best suited for my study. After careful consideration and determining how to email all people who expressed interest in my study, I selected five volunteers, all of whom are

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16 Rape crisis centers are commonly referred to as “RCC’s” and sexual assault centres are commonly referred to as “SAC’s” by scholars, activists, and my participants.
women, and all of whom have been volunteering at their respective rape crisis centres for the longest duration of time. Each participant lives in different locations across Ontario, including London, North Bay, Kingston, the Lake Simcoe area, and Ottawa. I emailed everyone who expressed interest in my study, to thank them for expressing their interest, and I asked five volunteers, Francesca, Raven, Jordana, Kim and Stephanie, if they would be willing to meet with me, at a location of their choice, in the city that they lived, for a series of two interviews over the course of a two-day period in the following two months. I also asked each participant if they would be willing to speak with me on the telephone in order to make arrangements about meeting locations and to provide them with more information about my study.

I spoke with all participants on the telephone during the month of April, with the exception of Francesca, who requested that we correspond through email. All participants invited me to interview them in their homes, and suggested convenient dates for the interviews. I sent an email one week before each participant’s interviews, in order to confirm that we were meeting.

Due to the nature of using life history as a method, I conducted two in-depth interviews with each participant, each lasting roughly one and a half hours, with the exception of Stephanie, who I interviewed once for around two hours. These choices are consistent with life history theorists. Each interview focused on different ‘slices of participants’ lives: the first interview focused on participants’ experiences in childhood/adolescence, adulthood, and the duration leading up to volunteering; the second interview focused on participants’ experiences during their time as volunteers. The organization of my interviews and the way that they were divided into particular life stages (past, present and future) were also influenced by Pinar’s (1975) method of currere, where individuals are encouraged to reflect on their life experiences and undertake an autobiographical reflection of themselves. As previously mentioned, Pinar’s (1975) method of currere consists of four stages: the regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical, which involve sharing experiences of the past and reflecting on future possibilities. These stages were followed in my interview structure where I focused on participants’ childhoods, adulthoods and their experiences as rape crisis volunteers.

At the beginning of each interview I provided participants with an overview of my study and invited them to ask me any questions. I let them know that the life history interviews were loosely structured and were primarily organized around particular themes that derived from particular life stages (for example, “childhood”). I urged participants to share anything that was significant for them; I assured them that I was not solely interested in their experiences as rape crisis volunteers, and that I wanted to learn about their lives, more broadly. I found that participants ‘settled into’ the interview and shared more intimate details of their lives as they
became more comfortable with me, and as we established what Elliot Mishler (1986) refers to as “a circular process through which the meaning of a question and that of its answer are created in a discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other” (p. 53-54). In other words, like Mishler (1986), I found that although I asked participants’ the same kinds of questions, these questions carried different meanings and significance for each participant, and elicited different responses. And, as I participated in the life history interviews, I was often aware of how my silences, nods, pauses, nonverbal expressions and verbal recognitions garnered different kinds of responses and partially shaped what participants chose to share. I also learned that the way I structured a question had the potential to change a participants’ response.

As knowledge was constructed by both myself and participants throughout the interview process, I was highly attuned to the fact that there was a great deal of ambiguity operating at different moments, and that “meanings were neither singular or fixed…terms took on specific and contextually grounded meanings within and through the discourse as it developed and was shaped by speakers” (Mishler, 1986, p. 64). Part of this ‘ambiguity’ relates to the ways that my positionalities influenced the research encounter with participants. Amy L. Best (2003) emphasizes the connection between researchers occupying multiple positions of power “(for example, white/of colour, first world/third world, middle class/poor/man/woman, adult child) and the partiality of any interpretive claim made by the researcher” (p. 896). Best (2003) goes on to note how “complex social relations including but not limited to race, class, sexuality and gender are always relevant to the experiences that researchers have in the field and shape research encounters” (p. 899). Regarding my encounters with participants, the way that they viewed me as a White woman conducting an academic project on violence against women may have carried different significance at various points throughout the interview process and may have been quite different for each participant. However, as Best (2003) importantly highlights, in many cases participants may have not assumed that there was a ‘shared Whiteness’ or any shared experience based on their perceptions of my identity markers.

After completing all interviews with participants, I carefully transcribed each life history interview. As Mishler (1986) argues, “a transcript is only a partial representation of speech…each representation is also a transformation” (p. 48). Mishler (1986) suggests that particular components, including pitch, volume, and rate of speech, are difficult to represent in a text, along with facial expressions and body movements. I experienced the challenge of representing participants’ tones when they were describing particular aspects of their lives and often felt that
the best way to mark these nuances was to leave the particular excerpt within its context when I presented the data in my write-up of findings.

After transcribing each life history interview, I sent the transcripts back to all participants (except for Kim who requested for me not to send her a copy of her life history interview). The purpose of having participants read their life history interviews was to make any corrections (in terms of dates, times, events) and to also give participants control over their narratives. This relates back to the goals of feminist standpoint theory, which is to provide marginalized groups with the tools and power to share their own standpoints and stories. I was aware that the process of recording participants’ life histories from digital tape cassette to the written word was a process of re-construction that ultimately gave me the power to re-tell participants’ lives and place an emphasis on particular aspects. Providing participants with the opportunity to read their life histories was an attempt to shift the balance of power, although I was fully aware that power would fluctuate throughout the entire duration of the research process. With the exception of Jordana, who requested that I omit a few details about her experiences working with male offenders, the other participants did not ask for any changes to be made to their life histories.

Once I finished corresponding with participants about the transcripts, I began my data analysis. Data analysis, which involves making sense of the information supplied by participants (Creswell, 2003, p. 190), consisted of the following steps outlined by Creswell (2003): “preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data” (p. 190). More specifically, after transcribing all tape-recorded interviews I began “to make connections and links which…provided insights for the development of concepts” (Gray, 2003, p. 149). In order to develop concepts, I took part in coding, which consists of “organizing the material into ‘chunks,’ segmenting sentences into categories, and labeling those categories with a term” (Creswell, 2003, p. 192). Coding the data allowed me to identify key themes and patterns (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26) and enabled me to interpret my data in a systematic way. Throughout the coding process, I began to notice similarities and differences among participants, which were eventually analyzed and presented as themes. The process of deciding what constituted a theme or subtheme was shaped through my lens, as well as through the lenses of participants. I consistently asked for clarification throughout the life history interview when I felt that particular themes were emerging, and I relied on literature that focused on rape crisis volunteers for guidance and to give me an idea of particular themes that would potentially be significant. That being said, since I worked with a small sample of participants, I did not disregard particular themes if they only surfaced in one participants’ life history. Instead, if I
found a particular theme surfacing throughout an interview, I considered it as a potential theme. Nonetheless, all of the themes that I chose to analyze ended up emerging in at least two life histories (quite often, more than two).

It is important to note that like the life history interviews, where my positionalities shaped the kind of exchanges I had with participants, my positionalities have also influenced my interpretation of the data. Similar to the ways in which each participants’ life histories are shaped by their own identity markers, my representation of their life histories are shaped through my identity markers as a White, middle class woman who is conducting research within an academic institution. An implication behind this can be summed up by Best (2003) who asks: “on what grounds can researchers authorize themselves to construct accounts of groups who often sit in positions subordinate to our own?” (p. 896). This means that occupying multiple positions of privilege and marginalization, however partial they may have be at times (both within and outside the life history interviews), have influenced my interpretations and have shaped the knowledge that I have co-constructed with participants.

In the upcoming chapter I will present the life histories of my five participants: Francesca, Raven, Jordana, Kim and Stephanie. Following this, I will discuss key themes and patterns, and explain how my study contributes to existing scholarship.
CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANTS’ STORIES

Francesca’s Story

Experiences Throughout Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood

Francesca is a Caucasian woman in her twenties, who identifies as a lesbian. Francesca was born in Edmonton. Her parents got divorced when she was less than one years old and her mother remarried a man named Rick when Francesca was about five years old. Francesca spent the first nine years of her childhood living in Edmonton with her two younger half brothers, Daniel and Leo, as well as her younger half sister, Rosie, who share the same mother as Francesca and whose father is Rick. Francesca’s biological father lives in Edmonton and he is remarried. Francesca has two other half brothers who live with her biological father and stepmother. Francesca suffers from borderline personality disorder and believes her tumultuous childhood has contributed to her getting this disorder. More specifically, Francesca believes that when she was a child nobody taught her how to regulate her emotions and that this was part of what caused her to get borderline personality disorder.

Commenting on her childhood, Francesca says, “I hate to be negative, but frankly, a lot of my childhood was quite negative.” However, Francesca points out that when she lived in Edmonton, “things weren’t so bad.” While living in Edmonton, Francesca’s stepfather was working on his Masters degree and when Francesca was nine, Francesca’s mother and stepfather moved to Brooklyn, New York. Francesca says the reason her family moved to Manhattan is because her stepfather could not find work and he was eventually offered a job on Wall Street, in New York. Francesca lived in New York until she was eighteen years old with Daniel, Leo and Rosie. Francesca attended school in Manhattan, and commuted from Brooklyn. When Francesca attended school in New York she was bullied a lot. Commenting on this, Francesca says:

Partly, it was an immigrant thing. You wouldn’t think emigrating from Canada to the U.S would be very difficult but people made fun of my accent. I don’t have one much now but my mother is actually British so I had more of an accent at that point. I suppose I had some friends.

Francesca was also teased about being fat. Her parents restricted how much food she could have and they would tell her that she ate too much. Children at school would tease Francesca for being over-weight, when she was actually a healthy weight.

17 Francesca has asked for her name to be used. All other names have been changed to protect the identity of individuals mentioned.
Because Francesca’s father was living in Edmonton, Francesca remembers being shuttled back and forth a lot as a child, about four or five times a year. Francesca would take the plane by herself between the ages of nine and fifteen. After that, she stopped visiting her father in Edmonton as much because of the difficulty of the constant travelling.

Francesca notes how 9/11 happened a few years after she moved to New York and she developed a terrible phobia of planes after that which was very unfortunate because of all of the travelling back and forth four times a year. Describing what it was like being in New York during this time, Francesca says that it was very frightening. She elaborates:

It was pretty terrible, actually. I was in middle school at the time… I went to school in upper Manhattan and we noticed there was a lot of smoke and nobody really knew what was happening, like maybe there had been a fire, or something like that. The assistant principal came into our class and she said there had been an accident, somebody had hit a building with a plane, and at first we thought that maybe it was a small plane because people could drive those little one person planes, something like that, and so they [the staff at school] activated their emergency protocol where they call everybody’s emergency contacts and try to find people to come and get everybody, so one of my mom’s friends came to get me… eventually, we got home. The trains, of course, weren’t working… it was raining paper at that point which is one of the more surreal things because, of course, the towers, they were buildings that had a lot of business offices, a lot of records and papers, so the sky was grey, very opaque. It was hard to see and there were burned papers and ashes raining out of the sky. People went out into the street and sort of gathered them up in the sense that it was something historical and people went out on the street and they were catching the papers and after that people started putting up posters of the people who were missing. It was very odd for so many people to go missing at once— there almost wasn’t enough room for the posters. They were papered on top of each other, overlapping. Every wall, every street post, every sign, [they were] just everywhere, these papers and nobody took them down again because you aren’t going to go and take them all down and so they stayed there for months and months and there were even some up seven or eight months down the line. They just slowly peeled away over time. They would have the person’s name and identifying marks in case they turned up dead and what floor they worked on. You would see a lot of them were on the one hundred and third floor and you knew they probably weren’t coming home.

Francesca’s mother was a stay-at-home mom at that point and her stepfather worked in Manhattan. Francesca’s siblings do not remember 9/11 as vividly as Francesca since they were much younger than her. She says, “9/11 was something we never talked about afterwards. We didn’t talk about much in my family.”

Commenting on her relationship with her father, Francesca explains that once she moved to New York, they became less close. They used to speak on the telephone quite a bit in the early years, but then, as time went on, they communicated less frequently and only saw each other four weeks over the year. Eventually, Francesca’s father remarried and had more children. Francesca
was not very close with her stepmother, either, and felt that her stepmother resented her. As explained by Francesca:

My father has always been a little bit off. My mother insists that he cheated on her. He insists that he didn’t, but I kind of think he did. When I was a kid he had this friend who was a woman and my stepmother wasn’t supposed to know that he was going to see her so he would pretend that he was taking me somewhere and he would go and see her and I would have to lie and tell my stepmother that we had been somewhere else. I wasn’t a very good liar as a child, unfortunately, so a lot of the time I would spill the beans! That usually didn’t end very well.

According to Francesca, the relationships that she had with her mother and stepfather were the most dysfunctional. Francesca provides details:

My mother… I guess, the kindest way of putting it is sometimes a parent and a child are just not temperamentally matched very well and I was a very anxious, fearful child. I had a lot of trouble regulating my emotions. My mother didn’t really know how to handle me. At that point we were living in a really violent situation. My stepfather used to beat my siblings. He was very aggressive with my mother as well. It was a very stressful relationship for all of us. He was also very bad towards me so I think all of us living in that situation together was sort of everyone for themselves, you know, nobody really had anything left for anybody else. We all just kind of survived.

Elaborating on this, Francesca says that when she was a younger child, her stepfather acted loving towards her and was a father figure to her in a lot of ways. When Francesca turned twelve or thirteen, her stepfather took a hatred towards her. Francesca explains that she never understood why this happened, although her therapist told her that perhaps her stepfather was a narcissist and when Francesca reached an age where she started to become her own person, he could not tolerate it and that was why he was violent. Francesca has wondered if part of the reason why he acted violently towards her and her siblings was because he was not happy with his job. She has also considered if he is just a violent person. Francesca’s mother has told her that her stepfather experienced trauma when he was a child, and Francesca has thought that this may have contributed to his behaviour. However, she is quick to point out that her father also had a very abusive childhood, but her stepfather “is a real piece of work.”

Commenting more specifically on her stepfathers’ actions, Francesca says that he was a very angry person, but that he could also be very funny and good with kids. At times he would play with Francesca’s siblings but then all of a sudden, “it was just like a switch when off in his head.” Francesca notes how “things that normal children do would upset him.” If she did the dishes and left a spot on the dishes, he would start telling her that she was lazy, stupid and fat. He would often tell her that she had done things on purpose that she had not done on purpose which
was very confusing for her. He felt that if she swept the floor and missed a piece of dirt that she was doing it deliberately to defy him, which would make him very angry, and he would tell her that. Then, Francesca would deny it because she had not done it on purpose, and he would become angry with her and accuse her of lying to him. Francesca explains that she could either agree with him, and say that she was lying when she was not lying, or she could continue to insist that she was not lying which made everything worse.

Francesca describes how her stepfather would stop talking to her for days. She would say something to him and he would stare at her with a look of hatred on his face and pretend that she had not said anything; according to Francesca, this was his favourite game when she was a teenager, although he changed his methods over the years. As a result of her stepfathers’ abuse, Francesca would hide in her room and cry. When Francesca’s mother would ask her what was going on, Francesca would tell her mother that her stepfather hated her and was mean to her. She would also tell her mother that she hated living with him and that she was depressed. Francesca’s mother would tell her that she should give him credit for taking her in because she is not his biological child. Francesca’s mother also frequently blamed Francesca for her abuse and accused Francesca of trying to ruin her marriage. When Francesca’s mother confronted her stepfather about abusing Francesca, he would yell at her mother. After that, Francesca’s mother told her that she was trying to get between them and Francesca gave up.

Francesca’s stepfather often turned her and her siblings against each other. His favourite child was Francesca’s younger sister, and Francesca says that he never hit her and was never cruel to her. Francesca’s stepfather would always tell everyone that her sister was his favourite—that she was special and that she was the only one who was worth anything. He would buy her presents, and this would make Francesca and her siblings jealous. Besides the exception of Francesca’s sister, all of Francesca’s other siblings experienced abuse from her stepfather—he was physically abusive towards Francesca’s brothers and verbally abusive towards Francesca. Francesca says that she is not sure why her stepfather did not hit her and her sister, and whether it was because he did not hit girls, or if there was some protective factor associated with Francesca not being his child. Francesca reflects on a particular time when her family was on my vacation and her stepfather acted abusive towards her youngest brother:

My little brother Leo, my youngest brother, he was so young, he would be one or two, and my mother was changing his diaper and he was kind of acting out, he was messing around, and my stepfather just came storming in the room and I knew he was going to beat him and we all froze and for some reason that satisfied him, that one time, usually it didn’t, but this one time, somehow we all froze and that satisfied him, so he walked away and my little brother said I’m not afraid of you and my stepfather came running back into the room picked him up by his head, dangled him off the floor and started beating him. I
thought to myself, so does this mean that it’s not okay to not be afraid of your parents, is that what the rule here is? Is that what gets you beaten, not being afraid of our parents? The rules were odd and they changed frequently. For the most part, my little brother, Daniel, the one who was older, there was some suspicion for a long time that he had ADD [attention deficit disorder] or OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder]. He had a very difficult time completing tasks, things like his homework, staying focused to do his chores, so that got him beaten a lot. Of course, he was also told he was lazy and things like that. It’s difficult to understand why he beat the others and not me and why there were certain cruel things he did to me and not to the others. It’s hard to understand. I’m not certain what happened except that those of us who were older got it worse.

Francesca has experienced guilt as an adult for being unable to defend her siblings against her stepfathers’ abuse, particularly since she is the oldest child. Francesca says that it is difficult for her when she is working18 with people, because this seems to be a common story among survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Francesca notes how she has talked to a lot of survivors who have managed to protect their siblings, often by seducing or attracting their abuser to themselves, and agreeing that they would endure the abuse so that their siblings did not have to. Francesca explains how she often tried to keep her siblings quiet in order to not provoke her stepfather, but because they were so young, they could not understand. Francesca goes on to explain how nobody could stop her stepfather from doing the things that he did, but that she had more of an awareness of the things that triggered her stepfather than her younger siblings. As a result of watching out for her siblings, Francesca’s stepfather accused her of being uppity and arrogant. Commenting on this, Francesca says, “I mean I was a kid; I was a teenager for god sake, just trying to live my life. I don’t think I was a particularly bad child. In fact, on the whole, I was a very good child.”

Francesca points out how a lot of her friends, and many of her mother’s friends were frightened of her stepfather. Years later, Francesca learned that some of her mother’s friends suspected that abuse was happening, but they never confronted anyone or did anything about it. Expanding on this, Francesca says:

It’s strange how people say this to me…that somehow they knew they were supposed to keep their abuse a secret. I mean, there are abusers who tell you that you can’t tell anybody about this, that this is a secret, but even when the person never tells you…I remember very clearly there were times when I was thinking about explicitly saying to someone that I was in trouble, that I needed help, but there was a part of me that knew that I wasn’t allowed to tell, strangely somehow.

Francesca did not really speak to her father about the abuse. She tried to tell him once but he told her not to gossip, so after that she gave up. Francesca says, “you would think he would

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18 Francesca uses the term ‘working’ and ‘volunteering’ interchangeably.
have realized there was something wrong with me, but he didn’t seem to.” Francesca often tried to get people to help her. She was very depressed and suicidal as a child, for most of the time. However, Francesca does not think that she ‘had it in her to act out.’ Francesca extends her thoughts:

Even though I was in bad shape—probably in worse shape than kids smoking pot and dropping out of school who were visibly in enough trouble to eventually get some help—I never really got any, I just kind of stumbled through and there were times when I would covertly hint to people that perhaps I needed some help. There were teachers at school, doctors that I thought maybe I could trust but none of them really picked up on my cues. I just spent most of my teenage years in kind of a dissociative fog, really. You just put one foot in front of the other.

Francesca says that even though she wanted to kill herself most of the time, she enjoyed schoolwork and there were certain redeeming features in her life. Francesca learned to find parental figures where she could, and they were primarily teachers. Reflecting on this, Francesca says, “…you find love where you can. If your parents don’t love you, then you sort of find little bits and pieces, and of course my teachers were always proud of me. I was probably one of the smartest students.” Adding to this, Francesca says, “school was kind of all I had. Everybody has something that keeps them from going completely twisty. My little brother smokes pot; I had school…being good in school, it was something that I had, something that made my life not so bad.” Some of Francesca’s teachers boosted her confidence and Francesca remembers how it gave her strength to have people in her life who did not think that she was a failure since, according to Francesca, “most of my life revolved around people telling me I was crap.”

Besides her teachers offering support, Francesca points out that there were particular doctors who were helpful. Francesca found some of her doctors to be comforting and soothing. Francesca drew on these experiences during other difficult times in her life and these experiences have influenced her decision to apply to medical school. Francesca specifically states “the memory of someone trying to soothe me, it was probably one of the things that made me not actually kill myself.”

Francesca’s best friend in high school was also a source of support, although Francesca does not state whether she confided in her friend about the abuse. Francesca and her friend would often go to a Taco Bell, near their high school, and they became friends with the Taco Bell employees. Francesca explains how they would go there for hours and not go home because neither one of them liked their parents, so they “would just really go anywhere else, anywhere that wasn’t home” When Francesca was younger, she would go to her friend’s houses because a lot of her friends were frightened of her stepfather and did not want to go to Francesca’s house.
Once Francesca was nearing the end of completing high school, she began thinking about where to apply for university. At this point, Francesca was eighteen years old, and she says, “I always had this idea in my head that I was going to get the hell out.” During this time, Francesca says:

Things were really bad then. Things were terrible. I just really needed to get out of there. I mean in some ways I felt guilty about leaving my siblings behind, especially Daniel. I think a lot of it fell on me and him but because there were two of us, there was some protection there because we were together, so of course part of me felt quite guilty leaving him there. There were certainly times when I considered calling social services, but I didn’t and, of course, I hated my younger sister because she was the favourite…in some ways I was sad to leave my mother…despite everything that went on, I did love her…she continually picked everyone else in my family over me I was always at the bottom of her list, but I was on her list…but mostly I just needed to be gone…

Francesca was accepted into the Arts and Science program at McGill University and she doubled majored in English literature and Physiology. Francesca’s father encouraged her to attend McGill because he is a professor at the University of Alberta and knew professors at McGill. Francesca decided to attend McGill in order to please her father and because she was offered a substantial scholarship. Francesca also won other awards that provided sources of funding, but since she was mostly paying for her own university education, the scholarship that she won at McGill was a significant factor that shaped her decision to attend McGill.

Roughly a month after Francesca moved to Montreal and began university, she was mugged. Francesca explains how she never goes out alone, late at night, but that particular night, she decided to visit a friend and walk home from her friends’ house around two o’clock in the morning. Her friend lived in a residence hall on the other end of the city. He was drinking, and Francesca did not feel comfortable staying overnight at his home. She had her first exam the following week and wanted to study. While Francesca was walking, a group of men grabbed her from behind and hit her. They took her bag and she did not have a way of getting home after that, so she walked home. It was quite a long way and she walked back to her residence crying. When Francesca got back to her residence, she woke up her floor fellows and told them what happened. They called the police. Once the police arrived, they recorded Francesca’s story but told her that there was not a lot that could be done because Francesca did not see the faces of the men who mugged her since they were wearing hoods, and would not be able to identify them. Shortly after this incident, Francesca developed post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]. She explains:

I had so many traumas in my life but I was so dissociated that I didn’t develop PTSD and then there is this one more thing and all of a sudden everything just rose up to bite me in the ass and I developed a really bad case of PTSD. I wasn’t sleeping, I wasn’t eating,
and I was having these terrible nightmares. I couldn’t leave the house. I developed a very unfortunate startle reflex. I still actually startle sometimes in a very exaggerated way when someone comes up behind me. It’s embarrassing because people think I’m joking or faking it but actually I have that exaggerated startle. I’ve had it since I got mugged and it’s been five years now.

Although this was a traumatic experience, Francesca feels that in some ways it was positive that it happened because it forced her to get help. At this point, Francesca could not put off getting help anymore because she was completely non-functional. Francesca was mugged in October, and struggled through November and December. In December, Francesca went home for Christmas and her mother told her that she was divorcing her stepfather. Thinking back to what it was like at this time, Francesca says that part of her was relieved and part of her was afraid, because at least if her mother was around, and if someone was going to wind up grievously injured, her mother could potentially call the police. Francesca did not like to think of her siblings as being completely alone with her stepfather, which would happen if her mother and stepfather decided to separate. Francesca remembers it being a very sad Christmas. She says that her stepfather worked on Wall Street and had a lot of money. He bought very expensive presents for all of her siblings, except he did not buy Francesca or her mother anything. Francesca felt that at times, her stepfather conflated her with her mother and that was potentially why he hated her so much. She notes how her mother bought her stepfather two presents and that it was pathetic and terrible. She says, “the whole thing was a shit storm.”

When Francesca returned to Montreal after Christmas, she thought “I’m either going to kill myself or I’m going to find somebody who can help me. So I decided to go to therapy.” Francesca describes attending therapy for the first time as being awful because she was convinced that she didn’t have any ‘real problems.’ Reflecting on therapy, Francesca explains that she was convinced that anybody who she saw would think that she was fat, stupid, lazy, ugly and worthless because that is what her parents thought about her. Francesca says that she could not comprehend what it would be like for someone to take her emotions seriously or to support her. During therapy, Francesca mostly cried and talked about how unhappy she was with her weight. Nonetheless, Francesca notes how she discussed some important issues related to self-esteem and food, but she hid a lot of her feelings and remained depressed.

That summer, Francesca moved back to New York and spent the summer working at a hospital where she volunteered as a teenager and had enjoyed. Although Francesca mostly took care of paperwork during the summer, when she volunteered at the hospital as a teen, she would escort people around the hospital, and a lot of the time patients were going through painful treatments. Francesca says that many people were very lonely and she would sit with them and
talk to them. While Francesca was living at home during this time, her mother and stepfather were trying to work on their relationship. Francesca’s stepfather kept moving in and moving out, and Francesca still wanted to kill herself constantly. Francesca says, “when I think about the percentage of the first twenty years of my life I spent wanting to kill myself, it kind of awes me that I’m still alive.” During this time, Francesca tried to get help. She went to a few drop-in counseling centre’s where she was able to reconnect with some of her old high school friends and says that being able to socialize with old friends was not bad. In addition to feeling suicidal, Francesca developed an anxiety problem. Francesca says, “it’s hard not to have horrible social anxiety when everybody in your life has been telling you you’re worthless. My job was very difficult and I was crying all the time, like hiding in the corner.”

When Francesca moved back to Montreal in the fall, she was starting her second year of university and she became involved in the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual] community. Francesca volunteered on the LGBT support line at McGill and met her girlfriend during training, although they were not dating at this time. Speaking about her volunteer work with the LGBT community, Francesca says:

The thing about this volunteer work and the volunteer work I do now is that it tends to attract people who are in some ways messed up. I mean that in the nicest way possible. A lot of people with trauma, a lot of rape survivors, a lot of child abuse survivors, and a lot of people with messed up pasts. In some ways it was a time of my life when I was just starting to grapple with the trauma that I had experienced and it was nice for me to be with these people and that’s the thing about activist communities, in some ways I didn’t fit in, because a lot of them identified as queer and other sexualities and I have always been a lesbian and I’m not very gender neutral. I’m just kind of pretty normal looking. But, you know, that community can also be accepting of peoples’ pasts so it can be a place that is a little safer to talk about things that are not so pretty. So being part of that community was a help to me…

Francesca also began seeing another psychiatrist, Dr. Roberts, who she saw throughout her time at McGill. At this point they began to revisit a lot of the trauma that Francesca had faced throughout her life. Francesca became even more depressed, to the point where she could not be in school anymore. She dropped some of her classes and deferred a lot of her work because of her depression. She was having her medications adjusted ‘left and right’ and while she was figuring out which medications were best for her, she gained about fifty points. Although she has lost most of the weight, Francesca notes that it was and continues to be difficult for her to feel good about her body. Around this time, Francesca started to lose touch with a lot of her friends. She explains:

I had made some friends in my first year but they were mostly bailing because they just couldn’t deal with it which, you know in retrospect, I was very untreated and with untreated borderlines it’s difficult to keep friends with untreated BPD [Borderline
Personality Disorder] and looking back, there were things I could have done differently. I think it would have been nice if my friends had stuck around but looking back I recognize that I didn’t really know how to handle myself.

During this time, Francesca joined a web forum for people with various mental health issues. She discovered the online forum when she was researching the side effects of a medication that Dr. Roberts had recently prescribed. She stumbled upon the forum and found that it was a good fit for her. Francesca explains how people find the forum through Google searches and tend to ask a lot of questions because they often do not have anyone offline to talk to about their mental illnesses. Francesca continues to spend a lot of time participating in this forum and she currently moderates discussions on the forum and often ‘hangs out’ in the chat room. She also blogs about her experiences in medical school and therapy on the forum. All of the people on the forum have mental illnesses but do not always talk about their mental illnesses; sometimes they ‘shoot the breeze’ and have casual conversation. However, other times people visit the forum when they are in crisis—they may be suicidal or they may be having trouble with cutting. When this happens, Francesca and other moderators with training in crisis work provide on-the-spot crisis intervention. Francesca handles a lot of the medically oriented questions because of her training and says that she is “one of the more touchy-feely moderators but some of the other moderators are hard asses.” In total, there are about fifteen moderators and there are about seven or eight active moderators who Francesca knows well. Francesca explains how the forum has provided a sense of community for her:

The web forum’s mission is to be a place where people who have been banned from other places for being, like, too screwed up can go. It’s actually something that has been a big part of my adult life because I have had a hard time making friends and I still have a hard time making friends. It’s something I’m still working hard on in therapy. My therapist says I have a lot of trust issues and, by all accounts, I come by them honestly. It’s been difficult for me to make friends. I’m doing better now, though. There are a lot of steps I’ve made that I wouldn’t have been able to make even last year. Most of the time I have substituted this web forum for social relationships. There are a lot of people I’ve known there who I know for a long time.

Francesca explains how her relationship with Dr. Roberts has influenced the way her relationships developed online:

They people on the forum thought Dr. Roberts was bad news, but I, of course, having BPD, once you are attached to someone not even with a crowbar is somebody going to pry you off… I wouldn’t even consider leaving her and for a long time people were very frustrated with me because it seemed like maybe I wasn’t getting better fast enough. That’s one thing that I think I try to really understand in my work because a lot of people get frustrated working with people with trauma who seem to sort of get a little better and
then relapse and people who quit treatment multiple times. I always remember that I think people have to heal in their own time and in their own way. I think that’s important.

In addition to facilitating discussions on the online forum, attending therapy and volunteering on the LGBT support line, Francesca decided to volunteer at the sexual assault centre (SAC) on campus, which was run by university students, at McGill. Francesca says “we didn’t have any money, we didn’t have any grown ups, we just ran support groups.” Francesca decided to train for the crisis line and passed training even though training was a very selective and intense process. Training consisted of forty hours of lectures and workshops, as well as role-plays. The material focused on crisis, suicide and child abuse.

Francesca also explains that volunteering at the rape crisis centre “was very normal” for her. She says:

Volunteering at the rape crisis centre really helped me understand more. I mean, everybody’s trauma is different and sexual assault is different from non-sexual assault and child abuse. All of these things are different, but during the training, I think I did learn a lot about trauma and I think that helped me and I was talking about it in therapy and finally started to feel like I had some hope of being better and probably around that time I was diagnosed with BPD, which is kind of an unfortunate diagnosis. There’s a lot of stigma attached to it. If you really understand what it is and where it comes from a lot of things start to make sense. So that was useful. I don’t even remember what else I was doing. My life has always been consumed with school and with volunteering.

After Francesca’s second year of university she felt that her medication had begun working and she started to have her “first periods of not being depressed which was pretty incredible.” However, Francesca still had a lot of episodes. She says:

I had a bad one in the spring, I had some in the fall, and there were sort of periods in between where I was screwing up my medications but there were times I wasn’t depressed and I started to feel like I was getting somewhere in therapy… I started to feel more in control of my life… I think back at that time, I was going to school, going to therapy and I was volunteering. I mean, I think that was my life. I didn’t do much else.

Francesca was living with her girlfriend by her final year in university and continuing therapy. She also decided to apply to medical school and was flying to different parts of Canada for interviews. Francesca explains that when she was in high school, she took courses that were geared toward the arts. It was not until university that she decided to take science courses, and Francesca thinks that she took science courses because she wanted to become a doctor. Francesca wanted to become a doctor because she had a lot of doctors in her life who were very influential, and because she was involved in volunteer work at a hospital when she was younger. Another
reason Francesca decided to pursue a career in the medical profession is because she liked the science courses that she took in university so it “seemed like a good fit.”

During this time, Dr. Roberts was pregnant and had arranged to go on maternity leave about a month before Francesca was going to find out if she was accepted to medical school. Francesca says she was very upset because people with BPD do not cope well when they are left. Eventually, Francesca found out that she was accepted to medical school and decided to go to The University of Western Ontario. She says “it was exciting but it was a very difficult time because my therapist had just gone on maternity leave and I was not doing very well with that, but then I got into medical school so that was helpful because it made me feel more excited about the future.”

Francesca has found medical school exciting and feels that she has found a good therapist in London. Francesca says that she has been depression-free for at least a few months and that her episodes have been much milder this year. Francesca says that people on the web forum, where she is a facilitator, are all very proud of her because she is the medical student. They supported her when she was on the forum while waiting to find out about medical school acceptances, and they consider her their success story now because she is much healthier. Francesca continues to date her girlfriend who she met when she was a student, at McGill. Her girlfriend currently lives in Montreal but is moving to live with Francesca, in a few months. Francesca says that having a long distance relationship is rough and difficult because Francesca’s girlfriend struggles with her own anxiety issues. Francesca explains that it is hard not having her girlfriend in London to support her, and it is also hard for Francesca’s girlfriend to not have Francesca in Montreal for support.

Francesca’s mother is living in New York with her siblings, along with her stepfather. Francesca’s mother and stepfather are currently divorced and sometimes her stepfather pays child support and watches her siblings, and sometimes he does not. For a long time Francesca was worried about her stepfather having custody of her siblings and she considered calling social services at several points. There was a time when Dr. Roberts wanted to call social services, which created conflicts with Francesca. Francesca’s siblings have a different last name than her, so Dr. Roberts could not call social services without Francesca giving her the additional information and Francesca refused to provide the information. At this point, Francesca’s stepfather does not watch her siblings very often and Francesca thinks that they are safe. She talks to her mother but does not have contact with her stepfather. For a long time Francesca had a difficult relationship with her mother and could handle being in the same room with her because she was very angry. However, with time, Francesca says that she has come to understand, that in
some ways, her stepfather was also abusing her mother. Coming to this realization has helped Francesca to feel kinder towards her mother. That being said, Francesca is still very angry that her mother did not protect her and that she blamed her for what happened. Nonetheless, Francesca has noticed that since her stepfather and mother have been divorced, her mother has become a better parent. Francesca has also noticed that a lot of the things that she did not give Francesca, she is now able to provide for her younger siblings. In some ways this makes Francesca very angry and jealous because she has had to ‘make her way’ on her own. Francesca says that she does not know if she has forgiven her mother, but she has a relationship with her now that she is fairly happy with.

In terms of Francesca’s relationship with her siblings and other family members, Francesca does not feel the hatefulness for her younger sister that she has felt for a long time, but because of the way her stepfather used to favour her sister, they have never had a close relationship. Francesca does not comment on her relationship with her youngest brother, but notes that he is still quite young. Francesca mentions that she has a relationship with her other brother, Daniel, and says that he has had a lot of psychiatric problems in the past few years. He is going to begin his undergraduate degree at McGill in the fall and Francesca thinks that it will be a good experience for him. Francesca explains that sometimes they talk and that she has let Daniel know that she has also had difficulties, and if he needs her or if he wants to talk about anything she is there for him. Francesca sees her father every so often and can tolerate him, but they are not particularly close. Francesca talks to her stepmother on occasion.

Overall, Francesca says “things have been getting better for me as an adult.” She adds, “my life is worth living which is something I couldn’t say for years and years. Now I can think I can say that my life is worth living.”

**Experiences volunteering**

As previously mentioned, Francesca began volunteering at a sexual assault centre on campus when she was completing her undergraduate degree, at McGill University. According to Francesca, “it was easier to get involved in that kind of work in some ways because it was just there…I don’t really know how I wound up volunteering where I did as opposed to anything else. I sort of fell into it, I guess.” Although Francesca is not really sure what caused her to become involved with the crisis line, she says that she thinks it was because of the work that she was involved in on the LGBT support line. Francesca elaborates:

I was kind of trying to transition into more, sort of, crisis work. I felt I would be more comfortable in a similar setting and…it kind of overlapped a bit. I didn’t find the work to
be as interesting on the LGBTQ support line. I think as time went on, being LGBTQ became less important to me. I mean, for a long time, of course, when I was a teenager, I first suspected I might be gay when I was sixteen or seventeen. I had a boyfriend at one point but it was really difficult for me to be sexual with him because I was gay. So we had some very awkward sexual encounters. Eventually he broke up with me because I wouldn’t have sex with him. I thought I might be gay.

Besides her involvement in the LGBT community leading to her participation in rape crisis work, Francesca highlights that she is a Unitarian Universalist. Francesca does not describe herself as being an overly religious person. However, she explains that Unitarians believe that the best way to praise god, or whoever one believes god to be, is to give service. She goes on to explain that she has always felt a certain calling towards “this kind” of volunteer work and believes that it has been something that she has felt she should be doing in her life. Francesca continues to explain:

It’s difficult to really understand why I chose it…I’ve always liked working with people one on one…my therapist says that perhaps the reason I find the work comfortable is because it’s easier for me to understand people who are distraught and upset or people who are traumatized or suffering. In a lot of ways their reactions make more sense to me, so in some ways it’s more of a jump for me to go out and live in the world than it is for me to do this work because it’s more surprising to be out in the world and more dissonant with what I understand than to be working with those who have survived horrible traumas.

Reflecting on what it was like when she was involved at her rape crisis centre in Montreal, Francesca states that it was very ‘stealth.’ She believes that because it was a small community, people may have been more reluctant to call and seek help. Although Francesca’s family and friends were aware that she was involved in rape crisis work, she did not talk about it with them. At her current SAC (sexual assault centre), Francesca believes that it is less tight knit. Unlike her current SAC, Francesca says that everyone supported each other at her SAC in Montreal and she remembers talking with other volunteers and sharing stories more than with anyone outside the centre. Francesca felt a sense of support while she was working with other volunteers in Montreal. She says:

That’s something I really miss in my current SAC. At the SAC where I worked in Quebec, I think part of the reason we were so close was because we were mostly all students. I mean, it wasn’t closed to people who were non-students but it was very much students and we were very much in the same area of life and we never did anything alone. Here, when I’m on call, we take calls from home and so there’s nobody with me and we aren’t supposed to call our backups unless you have a real problem. I’ve called a backup a few times, but not often. Mostly technical stuff, but at my old SAC, you came in to take shifts and we always took them in pairs so we could swap back and forth taking calls and we could sort of write notes to each other during the call.
Although Francesca feels that the volunteers at her current SAC are less close knit than the volunteers she worked with in Montreal, she describes the subtle bond that she has developed with volunteers at her current SAC:

I won’t say nobody, but very few people come to this work from a good place, you know. I mean, in some sense, we all come from a good place of wanting to help, but people don’t come to it from a good personal place. You look around you and you know that there is something in there. It sort of is like when you are on the phone with somebody and they start talking and it seems very casual, they are talking about their day and they’re talking about the grocery store and you are engaging with them but in the back of your head you are looking at the rock and wondering when is it going to turn over and reveal all the ants? There is always this certain observer in the back of your head wondering when it’s going to come. In some sense you feel that too, with other volunteers, and when the conversation is superficial you are both looking at each other and you’re thinking….

She adds:

It’s funny, now at medical school, I remember when I was training for this SAC there was another woman in training with me and at times our eyes would meet across the room and there was a certain feeling of knowledge and sometimes I had it with volunteers at my other SAC and sometimes I have it now with doctors who are involved with training us. There are times when you look at someone and they look at you and you both realize you both have seen terrible things. There is sort of a certain feeling of connection and that your eyes meet across the room and you can see that and I see it in doctors too, sometimes. You can see that they have seen horrible things. Sometimes I find it comforting actually, which may seem odd.

Francesca emphasizes how, compared to her old SAC, “it’s lonely work here. We don’t spend as much time with each other, and we don’t support each other as much.” Adding to this, Francesca says that the thing she likes the least about her current volunteer work is the level of isolation volunteers have from each other. Francesca does not feel that there is a strong support network and she finds this difficult. Although Francesca attends all of the mandated monthly meetings, she does not interact with volunteers outside of the centre and does not speak with them extensively at the meetings. Francesca explains how she admired the work of the other people at her SAC in Montreal and was more active at her SAC in Montreal because there was more work to be done. In Montreal, her SAC did not have any professional affiliations, and no one was paid for their efforts; instead, all of the volunteers ‘pitched in.’ At Francesca’s current SAC, there are employed counselors who run support groups and who see clients for individual therapy. There is more funding, and the centre has a board of directors who are paid. Francesca misses the work that she was involved at while she was in Montreal because currently, volunteers’ scope of practice is limited to speaking with clients on the crisis line.
At the SAC where Francesca volunteered in Montreal, the shifts were from noon until midnight, and there were walk-in hours during the day, and from six o’clock in the evening until midnight, volunteers only provided telephone support. Francesca explains how at the SAC she volunteered at in Montreal, volunteers had three hour shifts and she would sign up for one or two shifts during the week, but that she was “always around.” Francesca explains how the office at her SAC in Montreal also functioned as a “hang out space,” and that it had that “weird duality to it.” There were weeks when Francesca would volunteer for about ten or fifteen hours. However, quite often, she would be on shift but there would not be any calls. In London, at her current SAC, the shifts are from eight o’clock in the morning until six o’clock in the evening and from six o’clock in the evening until eight o’clock in the morning. Francesca has not socialized at the centre or spent time speaking with other volunteers during shifts.

Currently, Francesca only takes shifts during the day because with the medication that she is on, she has to be careful with her sleep patterns. Francesca is not convinced that she would be able to wake up completely in the middle of the night in order to be alert enough to take a call. Since Francesca is in school during most of the day, she usually takes her shifts on Saturdays because she sometimes goes to Church on Sunday. Usually, Francesca takes two shifts a month.

Francesca explains that quite often, at both her old and current SAC, there are repeat callers who contact the centre for support. Callers cannot request to speak to particular volunteers—it all depends on who is on-call. At Francesca’s old SAC, volunteers never told callers their names and volunteers were not supposed to let callers know that they had spoken to them before. At her current SAC, volunteers provide their names to callers and some callers will tell volunteers what their names are, in order for them to be aware that they have spoken to them in the past. Francesca says that even before a caller provides their name, it is usually easy to recognize the story of the caller. Francesca also says “in some ways it’s nice to have a long-term relationship. I mean, it’s hard to be with someone at a moment of crisis and never really know what happened to them or how it came out in the end.”

Describing what it is like before taking calls, Francesca says that sometimes it can be difficult waiting for the telephone to ring but that it depends how she feels. Francesca shares the following:

There are days when I’m on shift and I don’t feel like taking calls and so then sometimes I dread it a little bit. Other times I feel more…I mean, there is always a sense of anxiety to it because you never know what it’s going to be. There are some nasty and dangerous things that can turn up and so in that moment before you pick up the phone you really have no idea. Once I settle into the call, of course, usually I feel less anxious, especially if it’s someone I’ve spoken to before or frequently because you sort of have a gauge of that person.
Commenting on what it feels like after taking a call, Francesca explains that it depends on the call, and that some calls are harder than others. Francesca elaborates:

The thing that I always try to teach my trainees and that I try to remember myself, is that when you walk away feeling bad it’s not because you’ve failed, it’s because their situation is terrible. I mean, people call and you feel because your job is to want to help people and your job is to make it better and it’s something you have to train yourself out of because often times you can’t and sometimes it’s paternalistic and it’s disempowering…so all you can do is really sit down with people and just be there but I often do think about afterwards things I could have said, mistakes that I might have made or different ways I might have approached something. I’ve certainly made my share of mistakes, I think. Overall I think I’m very good at what I do.

Besides feeling anxious while waiting for calls as well as feeling disempowered at times, Francesca says that she finds volunteering, in general, to be very empowering. Specifically, volunteering has brought a lot of understanding and a lot of normalization to her own experiences. Even though Francesca does not share her experiences with the people she volunteers with or the callers she speaks to on the crisis line, she has heard a lot of commonalities and has come to realize that she is not the only person who has suffered from trauma. At times, Francesca has caught herself “telling people things on the line and then I realize that I don’t even tell myself those things. Sometimes it helps me to understand that.” Francesca also highlights how volunteering is a central part of her identity. She elaborates:

When I decided I was moving to London, the first thing I did was find a SAC. I found a source of therapy, a SAC, a grocery store…it’s a big part of who I am and what I do especially since I want to be a psychiatrist. I mean, it sort of keeps me going, especially being a medical student, especially the first few years – you go into medical school because you want to help people and in some sense it can be quite discouraging especially when you’re not working with patients. The first few years you’re not working with patients, you’re in the classroom all the time and you can do observations with doctors if you like, but I often feel the need to do something practical, something more in line with my values and what I want to be doing with my life, which is partly why I do this work and a lot of the cases in medical school are very depressing…I mean, the stories that you hear working on the line, they are terrible, but at least you feel there is some kind of active engagement with it. You feel at least there is something to be done.

Describing the training that she went through as a volunteer at her current SAC, Francesca says that initially there were not any role plays which she finds odd because, according to Francesca, you cannot train somebody to be a part of a crisis line without actually giving them some kind of hands-on instruction dealing with people in crisis. Francesca recalls how there was useful information in the training manuals on how to act and listen to callers, but she thought that it was quite unusual and problematic that volunteers were not given role-playing scenarios to act
out. Francesca says that other volunteers did not seem surprised by this. However, the coordinators at her centre are currently changing their training sessions in order to include role-plays.

When Francesca trained at her SAC in Montreal, half of the training was comprised of role-playing, and the other half consisted of different talks on sexual assault, oppression, and different stigmas. There were some skills oriented talks on active listening, for example, how to coach people through flashbacks, how to handle special kinds of calls as well as recent survivors, how to do a suicide assessment as well as a child abuse assessment, and how to speak about mental illnesses and offer coping strategies. There was a psychiatrist who worked at McGill and he would give talks during volunteer training on suicide. There were also people who would come from LGBTQ organizations to do talks on LGBTQ issues and sometimes there were workshops on racism or disability. Francesca explains how this depended on who was coordinating the training and what kinds of speakers were available. Francesca says that her centre in Montreal tried to cover most of the topics that people encounter. There were two training coordinators who usually would direct the entire training and then all the other volunteers were involved in training other new volunteers. Throughout training, everyone would break out into small groups and practice role-plays, observe one another, and offer feedback. In addition to completing training as a volunteer, Francesca was also involved in facilitating training at her SAC in Montreal. Explaining what led to her involvement, she says:

I think the thing was, there wasn’t really anyone else to do it. I mean, that’s kind of how I ended up working fifteen hours a week or taking on extra shifts. There wasn’t anyone to do it, so I did it, and there wasn’t anyone to do it with me, so I did that, too. I mean, there is a lot of turnover with a student organization like that because people are leaving and moving on. We had to train new volunteers or we wouldn’t fill our shifts and it was always a struggle to fill and a lot of weeks we didn’t fill completely. Although we did get close and I think our coverage was generally good. I did enjoy being a part of training. I do enjoy teaching and it did help me hone my own skills.

Francesca notes how when she coordinated training she changed particular policies. Originally, there was a moratorium on talking about any personal experiences and volunteers were not allowed to admit if they were a survivor of child abuse or sexual assault. The policy was intended to level the playing field. When Francesca coordinated training she changed this policy. Part of the reason was because when Francesca first trained she found it was difficult having to keep her abuse a secret. Although the training coordinators told all volunteers, including Francesca, that they were available for support if anyone needed anything, Francesca explains that she has “never been very good at taking people up on that kind of thing.” When training
focused on child abuse and the assessment of child abuse related calls, that was when Francesca started cutting. Francesca emphasizes how “training was a very difficult time for me but rewarding, also.”

Francesca also ran support groups while volunteering at her SAC in Montreal. One of the most memorable experiences that Francesca has had as a volunteer has been facilitating a particular support group with another volunteer. She mentions that at her old SAC, everything was done in pairs. Francesca’s co-facilitators had a chronic health condition and she bonded with her over that. Francesca and her co-facilitator worked with their group on a longitudinal basis and met very week for a year. There were about five or six regular members in the group and Francesca and her co-facilitator would get food for everyone, sit in comfortable chairs and talk. Francesca explains that “it was so nice for them to have somewhere to come to speak to other people who were in a similar situation. I admired many of them greatly. There was something I loved about each and every one of them, you know…when we lost one or two we lost people it was very hard. People would leave some times for whatever reason.” This was a very meaningful experience for Francesca. She was very close to her group and still wonders about them.

However, Francesca draws attention towards how it was difficult maintaining boundaries between herself and the people she counseled in her support group:

There were times I wish I could share things with them…in some ways, perhaps if there had been more resources for people with other kinds of issues, if there are had been more resources for populations more similar to me, then perhaps I would have ended up working with those populations. In some ways it’s also good that I didn’t, because it gives me a little bit of distance…in some ways it was sort of my first taste of my career and in some sense because I would like to be a psychiatrist and in some ways those were my first therapeutic relationships and I did have counter transference problems at times…it was weird because I was going to therapy, but at the same time I was kind of acting like a therapist in some roles, and at the same time that I was working with trauma survivors I was being a trauma survivor. My life was going around in circles a lot at that point. It was very odd.

Francesca often has told herself the following:

You do what you can and then you have to find a way to let it go. Especially when you can’t really talk to anyone about it. I mean, we are always keeping these big secrets from other people and that’s fine, but it’s difficult at times. I do share things with my therapist. I feel in some ways my therapist is an acceptable person to share these things with because she also has the confidentiality to me…and because my therapist is a therapist she can help me through it…in some ways seeing a therapist has taught me how to use tools with the people I’ve worked with…in some ways you just learn the things to tell yourself. You tell yourself that you did all you could in the moment and that if the person doesn’t feel better it’s not your fault.
Although Francesca has relied on her therapist for support while volunteering, she does not talk to very many people about her volunteer work. There are people who know that she volunteers, but she does not want to talk about it in detail with them in case they need to call the crisis line or need a resource. Francesca says that in the same way she does not often talk to people about her trauma, she similarly does not talk to people about the volunteer work she does because people tend to not understand it.

In terms of whether volunteering has changed her attitude towards safety, Francesca says that she has experienced so much trauma in her life that she does not know if she has ever felt safe at any point in her life. She believes that her volunteer work has certainly contributed to her posttraumatic stress disorder. Besides experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder while volunteering, Francesca has experienced nightmares:

I haven’t found that nightmares have gotten less frequent. I mean, sometimes I’ll go months without having them and sometimes I will have them frequently. The thing is that sometimes it’s hard to tell where my nightmares end and the caller’s nightmares begin. At this point it is so intertwined that the nightmares I’ve had all my life, the nightmares related to my abuse, they’ve become wound up in the nightmares with the people I’ve worked with and almost there are things I fear during the day and the thoughts I have when I’m walking alone at night and they centre around some of the stories I’ve heard, things that people have told me.

Adding to this, Francesca explains that there have been times when she has been on-call, and she has taken a call and then hung up and has called a crisis line herself. There have also been times when she has been at the centre and would take a call or facilitate training, and would then go home and cut herself and “come back all bandaged up.”

More recently in her career as a rape crisis volunteer, Francesca has experienced vicarious trauma. She describes a point where she decided to take a break from volunteering because of this:

There was a time I had a lot of vicarious trauma and then I did take a break from the work I was doing after I got into medical school the summer before moving to London…I was speaking to a caller one day and it was a caller I had spoken to quite frequently and I remember sitting on the phone and listening with one ear and thinking, God, I wish this person would hang up, and of course I didn’t let on and I knew I handled the call well, but afterwards I knew that I had to take a little space because…I was finding it difficult to engage. I always find it difficult to hear the stories and to some extent to me that’s a normal part of the work. If it ever becomes easy to hear these things you’re in trouble. It was more that I felt I was so overwhelmed with it that it couldn’t engage with it any more. I just found myself not wanting to believe in the stories that I heard, although of course I did. There’s a part of me that just really started to resist engaging with those stories and so I felt I needed a break because that’s not a good place to come to the work from. I took a break for a few months and then I moved here. I trained for SAC and…
wasn’t taking calls for a few months because I was training. I probably took six months off, all told. Now I’m working again.

In terms of whether Francesca considers herself to be a feminist or whether she considers the volunteer work that she is involved in to be a form of feminist practice, she says:

In some ways it is difficult for me to see rape as a feminist problem. I don’t know that I see rape as a tool for men to oppress women although certainly there are beliefs around rape that I think are really oppressive beliefs about women deserving it, women who walk out late at night or women who wear certain clothes. Certainly, I would never argue that those things are not part of the sexism and oppression that is present in our society, but I think that trauma at its core is not necessarily a feminist problem…we have this idea about rape and the idea is there is an adult woman and she’s very attractive, sexually desirable and she dresses up for a night on the town and she wears these skimpy, slutty clothes and then a man, you know, he sees her and she is teasing him and he has to have her and he rapes her and I think that if you construct rape within that story it is a very feminist…but from the stories I’ve heard and the ways the survivors I’ve worked with have constructed rape and child sexual assault, to me it’s just a brutal act of power not necessarily of a man over a woman but just of any person who is powerful over someone who is not. So I don’t know, I don’t know that I understand sexual assault as a feminist problem the way I think a lot of workers in this field do.

Francesca continues:

I mean, it depends on what you mean by feminism. I think there are a lot of people who identify as feminist who do a lot of marching and talking and work focused on creating change within the system. I prefer support work. I think I do consider myself a feminist. It’s not a big part of my identity, it’s not something I would say if somebody asked who I was, but if someone asked me if I was a feminist I suppose I would say yes. One of the things that does frustrate me about sexual assault work, though, is feminism is used as an excuse to deny services to men and that’s something that has always been difficult for me. The first sexual assault centre where I worked was very inclusive, we worked with a lot of men and we were one of the only sexual assault centre’s in Quebec that did work with men, especially in English, and we had male volunteers and that was something that I valued a lot but the sexual assault centre where I work now, men volunteers are not allowed to work on the phone lines or to work with clients.

Although Francesca was pleased with the way the SAC she volunteered at in Montreal handled issues related to male sexual assault, she often felt that her politics were not radical enough and adds, “…I’m just not a person who is going to go to a rally or march or lobby to change things on that level or really be involved in policy or politics very much. It’s just not really who I am as a person.”

Francesca continues:

It’s not the same here in London…at my old SAC I found that I was perhaps behind in terms of politics but here sometimes I feel it is the opposite, especially the attitude towards male survivors. Frankly, I think it’s disgusting. It really disgusts me what my
SAC believes about male survivors. I think it’s gross. I mean, we take calls from male survivors, but…

Adding to this, Francesca says:

There was a man in our training session who went through the training because he wanted to do something for male survivors but he didn’t end up volunteering and I think a lot of people probably are turned away. They say they can find jobs for you to do but it’s not really meaningful work. If you come into the work wanting to work with people and then you are told sorry, you are a second class citizen, you’re not good enough to work with survivors of sexual assault because you’re a man, to me that’s just messed up. People tend to spit it out as if there are more female survivors, but personally, I think male survivors are just in the closet and in some ways there are a lot of challenges associated with being a male survivor in terms of lack of support, lack of resources and I think in some ways female survivors don’t have to face that to the same extent.

Expanding on the problem she has with her current SACs’ policies related to male volunteers, Francesca says:

The attitude towards male volunteers I think is very unfortunate. I mean, we did have training on male survivors and that training was high quality I felt, but…I don’t see how we can serve male clients while not allowing men to volunteer on the line…there is no good reason for it. What could possibly be the reasons? Because men can’t empathize with women? That’s not true. Because men don’t know anything about sexual assault? That’s not true. Is it because women feel uncomfortable talking to men? Well, maybe that’s true, but at the same time, someone who is racialized might not feel comfortable talking with someone who is white. A male caller may not feel comfortable talking to a female and when you come right down to it is anybody comfortable talking to anybody about their rape? Not really, you know, and I think that despite the fact these reasons appear good on the surface, we have to empower our female survivors, we have to give them a women-only space, in the end I think that it’s ultimately not to the good of sexual assault survivors as a whole so that’s difficult for me and I’ve certainly spoken about that a few times and I think that I won’t be changing anybody’s minds anytime soon. At least we do speak to male callers. I think that’s important cause there was a time that didn’t even happen and that’s truly horrible because when someone reaches out if you smack them in the face, I mean, what are they going to do?

Finally, reflecting on her volunteer work, Francesca does not think that volunteering has affected her personal relationships. Francesca states that she does now have many close relationships in her life. She says that some people feel a certain sense of isolation being exposed to terrible stories, and although she believes that it may be dissonant to them and to the rest of their life, Francesca, she does not feel that it is dissonant to her life. She explains:

….working with survivors of trauma as a volunteer weaves in with my own fears but I wouldn’t say it necessarily makes my worldview different than it would be otherwise. There’s a different sort of flavor to it but the sort of bone deep knowledge of horror is not foreign to me and it never was, really. I’ve been doing this work a long time especially for how young I am…most of my adult life I’ve been doing this work.
Overall, Francesca enjoys her volunteer work but prefers the volunteer work she was involved in at her old SAC. She also says that she “cannot ever imagine not doing this kind of work.” Francesca believes she has made an impact on some of the clients that she has interacted with while volunteering, and explains how there have been times when people have expressed feelings of relief, gratitude and appreciation. There have also been times when Francesca has finished speaking with a caller and has felt that she has done a very good job.

In the future, Francesca plans on working with trauma survivors in her professional life, and less on a volunteer basis. In her second year of medical school Francesca will still be taking classes and expects that she will remain volunteering. However, the following year, she will be working in a hospital and will be on call every third night and will be working five or six days a week, eleven or twelve hours a day. Because of this, Francesca does not think that she will have time to volunteer or even have the emotional stamina for it. After that, Francesca will be doctor and she says “then I will be doing this work with my life. I plan to work with trauma survivors, I hope to, among other populations.” Francesca imagines that as her career approaches she will be involved in work related to trauma less on a volunteer basis “because there’s only so much you can do, there’s only really so much you can give.” Francesca also thinks that when she is a professional, her scope of practice as a volunteer will no longer be as appealing.

Raven’s Story

Experiences Throughout Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood

Raven is an Aboriginal woman in her twenties who identifies as heterosexual. Raven was born in Thunder Bay, Ontario, where she lived with her mother, father, and twin brothers, Dale and Darryl, until she was three years old. Commenting on her childhood, she says, “…we always had money, we never starved. We had rough times but it wasn’t to a point where we were struggling day to day.”

Raven describes her father as someone who “always worked hard, but he always saved his money…he never bought elaborate stuff, it was always crappy…there was just nothing fancy about us.” On the other hand, Raven says her mother “has a really good disability pension and she likes to spend money…she struggles but wasn’t starving.” The reason that Raven’s mother has a disability pension is because before Raven was born she broke her back in a car accident. Raven explains:

My mom is in a wheelchair. My dad was driving that car, so over the years I’ve heard different stories and different sides of things. I think my mom has always felt more
resentful and feels like my dad has caused her to live with it for twenty odd years. My dad was kind of just over it. My dad is like, ‘I’ve apologized I’m taking care of you and I’m doing everything I need to do for you.

Raven has had a tumultuous relationship with her father since she was young. Raven says he “did drugs ever since I was little…he smokes pot, pretty much. I don’t care what anyone says, pot is a drug. It alters your perspectives and alters everything about you. I’ve seen it firsthand.” She adds, “even before he met my mom, he smoked pot. There were times when he got into harder drugs and drug dealing…it was his medicine. That’s what I remember him telling me—I’m going out in the shed. I need my medicine.”

Although Raven did not spend a lot of time alone with her father as a child, she remembers going fishing with him and making bannock on the shore. She went fishing with her father once during the summer and once during the winter. During those times, her father’s friend would come along, and he would bring his two daughters who were Raven’s age. During all of the other summers, Raven spent time with her father’s family in Jellicoe, Ontario. Raven explains how there were about one hundred and fifty people who lived in that community, and she was used to only seeing her dad’s family and a few neighbours when she would go there. Raven visited Jellicoe every summer since she was born, and it was during these summer visits that Raven was sexually abused by one of her cousins. In total, eight of Raven’s cousins would spend the summer in Jellicoe, and Raven remembers how her dad’s family, particularly her uncle and aunts, were always involved with all of her cousins. However, she does not remember her father being there and has handfuls of “little memories” of being alone with her father, rather than spending time with him and the rest of her family. She explains that “besides the abuse that was happening it wasn’t all that bad” and she remembers feeling free, being by herself, and running down the tracks and playing in the bush. Raven spent most of her time alone in Jellicoe, with her aunt’s boyfriend, who had a farm with chickens, horses, pigs and turkeys. Her fondest memories include going horseback riding and helping her aunts boyfriend with the horses.

Recounting the abuse, Raven explains that her cousin, who has Downs Syndrome and who is twelve years older than her, sexually abused her. Raven says that he spent a lot of time in Jellicoe, and she knew they were going to meet up at some point. The abuse would happen during the summer when she visited her family in Jellicoe, and it would also occur when Raven and her mother would visit Thunder Bay, where Raven’s aunt and cousin lived. Raven says that her mom would always leave her with her aunt on her own even though she knew that the sexual abuse was occurring. Raven also notes how the sexual abuse has happened ever since she could remember. There were a few incidents when she used to dream about it.
Raven’s twin brothers are five years older than her, and both of her brothers are around six feet and three inches tall. Growing up, she was close with Darryl, but says that her other brother, Dale hated her and still does not associate with her at all. Darryl and Dale have a different father than Raven. However, Raven’s biological father raised her brothers since they were six months old and was extremely abusive to them. Raven explains how Dale gave her dad a hard time and would always tell him that he was not his father. On the other hand, Raven’s brother, Darryl, always considered him to be his father.

After living in Thunder Bay and spending the summers in Jellicoe, Raven’s family moved to Nipigon, Ontario, where they lived in a small trailer park until Raven was twelve years old. Raven remembers waking up at five o’clock in the morning and walking one kilometer to the bus stop in order to get to public school, which was a thirty-minute drive, away. Raven explains how the long commute caused her to hate attending school and because of the infrequent bus schedules, she had to attend a full day of junior kindergarten, instead of a typical half day. Due to limited transportation options, Raven says that since she was four years old she had to wake up early and would get home late. That being said, Raven describes her experiences as school as pretty average. Raven says:

I don’t remember having a lot of problems. I just always felt different, so I just kind of stuck to myself. I would try to be outgoing and try to hang out with kids, but all the kids were from the area, so they had their own little cliques and day care groups by the time I started school, so it was harder fitting in. I always found my friends here and there, though….

Once Raven completed sixth grade, her family moved to Geraldton, Ontario. Raven was excited about the move, and explains how many of the interactions she had with other kids during this time were becoming awkward because everyone was becoming a teenager. Raven began spending time with kids who were older people than her because she started to not get along with the other kids in the trailer park that were her age. By the time Raven moved, a lot of the other families in the trailer park were also moving, and there were only about four kids left. All of these kids went to different schools so it was harder to stay connected and to remain friends.

Soon after arriving in Geraldton, Raven’s brother, Dale, started to act physically abusive towards her. Raven says that the abuse began when Dale started drinking and there were a few times when he would come home, grab Raven by the throat and yell at her. Raven remembers telling Dale to hit her and to get it over with. She does not remember feeling scared, but she is unsure about whether this is because she was jumped very often at school. At this time, Raven
was close with her other brother, Darryl, but he was never around when Dale would be abusive. Raven says that when Darryl was around, Dale was “as sweet as pie and well behaved.”

In addition to the abuse by Dale, Raven experienced racism at school:

The racism in Geraldton was bizarre because coming from Nipigon, they had a reserve in Nipigon but they called it ‘The Mission,’ so growing up, because I’m not a traditional Aboriginal, so my parents didn’t really teach me anything about my culture, so when we moved, that’s when I realized, okay I’m a Native. Well, back then, it was, I’m an Indian. I never got called that before, like everybody was... they all hung together. There was no specific race in Nipigon. It was either you hung out with these people or you didn’t. When we moved to Geraldton, I was an Indian, that was part of my identity and it wasn’t positive at all, it was really negative. Boys and girls in my classes were extremely violent and would say really horrible, racist things to me...racism was everywhere...my grade seven Geography teacher made a comment that Natives came from outer space and were actually aliens.

Raven also explains how Dale and Darryl experienced racism on a regular basis:

My brothers were going into grade ten and I was going into grade seven and high school was a nightmare for them, too. They didn’t recognize themselves as Native, either. We had status cards and what not, but it wasn’t a tradition for us. We weren’t raised on reserves, so when we got to Geraldton, all of a sudden you have three reserves in the surrounding communities, so now you’re dealing with Natives living on reserves calling you White wannabes because you never lived on the reserve and the non-Aboriginal people calling you dirty Indians because of who you are...my brothers were constantly getting into fights and Dale ended up moving back to Nipigon.

Besides the racism that Raven and her brothers encountered, Raven suffered physically and emotionally from being bullied at school. She relied on her other brother, Darryl, who she says always looked out for her and taught her how to fight. Raven recalls being jumped about five times and describes how this occurred when she was in seventh and eighth grade:

I’d be standing outside by the wall and the boys would have those orange floor hockey balls, the really hard ones, and they would whip them at me. They would make horrible comments or I would always buy magazines and stuff, just to keep myself occupied and they would run up and rip them up in front of me...they were really cruel.

Raven explains that by the time she was in grade eleven, her brother Darryl had moved out. Darryl had got a job and left high school so did not have that support from him when she was attacked at school, anymore. Raven says that school was “a bit rough at that point” because there would be brawls between Natives, French and Non-Aboriginal students at school. Eventually, all of the students were separated; the French students ended up getting their own high school in a nearby community and the Native students ended up getting their own high school on the reserve.
After Raven’s brother, Darryl, left home to get a job and start a family, Raven continued to socialize with his friends and spent a lot of time with kids who were older than her. She drank a lot and says “I had a lot going on at that point because I started using alcohol and drugs to kind of cope with some of the abuse I experienced as a child. I just had a lot going on…I just got jumped after school and I was fists up and ready to go.” Besides turning to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain, Raven started cutting herself as a teenager. She says:

I remember the first time I did it I had a safety pin in my hand and I was just totally zoned out and the next thing I knew, I had a hole in my leg because I was rubbing the safety pin on my leg and after I realized what I was doing, I was like, that’s a different kind of pain. It was more a tool to be in control of my pain. It hurt, but it was a different hurt…when I got upset or mad I would go to the bathroom with a razor blade and skin my legs but it was always on my hips or my upper legs. It was weird, because I knew it would scar, so I wouldn’t do it deep enough or hard enough so it would actually scar. It was just enough to bleed, feel the pain and then I would stop after that. I was well aware of what I was doing.

Around this time Raven told her family doctor about her abuse and the violence she experienced at school. Raven’s doctor was eighty years old and Raven did not feel comfortable telling her about what was going on. When the doctor asked Raven how she was feeling, Raven explained that she did not want to wake up in the morning and was always feeling sad. The doctor responded by telling Raven that she was just acting like a teenager and that she should “get over it.” Raven notes how this was her first time reaching out for help and that she felt like she was shut down.

Raven began dating her boyfriend, who is now her husband, while going through these issues, and continued to “party full swing.” It was around this time that Raven’s mother left Geraldton and moved to North Bay. Raven says, “I was holding a lot of hurt and anger for my mom just picking up and leaving. When she left she moved to North Bay, so I was kind of mad at the little bit of family we had, thinking she let it go, because she left my dad. A week after Raven’s mother left for North Bay, Raven was jumped, and it ended up becoming a court case. Raven says:

I remember calling her and I ended up hanging up on her because I was so mad and I was saying this wouldn’t have happened if you didn’t leave…she cried and she always cried and felt bad, but I don’t know…I never felt that sincerity, even still now, I have a hard time with her. She always tried to be my friend more at times and I didn’t really need a friend, I needed a mom. She just basically always told me what I wanted to hear.

After Raven’s mother moved to North Bay, Raven’s father became romantically involved with a woman, who is now Raven’s stepmother, and within six months after Raven’s mother
moved out, Raven’s stepmother moved into Raven’s fathers’ house with her six children. Raven says that she was “kind of numb by then…I just did everything to please my dad, whatever makes you happy. He was a good manipulator.” Raven’s stepmother had six kids, the youngest was Raven’s age, and Raven explains how it was a big family. There were six kids between the ages of eighteen and thirty, and each of them had between two to four kids. Raven says that there were no boundaries and she only had a little box of personal items. Raven also mentions that the day Raven’s stepmother was moving in, was when her dad had asked her to either go on welfare or get a job. Raven explains:

I knew his wife owned a business. She owned like a boarding home for patients from reserves so they would fly in from remote communities and they would stay with her. She had this big house but she provided meals, transportation and all the administrative tasks that go along with First Nations. So we would get approval numbers, referrals and what not for these people flying in. We would make sure they got to their appointments, get the paperwork that they needed and issue their airfare and bill the government for their stay…I knew she had the business and I told my dad, well why don’t you tell your girlfriend to give me a job since she’s moving in on us and I have to move out, anyway? So she hired me on as a night clerk. Within six months she asked me if I wanted to do administration so I started working pretty closely with her and we ended becoming really close, so that worked out and then I ended up managing the business for five years after that.

Raven enjoyed working at the boarding house and felt that she was really good at it. She enjoyed organizing, doing the billing as well as the administrative tasks. However, Raven was in charge of hiring and training employees, and she says this was stressful due to there being a high turnover in the area because it was tax-free. Raven was managing about nine people and these positions would turn over quite regularly. People who would often leave and then try to come back. Raven turned many of these people away and would tell them that it is a small community and she was unable to re-hire them. As a result, Raven ended up doing a lot of double and triple shifts and spent a lot of time at work. Raven also notes how staff at the boarding house traveled to Longlac about two or three times a day, to visit a methadone clinic, in order to get pills and methadone. According to Raven, there was a large epidemic in that area.

Raven highlights how, in addition to the high turnover rate at the boarding house, the family dynamics behind the work was stressful. Raven’s father ended up quitting his job shortly after Raven began working and he went on her payroll but did actually not do anything to earn his pay. Raven explains that there was a lot of tension. She was making nine dollars an hour as a manager and was working because she loved doing it and felt comfortable with the work. Raven never thought about the money until one moment she realized that what she was making did not seem right.
Additionally, two of Raven’s stepsisters became heavily involved in drugs and were incapable of taking care of their children. Raven felt that there was a lot of tension and that she was not being appreciated or respected. More specifically, one of Raven’s stepsisters had four children, and her other stepsisters had two children. Raven’s stepsisters would show up at the boarding house in the middle of the night and would try to leave their children with Raven. Raven struggled to create boundaries with her stepsiblings. She reminded her father and stepmother that children were not allowed to be left unattended, and if they were left unattended, the policy that was in place permitted Raven to call Children’s Aid. Raven emphasized that she was not responsible for the children and that her stepsisters should be expected to follow rules. Working at the boarding house did not get easier for Raven, and the situation with her stepsisters intensified. Raven ended up leaving the boardinghouse and both of her stepsisters went to rehabilitation. As soon as they came out of rehabilitation, Raven’s stepmother hired them both again, right away. Raven advised her stepmother that it was too soon to rehire them, since it had only been two or three days since they left rehabilitation, and their kids were in care. Soon after, Raven found needles in vans that were used by staff members of the boarding house and Raven tried to tell her stepmother that they could not run a business this way. Money was going missing and when Raven confronted her stepsisters, they insisted that they had not taken money and that the needles were not theirs. Raven was fed up and decided that she could not continue working at the boarding house. She left twice before actually leaving for good.

After Raven decided to leave the boarding house, she did an employment insurance work program doing tourism-based initiatives. The position involved working directly with the coordinator as well as participating in several small group projects. Raven found the job to be tolerable, but explains that she was shy growing up, and found it to be difficult to share her ideas. Raven decided that she did not want to continue working there, and she ended up getting a job at a sawmill. She worked there for about six months and hated it. Due to the physically demanding nature of working at the sawmill, Raven ended up returning to the boarding house. Raven convinced herself that it was not so bad. At this point, one of Raven’s stepsisters was in charge, but she was absent all of the time, and was disorganized. Raven explains how she got back into working at the boarding house and re-organized everything. Another one of Raven’s stepsisters ended up leaving the boarding house because she was frustrated with the family dynamics. This is when Raven realized that she was not being spoiled, and that the tensions between family members were real issues. At this point, Raven decided to draw tighter boundaries. For example, Raven told her stepmother that she required breaks when she was tired and refused to do particular tasks. Raven’s stepmother started to call her lazy, and her father would manipulate her
and make her feel guilty. Raven’s father was also continuously breaking up with Raven’s stepmother and using drugs.

That summer, Raven decided to move to North Bay and live with her mother, to try it out. Reflecting on that summer, Raven says:

It was terrible…I tried so hard because ever since I was young I could never hold stuff in. I had such a hard time holding stuff in. If I was mad about something you’re going to hear it. I’m probably over stuffed already and I just couldn’t keep any more in. So I got there and one night…we were out partying and my boyfriend said shouldn’t you go home? Your mom might get mad at me. I said, my mom’s on the internet because we had just got a computer that Christmas. I told him that she probably doesn’t even realize I’m gone. So it was the middle of the night and we went to my house, we went up the stairs and my mom was on the internet and my boyfriend says, what are you doing? Oh my god, she panicked and started clicking stuff and I noticed… I remember seeing the guy she was talking to, Brandon, and when I moved in with her she had this picture of this guy on her computer screen and I asked her who it was and she said it was just a friend and I said so that’s why you left my dad? And she said no, and she got defensive. I said, why don’t you just tell me the truth? You don’t just pick up and leave somebody. I came home from school and she literally had the car packed and she was leaving.

Raven continues:

I tried telling her, you have to understand. Even my brother was mad. He had two little girls that my mom was really close to. He was just angry with her. He said too, I understand that you’re having problems in your relationship but why do you have to run so far? Now she cut all contact with all of us and then when I tried living with her and she would not, until this day she wouldn’t admit it…she’s still with Brandon. She told me she left my dad because he was a drug addict and blah blah blah and my dad always supported us. He’s no angel, trust me, but he always worked and always supported my mom and he was always there for my mom…but this new guy was supposed to be this incredible guy and was going to bring her white water rafting and blah blah blah. I’m like, mom you’re in a wheelchair. Do you think that’s the best thing? He ended up being a pothead, alcoholic, he still is and just when I started finding out about the drug problem and the alcohol it just made things worse.

Raven also highlights the financial problems her mother had when they lived together for the summer. According to Raven, her mother lied to her up until the night she decided to go back home to live with her father. Raven’s mother was trying to convince Raven to call her father and to ask him for money. Raven confronted her mother and asked her why they needed money since everything seemed to be taken care of. Raven’s mother lied and told Raven that they needed money for food. Raven asked her mother if she could work for her aunt, Sheryl, who owned a novelty shop in order to help pay for food, and Raven’s aunt agreed to hire her. After Raven brought home her first paycheque, Raven’s mother asked Raven to hand over her cheque so that she could get groceries. Raven explains that her mother actually wanted a gym membership but
did not have the money for it. Raven ended up paying for a lot of different things, and her mother told her that if she was going to school and was not eighteen years old yet, Raven’s father should be paying child support. That was when Raven began to question whether her mother wanted Raven to live with her because she wanted money. For Raven, ‘the last straw’ was when Raven’s mother told Raven to ask her father for sixty dollars. When Raven asked her father for the money, he asked her if her mother was the person who asked Raven to call him. After Raven told him the truth, Raven’s father asked her if she wanted him to come and get her, and she said that she did.

When Raven finished speaking to her father on the telephone, Raven’s mother offered to drive her back home, to Geraldton. Raven’s mother told Raven to ask her father to wire her some money and promised that she would drive Raven home since she wanted to see Raven’s brothers. The next morning Raven woke up thinking that her mother was at the gas station and she expected that she would work for her aunt for half of the day. When Raven went downstairs, her aunt was there and told her that her mother had left for Toronto to pick up a man named Brandon and Brandon’s son, a five-year-old boy, named Tay. Raven was surprised and confused that her mother had made all of these arrangements without telling her. Then, Raven’s aunt told Raven that later on, during the evening, Raven’s mother and Brandon would drive Raven home. Raven was very angry and she phoned her mother. Raven’s mother tried to calm Raven down and told her that she would pick her up around nine o’clock, and that they would have twelve hours in the car to discuss everything. It was not until two o’clock in the morning that Raven’s mother and her boyfriend, Brandon showed up with Tay. Raven was not expecting the drive home to be the way it was, but she started talking to Brandon and did not mind his company. She told Brandon that she was sorry that they had to meet under such strange circumstances and he agreed. Both Raven, and Brandon, confronted Raven’s mother and expressed their frustration. At that point Brandon had been dating Raven’s mother for almost six months since she left Raven’s mother, and Raven considered them to be dating for a very long time. During the car ride Raven was “crying the whole time” and she “didn’t say goodbye.” Expanding on this, Raven says:

I just got out of the car and said see ya. I didn’t really talk to her after that. Maybe once a month, it was just like, hey how you doing…my dad pretty much kind of said I told you so. He warned me and said your mom just wants money.

When Raven arrived back in Geraldton at the end of the summer, she decided to move out of her father’s house and live with her husband who was her boyfriend at the time. Raven was eighteen years old. She was spending a lot of time with her husband and says that he was partying a lot during this time. Raven found a small trailer where the rent was cheap. She told her husband that she was moving out, and said that he was welcome to join her, but that he should not feel like
he had to. He agreed. They had enough money to pay for the first months rent, but they did not have a lot of furniture or a lot of money. Raven was extremely happy but wished that she could have spent more time with alone with her father, without her stepmother. Before Raven’s fathers’ stepmother came into the picture, Raven says that she began connecting with him and started to learn a lot about his history.

When Raven and her husband moved in together, her husband ended up going on stress leave from work. He worked in the wood industry for five years and he wanted a few weeks off work to relax. He ended up being misdiagnosed as bipolar, since his mother was bipolar. Raven says that as soon as her husband told the doctors that his mother was bipolar, they put him on medication. Describing what it was like when her husband was diagnosed as being bipolar, Raven says that she kept telling her husband that he was not bipolar. Every time her husband would complain about a side effect, the doctors would put him on extremely high doses of medication. After a year, Raven’s husbands’ medication tripled, and he started to get drug-induced psychosis. He would become overly paranoid and he would not answer the door.

In addition to coping with the difficulties that her husband faced with managing his medications, at age twenty-three, Raven decided to disclose her sexual abuse. She says, “I felt this was, like, a deep dark secret…I decided, okay, I had to get this off my chest.” Raven’s husband was the first person she told about the abuse. Recounting what it was like when she disclosed her secret, Raven says:

I would drink to the point of black outs and after a while we weren’t at a party it was just me and him sitting there, drinking until I blacked out…I would start drinking and I would just start bawling. Even at that point it didn’t even click what I was doing until he asked me, what’s going on? Then I was like holy crap, I have to deal with this…I was nervous because, I don’t know, I just felt like I was damaged goods and I didn’t deserve anybody’s love or anything like that. I was more scared that he would leave. He said…I don’t really know how to react because I haven’t had any of this happen in my family so you need to tell me what you need. I didn’t know what I needed at the time.

Besides disclosing her sexual abuse to her husband, Raven also told family members. Raven explains:

My dad’s wife…one day she was crying and when I came home and I asked her what was going on. She said, well, my daughter is going through some stuff; she was raped by my husband. Her oldest daughter, I guess her ex-husband raped her daughter when she was thirteen and that’s when it hit me, like holy crap. So then I told her what happened to me in my dad’s family and then after that I was scared because I was thinking what if she says something because I hadn’t really told anybody…she was pretty supportive but I found that it was kind of awkward after because anytime we were in family situations…she was almost more engaged with my cousin with down syndrome and like would be dancing with him…now that I look back at that and the way she reacted with her own
daughter, well you were like thirteen years old, what did you do to provoke him? She almost looked at it like her daughter and her husband were having an affair.

After confiding in her stepmother, Raven approached her aunt and wrote her a letter explaining that she had memories of being at her house in Thunder Bay and of seeing her in Jellicoe although she could not remember exactly what had happened. When Raven gave her aunt the letter she was shaking and Raven says that her aunt came to her house right away but Raven did not answer the door. Eventually, Raven invited her aunt over to her house. Raven’s aunt kept telling Raven that she was a single mom and spoke about how her husband had left her. Raven felt that her aunt was not being accountable for her son’s actions and felt like her aunt did not understand the pain that Raven had been going through.

Afterwards, Raven’s went to her father’s house to show him the letter and to tell him about the abuse. She asked her father if he knew that she was touched inappropriately by her cousin and Raven’s father responded by saying, “What’s the big deal?” Raven was infuriated. Raven’s father asked her if her cousin had raped her, and Raven told him that she could only remember things leading up to that, but did not remember sexual contact involving rape. Raven’s father shrugged everything off and blamed Raven. Raven also told her mother about the abuse:

She was crying a lot and said, I know, I knew stuff was happening. I should have said something. At that point I was like, well you know it’s not your fault, but I need your support right now. She was really supportive through that because she had been abused herself by one of her uncles… but… she hadn’t dealt with her issues, either, so it wasn’t really healthy talking to her a lot of the time. My aunt ended up showing my dad the letter and my dad brought the letter over to my house…I was devastated. Then he asked me why I was doing this and causing all this trouble and I tried to explain it to him. There was so much sexual abuse that happened in his family with his dad and I was opening a can of worms and he knew it.

Although this was the first time Raven confronted her family about the abuse she suffered, she points out how her whole family basically already knew what was going on, and that all of her cousins were abused but the adults never talked about it.

Adding to the tumult, Raven and her husband experienced marital problems at this time:

My relationship with my husband was getting bad but I knew it was the drugs. the medications that he was on after he was diagnosed as being bipolar. A girl that he worked with in the summer, he ended up emailing her… I guess she had complimented him and kind of started this back and forth conversation and [she was saying] it’s nice working with you and you’re such a sweet guy, so he started getting more paranoid and I just knew something was going on and finally he had one of those little hand held mini tiny computer things and I picked it up and I saw this email and it was like, hey sweetie how are you? And I was like, oh my god, like seriously? This is at the time I was going through all my own stuff so I was trying not to take it too personally and thinking well
maybe it’s something I’m doing too, maybe I’m pushing or you know what I mean, like…he thought I was going to kill him but…I ended up leaving for about a week and there was just a lot of back and forth, like how could you do this to me and just his state of mind it was just so not him. It was like we were in the twilight zone.

Raven explains that her and her husband eventually sat down and talked, and they started to see a counselor. Raven’s husbands’ workplace provided counseling services and they went to couples counseling. The counselor told Raven’s husband that she had counseled both his mother and sister and did not believe that he was bipolar. As a result, Raven’s husband began cutting down his dose of medication. Raven felt glad that she had not left her husband and felt relieved that she had “fought” for her relationship. It took Raven’s husband about a year and a half to wean himself off medications and that is when they had an open and honest conversation. That being said, Raven says that she still struggled to maintain a healthy relationship with her husband. Her husband was not telling her the things that she wanted to hear, and he was having a difficult time distinguishing between what was real and what was not, while he was decreasing his medications. Raven’s husband says that he felt as if his life was a videogame.

Once Raven and her husband worked through their marital problems, they decided to get married, and they eloped in Cuba in order to avoid dealing with both of their families. Soon after getting married, Raven and her husband decided to work for Raven’s father and stepmother, again. Raven hired her husband to work at the boarding house because it was in disarray and they could not afford to have full staff. Raven and her husband would work from seven o’clock in the morning until seven o’clock in the evening, without being paid for over-time. Raven remembers how she was only being paid twelve dollars an hour, and she felt as if she sacrificed a lot. Raven’s stepsiblings would show up at the boarding house asking for money and saying that they needed groceries. At this point, Raven ended up getting pregnant. When she told her dad and her stepmother, Raven’s stepmother was angry.

Describing what it was like when she found out that she was pregnant, Raven says:

My dad was trying to be excited because my dad always said why don’t you have kids? And for me, I never thought I would have kids because of being abused that fear of… it was just bizarre because I thought I would have a kid with Downs Syndrome, like something was going to be wrong with the child if I ever got pregnant. After we were married and I did some of my own work and dealt with some of my issues I realized maybe I wanted a kid.

Raven continues:

I told my husband that I never wanted kids…and he was on the same page…then going through my healing, realizing just because I was hurt and abused that doesn’t mean I’m evil and bad and I don’t deserve this child and my biggest fear was having a baby with
Downs Syndrome so we decided to go ahead and have kids after about two years of talking about it. We found out he was going to be born with a cleft lip and I kept having this dream that I was going to have this baby boy with a crooked face, like his eyes were crooked and his whole face was shifted and I told the nurse practitioner that and she said, oh you’re just worried, you’re a first time mom…it was already late in my pregnancy that’s when we found out at thirty-six weeks he was going to have a cleft lip. The measurements that were coming back from the ultrasound said he was going to have dwarfism and I was like, see, I knew it that I was going to be punished. I have to relive this but my husband was so supportive. He was incredibly supportive. So then when my son was born and he was just gorgeous and beautiful and then all that went away. But he had to go for surgery at Sick Kids hospital and stuff.

Eventually, Raven began to feel excited about being a mother. Both Raven and her husband were happy although Raven’s husband was slightly anxious because he had never been around babies. When Raven was working at the boarding house during her pregnancy, Raven started telling her stepmother how she could not work over-time because she felt exhausted and could not clean with the harsh chemicals. Raven told her stepmother that she would continue working until the spring, but not for a lot longer after that. Her stepmother called her lazy and spoiled and said, “women nowadays can’t work and have kids—you’re a wimp.”

Raven ended up arguing with her stepmother and left the boarding house. Afterwards, Raven applied to a two-year diploma program, in order to become a Social Service Worker. Raven explains that she tried to apply for a degree as a Social Service Worker a couple of years earlier, but when she started to realize where she was in her healing journey, she ended up withdrawing from the course. After some time passed, Raven felt more confident and comfortable. She decided to apply again, having limited options. Raven was accepted into the program and began school when her son was seven weeks old. Raven describes the process as being very hard. Raven explains how her husband had never been around children before and was suddenly left alone with a seven week old baby, but that he did an amazing job of watching her son for two years while she completed her degree.

Raven completed her Social Service Worker degree (SSW) in Geraldton. Although the program was based out of Northern College in Timmins, courses were offered on the computer. Raven explains how she was able to attend courses in Geraldton, where she lived, and she did not need to move in her first year of the program. By the second year of the program, Raven had to complete her placement. She only had two choices for her placement, and she had a conflict of interest at both places, so Raven, her husband and her son moved to North Bay because there was a wider variety of social services there, and Raven could choose between government services and front-line crisis intervention.
Initially, Raven’s father was uncomfortable because he thought that the program was comprised of courses that would teach Raven about counseling and psychotherapy. He thought that she was going to analyze him all the time. Raven felt that her entire family was “on edge” about her taking the program because of the field of work and since everyone in her family was trying to hide so much. Raven says that her husband was okay with her decision at first, but soon this started to change. As Raven recalls:

While I’m learning all of these new skills and talking about how your past reflects the choices you make now and your relationships and how that all interacts, then I started to question him because he’s the only person there and I’m learning all of this, and I’m like, don’t you think you do this because of this, and he [Raven’s husband] is like stop analyzing me. We had a bit of that and I had to back off after a while and be like, okay, sorry. He understood. It’s all new and I’m excited about it and I’m not trying to diagnose you.

Reflecting on what it felt like completing her degree, she says it was very rewarding but that it was scary at first because there were four students in classroom and everyone was coming from very diverse backgrounds. Describing her classmates, Raven says:

We had a millwright who worked in the wood industry for fifteen years, another mill worker who had been in the industry for twenty five years and a younger woman, my age probably, who came from another community but she was a stay at home mom with four kids and never really experienced any childhood trauma…there were a lot of mature students and a lot of second career students…the mill industry completely shut down and everyone’s employment insurance was running out so it was basically just a bunch of odds and ends kind of people joining together to take this course. It ended up being extremely rewarding for a lot of people. Like not realizing it, they just thought I’ll just take my SSW and go work for Services Canada, not really thinking about addictions and sexual assault, domestic violence that kind of stuff. So by the time the second year came around we went from sixty-three students in the first semester to forty in the second and then there were only twenty-six that graduated.

In addition to finding the program rewarding, Raven says:

I think the hardest lesson or teaching that came from all of this was getting to know myself. Just my interactions with people and being open and not being offended when people make comments and stuff like that, and just being able to take an outside look at how I’m interacting with people. Being more aware with the knowledge from school, and stuff, you learn to self-reflect, a lot of self-reflecting. I think that was a big part of it.

Raven felt that participating in the program was also a good opportunity for her husband because he was able to talk about his family. Raven also notes that her husbands’ family might have an image of a perfect family, but his mother is bipolar, and there were dysfunctions with him, too. Raven and her husband started going to couples counseling, again, around this time. Raven says, that the counselor they were seeing was able to identify that her husband had issues in his family,
and that Raven had her own issues, so she separated them and counseled them individually. Although Raven notes that it was a short period of time, she says that it was probably the most work she had ever done confronting some of her past, and she says that her husband was able to talk and not feel judged. Raven goes on to explain how the counselor was very straightforward, and at the time, Raven felt as if the counselor was blaming her for exposing the abuse her cousins’ had experienced. Raven says:

It was difficult just dealing with the family issues, like how everyone was tiptoeing around it. Now I’m coming out and talking about it and she was saying what about the other cousins who were also abused? I was mad at her at first for putting that responsibility on me because that wasn’t mine and I told her that, but she says you still have to realize and now that I went through the schooling, [and learned about] like disclosure and stuff like that, I now realize what she was doing [she was] making sure there were no other kids in harms way. At the time I was like livid, I was like how dare she! This is about me.

Raven also highlights how while she was going through couples counseling with her husband, she was cutting herself. She explains how she felt as if she was the only person who cut herself, but believes that people are now more open about cutting and can talk about it. Raven says that she began realizing how much of a problem cutting was for her during this time, but she did not tell the counselor that she was cutting herself.

**Experiences Volunteering**

After going through couples counseling and reaching a form of self understanding about cutting and the abuse she experienced as a child, Raven completed the coursework requirements for her Social Service Worker degree. Then, in order to fulfill other requirements, Raven completed her student placement at a rape crisis centre in North Bay, where she volunteered on the crisis line.

Besides volunteering at the rape crisis centre for her placement, Raven has not been involved in other volunteer work. However, Raven says that she always wanted to volunteer but because she lived in a small town, it was difficult. Raven says that if she would have known more about resources when she was younger, as she currently does, she would have realized that there were quite a few resources in her community, including Children’s Aid and Native Child and Family Services.

Raven continues to volunteer at her rape crisis centre, and once she completed her placement, she transferred from being a student to becoming the Funds Financial Development Coordinator. Raven says that this position allowed her to be more proactive and to engage with
volunteers. Reflecting on what it was like completing her internship, Raven explains that she took the volunteer training when she applied to the rape crisis centre for her placement. The volunteer coordinator told Raven that if she wanted to get hands-on experience during her placement, that she should take the volunteer training. At this time, Raven decided to do the training on the weekend because she was still a student. In total, Raven was taking up to four crisis line shifts a month. Taking the training and taking shifts on the crisis line opened up opportunities for her at the centre, and she was able to participate in co-facilitations. Although Raven was supposed to be trained in order to facilitate discussions, coordinators at the centre had not trained people to facilitate discussions in a long time and they allowed Raven to co-facilitate a group with another counselor. Raven says that it took a lot of trust building in order for coordinators at the centre to allow her to facilitate discussions because they were not used to having a student who was eager and who wanted to be involved in everything, but eventually she was approached and asked to become involved. Raven explains how part of the reason that the centre was hesitant to allow her to facilitate groups is because there was not a lot of consistency with student volunteers at the centre—many students would come and go very frequently.

For Raven, going through the volunteer training was when she was able to make connections and see everything as a whole. However, she also describes some of the challenges that she faced throughout training. For instance, she was initially uncomfortable with the feminist content that was taught in training:

I wasn’t sure about feminism. I didn’t know what the feminist approach was. When I first started training I was like, completely out of my realm, like I was thinking I don’t belong here. This is so not me, a bunch of man haters are here. Once you get towards the end of the training, after the ten weeks, that’s when they start saying we aren’t a bunch of man haters, that’s not what we are here for, but it’s important to know the history and how far women have come in the past hundred years, even. It’s incredible the milestones that we’ve made and even still what’s going on around us today. It’s still keeping women back, but even still, after I still struggled a bit, like I really respect the women that brought us forward but it’s almost like I started feeling, well because of this now I can’t choose to be a stay at home mom—I have to be a part of the working family and once I had my son I was like, okay I’m just going to get my schooling [and] pass that milestone and be a stay at home mom. It was something I really wanted to do because I missed out on it when he was young. Then, even still, by the time my internship ended… but then I’m like, what about me, though, because I still want to fill that mother role… the choice was there, but the rest of society says no, you’re working now. It’s like we went a little too far and didn’t consider maybe moms do just want to be moms.

Besides feeling self conscious about whether to be a stay at home mom due to particular opinions about feminism that were raised in volunteer training, Raven also notes the challenges she faced while speaking in a group:
We actually had a pretty big group. I think there were twelve of us. Before I started with school, I struggled. I was so shy that as soon as I started talking my voice would shake and I would start sweating and my hands were vibrating. I still do it sometimes, but my voice would go so deep that it would hurt after, like after thirty seconds of talking…in the training I was experiencing a lot of that. I had all these opinions and I knew it was a safe place to share them, but still…I struggled with it a lot and didn’t feel comfortable and by the end of the training I was comfortable in the group but when I was still speaking I felt like I was going to be judged, but then after I was done and got into my placement, that’s when it started going away because I was forced into situations. It was like here, go and do this.

Raven’s involvement throughout the training process eventually gave her the confidence to speak in public. When volunteer training focused on suicide and cutting, Raven approached the volunteer coordinator and told her that she was interested in getting involved. The volunteer coordinator then asked Raven if she would be comfortable sharing her experiences with the group, and told Raven that she did not know anyone who had cut themselves before. Raven agreed to speak about her experiences with cutting and says that she was “blown away” by the expression on peoples’ faces when she told them about cutting. Many people were surprised and fascinated. Elaborating on this, Raven notes how sharing her experiences was a positive part of training, and eventually led her to facilitate training for new volunteers. The first time that Raven facilitated training she was very nervous, but the second time “it wasn’t so bad.” Raven says:

it actually made me feel better, in a sense, that I was teaching somebody something. It was something so horrible and bad that I was actually putting a face to a cutter and telling people that it could be somebody you’re going to work with. Talking about suicide, I ended up doing all the suicide-training portions for the volunteer training throughout my internship. Whenever they had volunteer training I was called in to do the suicide portions of it.

Raven says that she enjoyed facilitating the training because she connected with the content. She adds:

I think it was because my eleven-year old step-niece committed suicide the week before that training started… I went through the emotions really quick…I ended up thinking, like how do I turn this into a good thing? So I started talking about her during training and started realizing, this is an eleven year-old girl who committed suicide, it’s not just older adults. It could be anybody. So just having the confidence to talk about that and kind of honouring her in a sense, in that way. I think that really struck something with the volunteer coordinator. She said, you’re really good at talking about suicide and you’re really open about it…she was the one who asked me to do all the suicide portions just because she wasn’t comfortable.

While Raven facilitated training, she also took calls on her own and counseled clients, in person, at the centre. Most of the counseling visits were supposed to be an hour, but usually
would last up to two hours. Raven was given more of the “difficult cases,” the crisis visits, where clients would come in frequently because they were on the wait list for individual counseling, and the waiting list could be as long as six months. Commenting on the difference between counseling people in person, versus speaking to them on the crisis line, Raven says that she found it to be easier to provide counseling in person because she was able to “get more emotion.” However, after a while, Raven found the calls to be easier because she was able to “let it go” afterwards. After calls with clients, Raven would tell herself that she did everything that she could do to help the person who called, and then she would get on with her day. Raven says that when clients are sitting in front of you, it is more difficult to not feel effected by the interaction because the clients’ demeanor is visible.

Raven describes a particular instance that she was speaking to a client on the crisis line and recommended her for weekly crisis visits:

One woman, who was my first crisis line caller, like, she was the biggest impact I think for me. I was seeing her once a week and it’s been over a year and a half and I brought it to the management board, I said can I take her on weekly just as crisis visits to…see how that goes, just to see if we can keep her stable and give her some outlets? They allowed her to come in and see me once a week and what a difference. She was coming in the centre once a week and then when she was coming in on other days it was to help. She wanted to put clothes away in the clothing bank or do something. It wasn’t immediate crisis all the time.

Raven explains that volunteer shifts typically range from seven o’clock in the morning until four thirty in the afternoon, or from four thirty in the afternoon until seven o’clock in the evening and she says that the centre has an answering service with the names and telephone numbers of volunteers on a list, and volunteers are called and given the telephone number of the client or volunteers are directly connected to the clients. From time to time, Raven will take calls during the night shift, which is between midnight and two o’clock in the afternoon. Most of the calls that Raven has taken have been between seven until ten o’clock in the evening because during the day people will usually try to call the office and they will get a counselor. Volunteers do not get a lot of calls during the week unless the office is busy. However, if this is the case, then clients are referred back to the crisis line.

Raven highlights how all calls are different and they can range from topics related to addictions, self-esteem, relationships, domestic abuse and triggers. Raven is quick to note how a common feature that can be found in most calls relates to childhood sexual assault. In fact, she says that the majority of calls connect to childhood sexual assault in some way, and that many clients will start talking about an issue that is going on, and after a few questions are asked it
stems from child abuse. There are very few calls that relate to recent sexual assaults, and in these cases, clients are told that someone at the center is available to accompany them to the hospital if they choose to do so. Clients are also told about what to expect if and when they decide to go to the hospital or take legal actions.

Raven took, and continues to take, all calls from home and has not found it challenging to entertain her young son during these calls. Rather, she has found that having a child has helped her connect with clients. Raven’s previous apartment was one level, and as soon as she would receive a call, she would put a movie on for her son and give him a bowl of cheerios. Then, Raven would go into the bathroom to speak to the client and she would tell her son that she had to make a call, and that if he needed her he should knock on the door. Raven would close the door and turn on the phone in order to muffle the sound. There were a few instances where he would knock on the door and tell Raven that he was hungry. In total, Raven says her son was with her during three calls. Clients would ask her about her son and would say, “Oh, you’re busy,” but Raven would tell them that she was not too busy, and being able to talk about her son was an icebreaker. Raven’s husband works shift work and his schedule has never interfered with her shifts on the crisis line. Raven’s husband is okay with her involvement on the crisis line and debriefs her. Raven says that he never judges her and “has never said anything bad about it.”

A challenging call that Raven encountered on the crisis line was from a male client. As explained by Raven:

We actually got a call last month and it was this man, he said that he was from Parry Sound, wherever he was accessing services, I can’t remember, but they told him to call us and so I said can I ask what it’s for? We are a sexual assault centre. Well yea that’s what it’s about, the client said. I said, do you mind me asking whether it’s for yourself or a family member? Well, he said, it’s for me and you could tell he was frustrated and I’m trying not to, like, send him to another place. I said, honestly there’s not a lot of resources for men…there’s nothing directly related to men’s sexual assault. We ended up missing the boat on that funding which is really unfortunate because we could have done so much with it but with management and the turnover, it’s just a bad year. So I’m trying to give this man resources and he’s getting frustrated [and says] well I can’t go to North Bay and I’m like, I’m so sorry, you’re more than welcome to call our crisis line and he ended up hanging up on me and I felt so bad…I’m trying to give them a lot of online resources like chat rooms, there’s other phone numbers, like crisis lines for men, and I’m trying to give him this information and he’s like I don’t have a computer and I can’t call long distance.

Contextualizing this call, Raven explains:

We’ve had quite a few calls from men lately…on the crisis line we are allowed to take calls from men. They can’t access our centre’s services like counseling and group work unless we get funding that is specific to that. I think it was about four or five years ago we got a chunk of money that was put towards men’s counseling, group counseling,
which was a huge success. It was one time funding. So we still to this day have men calling and asking when are you guys going to do another group? There’s a place in Ottawa and the Friendship Centre in Sudbury does a couple of things a year.

Raven also states that her interaction with the male client who phoned the crisis line has impacted her affiliations to feminism:

I think, for me, my work is about feminism, which is mostly just being proud of being a woman and standing on your own and being able to take care of yourself. Fighting for injustice…it’s shifting now. Like we talked about the men, it’s like how do we collaborate with them to help them get resources? Because I’m thinking back to the call I got too, the end result with that call, it was, well you know, it took women this long to get the services that they needed and men are just starting now, so as women we can’t just go and start lobbying for men because they need to be able to discuss on their own and we can’t speak for them. How do we engage more men and encourage them to move forward and how can we support them in doing that? To me it’s almost like feminism is turning. I don’t even know how to say it, just being human to everybody…even in the workplace, women get sexually harassed in workplaces, men get sexually harassed in workplaces quite often, too…I look at it more like, how do we, as women in our strength that we’ve developed over all these years and everything we’ve learned, how do we turn that into family and community rather than just rah rah rah.

Besides improving resources that are available to men who have experienced sexual violence, Raven notes how she would like there to be improvements made to training, and that finding funding for training has been a part of her job recently. Raven feels that additional training should be offered to volunteers beyond the ten-week training. She would like to see non-violent crisis intervention incorporated into the additional training, and feels that additional training could help volunteers stay connected.

Raven has drawn from her own experiences as a volunteer in order to make improvements for volunteers at her centre and to figure out how to face particular challenges. For example, Raven describes how she felt uncomfortable as a volunteer when she had to call Children’s Aid:

I actually brought it to the attention of management when I first started, because I said, how come we don’t have any crisis reporting forms? Like, if we have to call the police or call Children’s Aid, I feel more comfortable if we had it on a form… and I wasn’t comfortable putting it on our regular reporting because it goes into our volunteer binder and then other volunteers can go in and read through and see what other people are saying or doing in certain situations so it’s kind of a resource. I didn’t want to put full details including the name of the officer, badge number, other names… because it’s important material. The Executive Director ended up asking me to develop this form so I developed the reporting form…I was getting frustrated crossing these bridges so I thought well let’s develop this form.
In addition to recognizing some of the challenges that volunteers face on the crisis line, when Raven was completing her internship she was curious about other volunteers and sent out a survey to all of the volunteers, asking them about their experiences. Raven found that volunteers wanted to be more engaged in centre activities and they wanted more volunteer based training and activities. In her current position, Raven took the feedback from volunteers and has tried to find funding for additional training. She has also helped to arrange a volunteer appreciation barbeque in order to recognize volunteers’ hard work. Commenting on what it was like to bring volunteers together for the barbeque, she says that they had a good turnout, and that it was nice for everyone to put a face to the centre and meet members of the board. After the barbeque, the centre had an awards ceremony that Raven helped to develop. During the awards ceremony, the centre recognized their most dedicated volunteer and named the award after her. The centre plans on having an awards ceremony every year in order to recognize volunteers’ hard work and efforts.

Although Raven explains that events, including Volunteer Appreciation Day, are important for keeping volunteers connected with each other, Raven echoes what volunteers’ expressed in her survey, and does not necessarily feel that there is a sense of community among volunteers at the centre. She attributes this to the fact that there has been a lot of changeover in the organization in the last couple of years, which has caused a lot of disconnect with the volunteers and the board of directors. Raven continues:

Recently a few board members shifted. A couple left so now they are starting to focus right down to the roots again and strategic planning, financial planning, that was part of my job but it was hard to do with having no sound management so it was definitely a struggle but the crisis intervention part of it kept me busy. I really enjoyed that part of it. With the changeover, like, I’m starting to see more attention put to the volunteer program.

Overall, Raven feels that she has made a contribution to the centre and to individual clients. She typically knows if she has made an impact on clients if, “by the end of the call they give me some indication, like a compliment or it’s so great having you guys around…it’s a good indication that you’re doing your job and you’re getting through to them.” Elaborating on her contributions as a volunteer and an employed worker, she says:

I think that something I brought to the organization was seeing the overall picture and how can we better support volunteers…I was more engaged in the volunteer program than I think I was just being a volunteer. I think I went in there, like thinking I’m going to get the most out of this as I possibly can so I think just having that attitude I was able to open up more opportunities for myself.
Finally, reflecting on her healing process and her journey, Raven proclaims:

I think, well, just my whole life journey brought me to where I needed to be. I’m very spiritual and I like to ride by the seat of my pants and sometimes my husband gets really freaked out but I just think everything will be okay and just every stepping stone that I was going across was fitting that role of doing what I’m doing…it keeps me going. It’s definitely been a hard journey. I’ve even been told by clients that I am wise beyond my years.

**Jordana’s Story**

**Experiences Throughout Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood**

Jordana is a Caucasian woman, in her twenties, who identifies as heterosexual. Jordana was born in Kingston, Ontario and lived with her parents, older brother and younger sister, until her parents divorced when she was around thirteen years old. She explains how “growing up in Kingston, you get very familiar with the prisons real fast.” Her family lived on a dead end street, by a field, and she felt as if she was living in the country, although she was actually living in the city. Jordana remembers play fighting with her siblings and having two wonderful, supportive parents as a child. She continues to have a close relationship with both of her parents. Jordana says:

I’ve always been very close with my family. My sister, I absolutely love my sister so much. We are really close. We hang out a lot, like my boyfriend is in a band and we went to see him recently and we spent a lot of time together. I just value her so much. You know, there are always up and downs with siblings, but we are super close and my brother I’m really close with, too. We get along super well. We both kind of chill, we like the same music, we are going to Toronto to see Pink Floyd…Yea, so I’m close with everybody in my family…still super close to my dad, super close to my mom.

Reflecting on when her parents divorced, Jordana says that at the time it was difficult. However, Jordana and her sister wanted their parents to get a divorce because they both knew that their parents’ marriage was not working and that they were not well matched. Jordana and her sister also felt that they would be happier, as children, if their parents separated. There was not anything particularly traumatizing about Jordana’s parents’ relationship, but Jordana felt that it “wasn’t what a relationship should be.” After her parents got a divorce, Jordana says that she was happy, but that it was sad moving all of her things out of the house where she grew up.

While her parents were in the process of getting divorced, Jordana moved out of her childhood home with her mother and sister, while her father and brother remained in the house. Jordana recalls moving into a one-bedroom basement apartment where she shared a room with her mother and sister. For the first few months, all three of them slept on separate blow-up
mattresses until they were able to get proper beds. Jordana does not think that her father realized that they were sleeping on blow-up mattresses and that they were struggling. Jordana and her mother and sister lived in the basement apartment for just over one year and then they moved into a rented house. This is when Jordana was attending one of the Catholic high schools.

Jordana labels her school as a very cliquey school and says that she “definitely wasn’t part of the popular crowd.” Instead, she describes herself as being “a drama nerd and a tech nerd.” She took drama courses throughout high school and absolutely loved it. By her final year of high school, Jordana was involved in many extra curricular activities, including performing in the school play, working on the video yearbook and hosting the Arts Awards Show.

Jordana credits her interest in videography as eventually leading her to pursue a degree in Journalism at Humber College, in Toronto. The program was three years, and although Jordana describes it as a “fabulous experience” she was held at gunpoint and mugged in Toronto while she was a student. Speaking about this experience, Jordana says that it happened at night and that she was very scared. The people who mugged Jordana had bandanas over their faces, and she was unable to know what they looked like. The police never caught them. Immediately following this incident Jordana feared for her safety, but as time went on, she has forgotten about it. At the time, Jordana considered herself to be extremely fortunate because she was not physically hurt. She says, “they just took my stuff and scared me.”

Jordana was mugged in Rexdale, which is where the Humber College residences are located. Jordana describes Rexdale as a dangerous area and says that many people treated her similarly to the way that sexual assault survivors are treated: people asked Jordana why she was walking alone at night and told Jordana that she had “asked for it.” Jordana was not by herself when she was mugged; she was with three other people and everyone was held at gunpoint. She emphasizes how people would continuously blame Jordana and instead of being supportive, they would say, “What were you thinking? You were outside at night, so that’s what you get.”

A few weeks after Jordana was mugged there was a home invasion close to the Humber College residences where she was living. Two girls were assaulted and raped in front of their boyfriends. Jordana recalls feeling lucky that it did not happen to her and believes that she was “super fortunate.” Jordana says that “it was very close having that perspective,” and at the time she did not think that she needed counseling, but has come to realize that she should have sought help. Although Jordana says that she “is now over it,” there are times at night when she looks over her shoulder to ensure that that she is not being followed. That being said, Jordana does not feel that being mugged has prevented her from going back to Toronto or that it has caused her to
feel afraid while walking alone in Toronto, although Jordana’s mother continues to worry about Jordana’s safety whenever she is alone.

Jordana did not experience nightmares after getting mugged or when she learned about the assaults nearby, but she felt that these incidents impacted her sense of safety and increased her anxiety around that time. She attributes her anxiety to the fact that the incidents “were so close.” She says, “I hadn’t known these girls before but now they were right there, they were in my space and it was super sad because you could see they were wearing their pain, basically. It was very apparent… I didn’t walk alone at that time at all, ever, and I definitely took cabs everywhere. It was really sad and scary.”

These incidents shaped Jordana’s experience as a student at Humber College and affected her transition to living in Toronto. Commenting on this, Jordana says:

It was hard. It was harder than I thought it would be especially because I was mugged a month after I moved to Toronto. It was definitely challenging because I’m so used to having my family around me all the time and then I was super far away from them and it was definitely a scary experience being mugged and finding out that women were assaulted near Humber College but then, like you get over things. It was okay and then the transition was fine after that.

Reflecting on what it was like being a journalism student, Jordana emphasizes her changing interests and how it was difficult completing her program. She says that her program was fun, but that other students were very competitive which was difficult to manage since Jordana was not prepared for this when she entered the program. In her second year, Jordana decided that she did not want to be a journalist, but she had already completed two years of the program and had one year left. At that point, she did not want to waste all of the hard work and money she had spent on completing her degree, so she finished the program and earned her diploma. Once Jordana finished her program she was unsure of what to do next, and eventually decided to go back to school and get a degree in psychology.

Jordana completed her Bachelors of Arts degree in behavioural psychology in Kingston and says that it was “amazing.” It was an applied degree, so Jordana had the opportunity to do placements, which is something that she enjoyed. Initially, Jordana did not know what behavioural psychology was, but she knew that she wanted to be in the helping profession. After learning about theoretical approaches at school and then applying the theory at her placements, Jordana felt intellectually stimulated and was in awe that theory actually could transfer into practice. Describing what her first placement was like, Jordana says:

I was really lucky. I had great placements. I always said I was lucky, but I also worked really hard for them. I was fortunate that I was able to do them. My first placement was
at a public school and a specialized classroom for kids with behaviour problems. It was a completely not normal classroom. It was small, there were I think, less than ten kids in it. They were pretty much all boys, actually, they were all boys...they all were not capable of being in a regular classroom because they had such bad behaviours, mostly like oppositional defiant disorder, like ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder]...it was a very interesting experience, but I felt like I never wanted to work in a school after that...it definitely opened my eyes a lot to the different things that people go through. It really broke my heart that kids were going through these things. I never really thought before that those were actually people's lives and they were because their behaviour in the classroom, it really reflected their home life. They had really unstable home lives and it was really terrible, so that was a great experience.

For Jordana’s second placement, she ventured to Calgary for eight weeks and worked at a group home with children between the ages of eight and fourteen who had behavioural problems. Jordana became very close and bonded with the children since she was living with them. Jordana says that this was an incredible experience and she had the opportunity to go on trips with the children around Alberta. Specifically, Jordana went to Edmonton for a few days and saw the mountains. She says that the trips were “really great” and that she was able to see many wonderful things. Rather than feeling stressed while working with the kids, Jordana says that she did not feel emotionally drained or affected by the intensity of the job. Jordana’s supervisor told her that the previous person who had her job had daily debrief sessions due to the difficult nature of the work. However, unlike the previous person with her job, Jordana says that she did not find working with the kids to negatively affect her and that she found the work to be fun. Jordana states that one of the reasons why she may have not been negatively affected was because she practiced yoga daily which helped her stay centred and re-focus her thoughts. Jordana says, “the kids never really got to me, because you do develop those personal relationships with them, so you are dealing with those problematic behaviours but they are also so sweet, they’re such great kids...so it made it easier.”

After completing her placement, Jordana went back to work for the summer at a different program for kids with behavioural problems. Jordana describes that job as being the most fun she’s ever had while working. During the summer, Jordana was living at one of the teaching homes, located outside of Calgary and she commuted with her car to a low-income area in Calgary for the program. Jordana explains that one of the reasons for having the camp located in a low income area had to do with keeping the kids busy and safe when they were not in school so that they were less likely to join gangs. In addition, the camp functioned as a way to reach out to communities and offer necessary supports and services. Because of this, Jordana remembers feeling like a social worker because not only was she building relationships with the children, but she was also building relationships with their parents. Jordana says that establishing trust with
parents was “super fun” because she was paid to run around all day and do really enjoyable activities that she never would have done otherwise. It was difficult for Jordana to say goodbye to the kids at the end of the summer, and it was especially difficult because she had developed relationships with the parents and was a person that they also trusted. Jordana illustrates this point:

“We had a sign-in thing there where the parents had to come in and sign in but not all these parents wanted to come in and drop their kids off. They were like, why can’t my kid just walk there? I don’t care, like whatever. So I would go door to door with my sheet and be like, just so you know, so-and-so showed up for camp today. I just need you to sign. Because we needed those signatures, right? Otherwise the kid couldn’t come to camp. I would go and knock on people doors and I would get the signatures.

A particularly memorable experience occurred at the end of summer when two of the kids that Jordana was the closest with and their mother asked if they could take a picture with her. At this time Jordana says, “I was going to bawl my eyes out and I thought, wow, you want to remember me? I was just there for a summer! That’s so sweet. They let me know that I really did make an impact on their lives, so that’s what I always take away with me, that somebody wanted a picture of me with their kids.”

Besides establishing relationships with the kids and their families, Jordana became close with the staff members who were hired by different agencies in Calgary. She underscores how she is still very close with both of them and felt that everyone worked well together as a team. Jordana also highlights how quite often she acted like the leader of the group because she would teach the team about information related to modifying behaviours.

In addition to feeling supported by co-workers, Jordana mentions how the man she was dating while living in Calgary was very encouraging and that he would get involved with the kids. Jordana explains that her boyfriend would play Nintendo with the boy that she was working with and would also take him to hockey games. She says, “I really appreciated that he was taking an interest in my clients because I spent most of my time with them, so they’re obviously a big part of my life when I have them.”

At the end of the summer, Jordana moved back to Toronto to begin her third placement, at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in the Eating Disorders and Addictions Clinic. Similar to the way Jordana characterizes her other placements, she describes her involvement at CAMH as “an incredible experience” and says her colleagues were amazing. Jordana says that she felt special and lucky for being able to work with Masters and PhD students during her placements since CAMH typically does not allow people for placements unless they are completing their Masters degree or are more highly educated. She says that the women she
worked with at CAMH were inspiring and that she wanted to be like them. Jordana would like to eventually pursue her Master’s degree and says that she always thinks of these women as role models.

At the time, Jordana worked with her clients consistently for four months. As part of her placement, she worked with clients individually and would administer pre-assessments for assessing eating pathology and substance use. Jordana would administer these pre-assessments in order to see if clients fit the criteria and to determine if they could be part of the program before they worked with PhD students. Jordana would do the first screening test with individual clients and she also facilitated a group for people who had binge eating problems. Most people agreed to participate in her thesis project.

During the placement, Jordana was writing her thesis and was using acceptance and commitment therapy, a mindfulness based therapy. She was interested in increasing mindfulness and acceptance in her participants and was interested in exploring how people with eating disorders could become more mindful of negative thoughts. For instance, Jordana explains, “if they are having thoughts like, oh I’m fat, I can’t eat this, if they would recognize that as a thought that doesn’t necessarily mean anything, or the statement, I’m fat…if they don’t judge themselves for having that thought, [and think] it’s just a thought, just because you have it, that doesn’t mean it’s true, then they might not have these problematic eating issues.” Jordana would lead her participants through mindfulness exercises that she hoped they would practice on their own.

For Jordana, mindfulness therapy was a central part of her work and continues to be central. She highlights how she uses mindfulness at her current job with male offenders: “I’m mindful at the prison with the guys. I do mindfulness with them and I’m like, this will help. It’s good I swear. I carried that with me. I do mindfulness for everything; I’m obsessed with it.” Elaborating on her interest in mindfulness, Jordana explains:

I had always been interested in yoga, at first not necessarily for the mental part of it, but just physically. I was like, this is a sweet way to exercise, I love it. That was just something I had done off and on since grade eight, doing yoga and then I had just randomly took an ACT, Acceptance, Commitment Therapy, workshop because it was thirty dollars for students in Ottawa and I was like thirty bucks? I’ll travel for that, sweet! Why the hell not? And so then I went to it and I was like, wow this is really interesting, this notion of mindfulness and how it can affect your life and how you get out of your head, basically. It’s like you have a thought but it’s just a thought, it doesn’t mean anything. I thought that in itself was really empowering because you’re not controlled by your thoughts. It’s just something in your head and then you just let it go and move on with your day. So that was something just for me that I could really benefit from was being able to do that, so I just became really interested in it and then when I got this placement at CAMH I was like, well maybe I’ll try ACT, maybe I’ll do that, and my thesis supervisor was like yes, I love ACT…I didn’t know we had this in common…I did
so much research, just crazy amounts obviously into mindfulness and the different mindfulness strategies that there are and how I could bring it forth and apply it to eating. There are books out there on mindfulness and eating disorders but when I was doing my thesis there wasn’t, so I was adapting the exercises. I made a few silly mistakes, of course, like a new practitioner right?

Jordana does not describe the work that she was doing at her placement to be difficult and says:

I was still able to let it roll off. I’m really good at not taking everything back with me. I can leave it where it is and I might worry a little bit, like I might be thinking about if I knew the women who were binge eaters had a big event that day and they were really worried about eating at it because they were like, I don’t want to eat, but if I don’t eat people will think weird things about me, so we would make a plan and have this much of this and I would think, gosh, I hope she was able to stick to her plan, I hope she didn’t drink too much. Those thoughts would come to me but I wouldn’t dwell on them. They would just be in my mind and then I would think about it, and then it would be gone. It didn’t really impact me too much.

Jordana remembers feeling happy for her participants and clients but is quick to emphasize their efforts, rather than crediting herself for their accomplishments. She felt as if she was giving them the tools to help themselves. Jordana often felt proud of her clients and would tell them that they “had it in them to do these things.”

Overall, Jordana describes her placement at CAMH as:

Really interesting and super eye opening because I had never been the type of person where I would think not to eat. I’ve never experienced that before in my life and so to be hearing so many of these women having this experience where they were thinking I’m actually not just going to eat today and trying so hard not to eat, it was really shocking to me because I just didn’t know how to relate to it because I’ve never felt that way before, ever. It was incredible and I just loved it. It was fabulous.

After completing her placement at CAMH in Toronto, Jordana moved back to Kingston to write her thesis and finish her degree. Jordana explains that while she was writing her thesis she felt like it would never stop, and developed a “love/hate relationship” with it. Once it was complete, Jordana felt very proud of herself and she also felt like it was a bit accomplishment.

Once Jordana graduated, the agency in Calgary where she had completed her placement hired her back. Jordana moved out west for eight months and worked in a specialized program with kids who had behavioural problems that were transitioning from youth services to adult services. Jordana taught them “how to live on their own, how to find a job and how to be a real person.” Jordana also worked with aboriginal mothers and taught them parenting and life skills. Jordana considers this to be a “really amazing experience.”

Jordana considers working in Calgary to have been “a super intense time” and says:
I wasn’t tired but I was definitely feeling the effects of being so far from my family and not having, I guess, enough time to...I don’t want to say de-stress, because I don’t think I was really stressed out and I wasn’t tired, but I didn’t have my own time basically, because I really worked all day and then would go to sleep, wake up and work again. That’s my own fault— I couldn’t say no. They would call for me a shift and I can’t say no. It’s impossible for me. If I don’t do it who is going to? So I have to go and do it.... I wasn’t quite myself then. I think that I wouldn’t say I necessarily had depression but I certainly had symptoms of depression because it was really hard being away from my family...I tried to do a lot of yoga and I guess I read a lot.

She continues:

I’ve done a lot of reflection on it since and it definitely wasn’t the work that I was doing because I take on people’s problems but I don’t take on people’s problems. I listen and help as much as I can but it doesn’t become my problem and it doesn’t affect my mood or anything like that, like it never has before…I think it was definitely being away from my family. Calgary wasn’t home for me. I didn’t feel like I fit in there. When I was there before it was awesome but being in Calgary the first time it was like, I was just visiting, almost, so it wasn’t my home where I was living and trying to make a life. I definitely did not fit-in in Calgary. No, I’m like, way too liberal and I used to have…it’s illegal to have rats in Alberta…and I love rats and people were like, ew, that’s disgusting. I’m like nobody here understands me…I still did my job, absolutely, but I wasn’t myself, so I moved home and it took me a while to get back to normal. I still wasn’t myself and my friends here noticed…it took a few months to get back to normal.

Once Jordana returned to Kingston she had difficulty finding a job in her field. She says “out west I just walked right into it and didn’t realize that it was actually hard. I was completely clueless because they were like, hey you graduated, want to come work for us? I didn’t know that it wasn’t like that here.” Eventually, Jordana was offered a relief position in Kingston working with adults who had mental illnesses (including schizophrenia and psychotic disorders). She enjoyed the job, but due to the on-call nature of the position, Jordana was not working enough hours and decided to take on a second job. She was able to get an administrative position at a regional treatment centre, which is a psychiatric prison, while continuing with the relief job. Then, through contacts and by emphasizing her training in psychology, Jordana ended up finding a job in her field at a maximum-security prison, just outside of Kingston. Jordana started doing short term counseling with men and then switched to work with ‘career criminals’ who she refers to as “the J-unit clients.” Jordana says that she had more J unit clients than anybody else.

Jordana explains that working in a maximum-security prison with men is an entirely other world that she had no idea about prior to her job. She says that many of her clients grew up in problematic situations and it is not surprising that they are criminals considering what they have been through. Jordana has worked with many men who had difficult childhoods and came from dysfunctional families. She is quick to point out that many clients are scared because they
have never been in a federal institution and for a lot of them, being there is a wake-up call at first. A few of Jordana’s clients realized that they needed counseling because they did not want to end up back in prison. In some cases, Jordana practiced mindfulness with them and found that they enjoyed it which made her happy. Jordana felt satisfied at this job because she felt like an important person in many of her clients’ lives. She says that it was rewarding because she became a support system for many clients and was the only person who had ever listened to them.

Describing what this was like, Jordana says, “I would get clients who would say thanks for looking at me in the eye when you talk to me, and I’m like, that’s a really weird comment, but you’re welcome…they may not be used to that…they did some pretty horrific things.”

Jordana shares what it was like listening to some of the crimes that were committed by the men she counseled:

It was really hard sometimes but what I found to be the most difficult is crimes against kids. I really, really hated working with those guys because it is hard to separate it. You like to think you can completely be impartial and treat them as a person as opposed to the person who did this, but it’s really hard when it’s a horrific crime against a child or sexual crimes are really hard especially when you hear them trying to justify it…that’s what I found really upsetting, like one guy was like, yea like, I raped her but she owed me two hundred dollars. Oh, okay so then you now owned her? Like what made you think…why does her owing you money mean that you get to do whatever you want to her? But that wasn’t necessarily my role to challenge those core beliefs. They would do that in the sexual programming that the guys would have to take. Hearing those attitudes, those really negative attitudes towards women, which is very pervasive in prison, was really challenging.

Although Jordana’s time working with male offenders as a counselor was cut short due to a lack of funding, soon after she was offered a research job at the same maximum security prison, which is where she is currently working. In her current position, Jordana’s supervisor is in Ottawa, but because the intake unit is in Kingston, that is where she conducts the research. Jordana works with another man who she says likes very much. Jordana enjoys listening to him tell her stories about his research. Jordana says, “we have a good relationship. We definitely have each other’s backs because the guys can be really difficult to deal with sometimes, so we help each other.” The research project that Jordana and her colleague are focusing on relates to the mental health prevalence of new offenders. Jordana explains how new clients come in three days a week and she asks them if they would like to participate in her research and then conducts assessments. According to Jordana, she is able to recruit over eighty percent of the men she speaks with, which makes her feel proud. Jordana says that a lot of people tell her that the reason she is able to recruit so many clients is because she is attractive, but Jordana insists that it is
because she uses a nice tone when speaking to clients. Jordana finds her job to be interesting because she hears everybody’s secrets and “learns cool information.”

Jordana considers the work that she is involved in to be part of the helping profession in different ways, although she distinguishes between research versus counseling, and also raises the issue of public safety. She says:

Absolutely, I would consider myself in the helping profession…in the research capacity not as much, because I’m not doing counseling with the guys but I am helping them because it is…therapeutic for them because they can get a lot off their chest. They really can, and if I do feel like they would benefit from some counseling I refer them to psychology, so I would consider myself in the helping profession because there are so many times during the assessments with guys, they’re like, well, I’ve never told anybody this...definitely when I was doing the counseling while I was with the guys, absolutely I was in the helping profession, and also in terms of public safety as well, because a lot of times it does get kind of swept under or missed that like, yea, we are working with these guys and they’ve done really horrible things—I would never deny they’ve done horrible things and they deserve to be in prison— but if you don’t work with them on those issues and teach them how to behave in more appropriate ways then they are just going to go back out and do the exact same thing. That’s why this role is completely needed within the institution and I see people’s points that it does seem unfair that they are getting resources that people in the community don’t necessarily get. Like, not everybody gets to see a counselor every week even though they need to. I absolutely can see how that seems really unfair…I don’t think you can change everybody, like I’m not that naïve, thinking that just coming to counseling with me is going to completely change them but it might be a start, it might be that first step and I think that’s really important. They do need help, too, and by helping them you are helping public safety and hopefully they won’t recommit any crimes, so that’s kind of what my goal is and that’s what I keep in mind because there are times when I’ve had guys and they’ve done horrible things and I’m like, I shouldn’t be working with them, I should be working with the kids, I should be working in victim services, that is what I should be doing, and then my co-workers are like, you almost are in a way. By helping this offender you will be helping everybody. That’s what I would try to keep in mind because it does weigh down on you sometimes. It’s hard stuff.

Jordana feels the relationship she has with her mother has influenced her decision to work in the helping profession. Jordana’s mother works as a manager for an organization that focuses on animal care. When Jordana was growing up, her mother was a veterinarian technician, and Jordana spent a lot of time watching her mother work with animals. Jordana explains that she used to tell people that what she does with people is what her mother does with animals. Jordana says that her mother is a very giving person and that Jordana is similar to her mother because they both cannot say ‘no’ to anyone. Jordana explains that one of her mothers’ colleagues once told Jordana that her mother “has a heart of gold and would do anything for anybody.” Elaborating on this, Jordana says that her mother has “definitely” shaped her decision to go into the helping profession because she has always seen her mother helping others and animals. Jordana explains
that watching her mother help others is what drew her in to that area and has impacted her
decision to help people herself.

In terms of work safety, Jordana says that she feels completely safe although her parents
and boyfriend do not like that she is working in a maximum-security prison. She explains how
her boyfriend likes her work does but does not like that she is locked in a room with prisoners.
However, Jordana states, “I think he recognizes that I’m not a person who’s a pushover and in a
vulnerable situation I’m not a vulnerable person.” Jordana also points out that maximum security
is safer than medium or minimum-security prisons because everyone is locked down and they are
not walking around. She believes the strong relationship that she has built with the security
guards plays a large part in feeling safe at work.

Finally, reflecting on her work, Jordana says that it has made her more aware of crime
and how pervasive it is because a lot of new criminals arrive every day, but that she does not feel
less safe. She is continually amazed at the amount of criminals who come into the federal prisons
and points out that there are also many criminals that enter the provincial system everyday.
Jordana feels bitter towards the justice system because of the short lengths of sentences that some
criminals face for horrific crimes that they have committed.

Experiences volunteering

Jordana became involved in rape crisis work when she moved back to Kingston after
completing her degree in journalism, while she was studying psychology in Kingston. She
volunteered for two years and then moved to Calgary. Upon returning to Kingston after leaving
her job in Calgary, Jordana decided to volunteer at the same centre. She is currently volunteering
at this centre, and has been volunteering there for over a year. Jordana explains that when she first
decided to volunteer, she contacted the volunteer coordinator, and explained that she was a
student in behavioral psychology and was interested in volunteering her time with the crisis line.
After that, Jordana had an interview where she was asked a few questions about herself. Jordana
explains that the reason she was asked about herself was because “you need to identify as anti-
oppressive and feminist and to share those ideals which is what they stand by and so we talked
about that for a bit.”

Jordana cites two incidents that occurred while she was studying at Humber College—
being mugged and learning that two women were assaulted near campus— as directly influencing
her decision to become a rape crisis volunteer. She also explains that when she was in high
school, one of her best friends, who she is still close with, was assaulted at a party. Jordana
provides further information about the incident:
My friend didn’t know him the perpetrator…she was a dancer and so some of her dancing friends, they were a lot older, like in their later teens, and they had a party at their house and it just wasn’t a safe place for her because these girls weren’t necessarily having her back and making sure she was safe and they were like, oh no she’s just having a good time, it’s fine. They didn’t realize that actually she was really young and drunk and didn’t know what was going on.

Jordana describes feeling overcome by shame in her adult years for the way she reacted to her friends assault, long ago. Jordana’s friend disclosed her assault to Jordana when they were fifteen years old, and at the time, Jordana did not feel that she was as supportive as she could have been. Jordana explains that her friend had “some damaging behaviours afterward the assault where she was hurting herself and I didn’t understand it to be as part of a cycle of what she was going through and I was super judgmental towards her.” Jordana goes on to explain that she feels her friend is a strong person and that it is incredible and inspiring to see the trauma that she has overcome.

As well as feeling ashamed for judging her friend, Jordana also remembers feeling very angry about the assault, and she highlights how survivors of sexual assault often feel silenced:

I was very angry and thought who the hell do you think that you are for thinking that you can do just whatever you want to my friend? And feeling like that fear, it does happen, because if you don’t know somebody or somebody doesn’t share with you that it’s happened, then you don’t know it’s actually going on. I think that’s why there is so much ignorance today because people don’t talk about it because it’s their private business—they don’t have to share if they don’t want to. But, like, if you don’t know, then you don’t think it’s going on. So it was a big shock like, oh my god, this has happened to my best friend who I’ve known since grade two.

Jordana explains how after beginning her psychology degree, she took a course on violence against women which helped her to channel some of her shame and anger. While Jordana was taking the class and started learning about what happens to women when they are assaulted, she began to feel ashamed and angry at herself for not supporting her friend. She called her friend crying, and apologized. Her friend was very responsive and thanked Jordana for talking to her about it. Jordana’s friend said, “We were little kids. Of course you didn’t know what to do, nobody knows what to do so it’s okay.”

The course that Jordana took on violence against women not only helped her to better understand her friends’ assault, but it also shaped Jordana’s experiences as a rape crisis volunteer. Jordana found that the course that she took on violence against women in her program helped her more while she was volunteering on the rape crisis line than the actual rape crisis training. While
taking the course, Jordana learned about the psychological effects that violence against women and girls has on survivors as opposed to just learning statistics. As noted by Jordana:

Even with the rape crisis volunteer training, it didn’t give me a full realization of how damaging it truly is. So it was that course that really opened my eyes even further, because we just learned about the different patterns of violence, the cycles, as well as what it’s like when women do report…how often times children or women, they will take it back, they will recant it, which doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. It’s just part of the whole cycle which was mind boggling to me…I still get furious if I read newspaper articles where they say, later the victim took it back, I’m like…you have to keep following up, though! I get furious when I read that. People just don’t understand the pattern. That course was really valuable to me in changing how I viewed the world. It really drove my dedication to rape crisis volunteering and to what they believed in so that was really great.

In addition to taking a course on violence against women, Jordana says that when she began volunteering for the first time, she was feeling rewarded, empowered and interested in learning all of the information from training. For Jordana, training was “a really awesome experience.” Expanding on this, Jordana says that were a lot of statistics and general information about law and medical procedures. Training exposed Jordana to the kinds of calls she would likely receive and taught her how to respond to callers without feeling nervous. In addition, there was a role-playing component, different documentaries and videos, as well as different guest speakers from various agencies that would speak about their services and provide advice.

After completing training, Jordana began taking her shifts from home. Jordana had a pager, and would phone the centre, providing details about how long she was on a shift for. If there was a call, the centre would page Jordana and she would phone back, receive the clients’ phone number and then call them. Jordana says that if she received a page at three o’clock in the morning, it could be difficult because she only had a few minutes to wake up and compose herself so that she could be “more present” when speaking to a client.

Jordana would frequently take calls during the evening, over night, and on the weekends because she was at school throughout the day. All shifts lasted four hours and she never remembers getting more than two calls during a shift. In many cases, people who called the crisis line often spoke of assaults that occurred in the past. Jordana explains how for many clients, once they are adults and realize what has happened to them, they want to take action. If they need information it is usually related to what their legal options and medical options are. For historical assaults, when clients they are going through the courts, Jordana says that “they often need to vent a lot of time because for many clients, going through court cases and pressing charges against someone is a horrible experience.”
Initially, speaking to people on the crisis line created a sense of anxiety for Jordana. At first, Jordana was nervous because she was expecting calls to be non-stop and thought that she would always be on the phone, talking to people. Once Jordana realized that this was not the case, she relaxed and calmed down. Jordana also explains how at first, she was “always nervous and on edge” because she wanted to do well and because it was a new experience. Eventually, Jordana’s anxiety began to decrease as she learned about the importance of listening:

You definitely have that nervousness at first, but then when you start your conversation then it really does dissipate but I always worry about having the answer… I always want to say the right thing, but really a lot of the time it’s truly just listening and just validating and normalizing their experience. So, instead of worrying about having the right thing to say, you don’t need to say anything… you just need to listen so that’s what I noticed and definitely took a lot of the edge off me once I realized they are here to talk and I’m here to listen.

Jordana considers herself to be “a pretty resilient person” and says that she does not take on other people’s problems. She has never experienced nightmares, and, although she might feel sad during a call, after the call ends, she continues on. That being said, Jordana recalls an incident when she accompanied a young woman to the hospital and found it to be physically and emotionally draining. Jordana says:

There was one time where I was up all night because it ended up being a young girl who had called and she decided to go to the Sexual Assault Division and get her rape kit done, so since I was the person on call, I provided the accompaniment for her and I did not sleep all night. We were up all night there and it was a very bad experience because I had to fight with the staff because this young woman was known to the hospital because she had a lot of mental health problems and she typically would go to the hospital in a worse way...the nursing staff were giving her some rude comments... and she’s turning to me, and saying, but I didn’t try to kill myself to come here this time and I came with you. And I’m like, so right, don’t worry about what they are saying. You did the right thing; you didn’t hurt yourself, perfect. It was a very poor experience with some of the nursing staff and then the physician that was on call. The actual nurse was wonderful, she was great, super supportive, super helpful. However, the physician refused to actually do the examination because he was like, she’s been here before. The physician didn’t believe her and he used that as a reason to not do it, which is incredibly ridiculous because it’s not his role to decide that—it’s his role to be doing the examination. I remember talking to the nurse, talking to the physician, but there was nothing I could say to change his mind and I felt awful about it because I’m there as her representative, I’m there as her advocate, because she can’t necessarily speak for herself and doesn’t know her rights, but her rights had been violated in that case and there was nothing I could do which made me feel really powerless and helpless and horrible. The nurse did collect whatever evidence that she could that was on her clothing, some fluids, but in terms of a more thorough examination, that wasn’t able to happen but she did document everything, like, that we were there so… if charges were pressed then this will at least help.
Although Jordana’s encounter with the physician made her feel powerless and helpless, she found the police officer to be encouraging and helpful. According to Jordana:

At that time the client also decided she did want to report to the police…and I was very impressed with the police officer. He was incredible, very non judgmental because I’m not sure what it’ like, but in Kingston there is a sexual assault division of police officers who are specifically trained to work with survivors of sexual assault. He was great and sensitive to her and was very caring and interested. I’ve heard how rare this is but he allowed me to sit in on the questioning which apparently is mind blowing and never happens… she didn’t want to talk unless I was present because she felt safe and comfortable around me and I was almost her protector because she was pretty young. So that worked, and that was great.

Jordana also illustrates how the emotional aspects of being a rape crisis volunteer (in this case, accompanying a caller to the hospital) has affected her personal life:

I didn’t sleep a wink, that was around Christmas and as soon as I got back, which was early in the morning, my family was getting ready to go to Toronto for our family Christmas party. I got showered quickly, got right back in the car and went to Toronto for a family Christmas party where I basically just tried to sleep in my brother’s car, in the back seat, the whole time. He was a little insensitive and refused to turn off his music, so I couldn’t sleep the entire time, but when I got to my uncles I’m like, I’m going to bed and slept for half of the Christmas party because I was truly exhausted. Exhausted physically and emotionally because it’s a really hard thing to go through and having to almost fight the whole time. I was like, I’m having to fight at four in the morning, it’s hard to do…that was a really good and bad experience because I did see really good things about the system, the way it worked, and also really bad things and felt it was really unfair that the physician had so much power over the client and was able to make that decision to not examine the client. It didn’t feel fair that he was able to do that. I really resented that.

Besides this incident, Jordana has had positive experiences when speaking to women in crisis. Usually, Jordana has felt good after speaking to clients. As stated by Jordana:

I remember when I had my first suicide intervention over a call I felt like a million bucks…I ended this call and she said to me, I want to live, and I was like, that’ s really incredible, I was able to do that for somebody and I felt really, really good that I was there for her, essentially. She was just a voice over the phone but I was there for her and I helped her. I felt really great about it…I was just really proud and like, I helped somebody and made a difference…it was really nice especially because when somebody is feeling that low it’s a horrible, horrible thing so it’s just so wonderful that that service is there for them.

Although Jordana notes how she has “felt really good” when speaking to clients, she has experienced self-doubt and is constantly reflecting on her actions. There are times when Jordana feels that she could have done or said something differently but she has never off the phone with a client when they were still upset. Jordana says that she is always critiquing how she can
improve. Although there are times that Jordana feels she could have acted differently with a client, she says, “you can only do what you can do. You have to do you best every time.” At times, when clients are seeking information, Jordana does not feel good about herself because she feels that she is regurgitating information, but reminds herself that she is still providing a service.

The assurance of speaking with other volunteers during meetings has helped Jordana to manage her self-doubt and to think about ways to improve her volunteer efforts, although Jordana does not interact with volunteers outside of scheduled meetings at the centre. Jordana explains that even though most of the meetings were brief and were mostly about updating information, there were opportunities to discuss calls that were difficult and to get feedback from others on what they would have done, which Jordana found helpful. Jordana provides an example to illustrate this:

I remember having a phone conversation with a girl who wasn’t sure if she had been raped. You have this image in your head of what rape is and if what happens to you doesn’t match, which date rape typically doesn’t, it’s like, well, I don’t know if I was even raped. It was so weird having to explain to somebody that yes, you were raped. This is what happened to you and here is what you can do now. Here are the steps if you want to pursue any of them. I remember feeling really good listening to another person who had that experience and they had said something similar to what I said and I was like, okay good, I had told her she had been raped, good, that was the right thing to do because I was unsure, should I even tell her that yes you were raped?

Jordana continues:

It was so hard for her to grasp that she actually, yes she had been, because it didn’t look this way, she said he didn’t hit me, and it wasn’t violent. It is violent but she wasn’t physically hurt and she was like, I knew him. It didn’t match the idea in her head…that was nice to be able to debrief and talk about that with the other women as well as at the meetings we would be signing up for our shifts and planning the month.

Besides other volunteers offering her assurance and support, Jordana expresses how “it was a really awesome bonding experience the first time I volunteered with all the women there. It was great.” Jordana felt like the other volunteers were similar to her since they were all first year university students who had an interest in the area of violence against women. Jordana explains that some of the other volunteers wanted to pad their resume and gain experience with community services. Jordana says, “I thought was really nice. We were all young women taking an active role together trying to do something for our community.”

Explaining why she decided to be a rape crisis volunteer for the second time, she says that after she moved back from being out west, she was looking for a job and had some spare time. Also, Jordana moved back to Kingston around exam time, and since most volunteers are
students, she figured that the centre could benefit from extra help. Jordana contacted the new volunteer coordinator, who she “adores,” since the old volunteer coordinator had switched during the time that Jordana had left the centre. Jordana told the new volunteer coordinator that she used to be a volunteer and that she was interested in volunteering. The new volunteer coordinator asked Jordana if she wanted to complete the training, again, and Jordana decided that it would be helpful for her because even though she felt comfortable speaking to clients on the phone, she was not sure if policies had changed and wanted to be updated on all information.

Jordana says that she enjoyed training even more the second time, although she is not sure whether it was because she was in a smaller group the second time or if it was her own life experiences. Jordana explains that she felt more mature taking training the second time, and that she was able to appreciate the information in a different way. She does not remember the actual content being different, but says that she was different.

Jordana does not continue to experience anxiety or other effects of working with clients on the crisis line. She thinks that she is a “better volunteer now” than when she volunteered the first time. Jordana attributes this to the fact that she is older and has more experience. As a result, she feels calmer and more confident with what she is saying when she speaks to clients, and feels that she is able to help more people normalize their experiences. As stated by Jordana, “I have all these years of experience, not just in volunteering but all my work experience, as well, that can help me normalize what they are going through which I think is really helpful.”

Besides feeling that she has changed and matured, having begun volunteering for the second time, Jordana has witnessed changes at the centre. Jordana explains how there is a new system where volunteers are each given a centre cell phone and they phone in. Instead of waiting to be connected to a client, volunteers are able to forward the call to whatever phone number they are at. According to Jordana, one of the positive aspects of this change is that volunteers are available immediately. On the other hand, Jordana says “a drawback can be that if you wake up in the middle of the night for a call you might sound tired because you do not have time to prepare yourself.”

Due to the flexibility of being able to take calls from home, Jordana does not think that she will stop volunteering anytime soon. She credits this to the fact that volunteering does not interfere with her life, since she is able to take the calls from home and is still able to do her chores. Jordana says, “it’s not stopping me from doing anything other than going out. I don’t go out but I don’t care, whatever. It doesn’t matter to me. I normally take evening and overnight shifts so I always try to double up.”
In terms of changes that she would like to see at the centre, Jordana feels that there are not enough services available for male survivors of sexual assault. She feels that the centre where she volunteers is very diverse and inclusive and she has never felt that the centre under-represents or does not reach out towards marginalized groups. Elaborating on this, Jordana says:

I guess one criticism that I would have, is that for male survivors there is really nothing for them at the centre. They can call the crisis line and I understand the reasons why, but in terms of providing counseling, that’s not available to them and that’s because it is a woman centred centre. It’s just for women and having men come there can really make the female survivors feel unsafe and can trigger things, even. It’s supposed to be a safe area where women are comfortable, so I fully understand why that service is not available to men, but I do wish that it was.

She adds:

We are definitively a very strength based, anti-oppressive centre. The training we do is from a feminist perspective, it’s like a feminist crisis line…feminist is in the title of our training. Everything is done from a feminist perspective, again, which makes it challenging working with men, when they phone, because they experience everything so differently. We are absolutely feminist.

Besides stating that her centre follows a feminist approach, Jordana feels that her volunteer work is a form of feminist practice and she identifies as a feminist. For Jordana, feminism is about equality among genders. However, Jordana highlights how defining feminism can be difficult because there are many meanings, and quite often, men are excluded by feminist organizations.

Jordana reflects on a particular conversation she had with a male survivor of sexual assault that she found that to be difficult:

When I volunteered the first time I had never had a male caller, but more recently, in my volunteering now, I’ve had a lot more male callers. I think that’s partially because of a lot of the media exposure that’s been going on right now with those hockey players and so I think that’s made lot of men feel more comfortable to reach out. I had a male caller saying I don’t know where to go or what’s available to me, I don’t know what to do and it’s like there’s really not a lot, so I was able to give him a few numbers for different agencies in Kingston but I was like, in terms of sexual assault support you can call the crisis line whenever you want to talk, but that’s really all our service can provide you but here’s the other numbers you can use. Which is fine, I give lots of women other numbers, too, because there are some things that the centre doesn’t do so that’s a typical thing to do, to give people phone numbers. He did spend a lot of time venting about how there was nothing available to him and I was saying I don’t disagree with you, I know it’s really hard out there especially because men do experience the violence, their response is different than women…he was like, I don’t know if I should even call because I’m not in crisis right now, because his version of crisis…you know, men and women experience things differently, so his version of crisis isn’t what he would have typically thought a crisis was. So I was like, okay, forget I said crisis, do you feel you need to talk right now
and he was like, yea I do, and I was like, okay that’s what I’m here for, like, what’s up? Because of the different ways they express themselves it is a barrier for men so that is something I wish could be changed within our organization but I also understand that they are a women first centre.

In addition to highlighting changes she would like to see at the centre, Jordana describes challenges that she has faced while working as a rape crisis volunteer:

One great challenge we do have is when we have problem callers because there was a caller, a male caller, who pretended to be a woman and while we were speaking with him he would masturbate. We were being assaulted at the same time that we were volunteering, and I have dealt with this phone call. I’ve had this caller more than once… when you realize what’s going on it’s completely violating, so that has been a challenge to deal with and we’ve had meetings about it and basically the police say they can’t do anything about it because apparently our equipment that forwards the phone calls is too high tech for them to trace it. How that’s true, I have no idea, and I feel really bad for Kingston Police Department if they can’t figure that out because seriously, that’s ridiculous, but they say they can’t do anything, so basically, when this person does phone we try to advocate for ourselves and say that you’re not supposed to be phoning right now…that’s not okay because there are people who might be calling that are legitimately in need and need help, go call a 1-800 number, like seriously. That’s been a challenge, dealing with that because it’s pretty horrific that we are being violated as we are trying to help. We are being assaulted in a way while we are trying to help these women who have been assaulted. That was something ridiculous to deal with. I haven’t had a phone call with him in probably three or four months, so that’s good.

As previously stated, Jordana is proud of her volunteer efforts and would like to continue volunteering in the future. Jordana’s family is supportive of her volunteer work and they value her involvement with sexual assault survivors. Jordana feels that she has had an impact on survivors of violence, both in her role as a volunteer, as well as in her work with male offenders.

Kim’s Story

Experiences Throughout Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood

Kim is a Caucasian woman, in her thirties, who identifies as heterosexual. Kim was born in Sudbury, Ontario, and lived in a small town nearby, with her parents and older brother until she was three years old. At this time, Kim moved back to Sudbury with her parents and brother, until beginning university in London, Ontario. Kim’s grandfather passed away when she was young. However, Kim remained close with her grandmother until she passed away when Kim was fourteen years old. Kim’s grandmother lived in a house near Kim’s family, and she

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19 Kim did not elaborate on her experiences in childhood and adolescence and chose not to go into extensive detail about these parts of her life.
remembers, being around her a lot, as well as spending time with her cousins. Kim describes her childhood as being “pretty fun” and says that she had many friends growing up. Kim also liked school and was very competitive with her brother in terms of doing well. She considers herself to have been a “big parent pleaser for a long time.”

Kim had a close relationship with her parents throughout her childhood and remembers how her mother would usually spend time with her during the summer. Kim would also play a lot of outdoor activities in the summer with her brother—especially soccer—and she went to arts and crafts camp a few times.

Kim initially began volunteering in Sudbury, when she was a teenager, after completing her St. Johns Ambulance certificate. During one summer, Kim volunteered at a hospital in her community. She describes her experience at the hospital as being fun and contemplates whether her mother influenced her decision to volunteer:

I don’t really know how I got into volunteering at the hospital in Sudbury. I always wonder if my mom pushed me into things or if it was me who was trying to do stuff. I was a little environmental activist when I was younger, too, and I made this newsletter to hand out to my community about how to be more green. I’ve asked my mom since then was that me or was that you? She was saying that it was me but I don’t know…

As a teenager, Kim dated a boy who was one grade older than her and she was in a relationship with him for approximately three years. Kim explains that he came from an aggressive group of boys who would get into fights after drinking at bars. She says that he was popular, although Kim explains how she “wishes that popularity was not associated with that kind of behaviour.” Kim describes how there was a year where she was in high school while her boyfriend was a student in Sudbury. Then, when Kim moved to London in order to complete her Bachelors of Arts in Sociology at the University of Western Ontario, her boyfriend stayed in Sudbury and there were a lot of issues going on. Kim explains that her boyfriend became controlling and he would visit her in London a lot, and he would abuse her at parties. Kim says that he would keep this hidden from most people. Recounting what it was like when her ex-boyfriend visited her in London, while she was a student at the University of Western Ontario, Kim says:

It was crazy, but it was a year of this and him being increasingly demanding and controlling and me trying to push him away and he would show up, and I would come home and he would be outside my apartment door. He had gotten into the building somehow and there would be all this crap and him pleading with me to use my computer to be able to come to my apartment and I would say no, and he would call me a bitch then and I couldn’t take that or he was saying he was going to go crazy…
Extending her thoughts, Kim says:

It’s just crazy how you can think… I don’t know, how you can fool yourself… I have gone through this in my head so many different ways, over so many years and like, I thought for a while that he had this reality and I had this reality and then there was this actual reality that was somewhere else. He was just trying to impose his reality onto me and I accepted that a lot and so I wasn’t able to really see what was going on.

After one year of being apart, Kim’s boyfriend decided to move to London and the two of them lived together. Kim says that living together did not go well and that there was a lot of harassment that went on for a long time. Near the end of that school year, Kim and her ex-boyfriend moved back to Sudbury for the summer and subletted their apartment in London. Kim reflects on what it was like returning to Sudbury for the summer:

During the summer, pretty quickly, he had a schizophrenic break while I was there, which was really insane and crazy and then his parents separated and his parents blamed me…that whole summer I was working at a kid’s camp. I was a camp counselor and like, that was the only thing keeping me going because it was this weird thing going on where it would be back and forth and where he would call me at night and say he wanted to have the relationship again and then in the morning he would call and say he didn’t or maybe it was the opposite, morning and night. It was this weird roller coaster thing. Still, I thought I was so in love with him and thought I was going to marry him and I probably had kids names picked out and…wasn’t conscious of all the crap that had gone on and that it was a very unhealthy relationship, so all this was going on, and finally I said that’s it— I can’t do this roller coaster ride thing, so that’s when things changed, when I sort of took back control.

Kim continues:

Right near the end of the summer, in August, I had started to cut off ties and everything, and he kept trying to see me and call me…it was this weird thing too, because he was sick, too, there was this mental illness factor now all of a sudden, and he seemed to be better and everything, but you are conscious of that, and then, so I would still let him see me but I was very clear that there was no touching, nothing like that going on and there were boundaries I had set and that was how I was keeping control…it makes sense to me now looking back… that’s why, by the end of the summer, he raped me. There was this after the bar thing where that happened. It makes a lot of sense looking back that he had to take back this control…my ex called me the next day laughing and said, I raped you last night eh? Which was really peculiar. There is some level of my brain that was aware of it, but most of it I couldn’t deal with, so I just sent it away somewhere. I was still determined that he and I were not going to be together anymore and I had already decided that before.

Once the summer came to an end, Kim and her ex-boyfriend returned to London, and Kim told him that they were not going to be living together but he still tried to be in her life. At this point, Kim explains that he would talk about suicide and that his parents would blame Kim.
When Kim would hear that he wanted to kill himself as well as his parents saying that she was to blame, Kim felt a sense of responsibility. She knew that she did not want to have anything to do with him but found the entire situation difficult to deal with.

Kim told her best friend that her boyfriend had raped her immediately after it happened. However, besides confiding in her best friend, Kim did not talk to her parents or anyone else about it during this time. Kim mostly kept her feelings bottled up, inside. However, her best friend, who lived in Sudbury, would tell Kim that when Kim would go out drinking with her friends in London, she would receive a call at two or three o’clock in the morning, and that is when Kim would talk about the abuse. Kim does not remember calling her friend to tell her about the abuse because she was intoxicated. Besides her friend in Sudbury, Kim had many male friends and would not tell them about the abuse. Sometimes they would catch glimpses of Kim’s boyfriend being controlling but they did not know what was going on and Kim felt that people would not understand. Kim says, “I remember one friend was like, what’s going on there? Who is this person? But I wouldn’t really talk about it.”

Kim went to great lengths in order to keep her abuse a secret from her family and friends. She did not want to change her email address because in order to change it, she felt that she would have to tell her parents about the abuse. Kim says, “it’s crazy that this harassment went on because of that, because of this ridiculous silence, of me not telling.”

Kim calls this period of her life “really hard” but she experienced temporarily relief when her ex-boyfriend went to Korea during the following summer to teach English, while she stayed in London. Kim says that at first, it was amazing, and she very glad. However, soon after, the threats continued. Kim’s ex-boyfriend would call her constantly on her home phone and cell phone from Korea and eventually she “could not take it.” Kim became close with one of her male friends and although she did not tell him about the abuse, she told him that she did not want her ex-boyfriend to call her anymore. One day, Kim’s friend answered the phone and yelled at Kim’s ex-boyfriend. After that, Kim changed her phone numbers. Kim describes her friend as her “knight in shining armor” and says that he was great, but her ex-boyfriend would continue to email her.

Kim explains how the abuse continued throughout the next year and it was not until Kim traveled with friends on vacation that she had an epiphany. When Kim was at a resort in Cuba, she was participating in a “games night” with other people at the resort. When she was on stage, one of the male employees who worked at the resort grabbed her breast on stage. At that moment, Kim’s male friend “lost it” and tried to get him fired. Kim says this was a big awakening moment for her because she thought “if only he knew what’s really happened, like if he had any idea,
because look at the reaction just to that, which to me was like…it sucked, but it’s not like, a big deal.” After that incident, Kim started to have flashbacks of when her ex-boyfriend abused her, and she says that the threats started to return through email. After Kim’s ex-boyfriend moved back to Canada from Korea, he was living in Vancouver, and he would send her long poems that he had written. Kim explains how there was one poem where he made reference to a hunter and it said, “be my doe deer.” Kim interpreted that as a threat and was worried that he was going to kill her. In the poem, Kim’s ex-boyfriend also alluded to the fact that he was coming to London, which is where Kim was living at the time, and he suggested that he had a gun. Kim soon realized how serious the situation was becoming and she was too afraid to walk around by herself. She decided to go back home to Sudbury and to tell her parents about the abuse. Kim says this was very difficult. She also told the police, and cites this as the beginning of the road to recovery. Kim also went to group counseling and participated in the Vagina Monologues.20

Kim considers her involvement in the Vagina Monologue to be a central part of her recovery process and highlights how it was “really amazing,” although she says that she did not become involved in volunteer work related to violence against women until after she experienced violence from her boyfriend. She participated in the play while living in London, and says her experience performing in the play was the perfect thing for her to do. Extending her thoughts about the impact that participating in the Vagina Monologues had on her, Kim says:

Just that one experience of the Vagina Monologues at Western, that it was so helpful just being around other women who, a lot of either knew or assumed and also had similar experiences was really key and seeing their reactions to some monologues and how difficult it was for them to talk about it and breaking the silence on things and for me. It was so important because on one of our last shows my parents attended, so the last part of the production that we did, we all stood out on the stage and we said something like, if there was no violence against women this is what the world would look like and we all had a piece that we wanted to say that was personal and I said something like I wouldn’t have had to be silent for so long and that was so powerful for me to say it on stage with my parents there and the audience and because I had to hide a lot from my parents.

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20 The Vagina Monologues is a play written by Eve Ensler, in 1996, after she interviewed around 200 women (Bell & Reverby, 2005). According to Cooper (2007), the play “is a series of first person narratives, in which women speak about their vaginas, typically in relation to sexual experiences” (Cooper, 2007, p. 727), and it is “the motor behind ‘V-Day,’ an anti-violence organization with the declared mission of ending violence against women and girls, once and for all, everywhere” (Cooper, 2007, p. 727). The play has been performed since 1998 throughout North America and continues to be typically performed around Valentine’s Day as part of the V-Day campaign (Bell & Reverby, 2005, p. 431).
In addition to participating in the Vagina Monologues, while living in London, Kim was involved in other anti-violence initiatives. Her first encounter volunteering in the area of anti-violence started when she was an undergraduate student. Kim volunteered on the Kids Help Phone, although she did not do this for a long period of time. Kim also volunteered with an organization where she received formal training about violence against women and eventually she facilitated discussions with high school students in classroom settings. Speaking about her volunteer experiences at the organization, Kim explains how “the healthy relationship stuff going on in the midst of it the violence with my boyfriend was hopefully part of me trying to get help in some way or something.” Elaborating on this, Kim explains that she enjoying leading discussions on healthy relationships but found it strange that her boyfriend insisted on volunteering with her. During this time Kim was trying to get away from the abusive relationship that she was in with her boyfriend.

While Kim was volunteering in London with high school students, she did not form strong relationships with other volunteers. There was not a lot of time to socialize with volunteers because the majority of time was spent in training and facilitating discussions in classrooms. When she began volunteering in London, her ex-boyfriend was constantly present and she was preoccupied with that “and was trying to figure out those dynamics.” Kim felt that her ex-boyfriends’ decision to volunteer was “probably some strange attempt to control and to be there to see what was going on and see what I was doing.” She continues:

I don’t remember any kind of support or sense like that from my ex-boyfriend but I remember this being…maybe it was the first day or something, and I was really trying to separate myself from him and so I had that Destiny’s Child survivor song in my head, it was called, ‘I’m a Survivor’ or something like that, and I’m singing that and I think I even was intentionally singing parts of that to him to try to, like, show him I’m more powerful now and things like that. So I don’t know what that was about, why he was there. Maybe he was… probably it was just another way to be close to me and try to see what was going on and try to be in my life.

After Kim completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Western Ontario, she began her Master’s of Arts degree in Sociology. Although Kim enjoyed both programs, she recalls being more intellectually stimulated throughout her Master’s. She says that there was a particular class that focused on theoretical frameworks in sociology that required students to read one book a week, and to then summarize the book. Kim enjoyed this element of the class and felt that it challenged her.

Kim’s Master’s thesis explored how public opinion was manipulated during the war in Iraq, and upon completing her Master’s, she began working on her PhD in Sociology at a
university in Scotland where she studied news and new technology. Kim found transitioning to life in Scotland fairly easy and made some friends immediately. Kim lived in a residence for graduate students, and often socialized with other students. Besides socializing with students, Kim mentions that she went on a few Take Back the Night marches and also volunteered with different organizations while she was in Scotland. Reflecting on her experience in Scotland, Kim says that she made several close friends, some of whom she has remained friends with. Kim also liked a lot of the students in her courses and professors. Kim “loved living in Scotland” and explains that “it was such a different atmosphere from Canada, I just loved getting to know the accents and the people and exploring.”

For her dissertation, Kim interviewed journalists who worked at different organizations in Scotland and she focused on the ways in which new technologies have changed the daily routines of journalists. During her time in Scotland, Kim stayed in touch with her family and communicated with them through email and online chatting devices, including MSN. Kim’s parents visited her in Scotland twice, and she returned to Canada to visit her family a few times.

Kim lived in Scotland for a total of three years, moved to China for a couple of years, and then moved back to Scotland, before finally moving back to Canada. Kim met her partner, Steven, in Scotland during graduate school. He was completing his Master’s while she was completing her PhD. When Kim decided to move to China, Steven moved with her and started working on his PhD. While living in China, Kim was finishing up her PhD and taught media courses to undergraduate Chinese students. She explains how she did not have a lot of time to write her dissertation because the majority of her time was spent teaching. Although Kim did not have a lot of work left in order to complete her dissertation, it ended up taking her almost a full academic year to finish her dissertation. This is because she was teaching and developing brand new courses, along with taking time to explore Scotland. Kim says that she would have one or two days during the week where she worked on her PhD, and then she would have to “switch gears.”

Although Kim struggled to meet the demands of balancing school and work while living in China, she describes her experience in China as “amazing” and found teaching to be a lot of fun because she enjoyed hearing students’ perspectives on different issues. Kim explains how when she was living in China she wanted to become involved in a performance that was similar to The Vagina Monologues, and she ended up performing a collection of memories and prayers with Chinese students. She says:
We did something called…what was it called? It wasn’t the whole play, but memory and prayers, so it was a bunch of different monologues that we were saying and I was really excited to bring that to the Chinese students.

Kim found that participating in the play very enjoyable but she says “I felt I couldn’t take it out into the community because I was a foreigner, like there was always this barrier…that was one of the things about being in China, I wanted to have more roots in the community, do more community work.” Nonetheless, Kim remarks:

Just getting together with these people and reading these monologues and talking about these issues…even if you’re not talking about the issues in too much depth, if you just do the monologues, themselves, it was great. There was one male student who wanted to read one too, who was a student of mine, so that was really neat. He was affected by this and you could see in people’s faces that they are affected by it when they were rehearsing, and I think that draws people to one another, to know that there’s something going on here in telling these stories.

Kim decided to accept a teaching position in China, which was partially a result of needing to find work, but teaching in China also satisfied Kim’s yearning for adventure. Kim explains that when she was Scotland, she found that it had a lot of similarities to Canada, and that living there did not take her out of her comfort zone; she wanted to live somewhere “even more different.” Kim thought that moving to China would be a great adventure. She says that the position in China was the first job that she applied to, and when she was offered the job, she was very excited. Similar to the relationships that Kim made in Scotland, Kim says:

There were a lot of really fun people…like there was this fun community of foreigners who did a lot of things together so there were a lot of people that I became really close to, and played soccer with, and we went out a lot there, too. I got to know a few Chinese people, too, and a lot of nice students, as well, who liked to take me out for dinners…the people there were amazing.

Towards the end of her time in China, Kim became pregnant with her first child and just before she was about to give birth, her and Steven moved to Canada. A few months later, the two of them moved back to Scotland in order for Steven to complete his PhD. Kim and Steven were living there for eight months, and then they decided to move to China. After living in China, they moved to Sudbury for a short period of time because they decided to get married and wanted to plan a wedding there, because Kim’s family lives in Sudbury. Soon after, Kim and Steven moved to Ottawa and they have been living in Ottawa for the past two years.

Kim and Steven ended up moving to Ottawa so that Kim could work on her post doctorate. Kim applied for a post doctorate in Ottawa and was offered the position. She decided to add a Women and Gender Studies component to her project because she has always been
involved in volunteer work in that area. Also, while volunteering, Kim envisioned herself being involved in the area of violence against women in her future academic career. Specifically, Kim added a gender-based violence component to her research with social media, and she is also an adjunct professor and currently teaches courses.

After moving to Ottawa, Kim decided to participate in The Vagina Monologues, as she had done in London. In Ottawa, Kim says, “there was a community thing going on as well…all those experiences you are sharing with this group of people was really powerful.” Adding to this, Kim says that she developed many friendships while participating in the Vagina Monologues.

**Experiences volunteering**

As soon as Kim moved to Ottawa, she immediately began exploring volunteer opportunities related to violence against women. Reflecting on why she chose to volunteer at a rape crisis centre, Kim explains:

I really wanted to give back somehow and I guess it felt like finally I was at a place where I had worked enough and I had dealt with a lot of crap and I was able to do that and I don’t know if it was at the top of my mind or not, but like, I know I had called the crisis line, I think only once, but yea, just the fact of knowing that was something that was available to me at that time. I really wanted to be a part of it and just help people I just had this strong urge to help as much as possible…I remembered accessing those services, so there was a strong desire to be part of it from the other side, having the experiences and then being able to be in a place where I’ve gone through it all and can give back. I just felt like it had to be done.

She adds:

I think like there is definitely a connection for me. I don’t know if I would have done volunteer work in the anti violence sector if it wasn’t for my experiences, but I can’t say for sure. I was always doing volunteer work of some kind or another so it might have inevitably went in that direction.

Discussing her volunteer work in Ottawa, Kim explains that she wanted to move to a city where she could become involved in community work, and had a strong urge to volunteer on a rape crisis line. She says, “it was something I knew I wanted to do for a while and I felt like I finally had this opportunity and I was going to do it.” As soon as Kim and her husband moved to Ottawa, Kim searched online for anti-violence organizations and she looked at many organizations to see which ones had volunteer opportunities. Kim volunteered at the organization where training sessions were available, and she also joined the board of directors at another centre, as well as their policy committee. Soon after, Kim joined another organization and became a member of their public education committee and advocacy committee.
Although Kim describes her involvement at all of the organizations as being “great,” she says that she was “gung ho” about volunteering on the crisis line. From the moment Kim began her work as a rape crisis volunteer, her partner was very supportive. When Kim told her parents and brother about it, she says:

I didn’t get a lot of a response back, but much later, my mother had said something like, oh, there was a call for volunteers at an organization in Sudbury…or no, she had read an article about how the organization had shut down so there was no crisis centre anymore. She said, that’s too bad because I would have considered doing the training, and that shocked me because it was kind of this tacit approval of what I had done and also something had maybe seemed to have affected her to the point where she would be interested in doing it.

The training that Kim took was thirty hours in total, and volunteers met once a week for three hours. Training involved a series of role-playing sessions that were led by two facilitators; one facilitator worked at the centre and the other one was a long-time crisis line volunteer. Both facilitators would go in-between rooms, to listen and give feedback based on how volunteers were responding to scenarios. Kim remembers being given a list of questions to ask callers who were in crisis as well as a list of different responses that related to particular types of calls.

In terms of the content, volunteers were provided with information about the centre and learned about anti-oppressive practices, including anti-racist work. Kim mentions that anti-oppressive practice was new to a lot of people. Throughout training there was a lot of group work and the smaller groups would report back to the larger group. Besides group work, there were a lot of readings every week to the point where Kim says it was difficult to finish the readings. Specifically, volunteers were given a CD manual with most of the readings, as well as a thick pamphlet that had other resources and activities. A memorable exercise that Kim learned in training and that she currently uses in her teaching relates to “unpacking White privilege.” She says:

I hadn’t come across that concept before, and I was like, holy shit! So that was really interesting, and then we did one activity where we all lined up and then there was…I forget what this was called, but I think this is common, too, where they mention certain marginalized groups, maybe if your parents haven’t attended or didn’t finish high school, all sorts of things, and then people took one step forward and one step back when each thing was called, if they were in the category…so, then it kind of showed you, I guess, just how privileged you were, if you weren’t stepping forward very often, and how it made you feel, because I think that’s what we were trying to get at, trying to unpack privilege, and how you felt when you did step forward and how other people felt to see where other people were coming from.
Kim describes aspects of training that prompted her to think about her privileged position as a White, middle class woman—experiences that she suggests were very meaningful. However, she also highlights components of training that she found traumatizing, including an experience where the coordinators at the centre had someone give a talk during the child sexual assault training component. Kim says that the women who came into the centre to speak about child sexual assault was a counselor for childhood sexual trauma, and she thought that it would be best to share the worst story that she had ever heard, so that volunteers would not be shocked by anything they heard on the crisis lines. Kim explains that the story that was shared was so disturbing that Kim had to leave the room, which is not something that she would normally do because she would not want to offend anyone. Kim went to the bathroom and cried during the talk. After reading the volunteer training manual, Kim says that she realized that she was experiencing vicarious trauma. Kim kept having flashbacks and emphasizes how the story was described vividly, in so much detail, that she could envision the story happening in her mind. Kim says, “I don’t know how long that story will stay with me—maybe for the rest of my life. It was really difficult and it was the most difficult thing of the whole training experience…I have never been able to tell anyone, not even my partner of the details of it.”

Kim describes how the crisis line coordinator offered support to volunteers if they experienced trauma throughout training or while taking calls and says that the crisis line coordinator “was great during those times.” Kim also says that she used to contact the crisis line coordinator to debrief after shifts, and she explains how she tended to call the crisis line coordinator a few days after a call. Kim would take notes while she was on call, and when she debriefed, she would tell the crisis line coordinator what her notes were about.

In addition to establishing a relationship with the crisis line coordinator, Kim spoke with a few volunteers during breaks throughout the training process. Kim also says that during training there were check-ins, where a lot of personal things were shared, and in general, everyone would hear each other talk about issues and ask each other questions. However, Kim believes the lack of flexibility with volunteer meeting times has contributed to the weakening of volunteer relations after training. There is only one volunteer that Kim has kept in touch with since completing training, and she highlights how volunteer meetings did not always occur on a regular, monthly basis. Quite often, these meetings were at times that Kim could not attend and there was not always a high attendance at the meetings. Kim says that she was always apologetic for missing the meetings, and did not get into trouble by the crisis line coordinator. Kim also says that it got to the point where she wondered whether it was worth getting a babysitter to attend the meetings, when she felt as though no one cared if she was present, anyway. Without an incentive to attend
the meetings, Kim often did not go. Kim feels that she probably could have developed more of a bond with other volunteers by sharing stories with them if the meetings were held at more convenient times.

Besides noting how improvements could be made to scheduling meeting times for volunteers, Kim identifies other potential areas of improvement at the centre. Kim says that she would have liked to see “a greater emphasis placed on trans issues throughout training” (since this was not discussed at all), as well as polyamorous relationships, residential schools and indigenous issues. The main areas that were focused on included childhood sexual assault, acquaintance rape, date rape and drug assisted assaults, as well as dissociative disorders and suicide. Kim also says that a small part of training explored lesbian, gay and bisexual issues as well as issues related to women with disabilities and residential schools.

Kim also voices her concern about the lack of resources for men who experience violence, and how improvements could be made towards this area in training:

I think, like, men experience sexual assault, and yet, they are very much silenced and they experience a different range of issues around that, and there’s this huge divide between what I see is, like, a generational divider in this violence against women stuff that has no room for men who are sexually assaulted, and there’s no room for LGBTQ issues or anything like that, and they are very hard core, and I get it, that that’s how it most frequently happens, that men are abusing women and I get that, but I can’t also deny all the other things that are happening especially to groups who are really marginalized.

Kim continues to explain how in training, volunteers were told that when men call the crisis line, they should be referred to resources in Ottawa that are specifically for men. Kim says she spoke about this at a meeting where she is on the board of directors at another organization. At the meeting, the executive director was talking about this issue, and Kim told her that in training, volunteers are told to divert those calls. The executive director told her that should not be happening, and that volunteers should be taking calls from men. Then, Kim approached the crisis line coordinator who told her that if men are in crisis, they should not be turned away and can be spoken to for a brief period of time, but they should be re-directed soon afterwards.

Although Kim notes problematic aspects of training, specifically in terms of the confusion related to speaking to male clients who have experienced violence as well as other matters, she feels that training prepared her for interacting with clients and was a positive learning experience. Kim says:

I think one of the biggest things was learning that I’m not helping people per se, I’m facilitating them to help themselves, and so that was just like, a key thing to learn and to feel like knowing and believing these women have this strength. They’ve called here so they’ve figured out how to access resources, they have the strength in themselves and
they are going to sort themselves out. They will be able to handle their lives and figure things out. They are going to survive in some way or another; they’ve survived up to this point.

She goes on to describe how significant training has been for her in many ways:

Training changed my life and I’ve wished every single person could take that training. Since now, I’ve thought about a lot of ways we could improve it, and after all my discussions with these other groups, like I’ve talked about…how else to do things…things around suicide, where you have to draw a line and then you have to say, I’m going to call the police, or something like that, and that might not be the case for all organizations, I don’t know. In general, I think training had a really profound effect on my life. I think a lot of things were happening at that time because we moved to Ottawa and I was doing a lot of volunteer work with all of these different organizations, and at the same time as the training, I had the Vagina Monologues and become part of a board of directors and all of that…and I was interested in and applied for this post doc in Women and Gender Studies and I had been reading a lot more around the Gender Studies literature, too, so I felt this big shift was going on and I attributed a lot of it to the training because there was some stuff that was really excellent, like, they brought in speakers, like a woman who spoke about women with disabilities and she did a phenomenal job, and there were a number of times that things happened in that training that will stick with me forever and I feel like there was a big transformation within me, too, trying to be more accepting of everybody and acknowledging my privilege and all that kind of stuff…which is like never ending, but, like, it felt like there were some good seeds that were planted there, you know.

Kim explains how after she finished training, there was a test that volunteers were required to complete. Elaborating on this, Kim says that she went to the rape crisis centre to complete this test. The test consisted of role-plays as well as a long list of information that the crisis line coordinator went over with Kim. Afterwards, the coordinator told Kim that she could become a crisis line volunteer and was ready to speak with callers.

For the first two shifts, Kim took calls with another volunteer who already had experience volunteering on the crisis line. During these two shifts, the other volunteer was present when Kim spoke with clients. The purpose of having another person available during these calls was in case volunteers could not figure out how to use the lines or if they had any questions. After that, Kim took calls on her own.

Kim usually took shifts from eight o’clock in the evening until midnight or overnight from eight o’clock at night until eight o’clock the next morning. All calls were answered from Kim’s cell phone, at her home. Kim would take calls after her daughter was in bed and always took evening or overnight shifts. She would set things up on a couch outside her bedroom, including her phone, as well as a pad of paper and a pen.
Kim was initially hesitant about taking overnight shifts because she was concerned about being able to fall asleep after taking calls, and she did not know if crisis volunteers were supposed to stay awake over night. She asked the coordinator about this, and was told that volunteers are not expected to stay awake the whole night, waiting for calls. Kim remembers wondering, how she was going to feel when she had to wake up for a phone call in the middle of the night, and says that it ended up being okay.

Kim notes how a common task that she is required to do as a volunteer includes freeing up the crisis line. More specifically, Kim says:

You know from the persons voice as soon as they are calling that it is somebody you have talked to before and you start to think in your mind, where is this going to go? Once you sort of identify there isn’t a crisis then how long do you continue talking to them for? And will they get upset if you start to try to signal that you are ending the call? That became one of the biggest jobs on the crisis line.

Reflecting on her first shift, Kim says that she did not have any calls and she was disappointed. After her first call, Kim felt that the caller got what they needed and that it went well. Kim extends her thoughts about her first call:

I remember during one of the very first calls I felt really…sort of elated afterwards, like yea, that’s what I’m doing this for and that’s what I’ve been wanting this to be on the other end for someone at a time like that, and to be able to facilitate them to figure out what they need for their coping and things like that, and get them talking and figuring things out, so yea, I remember feeling really elated about that. Also, this feeling, like, I shouldn’t be too elated because this shouldn’t be about me and I’m, like, giving something here so I shouldn’t be getting anything back, either, so it was sort of suppressing that a little bit, too.

Kim distinguishes feeling 'elated' from most interactions that she had with clients:

With the majority of calls being these frequent callers who are not in crisis, you need to end the call, then there’s not like the same kind of elated feeling—it’s more just thinking about how I handled it, did they feel too upset that the call had to end or not? There is almost, like, a neutral feeling for those calls. For the other calls, where someone is in crisis and you know that the call is really useful for them…then there is still that same kind of satisfied kind of feeling.

Although Kim speaks about feeling satisfied and experiencing a neutral feeling when working with survivors of assault, she also describes a particular instance where she was anxious and found it difficult to determine how to interact with a caller:

For a long while we had a specific caller that everybody knew on the crisis line, he was calling from California, which was a bit strange to begin with, and he was a male sex worker and it was always difficult to hear him and understand everything that he was
saying and he always said he was in crisis, but it was one of those callers that took up the lines for a long, long time and it was very difficult to find any ending to the call...so that one was a difficult one and we had to talk about what to do around that caller, specifically, and how to handle him, but I still talked to him.

Kim describes another scenario, related to protecting client anonymity, where she was challenged to think on the spot and had to face a tough decision:

It was a serious crisis and I had been working with them for a while and then... I was thinking the phone just disconnected, that seemed to be what happened, but maybe the caller hung up, though... yea, and I was thinking, what should I be doing, should I call back? In that situation I ended up calling back and I'm not supposed to really know their number, this is a tricky thing too, because I'm using a cell... the phone number shows up on my phone, so I was putting a sticky note over my phone so I wouldn't see what the numbers were and then the problem was that it's in my recent call list if I'm going in there. I was having to delete them or just not look there so that's a tricky thing, it's not really easy, so then in that case, I was thinking, what if she thinks I hung up on her? So I did call back and I left a message and I think I called back and there was no answer and I called back again and left a message and then while that was happening I got another call on the crisis line that I was dealing with. Whenever I called in to talk about it with the coordinator she said that we shouldn't call back, so that was an error I made. It was okay; it wasn't a big deal but yea....

Kim says that being a rape crisis volunteer has been stressful at times, although she emphasizes that it was never to any extent where she thought that it was having a negative impact on her life. Kim explains that sometimes after a difficult call she would need about a half of an hour to recover from the call and have quiet time. Her partner could usually tell when she needed space or needed to be with her own thoughts. Other times, Kim would contact the rape crisis line coordinator, although Kim explains how after taking the calls, debriefing usually consisted of emailing the coordinator statistics—for instance, about how many calls she took, what the calls were about, how long they lasted, and when they were taken. Kim says that support was available if she needed it, but emailing statistics was the main goal in those interactions.

Kim does not feel that her involvement in rape crisis work has caused her relationships to change with friends and family. Kim also does not consider her involvement with the crisis line to have had a direct impact on her personal sense of safety, although she mentions being concerned about the safety of her daughter. As stated by Kim:

I've already had a lot of concerns generally about safety and about my ex-boyfriend for a long time, so only in the last couple of years is when I have begun to feel a bit safer and not think that he will just suddenly show up or track me down or something. He tracked me down while I was in Scotland and other places, so there was always this fear there but well... like I found last fall on campus there were a number of sexual assaults that were really publicized and so then that affected me, but that doesn’t have anything to do with
the crisis line…although it’s hard to say, too. I worry a lot about my own daughter…but that may have been the case without this. I’m sure I had some of those concerns before. Maybe they’ve been heightened even more because I’ve learned a lot more about childhood sexual assault. That’s probably the case.

Looking back to her initial expectations about what it would be like as a rape crisis volunteer, Kim highlights many unexpected encounters. More specifically, Kim was surprised to learn that the majority of callers are callers who are not in crisis in the way people are generally taught to understand what crisis means; callers have usually experienced sexual violence in the past. Kim also explains how although students and one staff member completed part of the training, they did not end up volunteering with her afterwards. This surprised Kim, since she did not realize that not everybody who completes the training ends up volunteering on the crisis line.

Finally, Kim recalls:

I guess it wasn’t quite what I expected to be, the crisis line. I expected there to be lots of calls all the time. I remember in training being shocked when I found out if you are on the phone and someone calls that the call just goes to an answering machine. I sort of expected there would be multiple people on the lines or something and that a lot of shifts aren’t even filled, so then I was imagining people calling and there was nobody there to answer the phones and I remember all that being shocking.

At the moment, Kim is on the board of directors at an organization that is involved in initiatives to end violence against women. However, she has recently left the crisis line because she is pregnant with her second child and does not feel that volunteering is suitable during this time. Kim explains how there was one-year commitment that was required by volunteers, and that she would like to go back to the crisis line eventually. However, one of the major difficulties for Kim has to do with having a child. She has found that it has becoming increasingly difficult to fulfill the hours that are required by volunteers during the month, because the shifts begin around seven or eight o’clock in the evening, which is when Kim’s daughter goes to sleep. Kim explains that if her partner was not home and she was trying to put her daughter to sleep, she would become anxious about a client calling. Because of this, and due to the fact that Kim is pregnant, she decided to put volunteering on hold and to return to volunteering when it is easier for her to manage.
**Stephanie’s Story**

**Experiences Throughout Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood**

Stephanie is a Caucasian woman, in her fifties, who identifies as heterosexual. Stephanie was born in Barrie, Ontario, where she lived with her mother, father, two sisters and brother until she was two years old. At this point, Stephanie’s parents separated and Stephanie, along with her mother and siblings, moved into her grandmothers’ house in Mississauga. Although Stephanie’s father moved out on his own, Stephanie says that she always had a relationship with him. Every other weekend he paid child support and he kept in regular contact with her. When Stephanie was four years old, she moved to Cooksville with her mother and siblings, and stayed there until she was eleven years old. When Stephanie finished grade six, her mother remarried and she moved to Stouffville and spent her teenage years there. Stephanie’s brother, who was sixteen at the time, lived with Stephanie’s grandmother when Stephanie’s mother remarried and moved to Stouffville. Stephanie describes her time in Stouffville as “not good” because she grew up in a tight knit neighbourhood before moving to Stouffville. She says:

I had the same friends right through and the school was only a door away from me. It was a very small dead end street; we all knew each other…it was a tiny little town where everybody knew everybody and watched everybody’s kids. Everybody stayed out until the streetlights came on, and there was no crime, no whatever. I did really well in school and then when my mom moved it took us all out of that environment to a brand new spot, a brand new junior high, brand new high school, brand new friends. It was awful…we moved onto a farm.

Adding to this, Stephanie explains how her mother married a man who was seventeen years her senior and that he did not have experience with children. Stephanie’s stepfather had never had any children and he had never been married before. Stephanie remembers how the situation was difficult for her stepfather, and she thinks that he tried to ease the transition for Stephanie and her sister by buying them a horse. Stephanie says that because they were living in the country, there were not a lot of people around to socialize with. Stephanie also adds, “it wasn’t the happiest time and of course, I didn’t really want to have a stepfather.”

Stephanie and her sister felt that the transition was difficult because they lost all their childhood friends and both of them never adjusted well to the move. Stephanie’s sister ran away to Montreal when she was fifteen, and Stephanie’s father found her sister after a month or so, and brought her home. Stephanie explains how her sister was under arrest and was put in juvenile hall, but that everything turned out to be okay. A few years later Stephanie’s sister got married.
“and lived happily ever after.” Following in her sisters’ footsteps, Stephanie also encountered some difficulties. She remembers how “everything went down hill”:

I got into trouble with, like juvenile hall to start with… for not going to school, skipping, hanging out, smoking, whatever. So long story short, there was my girlfriend and I, one day we skipped school and went to the closest lake in Stouffville and I don’t remember how it happened, but anyway, we were in this abandoned barn and we were smoking and something caught fire and instead of doing the right thing, we kind of ran off and watched this barn burn and we were caught because we didn’t leave the scene. We were just hiding in the trees. We got caught and charged with arson so that was not good, so then things went further downhill and there was the court situation and things like that, and instead of going into juvenile custody, I had really close friends that lived on the outskirts of Stouffville and they were foster parents for a lot of children along the way so they offered to take me in, so I lived with them for a couple of years through all that time.

Stephanie’s parents were disappointed and worried while this was happening. However, Stephanie continued to have a fairly good relationship with her father and she says, that he offered to take her, but he lived in Toronto. Stephanie did not want to live with her father because he was very strict, whereas her mother was not. Commenting on her mother, Stephanie says, “I had some resentment towards her and felt she was trying to get rid of me. She just threw her arms up in the air one day and said I can’t do this anymore, so I felt that she had abandoned her responsibilities to me.”

Similar to Stephanie’s father, Stephanie’s foster parents were also fairly strict, too but she decided that if she lived with them she would be able to stay in Stouffville and would not have to go through significant changes. Elaborating on this, Stephanie says that when she was about fourteen years old, she was court ordered to stay with her foster parents for about one year, and after that, she had the choice of whether to live with her mother or to stay at the foster home. Stephanie decided to live at the foster home.

Besides living with her foster parents, Stephanie also lived with her foster brother who was a few years older than her, as well as her foster sister, who was a few years younger. Stephanie says that they all got along well and they are still friends, today. During this time Stephanie was in school. She explains how attending school was part of the court ordered agreement; she was only allowed to miss a certain amount of school and her stepmother was not allowing her to miss any time away from school. When Stephanie was fifteen years old, she moved away from her foster parents and she did not want to attend school anymore. Stephanie ended up getting permission from the school board and her parents to leave school, and she began working full time when she was fifteen years old.
Stephanie’s first job consisted of working at a hardware store in Stouffville. She worked there for a couple of years and was happy. A few years later, when Stephanie was about eighteen or nineteen years old, she ended up taking on a second job in Mississauga, where her brother and sister-in-law were living. Stephanie decided to work in Mississauga for three days during the week and then would come back to Stouffville for four days off. Stephanie was living in-between the two places for a couple of years.

Stephanie remained close with her best friend while working in Mississauga, who she has currently known for over forty-seven years. In addition to this friend, Stephanie had a couple of other close friends that she spent time with and she says that they “did a lot of partying, a lot of drinking and a lot of car racing” and would spend time in a parking lot near a local coffee shop. As a result of excessive partying, sometimes Stephanie would miss work.

Stephanie explains how she met her first husband in Stouffville around this time. They would argue a lot, and soon after they were engaged, they constantly broke up and would get back together, again. Before Stephanie and her husband (or fiancé at this time) were married, her fiancé moved to Alberta. Stephanie visited him, and eventually moved to Alberta for a year when she was nineteen. After living in Alberta, Stephanie moved home to Stouffville for a year, and then went back to the west coast, for the second time. Stephanie and her fiancé got married while living in Alberta, and then moved back to Stouffville when Stephanie was twenty-one years old.

Although Stephanie says that she loved living on the west coast, she felt lonely and did not like being away from her family. Stephanie also found her husband to be very controlling and jealous, and describes him as being “awful.” Stephanie’s family was not thrilled with her choice of husbands and they did not attend her wedding, which was in Alberta. The wedding was a small affair. Reflecting on married life in Alberta, Stephanie says that she made a few friends while living there, and that she became friends with her husbands’ friends.

While living in Alberta, Stephanie worked at a shoe store in a mall. Her husband worked on the oilrigs, and was gone a lot of the time, which was difficult for Stephanie. Stephanie does not remember a lot of what she did in her spare time, but says, “I had friends. I guess we would hang out, probably go to the bar…old cowboy bar thing, yea, probably that.”

That year, Stephanie and her husband moved back to Stouffville. Stephanie moved first, and secured a house to rent on the outskirts of Stouffville. Then, when Stephanie’s husband moved to Stouffville she says, “we fought like crazy and broke up…we got married in January and separated in December of the same year…there was a lot of change! Move here, move there, and get divorced. I stayed in the house and a friend moved in and we lived there for a couple of years.”
Stephanie explains how it took about four years for her divorce to be finalized, and during that time she met her second husband through friends. Stephanie’s second husband lived in Hamilton, and a few years into their relationship Stephanie moved to Hamilton. After living together for five years, they decided to get married. Describing her wedding, Stephanie says that she had a big, Catholic wedding in Scarborough because her husbands’ family lived in Scarborough. Stephanie and her husband were not engaged for a long time before getting married. Stephanie says:

We got married immediately and had children. In fact, I got pregnant with my son on my honeymoon in Jamaica… I stayed at home and my husband made enough money. We saved for a house. So we got married, got the house, got pregnant all within three months, maybe. So it was a whirlwind! About eighteen months later we had my daughter and we just lived happily maybe for seven or eight years after that.

During the time that Stephanie was married to her second husband, a close friend of Stephanie’s approached her and confronted her about a potential sexual assault that may have occurred when Stephanie and her friend were children. Stephanie remembers:

Something happened to me when I was young and it was really weird because my girlfriend, my best friend since I was four, she actually brought this up to me after I was married to my second husband. We were up at my cottage talking one day and she said to me, oh do you remember…she said I’ve wanted to talk to you about this for a long time. Do you remember a certain day we were out in this field frolicking? I think I was like, ten, and we were catching butterflies, which all sounds very lovely… apparently not… I remember as soon as she said it my stomach just went, like, I just felt sick and I had no idea why…I’m like, no I don’t remember. But this feeling continued, right? And I’ve always had not a great memory and she remembers everything. Oh my god, she can tell what we ate when we were seven years old on a picnic, seriously! I don’t remember being on a picnic never mind what we were eating. So, anyway, we started to talk and process all this stuff and I have little bits of memories of it.

Stephanie continues:

What happened is that her and I were out in this field catching butterflies, I guess we were ten or eleven…and there were some older boys, people that my older sister probably hung out with at that time. Anyway, I seriously don’t really remember what happened, but she tells me that, I don’t know exactly how it all came about, but these guys came after us and caught us for whatever intent and purposes there was and in the midst of how this was all happening apparently tied me to a tree…I’m glad I don’t remember…they tied me to a tree, and my friend managed to break away. So she broke away. She ran whatever it was, like a mile, to wherever my family was and got my brother and my sister and they came running back but by the time they were back whatever happened had happened and I don’t know exactly what it was, but apparently I wasn’t fully dressed and I was tied to something. Then my brother found them and beat the shit out of them and that’s the end of the story. She recalls a lot of things but what brought it up for us was because she has carried around this enormous amount of guilt that she wasn’t able to save
me from me whatever it was. I don’t even remember what it was, but she wasn’t able to save me. She was trying not to get me to remember but she was trying to see what I remembered, if I remember. She remembers it fully but she can only remember what she saw, she doesn’t know what happened when she ran for help.

After Stephanie’s friend confronted her, Stephanie decided to share this experience with her husband. Stephanie remembers thinking that perhaps it would be a good idea to revisit these memories, and she remembers there being a lot of stories in the media about sexual assault. When Stephanie told her husband about the assault and said that it could potentially explain some of her behaviours, Stephanie’s husband told her that she was “crazy.” After that, Stephanie did not continue talking about it and decided not to go to therapy. Stephanie is unsure of whether her husband believed her, but says, “even if he did believe me, it was in the past and not something that we needed to worry about…so I never did re-visit it and I have no intentions of it.”

Other than telling her husband about this incident, Stephanie says that her “life was very nice up until a point” and she felt that being at home with her children was “perfect.” As stated by Stephanie:

I wanted to get married to a nice guy who had a good job, get a nice little house and have a girl and a boy. That’s exactly what happened…in the meantime, we built a cottage…we were always really good with money…I went back to work when my daughter was about two, but just part time. I just wanted to be a mom and I didn’t really have big career dreams or anything like that. My second husband would work through the day and I would work a couple of nights a week…I enjoyed having the day with the kids and then at night I would go to work for five or six hours. That was perfectly fine with me. We always had enough money for whatever we needed.

Then, after eight years of marriage, Stephanie’s husband was unfaithful. Stephanie remembers how she was not dealing well with this, and says that it was a horrible situation. Stephanie’s children were young at the time: her son was four years old and her daughter was two years old. Stephanie ended up filing for divorce and put the house up for sale. Once people expressed interest in buying the house and put in an offer, Stephanie decided that she did not want to break up her marriage and felt that she wanted to continue trying to work on her marriage. Stephanie’s husband agreed to give their marriage another chance, and they bought a house in the same neighbourhood as where they were previously living. After a year of living together in their new house, Stephanie felt that it was not working out and separated from her husband. She says, “I’m not very forgiving in that department.”

During the time that Stephanie and her husband were separating, they were in the process of building a cottage. Stephanie says, “the kids grew up there. With the ensuing divorce and the breakup, he kept the house, and I kept the cottage. There was still a fair chunk of money that was
still coming to me.” At this time, Stephanie moved into a house with a close friend. Stephanie could not afford to live in the house on her own so Stephanie’s friend and her young daughter lived with her. While Stephanie’s friend was living with her, she revealed that she had been sexually abused as a child. As remembered by Stephanie:

It was funny now, but she was extremely sexually promiscuous and I was extremely the other way, and the only reason I’m telling you this is because it turned out she had no memory of herself being sexually abused and she had this lovely little blue eyed blond haired daughter…and something came up at the school of this young girl where she made some kind of inappropriate comment. Long story short, they took her to some kind of counseling and she said something that her granddad was doing something to her and they showed her the dolls, and this is all when they were living with me. It turned out that her daughter was being sexually abused by her grandfather who is my friends’ father…so then all of her suppressed memories came up. She had been abused for many, many years when she was young, by her father. They had lived in a strict German family and mama didn’t see anything and her and her sister were abused for years and years and years…. so this all came out. They both went through therapy, the sister and the daughter, so the generations. They all went through therapy, she had her father charged and went through that whole thing.

Stephanie continues:

The abuse went on for a long time. It was horrible. She got some kind of validation in the end. Her dad is dead now but she did keep up a relationship with him even throughout this which I was like, amazed. Why would you ever speak to him again? I can’t understand that. I can’t understand because I haven’t been in it…having someone close to me having gone through years of that experience. No self-esteem whatsoever and that’s why I bring up the promiscuousness. I know a lot of times that is where that comes from. Mixed messages when you are young and your father is abusing you but you don’t know its abuse because he’s saying I love you, whatever those people say, I have no idea. I’ve no tolerance for that. I know they’re sick, but…I would kill somebody if they…I shouldn’t say that!

After Stephanie’s friend revealed her sexual abuse, they continued living together for a few years. At the same time, Stephanie and her ex-husband continued arguing back and forth all of the time. Stephanie eventually saved enough money to buy her own house. She decided not to move out of the area because she did not want her children to switch schools, having personally experienced the difficulty of readjusting to a new school and neighbourhood when she was a child. Stephanie continues to explain how her divorce was stressful for her children and how her ex-husband became mentally unstable during this time:

There were a lot of suicide attempts and things like that. A lot of guilt, and it was just horrendous there was drinking and various things. I had to shelter my children away from their dad a lot of times and they couldn’t be with him because I would go to drop them off and he would be altered in some kind of state. One time he left a message threatening that he was going to drive into the lake with the kids in the car, so I went to
my lawyer so he didn’t have visitation rights for some time… it was really hard for the
kids, and my son especially acted out in various ways although he never ended up getting
into trouble.

Stephanie’s children understood why they could not see their father and were aware of his mental
state. Stephanie recalls going over to her ex-husbands’ house, planning to drop her children off,
and she would first go into the house to see what kind of condition he was in. Her children would
wait in the car, and there were various times when Stephanie would call a member of her family
to come and get her children while Stephanie sorted out what was going on with her ex-husband.
There were times when Stephanie called an ambulance for her husband. She adds: “ I dealt with
whatever their dad was doing so he didn’t go kill himself, so that they had a dad at the end of the
day.”

After Stephanie finalized her divorce she began working at different office jobs. More
specifically, she worked for York region, and she worked for different accountants and lawyers.
Stephanie describes how the longest job that she had lasted for ten years, and she worked for a
financial planner. Stephanie explains that she ended up losing her job with the financial planner
due to her excessive drinking. After losing the job, she worked seasonally for a golf course, and
went on employment insurance during the months that the golf course was closed. Stephanie also
had a friend who owned a restaurant, and she would work for her at various times. In addition,
there were other restaurants that Stephanie says that she worked at.

Part of the reason why Stephanie switched jobs so regularly was because of her drinking.
Reflecting on this, Stephanie says:

I guess everything just took its toll through the years of trying always to be strong and
trying to always take care of everything, get through the marriages… my mom was dying
at that time, too, and that was really difficult. It was actually here, at my house and it was
on Mother’s Day… she had a brain aneurism and it was horrible. The kids were here and
it was just terrible. That was a really, really bad time. I always drank a lot even when I
was young. I would drink a lot, so I got into real trouble with drinking, like extreme
drinking. I am a recovered alcoholic now. I’ve been a recovered alcoholic for four and a
half years but that was a really hard time, so say I was forty-seven or forty-eight, around
there.

Stephanie comments on how her family treated her during this time:

My whole family was at me. They were following me around, trying to reach me. The
kids were scared all the time… not knowing if I was going to come home or if I was
driving drunk all the time. I don’t know how much you know about alcoholism, but you
know, at the end you’re not really doing anything other than drinking. You’re not getting
groceries, not doing dishes, not having a shower, you’re not taking care of any
responsibilities and I would go to work hammered and get sent home and it was just a
nightmare. So, yeah, I don’t even remember…my sister got me into detox the first time and a good friend the second time, and my sister, again, the third time. The third time I went straight from detox to treatment…so they kept me there until it was time to go. I was downtown at Renaissance, which is where I work…

Stephanie attended several treatment sessions and explains how it is a twenty-one day program where addicts live at the facility for twenty-one days and are taught about alcoholism. Stephanie highlights how “alcoholism is not about the drinking—it’s about the thinking that gets you to drinking.” Part of treatment included beginning Alcoholics Anonymous, which is a twelve-step program. Stephanie explains how the steps are life guidelines that influence people how to behave and what to believe in. Stephanie began the program after visiting her doctor when she was very sick. The doctor told Stephanie that her liver was enlarged and that she was going to get cirrhosis and would die. Stephanie says that she went to treatment, came out of treatment to go to Alcoholics Anonymous, and that “the rest is history.” Stephanie still attends Alcoholics Anonymous a few times during the week, and she works at a treatment centre for people who are struggling with addictions, in Toronto. After she finished her treatment, Stephanie worked at the golf course where she previously worked for one year, and then decided to go back to school through a second career program in order to become an Addictions Counselor. Stephanie says that becoming an Addictions Counselor “is what everybody did when they all got sober.”

Stephanie finds working at the treatment centre to be excellent and helpful for herself. She says that “it’s really rewarding to help someone else and you know about it because you’ve been through it yourself. All the counselors—like every single counselor—is a recovering alcoholic. I mean, but you also have the degree, too.” At Stephanie’s current job, she says many clients disclose childhood sexual assault, as well as other childhood traumas. Elaborating on her relationships with clients, Stephanie explains that she sees clients for fifteen weeks, twice a week, after they have completed three-weeks of treatment in the facility. Once clients have completed the fifteen weeks with Stephanie, they are on their own. Stephanie says that the majority of clients do not stay sober, and that there is a lot of heartbreak attached to her job because she puts a lot of time into her clients and has had to learn to let them go. Stephanie says that there are many clients who she has thought would stay sober and they have surprised her because they have not. Stephanie explains, “people die and you go to funerals. It’s a hard thing...it’s very hard, you get very attached.” Stephanie adds:

Most of them live in the city so if they are attending meetings I don’t see them because they’re not out here so I don’t necessarily know how they are. I always say, call me and let me know, and nobody ever does. You feel like they’re your children. You’ve
mentored them along the way and you’re so happy for them and they’ve got this new life now and everything is looking rosy and then it crashes and oh crap.

Stephanie is currently living in same house that she purchased after her second divorce and has been there for over ten years. Her ex-husband lives a couple of streets over and she says that they good friends and “everybody is fine with everybody.” Stephanie is currently dating a man who is a police officer. She notes how he is also a recovering alcoholic and says that they have that in common.

Stephanie’s children have always lived with her. Stephanie’s daughter lived at home until starting her undergraduate degree at Guelph University, where she currently is studying. Stephanie’s son has also lived at home for most of his life, but Stephanie remembers how there was a time when her son was “out of hand” and went to live with her ex-husband for a month. Stephanie’s son is currently twenty-one years old and has attended Humber College. Commenting on her son, Stephanie says that he has been out of school for a year. He was living in an apartment with a friend in Toronto while he was going to school, and then he moved back with Stephanie last summer because he decided to work at a new job close by. Stephanie says that her son recently moved out and is living with a friend in Uxbridge, but that he still comes and goes. Although he does not officially live with Stephanie anymore, he will see her once or twice a week.

**Experiences volunteering**

During the period of time that Stephanie went back to school to become an Addictions Counselor, she became good friends with a woman in her program who was volunteering at a rape crisis centre affiliated with York Region support services. Stephanie explains how her friend told her about the ten week training where volunteers learned about rape crisis work and could become a volunteer. Stephanie thought, “Well, why not?” and decided to complete the ten week training with her friend. Stephanie has volunteered since.

Besides Stephanie’s friend encouraging her to volunteer, other reasons contributing to Stephanie’s decision to become a rape crisis volunteer relate to her friends and friends’ daughters’ experiences with sexual violence, along with volunteering being relevant to her work as an Addictions Counselor. As explained by Stephanie:

The abuse experienced by my friend and her daughter was kind of another reason to get in there and volunteer, but it was mainly because of why I have a little more understanding of people like addicts and alcoholics, if that’s what their background was and how to help them get through that kind of thing. My main focus is alcoholism and
drug addiction but sometimes that’s part and parcel with the sex trade and sexual abuse as children and that kind of thing.

Stephanie completed volunteer training with her friend and says that they attended training together, every other Saturday for the whole day, for ten sessions. Stephanie describes training as “diverse” and says there were many different topics covered, including socialization, feminism, anti-oppression, child sexual abuse issues, how to react on the crisis line, crisis intervention, suicide prevention and intervention and ritual abuse. Stephanie found training to be interactive and says that although training usually consisted of a lecture, volunteers could ask questions throughout, and then based on questions, discussions would be held on other topics.

Stephanie felt comfortable throughout training most of the time, although she found the sections that focused on child abuse to be difficult and says, “we watched some movies that just really...you get that real sick feeling in your stomach and the ritualistic abuses especially in certain cultures or certain countries of what they do is nauseating.”

Stephanie highlights how some of the content that she learned in training has coincided with her work as an Addictions Counselor:

The whole sex trade workers and how those women get abused and taken advantage of and a lot of people in the sex trade are from broken homes and they are only on the street because they have nowhere to go and then they are an addict and they have to feed their habit and it meshes together. So I just wanted to gain a better understanding of these issues because I see them coming into the house to try to get clean and sober.

Elaborating on this, she says:

I thought it would help me because what I wanted to do was...because my clients, maybe not the majority, maybe, but a large number of the women who are alcoholics or drug addicts are there because they’ve been sexually abused, right? Or their history or abuse by their family, or whatever. There’s a lot of cover up, a lot of shame, a lot of trying to deal with being raped when you’re four, kind of thing. There’s an awful lot of stuff that I really didn’t have a whole lot of personal knowledge of...well, I may have, but I’m not sure. So, anyway, I thought that would help, too, in my work, to have a better understanding where some people are coming from.

Stephanie explains that volunteers take calls from home. Specifically, volunteers have their own pagers, and when they receive a page, the clients’ phone number is provided and then volunteers call the clients back to speak with them. The volunteer coordinator will email a list of shifts at the beginning of the month, and volunteers will choose their shifts. Shifts are from seven o’clock in the morning until noon, from noon until five o’clock in the evening, from five o’clock in the evening until midnight and then from midnight until seven o’clock in the morning. Besides planning her shifts around her work schedule, Stephanie chooses her shifts based on her
boyfriends’ work schedule and says, “he doesn’t like the time I take doing volunteering but he is supportive…he volunteers for so many things in the university community that it’s not even funny…his approval is not an issue by any means…he volunteers an awful lot of time and I volunteer less so than him.” Stephanie explains that recently, she took two overnight shifts that were from midnight until seven o’clock in the morning because she knew that two weekends throughout the month she was doing a night shift at the treatment centre, and would already be awake.

Stephanie has not established relationships with any of the other volunteers, besides her friend who introduced her to volunteering. She is quick to point out that a problem for her is that she cannot attend the monthly meetings because they are scheduled during the time that she has to attend work. Besides the problem of not being able to attend meetings, Stephanie does not have additional problems with the centre where she volunteers.

Stephanie feels that it is unfortunate that she cannot attend the meetings because they conflict with her work schedule, and she feels “less in tune with what is going on at the centre.” She has found these meetings to be useful in the past because of the open dialogue that is exchanged between different volunteers. Stephanie explains that at the meetings, volunteers discuss new issues that have arisen as well as how to handle repeat callers, many of whom call the crisis line to talk about an episode that may have occurred decades ago. Stephanie says that at previous meetings, volunteers would usually all be familiar with particular repeat callers, and they would collaborate in order to come up with a support plan for the caller in case the caller contacted the crisis line, again.

Commenting on typical calls that she has received, Stephanie says that once in a while, there will be an immediate crisis. For example, recently, Stephanie received a call from a police officer who sought advice about what to do with a woman who was in the midst of leaving her abusive husband. The woman was trying to escape with her child while her husband was at work. However, her husband had taken the car that had the baby’s car seat. The police officer was trying to figure out how to find a car seat in order to help the woman and child leave their violent situation. More often than not, Stephanie says that there are repeat callers where volunteers on the crisis line can recognize the callers’ name and why they are calling. In these cases, many of the callers are mentally unstable, or they are will speak about a current court case and how they are pressing charges against someone for child abuse that happened many years ago. Other times, Stephanie has spoken with young girls who have been out on a date with somebody where there has been confusion surrounding whether there was consensual sex. Stephanie says that sometimes
“the guy thought it was consensual sex and she didn’t feel that way at all, and they might be thinking so what do I do now?”

One of Stephanie’s first calls on the crisis line was with a repeat caller, but Stephanie did not know this at the time. Stephanie explains how the call was with “an older lady, a bit nutty, and she had some abuse issues when she was young and she was taking the guy to court and nobody was believing her and it wasn’t going well. She was pretty angry. Yeah, I talked to her a couple of times since then.” Stephanie emphasizes how:

Most people just want to talk about it. They just want to be validated, they want to know that somebody believes them and then maybe later directed towards a legal way—if they want to. A lot of people don’t want to because they know they are going to go through hell and humiliation and years of court and lawyers and people don’t believe them and it will be made to look like the biggest whatever. So a lot of people choose not to do that.

Commenting on other kinds of calls on the crisis line, Stephanie explains that men rarely call. She is unsure of whether it is difficult for men to gain access to resources because she has never dealt with a male caller before. She says:

I mean, to me, it shouldn’t make a difference if it is a male calling. I know it’s a women’s support network. If someone is in crisis and wants to talk they should be able to…the centre has never said to direct men anywhere else. They’ve never treated them any differently. I mean, the calls that come through to me, I mean, like I said happen very rarely. You also get prank calls, too…you get somebody, like say, not necessarily, but say, a male, and then you realize and then they’ll start name-calling or whatever.

Reflecting on what it was like when she began volunteering, Stephanie says it was “scary” because she did not know if she was going to say the right thing and would just have the volunteer manual with her for assistance. When she started volunteering, Stephanie was anxious waiting for the calls:

I think, initially I was hoping it didn’t ring, you know? Because I don’t know what I was going to do! How am I going to send this for? What am I going to do? You know? But that’s the same kind of feeling, say, when I started working at the treatment centre, like what do I know? How am I gonna… Like I could set this person… I think my fear is that you’ll set the person off or say the wrong thing. Some people are suicidal—you have to watch for that. You have to have the right phone numbers to direct people to where they would be best suited. You have to decide whether it’s a crisis. Like I’ve never had somebody call where they have just been raped or something like that, like I have no idea how I would feel if that happened. I would probably call them and tell them to come over here. I have room! I don’t know!

Stephanie usually feels emotionally drained after a conversation with a client on the crisis line. Part of the reason why she feels drained is because of the difficult conversations that she has
with clients. She says, “It’s draining for me some days when I come home from my shift. It’s really draining because people take a lot out of you. Sometimes hearing people’s stories is so sad. Most of them are sad.” Besides feeling emotionally drained, Stephanie’s sleep patterns have been effected from volunteering. She often takes shifts during the evenings, and says that the calls disturb her sleep because she finds that it can be difficult to go back to sleep after speaking with a caller. However, Stephanie is quick to point out that she is rarely uncomfortable when taking calls on the crisis line. The only times that Stephanie becomes uncomfortable, is when callers are providing graphic details about their abuse and when Stephanie is able to envision the perpetrator and particular instruments or weapons that may have been used.

There are different ways that Stephanie de-stresses from volunteer work. She explains:

I have the drive home, which is just over an hour. I have that. I’ll come home and might read for a bit. I go to my AA meeting where I can share. I talk to my colleagues at work about it if it’s been especially trying or tiring or frustrating, or whatever. We will debrief about the client and what was said and that kind of thing. I can always go to my supervisor if that’s the case. Other than that, there are things that I enjoy to be stress free. I’ll walk, ride my bike, go to the cottage, I go to concerts…I hang out with my daughter; I mean we always have fun. That’s a good outlet for me.

Stephanie also highlights how, in addition to the stress from rape crisis volunteer work, she experiences stress from her work as an Addictions Counselor:

It’s hard because I’m always like, with my job it’s an intense kind of a thing and I’m also at my meetings so I have a lot of…five days, at least out of seven, are all about alcohol and all about drinking and all about people’s problems, right. So a lot of people [are] recovering alcoholics and they have their normal job and then they have AA. I have AA constant, constant, constant, right. There are lots of times when I don’t want to hear anything more about alcohol or addicts, I just want to go out with normal people and have some fun. Like my daughter and I will go to the horse show on Saturday so that’s got nothing to do with anybody and I have sponsees who are people that I have to guide through the whole process at AA. They are like students, kind of, they are learning and I have a sponsor myself that I go to in order to unload, you know. My boyfriend and I talk a lot because we are both in the program and his job is fairly stressful, as well. We go out on his motorcycle and stuff. We go for ice cream or whatever. So there are different outlets.

Stephanie feels that she has “not really” made an impact on some of the callers she has spoken to on the crisis line and feels that “it’s just more, to have an ear.” She experiences a greater sense of satisfaction from her job as an Addictions Counselor than from the rape crisis volunteer work she is involved in. She attributes this to the fact that she spends more time with clients at her job as an Addictions Counselor, and says that perhaps if she was spending more time speaking to callers on the crisis line and if she was employed at the centre, than she might
feel differently. She says, “I wouldn’t say I have made an impact, but just to calm somebody down and talk them through the issues they are going through, just to be an ear, I’m sure it helps them in some way.”

In terms of different ways that volunteering has made an impact on Stephanie, she draws a correlation between volunteering and feeling a heightened sense of awareness towards her daughters’ safety. She says that she relates some of the calls she receives to her own daughter and often wonders about how devastated she would feel if her daughter experienced sexual violence. However, Stephanie does not feel that speaking with clients has affected her personal sense of safety. Rather, she says her relationship with her boyfriend has changed her attitude towards safety. Part of this has to do with the fact that Stephanie’s boyfriend is a police officer. Stephanie explains that he is very safety conscious and responds to a lot of calls from women who have gone to parties and have had a drug put in their drink and have then been sexually assaulted. In addition, Stephanie’s boyfriend has a twenty-one year old daughter who is living on the University of Toronto campus. Stephanie highlights how safety is an issue that she often talks about with her boyfriend and that many of their conversations revolve around this topic.

Stephanie also highlights how living in a small town has shaped her attitudes towards safety. She says, “…maybe because we live out here, in the middle of nowhere, there is a false sense of safety. We had a girl raped just down at the corner two years ago or so, just walking the dog, which my daughter does, well she doesn’t anymore at night by herself.” Stephanie continues:

Then I got more knowledge about what to look for…I’m pretty naïve, from a pretty small town. I almost believe people are going to do the right thing…I changed a little bit in learning and plus with my boyfriend, he’s very much like, no you can’t trust anybody and I’m like you can trust everybody. He’s like, wake up! So now, I mean, I make sure I have a weapon, right. I’m not saying a gun or anything. I just make sure there is something close by to stab someone in the eye with. I work downtown in Toronto, right, in the university district. I make sure that my doors are locked when I go to the car. I make sure that I get in and look in the van and then I lock the doors. I probably have become more cautious…even around here, like, I won’t walk the dog at night anymore. We lock our doors now whereas before we would never lock our doors…my daughter is of the same mentality as me, like, everybody is nice. Yea, until they stab ya! My daughter and I, living alone here, we’ve learned to be more cautious and perhaps my boyfriend had lightened up a tad.

Besides volunteering impacting her attitude towards her daughters’ safety, Stephanie says her attitudes towards feminism have changed since volunteering, although she does not know whether to consider the volunteer work that she is involved in to be a form of feminist practice. Before Stephanie began volunteering, her understanding of feminism was “male bashing” and she
associated feminism with “burning bras.” Now, Stephanie considers feminism to be about recognizing that women and men have different issues and different perspectives on the world.

Stephanie says that she sees herself continuing as a rape crisis volunteer in the future and is pleased that her volunteer work has helped her as an Addictions Counselor. She is proud of the fact that she has been sober for many years, and feels that being exposed to people who have struggled to overcome similar issues as her has helped in her own healing process.
CHAPTER 5: MOTIVATIONS TO VOLUNTEER

As previously stated, this study explores the meanings that rape crisis volunteers attach to their experiences during their career as volunteers as well as how prior experiences have shaped their current involvement. I have noted earlier that standpoint theory is the lens through which I am examining my data and that I am drawing from the experiences of five women: Francesca, Raven, Stephanie, Jordana and Kim. The participants in this study offer unique perspectives on what it is like volunteering at rape crisis centres across Ontario.

Although the story of each participant is distinct, there are several shared experiences and particular themes that overlap. Throughout this chapter I will explore commonalities among participants, while simultaneously drawing attention to specific features that shape participants’ lives. I will begin by focusing on initial motivations or factors that have influenced volunteers’ decisions to participate in rape crisis work. I will then examine participants’ understandings of what it is like being a rape crisis volunteer. Finally, I will consider personal challenges that participants face as a result of volunteering at rape crisis centres, as well as challenges and tensions that are related to issues at each centre. All themes will be situated within the existing literature on volunteerism and rape crisis work in order to highlight similarities and differences.

Motivations

There are multiple factors associated with a rape crisis volunteers’ initial desire to volunteer and there are multiple factors associated with why a person continues volunteering as a rape crisis volunteer. These factors are interwoven with one another—each experience both affects and is affected by other experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to think of motivators and challenges as cyclical and to consider how participants’ pasts shape their present, and how the present potentially will shape the future. Similar to McMillan’s (2004) study, my participants were entirely women and I found motivations to be complex and interconnected. In light of this, I have attempted not to fixate on isolating different motivators and challenges since all themes are fluid and operate as a dynamic process. However, I have organized themes in this way for the purpose of presenting my findings clearly and coherently.

Volunteers frequently use the term ‘work’ to describe their volunteer work, and often use ‘work’ and ‘volunteer work’ interchangeably.
Experiences with Violence and Trauma

As previously stated, for most participants, a combination of factors influenced their decision to volunteer. Not surprisingly, however, I have found that past experiences have contributed greatly to why volunteers have chosen to become involved in rape crisis work. Although past experiences vary among participants, a common feature is that they have all directly or indirectly experienced forms of violence.

As noted by Francesca, based on her experience, rape crisis volunteers “come from a good place of wanting to help, but people don’t come to it from a good personal place.” Similarly, Kim says that she did not get involved in volunteer work related to violence against women until after experiencing violence, and she does not know whether she would volunteer in the anti-violence sector if it was not for her experiences with violence. This finding echoes McMillan’s (2004) study on women rape crisis volunteers in the United Kingdom and Sweden. Like my results, she found that:

Women saw their voluntary work as a form of ‘care’ and support for themselves in dealing with their own experiences of violence and emotional reaction to that violence…women often indicated that their own personal experience of violence had motivated them to become involved in anti-violence work. Often this was direct personal experiences and for some women it was the experience of a close relative or friend. (p. 133)

Besides all participants emphasizing how they have either experienced violence personally and/or have known someone who has experienced violence, several participants have noted that they have undergone tumultuous childhoods or have endured some form of trauma in their adult lives. In some cases, childhood trauma is related to violence. Specifically, Raven, Francesca and Stephanie experienced lack of stability as children, although this manifests quite differently for each of them.

Raven’s turbulent childhood stems from the sexual abuse that she experienced from her cousin, the physical abuse that she experienced from her stepbrother and feeling neglected by her mother. Raven never felt supported by her mother growing up and this intensified when her mother moved to Thunder Bay. Raven grew up in family where her father frequently turned to drugs and alcohol and physically abused her stepbrothers. Raven’s stepsiblings were also involved with drugs, and while she was growing up, there was a lot of tension between her stepsiblings, stepmother and herself. In addition, Raven recounts the racism that took place throughout high school and remembers feeling alienated for being an Aboriginal woman. She describes how she was called a “White wannabe” as well as a “dirty Indian.” When Raven was a
teenager, she turned to drugs and alcohol to numb her pain. As a young adult, Raven describes overcoming her alcohol addiction and then shortly after, she began to cut herself as another way to manage her pain. Raven also recalls feeling like she was “damaged goods” and was afraid that her husband would leave her when she told him about her abuse. Raven, unlike other participants, experienced different forms of violence and trauma at home, at school, and at other family members’ homes.

Like Raven, Francesca grew up in a household where her brothers were physically abused. Unlike Raven, who describes being physically abused by her brother, Dale, and sexually abused by one of her cousins, Francesca experienced emotional abuse from her stepfather, and witnessed her step-father physically abuse her brothers. Francesca describes living in a constant state of terror and being a very anxious, fearful child, whereas Raven does not. However, both Raven and Francesca highlight how they struggled with depression, cut themselves, and have had difficulty regulating their emotions. Both Raven and Francesca also point to the cyclical nature of abuse; Raven’s father has a history of sexual abuse in his family and an uncle abused Raven’s mother. Similarly, Francesca’s father and stepfather both may have had abusive childhoods. Francesca describes feeling guilty for not being able to protect her siblings from abuse and for leaving them behind to live with her stepfather when she attended university. Raven does not state that she felt guilty because her siblings endured abuse. Rather, Raven emphasizes how she felt ashamed from her abuse, particularly as an adult, when she became romantically involved with her husband. Francesca also notes that she was mugged when she moved to Montreal, and how this incident had significant consequences for her mental health and well being.

Similar to Raven, Stephanie turned to alcohol as a way to cope with instability throughout her childhood and adulthood, and, although she does not remember the details, Stephanie was sexually assaulted by a group of boys when she was younger. Stephanie describes how it was difficult to adjust when her mother remarried and uprooted Stephanie to the countryside, in Stouffville. She says that having to make new friends and attend a new high school was very difficult. As a result, Stephanie began drinking, smoking and skipping school. Similar to Raven, Stephanie felt that her mother “had abandoned her responsibilities.” And, like Raven, as an adult, Stephanie continued drinking. She describes her battle with alcoholism and how her kids were afraid of her all of the time. Stephanie also highlights the stress of going through two divorces and having to protect her children from the erratic behaviour of her ex-husband, who was suicidal.

Although Jordana does not state that she had a tumultuous childhood, like Francesca, she was mugged when she was a student. Unlike Francesca, who says that although she had so many
traumas as a child, getting mugged was ‘the last straw,’ for Jordana, this traumatic incident was isolated and made her feel like a “super fortunate person.” However, both Jordana and Francesca developed a startle reflex as a result of being mugged and both describe the embarrassment that they have felt as a result of their startles. Jordana also says that she was “messed up” and feels that she could have benefited from counseling after being mugged. Another incident that had a significant impact on Jordana was when she was a student in Toronto and two girls that attended her school were assaulted nearby. During this time, Jordana did not walk alone and took cabs everywhere. Unlike Francesca, Raven and Stephanie who had unstable lives growing up, Jordana describes how seeing the instability in children’s lives during her placement with boys who had behavioural problems “really opened her eyes to different things that people go through” and “broke her heart” to witness kids who endure hardships.

Unlike the other participants, Kim says that she had a “pretty fun childhood” but highlights the trauma of enduring emotional abuse from her boyfriend as well as being sexually assaulted by him as a young adult. Her relationship began in high school and lasted throughout the beginning of university. Unlike Raven, Francesca, Jordana and Stephanie, Kim is the only participant who was sexually assaulted and emotionally abused by a partner. However, Kim’s tumultuous relationship with her partner mirrors some of Stephanie’s experiences with her ex-husbands’ erratic behaviour.

For some participants, the process of going through their parents’ divorce was a source of trauma or distress in childhood and adolescence. Stephanie, Raven, Francesca and Jordana’s parents all divorced when they were young, and a common feature for them relates to the difficulties attached to moving as a result of their parents getting a divorce. Stephanie highlights how having to move was very disrupting and that it was hard losing all of her childhood friends. Raven explains how she was affected by her mother’s decision to move to Thunder Bay after she separated from Raven’s father. Raven describes how she harbored a lot of hurt and anger at her mom “for just picking up and leaving.” Francesca does not provide extensive details about her parents’ divorce, but she emphasizes how after her mother remarried, she moved to New York City and her father remained in Edmonton. In addition to getting very airsick and having to be shuttled back and forth on the plane by herself several times a year, Francesca says that she developed terrible phobias of planes after 9/11 and would be very frightened. Francesca briefly discusses her mothers’ second divorce with her stepfather, and says that part of her was relieved and part of her was afraid, because she was worried about her siblings’ safety when they were left alone with her violent stepfather. Unlike Stephanie, Raven and Francesca, Jordana says that she
did not find her parents’ divorce to be traumatizing, but she notes how “at the time it was definitely hard” and that it was sad moving out.

The tendency for rape crisis volunteers to have experienced trauma in their lives has been highlighted in existing literature on rape crisis volunteers. In particular, Baird and Jenkins (2003), Carlyle and Roberto (2007), Clemans (2004), McMillan (2004), Rath (2007) and Thornton and Novak (2010) found that most volunteers at rape crisis volunteers are survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse. However, these studies primarily consider the connection between sexual violence and participation in rape crisis work, rather than examining how different forms of violence or trauma may affect decisions to volunteer. As indicated by my participants, it is important not to restrict understandings of violence and trauma to those of a sexual nature, since trauma may vary from being mugged, to witnessing a sibling endure physical abuse. Additionally, these studies do not specifically consider how divorce may be a source of trauma or pain for participants who become involved in rape crisis work; nor do they consider differences between trauma that is ongoing or from an isolated event may impact how rape crisis volunteers experience training and cope with stress from volunteering.

Part of why this finding is significant, is because without recognizing the different kinds of traumas that volunteers may potentially experience prior to becoming involved in rape crisis work, rape crisis centres are not prepared to offer necessary supports if and when re-traumatization, occurs. And, in less extreme cases, centres could not be well prepared to support volunteers if they experience anxiety, guilt, or other emotions that stem from painful past experiences. For example, Francesca found the training portion of volunteering that focused on child abuse extremely difficult because it reminded her of her past. Francesca suggests that throughout training, the centre did not seem particularly attuned to the fact that volunteers may experience anxiety or stress related to issues besides sexual assault or sexual abuse. Francesca also suggests that the training did not handle the issue of child abuse in a particularly sensitive manner, which, unfortunately, may have been what led Francesca to take part in harmful behaviour, such as cutting herself.

Besides being able to offer necessary support for volunteers, recognizing that volunteers may have experienced a range of traumas before volunteering could potentially lead centres to provide volunteers with opportunities to teach others about different forms of marginalization during volunteer training, or at other times through the volunteer process. Providing volunteers with these opportunities may function as another form of support. To illustrate this point, Raven describes how rewarding it was for her when she was asked to facilitate a discussion on cutting and suicide once the volunteer coordinator realized Raven’s expertise on these topics and the
degree of ease that she felt sharing her experiences. Although participants state that they potentially could have shared their experiences of violence with other volunteers during training—regardless of whether they were of a sexual nature—both Francesca and Raven hint that their centres had never actively encouraged them to share their experiences of violence, and were often uncomfortable with them sharing experiences of violence. Raven mentions that this occurred when she describes how the volunteer coordinator was uncomfortable talking about suicide and expressed relief when Raven agreed to facilitate all discussions on this topic; rather than the volunteer coordinator using this moment as an opportunity to ask Raven about her experiences, the volunteer coordinator seems to have primarily been concerned with having Raven speak to others about suicide and cutting because she was not comfortable doing so. As well, Francesca mentions how one of the policies at her centre initially did not allow volunteers to disclose their experiences of violence and abuse when speaking to clients on the crisis line. Francesca says:

> When I coordinated training I actually changed the policy, but the policy was originally that there was a moratorium on talking about any of your own experiences or even admitting whether you were a survivor of child abuse or sexual assault or anything. The policy was intended to level the playing field. When I coordinated training I actually changed the policy a little bit. When I first trained, that was what it was, and it was difficult having to keep that inside and, I mean, certainly the training coordinators told us they were there for us if we needed anything, but I’ve never been very good at taking people up on that kind of thing.

Francesca says that “it was difficult to keep that inside,” which points towards Rebekkah Adams (2008) discussion about rape crisis centres and shelters. Adams explains that:

> There is little acknowledgement of the experience of trauma of front-line workers in a secondary victimization context. There are few opportunities built into the regular work schedule for psychological de-briefing, personal or professional…. the injustice lies in the fact that staff are forced into the terrible position of having to hide any trauma like a dirty little secret. (p. 112-113)

Adams continues:

> Being permitted the chance to name the issue and to have a plan set up for how to assist would dramatically decrease burnout, spiritual exhaustion and residual effects of the self-denial of pain…but many staff are well founded in their fear and reluctance to disclose in the workplace. One reason is that we have managed to bastardize the concept of boundaries to mean being devoid of feeling and experience. (p. 113)

Francesca does not go as far as saying that lack of disclosure has led to self-denial and pain. However, she does mention the difficulties attached to not sharing experiences of violence at several points throughout her life history interview, and as Adams (2008) points out, Francesca
speaks about having to hide her trauma ‘like a dirty little secret.’ Also, Francesca supports Adams’ (2008) insistence that being permitted to share different experiences of violence provided her with a sense of clarity and comfort, functioning as a way to restore power and control in her own life.

**Self-Healing**

As previously mentioned, all participants have directly and/or indirectly experienced violence. As a result of having experienced violence personally and/or having known someone who has experienced violence, several participants have noted that they have struggled with a range of issues. These personal struggles seem to have influenced participants’ decisions to become involved in rape crisis work and volunteering appears to function as a part of participants’ self-healing processes, in order for them to gain control over their lives. Participants suggest that they need to revisit their pasts and must reconnect with their victimization in order to heal. As well, identifying with clients and helping them normalize their traumas seems to be a way for participants to manage their victimization and to have their own experiences normalized—this is a cyclical process.

Nonetheless, Francesca is quick to distinguish between healing as something that is achievable versus it being a process. She says: “a lot of people get frustrated working with people with trauma who seem to sort of get a little better and then relapse and people who quit treatment multiple times. I always remember that I think people have to heal in their own time and in their own way.” Connected to this, Stephanie addresses the notion of healing as a process when she describes the work that she is involved in as an Addictions Counselor, in addition to her own recovery process from alcoholism. This connects to Judith Herman’s (1992) study on the recovery process of combat veterans, survivors of rape and domestic violence, and survivors of political persecution. Herman found that “no recovery follows a linear course: oscillating and dialectical in nature, the traumatic syndromes defy any attempt to impose such simpleminded order…” (p.155, cited in Adams, 2008, p. 112). Adams extends Herman’s discussion when she states that “the progression through the stages of recovery function as a spiral, in which earlier issues are continually revisited on a higher level of integration” (p. 112).

Relating to Herman (1992) and Adams’ (2008) points about how healing is a cyclical process, Francesca emphasizes the need to revisit trauma in order to heal when she describes the interconnectedness between helping others and being helped. Specifically, she says “I was going to therapy, but at the same time I was kind of acting like a therapist in some roles and at the same
time that I was working with trauma survivors, I was being a trauma survivor.” As well, Kim illuminates how helping others has been a central part of helping herself. She says:

I really wanted to give back somehow, and I guess it felt like finally I was at a place where I had worked enough and I had dealt with a lot of crap and I was able to do that…I had called the crisis line, I think only once, but yea, just the fact of knowing that was something that was available to me at that time…I really wanted to be part of it and just help people. I just had this strong urge to help as much as possible…I remember accessing those services so there was a strong desire to be part of it from the other side, having the experiences and then being able to be in a place where I’ve gone through it all and can give back.

Similar to Kim, Francesca explains that one of the major reasons why she decided to run a support group was because she wanted to provide others with help that was not available to her when she struggling with trauma. As stated by Francesca:

A big reason in some ways why I was running a support group is because I wanted a support group but there was nothing. I mean that is the thing about child abuse other than sexual abuse. There aren’t a lot of resources for those out there. You will find a lot of resources specifically for survivors of sexual abuse but there is very little for survivors of other kinds of abuse. I would call sometimes the line that I worked for simply because I didn’t have anyone else to call.

Francesca also highlights how “having a compassionate ear for people who are not necessarily following a linear path,” is part of the reason that she is involved in rape crisis work as well as why she moderates an online forum for people with mental illnesses. She suggests that being compassionate or empathetic to other peoples’ pain may occur as a result of experiencing similar issues and that this can be a stimulus for volunteering. Being empathetic or compassionate, in some cases, can derive from knowing what it has felt like to not have necessary supports available when experiencing a similar situation.

Like Francesca, Jordana describes how a lot of her work experiences, which have included interacting with marginalized groups, have led her to be compassionate. However, for Jordana, working with marginalized groups has been “eye opening” and has exposed her to other people’s lives that are quite different from her own. This suggests that her involvement in rape crisis work may be less about identifying with clients and/or normalizing her own experiences. Jordana also suggests that volunteering has functioned as a way to overcome the guilt and shame that she has experienced for not supporting her friend when she learned of her assault. However, Jordana’s healing process is unlike other participants because she is healing from the way that she responded to another persons’ violence.
Similar to Jordana, Stephanie’s decision to volunteer is related to the fact that her friend was abused. However, for Jordana, volunteering seems to be a way to rid herself of guilt, whereas this does not seem to be the case for Stephanie. Also, like Jordana, Stephanie says that her friend has felt guilty for many years because she was not able to “save” her from being sexually assaulted when they were children. Both Jordana’s guilt, and Stephanie’s friends’ guilt, suggests that an assault may not only lead survivors of violence to be ashamed, but that the feeling of shame can extended to friends of survivors. These examples also point towards how ‘shame’ can be an impetus for volunteering, which has not been explored in detail by any of the literature on rape crisis volunteers.

In contrast to other volunteers, Kim describes how she suppressed feelings of satisfaction after helping a caller. She recalls being “elated,” but felt guilty and says, “helping others shouldn’t be about me.” This suggests that Kim has difficulty accepting any form of personal gain from her volunteer efforts. Kim seems to be uncomfortable with the idea that her volunteering contributes to her own self-healing process, and she seems to want to view volunteering as a selfless act. This contrasts with Jordana, who says that after her first suicide intervention, she “felt like a million bucks.” Unlike Kim, Jordana underscores how it was “incredible” and that “it felt great” that she “was able to do that for somebody and be there for her.” Jordana emphasizes how she felt proud that she helped someone who was in crisis and made a difference, whereas Kim shies away from taking any credit, although she briefly explains how “when someone is in crisis and you know that the call is really useful for them there is a satisfied kind of feeling.” A potential way to account for differences between Kim and Jordana is to consider how Kim has been directly affected by violence, whereas Jordana has been indirectly affected by violence. However, it remains unclear how being directly or indirectly impacted by violence may lead participants to feel a greater sense of pride attached to helping callers.

These findings fit within existing literature on volunteers that focus on examining particular motivations. As stated by Clary and Orenstein (1991), volunteers are not ‘purely’ altruistic, and although volunteers are often more likely to be concerned about the well being of others, their involvement in volunteer work is likely to result from a combination of altruistic and egoistic (self-gaining) motives. My participant’s echo these findings since volunteers describe how they want to help others, while simultaneously want to help themselves. Francesca exemplifies this when she explains how she was working with trauma survivors while acting like one.

Jordana’s experiences also illustrate how her involvement in rape crisis work is driven by both altruistic and egoistic motives. She explains how speaking with a caller who was suicidal
made her “feel like a million bucks” thus, emphasizing the psychological benefits that she has experienced as a result of helping others, rather than discussing how the caller she spoke with might have benefited. Jordana also continuously notes how guilty she has felt because of the way she reacted to her friends’ sexual assault and suggests that volunteering has functioned as a way to rid her of her guilt, which again, draws attention to how Jordana has benefited, rather than suggesting that ‘pure’ altruism is a central factor driving her volunteer efforts. However, Jordana highlights how, at other times, working with people who are less fortunate than herself has made her feel deeply compassionate for other peoples’ suffering, which takes the focus away from the personal benefits that may have accrued as a result of helping others.

These findings extend the literature on rape crisis volunteers, since existing scholarship, including studies by McMillan (2004) and Rath (2007), do not elaborate on the ways in which feeling guilty about bearing witness to another persons’ abuse, or not reacting in a supportive way to someone after they were abused, may impact volunteer motivations and retention. These studies also do not explore how shame may be an impetus for friends and relatives of an individual who has experienced violence to volunteer.

Both Francesca and Kim echo findings in McMillan’s (2004) study, where volunteers were motivated to become involved at rape crisis centres partly because of a desire to ‘give back,’ and partly as a response to their awareness of the dearth of services available. However, Francesca underscores how the reason she sought help from a rape crisis line was because of the lack of services available to survivors of child abuse; unlike Kim, Francesca does not speak of wanting to ‘give back’ in order to help others who are going through similar experiences.

Kim’s point about wanting to give back, and feeling like she was at a place in her healing journey where she had worked enough on her own issues in order to want to help others, connects to Rebecca Campbell and Adrienne E. Adams’ (2009) study on the reasons that rape survivors chose to participate in community-based, face-to-face interviews. Campbell and Adams (2009) cite Campbell, Seif, Wasco and Ahrens (2004) who state that “it can be psychologically beneficial for victims to share their stories with engaged, empathic listeners” (p. 396). Although Campbell and Adams (2009) are referring to the research context rather than the volunteer context, their findings are reflected by Kim who, like Campbell and Adams’ participants, suggests that part of the reason for volunteering with survivors of violence was to “let other women know they were not alone and were helping to improve community services” (p. 402). However, unlike Kim, who seems to position herself as ‘being recovered,’ participants in Campbell and Adams’ study state that involvement with survivors of violence “would also be helpful to their own healing process” (p. 402). Although McMillan (2004) as well as Campbell
and Adams (2009) state that rape crisis volunteers may choose to volunteer as a way to ‘give back,’ they fail to specify how exactly, ‘giving back’ differs for volunteers who have and have not experienced sexual violence. They also do not consider how ‘giving back’ may change according to the kinds of rape crisis services that have been previously accessed by volunteers, and the degree to which volunteers felt that these services were beneficial.

In addition, Jordana’s experiences of feeling satisfied while helping clients who are in crisis are evident in Thornton and Novak’s (2010) study where a particular participant “talked about a sense of satisfaction with the action she took in a challenging situation” (p. 445). Similarly, McMillan (2004) states that in her study, participants indicated that “their work, and in particular helping other women and children, gave them a tremendous sense of satisfaction” (p. 130). However, these authors do not explore in detail how volunteers’ ability to feel satisfied may depend on the degree of ease and difficulty of a particular case. They also do not consider how satisfaction may increase with calls that are more challenging for volunteers, and, as illustrated in the case of Jordana, feelings of satisfaction may occur when volunteers are able to know that their efforts were helpful to clients. This may be more evident in extreme cases, including when clients are suicidal.

Besides Jordana, other participants extend McMillan (2004) and Thornton and Novak’s (2009) discussions on volunteer satisfaction. More specifically, Francesca and Raven describe how feelings of satisfaction derive from being able to satisfy personal needs; Raven and Francesca discuss how teaching other volunteers particular information in training has been satisfying because it has fulfilled egoistic motives, including providing them with a sense of self confidence and control. This point will be explored in greater detail in the upcoming section on self-empowerment and empowering others.

**Self-Empowerment and Empowering Others**

For many participants, the training portion of volunteering was an extremely significant part of their self-healing journey, and several participants spoke of the ways that training helped them build self-confidence and gain agency over their lives. Several participants felt self-empowered by the material they learned throughout training and also felt self-empowered by being able to provide clients/callers with the tools to help themselves. In addition to going through training as volunteers, Raven and Francesca highlight how having the opportunity to train others was a significant part of their healing journey. Francesca explains how she learned a lot about trauma throughout training. More specifically, Francesca says:
Volunteer training really helped me understand more. I mean, everybody’s trauma is different and sexual assault is different from non-sexual assault and child abuse. All of these things are different, but during the training, I think I did learn a lot about trauma and I think that helped me and I was talking about it in therapy and finally started to feel like I had some hope of being better.

Although Francesca says that training was helpful, this may have to do with the fact that Francesca participated in training at the same time that she was involved in other activities; she describes the overlap between training volunteers, learning about other peoples’ experiences when speaking with callers on the crisis line, and working through her personal issues during therapy. That being said, Francesca also mentions how she started cutting herself during the training portion that focused on child abuse. She says, “training was a difficult time for me, but rewarding, also.” Francesca also says that when she was training volunteers at her old centre in Montreal, she enjoyed being a part of training and enjoyed teaching.

Like Francesca, Raven draws attention towards the difficulties of training when she describes how she was struggling a lot by the end of training, and how, although training eventually gave her the confidence to speak in groups, she experienced anxiety and felt judged by others throughout the training process. However, Raven emphasizes the importance of training others and explains how going through training gave her the opportunity to participate in group work and co-facilitation. She says that training others made her “feel better in a sense” because she was “teaching somebody something.” Raven adds:

It was something so horrible and bad that I was actually putting a face to a cutter and telling people that it could be somebody you’re going to work with. Talking about suicide, I ended up doing all the suicide-training portions for the volunteer training throughout my internship. Whenever they had volunteer training I was called in to do the suicide portions of it.

Kim says that training changed her life and had a profound effect on her. She found training to be interesting and explains how there were particular concepts and ideas that she did not know before and found eye opening, including information on anti-racism. Kim remembers feeling as if there was a big shift going on for her, and she attributes a lot of this shift to the training. She elaborates:

There was some stuff that was really excellent like they brought in speakers, like a woman who spoke about women with disabilities and she did a phenomenal job, and there were a number of times that things happened in that training that will stick with me forever and I feel like there was a big transformation within me, too, trying to be more accepting of everybody and acknowledging my privilege and all that kind of stuff…which is like, never ending, but, like, it felt like there was some good seeds that were planted there.
Kim felt that training prepared her for taking calls and says that “one of the biggest things to learn is that it’s not about helping people per se, but rather, facilitating them to help themselves.” Kim emphasizes how clients can make their own decisions, and according to Kim, during training she learned that volunteering is about helping others to help themselves. Although Kim comments on the transformative aspects of training, like Francesca, she describes how she experienced vicarious trauma during training.

Unlike Kim and Francesca, Jordana does not describe feeling traumatized at any point throughout the duration of the training process. Similar to Kim, Jordana found training to be an empowering process and she says she was interested in all of the “cool information.” Echoing Kim, Jordana speaks of the notion of giving clients the tools to help themselves and says how this has been rewarding. Not only is this reflected in her volunteer efforts, it is apparent in different kinds of work that she has been involved in. More specifically, Jordana explains how she has put this idea into practice when she worked with children who had behavioural problems and when she was also working with Aboriginal mothers. Jordana felt that it was rewarding helping Aboriginal mothers learn how to take care of their children and live on their own in order to be independent. Jordana explains that “it is difficult for many of these women, who grew up on reserves because they do not necessarily have those skills, nobody ever taught them, so now this is us teaching them so they don’t lose their kids and can be a successful family unit.”

Unlike most participants, Stephanie primarily describes training, and the volunteer process more generally, in relation to how it connects to her job as an Addictions Counselor rather than her self-healing processes. However, Stephanie makes note of how working as an Addictions Counselor has helped her overcome her addiction to alcohol. Although she does not cite volunteering as a form of self-empowerment, and rather, tends to emphasize how volunteering compliments her work practice, this finding reveals that involvement in the helping profession may be a form of self-healing.

Like Stephanie, Kim notes how the knowledge she learned from training is reflected in her professional life. More specifically, Kim has used some of the activities that she learned in training in her own teaching practice, for instance, the ‘unpacking privilege exercise’ by Peggy McIntosh. However, unlike Stephanie, Kim’s discussion on training primarily revolves around her personal self-healing.

The findings in this section are supported by Rath (2007) in several ways. Rath argues that rape crisis training courses appeal to volunteers who have personally experienced sexual violence. In her study, participants who identified as survivors of violence felt that becoming a rape crisis volunteer was a part of the later stage of their healing process. Raven’s experiences
with training are consistent with Rath (2007) who found that for some of her participants, “training sessions were not seen as a safe space to discuss personal issues” (p. 27-28). Rath’s participants admitted to withholding comments about their personal beliefs during group work because they felt that their trainers would refer back to these comments when assessing their ability to become volunteer counselors. Although Raven does not go into extensive detail about how she felt judged throughout training, based on what she has shared, it seems that Raven could have possibly experienced fear that was expressed by Rath’s participants during training.

Similar to many of my participants, Rath’s participants noted how they “underwent personal development and growth as the training progressed. All the women talked about change in ways that contained strong themes of continuity and a strong sense of self agency” (p. 26-27). My findings extend Rath’s discussion on the benefits of volunteer training because participants in my study highlight how they underwent training while participating in other activities (including therapy, moderating a forum for people experiencing mental illness, taking a course on violence against women, etc.). This suggests that considering volunteer training as an isolated event may be problematic, and that taking into account multiple occurrences during the time of volunteer training is necessary in order to determine the degree to which training is beneficial to self-healing. My findings also differ from Rath, who emphasizes how participants in her study considered personal change and growth to operate steadily and continuously. Although this is the case with most of my participants, Francesca frequently highlights how training has disrupted her recovery process, and how it has been a source of re-traumatization.

Experiences expressed by Raven and Kim are supported by Thornton and Novak (2010) who found that rape crisis volunteers, in some instances, “enjoyed being able to plant the seed for someone else’s self empowerment” (p. 445). However, my study extends Thornton and Novak (2010), because participants problematize the notion of ‘empowerment’ through training and highlight how this is not always a painless or easy process—this is particularly evident in Francesca, Kim and Raven’s accounts of training. As well, several participants complicate understandings of ‘empowering others.’ Kim and Jordana mention that clients can make their own decisions, and Kim and Jordana consistently do not position themselves as ‘saviors’ who have ‘rescued’ clients, but rather, state that they have simply given clients the tools to take control over their own lives.

My study also confirms findings by Carlyle and Roberto (2007) who emphasize how training is central for rape crisis advocates. They state that previous research has shown that training can improve counseling skills, including self-efficacy and anxiety (e.g., Al-Darmaki, 2004; Daniels & Larson, 2001; Larson, 1998, cited in Carlyle & Roberto, 2007, p. 191). As also
stated by Carlyle and Roberto (2007), “in order to address anxiety most effectively, training programs need to equip their volunteers with the skills to confront reoccurring uncertain situations” (p. 191). The need for training programs to have necessary support available to participants who experience uncertain situations is exemplified in the experiences of Francesca, Kim and Raven, who describe a series of conditions, including anxiety, fear of speaking in groups, cutting and experiencing vicarious trauma. These points are reminiscent of my earlier discussion where I noted the importance of centres offering support to volunteers throughout training and the need for centres to recognize that volunteers may have experienced a range of trauma before partaking in volunteering.

**Experiencing a Sense of Community**

In addition to the previous forms of self-healing that have been described, another dynamic related to volunteers’ motivations has to do with participants’ desire to experience a sense of community and support. This theme has been highlighted in existing literature on rape crisis volunteers, and will be explored in detail throughout this section.

Francesca describes the feeling she experienced when her eyes meet the gaze of other volunteers during training and how this created is a sense of connection, which was comforting. She also says that she began volunteering as a way to fill a void. Besides focusing on schoolwork and attending therapy, volunteering functioned as an outlet to socialize. At the centre she volunteered at in Montreal, Francesca says that she was “always around. The office was a hang-out space, as well.” According to Francesca, it is easier for people who suffer from trauma to be around people who have also suffered from trauma. She says, “some people feel a certain sense of isolation being exposed to these kinds of terrible stories. It feels dissonant to them, to the rest of their life. To me, it’s not really that dissonant.” Adding to this, Francesca says:

My therapist now says that perhaps the reason I find the work comfortable is because it’s easier for me to understand people who are distraught and upset or people who are traumatized or suffering. In a lot of ways their reactions make more sense to me so in some ways it’s more of a jump for me to go out and live in the world than it is for me to do this work because it’s more surprising to be out in the world and more dissonant with what I understand than to be working with those who have survived horrible traumas.

Francesca goes on to describe how it was ‘nice’ to be with people on the LGBT line, where she volunteered prior to becoming involved in rape crisis work:

That’s the thing about activist communities, in some ways I didn’t fit in, because a lot of them identified as queer and other sexualities and I have always been a lesbian...but you know, that community can also be accepting of people’s past so it can be a place that is a
little safer to talk about things that are not so pretty. So being part of that community was a help to me.

This sense of community that Francesca is referring to is also reflected in activities that she is involved in as online moderator. Similar to the relationships that Francesca built the first time she volunteered on the LGBT line, Francesca explains how a few members “have been around a long time and we all hang around together. We have a live chat and we have blogs.” In addition, Francesca believes that some of the people on the forum are very proud of her because she is a medical student. Francesca’s involvement on the online forum mirrors the work she does on the rape crisis line because it functions as a space where she is provided with a sense of love and support that she does not receive from her family. Similar to the way Francesca learned to “find love where she could” as a child, particularly from doctors and teachers, as an adult, volunteers and people on the online forum currently serve this purpose.

Unlike Francesca, who emphasizes how volunteering functions as “a way to ‘belong,’” Kim’s emphasis on “doing community work” seems to be driven by her desire to change circumstances around her and to be an activist. This is evident when she describes what it was like becoming involved in the Vagina Monologues. Kim highlights how important participating in The Vagina Monologues was for her self-healing process, and she says that sharing her experiences with a group of women was very powerful. She emphasizes how women were struggling together to end violence against women and that performing collectively “broke the silence” that is often attached to violence, in a powerful way. However, in this case, bonding with women and developing social relationships is and has been a result of becoming involved in the Vagina Monologues, rather than a motivation for participating in the Vagina Monologues. In other words, Kim does not state that her initial motivation for performing in the Vagina Monologues or becoming a rape crisis volunteer was to connect with other women or to form friendships. Rather, she suggests that her desire to become politically active is of greater importance. It seems that in this case, her political activism or desire to become involved in her community just so happens to be performed with others, rather than her interest in volunteering being a conscious effort to collaborate with members of her community.

In terms of her involvement in rape crisis work, Kim emphasizes how she “wanted to have more roots in the community and do more community work” but that she could not become involved in China, because she was a foreigner. Kim stresses how she “really wanted to move somewhere where she could do this community work and had a big urge for that,” so when she relocated to Ottawa, volunteering at a rape crisis centre was one of the first things that she became involved in. Unlike Francesca, Kim does not state that she has lacked support from her
family, or that she has had difficulty building relationships or making friends. Rather, Kim suggests that her involvement in rape crisis work as well as the Vagina Monologues, is primarily driven by a desire to be politically active and as a way to ‘give back.’ However, like Francesca, Kim’s motivators for volunteering and participating in the Vagina Monologues are a combination of altruistic and egoistic motives: she suggests that participating in the Vagina Monologues, and, as an extension, participating in rape crisis work, has fulfilled personal needs of “breaking the silence” as well as standing up for her political beliefs.

Similar to Kim’s experiences while participating in the Vagina Monologues, Jordana emphasizes how training was “an awesome’ bonding experience with all of the women there.” A lot of the volunteers were of similar ages to Jordana, which she says, “was really nice.” Many of the volunteers were first year students who had an interest in violence against women and wanted to gain some experience in that area. According to Jordana, “they were all young women taking an active role, trying to do something for their community.” Although Jordana does not emphasize how training at her centre was a bonding experience, like Kim, Jordana highlights how becoming involved in volunteer work related to violence against women has resulted in some form of bonding with other women, but again, was not an initial motivator.

Raven and Stephanie do not emphasize volunteering as a way to socialize or develop a sense of community. Although Stephanie does not state that her volunteer work has provided her with a sense of community, she says that working as an Addictions Counselor has offered her ample opportunities to be around individuals, who, like her, are recovering alcoholics. It is worth noting that like all other participants, with the exception of Kim, Raven and Stephanie describe how they felt like outsiders at different points in their lives. Stephanie describes how when she was struggling with her alcoholism, she felt cut off from her family. She says, “they were following me and trying to reach me. The kids were scared all of the time…not knowing if I was going to come home or if I was driving drunk all of the time.” Raven and Francesca describe being bullied at school when they were young; Francesca was teased for having a Canadian accent, and Raven was tormented for being an Aboriginal woman; both Raven and Francesca describe how they have difficulty making friends and socializing; Jordana describes how when she was living in Calgary for one of her placements, she felt lonely and missed her family; Jordana describes feeling as if she did “not belong with anybody” in Calgary and was misunderstood.

These findings are consistent with research on volunteerism that explores how volunteers’ motivations are linked to increasing self esteem as well fulfilling social needs (Burns et al. 2006, p. 82). In addition, Clary et al. (1998) explain that for some people, volunteering can
help individuals fit in and provide an outlet to cope with inner anxieties and conflicts (p. 487). Jordana, Raven and Francesca all suggest that they initially began volunteering as a way to combat feelings of isolation and to feel a sense of belonging; Francesca is more explicit about this, whereas Jordana and Raven subtly note how there were particular moments in their lives where they felt lonely or cut off from their families. These findings extend the literature by illustrating how feelings of isolation and belonging can operate in a variety of contexts, at different moments in time, and can contribute to volunteers’ decision to become involved in rape crisis work differently depending on other ways that volunteers are fulfilling social needs. The literature does not offer detailed explanations about the ways in which volunteering may fulfill social needs; nor do most studies consider how volunteers may feel isolated during major life changes, including moving, going through treatments for alcoholism, or attending a new school.

Francesca’s desire to become involved in rape crisis volunteer work as well as LGBT volunteer work is consistent with Clemans (2004), who argues that rape crisis volunteers often become involved as a way to foster relationships with like-minded individuals. This is also consistent with McMillan (2004) who highlights the role of interpersonal relationships and friendships for volunteers working at crisis centres. McMillan found that establishing relationships was a significant initial motivating factor for women and was also a factor that sustained their involvement. In addition, Francesca’s experiences are consistent with Omoto and Snyder (1995), who reported that AIDS volunteers who feel that they have little social support may continue volunteering as a way to meet people and make friends, as well as Black and Dinitto (1994) who found that friendship with similar women was an important recruitment and retention factor. Francesca suggests that the possibility of developing relationships with likeminded individuals was a central factor related to why she initially decided to volunteer in the areas of rape crisis work. However, at her current centre, Francesca stresses how she has not been able to develop close relationships with other volunteers. This finding is at odds with McMillan (2004) and Black and Dinitto (1994) because Francesca suggests that building friendships and meeting people may not be a significant factor related to why she has remained a volunteer. Also, Francesca’s repeated mention of ‘learning to find love where she can,’ and feeling validated by people on the online forum where she moderates discussions suggests that the online forum may be a primary source of support for her. The notion of feeling validated and loved as a motivation to volunteer at rape crisis centres has not been explored in the existing literature, and Francesca’s accounts highlight the need to consider these factors.

Some of Kim and Jordana’s accounts are reflected in a study on women volunteers conducted by Reynolds Jenner (1982), where women of different ages, races, and socio-economic
positions were interviewed in order to better understand their different motivations for volunteering. Reynolds Jenner draws on studies of women volunteers conducted by Bartless (1959), Ginzberg (1966), Minnis (1951) and Moore (1961). Participants in these studies listed their reasons for volunteering as having to do with feeling a sense of responsibility to their communities, which is reflected in Kim’s discussion of wanting to become involved in her community. However, unlike Francesca and participants in the studies previously mentioned, Kim and Jordana do not say that they volunteered at rape crisis centres out of a need for group association and the sharing of common experiences. And, although Kim and Jordana are consistent with the results of Ginzberg (1966), who found that educated women tended to engage in voluntary work because the nature of the work, unlike Ginzberg’s (1966) findings, they both do not mention volunteering at a rape crisis centre a desire for association with others.

Kim’s experiences support findings by McMillan (2004), who states that in her study, it was difficult to separate altruistic motivations from political motivations, and that feminist political motivations were a central factor contributing to volunteers’ decisions to volunteer at rape crisis centres. However, Kim extends McMillan’s (2004) study where her participants felt that feminist political motivations were specifically about helping women. Like Kim, all other participants did not speak about how working with similar women in the area of rape crisis work helped them with their own experiences of violence. For Francesca, volunteering is not specifically about women and is more about being around like-minded people, who just happen to be women; Jordana echoes this sentiment. Although Jordana speaks about how her initial experience with training was a bonding experience with other women, she does not state that working directly with other women was a motivating factor or factor contributing to her continual involvement in rape crisis work.

As well, unlike Black and Dinitto (1994) who found that political motivations were of importance to their participants, it seems that political motivations are not a central motivator for my participants, with the exception of Kim. Several of my participants extend Black and Dinitto’s study, and suggest that political motivations can be broadened to include raising awareness about a range of violence that affects both men and women. In other words, for most of my participants, political motivations do not relate directly to ending violence against women. Instead, most participants relate their political motivations to end violence against all groups who experience violence, and they situate their efforts within the anti-violence movement.
Normalizing Experiences

Connected to the notion of self empowerment and experiencing a sense of community, all participants describe the aura of secrecy surrounding sexual violence and many participants suggest that volunteering has functioned as a way to “break the silence” and either normalize their personal experiences with violence, or normalize the fact that violence exists, more generally. Participants speak about hiding their experiences with violence for many years, or knowing someone who has done this. Jordana articulates this clearly when she explains what it was like learning that her best friend was sexually assaulted:

If somebody doesn’t share with you that it’s happened, then you don’t know it’s actually going on. I think that’s why there is so much ignorance today because people don’t talk about it because it’s their private business—they don’t have to share if they don’t want to. But, like, if you don’t know, then you don’t think it’s going on. So it was a big shock like, oh my god, this has happened to my best friend who I’ve known since grade two.

Jordana also says “all these years of experience—not just in volunteering—but in all my work experience as well, can help me normalize what they’re going through which I think is really helpful.” Although Jordana does not explain why she feels that normalizing experiences of violence is helpful, based on comments made throughout her life history interview, it seems that working with survivors of assault has helped to normalize her initial reaction to her friends’ assault. In other words, learning how other people can be judgmental towards individuals’ experiences with violence has helped Jordana throughout the process of forgiving herself and this has made her realize how common her reaction to her friend was.

Rather than understanding and normalizing other peoples’ abuse, Raven, Francesca and Kim describe the silence surrounding their abuse and how they tried to hide it. Francesca says “there was a part of me that knew that I wasn’t allowed to tell, strangely, somehow.” Francesca also notes how she hid a lot of her depression and her struggles with self-esteem from the first therapist that she saw in Montreal. This draws attention to how not only survivors frequently remain silent about their abuse, but this also shows the silence and shame surrounding mental health issues, such as depression.

Echoing Francesca, Raven says that she felt like her abuse was a “big dark secret.” Moreover, Kim highlights the extent to which shame and fear was wrapped up in the silence of not telling anyone about her assault, and she says that after telling her parents about the assault is when she “really started down the recovery road.”

Besides trying to hide their abuse from others, Francesca, Raven and Stephanie draw attention towards how not only survivors of violence feel ashamed about their abuse and remain
silent, but how friends and family remain silent, too. Stephanie explains how her friend and her
daughter were abused for many years and that her friends’ mother remained silent about the abuse
and did not intervene at any point. Similarly, Francesca describes how, although her mothers’
friends suspected that Francesca and her siblings were abused, they did not confront anyone about
it. As well, Raven explains how although her family knew about her abuse, nobody did anything
about it. Raven believes that perhaps her family was too scared or did not know how to react or
handle the situation. This connects to larger discussions surrounding the notion of living in a
‘rape culture’ (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993). However, discussions on this topic are beyond
the scope of my study.

Many participants describe the comfort of being around people who share similar
experiences, as well as how survivors calling the rape crisis line have seemed to benefit from
having their experiences validated. As stated by Stephanie:

Most people just want to talk about it. They just want to be validated, they want to know
that somebody believes them and then maybe later directed towards a legal way — if they
want to. A lot of people don’t want to because they know they are going to go through
hell and humiliation and years of court and lawyers and people don’t believe them and it
will be made to look like the biggest whatever. So a lot of people choose not to do that.

Jordana echoes Stephanie:

A lot of the time it’s truly just listening and just validating and normalizing their
experience. So, instead of worrying about having the right thing to say, you don’t need to
say anything…you just need to listen so that’s what I noticed and it definitely took a lot
of the edge off me once I realized they are here to talk and I’m here to listen.

Francesca extends Stephanie and Jordana, and describes how volunteering has been a
“normalizing experience” for her, and has brought a lot of self-understanding. Although she has
not shared her experiences with other volunteers, Francesca says that she has heard common
threads surface from the stories shared by volunteers and callers, which has helped her to come to
terms with her own trauma.

In order to feel that experiences are normalized, this often relates to being part of a
community or group. McMillan (2004) describes the importance of volunteers feeling a
connection to other members of the group as a way to come to terms with their own experiences
of violence. She supports Judith Lewis Herman’s (1992) assertion that commonality is an integral
step in the process of reaching self-understanding about traumatic events. As previously
articulated by participants, Lewis Herman (1992) as cited in McMillan (2004), outlines the
potential benefits that trauma survivors can gain from having their experiences normalized by
others:
Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her sense of humanity. (p. 134)

Similar to volunteers who have experienced violence, Koss and Harvey (1991) explain:

Rape groups provide rape victims with an opportunity to meet other survivors in a safe, supportive, equalitarian setting, and to both give and receive a degree of validation, solace and understanding that may have alluded them in their daily lives. (p. 205, cited in Clemans, 2005, p. 64-65)

Although providing a safe space for survivors by helping them “tell their stories, reconnect with others and learn to trust again” (Clemans, 2005, p. 64) may be an aspiration for rape crisis centres rather than a guaranteed outcome, participants in my study underscore the importance of having centres where this is possible.

However, with the exception of Francesca’s experience of working on the LGBT support line, participants do not emphasize the importance of a group directly helping to create a sense of normalcy. Instead, participants suggest they have benefited from working one-on-one with trauma survivors/clients on the crisis line. Also, extending McMillan’s (2004) discussion, where she cites Lewis Herman’s (1992) findings, participants suggest that establishing a sense of normalcy can operate in a cyclical manner: survivors of violence/clients on the crisis line can feel validated and have their experiences normalized by speaking with rape crisis volunteers, and rape crisis volunteers can feel validated and have their experiences normalized by speaking with survivors of violence/clients on the crisis line.

As noted in the previous sections, although rape crisis centres claim to provide spaces to normalize survivors’ experiences with violence, Francesca states that she does not engage with other volunteers at her current centre to share her trauma, nor does she contact her volunteer coordinator to share her experiences. And, as previously stated, Raven did not feel comfortable sharing her experiences with other volunteers throughout the training process out of fear that she would be judged. In most instances, participants in my study have revealed that building relationships with other volunteers in these spaces is not what has led to feelings of normalcy; instead, a large part of what has led to feelings of normalcy has been the content learned throughout training and speaking with clients on the crisis line. Overall, these findings do not confirm existing literature, with the exception of Rath (2007), who notes the importance of the content in training. However, most of the literature, including Rath’s (2007) study, does not
specifically consider volunteers’ feelings of normalcy as being directly related to training, and instead, tends to focus on the ways in which training can be rewarding.

Overall, the previous section has indicated that self-healing is a major factor contributing to why volunteers are involved in rape crisis work. These findings are consistent with MacMillan (2004), whose participants indicated that working in an anti-violence organization provided them with a way to channel the pain they felt about their own experiences of violence and helped them transform these experiences into something positive (p. 134). As well, findings in this section echo a study by Schauben and Frazier (1995) who found that female rape crisis counselors declared “their own growth and change as a positive aspect of working with rape survivors” (p. 59, cited in Clemans, 2004, p. 149). Nonetheless, as previously illustrated, self-healing is a complicated process that involves a series of factors, many of which are not considered extensively in the broader literature.

**Other Motivations to Volunteer**

Besides self-healing functioning as a potential reason to become involved in the area of rape crisis work, other factors have influenced volunteers’ involvement. These factors include going through major life transitions, employment and education and parental influences. In most cases, these factors overlap, which suggests that there are combinations of reasons for why people volunteer at rape crisis centres. Several motivations that I have labeled as ‘other’ throughout this section are consistent with findings from Cnnan and Goldberg (1991). Their study, which focused on volunteers from a variety of human service agencies across the United States, revealed that motives for volunteering are not distinct but overlapping. In other words, “volunteers act not from a single motive or category of motives, but from a combination of motives that can be described overall as a rewarding experience. They not only give, but they get back some reward or satisfaction” (p. 281). Cnnan and Goldberg are quick to point out that volunteers in their study found different aspects of volunteering to be rewarding, and that feeling rewarded in a variety of ways resulted in a desire to continue volunteering. Similarly, participants’ tendency to acquire personal benefits from volunteering is also evident in the previous section, and is consistent with Clary and Orenstein (1991), who argue that volunteers are not ‘purely’ altruistic in their motives. Clary and Orenstein’s (1991) study found that volunteers were involved in volunteer efforts out of a concern for self and others, but none of the volunteers in their study reported altruism, or being concerned for others, as the only motivational factor related to volunteering. Instead, they suggest that other factors can affect altruistic behaviours of volunteers, including the amount of
help and the effectiveness of being able to help. They illustrate how altruistic motivations require volunteers to be less concerned about the personal effects that volunteering has on their lives, and, as a result, this tends to lead to a greater degree of commitment to volunteering.

Major Life Transitions

Francesca began volunteering on the LGBT crisis line in Montreal during a time of tumult, when was struggling with depression and starting therapy. Francesca describes how her “friends were bailing,” her medication was being adjusted and she was dropping many of her classes. Francesca also describes how she began volunteering on the LGBT crisis line while she was struggling with her lesbian identity. She says:

For a while, figuring out my sexuality was a big fucking deal because I really didn’t have anyone to talk to about it and know what it would mean. I was trying to restructure my understanding of relationships. For years, even in my first few years of university, being LGBT was like, a big part of my identity. Over time, it’s become less important to me, so I sort of faded out of that community and I’ve become more involved with the sexual assault centre.

Francesca suggests that during the time that she was trying to understand her sexuality, she was looking for people to talk to, which links back to the previous discussion on the desire to fit into a community while volunteering.

Eventually, Francesca began to feel as if being part of the LGBT community was less important to her because she felt more at ease with her identity as a lesbian. Then, Francesca began volunteering at a rape crisis centre in Montreal. Her initial involvement in volunteer work at her rape crisis centre in Montreal was during a time of transition and Francesca describes how volunteering became a major part of her life while things were in flux. More specifically, Francesca remembers applying to medical school and anxiously finding out whether she was accepted. At this point, she was preparing herself to move away from her girlfriend, since the medical schools that she applied to were in different cities across Canada. As stated by Francesca:

My therapist...she was pregnant, she was leaving and I was freaking out and I didn’t know if I would get into medical school. I was contemplating moving away from my girlfriend and I was freaking out and I was running forty-hour trainings all over the place and facilitating a support group. I was working my ass off on the crisis line. I worked on the crisis line for a year and then after that I trained for support groups...that is a little different, because it’s in-person work and you see multiple people at once, which of course, you are trying to juggle. I was doing all that and I was trying desperately to say goodbye to my therapist and not really succeeding. I was still feeling depressed again.
Francesca also notes that when she was adjusting to her medications and going to therapy she would be on the online forum that she facilitates “all the time” and was “there constantly.” In some ways, Francesca suggests that developing relationships online and through volunteering have offered a source of stability in her life, and have kept her grounded when things have seemed chaotic.

Similar to the previous times that Francesca began volunteering, Francesca also began volunteering at her current centre during a time of transition. She explains, “when I decided I was moving to London for medical school, the first thing I did was find a SAC. I found a source of therapy, a SAC, a grocery store…it’s a big part of who I am.”

Like Francesca, Kim, and Jordana, began volunteering at rape crisis centres once they moved to new cities. However, they do not state that moving to new cities were times of upheaval. Kim says that as soon as she moved to Ottawa she looked for a rape crisis centre to volunteer at. Kim says, “I looked into all of the anti-violence organizations to see who had spots open for volunteering…it was something that I had wanted to do for a while and it felt like I finally had this opportunity and was going to do it.” Besides having recently moved to Ottawa and beginning volunteer training, Kim participated in the Vagina Monologues, joined the board of directors and several committees at a rape crisis centres and organizations in Ottawa.

Similar to Kim, who began volunteering as soon as she moved to a different city, Jordana got in touch with the volunteer coordinator when she moved to Kingston to start her degree in psychology. Jordana says, “in the bathroom at school there was just this sheet of all these services in Kingston, like the crisis line, and all these different things, and I thought, I should be spending my time working in this area and I should volunteer with one of these places.”

Francesca’s experiences connect to Rath (2007) who notes how many volunteers appear to join rape crisis training during times of personal upheaval. Many of Rath’s participants began volunteering at the same time as they were experiencing various changes in their lives. For example, Rath notes how one of her participants was undergoing psychotherapy, experiencing fertility issues and was going through changes in her relationship. Rath also highlights how for some of her participants, experiences during training were “part of complex webs of life stories that weave together a variety of, complementary and contrasting, themes and events” (p. 24).

Although Rath states that volunteer training gave meaning to participants’ experiences, she does not clearly explain how this is the case; nor does she examine the ways in which volunteering (besides the training portion) potentially provided meaning to participants’ lives. My study extends Rath, by pointing out how volunteering may not only provide volunteers with a sense of
meaning during periods of change, but that it can offer a source of stability during periods that are not particularly tumultuous.

Similar to some of Rath’s participants, Jordana and Kim do not state that they chose to volunteer during a period of tumult. Rather, they both explain how they chose to volunteer during a life change: for Jordana this involved beginning a new program at school, and for Kim, this involved moving to a new city. Like some of Rath’s participants, Jordana and Kim discuss their choice to begin volunteering in relation to interconnected activities in their lives—Kim describes beginning her post doctorate that focuses on aspects related to women and gender and Jordana mentions taking a course on violence against women. While there has been numerous research that documents how life changes can cause individuals to volunteer, most of these studies focus on transitions between adolescence to adulthood (Sherrod, Torney-Purta & Flanagan, 2010; Eccles, Barber & Raymore 2001) or adulthood to retirement (Einolf, 2009; Morrow-Howell, 2010; Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003). My findings contribute to the literature in this area by drawing attention to the ways in which individuals may choose to volunteer throughout adulthood, rather than focusing on different stages that separate adulthood from other life periods. Further, findings from my study underscore the difficulty of isolating changes that have occurred at one stage of a rape crisis volunteers’ life, because these changes may impact decisions at a later point in time.

**Employment and Education**

All participants link their involvement as a rape crisis volunteer to career goals and professional affiliations. However, unlike Raven, whose work is directly related to violence against women within the context of the rape crisis centre, and Kim who explores violence against women in her classes at university, Francesca, Jordana and Stephanie describe how rape crisis work compliments paid employment, which is indirectly related to the area of violence against women. As well, all volunteers identify themselves as being in helping professions and their volunteer work seems to be an extension of, or connected to, their employment. In many cases it is cyclical—work influences volunteering and vice versa. For some participants, revisiting trauma may not be restricted to their volunteer efforts—the fact that all participants are in helping professions is another way that this operates. Raven, in particular, draws attention towards her ‘healing journey,’ which has included becoming a Social Service Worker and getting involved in rape crisis volunteer work. She credits both as having led her on a trajectory towards good health and wellness.
Stephanie describes how, as an Addictions Counselor, many of the clients she sees have been abused as children and that volunteering with survivors of sexual abuse has informed her work and made her more knowledgeable about this area. Stephanie says:

A lot of people in the sex trade are from broken homes and they are only on the street because they have nowhere to go and then they are an addict and they have to feed their habit and it meshes together. So I just wanted to gain a better understanding of these issues because I see them coming into the house to try to get clean and sober.

Like Stephanie, who is a recovering alcoholic and has chosen to devote her professional career to work with alcoholics, Francesca describes how her experiences with trauma have influenced her decision to become a psychiatrist. In both cases, volunteering in the area of rape crisis work is consistent with current or future professional goals. However, for Stephanie, volunteering assists her with her work, while for Francesca, volunteering fills a void at medical school. Describing this ‘lack,’ Francesca explains how in medical school she often feels powerless because she is “learning about a lot of depressing cases where patients are going to die.” She states, “the stories that you hear while working on the rape crisis line are terrible but at least you feel like there’s some kind of active engagement with it. You feel at least there is something to be done.” Francesca labels her volunteer work as an active process of ‘doing something,’ and says that volunteering provides an outlet to directly help people, rather than feeling passive or helpless. Stated another way, for Francesca, being ‘active’ as a volunteer compensates for the inability to be active in medical school.

Similar to Francesca, Raven identifies correlations between her education, career choices, and volunteer choices. More specifically, Raven volunteered at a rape crisis centre in North Bay when she was completing her degree as a Social Service Worker. Raven’s economic situation may have partially influenced her decision to complete this degree, which in turn, led her to volunteer while she completed her placement. She speaks of having limited options and how other students were motivated to earn their degrees and to go to school because the mill industry shut down in the community and everyone was running out of employment insurance. After completing her degree as a Social Service Worker, Raven was hired at the centre where she volunteered. Raven also describes how doing crisis line shifts opened up opportunities to co-facilitate at the centre.

Like Raven, Jordana’s volunteer work is shaped by her education, which has shaped her career choices. She notes how after beginning her behavioural psychology degree, she could see that “this stuff works” and she knew that she wanted to be in the helping profession. Acquiring knowledge on mindfulness allowed Jordana to see the effects that it had on helping people.
Jordana adds a different perspective than other participants because she works with male offenders. Many of these male offenders have suffered from tumultuous childhoods and have experienced violence themselves. She also explains how negative attitudes towards women are pervasive in prison and that she finds this very challenging. Jordana considers the work that she is doing to be part of the helping profession and suggests that her involvement with male offenders connects to the volunteer work that she is involved in on the crisis line. This is because Jordana highlights the need to work with perpetrators as well as survivors of violence, even though at times, she feels these roles conflict. It seems that by speaking with clients on the crisis line, Jordana is able to compensate for not being able to work directly with survivors of violence in her workplace. At times, Jordana feels as if she should not be working with offenders, and instead, should be working in victim services. However, Jordana’s colleagues remind her that “by helping an offender, you are helping everybody because helping male offenders is a way of helping public safety, and hopefully crimes won’t be recommitted.”

Echoing other participants, Kim describes how her volunteer work compliments her career choices. Kim is in the process of completing a post doctorate and she decided to incorporate frameworks that are related to Women and Gender Studies into her project. She says, “I always have done a lot of volunteer work in anti-violence work and thought that was something I would do in my academic career way down the road.” Besides her research interests connecting with some of the content encountered as a rape crisis volunteer, Kim is a professor. As previously mentioned, Kim has used some of the activities that she learned in training in her own teaching practices.

My findings are consistent with Reynolds Jenner (1982) who states that supplemental and career volunteers represent the typical volunteer. All of my participants were involved in paid work, in addition to volunteering. As well, all volunteers state how volunteer work relates to their careers. This finding is consistent with McMillan (2004) whose participants were involved in paid work in addition to their volunteer work. She draws attention towards how women have a triple burden of paid work, volunteer work and domestic responsibilities. This is particularly evident for Raven and Kim, who have young families and describe juggling multiple responsibilities as mothers, workers and volunteers.

In addition, my findings echo John Wilson (2000) who explains that work encourages volunteering. He also states that “although it is possible that some people find in their volunteer work compensation for what is denied to them in paid employment, rational choice theory predicts that volunteer work replicated paid work because the volunteer is using skills developed in the workplace” (p. 221). As previously stated, most participants explain how volunteering is
similar to their other work in terms of the content area or skills. However, Jordana, Francesca, and Stephanie all note how volunteering compensates or supplements what is not available at work: for Francesca, this involves actively engaging with individuals; for Jordana this involves working with survivors of violence, and for Stephanie this involves learning about sexual assault survivors in order to treat recovering alcoholics who have similar experiences.

All participants have decided to volunteer directly after completing their degree or during their degrees. This is consistent with Brady et al. (1995) who state that education can lead to volunteering “because it heightens awareness of problems, increases empathy, and builds self confidence” (cited in Wilson, 2000, p. 220). Although several participants suggest that completing their degrees has heightened their awareness of problems related to violence against women, Jordana specifically emphasizes the importance of taking a course in university on violence against women. While taking this course, Jordana came to realize how survivors of violence are affected. This triggered feelings of shame because Jordana felt that she had not been as supportive as she should have been for her friend, who was sexually assaulted. Jordana describes how this course shaped the way that she understands rape and violence against women and she found that the course taught her more about violence against women than some of the statistical information that she learned in volunteer training. Jordana says that the “course was really valuable to me in changing how I viewed the world. It really drove my dedication to the sexual assault centre and to what they believe in, so that was really great.”

Like Jordana, Raven explains that while she was completing her degree she was learning new skills as well as how a persons’ past reflects the choices that are made in the present. Raven goes on to explain how “being more aware with the knowledge from school, and stuff, you learn to self-reflect, a lot of self-reflecting. I think that was a big part of it.”

Overall, participants support Clary et al. (1998) who state that although some people volunteer in order to gain experiences that will benefit their careers (for instance, making new contacts, being able to add volunteer work to a resume, exploring different career options, etc.,) motivations also tend to fulfill a combination of other needs and functions. More specifically, in addition to fulfilling career motives, needs and functions of volunteers are typically related to factors that included self-esteem, learning new things, socializing with others, helping others in need and working through personal troubles. Clary et al. (1998) also found that although volunteers begin their volunteer work with particular needs and motivations, whether they are able to fulfill their needs and motives influenced the extent to which they continued volunteering as well as whether they felt satisfied by their volunteer efforts.
Parental Influences

Most volunteers do not state that their parents have influenced their decision to become involved in rape crisis volunteer work. However, Jordana feels that her mother has shaped her decision to becoming involved in the helping profession and volunteer work, more generally. She says that her mother is “known for having a heart of gold,” and highlights how she always saw her mother helping others as a child, and then started volunteering herself. Jordana explains, “that’s what drew me into that area to begin with.” When Jordana was younger, she volunteered with her mom and walked dogs. As an adolescent, Jordana volunteered at a soup kitchen, where she served dinner one evening a week, and found it to be “an enriching and valuable experience.” In addition, Jordana volunteered with seniors, which she says, was “super fun.” The first time that she became a rape crisis volunteer, Jordana participated in other volunteer work that was related to her program, at school. She describes organizing events and orientations, being on the graduate committee and volunteering at conferences. She says, “my volunteering at that time was restricted to school because that’s where I spent most of my time…so I didn’t stop volunteering at that time, but I did it in different ways.”

Besides Jordana, Kim is less sure about whether her mother influenced her decision to volunteer but mentions her mothers’ approval of her volunteer activities as a child. Kim initially began volunteering in Sudbury, when she was a teenager, after completing her St. Johns Ambulance certificate, then, during one summer, she volunteered at a hospital in her community. Kim also states how when she was younger, she was “a little environmental activist.”

Jordana’s experiences are consistent with existing literature. More specifically, a study conducted by Clary and Miller (1986), revealed that telephone crisis counseling volunteers who reported having parents model altruistic behavior when they were children tended to participate in a greater degree of long term helping at an organization and be more empathetic than volunteers whose parents modeled less altruistic behaviors (p. 1366). In Clary and Miller’s study, they found that participants who did not have parents model altruistic behaviour, but who were in a well organized training group during their time volunteering as a telephone crisis counselor tended to volunteer more extensively and for longer periods of time. However, the degree of helping and increase in time spent volunteering for those whose parents did display altruistic behaviours did not change as a result of being in cohesive training groups. Clary and Miller’s study illustrates how volunteers whose parents displayed less empathetic and altruistic behaviours while they were growing up tended to be influenced by situational factors (such as training groups during volunteering), while those whose parents displayed empathetic and altruistic behaviours tended to be less influenced by situational factors.
In addition, the fact that Kim and Jordana have both been involved in other volunteer activities, besides rape crisis work, has been taken up in the literature. Mutchler, Burr and Caro (2003) cite Wilson (2000) who suggests that volunteering may be related to participating in volunteer activities as a child or youth, and having parents who volunteered and helped others. Mutchler, Burr and Caro (2003) also cite Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1994), who highlight the importance of experiences earlier in life and note that individuals tend to volunteer more often as adults if they had witnessed someone they admired volunteering (p. 1270).

The previous section exemplifies features of the functional approach to volunteering, which is an extension of the process model of volunteering. Supporters of this model believe that dispositional factors influence a volunteer’s decision to volunteer, including a volunteer’s prior and current experiences, and current personal motives and social needs” (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998, p. 525). A central tenet of the model includes the idea that volunteering serves different purposes for different individuals. Extending ideas about the functional approach, Clary, et al. (1998) explain that:

According to the functional approach of volunteerism, some people may be attempting to satisfy a Values function, whereby they participate in volunteer work to express and act on values important to their self (e.g., humanitarian values or altruistic concerns). Other people view volunteer work as an opportunity to increase their knowledge of the world and develop and practice skills that might otherwise go unpracticed, thus, serving an Understanding function. For others, volunteer work serves the purpose of allowing the individual to engage in volunteer work to gain experiences that will benefit their careers. For still others, volunteering helps individuals to fit in and get along with social groups that are important to them, thus satisfying the Social function. Finally, some people attempt to satisfy a Protective function and engage in volunteer work to cope with inner anxieties and conflicts, thus affording some protection for the ego (e.g., to reduce feelings of guilt, to combat feelings of inferiority). (p. 487)

As previously illustrated, in many instances, participants are motivated to volunteer in order to fulfill a combination of functions: Francesca, Raven, Kim and Jordana express altruistic concerns and volunteer in order to satisfy a values function; Kim and Jordana illustrate that in some ways, their volunteer work serves to satisfy the understanding function. Although all participants describe how volunteering connects to their careers, Stephanie appears to be the most concerned with how volunteering assists her with her position as an Addictions Counselor; Francesca primarily suggests that volunteer motivations relate to fulfilling a social function, although other participants, including Kim, emphasize how community work is an important dimension. As well, all participants, with the exception of Stephanie are involved in rape crisis work to satisfy the protective function, although, as explained previously, this manifests quite differently for each of them.
CHAPTER 6: EXPERIENCES AS A VOLUNTEER

Being a Volunteer

Participants describe many similarities in their volunteer work at rape crisis centres. For instance, at their current centres, all volunteers take calls from home. As a consequence, the nature of their volunteer work is quite independent. Implications of feeling isolated as a result of being involved in rape crisis work is a finding that will be explored in greater detail throughout this section. As well, other findings that are related to what it is like to be a rape crisis volunteer will be identified and discussed.

Relationships with Family and Friends

Several participants have discussed how their partners and family members are supportive of their involvement in rape crisis work. Jordana says that her family “values it and thinks it’s great.” Unlike Jordana, Francesca says that she does not really talk to her family and friends about her volunteer work or feel validated for her volunteer efforts from family members.

Similar to Francesca, Stephanie does not mention speaking to her family members about volunteering. However, she speaks to her boyfriend about it “a lot” because he works for campus security at a university in Toronto, and similar issues related to sexual assault emerge in his work.

Stephanie says that her boyfriend is supportive of her involvement in rape crisis work, but she explains that he does not like it when her volunteer shifts interfere with them spending time together. As a way to avoid conflict, Stephanie tries to take shifts when her boyfriend is working. Raven says that her husband works shifts, but that his work schedule never interferes with volunteering. Like Stephanie, Raven says that not only does her partner accept her involvement in rape crisis work, but that he “debriefs her” which suggests a deeper level of support, beyond merely accepting that she volunteers.

Echoing Stephanie and Raven, Kim says that her partner is very supportive and that he knew she wanted to become a rape crisis volunteer for a long time. When Kim told her parents and brother about her involvement in rape crisis volunteering, she “did not get a lot of response back.” Kim does not think that her relationships with family or friends have shifted. However, she feels that her mother has given her some indication of being proud and supportive since she expressed interest in volunteering at a rape crisis centre.

Similar to the support that Kim, Stephanie and Raven describe receiving from their partners throughout volunteering, Rath (2007) draws attention to positive relations with partners...
that result from volunteering. Rath’s participants stated that they had developed better quality relationships with their male partners since the start of training. Although participants in my study do not overtly state that their relationships are ‘better quality,’ than before, or that improvements to their relationships have occurred solely due to volunteering, compared to her relationship in the past, it does seem that volunteering has given Raven an outlet to heal and feel empowered, which, in turn, has affected her relationship with her partner in a positive way.

My findings support Clemans (2004) and Wasco and Campbell (2002), whose participants reported a tightening of personal boundaries and not being able to see the world as a safe place. They also found that rape crisis workers who were mothers became increasingly worried about the safety of their children. Clemans explains how “participants acknowledged that they became more protective and cautious since they had started working in the rape crisis centres, fearful that their children could be harmed” (p. 154). Kim exemplifies this point when she states:

I worry a lot about my own daughter…but that may have been the case without this. I’m sure I had some of those concerns before. Maybe they’ve been heightened even more because I’ve learned a lot more about childhood sexual assault. That’s probably the case.

Similarly, Stephanie draws a correlation between volunteering and feeling a heightened sense of awareness towards her daughters’ safety. However, Stephanie does not feel that speaking with clients has affected her personal sense of safety.

Besides participants developing a heightened awareness of their children’s safety, my findings are generally at odds with existing literature that tends to emphasize how rape crisis volunteers become increasingly cautious of their own safety when they are traveling alone or when they are in social situations. Many participants in Clemans’ (2004) study described looking over their shoulders while walking alone at night or hesitating before getting into taxis. Similarly, participants in Wasco and Campbell’s (2002) study described feeling unsafe in their workplaces, walking to their cars, and in other everyday situations. In contrast to these findings, participants in my study did not report a change in their personal perceptions of safety. A potential reason for this could be that many participants have already experienced a great deal of trauma in their lives, and, as Francesca eloquently says, “I experienced a lot of trauma in my life so I don’t know if I really felt safe at all at any point.”

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22 Jordana has described how she used to feel unsafe and would look over her shoulder while walking alone at night. However, this occurred as a result of being mugged, and happened before she started volunteering. Jordana no longer reports feeling unsafe.
Relationships with Other Volunteers

Previously, some participants, including Francesca, spoke of being motivated to volunteer in order to develop a sense of community and belonging. A common feature echoed by most participants has to do with inflexible volunteer meeting times preventing them from developing relationships, being part of a community at their centres, or engaging with other volunteers throughout the volunteer process.

Stephanie describes how she is unable to attend meetings because they are usually scheduled when she goes to work. Stephanie does not explicitly say that she has built relationships with other volunteers at the meetings. However, she describes how they are important; she specifically recalls meetings providing a space to discuss what to do in different scenarios, sharing stories and getting advice from other volunteers.

Echoing Stephanie, Jordana describes how volunteer meetings are helpful and that it “feels good listening to another person who had that same experience and hearing them say they did something similar,” Jordana says that it is ‘nice’ to be able to debrief and talk about different things at the meetings, although she has not interacted with volunteers outside of this capacity.

Kim explains that there were a few people who she chatted with during breaks, throughout training, but after completing training, she did not stay in touch with anyone. She also says that she probably could have developed a stronger bond with other volunteers by sharing stories about herself throughout training. As Stephanie noted previously, Kim says that she does not attend the meetings on a regular basis because they are often scheduled when she is busy.

Unlike the other participants, Francesca says that she usually attends the meetings, but does not specifically state whether they are helpful or if they are spaces for socializing. Compared to the sexual assault centre that she volunteered at in Montreal, Francesca says the centre where she is currently volunteering is lonelier and that volunteers “don’t spend as much time with each other and we don’t support each other as much.” She also says that the thing she likes the least at her current centre is the level of isolation that volunteers have with each other. She highlights that there is “not a good support network and that it is hard.”

Echoing Francesca, Raven says that there is not a sense of community at her centre because there has been a lot of changeover at the centre which has caused a lot of disconnect between the volunteers and the board of directors. She says that with board of directors changing, there is starting to be a larger focus placed on the volunteer program. Unlike Francesca, but similar to Stephanie and Jordana, Raven calls attention to the usefulness of meetings for volunteers. More specifically, she says that during meetings, volunteers exchange information and share how they have handled certain calls. Raven also stresses how there is a consistent group
of people who attend meetings, which is dissimilar from other participants’ experiences. Besides volunteers attending meetings, Raven explains that her centre recently had their first volunteer appreciation barbeque and she says there was a good turnout. In addition, the centre held an awards ceremony and recognized their top volunteer. According to Raven, these events have brought volunteers together and have provided opportunities for volunteers to connect.

Literature on rape crisis volunteers does not specifically consider how meetings create and prevent opportunities for volunteers to develop relationships with each other and experience a sense of community. Instead, literature tends to focus on the ways that the overall volunteer process can establish a sense of community and belonging or how volunteers are initially motivated to become involved in rape crisis work in order to fulfill these needs (Clemans, 2004; McMillan, 2004; Rath, 2007). Participants in my study do not emphasize how volunteering has provided opportunities for them to build strong relationships with other volunteers. For Francesca, this is a source of disappointment and for Raven this is a source of concern. However, for others, the lack of solidarity and community experienced at their centre does not appear to be a general problem for them. That being said, Francesca, who expresses her disappointment, also suggests how finding a sense of community was a driving force influencing her initial involvement in rape crisis work, whereas other volunteers do not describe finding a source of community to be a major factor motivating them to become involved.

The sense of isolation that Francesca describes as a result of volunteering is consistent with findings by Andrea Galiette Skoglund (2006) who conducted a study on volunteers at a bereavement program at a military hospital in Texas. Volunteers in her study expressed having infrequent contact with other volunteers, causing a sense of isolation and loneliness. Similar to rape crisis work, Skoglund notes that “in light of the type of service being performed by volunteers, feeling alone is particularly difficult because what the volunteers encounter when working with the bereaved can be heavy on one’s heart…” (p. 219). Consistent with participants’ previous accounts of the importance attached to volunteer meetings, Skoglunds’ participants highlighted benefits from meeting with other volunteers in support groups because they felt that this could provide a space for them to share their experiences of working with the bereaved.

Raven’s involvement in creating volunteer barbeques and an awards ceremony responds to Skoglund (2006) as well as to Rath’s (2007) insistence that “for some participants, social gatherings with group members provided ongoing support for personal work and…providing opportunities for informal social gatherings may be a strategy to encourage supportive friendships, which can increase a volunteer’s sustainability” (p. 31). Nonetheless, Raven is the only participant who states that her centre is actively trying to bring volunteers together.
Overall, participants suggest that the lack of social events at their centres and the lack of flexibility with meeting times have prevented them from connecting with other volunteers which is consistent with Skoglund (2006) and is an area that has not been explored in the literature on rape crisis volunteers.

**Variance Between Rape Crisis Centres**

As noted earlier, Francesca distinguishes between the centre that she volunteered at in Montreal, compared to the centre that she is currently volunteering at, in London. She explains how the centre in Montreal was more ‘stealth,’ smaller and that it was comprised of a tight knit community. Francesca describes how in Montreal, volunteers took calls in pairs at the centre, and they would swap back and forth between calls and write notes to each other during calls. Also, at Francesca’s centre in Montreal, there were walk-in hours during the day and the crisis phone lines would operate in the evening.

Another difference is that Francesca’s centre in Montreal did not have any professional affiliation—there were not any paid employees. Instead, volunteers were all ‘pitching in.’ Also, Francesca explains that there was a high turnover because it was a student organization and students were constantly graduating. As a result, the centre had to constantly train new volunteers, otherwise, shifts would not be filled, which, as Francesca remembers, was always a struggle.

Francesca suggests that that her centre in Montreal, which followed a grassroots model, provided a greater sense of community for volunteers. As stated by Francesca:

I did admire the work the other people at my SAC… I was just more active in my old SAC because there was a lot more to be done. At my old SAC we didn’t have any professional affiliation, we didn’t have any professionals, we didn’t have any paid employees, and we were all just sort of pitching in. At my current SAC, it’s more like employee counselors who run support groups and who see people for individual therapy and they have more funding and they have directors who are paid and people who are involved in that way. Volunteers basically do phones, that is sort of the scope of practice and in some way I miss the work I did at my own SAC.

Like Francesca, Kim points towards differences between the various rape crisis centres that she has learned about while being on the board of directors. She specifically describes their differences in terms of governance, and explains how one centre is “more of a collective and everyone has a voice,” whereas the other centre has a board of directors and is more hierarchical.

The issues surrounding governance models of rape crisis centres, and the tensions that arise between grassroots and professional approaches has been taken up by numerous scholars
including Adams (2008), Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009), Gornick (1985), Macy et al. (2010), Woody and Beldin (2012), among many others. The tension between these models is of concern for those who are involved in rape crisis work, particularly in terms of whether social change efforts tend to decrease as government funding controls centres and results in a professionalization of services. More specifically, Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009) argue that “reliance on state funding pressure to professionalize services and the need to attract charitable donations push sexual assault centres away from feminist and social change” (p. 147). Expanding on Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009), Macy et al. (2010) describe how some participants in their study felt that:

Skills, training and expertise of staff with professional human services education are invaluable. However, other participants argued that professional staff lacked real world experience working with survivors...some participants opined that increasing professionalization would reduce the energy, enthusiasm and motivation brought to the programs by survivors of violence. (p. 20)

Although Kim and Francesca mention different frameworks that have been utilized at centres where they have volunteered, and note differences between paid, professional staff versus unpaid staff, neither Kim nor Francesca provide detailed accounts of how student-run centres are at risk of being overthrown by professionalized services. As well, neither participant suggests that a particular governance model is necessarily more suitable. This point has been taken up by Naomi Wolf (1994), who describes the complexities attached to supporting each model. She proposes a model that combines the grassroots model with the professionalized model, and insists that “we must replace the sentimentalized model of sisterhood with a pragmatic model” (p. 301). Wolf is suggesting what Campbell et al. (1998) have highlighted as important components for rape crisis centres: they found that centres that took part in social change efforts tended to be in consistent communication with other social change agencies, but argue that “hierarchy may not necessarily suppress activism” (p. 478).

Another issue raised by Francesca has to do with volunteer retention. Besides the fact that volunteers at Francesca’s centre in Montreal were students who eventually left the centre because they were graduating, studies on rape crisis volunteers have examined the issue of retention operating due to multiple factors. For example, Hellman and House (2006) are primarily concerned with volunteers’ perceived value of effectiveness in relation to their commitment to a rape crisis centre. They explain that “to reduce the costs associated with recruitment, selection, training, and scheduling, the sustainability of effective volunteers for nonprofit rape crisis centres is important” (p. 122). Further, Wasco and Campbell (2002) explain that organizational support
led to higher retention rates for rape crisis staff in their study, for instance, through weekly supervision sessions and debriefing sessions on traumatic material, although they do not expand their discussion on what they consider organizational support to include.

These concerns are reminiscent of Orr (1982) as well as Skoglund (2006) who stress the importance of agencies meeting the needs of their volunteers. Orr (1982) argues that agencies should tap into volunteers’ motives in order for volunteers to remain committed, otherwise, it can be costly to re-train new volunteers and difficult for volunteers as well as paid staff to foster committed relationships with one another. Orr (1982) lists socialization, developing a sense of belonging and organization building as necessary for volunteer retention. However, similar to Wasco and Campbell (2002), she does not offer specific suggestions on how to implement these strategies.

**Self-Care Strategies**

Participants describe a variety of ways that they manage stress from volunteering and practice self-care strategies. According to Wasco, Campbell and Clark (2002), self-care refers to:

proactive strategies, or routines, that professionals use to offset the negative aspects of working with trauma victims and promote their own well-being. This wording represents a conceptual shift away from traditional stress and coping paradigms, which often frame coping as reactive behaviors or mechanisms that may or may not be chosen consciously. (p. 734)

Stephanie describes several self-care strategies that she utilizes due to stresses encountered from working as an Addictions Counselor, as well as volunteering in the area of rape crisis work. These strategies include the following: driving, talking to colleagues, debriefing at work, walking, riding a bike, going to her cottage, going to concerts, hanging out with daughter and spending time with her boyfriend. As previously noted in an earlier section, Stephanie emphasizes how spending time with her boyfriend, who also has a stressful and intense job, is particularly helpful, because he understandings the issues that she encounters on the crisis line and comes across comparable issues in his own work.

Similar to Stephanie, Francesca lists a variety of different ways to de-stress. She says, “there are all kinds of things you do, you go out, you watch television, you call a crisis line, you cut yourself, you have some tea, hang out with the animals, you just let it go and you try to be mindful.” Unlike Stephanie who confides in her boyfriend, Francesca says that she does not really talk to other people about her volunteer work in detail because she does not think that other people will understand the issues she faces, and she does not want to talk to them in case they
want to use the crisis line for support. An exception to this is Francesca’s tendency to speak with her therapist about her experiences as a rape crisis volunteer. Francesca explains, “I do share things with my therapist. I feel in some ways my therapist is an acceptable person to share these things with because she also has the confidentiality to me.” Nonetheless, Francesca’s self-care strategies are mostly independent activities that do not include other people. As stated earlier, Francesca has less social support than other participants and reports the difficulties she has making friends and building relationships. As well, Francesca reveals that throughout training and after speaking to callers on the crisis line, she has resorted to cutting herself, which suggests that other self-care strategies are not sufficient on their own.

In the previous section I noted that Francesca’s desire to continue volunteering may relate to the lack of social support that she has in her life. As Omoto and Snyder (1995) have highlighted, “individuals who reported greater social support in their life circumstances actually served less time as aids volunteers” (p. 683). An explanation for this is that because AIDS volunteer work can be an added source of grief for volunteers, “they may quit volunteering as an attempt to re-establish a happier state in which they feel supported and accepted by their friends and associates” (p. 683). However, Omoto and Snyder reported that AIDS volunteers with little social support may continue volunteering as a way to meet people, make friends, and may “seek to preserve [this support] by continuing their service” (p. 683). In the case of Francesca, the entire act of participating in rape crisis work seems to serve as a way to manage stress and anxiety that is encountered as a result of her personal trauma. Therefore, some of the self-care strategies mentioned earlier are directly linked to her own process of working through trauma, as well as coping with the re-traumatization of listening to survivors’ stories on the rape crisis line.

Besides the previous self-care strategies mentioned, Francesca describes how she talks herself through mistakes that she has made, and reassures herself that she is doing her best. Francesca says, “in some ways you just learn the things to tell yourself. You tell yourself that you did all you could in the moment and that if the person doesn’t feel better it’s not your fault.”

Similar to Francesca, Jordana says, “I’m always critiquing what can I do better next time. Those times definitely happen, but you can only do what you can do. You have to do your best every time. Jordana also emphasizes how she practices mindfulness strategies as a way to cope with the stresses of her job and volunteer work.

Like Jordana and Francesca, Kim describes how she usually spends time alone in order to “unwind,” and says that after difficult calls she needs to quietly decompress. However, unlike Jordana, Kim does not cite practicing a particular kind of spiritual activity.
Participants’ self-care strategies are described in relevant literature. In Wasco, Campbell and Clark’s (2002) study on rape victim advocates, they found that advocates used both cathartic and integrative self-care routines. These self-care routines include the following:

Proactive self care included regulating the amount of work related or rape related stress that rape victim advocates experience (cathartic strategies) and developing skills, strengths, and support to compensate for the daily exposure to traumatic experiences (integrative strategies). Additionally, all of the advocates used various self care resources: changing how they think about things (cognitive), using body and senses (physical), relying on their religious beliefs or spirituality (spiritual), using friends, family, or creative activities as outlets (social/recreational), and putting into words the painful details and intense feelings that they experience (verbal). (p. 755)

Wasco, Campbell and Clark (2002) go on to highlight how “Schauben and Frazier (1995) were among the first to explore the coping strategies utilized by rape victim counselors,” (p. 733), and explain that participants in Schauben and Frazier’s study practiced the following self care strategies: activities related to physical health, spiritual activities, leisure activities, as well as finding emotional and instrumental support elsewhere.

In addition, the same authors cite Iliffe and Steed’s (2000) study, where counselors who worked with domestic violence survivors were interviewed. In this study, debriefing and peer support were the most important strategies, followed by socializing, partaking in physical and recreational activities, as well as becoming involved in activism.

In Thornton and Novak’s (2007) study, participants described particular self-care strategies related to managing emotions. For some participants, this included delaying their emotions, postponing emotional experience indefinitely, while others experience their emotions following particular interactions. Regardless of how participants managed their emotions, the notion of temporality was considered to be a central part of this process. Thornton and Novak refer to temporarily as it relates to how volunteers manage their emotions a priori, during and post calls. They are interested in the nature of rape crisis volunteer work as it changes across time and space.

Overall, participants’ self-care strategies are consistent with research conducted by Wasco, Campbell and Clark (2002) as well as Schauben and Frazier (1995) since they draw on a variety of different ways to manage the stress that they are faced with while interacting with callers. However, unlike Iliffe and Steed (2000), who noted how debriefing and peer support were important strategies, participants in my study do not emphasize these approaches, with the exception of Stephanie and Jordana who highlight the close relationships they have built with colleagues in their workplaces, but not at their rape crisis centres. As well, participants do not
stress the importance of managing their emotions, which was central for participants in Thornton and Novak’s study. And, unlike Clemans (2004) who lists various self-care strategies, including “activism, feminism, spirituality, and positive interactions with other staff members, and humor” (p. 156), most participants do not draw on these strategies (in particular, humour is not cited by any participant). However, similar to Clemans’ participants, Stephanie and Jordana describe how they interact with staff members at work, and Jordana notes how she tries to practice mindfulness, which can be considered to be a form of spirituality. As previously mentioned, Francesca’s self-care strategies are primarily independent activities, as well as confiding in her therapist.

Perceived Impact

Most participants emphasize their perceived impact on survivors of violence while speaking to them on the crisis line. However, this was not discussed in great detail throughout participants’ life histories. Raven says that by the end of a call, clients will typically give her some indication that she has been helpful, usually in the form of a compliment. Francesca says that there have been calls where she has felt that she did a good job, and people have expressed that they were grateful for her help. Similarly, Jordana feels she has “made a difference” and feels as if she has made an impact on survivors of violence. Unlike other volunteers, Stephanie feels that she has made a greater impact at her job. She says that as a volunteer, she is “just an ear.” Stephanie suggests that this is partly due to the amount of time she spends with clients at work compared to the amount of time spent with clients at her centre—she works individually with clients for three months and sees them twice a week, which she says is very intense.

Most of the literature focuses on volunteer satisfaction rather than exploring the impact that rape crisis volunteers feel that they have on survivors of violence. As well, when volunteer satisfaction is explored, this is usually in relation to volunteer retention (Hellman & House, 2006) or in relation to whether personal goals of feminist activism have been achieved (Clemans, 2004; McMillan, 2004). Interestingly, participants in my study do not draw correlations between perceived impact leading to personal feelings of satisfaction, nor do participants suggest that feeling as if they have been able to impact survivors has increased their dedication to the rape crisis centres where they volunteer. A potential response to this finding is that, as previously mentioned, participants are interested in volunteering as a form of their personal self-healing processes or personal satisfaction. As a result, the impact that volunteering has on themselves is generally thought of as a more central concern to satisfaction as opposed to their perceived impact on others.
Challenges and Tensions

Connected to what it is like being a volunteer at their centres, volunteers describe personal challenges as well as challenges that occur as a result of the politics or structural issues that exist at their centres. The following section will explore these tensions and identify similarities and differences among participants.

Personal Challenges

Re-experiencing Trauma

In many instances volunteers have suffered from a range of mental health issues, including, depression, cutting, drug and alcohol addiction, post traumatic stress disorder, etc. However, in most cases, volunteers suggest that revisiting trauma does not necessarily prompt them to re-experience mental health issues (such as post traumatic stress disorder and cutting), and instead, offers a way to manage these issues. The only participant who has explicitly stated that volunteering has led her to re-experience trauma and particular mental health issues is Francesca. She explains how learning about child abuse during training caused her to start cutting again, and that speaking to clients on the crisis line has caused her to cut herself, at particular times. Francesca also notes how volunteering has contributed to her post-traumatic stress disorder and has caused her to have nightmares.

Like Francesca, Kim and Stephanie describe how the child abuse portion of training has been a difficult and disturbing part of volunteering. Kim says that she experienced vicarious trauma from training, after hearing a very disturbing story about child sexual assault, but does not mention any other experiences while volunteering that have led to vicarious trauma.

Raven does not describe feeling re-traumatized as a result of becoming involved in rape crisis work. Like Francesca, she has struggled with cutting, but does not mention returning to this habit throughout training, while speaking to clients on the phone or during facilitation sessions.

Similarly, Jordana has never felt traumatized as a result and she says that she does not have nightmares or take on other peoples’ problems. Although she might feel sad after a call, Jordana does not believe that volunteering has been extremely difficult for her on an emotional level.

Inconsistent with the literature, most of my participants, with the exception of Francesca, do not state that they felt angry or fearful, and few experienced vicarious traumatization. Kim mentions that she experienced vicarious traumatization once. However, she emphasizes how “there were times when I would think about some of the calls but not to any extent where I
thought it was having a negative impact on my life.” This contrasts with Francesca, who, unlike other participants, has experienced vicarious traumatization consistently. Francesca’s experiences echo findings by Baird and Jenkins (2003), Clemans (2004), Hellman and House (2006) as well as Wasco and Campbell (2002), among many other scholars, who draw attention to the physical and psychological effects that helpers may experience when assisting survivors of violence. More specifically, all scholars point towards the devastating effects that vicarious trauma can have on rape crisis volunteers and advocates. Besides vicarious trauma, Clemans (2004) and Baird and Jenkins (2003) describe how people who work closely with survivors of violence may experience secondary traumatic stress, or compassion fatigue.

**Emotional Drain**

Although most participants did not experience forms of re-traumatization throughout the volunteer process, a few participants noted that they felt mentally exhausted at times. In particular, Stephanie explains how hearing people’s stories can be sad and often leaves her feeling emotionally drained.

Unlike Stephanie, Jordana does not feel drained on a regular basis. However, she describes an incident where she felt emotionally and physically exhausted when she accompanied a survivor of violence and took her to a hospital for an examination. Reflecting on this, Jordana says that it was a negative experience because one of the physician’s at the hospital refused to give her client an examination. Jordana says that he violated the clients’ rights and there was not anything that she could do, which made her feel powerless.

Francesca says that sometimes being a rape crisis volunteer feels paternalistic and disempowering. Frequently, Francesca has felt that she has failed her clients, and she explains how here is a lot of self-blame that is attached to volunteering. For her, an issue related to feeling emotionally drained has to do with keeping secrets. She says, “we are always keeping these big secrets from other people and that’s fine but it’s difficult at times.” In contrast, Jordana explains that it is exciting to keep other people’s secrets at her job with male prisoners. Even though she is not referring to keeping secrets as a rape crisis volunteer, it is worth drawing parallels. She says “It’s a really interesting job because I hear everybody’s secrets. I get all the goods, like I really feel like I get cool information so I really like the job, it’s so fun.” This suggests that having someone confide in you can have different implications: for Francesca, keeping secrets can be a strain, whereas Jordana highlights how it can teach her new things.

Stephanie’s emotional exhaustion correlates with findings by Clemans (2004) and Baird and Jenkins (2003) who describe how people who work closely with survivors of violence may
experience secondary traumatic stress, or compassion fatigue. As well, Stephanie confirms findings by Baird and Jenkins who discovered that “volunteers (but not paid staff) in counseling roles had more emotional exhaustion but also more personal accomplishment. Volunteers in crisis roles displayed the opposite pattern” (p. 79). Put another way, volunteers who saw more clients for longer periods of time often reported a greater sense of personal accomplishment. This contrasts with volunteers who saw fewer clients, and reported experiencing a lower sense of personal accomplishment and had quicker burnout.

Stephanie interacts with survivors of sexual violence in her job as an Addictions Counselor, as well as her volunteer work on the rape crisis line. She experiences emotional exhaustion from both, but she feels greater satisfaction from her work as an Addiction Counselor because she is able to work with clients for longer periods of time. As Baird and Jenkins (2003) suggest, Stephanie may experience a combination of greater emotional exhaustion and greater satisfaction from her work because she interacts with clients for a longer duration of time than with callers on the crisis line.

Lastly, accounts by Jordana echo findings by Thornton and Novak (2010) whose participants expressed feelings of anxiety due to the way in which a service provider, such as a police officer or nurse, treated a survivor. In Thornton and Novak’s study, participants apologized to clients for the way that nurses blamed survivors of violence. Similar to Jordana, volunteers in their study felt empathy and compassion towards survivors of violence, “and tried to protect survivors from harmful effects that emerged from the actions (or lack thereof) of paid providers” (p. 443).

**Communication Anxiety**

Several participants spoke about different forms of communication anxiety that they experienced as a result of volunteering. This occurred at various times throughout the volunteer process and took several forms. For example, participants experienced anxiety while waiting for the telephone to ring, while talking to clients as well as after calls. Initially, speaking to clients on the crisis line created a sense of anxiety for Jordana. She was extremely nervous when she became a volunteer because she was expecting there to be a constant phone calls from callers who were in crisis. Jordana attributes her nervousness to the fact that she “wanted to do so well” and provide sufficient help. Jordana explains that although she was nervous at first, once she started having a conversation with clients, her nervousness would subside. However, she says:

I always worry about having the answer. I want to the have the answer, I always want to say the right thing, but really, a lot of the time it’s truly just listening and just validating
and normalizing their experience. So, that worry about having the right thing to say, you don’t need to say anything, you really, really don’t, you just need to listen, so that’s what I noticed and it definitely took a lot of the edge off me once I realized they are here to talk and I’m here to listen.

Similar to Jordana, Stephanie describes the anxiety of not knowing what to do when clients call, and she is often worried that she will not say the right thing. Kim echoes Jordana and notes her surprise with how “the crisis line didn’t ring off the hook.” That being said, Kim describes the anxiety she feels when she is talking to a caller, and “time keeps ticking by.” Elaborating on this, she says:

You always felt anxiety when you see the time ticking by because you are only supposed to have maybe fifteen to twenty minutes... you can always extend that longer if you really have to... but when it’s not, it’s weird trying to make those determinations, too. Then you start feeling this anxiety—what if someone else is calling? Because if someone else is calling they will get an answering machine, there is no one else to pick it up. What if someone else is calling who was just sexually assaulted right now, these things go through your head. What if this is the only time they are going to call?

Francesca says “there is always a sense of anxiety to it because you never know what it’s going to be. There are some nasty and dangerous things that can turn up and so in that moment before you pick up the phone you really have no idea. Once I settle into the call I usually feel less anxious.” Francesca also highlights how “it’s hard to be with someone at the moment of crisis and never really know what happened to them or how it came to an end.” Francesca finds the uncertainty of usually never knowing what happens to clients after speaking to them quite difficult.

Raven talks about “feeling on the edge just waiting for the phone to ring,” but generally feels more comfortable and happy about the way the conversation went afterwards.

These findings are consistent with Thornton and Novak (2010) whose participants often experienced a heightened sense of nervousness and anxiety while waiting for a telephone call from a person in crisis. As well, some of my findings are consistent with Carlyle and Roberto (2007), who emphasize how “reducing anxiety is particularly important for rape victim advocates because they are consistently faced with crisis situations involving a high level of uncertainty (e.g., no information about victims is available before the advocate arrives at the hospital or answers the crisis hotline)” (p. 188). Several of my participants echo findings by Carlyle and Roberto (2007), and state that a source of anxiety stems from being unable to follow-up with clients, being unable to know how clients are managing in the future and being unable to know whether their efforts were helpful.
Although the literature on rape crisis volunteers highlights the ways in which volunteers may experience anxiety before and after calls, findings in my study extend the literature by emphasizing how there is a range of different reasons why volunteers may experience anxiety. The literature does not explore in detail how anxiety for volunteers can be related to not knowing what to say to clients, worrying that clients will be unpleasant or offensive, being concerned that clients are taking too much time for their calls and preventing other callers from accessing services, as well as not knowing what happened to clients after a call. My findings broaden the focus on volunteers’ anxieties and point out that anxiety may not primarily be based on fear of ones safety or the safety of others.

**Challenges with Rape Crisis Centres and Potential Improvements**

Participants highlight two central challenges that they have with the centres where they volunteer, and they also consider improvements that can be made. These challenges and suggestions revolve around the themes of training and how to make their centres more inclusive to men and transsexual people. Besides these two major challenges of training and inclusion, another challenge identified by Kim and Francesca has to do with finding enough volunteers to fill shifts. Kim explains that in order to improve this problem, her centre recently started using Google Calendar, which she says, has been extremely helpful and efficient. Kim says that with Google Calendar, volunteers are sent out a schedule where they can choose their shifts electronically, and that any changes in volunteers’ shifts will automatically be sent to all volunteers.

Francesca and Kim both point towards the inability of volunteers to fill shifts at their centres, which is a finding supported in the literature on rape crisis volunteers. More specifically, Macy et al. (2010) describe how the difficulty of retaining volunteers and staff has to do with inadequate funding. Limiting funding often makes it difficult for centres to hire enough staff in order to carry out all of the necessary work. As a result, workers and volunteers are forced to fill multiple roles and take on additional work, which often leads to burnout. Lack of funding also makes it difficult for rape crisis centre staff to have enough time and resources to attend to several areas that require improvement. In many cases, determining how to better support volunteers is an area of improvement that is not made a priority. As expressed by Kim, a problem encountered for volunteers at her centre had to do with developing a way to clearly organize volunteer shifts. Although the implementation of Google Calendar has been successful, Kim suggests that this issue was neglected for a long period of time.
Training

Raven draws attention towards the importance of having continuous training. She says that the initial ten-week training was not enough, and having additional training after the initial training would keep volunteers connected and would be helpful. She goes on to explain how over the past year, in her position at the centre, she has tried to organize continuous training, and says that additional training will be available to volunteers at her centre in a few months.

Besides Raven’s suggestion about providing prolonged training, Francesca describes various changes that have been made to activities in training at her current centre. More specifically, Francesca says that training at her current centre did not initially include role-playing, which she finds extremely problematic because, according to Francesca, “you can’t train somebody to be a part of a crisis line without actually giving them some kind of hands-on instruction dealing with people in crisis.” Other volunteers, including Kim, have noted the importance of role-playing throughout the training process, suggesting that there is much value to be had in incorporating role-playing into training.

Similar to Francesca, Kim draws attention towards changes that could be made to the content in training. Kim explains that she would have liked there to be a greater focus on transsexual issues, indigenous issues, as well as more information on polyamorous relationships and women with disabilities. She argues that it would have been valuable if this content was more central.

Most of the literature on rape crisis volunteers does not focus specifically on improvements that can be made to training from the viewpoints of volunteers with the exception of Rath (2007). However, Rath (2007) does not extensively focus on expanding or changing content in training in order to meet the needs of volunteers; nor does she provide an in-depth exploration of activities to be changed in training. That being said, research conducted by Andrea Galiette Skoglund (2006) revealed that “many of the volunteers expressed a desire to attend annual refresher courses as well as regular professional development workshops” (p. 219). Participants in Skoglund’s (2006) study felt that continuous training would allow volunteers to share their experiences and ask each other various questions. Considering how several participants previously noted how meaningful they found training, as well as how disconnected they feel from other volunteers, Raven’s suggestion of providing additional training to volunteers could be a potential way to keep volunteers connected. This also responds to Skoglund’s (2006) call for volunteer organizations to incorporate professional development activities into their policies.
Exclusion of Men and Other Groups

Several participants have noted the discrepancy between their personal beliefs about violence against women and feminism, in relation to their perceptions of beliefs espoused by their centres. Connected to this is the way that centres offer support to male survivors of violence as well as policies surrounding whether men are allowed to volunteer. It is worth noting that in some cases, not providing men with direct services at rape crisis centres can be directly related to lack of funding, whereas in other cases, participants feel that this may be driven by a commitment by their centres to remain women-centred and to follow particular feminist politics. As well, in certain cases, a combination of both factors may contribute to why men are not provided with necessary support.

Based on experiences and opinions provided by participants, it seems that in several cases, rape crisis centres are ‘out of touch’ with some of their policies. Commenting on this, Kim draws a connection between men who have experienced violence being excluded from her centre and how, in her opinion, this relates to feminism. She says:

I think, like, men experience sexual assault and yet they are very much silenced and they experience a different range of issues around that and there’s this huge divide between what I see is like a generational divider in this violence against women stuff that has no room for men who are sexually assaulted and there’s no room for LGBTQ issues or anything like that and they are very hard core and I get it, that that’s how it most frequently happens, that men are abusing women and I get that, but I can’t also deny all the other things that are happening, especially to groups who are really marginalized. With men calling into the centre on the crisis line we were told that we had to refer them in training to one of the resources for men.

Kim states that being ‘hard core’ represents a radical feminist approach because there is an emphasis placed on women, rather than different marginalized groups. Kim also suggests that she does not identify as a radical feminist because she is highlighting how there is a need for more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer inclusive policies at her centre—she states this in the previous passage as well as earlier on, when she describes improvements that could be made to training.

Jordana echoes Kim and calls attention towards the need to support male survivors of violence. As stated by Jordana:

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23 Radical feminism is a feminist approach that has influenced the rape crisis movement from when it began, in the 1970s. It tends to focus primarily on the oppression of women, rather than the oppression of other marginalized groups, including people of colour as well as lesbian, gay and transgendered people.
I guess one criticism that I would have, is that for male survivors there is really nothing for them at the centre. They can call the crisis line and I understand the reasons why, but in terms of providing counseling, that’s not available to them and that’s because it is a woman centred centre. It’s just for women and having men come there can really make the female survivors feel unsafe and can trigger things, even. It’s supposed to be a safe area where they [women] are comfortable, so I fully understand why that service is not available to men, but I do wish that it was.

Stephanie says that she has never had issues with male violence at her centre, but as other participants have highlighted, she says, “to me, it shouldn’t make a difference if someone is a male calling a women’s support network, if someone is in crisis and wants to talk.”

Like Kim and Jordana, Francesca draws attention towards the lack of support at her centre towards men who have experienced violence and she explains how feminism factors into this. She says:

One of the things that frustrates me about sexual assault work is feminism is used as an excuse to deny services to men and that is something that’s something that has always been difficult for me. The first sexual assault centre where I worked was very inclusive, we worked with a lot of men and…we had male volunteers…but at the sexual assault centre where I work now, men volunteers are not allowed to work on the phone lines or to work with clients.

Francesca adds:

In some ways it is difficult for me to see rape as a feminist problem. I don’t know that I see rape as a tool for men to oppress women although certainly there are beliefs around rape that I think are really oppressive beliefs about women deserving it, women who walk out late at night or women who wear certain clothes. Certainly, I would never argue that those things are not part of the sexism and oppression that is present in our society but I think that trauma at its core is not necessarily a feminist problem.

Francesca explains that based on the stories that she has heard from clients as well as her personal beliefs, “rape is just a brutal act of power not necessarily of a man over a woman but just of any person who is powerful over someone who is not.” By making this statement, Francesca is appears to be distancing herself from earlier radical feminist positions on rape where women were seen as potential victims of violence, and where rape was specifically considered to be an issue linked to men’s power over women (Brownmiller, 1976). Instead, Francesca suggests that the problem of violence against women can be understood within a broader context where oppression exists among various groups including, but not limited to, women.

Like Kim and Jordana, Francesca is concerned about support that is available to male survivors of violence, and in her life history, Francesca draws attention towards resources that are available for survivors of child abuse, and children who are suffering from child abuse. Francesca
mentions that when she was experiencing trauma, she ended up calling a rape crisis support line because there were no other supports available to her. This connects to the discussion on limited supports available to men, because it draws attention towards how several groups may not be able to or may choose not to access resources from organizations that label themselves as explicitly feminist.

Many of the points raised by participants can be situated within literature that explores the tensions within feminist organizations. As stated by Adams (2008), feminist organizations frequently experience funding cuts, which impacts the kinds of services that are available to survivors of violence, and may prevent organizations from following feminist frameworks and principles that were initially the driving force behind their policies. To exemplify this point, Raven highlights how although her centre claims to follow feminist, anti-oppressive philosophies, and prides itself on being inclusive, lack of funding has prevented her centre from providing men, who are experiencing violence, adequate services. Raven explains how there have recently been quite a few calls from men and that the crisis line takes calls from men but that men cannot access their services unless the centre gets funding that is specific to this. Raven says that four or five years ago her centre received financial support to put towards men’s counseling, and that it was a huge success. However, it was one-time funding and was discontinued. Although Raven emphasizes that there are not a lot of resources for men at her centre, which is consistent with other participants, she does not explicitly label this as a major concern. This contrasts with Francesca, Jordana and Kim who feel that their centres need to make a stronger effort to assist men who experience violence and need to make this issue a funding priority.

The issue of funding cuts is raised by Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009) who explain that in Canada:

with the election of the Harper Conservatives, erasure of sexual violence as a social problem is evident… provinces have devoted increased funding for gender-neutral victims’ services that are tied to police reporting, while funding for sexual assault centres/rape crisis centres, especially as they provide support for women who do not seek criminal justice interventions, has been limited. (p. 144)

This finding corresponds with Macy et al. (2010) who highlight that a major problem faced by North Carolina domestic violence and sexual assault services had to do with inadequate funding. They describe how lack of funding reduced a number of core services, making it difficult to ensure that survivors can access what they need.

The issue of funding various resources and initiatives at rape crisis centres has also been taken up extensively by Sarah Ullman and Stephanie Townsend (2007) in their study on rape
crisis workers. Ullman and Townsend found that lack of funding contributed to staff turnover and has ultimately affected the quality of support made available to survivors of violence. They describe how lack of funding has meant that rape crisis centres may take on projects in order to secure funding grants, rather than focusing on projects that may be useful for clients who access services at their centres.

Although all of these studies highlight how rape crisis centres are often under-funded and struggle to provide necessary resources to survivors, there is not an extensive discussion on lack of funding towards men who have experienced violence. My findings contribute to existing literature by illustrating how there may be a discrepancy between what centres deem worthy of funding in relation to what volunteers view as top priorities. My findings also illuminate how there may be a variance between what is clearly needed in the community, for instance, initiatives that assist male survivors of violence, and what is actually being offered at centres, where resources are primarily directed to women. As well, what is considered as a funding priority for rape crisis centres connects to the feminist politics of these centres. More specifically, for some of these centres, men may be not be recognized as survivors of violence and centres may also not be concerned with raising the visibility of transsexual women, or have sufficient resources available to assist survivors of child abuse. This links to a broader discussion surrounding the challenges of addressing how issues related to intersectionality influence the lives of survivors of violence; this also points towards the extent to which feminist organizations are willing to extend their scope of feminism beyond solely assisting women.

**Feminist Identification**

As previously stated, the discussion surrounding how men are excluded or not given enough support at centres may relate to how participants define feminism. For some participants, feminism seems to be about providing help to all people who are affected—not just women, and most participants do not necessarily interpret feminism as being about women’s rights, as opposed to being about human rights, more broadly. Among all participants, Stephanie and Raven note how they were initially skeptical of feminism prior to training, and state that their attitudes towards feminism have changed since volunteering. Stephanie says:

> When I first came into the volunteering at the rape crisis centre my understanding of feminism was male bashing, that’s kind of what I thought it was. Burning the bras and I can do everything just as good as you can. But then, since being enlightened, I realize that it’s not that at all. I mean, it is about, like, I see some solidarity in it and to me feminism is just like looking at yes, there are these female issues and they are different and they need to be validated and looked at, and it’s not just, oh she’s just a woman, or
it’s just that time of the month...we do have different issues than men have and it’s okay to have them.

Adding to this, Stephanie explains:

I don’t know if I would identify as a feminist. I certainly, I mean I’m not saying I wouldn’t. I would be more inclined to than not to, but I’ve just never thought of myself as that. I mean, to me if it encompasses being independent and not needing another person to fulfill your life or to help you with whatever, I’ve always been really big on being independent and I think a lot of women’s issues are really important and when you get into gays and transsexuals and bisexuals and all those things, I would love to see a lot of the racism, like eradicated, you know. I hate to see women of any races or any sexual preferences to be oppressed in any way. In that way, I would certainly identify as being a feminist but not like the old fashion bra burning flag waving feminist, no.

In other excerpts, Stephanie describes feminism as “validating women’s issues.” She sees solidarity in it, but does not know whether to identify as a feminist—she says that for her, feminism is about “just being human.” Stephanie also says that she would identify as a feminist if it has to do with placing an emphasis on independence and eradicating racism, but not supporting the notion of a “bra burning, flag waving feminist.” This complicates Stephanie’s earlier claim about having had particular perceptions about feminism as “bra burning and male bashing” challenged after participating in rape crisis training. She suggests that training has changed her initial perceptions and has widened her understandings about feminism, but is quick to define how she views feminism in order to distance herself from radical feminist perspectives, or “old-fashioned, flag waving feminism.” Like Kim, Stephanie highlights the importance of including gay, transsexual and bisexual people into feminism, which parallels Kim’s feminist beliefs.

Like Stephanie, Raven alludes to not identifying with feminism that is about “burning bras” and highlights how volunteer training changed her perspectives:

I wasn’t sure about it. I didn’t know what the feminist approach was. When I first started training I was like, completely out of my realm…I felt that I didn’t belong here. This is so not me, a bunch of man haters are here. Once you get towards the end of the training, after the ten weeks, that’s when they start saying we aren’t a bunch of man haters, that’s not what we are here for, but it’s important to know the history and how far women, how far they’ve come in the past hundred years, even...but even still, after [the training] I still struggled a bit, like I really respect the women that brought us so forward but it’s almost like I started feeling, well because of this now I can’t choose to be a stay at home mom—I have to be a part of the working family and once I had my son I was like, okay I’m just going to get my schooling and pass that milestone and be a stay at home mom. It was something I really wanted to do because I missed out on it when he was young. Then, even still, by the time my internship ended it was little comments around the office, like women coming forward but then I’m like, what about me, though, because I still want to fill that mother role...the choice was there, but the rest of society says no, you’re working
now. It’s like we went a little too far and didn’t consider maybe moms do just want to be moms.

Like Stephanie, Raven also speaks about feminism as ‘shifting’ to include other groups—not just women. She says that feminism is about “being human to everybody” and she raises the question of how men can be encouraged to move forward and provided with services. Similar to Stephanie, Raven’s reference to “rah, rah rah feminism” alludes to radical feminist protests in the sixties, where women would take to the streets as a form of protest against oppression that was considered to be rooted in male domination. Like Stephanie, Raven distances herself from radical feminism, and instead, emphasize the inclusivity attached to their feminist beliefs. As well, the later part of Raven’s excerpt suggests that although she does not seem to consider herself to be a radical feminist, she has had difficulty finding a feminist lens that supports her beliefs. The lack of support that she has felt at her centre with regards to wanting to be a stay-at-home-mom illustrates the narrow feminist perspectives she perceives are available to her, and also offers an explanation for why she may be hesitant to identify as a feminist.

In addition to participants’ rape crisis centres influencing their feminist beliefs, it seems that for some participants, personal experiences with marginalization have shaped their affiliation with feminism. For example, Francesca articulates the importance of supporting children’s rights, and suggests that she considers her volunteer work to be part of the anti-violence movement, rather than situated within the movement to attend violence against women. Francesca also suggests that for her, feminism includes supporting children’s rights, not only women’s rights. This corresponds with the fact that she was abused as a child and her own experiences with violence are not of a sexual nature. Also, Raven describes how her father and members of her father’s family have experienced abuse, which may have influenced her feminist politics to include men.

These previous findings are not taken up extensively in the literature on rape crisis volunteers, and when they are, little attention is placed on what encompasses ‘feminist beliefs’ for volunteers. For example, findings in McMillan’s (2010) study revealed that participants were strongly influenced by their feminist political beliefs, However, McMillan (2010) fails to consider a range of feminist beliefs and that having a feminist outlook is riddled with numerous tensions that are shaped by personal experiences and are related to how volunteers feel about the feminist politics at their centres. For McMillan’s participants, “voluntary work is about care (care for the self as well as others) as much as it is about feminism” (p, 135). However, in my study, voluntary work seems to be more about self-care and less about feminism.
Similar to my participants, Rath (2007) explains that despite the tendency for rape crisis centres, and those who work at rape crisis centres, to be considered feminist, many of her participants either rejected or expressed hesitancy with being labeled as a feminist. Rath attributes her participants’ reluctance to identify as feminists with the stage of development at the rape crisis centre where they volunteered. The particular centre that her participants volunteered at became more institutionalized over the years, and Rath explains that in order for the centre to secure funding, it has distanced itself from being overtly ‘feminist’ in terms of its politics and goals. Unlike Rath (2007) who does not expand her discussion on other potential reasons for her participants’ hesitancy to identify as feminist or elaborate on what she means by ‘feminism’ or ‘feminist politics,’ participants in my study provided varying responses to how they defined feminism and why they were hesitant to identify as feminist. My findings extend the literature on rape crisis volunteers by further exploring the correlations between feminist identities of volunteers in relation to their perceptions about the rape crisis centres where they volunteer. Although volunteers’ opinions about men being excluded from their centres as well as volunteers feeling frustrated with feminist politics at centres is virtually absent from the literature, my findings highlight the importance of exploring these topics.

Besides aligning with Rath, my findings support Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009) who highlight how volunteers and workers at feminist organizations throughout Canada may choose not to identify as feminist, since, as previously stated, almost all my participants, with the exception of Kim and Jordana, have expressed hesitancy with being labeled as feminists. These authors argue that:

> It is possible that choosing not to self identify as feminist is linked to a rejection of particular positions and/or conflation of feminism with radical feminist practices. For a few survey respondents, the label ‘feminist’ seems to be associated with adherence to women-only politics and they distinguished their own practices by choosing ‘other’ and qualifying their positions as ‘survivor focused’ or ‘feminist—but that does not mean ‘born female only.’ (p. 149)

Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009) state that centres are moving away from an explicitly feminist orientation (p. 149), and that “trans-inclusion was actively being debated within centres, suggesting the presence of third wave feminist inspired challenges and the possible evolution away from radical feminist, women only models” (p. 150). Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009) cite the 2005 British Columbia Court of Appeal case involving Kimberly Nixon versus the Vancouver Rape Relief Society, in which Kimberly Nixon claimed that she was discriminated against as a transgendered person, because she was prohibited from participating in volunteer training. This case draws attention towards the controversy surrounding women-only politics at sexual assault
and rape crisis centres, and raises the question of whether these centres should include other groups. This issue has been reflected in the stories of my participants. In fact, participants suggest that centres align themselves more closely with radical feminism, rather than third wave feminism. According to Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997), third wave feminism can be defined as “a movement that contains elements of second wave critiques of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures, while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger and defining power of those structures” (p. 3). They go on to note how third wave feminists consider intersections between gender, race, sex and class, as well as raising the need for various groups that were traditionally excluded from feminism, including women of colour and third world women, for example, to be emphasized. Although Heywood and Drake (1997) point towards significant differences between second and third wave feminism, it is problematic to position second and third wave feminism in binary opposition, with entirely different political goals and orientations. Not only does this ignore the nuances between other kinds of feminisms (including Socialist feminism, Eco-feminism, Lesbian feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Transnational Feminism etc.,) but it also ignores the tremendously important contributions that were made by women of colour, both within and outside of North America, during this time period (including work by Barbara Smith, 1983; Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa; 1981, Audre Lorde, 1984, and many others). Nonetheless, participants’ concerns can be summed up by Macy et al. (2010) who state:

Given their beginnings in second wave feminism, which was dominated by White, middle-class women (Bent-Goodley, 2005), coupled with the dearth of funding for these services, it is perhaps not surprising that agencies still struggle to provide inclusive services to all survivors regardless of their age; economic status, race, ethnic or cultural heritage; sexual orientation; and disability status…our findings suggest that reformulating funding and service delivery policies to improve inclusiveness in core services offered by domestic violence and sexual assault services…could strengthen the accessibility of services for survivors. (p. 26-27)

As previously stated, several participants have spoken of the exclusive nature of their centres and how there are inadequate resources available for men. Participants suggest that this is related to lack of funding as well as their centres primarily being women-centred. Participants also highlight how developing a feminist consciousness is a fluid process that does not include a core set of values. Perhaps if participants felt that their centres recognized the complexities attached to feminism, and carried out various kinds of feminist practices, identifying as a feminist would not be such a contentious issue.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Throughout this final chapter I will highlight the significance of my findings and discuss how these findings contribute to the advancement of knowledge both within academia and broader culture. I will also make note of research limitations and point towards suggestions for future research.

To begin, I would like to discuss how using the life history approach as well as feminist standpoint theory have provided a unique opportunity for participants to reveal how interlocking oppressions have shaped their experiences at multiple points in time, and have provided me with the theoretical tools to attach meaning to these experiences. The in-depth and loosely structured nature of life history interviews has enabled me to see the tensions and complexities that participants have faced, and has underscored the need to consider how participants’ positionalities (including age, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality) have shaped their marginalization. For example, Raven describes her experiences as an Aboriginal woman, where she has functioned with limited resources. She sets her personal narrative against the backdrop of a community where people struggle with alcohol and drug addictions, and she highlights the prevalence of suicide and sexual assaults in her community. Raven’s standpoint as an Aboriginal is inseparable from her position as a woman, as a mother, and as someone who has struggled financially. Similarly, understanding the complexity of Francesca’s life experiences requires attention to be placed on the way she identifies as a lesbian, as someone who has struggled with several mental health issues, and who is highly educated. My understanding of participants’ life histories has been influenced by Collins’ (2000) theory of intersectionality, where she draws from Black feminist thought in order to emphasize how systems of oppression interlock. Similar to Collins’ (2000) discussion of Black women’s experiences, I have considered the way in which distinctive ‘markers’ are part of a larger system that have informed participants’ understandings of the world as well as my own. My own intersectionality, as a White, able-bodied, middle class, Jewish, woman has contributed to my ways of knowing, much like my participants’ multiple positionalities have informed their ways of knowing.

Collins (2000) describes how an implication behind utilizing a theory of intersectionality involves recognizing the need to allow subordinate groups to define their own lived experiences. She also highlights that the ways in which an individual may be an oppressor and/or oppressed depends on the particular context. In other words, Collins (2000) draws attention towards how power is fluid and ever-changing depending on the set of circumstances and individuals/groups who have come into contact with one another. I have not only taken this point into account while
Theorizing participants’ experiences, and noting how their positions of power have changed at different point in time, but I have also been aware of the fluctuating power differential between myself and all participants during the life history interviews. As I previously mentioned, not only have my positionalities as a White, able-bodied, middle class, Jewish woman shaped the meaning that I have attached to various aspects of the research process, but my position as a researcher within the context of an academic institution has also positioned me in particular ways in relation to my participants. My position as a researcher has potentially provided a degree of distance between participants and myself, and in other ways, being a researcher has potentially created commonality. The fact that I am not a volunteer additionally contributes to my ‘outsider’ status, because I lack the understandings of what it means to work with survivors of violence within the context of rape crisis centres on a regular basis, and due to the different knowledge that I have brought to the research encounter as someone who does not work with survivors of violence directly, participants may have felt reluctant to disclose certain information (and potentially more willing to disclose information).

I have felt a degree of discomfort or ‘strangeness’ attached to my position as an ‘outsider’ both in terms of being a researcher within the academic sphere, and as someone who is not a volunteer. I have also experienced unease having learned intimate details about participants’ lives during the life history interviews and then having to grapple with these experiences on my own—it was difficult to detach myself emotionally from participants after being invited into their homes in order to record their life histories. This feeling of ‘unease’ connects to issues raised by life history researchers, feminist researchers and those who draw from currere: struggling with the feeling of unease or strangeness that may arise from learning about someone else and their painful experiences has the potential to trigger new self understandings for researchers. These frameworks have led me to contemplate how it can be problematic and impossible to create ‘distance’ with participants, since one of the underlying purposes of the life history approach, feminist research methodologies and currere includes drawing personal connections to others and considering how one is implicated in other people’s lives. By using the life history approach along with currere, I have learned to understand how participants’ own processes of self-healing have changed at different moments in time. As a result, this has caused me to reflect on my own process of self-healing, and to understand how trauma from the past informs the present, which in turn, may influence the future.

Theorizing rape crisis volunteers’ experiences as well as my own position as a researcher through the lens of intersectionality, offers a new approach to knowledge construction in the area of rape crisis work; none of the studies that examine the lives of rape crisis volunteers draw from
Collins (2000) framework of intersectionality or highlight the need to consider how multiple forms of domination affect the life histories of rape crisis volunteers.

Connected to the way in which Collins’ (2000) theory of intersectionality has informed my analysis, feminist standpoint theory has also influenced the way I have attached meaning to participants’ life experiences and formulated knowledge. Similar to tenants of intersectionality, feminist standpoint theorists are interested in providing participants and researchers with spaces to contemplate how their forms of privilege and marginalization overlap and connect, to consider future possibilities for empowerment, and to highlight how multiple forms of identity (including age, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc.,) shape a person’s ‘standpoint.’ Although I do not want to presume that the life history interview was necessarily the first time that participants reflected on their lives, it certainly was an opportunity where I developed new understandings of my position(s) in the world. The research process provided me with spaces to partake in Pinar’s (1975) method of currere, which encourages learners to participate in a ‘complicated conversation’ with themselves, and to self-reflect on their life experiences. Feminist standpoint theorists emphasize how a standpoint must be an achieved political struggle; I argue that a political component that has been part of the research process for me has involved listening to women share their experiences with violence and actively engaging in the process of knowledge construction with them as I have presented their experiences in this dissertation. As previously noted, although I consider all of the participants who have participated in this study to occupy different standpoints and different marginalized/privileged positions, I consider the volunteer training process to be a particular site where participants have accomplished what Hartsock (1987a) refers to as a ‘political struggle.’ This is because participants have emphasized how training has provided opportunities for them to share their experiences of marginalization (and/or to share the experiences of people they have known who have experienced marginalization), and to situate these experiences within broader societal structures. Additionally, as noted by most participants, training functioned as a space where experiences of marginalization were normalized, and where participants were encouraged to consider the complexities attached to various kinds of violence.

Summary of Findings

I have found that rape crisis volunteers attach a range of meanings to their volunteer experiences. In many instances, participants emphasize how their role as volunteers is to provide clients/callers on the crisis line with tools in order for the clients/callers to help themselves. As a result, volunteers distance themselves from being seen as liberating survivors of violence, and
instead, volunteers highlight how survivors of violence can become self-empowered. Overall, participants describe how volunteering can be self-empowering but not always satisfying or rewarding in terms of being able to provide assistance to clients. This can partly be attributed to the fact that volunteers do not speak with clients on a regular basis and are unable to follow up with them at a later point in time in order to evaluate their efforts.

I have also found that rape crisis volunteers are motivated to become involved in rape crisis work for a variety of reasons that are clearly related to their past experiences. All participants have experienced violence and/or trauma directly, or have known someone who has experienced violence and/or trauma. Regardless of the specific kind of violence or trauma that volunteers have suffered directly and/or indirectly, all participants suggest that volunteering has functioned as a part of their self-healing process, both as an initial motivator and as a factor that has sustained their involvement. Participants suggest that in some cases, volunteering operates as a way to gain control over their lives, to normalize their experiences or “break the silence of violence” and to rid themselves of guilt. In all cases, there is a need for volunteers to revisit this trauma in order to overcome it. As a consequence of volunteering, participants in my study have exemplified Herman’s (1992) assertion that self-healing and recovery does not follow a linear path and is indefinite; for participants, issues from the past tend to resurface at various points in time and recovering from trauma is not spoken of as being absolute.

My findings are similar to McMillan’s (2004) study, where, for her participants, motivations to volunteer in the area of rape crisis work were complex and interconnected. More specifically, like McMillan’s (2004) study, there are several factors that have influenced my participants’ decision to initially become a volunteer, as well as different factors contributing to why they are currently volunteering. For example, some of my participants were motivated to volunteer as a way to manage their pain and to normalize their experiences of violence, while they were simultaneously going through major life transitions (such as moving to a new city). Employment and educational choices have also been connected to participants’ decision to continue volunteering, and volunteering has supplemented and/or enhanced particular needs that have not been fulfilled in the workplace.

Like McMillan’s (2004) study, my participants were motivated to become involved in rape crisis work partly because of a desire to ‘give back,’ partly as a response to their awareness of the dearth of services available, and as a form of self-care. Although volunteers speak of their volunteer efforts as a way of ‘giving back’ to others and empowering others to help themselves, volunteering is not a purely altruistic act. Instead, volunteers speak of the ways in which volunteering fulfills self-gaining purposes. For instance, in some cases, volunteering is related to
participants’ desire to experience a sense of community and support. In other cases, volunteering is driven by a yearning to become more politically active and to enhance or supplement ones’ career. This finding is consistent with Clary and Orenstein (1991), who state that volunteers are not ‘purely’ altruistic, and although volunteers are often more likely to be concerned about the well being of others, their involvement in volunteer work is likely to result from a combination of altruistic and egoistic (self-gaining) motives.

Lastly, most participants did not associate feminism, and the anti-violence movement as being strictly related to women. Instead, participants emphasized the need for feminism on a theoretical level and policy level, to include men and other groups. Participants also did not state that their feminist political beliefs strongly influenced their decision to initially volunteer and to continue volunteering. This finding is at odds with McMillan’s (2010) study, where she discovered that participants were strongly influenced by their feminist political beliefs. However, this finding is supported by Rath (2007), whose participants rejected or expressed hesitancy with being labeled as a feminist.

Contributions to the Advancement of Knowledge

A key contribution of my study is that it sheds light on a range of topics that have not been explored extensively in the literature on rape crisis volunteers. Specifically, most studies on rape crisis volunteers tend to focus on the ways in which volunteers at rape crisis volunteers are survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Carlyle & Roberto, 2007; Clemans, 2004; Rath, 2007 and Thornton & Novak; 2010). When referencing volunteers’ pasts, most scholars (e.g., Clemans, 2004; Hellman & House, 2006; Rath, 2007; Thornton & Novak, 2010; Wasco & Campbell, 2002), do not explore how different forms of violence and trauma may influence volunteers’ decisions to volunteer. In the literature on rape crisis volunteers there are not any rich descriptions of the ways that volunteers have experienced racism or other forms of marginalization, have battled depression and mental health issues, have undergone tumultuous childhoods or have suffered from other kinds of abuse (including emotional abuse and childhood abuse). These studies also do not carefully examine how the notion of self-healing is a complicated process that is full of disappointments, small feats, and destructive behaviours. Although many participants in my study have directly and/or indirectly experienced sexual violence, my study significantly adds to existing literature on rape crisis volunteers by considering how other life experiences and forms of trauma have shaped rape crisis volunteers’ decisions to remain and initially become volunteers.
Also, many participants note how they began volunteering when their lives were in flux. In particular instances, this consisted of life changes that included moving or beginning a new program at school. In other instances, choosing to volunteer emerged at a time of tumult (for instance while struggling with depression and beginning therapy). Regardless of the nature of these life transitions and difficulties, participants suggest that volunteering provided a sense of stability and consistency in their lives—a point that has not been given a great deal of attention in the literature, with the exception of Rath (2007), who notes how some rape crisis volunteers appear to join rape crisis training during times of personal upheaval.

Another area that has been under-researched relates to the correlation between rape crisis volunteers’ paid employment and their volunteer work. In my study, for all participants, volunteer work is an extension of, or is connected to paid employment and quite often volunteering compensates or fills a lack that exists in volunteers’ professional lives. Virtually none of the studies on rape crisis volunteers have considered how volunteering supplements paid employment, and there have been no studies that have explored the tendency for recovering addicts to become involved in rape crisis volunteer work.

In addition, most of the literature highlights the negative effects that rape crisis work has on volunteers and staff rather than emphasizing how volunteer work can function as a form of self-healing (e.g., Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Hellman & House, 2006; Thornton & Novak, 2010; Wasco & Campbell, 2002). More specifically, these studies tend to emphasize the detrimental physical and psychological affects that rape crisis volunteers experience as a result of working with survivors of violence (for example, how vicarious trauma can impact rape crisis volunteers’ experiences as volunteers). Most participants did not undergo vicarious trauma, distrust in others, intrusive thoughts or post-traumatic stress disorder. Instead, all participants in my study experienced communication anxiety before, during and after speaking with clients on the crisis line. This finding is consistent with Carlyle and Roberto’s (2007) study, where they found that a source of anxiety for volunteers was linked to their inability to follow up with clients, and being unable to know whether their efforts were helpful.

My study is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provides volunteers with an opportunity to be self-reflective about their efforts, which can potentially be a part of their self-healing process. Some participants have suggested that participating in life history interviews, like volunteering, has provided them with an outlet to share the trauma that they have experienced at previous moments in their life and has functioned as a positive step towards self-acceptance. Participants have also suggested that reflecting on their volunteer practices has provided them with a space to consider areas of potential improvement at their centres, as well as particular
efforts that they are proud of. That being said, for most participants, the life history interview is not the first time that they have ‘come to accept the things that have hurt.’ This means that I am not positioning myself as a figure who should be held responsible for empowering others, but rather, I consider the life history interview to be another means for participant to channel and work though some of their inner struggles.

Secondly, my work focuses on how volunteers can be more fully supported. As my study has shown, volunteers bring different experiences to the work that they do and undergo different experiences during training and throughout the volunteer process. This impacts the ‘effect’ that crisis intervention has on survivors of violence as well as volunteers who are survivors of violence, and points towards the ways that services (including training) can be improved for volunteers.

Thirdly, my study responds to Fine’s (1989) call to conduct research that enables paid workers and volunteers in organizations that offer resources for women who have experienced violence “to feel empowered, to have a grounded sense of their importance, and to experience a sense of success in work with little gratification” (p. 554). While there is a breadth of research that draws attention to the negative aspects of rape crisis work, little attention is usually given to the ways that volunteers can feel a sense of empowerment or satisfaction from their involvement in rape crisis work. My research extends ‘positive outcomes’ of rape crisis work that are briefly mentioned in studies conducted by Clemans (2004), Rath (2007) and Thornton and Novak (2010) and Wasco and Campbell (2002).

Fourthly, one of the aims of feminist standpoint theory is to offer perspectives that are typically ignored and to contribute to the formation of knowledge production in new ways. By using this framework, knowledge produced by rape crisis volunteers—which is often not represented in different areas of the public sphere—can be recognized. This is significant considering how typically, survivors of violence (of whom many participants happen to be) are spoken for and about, rather than being able to have the opportunity to share their own experiences. As well, my study contributes to the formation of knowledge production by complicating notions of rape. In some instances, participants debunk common beliefs about sexual violence and draw attention to what people typically consider rape to be like.

Finally, my work contributes to alternative ways of researching and theorizing sexual violence through my chosen methods. Campbell and Wasco (2005) emphasize how research on violence against women has primarily been quantitative, although qualitative research is of equal importance and can create new understandings. They argue that qualitative approaches are the next step in many areas of sexual assault research. Linked to this, conducting life history research
on rape crisis volunteers responds to Atkinson’s (1998) insistence that “we need to hear the life stories of individuals from those underrepresented groups to help establish a balance in the literature and expand the options for us all on the cultural level” (p.19).

Suggestions for Future Research

Findings in this study reveal several important areas to be explored in future research that is conducted on rape crisis volunteers. As previously noted, consistent with literature on rape crisis volunteers (Carlyle & Roberto, 2007; Rath, 2007), many participants spoke of the ways in which training was a critical part of their self-healing journey, and in many instances, training offered volunteers an opportunity to build confidence and gain agency over their lives. Several participants felt empowered while learning new material on violence against women in training, and volunteers who eventually became trainers spoke about how rewarding it was to teach others about experiences they personally encountered (for instance, feeling empowered by teaching volunteers about suicide and cutting).

My findings extend Rath’s (2007) discussion on the benefits of volunteer training because participants in my study highlight how they underwent training while participating in other activities (including therapy, moderating a forum for people experiencing mental illness, taking a course on violence against women, etc.). This suggests that considering volunteer training as an isolated event may be problematic, and that taking into account multiple occurrences during the time of volunteer training is necessary in order to determine the degree to which training is a part of participants’ self-healing processes.

Although participants spoke about how training was helpful and interesting for them, future research could explore in more detail the ways in which particular topics were appealing for volunteers. Research could identify what specifically about these topics volunteers found helpful and interesting. For instance, research could focus how curriculum in training potentially assists volunteers when they interact with callers as well as how topics from training assist them in their own lives, outside of volunteering. Research could also examine the potential correlation between empowerment and teaching, and consider how teaching others can function as a way of being active and ‘doing something.’

Future research should also focus on volunteers who are involved in rape crisis work as a way to rid themselves of guilt and shame. Most of the research on rape crisis volunteers only briefly mentions how volunteers may become involved in initiatives related to violence against women because a close friend or relative experienced violence without analyzing how guilt may be a factor contributing to why they remain volunteering. The literature does not examine
concepts of guilt and shame and how they interconnect with other emotions, including pride or satisfaction. Nor does existing literature closely consider how volunteers who have not personally experienced violence attach meaning to their volunteer efforts.

Another area that should be explored includes the impact that volunteer events could have on establishing a sense of community and support for volunteers. Not only is this significant for volunteers who are drawn to rape crisis work in order to develop friendships and feel less isolated, but, as noted by Rath (2007), these gatherings may help to decrease volunteer retention. Few studies on rape crisis volunteers have directly cited how, and in what ways volunteers may find these events beneficial, and/or how they could be improved, with the exception of Skoglund’s (2006) study on volunteers at a bereavement program at a hospital in Texas, where she argues that social gatherings may create opportunities for volunteers to experience a sense of belonging and support. Nonetheless, most of the literature does not focus on the specific way these events may potentially lead volunteers to feel greater satisfaction and impact while volunteering.

As well, additional attention could be placed on the ways in which volunteers who are healing from violence are often denied opportunities to share their experiences with clients. Several participants suggest that there is a tension that exists between their lived experiences of violence being considered as a legitimate source of knowledge within the space of rape crisis centres, versus lived experience of violence being considered as ‘unsuitable,’ or getting in the way of assisting other survivors of violence. This raises the question of the kind of knowledge and understanding of violence against women that is regarded as acceptable and valuable in feminist organizations. This tension also relates to a broader discussion related to the increasing professionalization of service providers, where professional knowledge (including specific credentials) may be deemed as more important, or perhaps, the only important knowledge base.

Reflecting on potential reasons why feminist organizations have become increasingly professionalized, Adams (2008) suggests that “it seems to be a survival mechanism, in which if we can keep ourselves removed even by one degree…we can separate from ‘those women’ and remain elitist, one step above them. We fear that women clients could easily become us” (p. 110). Adams (2008) goes on to explain how many women who are survivors of violence want to ‘give back’ to feminist organizations that may have helped them at some point, and how quite often, those in paid positions are often reluctant to accept these survivors of violence from volunteering ‘too soon.’ Adams (2008) asks, “who can determine when is too soon for someone else? Is the fear really that she will take our job; will attack; cannot be fixed, will not be accountable; is not trained?” (p. 110). It is important to consider the implications behind feminist organizations
favouring a particular kind of knowledge that is quite often manifested through professional degrees, including Bachelor of Social Work and Masters degrees. What ways of knowing are potentially lost, and what is potentially gained from valuing this kind of experience? As I have previously argued, having drawn from standpoint theory, privileging the experiences of those who are marginalized and who have endured violence can offer an ‘insider perspective,’ a way of looking at the world that professional degrees may not account for. Research that examines how feminist organizations manage multiple ways of knowing between volunteers and staff who have experienced violence can offer new insights into the ways that clients and volunteers are assisted on their healing journeys.

Finally, future studies that focus on rape crisis volunteers should place an emphasis on the myriad of ways that volunteers identify as feminist, and how their feminist identities relate to the practices at their centres, since, as Beres, Crow and Gotell (2009) highlight, rape crisis centres in Canada are moving away from an explicitly feminist orientation. Future research should also examine potential reasons why volunteers may be hesitant to identify as feminist, how perceptions of feminism have or have not changed since undergoing participation in volunteer training, and whether volunteer efforts are situated within the movement to end violence against women and/or the anti-violence movement, more generally. As well, research should focus on volunteers’ attitudes towards whether men and other marginalized groups should be supported by rape crisis centres, and whether volunteers feel that their respective centres handling of issues related to male violence is sufficient.
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