Life, Irrupted: An Occupational Perspective on the Lives of Women Who Experienced Sexual Assault While at University

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Rehabilitation Sciences Institute
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Although sexual assault that occurs during university is known to have numerous significant consequences, many are believed to remain “hidden.” This dissertation research employed an occupational perspective to provide a more fulsome examination of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Three distinct studies, yielding four manuscripts, were conducted. First, a review of the sexual assault literature was carried out. Findings suggested a clear but narrowly examined occupational aftermath of sexual assault. Next, women’s experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault were explored through different forms of narrative: (a) memoirs written by women who had experienced sexual assault during university, and (b) interviews with women who had experienced sexual assault during university. These studies suggested an extensive occupational aftermath of sexual assault. Together, the findings of this dissertation research make five unique contributions to the sexual assault and occupational science literature. First, the findings suggest that an occupational perspective may be used to uncover some of the hidden consequences of sexual assault, specifically those related to human occupation. Second, the findings suggest that sexual assault that occurs during university is occupational life-altering. Sexual assault was
found to have significant, widespread, and lasting consequences for women’s daily occupations, as well as for their occupational trajectories. Third, the findings suggest that sexual assault alters women’s occupational lives in ways that at once follow a pattern and are particular to the individual. Although broad patterns in changes to women’s occupations were identified, occupational choice and engagement were found to be idiosyncratic in the aftermath of sexual assault during university. Fourth, the findings suggest that the alterations produced by sexual assault necessitate the (re)building of one’s occupational life and self through conscious engagement in occupation. Last, the findings are suggestive of a model of occupational response following major life disruption. Further research is warranted to continue to develop an expanded understanding of what everyday living looks like after life disruption beyond sexual assault that occurs during university.
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To the 13 women who so generously gave their time and expertise to this research, thank you for your participation. I am indebted to you for sharing your life stories with me. Thank you for contributing to our understanding of what everyday living looks like after experiencing sexual assault while at university, both in the short- and long-term. It is my hope that this dissertation does justice to your experiences. Without you, this work would not have been possible.

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Chapter 1
Introduction
1 Introduction

1.1 Examining the Aftermath of Sexual Assault That Occurs During University from an Occupational Perspective

*Individuals are most true to their humanity when engaged in occupation.*  
(Yerxa et al., 1990, p. 7)

Over the past several years, stories of the sexual assault of women and its injurious consequences for their lives have become impossible to ignore. In particular, recent years have seen a dramatic increase in stories about the consequences of being sexually assaulted during university, which have received international attention (Baker & Bevacqua, 2018; Whitely & Page, 2015). These stories—for example, that of Emma Sulkowicz, a student at Columbia University who carried a dorm room mattress identical to the one upon which they were raped around campus for nine months (see Smith, 2014)—have significantly contributed to a heightened awareness of the potentially devastating nature of sexual assault that occurs during university.

This recent outpouring of stories of sexual assault during university and its aftermath is perhaps unsurprising, given that sexual assault has reached epidemic levels among university women (Carey, Durney, Shepardson, & Carey, 2015; Wright, Dhana, Riddle, De Gannes, & Berzins, 2019). In acknowledgement of the severity of this problem, several provinces across Canada have passed legislation mandating universities to develop stand-alone sexual violence policies (Lopes-Baker, McDonald, Schissler, & Pirone, 2017). Indeed, the sexual assault of university women is becoming increasingly recognized as cause for immense

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1 As per Tolentino (2018), Emma Sulkowicz identifies as non-binary and uses the gender-neutral pronouns “they” and “them.”

concern, in large part due to its many known, negative consequences. In particular, the adverse effects of sexual assault on women’s physical and psychological health have been extensively documented (Boyd, 2011; Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009).

Despite that many of the consequences of sexual assault are well known, the World Health Organization has suggested that a number of its consequences remain “hidden” and that its aftermath continues to be underestimated (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). As an occupational scientist, it has become abundantly clear to me that an occupational perspective—that is, “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing” (Njelesani, Tang, Jonsson, & Polatajko, 2014, p. 233)—is largely missing from the current picture of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. I would argue that the absence of an occupational perspective has helped to keep many of the consequences of sexual assault hidden.

As the introductory quote by Yerxa and colleagues (1990) would suggest, doing or human occupation is an essential aspect of the human condition. If we are to develop a robust appreciation of the consequences that sexual assault holds for women’s lives, consideration of whether and how women’s doings are shaped by sexual assault is critically important. This is especially true when sexual assault occurs during university, given the significance of the university period on individuals’ life trajectories (Whiteford, 2017). To uncover a fuller understanding of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university—to reveal consequences that remain hidden—I undertook to examine this phenomenon from an occupational perspective.

1.1.1 Background

Sexual assault occurs among university women at alarmingly high rates. Although individuals of any age and gender may experience sexual assault, women enrolled in post-secondary education are particularly affected (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). Research has consistently demonstrated that women in their teens to early 20s report the highest rates of sexual assault victimization (e.g., Conroy & Cotter, 2017; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Kilpatrick & McCauley, 2009; Perreault, 2015; Planty, Langton, Krebs, Berzofsky, & Smiley-McDonald, 2013). Of all sexual assault
incidents recorded in the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS), nearly half were committed against women ages 15 to 24 (Conroy & Cotter, 2017), a range that includes the typical ages of undergraduate students. Findings from Senn and colleagues’ (2014) research indicates that 58% of women in their first year of university have experienced one or more forms of sexual assault since the age of 14. Conservative estimates suggest that one in four women will experience attempted or completed rape while attending university in Canada (Senn et al., 2014), with similar findings published out of the United States of America (Cantor et al., 2015; Krebs et al., 2016; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2009). Given that the sexual assault of university women remains severely underreported (Lombardi & Jones, 2015; Walsh, Banyard, Moynihan, Ward, & Cohn, 2010), it is likely that these estimates dramatically underrepresent the problem (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2016).

When a woman is sexually assaulted while at university, she is likely to experience a myriad of negative short- and long-term consequences to her physical and psychological health and well-being, which include ano-genital and/or extra-genital injury, sexually transmitted infections, post-traumatic stress, mood disorder, sleep disorder, substance use disorder, eating disorder, and attempted and/or completed suicide (Du Mont & White, 2007; World Health Organization, 2013). Further, she may experience increases in drug, alcohol, and tobacco use (Brener, McMahon, Warren, & Douglas, 1999; Deliramich & Gray, 2008; Young, Grey, Boyd, & McCabe, 2011) and academic consequences such as decreased academic performance, changing universities, and dropping out of university altogether (Baker et al., 2016; Jordan, Combs, & Smith, 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Stermac, Bance, Cripps, & Horowitz, 2018). Other consequences may include the experience of isolation and ostracism from her family and/or community (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002), lost income and/or lost capacity for future earnings (Hoddenbagh, Zhang, & McDonald, 2014), and diminished quality of life (Hanson, Sawyer, Begle, & Hubel, 2010).

Although sexual assault is now understood to be among the most serious of public health and social issues (World Health Organization, 2013), it has not always been viewed as such. For years, the rape-supportive notion that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) dominated everyday understandings of sexual assault (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). Burt (1980) suggested that this and other such stereotypical and prejudicial beliefs and assumptions served to deny
or drastically minimize the harm done by sexual assault and/or to blame women for their own victimization. Challenging the assumption that sexual assault is “no big deal” for women has thus been central to the work of both resisting and refuting a level of tolerance for sexual assault within Western cultures (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011).

For more than 40 years, scholars have endeavoured to identify and document the consequences of sexual assault (e.g., Atkeson, Calhoun, Resick, & Ellis, 1982; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Cohen & Roth, 1987; Kilpatrick 1984). This work has led to the widespread acknowledgement of its potentially devastating aftermath (see World Health Organization, 2013). Gavey and Schmidt (2011) assert that the publication of Burgess and Holmstrom’s (1974) pioneering research identifying a “rape trauma syndrome” spurred a profusion of research relating to the effects of sexual assault.

Because of the important research that has been conducted over the past four decades, many of the adverse consequences of sexual assault have been well documented; in particular, its negative short- and long-term physical and psychological health effects have been extensively researched (Boyd, 2011; Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009). However, despite this robust body of research, the World Health Organization has signaled that the extent of the aftermath of sexual assault continues to be grossly underestimated (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). That is, there likely exist a number of other, important consequences of sexual assault that have yet to be identified, and/or to which the extant literature has not sufficiently attended (Boyd, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Specifically, scholars have argued that many of the consequences of sexual assault remain hidden (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010), in part due to the complex nature of sexual assault as well as the shame, guilt, and stigma often associated with sexual victimization (Johnson, 2012). In particular, the consequences of sexual assault have yet to be thoroughly examined and understood from an occupational perspective.

1.1.2 Research Problem

Largely absent from the research literature exploring the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university is a consideration of its effect on everyday living, or more
specifically, on what occupational scientists would refer to as *occupation*. Occupational scientists define occupation as “an activity or set of activities that is performed with some consistency and regularity, that brings structure, and is given value and meaning by individuals and a culture” (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013, p. 19). From the perspective of occupational science, occupation may be understood to involve all manner of human *doing* (Wilcock, 1998), of which individuals’ everyday lives are comprised (Yerxa et al., 1990).

Drawing on the major occupational models (e.g., the *Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement* [Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik, 2013]; the *Model of Human Occupation* [Taylor, 2017]; and the *Person-Environment-Occupation Model* [Law et al., 1996]), one might expect the experience of sexual assault during university to hold consequences for women’s occupations in a number of ways. In particular, these models propose an extensive relationship between the person and the occupations in which they engage. Because person and occupation are inextricably linked, it follows that any changes to the person ought to result in subsequent changes to all manner of occupations (i.e., spanning self-care, productivity, and leisure occupations), and that the magnitude of these changes to occupation are directly linked to the magnitude of the changes to the person. Sexual assault that occurs during university is known to result in a number of significant changes to the person, most notably to a woman’s physical and psychological health (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Zinzow et al., 2011). Accordingly, following from the major occupational models, one would anticipate that if a woman’s physical and psychological health is significantly disrupted after sexual assault, it is likely that her occupations will be significantly disrupted as well.

Further, one ought to expect that these disruptions to a woman’s occupations would be particularly profound if she were sexually assaulted while at university. The university period signals a time of great personal and occupational development, which supports the transition from the role of student to the roles of worker and professional (Whiteford, 2017). Although an experience of sexual assault at any point in one’s life course may be profoundly harmful, if a woman experiences sexual assault while at university there is the potential for her academic and career trajectories—indeed, her life trajectory—to be significantly altered. It follows that being sexually assaulted while at university may alter women’s occupational
lives in important ways. I argue that examining the intersection between human occupation and sexual assault is necessary to develop an understanding of what everyday living looks like for women after experiencing sexual assault while at university.

Unfortunately, an examination of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university from an occupational perspective is substantially lacking. Indeed, very few studies have taken an explicitly occupational perspective in the examination of the aftermath of sexual victimization, at all (see Hodge, 2017; Lentin, 2002; Ratcliffe, Farnworth, & Lentin, 2002; Twinley, 2012, 2016). Of these studies, two are focused on the aftermath of sexual abuse in childhood (e.g., Lentin, 2002; Ratcliffe et al., 2002). Another is focused on woman-to-woman sexual assault in adulthood (e.g., Twinley, 2012, 2016). Only one of these studies is specifically focused on the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (see Hodge, 2017). However, this study (see Hodge, 2017) does not explore this aftermath over the long-term, though sexual assault is known to hold both short- and long-term consequences (Du Mont & White, 2007; World Health Organization, 2013), and its aftermath is often considered to be life-long (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011).

Advancing an understanding of what everyday living looks like after an experience of sexual assault during university both in the short- and long-term is not only necessary to address this current gap in the literature, but is also crucial to the development of a fuller understanding of the aftermath of sexual assault (see Boyd, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Examining the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university from an occupational perspective may thus contribute new knowledge in working to uncover its hidden consequences (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Given the relationship between the person and the occupations in which they engage, and that the magnitude of the changes to occupation ought to be relatively proportional to the magnitude of the changes to the person following a disruptive event (e.g., Law et al., 1996; Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik, 2013; Taylor, 2017)—sexual assault in this instance—this research may also inform an understanding of occupational change following major life disruption, more broadly.
In sum, at present, a more fulsome picture of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university remains to be uncovered. Currently, the picture is such that the physical and psychological health consequences of sexual assault are largely foregrounded. What is still missing from this picture is a consideration of the aftermath of sexual assault, in both the short- and long-term, from an occupational perspective. This dissertation offers just that: an examination of both the short- and long-term aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university from an occupational perspective.

1.1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to provide an examination of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university—that is, how women’s lives subsequently unfold—from an occupational perspective. Four specific objectives underlie this overarching aim:

(a) To explore what is known about whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault.

(b) To examine how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

(c) To explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, in both the short- and long-term.

(d) To examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Achieving the overarching aim of this research required the thoughtful completion of a number of smaller steps, each captured by the objectives listed above and addressed in Chapters 2 through 5 of this dissertation. Specifically, to achieve the overarching aim of this research, I first set out to explore whether evidence for an occupational aftermath of sexual assault of any kind could be found within the existing sexual assault literature. Because a consideration of the aftermath of sexual assault from an explicitly occupational perspective has been largely absent from the research literature to date—including sexual assault that occurs at any point across the life course—it was not readily apparent whether this absence
was due to the non-existence of an occupational aftermath or to a more general lack of attention paid to the occupation-related consequences of sexual assault. As such, I undertook a review of the sexual assault literature to explore what is known about whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault in adulthood (Chapter 2).

From the findings of this review, evidence suggested that an occupational aftermath of sexual assault exists. However, the reviewed literature presented a constricted picture of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, specifically as it occurs during university. Accordingly, I next set out to explore whether an expanded picture of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university could be found. To discern a more complete picture of the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective, I turned to memoirs about everyday life in the aftermath of sexual assault. Drawing upon memoirs as a data source allowed for the exploration of one facet of narrative engagement with sexual assault; that is, women’s stories about their experiences. Specifically, I sought to examine how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 3).

Through this analysis of memoirs, findings emerged that suggest a broad occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. However, because the analyzed memoirs were not originally written with a concern for human occupation in mind, it was possible that some important aspects of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault were not recorded in these memoirs. Further, I acknowledge that these memoirs are shaped by market forces associated with mass publishing and are edited as such. In consideration of these points, I next set out to interview women who had been sexually assaulted during university about their experiences of everyday living with the express intent of analyzing these first-hand accounts from an occupational perspective. Specifically, I sought to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, in both the short- and long-term (Chapter 4).

In analyzing these interviews with women, it became apparent that their accounts of everyday living were layered. That is, the women provided accounts of not only what they
did in the aftermath of sexual assault, but also how they came to those doings. Accordingly, I
next set out to build upon the findings generated out of the analysis of interviews and
undertook to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday
living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 5).

In what follows, I present key concepts and terms used throughout this dissertation. I then
discuss the conceptual, philosophical, and methodological underpinnings of this research,
and comment on important methodological and ethical considerations. Finally, I end this
introductory chapter with a fuller discussion of the organization of this dissertation.

1.2 Key Concepts and Terms

A number of key concepts and terms are central to this dissertation. I introduce these
concepts and terms here for the purposes of defining each. Throughout this dissertation, I
have endeavoured to attend to “what words do.” That is, language is not simply a neutral tool
of communication, but is instead a channel for how we view and construct the world around
us (Mooney & Evans, 2018). My use of the following key concepts and terms, as well as
other language throughout this dissertation, is informed by this understanding of “language-
in-use” (see Gee, 2014; Mooney & Evans, 2018).

1.2.1 Occupation

Although many definitions of the term occupation exist, I have chosen to use Polatajko,
Davis and colleagues’ (2013) definition for the purposes of this dissertation: “an activity or
set of activities that is performed with some consistency and regularity, that brings structure,
and is given value and meaning by individuals and a culture” (p. 19). While the term
occupation is most commonly understood to be a synonym of work, in the language of
occupational science, occupation is understood in a much broader sense. Polatajko, Davis
and colleagues’ (2013) definition of occupation reflects the understanding that human
occupation includes all manner of doing (Wilcock, 1998).

1.2.2 Doing

In the language of occupational science, human occupation is understood to involve all
manner of doing (Wilcock, 1998). Although occupation and doing are not completely
synonymous, I deliberately use the terms interchangeably at different points throughout this dissertation. I have chosen to do so because the term occupation holds different meanings outside of (e.g., work) and within (e.g., beyond work) the field of occupational science. To facilitate the successful dissemination of the findings of this research beyond the field of occupational science, I predominately use the term doing to refer to occupation in Chapters 3 and 5, which have been prepared for submission as manuscripts to non-occupational science journals.

1.2.3 Everyday Life/Everyday Living

From the perspective of occupational science, everyday life is understood to be comprised of occupations (Yerxa et al., 1990). Again, while not entirely synonymous, I use the terms occupation and everyday life or everyday living interchangeably throughout. I predominately use the terms everyday life or everyday living in Chapters 3 and 5, for the same reasons related to dissemination of the work noted above.

1.2.4 Occupational Life

The term occupational life is defined as “a person’s encompassing and comprehensive experiences of occupations in the context of his/her life situation” (Lund & Nygard, 2004, p. 244).

1.2.5 Occupational Aftermath

The term occupational aftermath has been coined in this dissertation to refer to “changes to individuals’ occupational lives following the experience of trauma” (Stewart, Du Mont, & Polatajko, p. 3).

1.2.6 Lived Aftermath

The term lived aftermath has also been coined in this dissertation. Although, from a definitional perspective, the occupational aftermath is a discipline-specific aspect of the lived aftermath, I use the terms interchangeably throughout this dissertation, again to facilitate the dissemination of the findings in fields outside of occupational science. Accordingly, I predominately use the term lived aftermath in Chapters 3 and 5.
1.2.7 Occupational Science

Perhaps the simplest definition of occupational science is “the study of the human as an occupational being” (Yerxa et al., 1990, p. 6). Occupational science was formally introduced in the late 1980s, first envisaged and named at the University of Southern California under the leadership of Dr. Elizabeth Yerxa (Clark, 1997). Occupational science was introduced as a basic science to examine the phenomenon of human occupation (Yerxa et al., 1990). However, given the complexity of human occupation, Yerxa and colleagues (1990) assert that “no science existing today can, of itself, explain occupation” (p. 5).

1.2.8 Sexual Assault

While different definitions exist, for the purposes of this dissertation, the term sexual assault is understood to include any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). Throughout this dissertation, I primarily focus my discussions of sexual assault to those instances that occur during the university period. In doing so, I use the phrases sexual assault during university and sexual assault while at university interchangeably.

1.3 Conceptual, Philosophical, and Methodological Underpinnings

This research sits primarily within the traditions of qualitative inquiry. This research explores questions that focus on the “why and how” (Agee, 2009, p. 432) of women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Carter and Little (2007) propose that good qualitative research should attend to issues of coherence and consistency between the elements of epistemology, methodology, and method. Below, I describe these elements as related to this research and discuss the ways in which they are coherent and consistent with one another throughout. However, I first discuss the particular perspective, or conceptual lens, I used to frame this dissertation.

1.3.1 Conceptual Lens

As an occupational scientist, I take an occupational lens, or perspective, to my work. An occupational perspective is defined as “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing”
As proposed by scholars in the field, I understand occupation to be deeply rooted in human existence (see Clark, 2000) and to be a basic human need (see Dunton, 1919). Further, I understand occupation to be an important means through which humans interact with their broader environments and as a means through which meaning is brought to life (see Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013). I believe humans are occupational beings; that occupations hold form, function, and meaning, are idiosyncratic, and are contextually and temporally bound (see Njelesani, Tang et al., 2014; Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013); and that occupation and the self are profoundly linked (see Polatajko, 1998). Additionally, I believe that “an individual’s identity and what an individual chooses to ‘do’ can neither be separated from each other, nor from the social structures that inform each of these entities” (see Gallagher, Muldoon, & Pettigrew, 2015, p. 2).

1.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the nature and form of knowledge; that is, how knowledge is created, acquired, and communicated (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). About the nature and form of knowledge, I believe that all knowledge is partial and fallible. That is, I do not believe that it is possible to ascertain “objective” or certain knowledge of the world. Specifically, consistent with more critical forms of realism, I believe that “there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories, and constructions while accepting…[that] our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5). Although I do not subscribe to the notion that “multiple realities” exist in the sense of “independent and incommensurable worlds that are socially constructed by different individuals or societies” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 9), I do believe that multiple valid perspectives on reality exist. In the context of this research, my conceptual lens—my occupational perspective—offers one such perspective on reality.
1.3.3 Methodology

Methodology is “a theory and analysis of how research should proceed” (Harding, 1987, p. 2). The particular epistemological assumptions underlying research should be reflected within the methodology (Scotland, 2012). My epistemological assumptions, as well as my conceptual lens, are reflected within my chosen methodology: a critical occupational approach, as described by Njelesani, Gibson, Nixon, Cameron, and Polatajko (2013). A critical occupational approach is one that is mutually informed by an occupational perspective, as described above, and a social science perspective (Njelesani et al., 2013). A critical social science perspective is one that may be applied to an extensive field of theory and research that addresses social transformation, equity, and social justice (Guba, Lincoln, & Lynham, 2018).

A critical occupational approach may be employed not only to explore and describe human occupation, but also to examine the “assumptions and ideologies underlying human activity, how knowledge is re/produced through engagement in occupation, who controls the knowledge re/production, the mechanisms of how occupations are taken up, and who stands to gain or lose from them” (Njelesani, Cameron, Gibson, Nixon, & Polatajko, 2014, p. 971). From a critical occupational perspective, human occupation is considered to be a site of knowledge production where meanings are both generated and contested (Njelesani et al., 2013). In recognizing occupation as a site of knowledge production, a critical occupational approach acknowledges that the meaning(s) ascribed to particular occupations are contextually dependent (Njelesani et al., 2013).

According to Njelesani and colleagues (2013), particular research designs are not prescribed by a critical occupational approach. As such, I elected to use narrative inquiry in conjunction with a critical occupational approach because of its good alignment with the overarching aim and specific objectives of this research. Specifically, narrative inquiry may be used to examine socially situated human experience (Bonsall, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2014), such as women’s experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault.

Narrative is one of the most widely-used methods of organizing human experience. Humans use narratives to make sense of what we know, what we feel, and how we experience the
world (Souto-Manning, 2014). It is through the use of narrative, alternatively referred to as
the act of storytelling, that human experience is both ordered and imbued with meaning
(Bruner, 1990). Polkinghorne (1988) asserts that narrative is “the primary scheme by which
human existence is rendered meaningful” (p. 11). From a critical perspective, narratives may
be understood as dynamic, active, and fluid productions that are socially constitutive (Souto-
Manning, 2014). The construction of narratives involves “making sense of one’s life as lived
within a particular socio-historical context and accomplishing versions of the self that are
intelligible within that context” (Rudman & Aldrich, 2017, p. 472).

1.3.4 Methods

Methods are the specific procedures and techniques employed to generate and analyze data
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). One’s methodology should inform the selection of
methods (Scotland, 2012). In the following section, I briefly discuss the methods used in this
research. Although methods of data generation and analysis are intertwined, I first describe
the methods of data generation I employed before discussing the corresponding methods of
data analysis. Finally, I touch upon the research setting in which data were generated and
analyzed.

1.3.4.1 Data Generation

Three methods of data generation were used to achieve the overarching aim of this research:
(a) review of the literature, (b) analysis of memoirs, and (c) interviews with study
participants.

1.3.4.1.1 Review of the Literature

The first method of data generation involved a review of the existing sexual assault literature.
Specifically, the method of narrative overview, which is a type of systematic review (Green,
Johnson, & Adams, 2006; Pan, 2008), was employed. The main purpose of conducting a
narrative overview is to allow for the rigorous identification and synthesis of relevant
literature, while also generating new knowledge about the topic of review (Torraco, 2005). It
was through a review of the literature that the first research objective was addressed: to
explore what is known about whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault.

To generate data, an electronic database search was conducted to identify articles describing longitudinal studies of women’s experiences of life after sexual assault. Using a data collection chart, information was extracted from the included articles through the process of charting (Ritchie & Spencer, 2004). Further detail about the electronic database search, the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to the articles identified by the search, and the charting process is provided in Chapter 2.

1.3.4.1.2 Analysis of Memoirs

The second method of data generation involved the analysis of memoirs written by women who experienced sexual assault during the university period. Specifically, these memoirs presented accounts of life after sexual assault while at university and were not solely focused on recounting the memoirists’ experiences of sexual assault. The main purpose of analyzing memoirs is to develop a sense of an individual’s subjective experience, including the ways in which an individual interprets that experience (Boylorn, 2008). It was through the analysis of memoirs that the second research objective was addressed: to examine how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Within this dissertation, memoirs are understood to be a type of autobiographical work that blurs the “boundaries between private and public, subject and object” (Miller, 1996, p. 2), and whose focus is the recording or sketching of memory (Rak, 2004). Rather than representing a passive reflection of reality, memoirs lend themselves to being open to interpretation (Trinh, 1991). Importantly, memoirs emphasize the ascendancy of the author’s perspective (Connidis, 2012).

As described in further detail in Chapter 3, memoirs were identified through a Google search to cast a wide net and allow for the retrieval of the broadest possible range of memoirs. Four memoirs were identified as eligible for inclusion in this research: College Girl: A Memoir by Laura Gray-Rosendale (2013), published by the State of New York University Press; Crash Into Me: A Survivor’s Search for Justice by Liz Seccoro (2011), published by Bloomsbury;
1.3.4.1.3 Interviews with Study Participants

The third method of data generation involved conducting narrative interviews with women who experienced sexual assault while at university. The main purpose of conducting interviews is twofold: (a) to develop a sense of the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals assign to their experiences, and (b) to shed light on aspects of social life, including social processes, that may be particularly difficult to study in other ways (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2009). It was through interviews with study participants that the third and fourth research objectives were addressed: (a) to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, in both the short- and long-term, and (b) to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Following the receipt of institutional ethical approval from the University of Toronto Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (see Appendix A and Appendix B for letters of ethics approval), a total of 13 women were recruited for this research and were interviewed between the period of August and December 2017 (see Appendix C for recruitment flyer and Appendix D for list of posting locations). A more comprehensive description of the study sample is provided in Chapters 4 and 5. Prior to their participation in the interviews, verbal and written informed consent to participate and to have the interviews audio-recorded was obtained from every study participant (see Appendix E for study information form and Appendix F for consent form).

As described in further detail in Chapters 4 and 5, a two-phase approach to interviewing and narrative elicitation was used. The first phase of the elicitation process involved an open-ended interview, during which study participants were given the following primary narrative prompt: “Please tell me the story of your life. Please include all events, experiences, and things that you have done that have been important to you. Begin wherever you would like to begin. I will not interrupt and will only ask questions once you have finished telling your
story.” The second phase of the elicitation process involved a semi-structured interview, during which follow-up questions were asked based on the information shared during the first open-ended interview (see Appendix G for interview guide).

1.3.4.2 Data Analysis

Three methods of data analysis were used to achieve the overarching aim of this research: (a) charting, (b) thematic analysis, and (c) memo writing. To analyze the data generated from the review of the literature, I used the strategy of charting relevant information from the articles included in the review. With respect to the analysis of the data generated from the analysis of memoirs and study participant interview transcripts, both the strategies of thematic analysis and memo writing were applied. As mentioned, I used narrative inquiry in conjunction with a critical occupational approach in this research. Within narrative inquiry, a broad range of analytic strategies may be employed depending on the theoretical underpinnings and aim(s) of the study (Bonsall, 2012; Polkinghorne, 1988). In this research, I drew upon the analytic strategy of thematic analysis of narrative data as informed by a critical occupational approach (i.e., either taking an occupational perspective or a combined occupational and critical social science perspective, see Njelesani et al., 2013). My strategy of thematic analysis was complemented with memo writing, which is recommended when analyzing data using a critical occupational approach (Njelesani et al., 2013).

1.3.4.2.1 Charting

Charting is a “technique for synthesizing and interpreting qualitative data by sifting, charting, and sorting material according to key issues and themes” (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005, p. 15). Although charting may be understood as a method of data generation as it involves the extraction of relevant information from reviewed articles, it may also be understood as a method of data analysis (see Ritchie & Spencer, 2004). As described in further detail in Chapter 2, I used the data generated through the use of the data collection chart to inform the basis of the analysis, which included basic counts for descriptive information to identify patterns within and across the data.
1.3.4.2.2 Thematic Analysis

The main purpose of thematic analysis is twofold: (a) to interpret meaning, and (b) to reveal complexity (Hsiung, 2010). In particular, the qualitative analysis of interview transcripts may be understood as a process of interpretation that surfaces meanings, linkages, and layers of the data so that recurrent patterns (e.g., themes) and contradictions may be developed as a result (Hsiung, 2010). For the purposes of this dissertation, I employed the theoretically flexible method of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Accordingly, the data analysis process was open-ended and inductive. Although I describe the stages of data analysis in a sequential manner in what follows, each stage was instead performed in a recursive, non-linear manner. That is, each stage of analysis ultimately informed the others.

I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) stages of data analysis, as described in further detail in Chapters 3 through 5. More specifically, I first familiarized myself with the data, then generated initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed these themes, and finally defined and named these themes (ultimately producing this dissertation, or report). During this analysis process for both the analysis of memoirs and participant interview transcripts, I worked closely with my supervisory committee to further develop and refine the themes and subthemes generated through my analysis.

Although thematic analysis of narrative data allows for the identification of recurrent patterns and multiple layers of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsiung, 2010), it can also serve to break up and segment a narrative. In this way, thematic analysis may be understood as “sacrificing some of the meaning inherent in the structure” (Bonsall, 2012, p. 98). In the case of the thematic analysis of narrative data generated from participant interviews, I have developed summary narratives for each study participant in an attempt to offset some of the segmentation inherent to thematic analysis, a practice which is common in the field of narrative inquiry (e.g., Bailey & Jackson, 2003; Bonsall, 2012). These summary narratives may be read alongside the analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 5 (see Appendix H for summary narratives).

With respect to coding and data management processes, I chose to complete these largely by hand rather than using a computer-assisted program. My reasons for doing so were related to
a desire to “stay close to the data.” I wanted to be able to “feel” the data in a way that I felt I would not be able to through a computer screen. However, while I completed a majority of data coding manually, I did complete portions of the analysis process in the analysis of memoirs using word processing software. The particular aspects of the analysis process completed manually or electronically are further outlined in Chapter 3. During this analysis of the memoirs, I transferred hard copy codes to an electronic format, only to transfer my subsequently developed themes from this electronic format back to hard copy. Through this process, I discovered that, for this research, I preferred engaging with the data in hard copy. As such, in the analysis of the participant interview transcripts, I completed all coding by hand. Again, specific details about the coding of the participant interview transcripts are described in further detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.3.4.2.3 Memo Writing

As mentioned, when using a critical occupational approach to research, employing the analytic strategy of memo writing is recommended (Njelesani et al., 2013). As such, I complemented my thematic analysis with the writing of analytic and reflexive memos, as described by Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008). The writing of analytic memos involves considering patterns that may be generated from raw data. In the writing of analytic memos, researchers facilitate the development of conceptual linkages between raw data and broader abstractions, which may help to explain the phenomenon of interest (Birks et al., 2008). The writing of reflexive memos involves considering not only what you have done in the data generation and analysis process, but why. Specifically, in the writing of reflexive memos, researchers are called upon to consider the ways in which their previous experiences, beliefs, and assumptions shape the way in which they generate and analyze data (Birks et al., 2008). Both analytical and reflexive memos were used to support the generation and refinement of themes through the thematic analysis process.

In the process of memo-writing, given my use of a critical occupational approach (see Njelesani et al., 2013), I made notes about what I have termed, occupation-in-use. Similar to the notion of language-in-use, which captures the notion that language “does” (Mooney & Evans, 2018), occupation-in-use captures the notion that that occupation “does.” That is, I consider occupation to be an active site where knowledge and meaning are generated (see
Njelesani et al., 2013), and thus understand occupation-in-use to be the doing, or knowledge productive actions, of occupation in relation to its social contexts. Following from the work of occupational science scholars, I believe that humans are occupational beings (see Njelesani, Cameron et al., 2014; Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013; Wilcock, 1996, 2006; Yerxa, 1998; Yerxa et al., 1990). I drew upon occupation-in-use to acknowledge that occupation is an important means through which humans interact with their broader environments, which I understand to include social structures.

1.3.4.3 Research Setting

The data generation and analysis processes outlined above took place within a particular research setting, or context. Specifically, this research was conducted during a time in which recent social movements related to sexual assault during university, as well as violence against women more broadly (e.g., #MeToo, Time’s Up), emerged. As previously mentioned, a profusion of stories about women’s experiences of sexual assault during university and life thereafter have come to light as part of these social movements. Many of these stories (e.g., Emma Sulkowicz’s story, see Smith, 2014) have received international attention (Baker & Bevacqua, 2018; Whitely & Page, 2015) and have become part of our everyday understanding of sexual assault. This context served as a backdrop to this dissertation and was, broadly, part of the research setting for the review of the sexual assault literature, as well as the analysis of memoirs and interviews with study participants.

1.4 Methodological Considerations

1.4.1 Reflexivity and Positionality

Within the qualitative research traditions, it has been widely acknowledged that the researcher is interwoven with the research itself (e.g., Cassell, 2005; Finlay, 2002; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). This depth of researcher involvement has been characterized as the embodiment of the researcher as the instrument of his or her own research (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Given that the researcher is the primary instrument in all phases of the research process, it is inevitable that data generation, analysis, and interpretation are shaped by the researcher’s unique attributes (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). However, just how the researcher’s attributes affect the research process is of concern to those working from
epistemological assumptions in alignment with more critical forms of realism, as our understandings of phenomena are a construction of our own perspectives (Maxwell, 2012). It has been argued that engaging in reflective practice is central to freedom from illusions of objectivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As such, a number of scholars have called for self-reflexivity in research (see Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012) to evaluate the subjective responses and intersubjective dynamics involved in the construction of knowledge (Finlay, 2002; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Reflexivity in research is “considered to be honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). Reflexivity is a process that is active, continuous, and emergent; involves critically examining how knowledge is constructed and the ways in which the researcher shapes the research study; and should permeate all aspects of research (Finlay, 2002). Although most researchers turn inwards when engaging in reflexive thinking, it has been argued that “the boundaries between self indulgence and reflexivity are fragile and blurred,” thereby raising “the question of how much of ourselves to reveal” (Coffey, 1999, p. 133). Rather than providing a vehicle through which to communicate “confessional tales” (Van Maanen, 1988), reflexive practice instead offers an important opportunity to reflect upon the personal or political motivations that influence all aspects of the research process, including how researchers come to their research topics, the questions they ask of their data, and how they present their analysis and interpretation of their data (Doucet, 2008).

Positionality is closely linked to reflexivity and, as such, the two are discussed together here. Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that “people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity” (Kezar, 2002, p. 96). Although it is impossible to detail all of the identities or positions that I hold here, broadly, I approached this research as an occupational scientist, a novice qualitative researcher and, as a doctoral candidate, an individual with a number of years of experience as a university student. I acknowledge that these multiple positions have shaped all aspects of this dissertation in ways both explicit and implicit, including my interest in the research topic, my understanding of the research problem, the research aim and objectives I developed, the way in which I engaged in data generation (i.e., the review of the literature,
the analysis of memoirs, and the interviewing of study participants), how I analyzed and interpreted the data, and the particular story I chose to tell out of the data with this dissertation.

At various points throughout this dissertation, I reflexively comment on the ways in which my positionality served to shape this research.

1.4.2 Rigour

The demonstration of rigour is often viewed as a necessary marker of good quality research (Saldana, 2013). Indeed, Tracy (2010) asserts that for “qualitative research to be of high quality, it must be rigorous” (p. 841). However, understandings of what constitutes rigorous research vary both between and within research paradigms (e.g., Saldana, 2013; Pitney & Parker, 2009; Tracy, 2010; Wolcott, 1995). Given this variability, I aimed to establish the quality of this research by attending to two main aspects of rigour: (a) analytical rigour, and (b) procedural rigour.

Analytical rigour refers to generalizing from a particular empirical instance to a theoretical one (Gobo, 2004). In other words, theoretical insights are generated through the analysis and interpretation of data, and these insights may be generalizable to other comparable contexts (e.g., the occupational aftermath of a variety of forms of major life disruption or trauma). This generalizability of findings has alternatively been referred to as transferability (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it is through the detailed presentation of one’s findings that readers may judge whether one’s analysis and interpretation of the data is indeed transferrable to other contexts: “it is, in summary, not the [researcher’s] task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). As such, I made every effort to provide the thick description (see Geertz, 1973) necessary to enable readers to make such judgements about transferability.

Procedural rigour refers to specific strategies to establish the trustworthiness of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness relates to the ways in which “an inquirer persuades the audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to or
taking account of” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). I demonstrated procedural rigour by being transparent about the ways in which I analyzed and interpreted the data, including explicating the conceptual, philosophical, and methodological underpinnings of this research; identifying whether findings (i.e., themes and subthemes) were framed using study participants’ direct words and phrases or whether they were framed using researcher-constructed words and phrases; and providing sufficient data extracts to allow readers to evaluate any inferences drawn and interpretations made. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), emergent findings were reinforced through the use of specific strategies widely considered to enhance credibility (e.g., prolonged engagement with the data), dependability (e.g., establishing an audit trail through the writing of analytic and reflexive memos), and confirmability (e.g., consulting with supervisory committee members who served as multiple reviewers of the analysis, interpretation, and representation of the data).

1.5 Ethical Considerations

At minimum, ethical research involving human participants is broadly understood to adhere to the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). Particularly in the case of researching sensitive topics, of which sexual assault is one (Fontes, 2004), attending to ethical procedures is not only necessary to ensure data quality, but is critical for the protection and safety of participants and researchers alike (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). To address the major ethical issues in research of confidentiality, consent, and freedom from harm (Webster, Lewis, & Brown, 2014), the following actions were taken in relation to those aspects of the research involving study participants:

(a) Institutional ethical approval was obtained from the University of Toronto on January 2, 2017 (see Appendix A and Appendix B for letters of ethics approval).
(b) Study objectives were shared with participants both verbally and in writing to facilitate comprehensive understanding (see Appendix E for study information form).
(c) Informed verbal and written consent to participate in the study was obtained from participants, which addressed issues of confidentiality and voluntariness (see Appendix F for consent form).
(d) Informed verbal and written consent to have interviews audio recorded was obtained from participants (see Appendix F).

(e) Participants selected or were assigned pseudonyms to be used in the dissemination of study findings to protect confidentiality.

(f) Protecting participants’ rights, interests, and wishes were of primary concern when presenting study findings.

Although Ellsberg and Heise (2005) suggest that researching the topic of sexual assault is similar to researching other sensitive topics, they also note that sexual assault research poses additional ethical concerns to which researchers should attend. Accordingly, within this research, I carefully attended to ethical recommendations for the study of sexual assault (see Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Rosoff, 2017). For example, issues of potential distress were discussed with participants prior to each interview session, as well as if and when they arose during interviews. After each interview session, as well as at the beginning of the second interview session, I debriefed with participants; that is, I discussed with each participant how she found her participation in the current or previous interview session and if there was anything that I could do to make the experience more comfortable for her. In doing so, I endeavoured to facilitate ongoing informed consent, as well as respect for the participant. I frequently communicated to participants that they were free to stop or to leave the interviews, or to withdraw from the study altogether, at any time without fear of experiencing any negative consequences. Finally, at the end of each interview session, I provided all participants with a written list of local sexual assault resources, should additional support have been needed by participants.

Although this discussion of ethical considerations has thus far been focused on those aspects of the research involving study participants, there are, of course, ethical issues to consider when working with memoirs, as well. For example, Harrison and Lyon (1993) note that the contexts in which memoirs are produced place boundaries on the interpretation of their contents. While Scott (1990) suggests that explicating not only the personal, political, and/or commercial contexts but also related interests of memoirs is necessary to ensure data quality, Harrison and Lyon (1993) argue that this is difficult to achieve in practice. As such, I follow Harrison and Lyon’s (1993) suggestion that researchers consider and comment on the context
in which a memoir was produced in presenting their analysis and interpretation of the data gleaned from such sources.

1.6 Organization of the Dissertation

This manuscript style dissertation is comprised of six chapters, four of which are manuscripts that have been prepared for publication. My reasons for presenting this dissertation in manuscript style are twofold: (a) to facilitate the prompt dissemination of the research findings, and (b) to further develop my skills related to the act of preparing manuscripts for submission to academic journals, an essential skill required of researchers in the areas of occupational science and occupational therapy. Given that this dissertation is presented in manuscript style, it contains some necessary repetition, especially in the introduction and methods sections of each manuscript, which are not typical of a traditional monograph style dissertation. Nevertheless, this dissertation represents a single, cohesive document that presents and describes the entirety of my doctoral research work. Although several chapters represent stand-alone manuscripts, they also fit together into a single body of work to achieve the aim and objectives of this research.

In this dissertation, Chapters 1 and 6 serve to introduce and conclude this dissertation work, while the remaining chapters represent manuscripts prepared for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals: Chapter 2 serves as the literature review and Chapters 3 through 5 provide empirical contributions to this dissertation’s aim. The flow from conventional chapters (i.e., Chapters 1 and 6) to those that are manuscript-based (i.e., Chapters 2 through 5) is facilitated by brief explanatory chapter prefaces. For each manuscript-based chapter, I have provided information about its publication status, the target journal for publication, and the target journal’s general aims and purposes. Because these manuscripts have been prepared for submission to a variety of academic journals, some of the language used within each differs. Specifically, Chapters 2 and 4 have been prepared for submission to a journal in the field of occupational science; language specific to the field of occupational science (e.g., key terms such as occupation, occupational aftermath) are used more often within these manuscripts. Chapters 3 and 5 have been prepared for submission to journals in the field of violence against women and less discipline-specific language (e.g., key terms such as doing, everyday living, lived aftermath) is therefore used.
Additionally, because the manuscript presented in Chapter 2 has been published, when citing specific quotes from this manuscript, I reference the appropriate page number(s) as found in the published version. In keeping with copyright restrictions, the version of the manuscript included in this dissertation differs slightly from that in print; specifically, the pagination of the published version of the manuscript differs from that of the version presented in this dissertation. The version presented here is the final accepted version of the manuscript.

This dissertation represents my independent doctoral work, which was completed with the guidance of my supervisory committee. To reflect my ownership of this dissertation and the ideas herein, as well as to emphasize my role as a researcher and author, I have chosen to use first-person singular pronouns (e.g., I, my) in Chapters 1 and 6, where I am the sole author. However, in Chapters 2 through 5, I have used first-person plural pronouns (e.g., we, our) to reflect the multi-authorship of those manuscripts.

Moving on from this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2, I review and synthesize the relevant sexual assault literature to contextualize this research. Specifically, I provide a comprehensive description of what is currently known about whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault.

In Chapter 3, I undertake to discern a more complete picture of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, particularly when it occurs during university. In this chapter, I present an analysis of four memoirs detailing women’s experiences of life after being sexually assaulted while at university. I examine the ways in which the memoirists textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault, exploring both the memoirists’ descriptions of what they did, as well as how the memoirists discussed how they came to that doing.

In Chapter 4, to continue to develop the picture of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, I turn to accounts of everyday life specifically generated with human occupation in mind. In this chapter, I present an analysis of 13 women’s first-hand accounts of everyday living after experiencing sexual assault while at university. Informed by an occupational perspective, I describe the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, in both the short- and long-term.
In Chapter 5, I build upon the findings presented in Chapter 4 to present a different layer of analysis of the study participants’ first-hand accounts of everyday living after experiencing sexual assault while at university. Oriented by a critical occupational approach, I examine the ways in which the participants make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault.

In Chapter 6, I conclude this dissertation by bringing together the findings from each of the individual studies (i.e., Chapters 2 through 5) to bear on the overall thesis of this dissertation. I summarize the unique and important contributions of this dissertation, while also discussing the potential implications of this research for the sexual assault literature and the occupational science literature. Finally, I note the limitations of this research and offer a perspective on directions for future research.
Chapter 2
Preface

In Chapter 2, a review of the sexual assault literature is presented. To achieve the overarching aim of this dissertation research, it was necessary to first explore whether evidence for the existence of an occupational aftermath of sexual assault could be found in the literature. In an effort to consider a wide range of studies in this endeavor, and given that the aftermath of sexual assault is not yet well understood from an occupational perspective, we undertook to comprehensively describe what is known about whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault that occurs in adulthood, broadly. Using an occupational perspective, the findings of studies exploring women’s experiences of life after sexual assault were reframed to consider changes to occupation.

The manuscript presented in this chapter has been published in the *Journal of Occupational Science*. Language specific to the discipline of occupational science (e.g., occupation, occupational aftermath) is thus used more frequently throughout this chapter than in other chapters in this dissertation.
Chapter 2
Applying an Occupational Perspective to Women’s Experiences of Life After Sexual Assault: A Narrative Review

Stewart, K. E., Du Mont, J., & Polatajko, H. J.

This chapter has been published as a manuscript in the *Journal of Occupational Science*. The *Journal of Occupational Science* publishes original research and scholarly papers on human occupation. This journal aims to bring important work about the form, function, performance, and meaning of occupation to a wide international audience.
2 Applying an Occupational Perspective to Women’s Experiences of Life After Sexual Assault: A Narrative Review

2.1 Abstract

The negative consequences of sexual assault on women’s health are well researched. Given that a reciprocal relationship between health and occupation exists, it is likely that the consequences of sexual assault extend beyond health to include consequences for women’s occupations. However, whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault is not yet well understood. The objective of this narrative overview was to provide a comprehensive description of what is currently known about the occupational aftermath (i.e., changes to individuals’ occupational lives after trauma) of sexual assault that occurs in adulthood. An occupational perspective was used to reframe the findings presented in 26 articles describing longitudinal studies of women’s experiences of life after sexual assault. Findings suggest that although changes to women’s occupations after sexual assault are addressed in the literature, the understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault as presented is narrow and partial. Insufficient consideration is given to the breadth and depth of the daily occupations in which women might engage after sexual assault, as well as to the variety of ways in which women’s occupational engagement might change after sexual assault. Further nuanced exploration of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault is warranted and necessary to develop a deeper understanding of the changes to occupation that might occur after sexual assault, as well as to illuminate the reasons for and consequences of these changes to occupation.

2.2 Introduction

The ways in which women’s health and well-being may change after sexual assault have been the focus of much research; however, the ways in which their occupations might also change are not yet well understood. Developing an understanding of the possible changes to women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault is imperative, as experiencing sexual assault may pose a threat to occupational justice through potentially serious and long-lasting occupational disruptions. The objective of this narrative overview is to provide a
comprehensive description of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault; that is, of what is known about whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault in adulthood.

2.2.1 Background

Sexual assault is a persistent and pernicious problem worldwide. Despite being a violation of basic human rights, sexual assault is both wide-spread and, disturbingly, socially tolerated (World Health Organization, 2013). Although the sensitive nature of sexual assault poses challenges to measuring its prevalence (Johnson, 2006), there has been a significant increase in the availability of data in recent years (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). For example, there were 553,000 incidents of sexual assault reported by women in Canada in the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization or a rate of 37 in 1,000 women ages 15 years and older; these rates have remained largely unchanged since the last GSS in 2004, despite declines in prevalence rates for all other types of self-reported non-violent and violent crimes (Perreault, 2015). Globally, it is estimated that one in three women will experience physical and/or sexual assault by a partner or sexual assault by a non-partner over the course of her lifetime (World Health Organization, 2013).

Sexual assault may have numerous devastating consequences for women’s lives. Traditionally, the consequences of sexual assault have been primarily studied from a health perspective: the negative effects of sexual assault on women’s physical, mental, and emotional health are well-established (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009). Although the health consequences of sexual assault may differ across individuals (World Health Organization, 2003), women who have been sexually assaulted may experience one or more of a number of health consequences: ano-genital and/or extra-genital injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted/unintended pregnancy, post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, eating disorders, sleep disorders, substance use disorders, and attempted or completed suicide (Du Mont & White, 2007; World Health Organization, 2013). For many of these potential health consequences of sexual assault, diagnosis is framed, in part, in relation to daily functioning. For example, within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), post-traumatic stress disorder and mood, eating, sleep, and substance use disorders are understood to involve impairments in
functioning. It is important to note that not all women who are sexually assaulted experience or are diagnosed with formal physical and/or mental health disorders. However, even in the absence of specific diagnoses, women’s well-being and engagement in various aspects of life and society may be affected by changes to their health after sexual assault (Johnson, Ollus, & Nevala, 2008; Sinha, 2013).

Central to occupational science is the belief that a reciprocal relationship between occupation and health and well-being exists, and that “people’s occupations sustain or undermine their health and well-being and conversely, their state of health allows or inhibits participation in occupation” (Hocking & Wright-St. Clair, 2011, p. 30). Given this relationship, the link between health, well-being, and engagement in life and society suggests that sexual assault likely has consequences for women’s occupations. Support for this assertion is found in the World Health Organization’s (1986) assertion that health is “a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living” (p. 1). Because individuals live their lives through engaging in occupations, health may thus be viewed as a resource for occupational engagement. It follows that if women’s health, or their resource for everyday life, is disrupted after sexual assault, it is likely that their everyday lives, or their occupational engagement, will be disrupted as well.

The potential for trauma, including sexual assault, to have consequences for occupation is being increasingly recognized (e.g., American Occupational Therapy Association, 2017; Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2017), and some research demonstrating changes to occupation after sexual assault does exist. However, research exploring changes to occupation after sexual assault has largely focused on occupation in the most common sense of the word (i.e., work). Specifically, the experience of sexual assault has been shown to be disruptive to women’s work through means such as increased time off, diminished performance, job loss, and inability to work, which may ultimately lead to disruptions in women’s short- and long-term economic trajectories (Loya, 2015). However, limited consideration has been given to the ways in which these disruptions to women’s work after sexual assault might influence and/or disrupt women’s routines or daily occupations more broadly.
Questions of whether and how people’s lives, including routines and daily occupations, change after sexual assault have been the focus of much less research. Specifically, Twinley’s (2012, 2016) research exploring women’s subjective experiences of daily occupations after woman-to-woman rape and sexual assault highlights the devastating negative consequences that sexual assault may have on the occupations of self-care, caring for others, work, and leisure, as well as on occupational roles and relationships. Other research exploring changes to routines and/or daily occupations following sexual victimization focus on childhood sexual abuse (Lentin, 2002; Ratcliff et al., 2002). Exploration of how women’s occupations are changed after sexual assault perpetrated by men is limited and represents an important gap in the literature, as the majority of sexual assaults across the globe are committed by men (World Health Organization, 2017).

2.2.2 Applying an Occupational Perspective

Existing preliminary research demonstrating the potential disruption to women’s engagement in meaningful occupations after sexual assault (e.g., Loya, 2015; Twinley, 2012, 2016) would suggest that the experience of sexual assault may pose a threat to occupational justice, defined as concerns around the “ethical, moral, and civic issues such as equity and fairness for both individuals and collectives but specific to engagement in diverse and meaningful occupation” (Wilcock & Townsend, 2013, p. 542). An occupational perspective, defined by Njelesani, Tang, and colleagues (2014) as “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing” (p. 233), may be used to reconceptualize the consequences of sexual assault that have been identified in the existing sexual assault literature to inform an understanding of whether and how women’s occupations are changed after sexual assault.

To reframe findings from the sexual assault literature related to the consequences of sexual assault on occupation, we used an occupational perspective to inform this review and synthesis of the literature. We adopted, in part, the definition of the term occupational perspective proposed by Njelesani, Tang, and colleagues (2014) for use in this review. However, we propose an expanded definition that draws upon Polatajko, Davis and colleagues’ (2013) definition of occupation: An occupational perspective is a way of looking at or thinking about human doing, which considers the consistency and regularity of performance of the doing, the structure that the doing brings to one’s life, and the value(s)
and meaning(s) ascribed to the doing by individuals and a culture. About occupation, we believe that humans are occupational beings; and that occupations hold form, function, and meaning, are idiosyncratic, and are contextually and temporally bound (Njelesani, Tang et al., 2014; Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013). These assumptions informed not only our data analysis, but also the development of our research question used to guide this review.

2.3 Method

The research question guiding this review was: What is the occupational aftermath of the experience of sexual assault that occurs in adulthood on women’s lives as described in longitudinal studies? For this review, occupation is defined as “an activity or set of activities that is performed with some consistency and regularity, that brings structure, and is given value and meaning by individuals and a culture” (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013, p. 19). The term occupational aftermath is coined here to describe the changes to individuals’ occupational lives following the experience of trauma.

Within this review, sexual assault is defined as any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). While there is no consensus regarding the definition of sexual assault that occurs in adulthood, it is understood in this review as it is in the Sexual Experiences Scale (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987): any form of sexual assault that occurs after the age of 14. The Sexual Experiences Scale has been widely used by researchers to assess women’s unwanted sexual experiences (Abbey, Parkhill, & Koss, 2005). We chose to focus our analysis on longitudinal studies of 6 months or longer because of our interest in understanding changes to women’s occupational lives after sexual assault. It is generally accepted that causes precede their effects in time, and that following the same individuals over a period of time facilitates the establishment of causal relations (Hume, 1739/2000; Wunsch, Russo, & Mouchart, 2010).

2.3.1 Review Design

The method of narrative overview, a type of systematic review (Green et al., 2006; Pan, 2008), was employed in this review and synthesis of the literature. That is, systematic criteria were applied, allowing for the rigorous identification and synthesis of relevant literature, as well as the generation of new knowledge about the topic reviewed (Torraco, 2005). The
The purpose of a narrative overview is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current research available on a particular topic and to place this synthesis of research into perspective. Narrative overviews often involve the discussion of theoretical and/or contextual considerations and may serve to provoke thought; as such, narrative overviews may be used to present a philosophical argument or perspective on the topic reviewed (Green et al., 2006).

The articles included in this review were identified through an electronic search of the databases most likely to contain literature related to the consequences of sexual assault. The searched databases were: CINAHL, ERIC, MEDLINE, PsycINFO, and Sociological Abstracts. Search terms were identified through examination of the background literature on the consequences of sexual assault. Boolean operators were used to combine the following search terms related to four broad concepts of interest: (a) sexual assault – rape*, sex* abuse*, sex* assault*, sex* crime*, sex* offence*, sex* violence, sex* victimization, (b) victims/survivors – survivor*, victim*, “crime victims”; (c) women – adult*, female*, wom?n ; and (d) longitudinal studies – longitudinal. The titles and abstracts of each article identified by the electronic search were screened by the first author and a research assistant for inclusion and exclusion criteria (see below). The articles that met the inclusion criteria were then reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria in full. Finally, the process for article identification and selection was repeated with relevant articles found in the reference lists of all articles selected for inclusion in this review. Any differences in opinion in article selection were discussed by the first author and the research assistant until agreement was reached.

2.3.1.1 Inclusion Criteria

Articles were included in this review if they: (a) were peer-reviewed research articles, (b) reported the findings of longitudinal studies, (c) focused on female study participants who reported experiencing sexual assault in adulthood (i.e., after the age of 14), (d) explored occupation-related changes to study participants’ lives following the sexual assault, and (e) were written in English.
2.3.1.2 Exclusion Criteria

Articles were excluded from this review if they: (a) focused on female study participants who reported experiencing both physical and sexual assault where types of assault experience could not be separated, (b) focused on female study participants who reported both experiencing and perpetrating sexual assault where experience and perpetration of sexual assault could not be separated, and (c) focused on male and female study participants without analyzing for differences in their reported life changes following sexual assault. The article identification and selection process is further outlined in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Article selection.](image)

2.3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Using a data collection chart created specifically for this review using Excel software, key information from the articles included in this review were charted (Ritchie & Spencer, 2004) by the first author and a research assistant, which is a “technique for synthesizing and interpreting qualitative data by sifting, charting, and sorting material according to key issues and themes” (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005, p. 15). This information included author names, date of publication, article title, name of journal, study purpose, research question/hypothesis,
study participants, study design/methods, variables examined, measure(s) used, use of the term *occupation*, use of terms related to *occupation* (e.g., *activity*, *task*, *time spent*, *work*), “occupation” studied, outcomes, discussion of occupation, stated relationship between sexual assault and occupation (e.g., explanation of relationship), and other relevant information. To promote consistency in data collection, the first author and the research assistant independently collected data from the same five articles at the beginning of the data collection process. The data were compared, and minor discrepancies related to the placement of data under chart headings were identified. These discrepancies were discussed until consensus regarding the placement of data was achieved. This same process was repeated with another group of five articles after the first author had collected data from approximately half of the reviewed articles. No discrepancies in data collection were noted at that time. Data collection for the remaining articles was performed by the first author. The charting of key information formed the basis for our analysis, which included basic counts for descriptive information to identify patterns within and across the data.

### 2.4 Findings

A total of 638 articles were initially identified by the electronic database search. Following the removal of duplicate articles, 83 articles were identified as eligible for full-text review. After full-text review, 59 articles were found not to meet the inclusion criteria, resulting in a total of 24 articles identified for inclusion through the initial electronic search. The titles of articles found in the reference lists of included articles were reviewed, and an additional two articles were identified for inclusion. This resulted in a total of 26 articles (see Figure 1), two of which reported findings from the same study (Duma, Mekwa, & Denny, 2007a, 2007b).

The articles included in this review were published between the years 1979 and 2016, with the majority of articles published between 2000 and 2016 ($n = 23, 88.5\%$). The *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* published the greatest number of articles included in this review ($n = 6, 23\%$), followed by *Addictive Behaviors* ($n = 4, 15\%$), *Curationis* ($n = 2, 8\%$), and the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychiatry* ($n = 2, 8\%$). The greatest number of articles were published by first authors affiliated with American universities or research institutes ($n = 24, 92\%$), while the remaining two (8%) articles included in this review were published by first authors associated with South African universities. Duration of the longitudinal studies
described in the included articles ranged from 6 months to 8.5 years, with the greatest number of longitudinal studies running for 1 year \( (n = 9, 35\%) \), followed by 6 months \( (n = 5, 19\%) \).

2.4.1 Use of Occupation and Other Related Terms

The term *occupation* was not used to describe the aftermath of sexual assault in any of the articles reviewed. The related terms of *work* and *leisure* were used to characterize the aftermath of sexual assault experienced by participants in one article (Resick, Calhoun, Atkeson, & Ellis, 1981). Additionally, the term *work* was used to characterize the aftermath of sexual assault experienced by participants in two articles that reported on the same study (Duma et al., 2007a, 2007b). No other terms related to occupation (e.g., activity, task, time spent) were used in any other reviewed articles.

2.4.2 Occupations Studied

Across the articles included in this review, 12 different types of occupations were studied, with some articles focusing on a single occupation and others focusing on two or more. Twenty (77\%) articles reported on only one occupation, while 5 (19\%) articles reported on two different occupations, while only 1 (4\%) article reported on six different occupations. Engagement in alcohol use was most frequently studied \( (n = 17, 47.25\%) \), followed by sexual activity \( (n = 6, 17\%) \), eating \( (n = 2, 5.5\%) \), paid work \( (n = 2, 5.5\%) \), and school work \( (n = 2, 5.5\%) \). Engagement in dating, dressing, drug use, generic leisure occupations, legal activities (i.e., occupations associated with taking legal action against the perpetrator), shopping, and smoking were each studied once \( (n = 1, 2.75\%) \) across the reviewed articles.

2.4.2.1 Notions of Risk

Several occupations studied within the articles reviewed were positioned as threats to women’s good health and well-being. Specifically, alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking were often discussed within the context of risk. Engagement in these occupations was viewed as dangerous, placing women at risk for illness, disease, or re-victimization:

[R]esults of this study show that African-American adolescent females seeking services at local STI [sexually transmitted infection] clinics and who have a history of RV [rape
victimization] report an earlier age of consensual sex and are engaging in more risky sexual behaviors as they age than their counterparts who do not report a history of RV, thereby placing themselves at increased risk for contracting STIs, including HIV. (Lang et al., 2011, p. 337)

However, there were some instances in which engaging in sexual activity was not positioned as a risk to women’s health. In particular, when considered in the context of a committed relationship, sexual activity was instead discussed as a vital factor contributing to women’s overall health and well-being:

While many traditional approaches to sex therapy may be effective with these women, new methods may be needed to cope with the special issues of the rape victim. The sex therapist may have to deal with attitudinal changes the rape victim may have about her body, her partner, and certain types of sexual activity. (Ellis, Calhoun, & Atkeson, 1980, p. 47)

2.4.3 The Occupational Aftermath of Sexual Assault

Across the articles reviewed, the nature of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, or the changes to women’s occupations, was described in five distinct ways: (a) a start and/or increase in engagement in a particular occupation after sexual assault (reported 19 times); (b) a stop and/or decrease in engagement in a particular occupation after sexual assault ($n = 5$); (c) a stop and/or decrease in engagement followed by an eventual restart and/or increase in engagement in a particular occupation after sexual assault ($n = 6$); (d) a change in occupational form after sexual assault ($n = 2$); and (e) no change to occupation after sexual assault ($n = 6$; see Figure 2).

![Figure 2](image-url)

*Figure 2.* Frequency of the reported nature of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault.
The nature of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault varied at times within a particular occupation (i.e., across the articles that studied the same occupation). Table 1 describes the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, by occupation studied.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation Studied</th>
<th>Author(s) and Publication Year</th>
<th>Reported Change to Occupation Following Sexual Assault</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol use</td>
<td>Bryan et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gidycz et al. (2007)</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Griffin &amp; Read (2012)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lindgren, Neighbors, Blayney, Mullins, &amp; Kaysen (2012)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McCauley, Calhoun, &amp; Gidycz (2010)</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McMullin &amp; White (2006)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Messman-Moore, Ward, Zerubavel, Chandley, &amp; Barton (2015)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mouliso, Fischer, &amp; Calhoun (2012)</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Najdowski &amp; Ullman (2009)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nowotny &amp; Graves (2013)</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parks, Hsieh, Taggart, &amp; Bradizza (2014)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testa, Hoffman, &amp; Livingston (2010)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testa &amp; Livingston (2000)</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testa, Livingston, Hoffman (2007)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsai et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ullman (2016)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ullman, Filipas, Townsend, &amp; Starzynski. (2005)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>Collibee &amp; Furman (2014)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease OR no change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressing</td>
<td>Duma, Mekwa, &amp; Denny (2007b)</td>
<td>Change in form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>Nowotny &amp; Graves (2013)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Change Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>Duma, Mekwa, &amp; Denny (2007a)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease followed by a start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duma, Mekwa, &amp; Denny (2007b)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease followed by a start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic leisure occupations</td>
<td>Resick, Calhoun, Atkseon, &amp; Ellis (1981)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease followed by a start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal activities</td>
<td>Duma, Mekwa, &amp; Denny (2007b)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Griffin &amp; Read (2012)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jordan, Combs, &amp; Smith (2014)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual activity</td>
<td>Burgess &amp; Holmstrom (1979)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease OR start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duma, Mekwa, &amp; Denny (2007b)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ellis, Calhoun, &amp; Atkeson (1980)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease followed by a start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lang et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McMullin &amp; White (2006)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testa, Hoffman, &amp; Livingston (2010)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>Duma, Mekwa, &amp; Denny (2007b)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease followed by a start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>Amstadter et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Duma, Mekwa, &amp; Denny (2007b)</td>
<td>Change in form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resick, Calhoun, Atkseon, &amp; Ellis (1981)</td>
<td>Stop and/or decrease followed by a start and/or increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.5 Discussion

This review provides a comprehensive description of what is known about the occupational aftermath of sexual assault. A total of 26 articles detailing the findings of longitudinal studies, which spanned from 6 months to 8.5 years, exploring women’s experiences of life after sexual assault were identified for inclusion in this review. The findings from these articles were reframed using an occupational perspective. Despite a lack of any explicit
reference to the term *occupation* across the articles reviewed, the findings of this review demonstrated that the occupational aftermath of sexual assault is indeed studied within the sexual assault literature.

### 2.5.1 Breadth and Depth of Women’s Daily Occupations

Across the reviewed articles, only a restricted set of women’s daily occupations were studied. The focus of study often rested on changes to occupations that were discussed as “health risk behaviours.” In many of the articles reviewed, occupations such as alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking were often associated with notions of risk and were framed as problematic with respect to maintaining the integrity of women’s health and well-being. Within the broader peer-reviewed and grey sexual assault literature, these occupations are also discussed as health risk behaviours. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) present four categories of consequences of sexual violence victimization: (a) physical, (b) psychological, (c) social, and (d) health risk behaviours. Listed as health risk behaviours include engaging in high-risk sexual behaviour (e.g., unprotected sex, having multiple sex partners) and using harmful substances (e.g., smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and taking drugs), all of which were occupations addressed in many of the articles reviewed. However, it is important to note that while alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking may pose risks to some aspects of women’s health and well-being, engagement in these occupations may also be used as a form of coping after experiencing sexual assault, as was acknowledged by Messman-Moore, Ward, Zerubavel, Chandley, and Barton (2015). Further, Stewart, Fischer, Hirji, and Davis (2016) have argued that it is problematic to conceptualize occupations as either absolutely health-promoting or absolutely illness-producing in that such distinctions ignore contextual influences. In framing alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking as health risk behaviours in the context of sexual assault, the possibility that engaging in such occupations fulfills some aspect of personal need despite posing risks to one’s health and well-being is effectively silenced.

Given that the study of the consequences of sexual assault is so often approached from a health perspective, it is not surprising that the articles reviewed not only framed certain occupations as health risk behaviours, but were also predominantly focused on studying changes to these occupations after sexual assault. When applying an occupational perspective
to women’s experiences, as reported in the reviewed articles, this disproportionate focus on the study of health risk behaviours becomes concerning. Occupations such as alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking may make up only part of the range of occupations in which women are likely to engage on a regular basis. This strong focus on changes to these specific aspects of women’s lives serves to emphasize the narrow health perspective that has been adopted to consider the consequences of sexual assault more broadly, thus supporting our call for the examination of the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective. Further, the occupations of alcohol use and sexual activity were most frequently studied across the reviewed articles, and although other occupations (e.g., eating, general leisure occupations, school work) were studied, the spectrum of occupations reported across articles included in this review was severely limited. The restricted set of occupations studied does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the changes to women’s broader occupational repertoires after sexual assault, defined as “the set of occupations an individual has at a specific point in the life course” (Davis & Polatajko, 2006, p. 137). This is not to say that the study of changes to specific, singular occupations such as alcohol use or sexual activity after sexual assault does not have its place. However, changes to women’s occupational repertoires, or the sum total of occupations in which women engage on a regular basis, must also be considered to develop a robust understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault.

2.5.2 Nature of the Occupational Aftermath of Sexual Assault

Of the 26 articles included in this review, only one article (Duma et al., 2007b) addressed changes to occupational form. The remaining 25 articles addressed changes to frequency of occupational engagement alone. Although information about frequency of engagement in occupations is useful in understanding the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, it does not provide a full picture of the possible changes to the function, meaning, and subjective experience of occupations.

Despite presenting a relatively surface-level understanding of the nature of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, the reviewed articles do hint at deeper complexities. Specifically, for those occupations that were studied on more than one occasion across the reviewed articles, such as alcohol use (studied 17 times) and sexual activity (studied 6 times), reported
changes to frequency of engagement varied greatly. That is, although frequency of engagement in alcohol use was reported to increase after sexual assault in the majority of articles, no change to frequency of engagement in alcohol use was reported five times. Similarly, frequency of sexual activity after sexual assault—especially when framed as a type of health risk behaviour—was reported to increase, but in the context of an intimate relationship, was reported to decrease or to decrease and then return to “normal” after a period of time.

Differences in the reported changes to frequency of engagement across the same specific occupations (e.g., alcohol use) after sexual assault may be explained in a number of ways. For example, differences in study design, measurements used, or operational definitions employed may have influenced findings related to the nature of the changes to specific occupations after sexual assault (Gidycz et al., 2007). Still, these differences may also point to the complex, and currently unexplored, nature of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault. Research has demonstrated that women who have been sexually assaulted experience a wide range of physical, mental, and social consequences, and that responses to sexual assault are influenced by a variety of contextual factors (Boyd, 2011; Daane, 2005). It is likely that the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, or changes to occupations, experienced by individual women is also wide-ranging, unique, and dependent on context.

We argue that, in light of the insufficient exploration of the breadth and depth of women’s daily occupations, as well as the limited examination of the nature of changes to their occupations, there is a need for further study related to the occupational aftermath of sexual assault. In particular, given the potentially serious and long-lasting changes to women’s occupations, it is likely that developing a deeper understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault will have important occupational justice implications. That is, across the reviewed articles, no change to occupation after sexual assault was reported just six times, whereas some type of change to occupation was reported 32 times. Although some might argue that the changes to occupation reported across the reviewed articles suggests occupational disruption, we propose that more research is needed. Occupational disruption “occurs when a person’s normal pattern of occupational engagement is disrupted due to significant life events” (Whiteford, 2000, p. 201). However, a return to normal occupational
engagement was reported only six times; the majority of articles reviewed reported changes to occupation that did not involve a return to normal engagement. While it is possible that study design plays an important role in determining a return to normal occupational engagement (e.g., study participants were not followed for sufficient time to allow for a return to normal occupational engagement to be observed), it is also possible that changes to occupation after sexual assault are not always temporary, and that they may constitute much more serious, long-lasting changes than are typically seen in instances of occupational disruption. We propose that there is a need to more deeply explore the occupational aftermath of sexual assault not only to further develop an understanding of how women’s occupations might change after sexual assault, but also to examine the possible reasons for and consequences of these changes to occupation and how these changes might impact upon occupational justice. As the study of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault is in its infancy, the possible directions that future work in the area may take are seemingly countless. However, we argue that next steps should adopt an expanded focus on the types of occupations that may change after sexual assault, explore alternative types of changes to occupations that may occur after sexual assault (e.g., changes to the function, meaning, or subjective experiences of occupations), and consider the ways in which the occupational aftermath of sexual assault may develop over time.

2.5.3 Limitations

As with any review, there are some limitations associated with this narrative overview. Most importantly, this review was limited to articles written in English and information about the occupational aftermath of sexual assault published in languages other than English was not included. Further, the majority of articles included in this review were written by authors affiliated with American universities and research institutes. Although American culture is diverse, this review presents an understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that is primarily informed by American culture.

2.6 Conclusion

The objective of this review was to provide a comprehensive description of what is known, from the literature, about the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs in
adulthood. Although the findings of this review demonstrate that the occupational aftermath of sexual assault is addressed within the existing sexual assault literature, the understanding of the occupational aftermath that is presented is narrow and partial. Indeed, the reviewed articles only study changes to a restricted set of occupations after sexual assault, primarily measuring changes to frequency of occupational engagement without attending to other possible ways in which occupations might change after sexual assault (e.g., changes to the function, meaning, or subjective experiences of occupations). Developing a deeper understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault is imperative, as it is possible that the experience of sexual assault in adulthood may have serious implications for occupational justice. We propose that further broader examination of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault is both warranted and necessary to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the changes to occupation that might occur after sexual assault, as well as to illuminate the reasons for and consequences of these changes to occupation for women who experience sexual assault in adulthood.
Chapter 3
Preface

In Chapter 3, an analysis of four memoirs is presented. To achieve the overarching aim of this dissertation research, it was necessary to explore whether an expanded picture of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university than was presented in the reviewed literature could be found. To discern a more complete picture of the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective, memoirs about everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred while at university were analyzed using a critical occupational approach. Through this analysis, we examined how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

The manuscript presented in this chapter has been prepared for submission to the journal, *Violence Against Women*. As such, an effort has been made to sufficiently define language specific to the discipline of occupational science (e.g., occupation), and to use non-discipline specific language wherever possible (e.g., doing, everyday living, lived aftermath). However, differing from traditional manuscript formatting, I make references to other chapters in this dissertation throughout to acknowledge this next chapter’s place within the larger whole. For the referencing of published manuscripts (i.e., as in Chapter 2), both the chapter number and the formal citation are indicated. For the referencing of yet unpublished manuscripts (i.e., as in Chapters 3 through 5), or chapters that are not intended for publication (i.e., Chapter 1), only the chapter number is indicated.
Chapter 3
The Aftermath and the Aftermyth: Learning from Memoirists Who Experienced Sexual Assault While at University

This chapter has been prepared for submission as a multi-authored manuscript to the journal, *Violence Against Women*. *Violence Against Women* is an international, interdisciplinary journal dedicated to the publication of research and information on all aspects of the problem of violence against women.
3 The Aftermath and the Aftermyth: Learning from Memoirists Who Experienced Sexual Assault While at University

3.1 Abstract

Sexual assault is known to have numerous and severe consequences, especially when it occurs during university. Traditionally, these consequences have been primarily studied from a health perspective: the negative effects on physical and psychological health are well-established. However, it has been suggested that a number of the consequences of sexual assault remain “hidden,” particularly as they affect women’s everyday lives. Although an emerging body of research points to a lived aftermath of sexual assault, this topic has yet to be sufficiently explored. Current understandings of the consequences of sexual assault for everyday living are thought to be limited and partial. To develop an expanded understanding of the lived aftermath, we sought to examine how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university in their memoirs. Specifically, we turned to memoirs to explore a form of narrative engagement with sexual assault, or women’s stories about their experiences. Using a critical occupational approach, we found that sexual assault was discussed as having a life-long legacy: everyday living was described as vastly changed by sexual assault in both the short- and long-term, and occupational engagement, or doing, was constructed as a means of responding to these changes, or “getting on.” Moreover, we found that expectations for doing were implicit in these discussions of everyday living and that these expectations shaped doing. However, these expectations are restrictive and serve to position certain doings and the women who engage in them as deviant. Developing a broader understanding of “necessary” doings in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university is imperative, as is challenging these restrictive standards for behaviour.

3.2 Introduction

Sexual assault is both widespread and, disturbingly, socially tolerated (World Health Organization, 2013). In particular, universities across North America are home to an epidemic of sexual assault (Carey et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2019). Defined as any form of
sexual contact without voluntary consent (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008), sexual assault is known to have numerous and severe consequences. However, it has been suggested that a number of the consequences of sexual assault remain “hidden” (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010), and have yet to be sufficiently explored (Boyd, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011). An emerging body of research points to a lived aftermath of sexual assault, or that sexual assault holds both short- and long-term consequences for women’s everyday lives (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018). At present, the picture of the lived aftermath is likely severely constricted, given that discussions of changes to women’s everyday lives are disproportionately focused on those related to “health risk behaviours,” such as alcohol, drug, and tobacco consumption, as well as risky sexual activity (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018). Given that the university period is a time of great development (Whiteford, 2017) that holds particular significance for individuals’ life trajectories, developing a more fulsome understanding of the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university is essential. Thus, we turned to memoirs to explore everyday life in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

3.2.1 Background

Sexual assault is a serious and widespread problem worldwide (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Although individuals of all genders may experience sexual assault, it is women who continue to be primarily affected (World Health Organization, 2013). Further, women attending university are at particularly high risk (Sinozich & Langton, 2014), with an estimated one in four experiencing attempted or completed rape (Cantor et al., 2015; Krebs et al., 2016; Krebs et al., 2009; Senn et al., 2014). Many of the adverse consequences of sexual assault are well-documented; in particular, the negative effects on women’s short- and long-term physical and psychological health have been extensively researched (Boyd, 2011; Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009). However, it has been suggested that because of the nature of sexual assault and the shame, guilt, and stigma often associated with sexual victimization (Johnson, 2012), many of the consequences of sexual assault remain hidden, resulting in an underestimation of the extent of its aftermath (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). It has been argued that, despite a robust understanding of some of
the consequences of sexual assault (e.g., its physical and psychological health effects), there likely exist a number of other, significant consequences that have yet to be identified and/or sufficiently explored (Boyd, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011). In particular, the consequences of sexual assault have yet to be thoroughly examined or understood from an occupational perspective; that is, “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing, which considers the consistency and regularity of performance of the doing, the structure that the doing brings to one’s life, and the value(s) and meaning(s) ascribed to the doing by individuals and a culture” (Stewart et al., 2018, p. 3).

From the perspective of occupational science, everyday lives are understood to be comprised of “doings,” or occupations (Yerxa et al., 1990). Occupation is understood in the broadest sense of the term: “an activity or set of activities that is performed with some consistency and regularity, that brings structure, and is given value and meaning by individuals and a culture” (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013, p. 19). Occupation is deeply rooted in human existence (Clark, 2000) and is a basic human need (Dunton, 1919). Humans are “doing” beings, and this doing is a source of meaning in our lives (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013; Wilcock, 1996, 2006; Yerxa, 1998; Yerxa et al., 1990). Thus, changes to everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault have the potential to be deeply significant for the women who experience them.

Given that a reciprocal relationship between health and occupation exists (Hocking & Wright-St. Clair, 2011), the consequences of sexual assault ought to extend beyond health to include consequences for women’s everyday lives, or occupations (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018). Further, drawing upon the major models within the field (e.g., the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement [Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik, 2013]; the Model of Human Occupation [Taylor, 2017]; and the Person-Environment-Occupation Model [Law et al., 1996]), one might expect these consequences to involve changes to multiple aspects of occupation (i.e., spanning self-care, productive, and leisure occupations).

In a recent review of the sexual assault literature (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018), we found that the occupational, or lived, aftermath of sexual assault was addressed, albeit in a very limited fashion. Using an occupational perspective to reframe the findings of studies of women’s experiences of life after sexual assault, we found the picture of the lived aftermath as presented within the sexual assault literature to be narrow and partial. That is to say, the
study of changes to women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault were primarily focused on health risk behaviours such as alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking. Changes to other occupations including those related to school, paid work, and leisure, while mentioned, were only briefly discussed (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018). Given the extent of the physical and psychological health consequences of sexual assault (Boyd, 2011; Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009), as well as the established relationship between health and occupation (Hocking & Wright-St. Clair, 2011), we argue that the present understanding of the lived aftermath of sexual assault is severely constricted. We suggest that this is particularly the case when considering sexual assault that occurs during the university period.

Although the findings of our review (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018) were not specifically limited to the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, we suggest that this time period warrants particular attention. The university period marks a time of great personal and occupational development during which one’s transition from the role of student to the roles of worker and professional is supported (Whiteford, 2017). While sexual assault that occurs at any point in one’s life course may be profoundly harmful, if a woman experiences sexual assault while at university, there is the potential for her life trajectory, including her academic and career trajectories, to be significantly altered. At present, the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university is not well understood and represents an important gap in the literature.

3.2.2 Study Objective

The constricted nature of the current picture of the lived aftermath of sexual assault (see Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018), as well as the lack of understanding about the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university in particular, suggest the need for further exploration. Without this exploration, the understanding of the lived aftermath that occurs during university remains incomplete. Accordingly, we undertook to discern a more complete picture of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. To allow for a more fulsome understanding of the lived aftermath, we turned to memoirs detailing women’s experiences of their lives after being sexually assaulted while at university. We understand memoirs to be a type of autobiographical work that blurs the “boundaries between private and public, subject and object” (Miller, 1996, p. 2), and whose
focus is the recording or sketching of memory (Rak, 2004). Written autobiographical narratives such as memoirs are becoming increasingly recognized as legitimate data sources (O’Brien & Clark, 2012). In this way, the analysis of memoirs allows for the exploration of a particular facet of narrative engagement with sexual assault; that is, women’s stories of a significant life experience (Miller-Day & Hecht, 2013). Additionally, memoirs that recount women’s experiences of life after sexual assault are likely to hold information about all manner of occupations, and thus, to be particularly relevant to occupational analysis.

The objective of this study was to examine how women textually represent (i.e., write about) everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Specifically, we sought to examine: (a) women’s descriptions of what they “do” in the aftermath of sexual assault, and (b) how women discuss how they come to “do.”

Our study is informed by a critical occupational approach (see Njelesani et al., 2013). A critical occupational approach is one that is mutually informed by occupational and critical social science perspectives. An occupational perspective is defined as “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing, which considers the consistency and regularity of performance of the doing, the structure that the doing brings to one’s life, and the value(s) and meaning(s) ascribed to the doing by individuals and a culture” (Stewart et al., 2018, p. 3). A critical social science perspective is one that may be applied to an extensive field of theory and research that addresses social transformation, equity, and social justice (Guba et al., 2018). As such, a critical occupational approach may not only be employed to explore and describe human occupation, but also to examine the “assumptions and ideologies underlying human activity, how knowledge is re/produced through engagement in occupation, who controls the knowledge re-production, the mechanisms of how occupations are taken up, and who stands to gain or lose from them” (Njelesani, Cameron et al., 2014, p. 971). From a critical occupational perspective, human occupation is considered to be a site of knowledge production where meanings are both generated and contested (Njelesani et al., 2013). Further, what and how individuals choose to “do” both shapes and is shaped by social structures (Gallagher et al., 2015).
3.3 Method

As noted above, to inform our analysis of the ways in which women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault, we drew upon a critical occupational approach. However, given that we sought to examine both women’s descriptions of what they “do” in the aftermath of sexual assault and how women discuss how they come to “do,” we adopted a layered approach to analysis whereby the descriptive (i.e., occupational) and critical (i.e., critical social science) perspectives which inform in a critical occupational approach were at different times brought to the fore. Specifically, we foregrounded a more descriptive perspective when analyzing women’s descriptions of what they “do.” Similarly, we foregrounded a more critical perspective when analyzing how women discuss how they come to “do.” Although these two perspectives were alternatively brought to the foreground or shifted to the background during analysis, they were both always at play.

According to Njelesani and colleagues (2013), particular study designs are not prescribed by a critical occupational approach. We thus chose to use the theoretically flexible method of thematic analysis of narrative data (under the larger umbrella of narrative inquiry; see Bonsall, 2012), as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze the memoirs. Additionally, we complemented our analysis with memo writing (Birks et al., 2008), which is recommended when analyzing data using a critical occupational approach (Njelesani et al., 2013).

3.3.1 Data Sources

Data were gleaned from memoirs written by women who experienced sexual assault during the university period. To identify memoirs eligible for inclusion in this study, we conducted a Google search to allow for the retrieval of the widest range of memoirs. Memoirs were selected for inclusion only if they (a) were written by women who were sexually assaulted while at university, and (b) presented an account of the memoirist’s life after being sexually assaulted while at university (i.e., were not solely focused on an account of the sexual assault itself). As memoirs are considered to be a form of autobiographical narrative, fictional works were not included in this study. Using these specific criteria, four memoirs were identified as eligible for inclusion: College Girl: A Memoir by Laura Gray-Rosendale (2013), Crash Into
Me: A Survivor’s Search for Justice by Liz Seccuro (2011), Girl in the Woods: A Memoir by Aspen Matis (2015), and Lucky by Alice Sebold (1999). No other memoirs were identified as eligible for inclusion in this study.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

To analyze the memoirs, we used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method of thematic analysis, in combination with memo writing (Birks et al., 2008). Here, we first describe our process of thematic analysis, and then our process of memo writing. However, following with both thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and memo writing (Birks et al., 2008), our approach to analysis was open-ended and inductive. Although the following stages of analysis are described sequentially, they were performed in an iterative, nonlinear manner, with each stage of analysis ultimately informing the others. Further, at every stage of analysis, we considered the data with the dual perspectives (i.e., occupational and critical social science) that inform a critical occupational approach to research.

Using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) stages of thematic analysis, we began the analytical process by familiarizing ourselves with the data. In this first stage, the first author read each memoir once without making any notes. Then, the first author re-read the memoirs two more times while also engaging in the noting of initial reactions and impressions of the text. In the second stage, the first author generated initial codes. In staying close to the text, as well as in an effort to attend to the complexity of the memoirists’ accounts, the first author generated as many codes as possible without being overly concerned about how they would ultimately be grouped into themes. The initial coding process was performed manually. In the third stage, the first author re-focused the analysis from the level of codes to the broader level of themes. In considering how the initial codes might be grouped to form overarching themes, the first author transferred the initial codes to a digital format for the purposes of data organization. Using word processing software, the first author sorted the initial codes into candidate themes and subthemes (i.e., a thematic map). In the fourth stage, the first author refined the candidate themes and subthemes. The coded data extracts that made up each candidate theme were reviewed for coherence. At this time, some coded data extracts were moved to different themes. In the process of refining the thematic map and considering whether it “accurately reflect[ed] the meanings evident in the data set as a whole” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91),
the first author transferred the refined themes and subthemes onto separate pieces of paper to develop a revised thematic map. At this time, the first author discussed the refined themes and subthemes with the other authors. This led to further refinement (i.e., rearranging themes and subthemes within the thematic map), after which the fifth and final stage of naming, defining, and refining themes was completed. Again, the authors discussed each theme and subtheme, until agreement was reached with respect to the “essence” of each, and the final thematic map was developed (see Appendix I for thematic map).

In the process of memo writing (Birks et al., 2008), the first author made notes about what we term here as occupation-in-use. Given that a critical occupational approach considers occupation to be an active site where knowledge and meaning are generated (Njelesani et al., 2013), we considered what the occupations described in the memoirs were “doing.” That is, we understood, occupation-in-use to be the doing, or knowledge productive actions, of occupation in relation to its social contexts. Because humans are believed to be occupational beings within the field of occupational science (see Njelesani, Cameron et al., 2014; Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013; Wilcock, 1996, 2006; Yerxa, 1998; Yerxa et al., 1990), we drew upon occupation-in-use to acknowledge that doing, or occupation, is an important means through which humans interact with their broader environments, including social structures. All reflexive memos were developed by the first author and were used to support the generation and refinement of themes and subthemes.

3.3.3 Study “Setting”: Description of Data Sources

All memoirists were attending universities in the United States of America when they experienced sexual assault. Additionally, all were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs at the time of their sexual assault. Each of the memoirs details accounts that span the approximate length of time between the sexual assault event and publication of the memoir, which ranged from 7 to 27 years post-sexual assault.

*College Girl* was written by Laura Gray-Rosendale (2013). In 1988, while 20 years old and a junior at Syracuse University, Laura experienced stranger rape. While asleep in her bedroom one night, Laura was violently awoken by an intruder. She was horrifically beaten and raped. Upon overhearing the struggle, Laura’s roommate and neighbours called the police. The
perpetrator was apprehended while still in Laura’s house. Although the rapist was unknown to Laura, the police eventually concluded that he had been stalking her for some time. Criminal charges were filed against Laura’s rapist. Laura participated in the legal proceedings and testified in court against her rapist, who was found guilty. After taking a break from her schooling during part of the trial, Laura returned to university to complete her undergraduate degree. Laura’s memoir was published 25 years after her sexual assault.

*Crash Into Me* was written by Liz Seccuro (2011). Liz experienced stranger rape in 1984 as a freshman at the University of Virginia. While attending a party at a fraternity, Liz was drugged and raped. Although she reported her sexual assault to her university, Liz was discouraged from reporting to police. She went on to complete her undergraduate degree. Some 21 years later in 2005, Liz received an apology letter from her rapist. Shortly after, she reported her sexual assault to the police. Criminal charges were filed against her rapist. Liz participated in the legal proceedings and testified at trial. During the course of the trial, it was discovered that Liz had been gang raped, although only the one perpetrator was charged, tried, and convicted. Liz’s memoir was published 27 years after her sexual assault.

*Girl in the Woods* was written by Aspen Matis (2015). As a freshman at Colorado College in 2008, Aspen experienced acquaintance rape. On her second night on campus, she was raped in her dorm room by a fellow student whom she had met earlier that evening. Aspen reported her sexual assault to her university and the case was ruled “inconclusive” (Matis, 2015, p. 32). She left university at the end of her first year to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, leading from Mexico to Canada. Aspen’s memoir was published 7 years after her sexual assault.

*Lucky* was written by Alice Sebold (1999). In 1981, while 18 years old and a freshman at Syracuse University, Alice experienced stranger rape. While walking home from a friend’s house one night just after her first year of school had ended, Alice was brutally beaten and raped in a park. Criminal charges were filed against Alice’s rapist. She participated in the legal proceedings and testified in court against her rapist, who was found guilty. During the time that the criminal trial was taking place, Alice continued to attend university. She later completed her undergraduate degree. Alice’s memoir was published 18 years after her sexual assault.
3.4 Findings

From our analysis, a picture emerged of the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Our findings suggest that the memoirists’ discussions of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault are layered. We have generated two overarching themes to capture the dual layers of the overriding “narrative” of these discussions: (a) the aftermath: never getting over, but getting on, and (b) the aftermyth: I’m supposed to. The first overarching theme, or layer, the aftermath: never getting over, but getting on, details how everyday living, or doing, after sexual assault is described by the memoirists. The second overarching theme, or layer, the aftermyth: I’m supposed to, details the implicit assumptions about doing in the aftermath of sexual assault that underlie the memoirists’ descriptions of everyday living. Although we have categorized aspects of the discussions of the lived aftermath into two distinct overarching themes/layers through our analysis, we feel it important to note that these layers are interconnected and complementary.

3.4.1 The Aftermath: Never Getting Over, but Getting On

The memoirists discussed everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault during university as distinctly different from everyday living pre-sexual assault. In particular, everyday living was discussed as a matter of never getting over, but getting on. That is, the memoirists expressed the notion that one’s self and one’s life are changed by sexual assault, and that these changes, while modifiable, are irreversible. Specifically, the memoirists discussed sexual assault as an experience after which one was never the same: “You never get over certain things” (Sebold, 1999, p. 237). Further, the memoirists suggested that making a full recovery from sexual assault—that is, restoring one’s self and one’s life to exactly as they had existed before sexual assault—was beyond the bounds of possibility. For example, Gray-Rosendale (2013) made reference to Robert Frost’s poem, Birches, in discussing the effects of sexual assault. In doing so, she compared the aftermath of sexual assault to the damage done to birches by an ice storm: “Ice storms maim the birches, and the trees don’t necessarily recover: ‘bowed / So low for long, they never right themselves: / You may see their trunks arching in the woods / Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground”’ (p. 72).
Because sexual assault was presented as an event that was impossible to get over, the memoirists also discussed the aftermath of sexual assault as life-long:

As I had begun to speak on campuses around the country myself, and seen how students responded to me, I felt that my story, my message, was the one they needed to hear. Not just “Rape could land you in jail,” but “Rape is a horrific crime, with a lifelong impact on the survivor.” (Seccuro, 2011, p. 236)

The life-long impact of sexual assault was often likened to a scar: although the open psychic and spiritual wound would eventually close, vestiges of the damage produced by sexual assault would remain: “The scars would last long after college” (Seccuro, 2011, p. 83).

Despite suggesting that they would never get over sexual assault, the memoirists also expressed the sentiment that moving forward with one’s life after sexual assault—getting on—was possible. For example, Sebold (1999) discussed holding hope for her life, while also recognizing that her life had been irrevocably changed, and even damaged, by sexual assault: “I live in a world where the two truths coexist; where both hell and hope lie in the palm of my hand” (p. 243).

The idea that, while one can never get over sexual assault, one can get on and move forward with everyday living is further explored through two themes: (a) fractured selves, fractured lives, which describes discussions of a break between one’s self and one’s life pre- and post-sexual assault, and (b) doing to move forward, which describes how occupation was constructed as a means of responding to the changes to everyday living produced by sexual assault.

3.4.1.1 Fractured Selves, Fractured Lives

The effects of sexual assault during university were discussed in terms of fractured selves and fractured lives. That is, sexual assault was characterized as producing an irreparable break between one’s pre-sexual assault self and life and one’s post-sexual assault self and life. Specifically, sexual assault was discussed as a life-altering experience with significant and lasting implications for one’s understanding of the self. The memoirists suggested that, with sexual assault, life as they knew it ended and a different life began: “My life was over; my life had just begun” (Sebold, 1999, p. 33). As a result, the memoirists discussed their
post-sexual assault selves as distinctly different from their pre-sexual assault selves. For example, in referring to her pre-sexual assault self as the “college girl,” Gray-Rosendale (2013) wrote:

> And for a few moments I allow myself to imagine her—imagine the college girl who was me in there studying. Imagine the college girl eating. Imagine the college girl jabber-talking on the phone. . . . I catch myself thinking as the house recedes, go back, she could still be there, that college girl. But no, I realize, as we turn the corner and the house disappears. She’s gone. (pp. 253–254)

Additionally, the memoirists discussed their post-sexual assault lives as different from their pre-sexual assault lives. For example, in referring to her life before she was sexually assaulted as “old,” Sebold (1999) implied that her life after sexual assault was in some way new, and largely unrecognizable: “It was the first thing from my old life that I recognized on the other side” (p. 17).

The notion that one’s self and one’s life are forever changed following sexual assault is explored through two subthemes: (a) wearing my rape eternally, which describes discussions of the deep-rooted, irrevocable changes to the self post-sexual assault, and (b) haunted by sexual assault, which describes discussions of the life-altering changes after sexual assault, and the changes to everyday living in its immediate aftermath.

### 3.4.1.1.1 Wearing My Rape Eternally

The changes to the self, produced by sexual assault, were characterized as impossible to get over. Sexual assault was not only constructed as an event, but as a state of being: “I’m raped” (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 52). This permanence was emphasized across the memoirs. Within some accounts, sexual assault and its effect on the self was compared to a violent death: “In my mind, the rapist had murdered me on the day of the rape” (Sebold, 1999, p. 113). Presented within other accounts was the suggestion that one is branded by sexual assault: “So marked by rape, tagged by my terrible seeds of blood” (Matis, 2015, p. 114). No matter how the changes to the self were described, the sentiment that one is forever changed was common to all accounts: “She’ll wear the rape eternally” (Sebold, 1999, p. 205).
3.4.1.1.2 Haunted by Sexual Assault

Everyday living was discussed as permanently coloured by sexual assault. The memoirists suggested that their experiences of sexual assault were deeply woven into their lives: “He [the memoirist’s friend] had what I wanted – a life apart [from sexual assault]” (Sebold, 1999, p. 151). In this way, everyday living was characterized as haunted by sexual assault. For example, in referring to herself as “haunted by rape,” Sebold (1999) suggested that her experience of sexual assault was inescapable and that it shaped the way in which she lived in the everyday:

I tried to be like everyone else. During my junior year, I had given it a go. But that wasn’t the way it was going to be. It seemed I had been born to be haunted by rape, and I began to live that way. (p. 225)

Across the accounts, the sentiment that, in being coloured by sexual assault, living in the everyday was different after sexual assault: “My life was terribly altered by the fact that you raped me” (Securo, 2011, p. 12). The memoirists discussed everyday living in the immediate aftermath in terms of survival: “I’ve been trying to figure out how to just make it through each day” (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 137). Immediately following sexual assault, everyday living was characterized by a lack of doing:

Rape had shocked me like white electricity and left me hurting. . . . Small tasks became too exhausting to attempt, all good efforts seemed futile. The wound, flushed with the heat of blood, pulsing, was all that I could feel. I was swallowed inside the mute darkness that follows loss, I was fading in it. I could have passed my life staying in it. (Matis, 2015, p. 103)

The memoirists discussed everyday living in the immediate aftermath as riddled with difficulty. They described having trouble doing any more than what was necessary to make it through each day and to sustain life, such as eating or drinking: “I haven’t been sleeping. . . . I cannot recall eating or drinking much. Maybe there were bites of crackers, sips of ginger ale” (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 58). Further, the memoirists suggested that, shortly after being sexually assaulted, they were largely incapable of doing what they had done before:

I’m not capable of going to a party. I can’t walk on a street alone. I can’t go see friends or make my way to a grocery store. I can’t go to classes. I can’t do any of these things. I can’t. (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 75)
Given that the memoirists were sexually assaulted while at university, large portions of their accounts were dedicated to discussing the ways in which their school-related occupations changed in the immediate aftermath. In the relative short-term following sexual assault, the memoirists described experiencing disruptions to their schoolwork:

I can dimly recall trying to read. I know I thought I had a test to study for, that I had to read a textbook, like a college girl. At first I wasn’t sure what class the test was supposed to be in. But after a while I must have determined that it was anthropology because I began reading that textbook. I remember letting my eyes roll over those weighty names of places and people, looking at the pages with pictures. But I had to stop reading before too long, because my eyes still hurt from where he [the memoirist’s rapist] hit them. I remember not remembering anything I’d read. I have no other details I can fill in. I have nothing. (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, pp. 58–59)

Although not doing, including difficulty doing school work, was primarily discussed as characteristic of the immediate aftermath of sexual assault, and was described as lessening with time, the memoirists expressed that not doing in the short-term held serious implications for the long-term. In particular, the memoirists suggested that the ways in which they lived in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault had lasting effects for their academic trajectories: “Despite early promise, I barely scraped by in college to graduate” (Seccuro, 2011, p. 15).

3.4.1.2 Doing to Move Forward

In the aftermath of sexual assault, and with the passage of time, everyday living was discussed as an effort to move forward. That is, doing was constructed as a means of responding to the changes to everyday living produced by sexual assault. The memoirists suggested that they could not live forever as they did in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault. Discussions related to a desire to do differently—to get on with living—arose at different points in time across the accounts. For example, Seccuro (2011) discussed the urge to get on within just a few short days of being sexually assaulted:

Meg [the memoirist’s friend] and I slept that night with a dresser shoved against the door and a chair under the handle, terrified that Beebe could come back. We slept fitfully, and when we awoke in the morning, Meg insisted I couldn’t live like this. (pp. 64–65)

However, a desire to do differently was also discussed as arising months and even years after the initial sexual assault. For example, Gray-Rosendale (2013) discussed a desire to get on,
arising several years after she was sexually assaulted. Shortly after graduating from her undergraduate degree program and beginning graduate school, she suggested that she could not continue to live in the manner that she was:

What I was like in Wisconsin [at graduate school] wasn’t good. Six months after graduating from Syracuse—it was actually November 20, two years to the day from the rape—I found myself huddled in my apartment, unshowered for days . . . I was going to classes apparently. But I couldn’t remember anything at all about them. . . . That night, back in my little Wisconsin apartment, I made a decision. I didn’t know it then, but it was perhaps the biggest one of my life. I couldn’t continue to exist this way. In order to really live my life, I resolved to make some radical changes in my current situation, to embark on a quest of sorts—to try as best I could to solve the mysteries of my own past. . . . I’d continue my graduate studies at Syracuse, concentrating some of my work on the subject of rape itself and how it is treated in public discourses like law, literature, and TV. (pp. 174–175)

In these ways, the desire to get on with living, or to do differently, was not discussed as related to an exact timeline. Similarly, the ways in which the memoirists discussed getting on varied. Within some accounts, getting on was discussed as reclaiming one’s life: “I wanted my life back” (Sebold, 1999, p. 176). Within others, getting on was discussed as continuing with everyday living: “I needed to move forward” (Seccuro, 2011, p. 79). The memoirists suggested that, to get on, they could do: to respond to the changes to everyday living produced by sexual assault, the memoirists used occupation.

The notion that one can “do” to get on with life after sexual assault is explored through three subthemes: (a) living small, which describes discussions of the ways in which the memoirists constricted their doings to promote feelings of safety, (b) finding a way back to before (almost), which describes discussions of how the memoirists worked to regain a sense of normalcy, and (c) building a different life, which describes discussions of the ways in which the memoirists built a different life for themselves.

3.4.1.2.1 Living Small

Everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was discussed as a matter of personal safety. Further, occupation was constructed as a means through which safety (i.e., avoiding another sexual assault) could be achieved. The memoirists suggested that they no longer saw the world as a safe place after sexual assault, and that being haunted by rape necessitated
Discussions of everyday living were centred around doing for safety. In particular, the memoirists described altering the ways in which they interacted with others and the world around them to promote feelings of safety. In the aftermath of sexual assault, constricting one’s doings was discussed as a strategy for self-protection. The memoirists described limiting the number and type of occupations in which they engaged, with whom they engaged in occupations, and where they engaged in occupations with respect to geographical space. They suggested that safe everyday living frequently involved engaging in familiar occupations with familiar people in familiar places. For example, Sebold (1999) wrote about the ways in which she constricted her engagement in unfamiliar or now-unsafe occupations:

That’s not to say I wasn’t scared. I was. So were my parents. But we tried to work the odds. I would stay out of the park and my father would get on the phone and write letters to get me a single in Haven Hall, the only all-girls’ dorm. I would have a private phone installed in my room. I would ask to be escorted by campus security guards if I had to walk after dark. I would not go to Marshall Street alone after 5:00 P.M. or hang out. I would stay out of the student bars. (p. 92)

Similarly, Seccuro (2011) described placing a self-imposed limitation upon where she studied and with whom:

Instead of studying outside at the Amphitheatre, a popular gathering spot for those soaking up the last sun of the season and scoping out the opposite sex, I banished myself to the Cave, a smoke-filled bohemian enclave for philosophy students who listened to the Cure [a band]. (p. 73)

Seccuro (2011) suggested that she continued to constrict her doings even after graduating from university and leaving the place where she was sexually assaulted:

But mostly, I stayed home, scared that the mystery illness [anxiety attacks] would strike again. I still made it to the office and back, but there were no movies, no dinners out, no trips to the store. I became a hermit. (p. 87)

The act of moving to place distance between oneself and the location of one’s sexual assault—often on or very near to the campuses of the universities the memoirists attended—was commonly described in relation to safety. For example, Matis (2015) discussed leaving
university in Colorado, where she was sexually assaulted, for the West Coast of the United States of America to try to free herself of sexual assault’s haunting: “I had decided: I was going to hike the whole Pacific Crest Trail. I was done here, free of Colorado College [where the memoirist was raped]” (p. 47). Although Matis’ (2015) move was a large one, the implications for her everyday life still involved constricting her doings. In hiking the Pacific Crest Trail, she did similar things each day, often alone:

From California’s deserted border with Mexico, I had walked more than a marathon a day. Yesterday I had hiked twenty-five miles. Today I’d hiked seventeen miles, already. . . . For days I’d seen no one. But I wasn’t scared of the solitude. Peopleless wilderness felt like the safest place. (pp. 1–2)

The memoirists discussed the ways in which they constricted their doings, over time, beyond a limiting of their everyday routines. Strategies for self-protection through doing shifted from the micro (i.e., altering how one moves about in the world on a day-to-day basis) to the macro (i.e., making broad life choices through a lens of safety). The memoirists suggested that safe everyday living also involved how they chose educational and career opportunities, as well as romantic partners. For example, Gray-Rosendale (2013) described choosing to date men with attributes not often associated with violence or aggression: “I also make awkward, tentative attempts at dating again. And mostly it seems forced. But I try. I find that I’m newly attracted to thin, small men with kind hearts, ponytails, and impressive vocabularies” (p. 162). Similarly, Seccuro (2011) suggested that her choice of husband was influenced by a desire for safety after sexual assault. In a letter to her rapist, she wrote:

Shortly after graduating, I married a selfish, arrogant man who also went to UVA [University of Virginia], born to incredible wealth and intelligence, who wasted his life on neediness. Because of you, I married that person. Thinking I would be safe, thinking I needed marriage so early. You sound like him, although he would never have raped me. (pp. 15–16)

3.4.1.2.2 Finding a Way Back to Before (Almost)

In the aftermath of sexual assault, everyday living was also discussed as a matter of being and doing “normal.” Occupation was constructed as both a measure of normalcy and a mechanism through which normalcy could be performed. Although the notion that restoring one’s life as it had existed before sexual assault was impossible was expressed within the
accounts, also evident were discussions of a competing desire to reclaim one’s pre-sexual assault life: “[I’m] angry because I can’t seem to find my way back to before” (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 100). In discussing normal everyday living, the memoirists described the ways in which they compared what they were able to do post-sexual assault with what they were able to do pre-sexual assault. For example, in reflecting upon her everyday life at one year after her sexual assault, Gray-Rosendale (2013) wrote:

One year has passed. Am I getting better yet? I CAN . . . walk down the street in the daylight by myself, be alone in the shower or in my bed with my body, sleep a little more during the night, concentrate on my school work better, write on and on forever. I CAN’T . . . ever turn off the lights, sleep through any night without waking up seven or eight times, imagine ever dating a guy (though I wish I could), keep myself from startling at strange noises, go anywhere at night alone without running there, like someone is chasing me. (p. 158)

Living a truly normal life in the aftermath of sexual assault was discussed as something to which the memoirists aspired, but never achieved. As such, for the memoirists, normal everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault involved working to appear normal to others: “If you can’t do, mimic” (Sebold, 1999, p. 207).

To appear to live normal lives, the memoirists described drawing upon doing: “This was going to be the turnaround year. I was going to do what I called ‘live normal’ now” (Sebold, 1999, p. 204). The memoirists suggested that a variety of occupations could be used to perform normalcy. However, given that the memoirists were university students at the time of their sexual assaults, discussions of doing as normal university students do were of particular emphasis across the accounts. Expressed within the accounts was the notion that sexual assault had a significant, unmistakable influence on the memoirists’ doings during university. For example, in comparing her university experience to her sister’s, Sebold (1999) wrote: “[Your major] may be Arabic,’ I said. ‘It looks like mine is rape’” (p. 161). The memoirists suggested that the life of a raped university student was different from the life of an un-raped, normal university student. However, the memoirists also described how they worked to show others that they did the same things that un-raped university students did, and in the same manner: “I tried to let them [the memoirist’s parents] see the normal parts of my collegiate life, introducing them to friends I had made, showing them my classrooms and the places I hung out” (Seccuro, 2011, p. 79). The memoirists discussed
intentionally engaging in the occupations of normal university students in an attempt to live normal university student lives:

I had been determined not to let the rape destroy the rest of my college years, and the reminder of my time at Virginia was pretty typical. I made lots of friends, partied, dated a little bit. I went to football games and movies and fell in love with Latin American literature. I even joined a sorority, Alpha Phi. (Seccuro, 2011, p. 82)

Further, the memoirists expressed the sentiment that the promise of getting on after sexual assault laid within the doings of normal university students, in that it allowed them to perform normal everyday living. For example, Gray-Rosendale (2013) described working to adhere to the requirements of her courses, including performing in a play for credit, after being sexually assaulted:

I won’t remember what happens up there [on stage], just have the sense that it felt right and good to follow through on my commitments, that for a few moments I almost felt like a normal college girl. When I get off the stage, Mom’s there and she’s crying, saying that she’s real proud of me, and I tell myself that maybe I will be, maybe I’m going to be alright. (p. 78)

3.4.1.2.3 Building a Different Life

Everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was also discussed as a matter of building a different life for oneself. Further, occupation was constructed as a means through which a life, different from everyday living in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault, could be built. The memoirists suggested that the pathway to living out what was possible was through doing differently. For example, in describing her decision to return to university to continue her undergraduate degree, Sebold (1999) wrote: “If I returned home and lived in my bedroom, I would never know what my life would have been like” (p. 92). However, the memoirists also suggested that different pathways of doing could be followed in building a different life. One particular pathway discussed was through schoolwork: “I focused my attention on my coursework and forged forward with the rest of my life” (Seccuro, 2011, p. 81). The memoirists discussed how doing related to academics provided a way to build a life that did not entirely revolve around sexual assault. For example, Gray-Rosendale (2013) described how she was going to do and be different once she began graduate school:
I was going to the University of Houston in the fall. I was going to get an MA in poetry. I would spend the summer trying to reinvent myself. It was going to be different there. Rape would not follow me. (p. 232)

Another pathway to building a different life discussed by the memoirists involved breaking away from school-related occupations altogether. For example, Matis (2015) wrote about leaving university to hike for several months. She suggested that engaging in the new doings associated with traversing the Pacific Crest Trail would lead her to a new life:

I would walk it until it faded in the mist and lush of northern Washington, then ended. I would walk the height of the country. I would walk off my fat, my sadness, the year of my rape. The PCT [Pacific Crest Trail] would lead me to an otherworld, through the sadness I felt here, out of it. (p. 59)

Although the memoirists suggested that building a different life was possible through doing, they also expressed that the pathway to living differently was not without its roadblocks. The memoirists discussed building a different life as a learning process. For example, Matis (2015) described her use of marijuana as preventing her from discovering her best path forward:

I was disappointed in myself. Weed was an escape path I already knew was fraught. I didn’t come out here to smoke. I was on a grand walk hoping to discover my best path forward. The weed distracted me. I was wasting my own time. I was seeking answers in things that weren’t the answer. I’d tried the whole getting annihilated thing in the months after the rape – I’d even woken once in the campus hospital sick from vodka, desolate – and it got me to no place good. I didn’t feel good smoking. (p. 92)

However, the memoirists suggested that, with the involvement of others and the passage of time, they were supported to build a different life. Doing with others, including family members and friends, was discussed as an essential element to doing and living differently:

Friends old and new helped bring me out of my fearful shell. I began to go out again – to the store, the gym. I was no longer agoraphobic. I was making progress and was so grateful to have the beginning of a genuine life again. (Seccuro, 2011, p. 89)

In particular, building a different life with a romantic partner was discussed: “We were married. We were beginning to build a life together” (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 199).

Although everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was discussed as a matter of building a different life, the memoirists did not suggest that these different lives were entirely
new. The memoirists discussed drawing upon past experiences to inform the ways in which they did and lived differently. At times, the memoirists discussed drawing upon their experiences of sexual assault to inform their doings. For example, Sebold (1999) described how interacting with the justice system and participating in a criminal trial shaped what she wanted to do, and how she wanted to build a different life: “I wanted to be a lawyer now” (p. 204). At other times, the memoirists discussed drawing upon their pre-sexual assault experiences as an inspiration for doing. That is, while the memoirists suggested that it was not possible to restore one’s life exactly as it had existed before—that one never gets over sexual assault—they did discuss reclaiming aspects of their lives that had been lost to sexual assault to build a different life. For example, in describing her work writing about sexual assault, Gray-Rosendale (2013) discussed unearthing parts of her life that had been buried by sexual assault; namely, her dreams of pursuing a career as a writer:

> It means maybe there really can and will be an after, something beyond all this. It means maybe my heart and my dreams of becoming a writer one day—things I’ve wondered whether I would ever be able to unearth again—may not be irrecoverable after all. (p. 150)

### 3.4.2 The Aftermyth: I’m Supposed To

Reflected in the discussions of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was the aftermyth: the false but widely held belief that there is a particular standard of behaviour for women who have been sexually assaulted during university. That is, the notion that there are expectations for everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was reflected within the accounts. Underlying these expectations for doing was the belief that there is a correct way to respond to being sexually assaulted: “I had never been taught how I was supposed to handle rape” (Matis, 2015, p. 30). The expectations for everyday living were not always explicitly described within the accounts; however, the memoirists’ discussions of everyday living suggested that, as sexually assaulted women, there was a standard of behaviour to which they were expected to adhere. For example, in writing about helping her sister move out of her university dorm room, Sebold (1999) suggested that there are “things you do” in the aftermath of sexual assault:

> I said I wanted to see Mary’s room, see where she lived, help. . . . I crammed in the elevator with my family and Penn students going back up for another load. . . . My
memories of my family that day are splotchy. I was busy performing, thinking that it
was for this that I was loved. . . . Your sister has a dorm room for you to see. Your
mother has a panic attack to attend. Your father, well, he’s being ignorant, and you can
shoulder the burden of educating him. . . . These are the things you do instead of
collapsing in the bright sun. (pp. 54–55)

The idea that there are expectations for doing in the aftermath of sexual assault, and that
these expectations shape doing, is explored through three themes: (a) *doing safety*, which
describes the belief that sexually assaulted women should protect themselves and others, (b)
*doing normality*, which describes the belief that sexually assaulted women should attempt to
live normal lives, and (c) *doing healing*, which describes the belief that sexually assaulted
women should work to close the open wound of sexual assault.

3.4.2.1 Doing Safety

Evident within discussions of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was the
belief that sexually assaulted women should protect themselves and others. With respect to
self-protection, the memoirists expressed that the responsibility to do things that would keep
them safe laid largely with themselves. For example, in describing how she began vigorously
exercising after being sexually assaulted, Gray-Rosendale (2013) suggested that she ought to
weaponize her body to prevent a future sexual assault:

> I lift weights and I keep rowing on my machine to nowhere. I’m dedicating myself to
becoming a mini-Incredible Hulk minus the green part, because I have to be ready,
ready at any time, to fight for my life again. (p. 134)

Similarly, Seccuro (2011) suggested that reporting her sexual assault to an authority figure
was a necessary doing to achieve safety: “I knew I had to do something to help myself, that I
had to tell someone what had happened to me” (p. 54).

Discussions of everyday living not only reflected expectations for doing to protect oneself,
but also expectations for doing to protect others. The memoirists suggested that they had a
responsibility to fight for justice and prevent sexual assault: “We should forgive, but we
shouldn’t give up. We shouldn’t stop fighting for justice when a crime has been committed,
or fighting to prevent such crimes in the first place” (Seccuro, 2011, p. 240). Fighting for
justice and preventing sexual assault were often performed through advocacy work, such as
speaking out against sexual assault: “I spoke out in another way – the student press. The fight
against campus rape was very much a grassroots movement at this point. Most of all, I didn’t want other college girls to suffer similar fates” (Securo, 2011, p. 80). Further, the memoirists suggested that they had a responsibility to protect their loved ones from emotional distress. For example, Sebold (1999) discussed concealing details of her sexual assault to protect her parents and sister:

They [the memoirist’s family] had no idea, because I had not told them, what had happened to me in that tunnel – what the particulars were. They were fitting together the horrors of imagination and nightmare and trying to fashion what had been their sister’s or child’s reality. I knew exactly what had happened. But can you speak those sentences to the people you love? Tell them you were urinated on or that you kissed back because you did not want to die? (p. 61)

Despite expressing a desire to communicate the details of her sexual assault to others, Sebold (1999) suggested that to do so would be a crime: “I felt I had to say it. But I felt also that saying it was akin to an act of vandalism” (p. 68). Gray-Rosendale (2013) discussed disclosing her sexual assault to her parents, but also suggested that, in doing so, she was in contravention of what was expected of her: “Now I know that I didn’t do what I should have done. I should have kept it quiet” (p. 55).

3.4.2.2 Doing Normality

Across discussions of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault, the belief that sexually assaulted women should attempt to live normal lives was presented. However, underlying the expectation that women should try to live normally was the assumption that living a truly normal life after sexual assault is beyond hope: “All the hope I had of living a normal life had gone out of me” (Sebold, 1999, p. 219). As such, the memoirists and other sexually assaulted women were positioned as abnormal. And, while the memoirists suggested that their lives would never truly be normal, they also discussed the ways in which they were expected to pretend as if they were: “[We] who have survived sexual violence, told it’s better to keep quiet, just move on, not make a fuss” (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 112). Nevertheless, attempting to live a normal life—to keep quiet and move on—was discussed as difficult. The memoirists described bumping into the outer boundaries of normality as they moved through their everyday lives: “My heart was pounding as I crawled up the stairs to my room and
collapsed on the bed. I had been trying to act normal, to feel normal, but seeing Beebe [the memoirist’s rapist] again tore me apart” (Seccuro, 2011. p. 83).

To assess whether they were doing normally and living normal lives, the memoirists suggested that they looked to others’ reactions for clues. Looking to others to judge expectations for normal doing was primarily discussed within Gray-Rosendale’s (2013) memoir. In particular, she described the ways in which she did not meet the expectations for doing of a normal university student. For example, she described her professors’ reactions to the papers that she wrote after being sexually assaulted:

> When I’m not writing or dreaming, I’m reading or doing homework. I spend five times as long as my classmates on my assignments, over-check everything a zillion times. The papers I turn in are twice as long as the required length, and they make my professors look at me strangely, like they know something’s really off here. (p. 105)

Gray-Rosendale (2013) also described a conversation during which she discovered that her friend thought that refraining from sexual activity after sexual assault was considered abnormal:

> Jamie and I talked about sex and I told a lie. In the bar one night, Jamie asked me—it felt offhand—if I’d slept with anyone since the rape. I said no, but in that second, the expression on his face told me that was not the right answer. I rephrased, “No, don’t be silly, of course I have.” (p. 153)

The expectations related to living a normal life found in discussions of everyday living positioned certain doings as normal while positioning others as abnormal. Doings considered to be normal were discussed as acceptable to perform in public. For example, in describing how she attended classes and spent some time with friends, Sebold (1999) wrote: “I could pretend that I was a normal college coed whose life revolved as much around my classes and food runs to Marshall Street as it did a rape trial” (p. 160). However, doings considered to be abnormal were discussed as unacceptable to perform in public and were thus concealed. For example, Gray-Rosendale (2013) suggested that she knew that certain doings should not be talked about with her friends:

> Lindsey [the memoirist’s friend] knows how I won’t ever go in an unlit room by myself, how I try hard to hold my pee until it starts to get light outside, how I don’t sleep on my stomach anymore because next time I have to see him [the memoirist’s rapist]
coming at me. And she knows the knife I grabbed from her kitchen is still tucked under my pillow. But we don’t talk about these things. (p. 90)

Gray-Rosendale (2013) also suggested that she knew that other doings should not be talked about with people beyond her intimate friends and family, such as her professors:

Mr. R [the memoirist’s professor] says he’s very glad to hear I’m doing alright because he’s been worried. I say yeah, thanks, and I’ll drive back from New Hampshire [her hometown] before the semester ends to do the scene. I don’t say I won’t be able to drive myself, that I’ll have to have someone who loves me stay in the hotel with me all night long with every light on, that this someone will have to walk me to and from the class. (p. 75)

In the context of everyday living that involved a rape trial, even more stringent expectations were expressed. That is, attempting to live a normal life—to keep quiet and move on—involved demonstrating extreme emotional strength and composure. For example, Seccuro (2011) suggested that she was expected to have almost superhuman characteristics while testifying against her rapist:

As I dressed in the hotel bathroom, I laughed to myself as I was reminded of one of Ava’s favorite movies, The Incredibles. There is a scene when a character wants to morph into his superhero self. I was transforming myself into a superwitness. (p. 125)

Sebold (1999) suggested that, because sexually assaulted women were positioned as abnormal, they were expected to be good and to communicate strength of moral character through doing in particular ways:

On television and in the movies, the lawyer often says to the victim before they take the stand, “Just tell the truth.” What [was] left up to me to figure out was that if you do that and nothing else, you lose. So I told them I was stupid, that I shouldn’t have walked through the park. I said I intended to do something to warn girls at the university about the park. And I was so good, so willing to accept blame, that I hoped to be judged innocent by them. . . . I was authentic. I had been a virgin. . . . I was also a good girl, and I knew how to dress and what to say to accentuate that. That night following the grand jury testimony, I called Madison [the memoirist’s rapist] a “motherfucker” in the privacy of my dorm room while I pounded my pillow and bed with my fists. I swore the kind of bloodthirsty revenge no one thought possible coming from a nineteen-year-old coed. While still in court I thanked the jury. I drew on my resources: performing, placating, making my family smile. As I left that courtroom I felt I had put on the best show of my life. (p. 144)
3.4.2.3 Doing Healing

Evident within discussions of everyday living was the belief that sexually assaulted women should work to close the open wound of sexual assault. Closing this open wound, or healing, was not discussed as a complete and full recovery, but rather as an effort to salvage parts of one’s self and everyday life damaged by sexual assault: “You save yourself or you remain unsaved” (Sebold, 1999, p. 61). The memoirists suggested that healing from sexual assault necessitated active participation: “The fact of the matter was that I was a bit detached from my own trauma and not doing the work I should have been doing on myself” (Securo, 2011, p. 96).

Discussions of everyday living reflected the idea that healing involved preventing the wound of sexual assault from widening and spreading into all areas of one’s life. The memoirists suggested a concern for allowing sexual assault too much importance in shaping how they lived in the day-to-day: “With each step I made toward shaping a way of living with the rape, I remained wary of giving the experience too much of a foothold in my life” (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 200). Within the discussions of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault, writing was presented as a means by which one could heal. The memoirists suggested that writing about their experiences of sexual assault was required for closing the open wound:

I was going to have to write about, around, and through these things in order to reconstruct myself. . . . Eventually I was going to have to find a way to tell my story. Making narrative out of this chaos, I understood, was about to become a central focus in my life’s work. (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, p. 175)

Writing was discussed as central to salvaging one’s life in the aftermath of sexual assault:

If I hadn’t walked away from school, through devastating beauty alone on the Pacific Crest Trail, met rattlesnakes and bears, fording frigid and remote rivers as deep as I am tall—feeling terror and the gratitude that followed the realization that I’d survived rape—I’d have remained lost, maybe for my whole life. The trail had shown me how to change. This is the story of how my recklessness became my salvation. I wrote it. (Matis, 2015, p. 356)

Underlying these expectations around working to close the open wound of sexual assault, including through writing, was the belief that although everyday living is coloured by sexual
assault, it is possible for sexually assaulted women to eventually heal and thus to lead lives largely undamaged by sexual assault:

And then I began to understand and incorporate what had happened to me into other important areas of my life, building new narratives around my career goals and personal relationships. I was able to create forward-thinking versions in which I could be a writer and a scholar, not someone whose life effectively ended when she was raped. And in my own story, I could be a girlfriend and a partner, a wife, a friend, a professor, not someone who was stuck-in-trauma unlovable or forever damaged. (Gray-Rosendale, 2013, pp. 203–204)

3.5 Discussion

Our findings bring a particular picture of the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university into focus. Resonating with previous research, our analysis of four memoirs points to a broad lived aftermath of sexual assault that extends beyond changes to alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking (see Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018). Specifically, the memoirists described changes to almost all areas of everyday living after being sexually assaulted. Extending from previous research about doing after sexual assault (see Hodge, 2017; Stewart et al., 2018; Twinley, 2012; 2016), our analysis points to the layered nature of discussions of everyday living, and thus, the lived aftermath. Everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was discussed as a matter of getting on, although never getting over. In this way, doing, or occupation, was constructed as a means of getting on; that is, responding to the changes to everyday living produced by sexual assault. Further, reflected within discussions of everyday living was the aftermyth, or the false but widely held belief that there is a particular standard of behaviour for women who have been sexually assaulted during university. Our analysis suggests that everyday living is shaped by expectations for doing in the aftermath of sexual assault.

The discussions of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault provide support for the assertion that the understanding of the lived aftermath as presented within the existing sexual assault literature is constricted (see Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018). The memoirists described the ways in which doings in almost all areas of their everyday lives were changed after being sexually assaulted. Although changes to health risk behaviours (see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017) were described across the memoirs, they were not the
primary focus. That the memoirs contained descriptions of broader changes to everyday living is unsurprising, given that sexual assault is largely understood to be a traumatic, life altering event (see Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). Research exploring various types of traumatic life events has suggested that a wide range of doings may be affected (e.g., Klinic Community Health Centre, 2013; Snedden, 2012; Twinley, 2012, 2016). For example, in their integrative review exploring transition following health-related traumas (e.g., brain injury, stroke, serious mental illness) from an occupational perspective, Scalzo, Forwell, and Suto (2016) found that the effects of these traumas were repeatedly described as disruptive and life-altering. Additionally, common to these unexpected traumas was a gap in doing; transitioning to living after trauma often created “a gap between the individual’s pre- and post-trauma abilities” (Scalzo et al., 2016, p. 470).

Further, through examining how women textually represent everyday living, our findings contribute to the development of an expanded picture of everyday understandings of sexual assault’s lived aftermath. Although sexual assault is often discussed as having negative consequences for daily “functioning” (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011; see also Boyd, 2011; National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2010), functioning is often either poorly explicated or narrowly understood (i.e., as comprised of engagement in health risk behaviours). For example, although sexual assault among university women is frequently discussed as holding consequences for academic functioning, these consequences are primarily described in terms of decreased academic performance, changing universities, and/or dropping out of university altogether (e.g., Baker et al., 2016; Jordan, et al., 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Stermac et al., 2018). Although the memoirists’ discussions of everyday living included mention of changes to academic performance, consideration of a change in universities, and dropping out of university, they also included mention of other doings related to their roles as university students. Specifically, the memoirists suggested that being a university student involves studying, attending classes and parties, and socializing with peers. Thus, it may be argued that, for the memoirists, academic functioning is understood to be much broader than current conceptualizations found within the sexual assault literature would suggest.
Across the memoirs, everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was discussed as a matter of never getting over, but getting on. In many ways, this discussion of everyday living is consistent with some dominant discourses; namely, the understanding of sexual assault as traumatic. In alignment with the trauma of rape discourse (see Gavey & Schmidt, 2011), sexual assault was discussed by the memoirists as life-altering, and as having a life-long legacy. The characterization of sexual assault during university as an experience that one never gets over speaks to the magnitude of the event, as well as to the magnitude of the changes to everyday living it produces in its aftermath. Indeed, the major occupational models (e.g., the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement [Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik, 2013]; the Model of Human Occupation [Taylor, 2017]; and the Person-Environment-Occupation Model [Law et al., 1996]), would suggest that the magnitude of the changes to everyday living are directly linked to the magnitude of the changes to the person produced by sexual assault. Thus, the depth of significance of the changes to everyday living described by the memoirists point to the gravity of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Discussions of everyday living as a matter of never getting over, but getting on draw further parallels with the trauma of rape discourse (see Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). These discussions reflect the assumption that, although the wound of sexual assault is long-lasting and its scar will permanently remain, its effects will “moderate in time” (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011, p. 439). However, the ways in which everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault was discussed within the memoirs also presented a challenge to dominant understandings of the consequences of sexual assault as primarily psychological. Discussions of the memoirists’ health, including psychological health, while present, did not dominate the ways in which they discussed their everyday lives. Instead, discussions of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault were largely focused on doing.

Indeed, doing, or occupation, was constructed as a means of responding to and negotiating the changes to everyday living produced by sexual assault. As such, doing in everyday life was described as a means through which safety could be achieved, normalcy could be performed, and a different life could be built. The notion that women “do” as a form of control after sexual assault has been explored by previous research. In particular, engagement
in alcohol and/or drug consumption or eating disordered behaviours has been conceptualized as a form of pseudo-control following extreme stress or trauma (Van der Kolk, 2014). However, the findings of our analysis suggest that other forms of doing, such as doing only with familiar people in familiar places (i.e., living small), doing as a normal university student (i.e., trying to find a way back to before), and doing differently than in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault (i.e., building a different life), were understood as means of controlling everyday living.

The construction of doing as a means of responding to and negotiating the changes to everyday living produced by sexual assault carried with it expectations for behaviour, which we have termed the aftermyth. Our analysis suggests that the memoirists took up dominant discourses of sexual assault (i.e., the previously-described trauma of rape discourse; see Gavey & Schmidt, 2011) and expressed them through doing. That is, the discourses of the lived aftermath of sexual assault presented within the memoirs reflected the belief that sexually assaulted women are expected to do or behave in particular ways, and that doing in these ways will allow women to be safe, normal, and healed. The idea that there are expectations for how women should behave in the context of sexual assault is not a novel one. In particular, expectations for women’s behaviour are embedded in rape myths, or “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). Although rape myths may be endorsed across individuals, communities, and institutions (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011), there is a body of literature exploring rape myth acceptance in university student populations, in particular (e.g., Buddie & Miller, 2001; Carmody & Washington, 2001; McMahon, 2011; Navarro & Tewksbury, 2017). Typically, the behavioural expectations reflected within rape myths pertain to what women, including university students, should and should not do before a sexual assault occurs (i.e., to prevent sexual assault). For example, the rape myth that sexual assaults happen while walking home alone at night implies that women should avoid travelling alone after dark.

We suggest that the behavioural expectations for doing for women in the aftermath of sexual assault during university parallel the behavioural expectations for women embedded in rape
myths around preventing sexual assault from happening or from recurring. Forty years of research has demonstrated the many ways in which rape myths permeate broader social structures and practices, and thus operate to sustain violence against women in the form of sexual assault (Edwards et al., 2011). Given that rape-supportive discourses (i.e., rape myths) continue to compete with anti-rape discourses (e.g., rape as trauma) today (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011), it would appear that expectations for doing are influenced by both, and that these discourses are re/produced through doing, or everyday living, shaped by these expectations. Although the findings of this study point to the gravity of the experience of sexual assault as it occurs during university (i.e., the characterization of sexual assault as an event that one never gets over, but from which one gets on) and thereby contest the notion that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault, they also suggest that this notion persists and shapes women’s doings. The persistence of this notion serves to conceal sexual assault’s life-long legacy.

The memoirists’ discourses of the lived aftermath of sexual assault are found across their discussions of everyday living, and may thus be understood to reflect an internalized, idealized norm of conduct particular to women who have been sexually assaulted. However, while social norms, including expectations for doing in the aftermath of sexual assault during university, are foundational to the ways in which we make sense of the world, we argue that the particular expectations evident in discussions of everyday living found within the memoirs need not simply be accepted as natural, necessary, or normal. Because occupation and thus, everyday living, is idiosyncratic and deeply personal (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013), we assert that there exists a wide range of possible doings in which women might engage in the aftermath of sexual assault. As presented, the standard of behaviour for sexually assaulted women is restrictive, and serves to position both “alternative” occupations and the women that do them as deviant. Acknowledging the idiosyncrasy and the personal nature of everyday living is necessary if we are to challenge restrictive expectations for doing for women in the aftermath of sexual assault during university.

3.5.1 Limitations and Future Directions

We feel it important to reiterate that the four memoirs included in this study were all written by women who attended university in the United States of America, and thus reflect Western
perspectives on the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Additionally, while American culture is diverse, we acknowledge that intersectional concerns might diverge from the concerns raised based on the analysis of these particular memoirs (e.g., the experiences of women who have never attended university).

Further, it should be considered that the memoirs largely reflected a particular type of experience of sexual assault during university and life in its aftermath. Specifically, three out of four of the memoirs provided accounts of stranger rape, and thus classic rape narratives were primarily represented. Anderson (2005), along with Du Mont, Miller, and Myhr (2003), suggest that acquaintance rape, while more common in practice, is far less likely to be found in public discourse. It is important to note that the experiences presented in these memoirs are shaped by market forces associated with mass publishing and are thus edited in a way that is influenced by expectations of a publishing market. It is therefore possible that these forces serve to perpetuate the classic stranger rape narrative. Although research has demonstrated that the psychological effects (e.g., depression, anxiety) of stranger rape do not differ significantly from those of acquaintance rape (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988), exploring whether differences exist between discussions of everyday living of those who have experienced stranger rape versus acquaintance rape was beyond the scope of this study. Future research exploring the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university should include a diversity of accounts, including those that represent a range of types of sexual assault experiences, as well as those that reflect the perspectives of women who hold a range of social identities (e.g., persons with disabilities, persons whose gender identity and/or gender expression do not conform to historical and dominant gender norms, members of racialized and/or sexually diverse groups).

Last, presented within this paper are the findings of our analysis of first-person narratives, and specifically our interpretation of themes related to everyday living manifest in these memoirs. Presumably, the memoirs included in this study were not written with the explicit purpose of exploring everyday living, or occupation, in the aftermath of sexual assault. Although much can be learned about everyday understandings through the analysis of memoirs—rather than representing a passive reflection of reality, memoirs lend themselves to being open to interpretation (Trinh, 1991) and emphasize the ascendancy of the author’s
perspective (Connidis, 2012)—it is possible that important aspects of the occupational aftermath were not reflected within our analysis of these memoirs. Given that the memoirs analyzed were not specifically written with human doing in mind, it is possible that the analysis of accounts of everyday life specifically generated through the use of an occupational perspective may further contribute to understandings of the lived aftermath. Thus, we argue that further exploration of everyday living from an occupational perspective is warranted to continue to develop an expanded picture of the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

3.6 Conclusion

In undertaking this study, we sought to examine how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university within their personal memoirs. Using a critical occupational approach, we found that sexual assault was discussed as having a life-long legacy: everyday living was described as vastly changed in the aftermath of sexual assault in both the short- and long-term, and doing was constructed as a means of responding to and negotiating these changes. Further, our findings suggest that expectations for doing in the aftermath of sexual assault were implicit in these discussions, and that these expectations shaped doing. However, we argue that these expectations for doing are restrictive and position particular doings and the women who engage in them as deviant. Accordingly, we argue that further exploration of the expectations for doing in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university is not only warranted, but necessary, if these restrictive standards for behaviour are to be challenged.
Chapter 4
Preface

In Chapter 4, an analysis of interviews conducted with 13 study participants is presented. To achieve the overarching aim of this dissertation research, it was necessary to explore first-hand accounts of women’s experiences of everyday life in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred during university that were both expressly generated with human occupation in mind and were not edited in a manner shaped by market forces associated with mass publishing. We analyzed participant interviews to explore another facet of narrative engagement with sexual assault, and to continue to discern a more complete picture of the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective. This chapter represents the first part, or layer of this analysis. With respect to this first layer of analysis, we undertook to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred during university, in both the short- and long-term.

The manuscript presented in this chapter has been prepared for submission to the Journal of Occupational Science. Language specific to the discipline of occupational science (e.g., occupation, occupational aftermath) is thus used more frequently throughout this chapter than in other chapters in this dissertation. However, differing from traditional manuscript formatting, I make references to other chapters in this dissertation throughout to acknowledge this next chapter’s place within the larger whole. For the referencing of published manuscripts (i.e., as in Chapter 2), both the chapter number and the formal citation are indicated. For the referencing of yet unpublished manuscripts (i.e., as in Chapters 3 through 5), or chapters that are not intended for publication (i.e., Chapter 1), only the chapter number is indicated.
Chapter 4
Continuously Working at Living: Learning from Insiders Who Experienced Sexual Assault While at University, Part I

This chapter has been prepared for submission as a multi-authored manuscript to the *Journal of Occupational Science*. The *Journal of Occupational Science* publishes original research and scholarly papers on human occupation. This journal aims to bring important work about the form, function, performance, and meaning of occupation to a wide international audience.
4 Continuously Working at Living: Learning from Insiders Who Experienced Sexual Assault While at University, Part I

4.1 Abstract

Recent research points to a lived, or occupational, aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university that is far broader and longstanding than is generally described in the literature. However, an in-depth understanding of this aftermath does not currently exist. Given the significance that the university period holds for individuals’ life trajectories, this lack of understanding represents an important gap in the literature. As such, we undertook to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, in both the short- and long-term. Informed by an occupational perspective, we examined women’s first-hand accounts of their everyday lives after experiencing sexual assault while at university. Using thematic analysis, we found that sexual assault that occurs during university disrupts women’s everyday lives in significant and lasting ways. Although sexual assault was found to touch almost all areas of life, being sexually assaulted during university had particularly serious implications for participants’ academic and work lives. Additionally, our findings suggest that, following sexual assault, daily living becomes work and through this work a different life is built. We argue that further exploration of women’s accounts, specifically using a critical occupational approach, is warranted to attend to the social forces (e.g., expectations, assumptions) underlying women’s doings and to develop an expanded understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

4.2 Introduction

Sexual assault that occurs during university is a widespread problem (see Cantor et al., 2015; Krebs et al., 2016; Senn et al., 2014) that is known to have numerous negative consequences for women. In particular, its many adverse physical and psychological health consequences have been extensively documented (Boyd, 2011; Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009). Although less well-documented, the consequences that sexual assault holds for women’s everyday lives have become increasingly recognized (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018).
Specifically, recent research points to a lived, or occupational, aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university and suggests that everyday living is vastly changed by sexual assault in both the short- and long-term (Chapter 3). These findings are meaningful, given that the university period holds particular significance for individuals’ life trajectories (Whiteford, 2017), and that sexual assault that occurs during university thus has the potential to alter women’s futures in important ways. However, despite these findings, an in-depth understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university does not currently exist. Accordingly, we sought to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, in both the short- and long-term.

4.2.1 Background

Universities across North America have been described as being home to an epidemic of sexual assault (Carey et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2019). This is not surprising, given that women in their teens to early 20s, the typical age range of undergraduate students, consistently report the highest rates of sexual assault (e.g., Conroy & Cotter, 2017; Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher et al., 2003; Kilpatrick & McCauley, 2009; Perreault, 2015; Planty et al., 2013). Conservative estimates suggest that, in Canada, one in four women will experience attempted or completed rape while attending university (Senn et al., 2014). Similar findings about the prevalence of sexual assault among university students in the United States of America have also been published, with rates ranging from 20% to 25% (Cantor et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2000; Koss et al., 1987; Krebs et al., 2016; Krebs et al., 2009).

Given the numerous and devastating short- and long-term consequences that sexual assault may hold for women, these remarkably high rates of the sexual assault of university women are cause for immense concern. When a woman is sexually assaulted while at university, she may experience a range of negative consequences to her physical and psychological health, including physical injuries; post-traumatic stress disorder; mood, sleep, eating, and substance use disorders; and attempted and/or completed suicide (e.g., Du Mont & White, 2007; World Health Organization, 2013). Additionally, she may experience academic consequences such as decreased academic performance, changing universities, and/or dropping out of university altogether (Baker et al., 2016; Jordan et al., 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Stermac et al.,
2018). Other consequences may include isolation and ostracism from her family and/or community (Jewkes et al., 2002), lost income and/or lost capacity for future earnings (Hoddenbagh et al., 2014), and diminished quality of life (Hanson et al., 2010).

In addition to this long list of known consequences, recent research suggests that sexual assault that occurs during university also holds important consequences for women’s everyday lives (Chapter 3). Within the field of occupational science, everyday life is seen to involve engagement in a variety of occupations (Yerxa et al., 1990). In this sense, occupation is understood to refer to “an activity or set of activities that is performed with some consistency and regularity, that brings structure, and is given value and meaning by individuals and a culture” (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013, p. 19). Occupation is considered to be a basic human need (Dunton, 1919) and to bring meaning to life (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013). Indeed, Yerxa and colleagues (1990) suggest that “individuals are most true to their humanity when engaged in occupation” (p. 7). Although changes to occupation in the aftermath of sexual assault have the potential to be deeply significant for all women who experience them, we assert that these changes may be particularly important in the context of sexual assault that occurs during university. This is because the university period signals a time of great development in individuals’ lives, which supports the transition from the role of student to the roles of worker and professional (Whiteford, 2017). When sexual assault occurs during university, its consequences for women’s occupations are likely to be of particular import given that women’s occupational trajectories, including those related to their academic and work lives, may be severely altered.

Although research points to a lived, or occupational, aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 3), its extent and nature are not yet well-understood. In an analysis of memoirs to examine how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 3), we found that everyday living was discussed as vastly changed by sexual assault in both the short- and long-term, and that occupation was constructed as a means of responding to these changes. Further, we found that expectations for doing were implicit in these discussions of everyday living, and that these expectations shaped doing. However, we feel it important to note that the analyzed memoirs were not written for the specific purpose of exploring the occupational aftermath of
sexual assault. Further, it must be acknowledged that these memoirs were produced for mass market publishing and were edited accordingly. As such, it is possible that important aspects of the occupational aftermath were not recorded in these memoirs. The analysis of first-hand accounts of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred while at university generated for the express purposes of occupational analysis is limited and represents an important gap in the literature. The analysis of such accounts may contribute novel information and add to current understandings of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Accordingly, we undertook to examine first-hand accounts of women’s experiences of everyday life in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred while at university that were expressly generated for the purposes of occupational analysis, and that were not edited in a manner shaped by market forces associated with mass publishing. We thus turned to interviews with women to allow for the exploration of another facet of narrative engagement with sexual assault. In this exploration, we performed two separate, but related, layers of analysis on the participant interview transcripts. As such, different data sets, drawn from a common data corpus, were analyzed in each respective layer, where “data corpus refers to all data collected for a particular research project, while data set refers to all the data from the corpus that are being used for a particular analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Together, these two layers of analysis provided an examination of different aspects of women’s experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault, or the occupational aftermath of sexual assault. The findings presented in this paper relate to the first layer of analysis, in which a descriptive approach was employed.

4.2.2 Study Objective

To address the current lack of understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, we conducted an in-depth exploration of women’s experiences of everyday living. Specifically, the objective of this study was to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred during university, in both the short- and long-term. This study was informed by an occupational perspective, defined as “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing, which considers the consistency and regularity of performance of the doing, the structure that
the doing brings to one’s life, and the value(s) and meaning(s) ascribed to the doing by individuals and a culture” (Stewart et al., 2018, p. 3). About occupation, we believe that humans are occupational beings; that occupations hold form, function, and meaning, are idiosyncratic, and are contextually and temporally bound (see Njelesani, Tang et al., 2014; Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013); and that occupation and the self are profoundly linked (see Polatajko, 1998).

4.3 Method

Informed by an occupational perspective, we analyzed narrative data generated through interviewing women about their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred while at university. Specifically, we elicited first-hand participant narratives through the method of narrative interviewing, as per Wengraf (2001). Narrative is one of the most widely used methods of organizing human experience. Humans use narratives to make sense of what we know, what we feel, and how we experience the world (Souto-Manning, 2014). It is through narrative, or storytelling, that human experience is ordered and imbued with meaning (Bruner, 1990). Indeed, narrative is “the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11). Narrative inquiry may be used to examine the human experience (Bonsall, 2012), and was chosen as being suited to analyzing women’s accounts of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault. Further, the analysis of narrative interviews facilitates the exploration of a particular facet of narrative engagement with sexual assault; that is, women’s stories of a significant life experience (Miller-Day, & Hecht, 2013).

4.3.1 Study Recruitment and Participants

Following the receipt of institutional ethical approval, we recruited women who had experienced sexual assault while at university for participation in the study. For the purposes of this study, sexual assault was defined as any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). Individuals were eligible to participate if they identified as women, lived in Canada, could participate in an interview in English, were 20 years of age or older at the time of their participation in the study, and had experienced sexual assault while enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate university program at least two
years prior to participating in the study. We employed various means of recruitment, including postings on social media platforms such as Twitter, postings through electronic newsletter mailing lists, and snowball sampling.

We recruited a total of 13 participants. In keeping with philosophical assumptions underlying the qualitative research traditions, we were not concerned with issues of statistical generalizability nor ensuring a random representational study sample (Tracy, 2010). Instead, decisions regarding our study sample, including sample size, were dependent on a number of factors including the nature of the research topic, the scope of the study, the study design, the number of interviews conducted with each participant, and the quality of the data (see Morse, 2000). Considering these factors, Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) suggest that between 10 and 15 participants are typically recruited in most interview-based studies.

At the time of their involvement in the study, participants ranged in age from 21 to 61 years and were between 2 and 40+ years post-sexual assault. Ten participants identified their race/ethnicity as white, 1 participant identified as white and Native/Indigenous, 1 participant identified as Iranian, and 1 participant identified as mixed race. Six participants identified as straight, 3 as bisexual, 2 as queer, and 1 as lesbian. Six participants were single, 2 were married, 2 were in common-law relationships, and 2 were divorced. The majority of participants were employed, with 5 participants employed full-time and 4 employed part-time. Participants’ annual incomes ranged from approximately $20,000 to $210,000. All participants, but one, lived in Central Canada, with one participant living in Atlantic Canada. Procedures for conducting interviews with participants living in different locations across Canada are described in the following section.

4.3.2 Data Generation

Data were generated through narrative interviews with participants. In alignment with narrative inquiry, in which the ways that individuals shape their stories is of concern (Bonsall, 2012; Rudman, 2015), we used a two-phase approach to elicitation as described by Wengraf (2001). This approach allows participants the space to convey their narratives in a self-led manner (Wengraf, 2001). The first phase of the elicitation process involved an open-ended interview. In the first interview session, participants were asked to tell their stories of
everyday living after experiencing sexual assault while at university. The primary narrative prompt asked of participants was, “Please tell me the story of your life. Please include all events, experiences, and things that you have done that have been important to you. Begin wherever you would like to begin. I will not interrupt and will only ask questions once you have finished telling your story.” The second phase of the elicitation process involved a semi-structured interview. In the second interview session, participants were asked follow-up questions based on the information shared during the first open-ended interview, with the aim of eliciting further detail and seeking clarification. Both the first and second interviews ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes. All but one participant completed both interview sessions.

After each interview, the first author made detailed notes of the events, circumstances, and interpersonal dynamics that occurred before, during, and after the session. Further, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author shortly after each interview.

Verbal and written informed consent to participate in the interviews and to have the interviews audio-recorded was obtained from every participant at the beginning of the first interview session, and verbal informed consent was again obtained at the beginning of the second interview session. At the end of the first interview session, each participant was invited to answer a series of open-ended demographic questions in an effort to generate a description of the participants and to contextualize the study sample. To compensate them for their time, participants were paid an honorarium in the amount of $25 with each interview session.

All interview sessions were conducted by the first author in-person or via telephone or Skype, depending on each participant’s place of residence and personal preference. Specifically, 22 sessions were conducted face-to-face in one of two major cities in Ontario, 2 sessions were conducted via telephone, and 1 session was conducted via Skype. The interview medium did not appear to affect the interview length, nor the type of information shared by the participant.

Given that research on sexual assault constitutes a sensitive topic (Fontes, 2004), we carefully attended to ethical recommendations for the study of sexual assault (see Ellsberg &
Heise, 2005; Rosoff, 2017). For example, participants were required to be 20 years of age or older and at least two years post-sexual assault in an attempt to mitigate vulnerability and research risk. Additionally, issues of confidentiality, privacy, and potential distress or emotionality were discussed with participants prior to each interview, as well as if and when they arose during interviews. The first author debriefed with participants at the conclusion of each interview, as well as at the beginning of the second interview session, to facilitate ongoing informed consent, as well as respect for persons. Participants were frequently reminded that they were free to stop or leave the interviews, or withdraw from the study altogether, at any time without any negative consequences. A written list of sexual assault resources local to individual participants was given to all participants at the end of each interview to provide them with access to supports, should additional support have been needed by participants. Evidence of the sometimes highly emotional nature of these participant interviews may be seen in the findings presented below (e.g., the use of strong language evident within some participants’ quotes, none of which were edited to remove such language). Last, to maintain confidentiality, participants selected or were assigned pseudonyms to be used in the dissemination of the study findings. The majority of participants selected their own pseudonyms. The first author assigned pseudonyms to those participants who preferred not to select their own. In presenting our findings below, we refer to participants by these pseudonyms.

4.3.3 Data Analysis

Within narrative inquiry, a broad range of analytic strategies may be used depending on the theoretical underpinnings and aim(s) of the study (Bonsall, 2012; Polkinghorne, 1988). In this study, we drew upon the analytic strategy of thematic analysis of narrative data informed by an occupational perspective (Njelesani et al., 2013). Specifically, we followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis. Although thematic analysis of narrative data allows for the identification of recurrent patterns, as well as multiple and contradictory layers of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsiung, 2010), it can also break up and segment the narrative, thereby “sacrificing some of the meaning inherent in the structure” (Bonsall, 2012, p. 98). Following common practice in the field of narrative inquiry (e.g., Bailey & Jackson, 2003; Bonsall, 2012) we have included summary narratives for each participant alongside the
analysis presented in this paper to offset some of the segmentation inherent to thematic
analysis of narrative data (see Appendix H for summary narratives).

As per Braun and Clarke (2006), our analysis process was recursive and inductive. As such,
while we describe our stages of analysis sequentially, they were performed in an iterative,
nonlinear manner, with each stage ultimately informing the others. The first stage of analysis
involved familiarizing ourselves with the data, beginning with the first author transcribing
each interview audio recording verbatim, using word processing software. The first author
then printed hard copies of each transcript and read and re-read the transcripts several times
over while also manually noting initial ideas about the data. The second stage involved the
generation of initial codes by the first author. In staying close to the text, as well as in an
effort to attend to the complexity of the participants’ accounts, the first author generated as
many codes as possible without being overly concerned about how they would ultimately be
grouped into themes. Again, this initial coding process was performed manually. The third
stage involved collating initial codes into potential themes. The first author wrote the names
of the initial codes onto separate pieces of paper, organizing groups of codes into theme-
piles. At this time, the first author also developed a first-draft thematic map, attending to the
relationship between the initial codes and candidate themes and subthemes. The fourth stage
involved refining the candidate themes and subthemes. The first author reviewed the coded
data extracts that made up each candidate theme for coherence. At this time, the first author
moved some coded data extracts from one candidate theme or subtheme to another or
developed new candidate themes. The fifth and final stage involved further refinement of the
themes and subthemes, as well as the naming and defining of each. With the draft of the
thematic map produced through stage four, the authors discussed the themes and subthemes
to refine and clarify each, as well as to refine and clarify the relationships between themes
and subthemes. When agreement was reached with respect to the “essence” of each theme
and subtheme, the final thematic map was developed (see Appendix J for thematic map).

4.4 Findings

From the participants’ accounts of their experiences of everyday living after being sexually
assaulted while at university, we developed a description of the breadth and nature of the
changes to occupation experienced by women in both the short- and long-term. We have
captured the ways in which the participants described their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault through the overriding “narrative,” *life, irrupted*. This overriding narrative captures the storied nature of the themes generated from our analysis, which are presented below.

Although we present a description of the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university in our findings below, we feel it important to note that the overriding narrative of *life, irrupted* must be understood in relation to the “threads” of temporality and idiosyncrasy. That is to say, the participants did not discuss everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault as static. Instead, the participants’ accounts conveyed the ways in which their experiences of everyday living—and by extension, the occupational aftermath—changed over time (i.e., temporality). Similarly, although all participants described their experiences of everyday living as changed over time, the specific ways in which everyday living was changed were particular to the individual (i.e., idiosyncrasy). Accordingly, our findings reflect the temporal and idiosyncratic nature of women’s experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault.

These threads of temporality and idiosyncrasy are woven through the overriding narrative of *life, irrupted*. The threads draw out the ways in which the different themes within the narrative of *life, irrupted* are connected not only to the overriding narrative itself, but to each other. Further, these threads allow for the capturing of broad patterns of common experience (i.e., temporality), while also speaking to the nuances of individual experience (i.e., idiosyncrasy).

4.4.1 Life, Irrupted

Across the participants’ accounts, everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred during university was described as significantly altered from everyday living pre-sexual assault. The participants suggested that being sexually assaulted changed their everyday lives in lasting ways in that it not only shaped their day-to-day doings, but also contributed to shaping the course of their lives: “It severely altered the way I was going” (Butch Coriander, age 61). Being sexually assaulted during university was not discussed by
the participants as an insignificant event. Rather, the participants discussed their experiences of sexual assault as central to both their understandings of their selves and their lives. For example, in describing her experience of being sexually assaulted, as well as of immigrating to Canada, Raging Feminist (age 22) said:

There’s three parts of my life. It’s pre-Canada [before immigration], between Canada and Ottawa [the location of the participant’s university], and after Ottawa. And Ottawa is where my first sexual violence experience took place. I feel like that’s, as a person, that’s how I describe myself. Or, how I make sense of my life, to myself.

The experience of being sexually assaulted was characterized as a watershed moment. The participants described sexual assault as a major life event that signaled the beginning of a different life: “It’s the most big thing in my life. So, when I think about the question, ‘Tell me about your life,’ it always kind of starts there for me” (Rose, age 22).

In discussing the ways in which their everyday lives were different, the participants suggested that almost no area of life remained untouched. The participants described the changes to everyday living as far-reaching, with changes in one area of life often producing a cascade of changes in other areas:

After that [sexual assault], suddenly I wasn’t sleeping. And I wasn’t eating. And I barely did any school work, if any. So, my classes continued, and I wasn’t engaging. So, I was, like, a 4.0 rough give-or-take GPA. And suddenly, I was failing. So, I used to cook meals for my kids. But at this point, it became a heck of a lot of take-out. Drive through. Suddenly, I was up all night because my mind was racing, and I couldn’t get intrusive thoughts out of my head. It was just things playing over and over again. And through the day, all I wanted to do was sleep. So, I’d get up, get the kids out the door, go back to bed, and wake up when they came home. And then I’d feed them, cook them supper, and I’d go to bed when they went to bed. But then I’d wake up somewhere between 9:00 and 11:00 [p.m.] and then couldn’t sleep all night again…Because my mind was trying to resolve what happened, and I was thinking, I was just in overdrive. And, next thing I knew, it was 3:00 a.m., 4:00 a.m., 5:00 a.m. And then the alarm was going off at 6:00-something [a.m.] to get the kids out the door and I hadn’t slept yet. So, it was just total, total chaos. (Elizabeth, age 40)

Across the participants’ accounts, the ways in which the area of academic life was changed by sexual assault was particularly evident. The participants described the ways in which their academic lives were changed in the shorter-term, immediately after being sexually assaulted:
I failed ten courses at [the participant’s university] . . . And I don’t know why I was still in school, because I clearly should not have been. I wasn’t functioning well . . . After [being sexually assaulted], I stopped going to classes” (Raging Feminist, age 22).

However, they also described the ways in which their academic lives were changed over the longer-term. For example, Lucy (age 23) discussed the ways in which the influence of sexual assault reverberated through her academic life for years: “Two years after the assault happened, I’m still feeling reverberations through my academic life.” Additionally, the participants suggested that changes to their academic lives in the short-term (e.g., not attending classes in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault) were related to changes to their broader academic and career trajectories over the long-term:

“I don’t even have my degree. I don’t know what I’ll be, when I will be able to have it . . . It’s going to take me 10 years to get a degree. And that’ll impact the jobs I’ll be able to take on. (Raging Feminist, age 22)

Beyond shaping their academic and career trajectories, the participants expressed that experiencing sexual assault contributed to the shaping of their overall life trajectories: “It’s totally shifted my life course” (CeCe, age 29). In addition to discussing everyday living as changed in both the short- and long-term, the participants suggested that the particular ways in which everyday living was changed were not fixed over time. That is, the participants discussed how everyday living “looked” different at different points in time in the aftermath of sexual assault: “The way my day looks is so much different than what it did pre-assault, immediately post-assault, and then now” (CeCe, age 29).

Within the overriding narrative of life, irrupted sit three themes: (a) the irruption: a different perspective, which describes the ways in which the participants characterized sexual assault itself, (b) the initial aftermath: getting by, but not living, which describes how the participants characterized everyday living in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault, and (c) the protracted aftermath: continuously working at living through occupation-in-conscious-use, which describes how the participants characterized everyday living in the more distant aftermath of sexual assault.
4.4.1.1 The Irruption: A Different Perspective

Sexual assault was described by the participants as changing their everyday lives in ways both sudden and significant. The experience of sexual assault during university was discussed as one that violently burst into the participants’ everyday lives and thus, held consequences for how they lived in both the short- and long-term. At times, the participants characterized sexual assault and its consequences for everyday living as disruptive. They suggested that, although rapid in their development, some changes to everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault were temporary. For example, June (age 33) discussed feeling as though she was in the process of moving past her experience of sexual assault: “That year just sort of stands still in my mind. And I remember all those things. Those shitty experiences. And I think I’m a lot more past it now.”

The participants more often characterized sexual assault and its consequences for everyday living as irruptive. Sexual assault was largely discussed as a sudden invasion into the participants’ everyday lives: “Violence in your life, it becomes, by necessity, because it’s a traumatic event, and ‘boom!’ You know? It’s like you’re going along, you’re going along, and ‘boom!’” (Butch Coriander, age 61). As such, the participants suggested that the changes to everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault were not temporary, but lasting. In particular, the participants expressed that they developed a different perspective on life after being sexually assaulted, and characterized this change as one that could not be undone:

It was kind of one of those things. It really just changed how you think about everything. You kind of know. You hear about these things. But then when it happens to you, for me, there wasn’t a way to undo it. You know? It’s like you’ve opened that box. You can’t close it now. (Alana, age 34)

Further, the participants suggested that this different perspective coloured the ways in which they lived, as well as how they understood everyday living: “It [sexual assault] has to be seen as part of what’s going on in the day-to-day” (Butch Coriander, age 61).

4.4.1.2 The Initial Aftermath: Getting By, but Not Living

Everyday living in the immediate aftermath was discussed by the participants as a response to the irruption that was sexual assault. This response involved a focus on getting by. In
particular, the participants suggested that, as compared to their lives prior to being sexually assaulted, everyday life was dramatically different in the immediate post-sexual assault period. Specifically, the participants expressed that everyday living in the immediate aftermath was not really living at all. That is, although the participants described doing in the initial period after being sexually assaulted, they suggested that this doing was not quite the same as living:

I felt like I wasn’t existing. I was responding, but I wasn’t existing. I wasn’t living. I figured if I could just be, then I could bake a cake again and enjoy it. And I could put up my Christmas tree and light the candle. (Elizabeth, age 40)

In this way, the participants discussed doing in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault as responding to being sexually assaulted. The participants characterized this response in relation to doing for everyday survival. The participants described the ways in which everyday living centred around simply getting by after being sexually assaulted: “I was pretty much just getting by I’d say. In terms of actually living . . . It was a very narrow existence. Just getting the bare necessities of everyday life at that point, I would say” (CeCe, age 29).

Although a focus on getting by was evident across the participants’ accounts, the particular ways in which the participants described what and how they did to get by differed. These differing descriptions of doing in getting by were reflected within different patterns of changes to one’s level of occupational engagement in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault discussed by the participants. These changes spanned a continuum of hypo-engagement, characterized by a sharp decrease in engagement relative to pre-assault, to hyper-engagement, characterized by a sharp increase in engagement relative to pre-assault.

The different ways in which the participants discussed doing to get by are explored through three subthemes: (a) hypo-engagement: doing less, which describes the ways in which the participants reduced their engagement in occupation, (b) hyper-engagement: doing more, which describes the ways in which participants increased their engagement in occupation, and (c) stable engagement: doing the same, which describes the ways in which participants maintained a fixed level of engagement in occupation.
4.4.1.2.1 Hypo-Engagement: Doing Less

At one end of this continuum was a change in level of engagement that may be characterized by hypo-engagement, where the participants did very little (i.e., stopped doing most things): “I was going full-tilt and it came full-stop for me” (Elizabeth, age 40). In particular, participants discussed the ways in which, in getting by, they decreased the frequency with which they performed particular occupations. Often, the participants’ accounts reflected a decreased frequency of performance of a wide range of occupations. For example, Alana (age 34) discussed largely ceasing her performance of school-related occupations, as well as a variety of occupations related to self-care:

After the assault, forget it. I didn’t even try to take care of myself. I didn’t shower. I barely brushed my teeth. I just could not care less. Didn’t go to school. Really just slept a lot and smoked a lot of weed.

The participants often discussed their reduced performance of self-care occupations in relation to looking to create distance from one’s body, or feeling divorced from one’s body: “I think the biggest thing was, um, divorce from my body. Just not caring about it very much. Um, not taking care of myself” (Butch Coriander, age 61). However, in discussing what they did not do in the period immediately following sexual assault, the participants did not suggest that they stopped doing completely. Instead, they described how, in decreasing the frequency with which they performed more “active” forms of doing, they also increased the frequency with which they performed less active forms of doing: “I used to sleep a lot at [university]. Like, 16, 18 hours a day. I mean, if I wasn’t eating, I was sleeping” (Raging Feminist, age 22).

4.4.1.2.2 Hyper-Engagement: Doing More

At the other end of this continuum was a change in level of engagement that may be characterized as hyper-engagement, where the participants greatly increased their level of doing. In particular, participants discussed the ways in which, in getting by, they increased the frequency with which they performed particular occupations. Often, the participants’ accounts reflected an increased frequency of performance of a singular occupation or a small group of related occupations. For example, CeCe (age 29) discussed performing occupations related to advocacy work at an increased frequency after being sexually assaulted: “It was
just that constant working as a coping mechanism. Talking about sexual assault, writing about sexual assault, organizing day in and day out. That’s all I was doing.” Given their singular focus on particular occupations, the participants discussed the ways in which an increase in some types of doing was accompanied by a decrease in other types of doing. For example, in discussing her increased performance of school-related occupations in the immediate time period following sexual assault, Rose (age 22) also described experiencing changes to other areas of doing:

Everything was written off except for schoolwork. I would never sleep. I would literally sleep three or four hours a night. And I would just work day in and day out. I would be on every extracurricular, on every club. Working my ass off in every class to get the best marks that I could. And, it turns out, that’s the beginning of the semester after all the original stuff went down, I had the best grades of my life. I kind of feel like that seems counterintuitive. You know? Something bad happens to you, and I guess that was just how I coped.

4.4.1.2.3 Stable Engagement: Doing the Same

Some participants operated between the two ends of this engagement continuum, in that they purposely did not change their level of engagement. Participants discussed the ways in which, in getting by, they maintained the frequency with which they performed occupations. That is, participants suggested that they performed the same occupations at the same frequency as they had done prior to being sexually assaulted, or attempted to do so:

I acted like nothing different ever happened. I got up and went to school every day. I don’t remember the details of what my life was like, but I remember it being the same. Or, me trying to act like nothing had ever changed. (Laila, age 49)

The participants suggested that doing or trying to do in the same way as they had done before was a means of also getting by after being sexually assaulted: “This was so stupid that this happened. Better not let it, better not even miss Monday’s classes” (Laila, age 49).

4.4.1.3 The Protracted Aftermath: Continuously Working at Living Through Occupation-in-Conscious-Use

Everyday living in the more distant aftermath of sexual assault was characterized as a form of labour. The participants suggested that, after some time had passed, they felt a desire to move from simply responding to living once more. The participants suggested that they could
get back to living and rebuild one’s life through doing. However, in the aftermath of sexual assault, everyday living was discussed as now requiring intentional effort, or the conscious use of occupation.

Specifically, the participants suggested that how they lived in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault was not “normal.” As such, they expressed a desire to recapture normal everyday living after some time had passed since being sexually assaulted: “I’m just trying to get back to having a normal, what I call a ‘normal person life.’ Which I feel like I absolutely did not have for so long” (Elizabeth, age 40). Across the participants’ accounts, the notion that it is possible to build a life different to the one lived in the initial aftermath was expressed: “This is my new life. I’m in Toronto now. I have new friends” (Rose, age 22).

The participants suggested that the way to move forward and build one’s life was through occupation: “I need to just keep my head down and work and get through all of this” (June, age 33).

The participants expressed the sentiment that building a life through occupation was no small feat. The participants discussed the ways in which, after being sexually assaulted, everyday living had become a chore. They suggested that doing, even in the most ordinary of ways, required extra effort: “Everything just became a chore. Like eating. And then sleeping. But then not being able to sleep. And then being exhausted all day” (CeCe, age 29). Still, the participants discussed the ways in which, with the passage of time, they consciously engaged in occupation to live differently. For example, Elizabeth (age 40) described how shopping for groceries and getting dressed were acts of life reclamation:

So, my hair was up, and I was in bed, and in sweats, and I didn’t leave the house. And then when I started to go, “I can do this. I can go grocery shopping today. I can put on jeans. And I can, you know, I might actually want to put my hair down today.” So, the act of doing things was a little bit of control, too. It was me reclaiming my life. Like, “You’re not going to, you’ve taken too much from me. You’re not going to take this. I’m taking it back.”

Although the participants discussed consciously using occupation to rebuild their lives across their accounts, they discussed doing in different ways and at different points in time in the aftermath of sexual assault. The different ways in which the participants discussed consciously using occupation over time are explored through three subthemes: (a)
(re)establishing daily routines: caring for oneself, (b) searching for safety: interacting with others and one’s environment, and (c) propelled into new life choices: shifting one’s trajectory. While the different ways in which the participants worked to build a life are described sequentially, the participants suggested that this work was ongoing.

4.4.1.3.1 (Re)Establishing Daily Routines: Caring for Oneself

In working at living, the participants discussed first consciously doing to develop routine by establishing or re-establishing engagement in routine daily occupations, particularly those related to caring for the self. These routine, daily occupations, which we have characterized as micro occupations, may be understood as the foundational doings which, taken together, sustain life. In discussing the re-establishing of daily occupations, the participants suggested that part of the process could simply be attributed to the passage of time: “I’ll have a shower if I need to, or every other day. And it’s weird. It’s the natural progression of time that I’m just starting to go back to normal daily routine” (Raging Feminist, age 22). However, the participants also suggested that a large part of re-establishing routine involved consciously engaging in self-care occupations. The participants described the ways in which occupations that were once almost automatic now required effort to do:

Taking care of myself. Learning to cook. Just being really kind to myself. Washing my face, brushing my teeth, you know, all those things that you kind of don’t really think about after experiences of trauma. Which I really had to, like, I write out for the week goals. Like, “OK. You’re going to wash your face every, two times a day. Are you going to?” Because it was really hard just to maintain any sort of routine. (CeCe, age 29)

In this way, the participants expressed the sentiment that re-establishing routine in the aftermath of sexual assault was an act of re-learning. For example, Elizabeth (age 40) likened re-establishing routine through daily occupation to learning to walk again:

Right now in my life, I’m focused on just getting control of those basic things of my life again . . . Just trying to grasp those basic life things all over again . . . And now, I’ve started, I feel like a kid learning to walk again. Is sort of how it feels. I’m doing simple recipes. I might actually get my dishes done every night instead of, “Oh, I’ll get to it tomorrow.” Or, the laundry is manageable instead of, “Oh, we desperately need to do it because somebody’s out of something.” We’re starting to form new routines. The routines that I would have had before, I’m starting to gain them back. I’m getting there.
Further, the participants suggested that, after being sexually assaulted, doing took on new meaning. Engaging in daily occupations was discussed as a means of measuring one’s level of success in re-establishing routine:

As long as I put on clean [pyjamas] every day, I’m not that depressed. So, I would be moving from one set of sleep clothes to clean ones. And that was a huge accomplishment for me at the time. And now, I actually try to get up and put on jeans. And maybe a blouse. (Elizabeth, age 40)

In addition to describing the ways in which they took up daily occupations in which they had engaged prior to being sexually assaulted, the participants also described how they took up new occupations in an effort to establish routine:

In terms of doing well, I’m talking about, I was able to get through the day. And shower. I would probably buy most of my meals. Because I wasn’t really having the energy to cook or do other things. But then when I had this little puppy, all I wanted to do was take care of her. But it was good. Because I took her to puppy school. And so, I was forced out of the house to do activities having to care for this dog. I was exercising every day. Taking her to the park . . . So that was nice. And gave me some routine. (CeCe, age 29)

Importantly, the participants did not always discuss the re-establishing of routine as a linear process. Instead, some participants suggested that they experienced a context-dependent regression in routine. For example, Frances (age 25) described how she experienced disruptions to the routine that she had worked to re-establish each year around the anniversary of her sexual assault. Further, she discussed the ways in which her partner carried much of the labour of living during that time:

There are definitely times of year where he takes a more active role in taking care of me. I find life to be quite hard to live. Just because it’s the same period of time from when I was involved with [the perpetrator]. [The participant’s partner] will make sure there’s food for me to eat around. He’ll plan a really low-impact activity for us to do.

As such, although the participants discussed re-establishing routine as a first step toward building a life, they suggested that this work was lasting. The participants described continuously working for years to ensure that they cared for themselves each day. For example, at approximately 40 years post-sexual assault, Butch Coriander (age 61) described how she consciously worked to maintain routine through engaging in self-care occupations on a day-to-day basis:
I have to make a routine. If I get out of my routines and don’t make it part of my routine to take care of myself, I can very easily stop taking care of myself. And I do attribute that to being a survivor of sexual violence. Just forgetting that my body needs taking care of. And that it’s not to be abused and forgotten about.

4.4.1.3.2 Searching for Safety: Interacting with Others and One’s Environment

Across their accounts, the participants discussed consciously altering the ways in which they interacted with others and with their environments while doing as time passed. The occupations involved with interacting with others and one’s environment, which we have characterized as meso occupations, may be understood as doings that support individuals to move about the world. Specifically, the participants discussed modifying their doing with others or while out in the world in relation to safety. The participants suggested that, after being sexually assaulted, their perspective on interacting with the world around them had shifted: “It just makes me more kind of cautious in how I move about the world” (Rose, age 22). The participants expressed the notion that, through modifying the ways in which they interacted with their environments or with other people, they could improve their safety:

I was looking through the world at, with this really particular view of what might happen. I had this idea of, “Well, if it can happen, it can happen again. You have to be careful around guys because it could just happen again if you’re not careful.” And I tried to modify my behaviour in ways. I stopped doing things that I considered irresponsible. I wouldn’t go out super late at night by myself. (Alana, age 34)

As a result, the participants described consciously altering the ways in which they moved about in the world. For example, Frances (age 25) described how she modified how she travelled in her neighbourhood, whether walking or using public transportation:

The idea of being out alone at night was frightening and induced anxiety in me no matter where I was. So, even travelling between my friends’ houses in the suburbs, like, if I was walking around there, or waiting for buses on street corners in the suburbs, where really, there’s practically nobody around, was still not something that I really enjoyed doing and would try to avoid, not at all costs, but I would try to avoid.

Similarly, Natalie (age 21) described the ways in which she adapted to travelling at night: “When I call my mom and I’m walking home by myself at 9:30 [p.m.], and she doesn’t let me go until I’m home. Because she’s scared for my safety.”
In addition to altering the ways in which they moved about in the world, the participants discussed modifying how they interacted with others, as well. For example, participants expressed that attending parties with friends, while something they had once enjoyed, was no longer seen as safe after sexual assault. That is, the participants suggested that the meaning of attending parties changed: “I hate going to parties. Most of the time, parties are my trigger” (Natalie, age 21). However, the participants expressed that modifying the ways in which they travelled or interacted with others held consequences for their relationships with other people. In particular, discussions of changes to friendships were evident across the participants’ accounts. For example, Frances (age 25) described the ways in which her friendships changed in the aftermath of sexual assault:

There was tons of stuff I didn’t go to, just because I didn’t know who was going to be there, or I didn’t have confirmation that I could travel with somebody there or back. A lot of my friendships kind of stepped down a peg.

Similarly, Rose (age 22) discussed how her friendships deteriorated after she stopped attending parties:

My friends kind of all went away. And they tried to be there for the first little bit, and then I guess it became too exhausting. And, I wasn’t very social anymore. So, after a while they kind of thought, “Ok. She’ll be over it by now.” And would invite me out. And I was just not interested. So, eventually those friendships just fell away. Just fell apart. And I never spoke to them again.

Further, the participants suggested that they altered the ways in which they engaged in romantic relationships in an attempt to be and feel safe. Like attending parties with friends, participants described engaging in romantic relationships as something that they had once done, but no longer felt safe doing after being sexually assaulted:

I couldn’t engage in sexual relationships. At all. I couldn’t, I didn’t go on dates, I didn’t pursue, that was repulsive to me. That was something that I directly thought related to that [being sexually assaulted]. I just didn’t trust that I could articulate a “no” if I didn’t want to be doing something. So, I just stopped doing that. I guess that’s a big part of lots of people’s lives is that they have a partner or a sort of sexual exchange. I just didn’t, that wasn’t for me. (Fiona, age 27)
Propelled into New Life Choices: Shifting One’s Trajectory

With even greater passage of time, in working at living, the participants discussed consciously shifting their life trajectories through making important choices about one’s schooling or career or one’s life roles. The occupations related to one’s academic or work trajectories or one’s broader life roles, which we have characterized as macro occupations, may be understood as the more advanced doings that support personal development and growth, and that more broadly shape how one interacts with society. For example, the participants discussed the ways in which, after being sexually assaulted during university, they altered their academic and career choices. The participants described the ways in which they used their experiences of sexual assault to inform the paid or school-related work in which they engaged: “I conducted this workshop with other groups. And, so, it was kind of a way for me to use that experience and actually teach other people how to treat others” (Jessie, age 31). As such the participants suggested that they eventually developed new academic and career paths. For example, Rose (age 22) attributed her choice to shift her academic focus and eventual career path to being sexually assaulted during university:

So many big things in my life have come as a result of this experience. Because, not just because specifically of it being a sexual assault, but it, just going through that stress period. I always had good grades. But my grades were next-level afterwards. Because of this whole thing about me throwing myself into my work. And so, I don’t think I would have even got into law school if it wasn’t for this happening . . . That experience of assault 1,000% propelled me into this career, otherwise I would not be doing it.

Further, the participants expressed that these shifts to their academic and career trajectories were long-lasting. Specifically, the participants characterized their altered choices about their schooling or career as an enduring aspect of sexual assault’s occupational aftermath: “Big life changes, like changing my career, you know? But as far as the everyday stuff, I guess, not so much. Or, not so much anymore” (Rose, age 22).

In addition to describing how they altered their academic and career choices, the participants also discussed the ways in which being sexually assaulted shaped their broad life roles. In particular, the participants suggested that they made conscious choices related to their roles as romantic partners and family members in the aftermath of sexual assault. For example, Frances attributed her choice of husband to her experience of sexual assault: “It definitely
was why I chose my husband... I have had this thought several times where if [the perpetrator] hadn’t raped me, I kind of actually don’t think [the participant’s husband] and I would be married” (Frances, age 25). Similarly, Jessie (age 31) described how being sexually assaulted shaped her thinking around choosing to have children and take on the role of mother:

I don’t know if I want to have children or not. And when I think about my future, I also think about parts of my life. And my sexual assault in terms of whether I would want to bring someone into the world, especially a girl, where they had to deal with this shit. And this is unfortunately part of this world. It’s the scar of this world.

4.5 Discussion

In this study, we used an occupational perspective to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university in both the short- and long-term, as described within women’s first-hand accounts of their experiences of everyday living. Our findings suggest that sexual assault that occurs during university disrupts women’s everyday lives in significant and lasting ways. The participants expressed that, after being sexually assaulted, they developed a different perspective on life, which held implications for how they lived in the day-to-day. Evident across the participants’ accounts was that sexual assault touched all areas of their everyday lives from the micro (i.e., daily routines) to the macro (i.e., life trajectories), but that the specific changes to everyday living varied across both time and individuals. Finally, the participants described the ways in which, after being sexually assaulted, they consciously used occupation to build a different life.

The findings of this research add to the growing body of support for the existence of an occupational aftermath of sexual assault (see Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018; Chapter 3). Additionally, our findings resonate with previous work (e.g., Twinley, 2012, 2016) which suggests that sexual assault leaves almost no area of everyday life untouched in its aftermath. Specifically, Twinley’s (2012, 2016) findings, which point to the devastating consequences that woman-to-woman rape and sexual assault may have on the occupations of care, caring for others, work, and leisure, as well as on occupational roles and relationships, are echoed in the findings of this study.
Additionally, the findings of our study point to the particular significance of experiencing sexual assault within the context of university. Although the findings of this study support previous work which suggests that everyday living in the short- and long-term is vastly changed in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 3), our findings particularly highlight the ways in which sexual assault may specifically shape women’s schooling in the short-term, and their academic, career, and even broad life trajectories over the longer-term. Consistent with Hodge’s (2017) work, which explores women’s lived experiences of daily occupations while in university after sexual assault, our findings reflect the changes to work, self-care, and sleep routines, as well as challenges with academics and the interruption of social patterns, experienced by participants.

Importantly, the findings of this study build upon Hodge’s (2017) research, in which the study of participants’ experiences of daily occupations did not extend beyond the university period, despite that sexual assault is known to hold both short- and long-term consequences (Du Mont & White, 2007; World Health Organization, 2013), and its aftermath is often considered to be life-long (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). Specifically, in exploring women’s experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university over the longer-term (i.e., participant interviews took place between 2 and 40+ years post-assault), our findings highlight the significant implications for women’s occupational trajectories. Across the participants’ accounts, discussions of changes to academic and work life abounded. Participants explicitly attributed lasting shifts in their academic and career choices to the experience of sexual assault. Ultimately, these findings suggest that sexual assault that occurs during university has the potential to alter women’s occupational lives and futures in important ways and supports the notion that the university period is a time of critical occupational development and transition (see Whiteford, 2017).

These findings serve to reinforce the gravity of the experience of sexual assault, especially as it occurs during university. Specifically, the participants characterized the experience of sexual assault as more than a minor perturbation. Instead, they suggested that sexual assault was a life-altering experience and that its reverberations could be felt throughout their lives for years. Although some scholars have argued that discussions of the life-altering nature of sexual assault dominate current everyday understandings of sexual assault (e.g., Gavey &
Schmidt, 2011), our previous work suggests that the notion that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault persists (see Chapter 3). The findings of this study point to the potential for sexual assault to produce severe harm to those who experience it, in that the participants described their lives as significantly altered by sexual assault during university. To wit, our findings suggest that, following sexual assault during university, life is not only disrupted but irrupted: women’s occupational lives may be suddenly and violently changed by sexual assault.

In addition to highlighting the significant short- and long-term occupational consequences of sexual assault, our findings suggest that the occupational aftermath of sexual assault follows a particular temporality. In the immediate aftermath, the participants suggested that their lives were so severely disrupted by sexual assault that everyday living was focused on getting by. After time, in the more distant aftermath, the participants described the ways in which they first began to re-establish daily routines of self-care, then started to interact with others and the world around them within a framework of safety, and finally shifted their doings in the broader occupational areas of school and work, as well as family roles, which we have characterized as micro, meso, and macro occupations, respectively. This particular temporal pattern is reminiscent of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of human needs, which contends that an individual is motivated to meet basic psychological and safety needs before attending to higher levels of need. That is to say, these findings of this study would seem to suggest that there is a similar hierarchy of human occupation: in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, the participants first engaged in those occupations foundational to the sustenance of life, then those occupations that support one to move about the world, and finally those occupations that support personal development and growth, and that broadly shape how one interacts with society. The notion that Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of human needs may be applied to the study of human occupation has been previously raised by such scholars as Wilcock (1993). Indeed, drawing upon Maslow’s (1943) work, Wilcock (1993) proposes three major functions of human occupation: “to provide for immediate bodily needs of sustenance, self care and shelter; to develop skills, social structures and technology aimed at safety and superiority over predators and the environment; and to exercise and develop personal capacities enabling the organism to be maintained and to flourish” (p. 20). These functions of human occupation parallel the findings of our study and point to a hierarchical
ordering of occupation (i.e., micro, meso, macro) in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. That is, following such severe disruption to occupation, (re)engagement in micro occupations is first addressed before (re)engagement in macro or even meso occupations is addressed.

Further, these findings also echo aspects of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1995) ecological systems theory, which proposes that human development is shaped by the interaction between the individual and his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1995) work has been used to inform an understanding of human occupation (e.g., Dunn, Brown, & McGuigan, 1994; Howe & Briggs, 1982; Law et al., 1996), as well as an understanding of the consequences and responses to sexual assault (e.g., Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Neville & Heppner, 1999; Wadsworth, Krahe, & Searing, 2018). This consideration of human ecology present within the occupational science and sexual assault literatures acknowledges that human occupation and responses to sexual assault do not occur in a vacuum but are instead a product of the individual in context (see Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Dunn et al., 1994; Howe & Briggs, 1982; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Law et al., 1996; Neville & Heppner, 1999; Wadsworth et al., 2018). With respect to the findings of this study, participants’ engagement in micro, meso, and macro occupations over time suggest a constricted interaction with one’s environment in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault (i.e., limited to one’s immediate surroundings, or microsystem), that gradually expands in the more distant aftermath of sexual assault (i.e., to include one’s community, or mesosystem, and the broader society, or macrosystem).

Despite that the occupational aftermath appears to follow a particular pattern over time, our findings also suggest that the aftermath is idiosyncratic. By this, we mean that the specific changes to everyday living experienced by the participants were highly individual. Although changes to broad areas of occupation were identified (i.e., changes to school, paid work, volunteering, caring for the self, caring for others, leisure, and social relationships with acquaintances, friends, family, and intimate partners), the particular changes to specific occupations within these broad areas varied greatly from participant to participant. It was only when examining changes to the participants’ occupations over time—within a framework of temporality—that an identifiable order emerged.
This finding is consistent with other studies of human occupation that have been framed in chaos theory (e.g., Davis, 2009; Elliott, O’Neal, & Velde, 2001; Haltiwanger, Lazzarini, & Nazeran, 2007; Ikiugu, 2005), and hints at its potential usefulness in understanding the occupational aftermath of sexual assault. Alternatively referred to as complexity theory (Goldstein, 1995), chaos theory is used to study complex systems. Briefly, chaos theory purports that there is hidden order in chaos. In cases of disorder, chaos theory suggests the presence of an underlying pattern of order (Coffey, 1998).

Although chaos theory is a mathematical one, its principles have been used metaphorically to study phenomena within the social sciences and humanities (e.g., Byrne, 1998; Eve, Horsfall, & Lee, 1997; Kiel & Elliott, 1996). Indeed, the notion that chaos theory may be used to inform the understanding and study of human occupation is not novel. In her Eleanor Clarke Slagle lecture, Royeen (2003) urged occupational scientists and occupational therapists to “move from the lens of linearity to the kaleidoscope of chaos in occupational science and occupational therapy” (p. 613). She argued that linear scientific methods do not adequately capture the complexity of human occupation and occupational performance; thus, Royeen (2003) proposed that chaos theory was the “missing link to help integrate our science and our profession” (p. 613). Since then, other occupational science scholars have also highlighted the applicability of chaos theory to the study of human occupation (e.g., Eakman, 2007; Fogelberg & Frauwirth, 2010; Ikiugu & Rosso, 2006). Given these arguments for the use of chaos theory in understanding human occupation, and the complex nature of sexual assault and its related consequences, it is possible that the study of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault would be well-suited to a framing in chaos theory.

The findings of this study further contribute to the occupational science literature in that they advance an understanding of “what occupation does.” Particularly, our findings suggest that, following sexual assault that occurs during university, daily living becomes work, and through this work a different life may be built. In this paper, we have termed the ways that the participants used occupation to build a life occupation-in-conscious-use. The notion that occupation functions to recapture one’s life in the aftermath of sexual assault resonates with the findings of our previous work (Chapter 3). These findings align with understandings of language-in-use, which suggest that language is not only a communication tool nor is it a
neutral phenomenon, but is instead a channel for how individuals view and construct their worlds (see Gee, 2014; Mooney & Evans, 2018). Similarly, our findings suggest that occupation may be consciously used by individuals to do or to construct: a different life may be built through engagement in occupation in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Finally, although the findings of this study add to an understanding of the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation that women experience in the aftermath of sexual assault specifically, we believe that these findings may potentially be applied to broader contexts. When taken together, our findings that suggest a hierarchical ordering of human occupation (i.e., micro, meso, macro), a temporal and idiosyncratic nature of changes to occupation, and an understanding of occupation as a means through which a life may be built may have broader relevance and applicability beyond the context of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Although our findings offer a much-needed perspective on everyday living following the major life disruption of sexual assault during university—Hammell (2004) suggests that disruption following illness, accidents, or impairment has been the primary focus of research in the area of disruption from an occupational perspective—comparing individuals’ experiences following other forms of major life disruption or trauma offers the potential to contribute to a deepened understanding of human occupation.

4.5.1 Limitations and Future Directions

Study participants were recruited through electronic postings on various online platforms and snowball sampling. Several recruitment postings were made on the social media pages of individuals and/or organizations who perform work related to the topic of violence against women and/or mental health. As such, it is likely that only women who had an interest in exploring the topic of violence against women and/or mental health, or accessing support services were exposed to these electronic recruitment postings. Indeed, many participants discussed current or anticipated future engagement in sexual assault- or mental health-related advocacy work. It is possible that accounts of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault might vary between women who engage in sexual assault- or mental health-related advocacy work and those who do not, women who have an interest in exploring the topic of violence against women or mental health and those who do not, and/or women who have an
interest in accessing supports services for individuals who have experienced sexual assault or mental health challenges and those who do not.

Additionally, while the findings of this study add to an understanding of the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university in both the short- and long-term, these findings do not address the underlying influences on women’s occupations. Given that what and how individuals choose to “do” both shapes and is shaped by social structures (Gallagher et al., 2015), we feel it important to also consider the social forces (e.g., expectations, assumptions) underlying women’s doings in the aftermath of sexual assault. Therefore, these findings could be further explored using a critical occupational approach as described by Njelesani and colleagues (2013).

4.6 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred while at university in both the short- and long-term, as described in women’s first-hand accounts of their lives. Informed by an occupational perspective, we found that sexual assault that occurs during university disrupts women’s everyday lives in significant and lasting ways. Although sexual assault was found to touch almost all areas of life, experiencing sexual assault during the university period had particularly serious implications for participants’ academic and work trajectories. Additionally, our findings suggest that, after being sexually assaulted, daily living becomes work and that through this work a different life may be built. We suggest that further exploration of women’s accounts of everyday living using a critical occupational approach (see Njelesani et al., 2013) is warranted to attend to the social forces underlying women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.
Chapter 5
Preface

In Chapter 5, a further analysis of interviews conducted with 13 study participants is presented. As previously mentioned, to achieve the overarching aim of this dissertation research, it was necessary to explore first-hand accounts of women’s experiences of everyday life in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred while at university that were expressly generated with human occupation in mind and that were not edited to suit the expectations of a publishing market. To allow for the exploration of another facet of women’s stories about their experiences following sexual assault, interviews were analyzed. This chapter represents the second part, or layer of this analysis. With respect to this second layer of analysis, we sought to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

The manuscript presented in this chapter has been prepared for submission to the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. As such, an effort has been made to sufficiently define language specific to the discipline of occupational science (e.g., occupation), and to use non-discipline specific language wherever possible (e.g., doing, everyday living, lived aftermath). However, differing from traditional manuscript formatting, I make references to other chapters in this dissertation throughout to acknowledge this next chapter’s place within the larger whole. For the referencing of published manuscripts (i.e., as in Chapter 2), both the chapter number and the formal citation are indicated. For the referencing of yet unpublished manuscripts (i.e., as in Chapters 3 through 5), or chapters that are not intended for publication (i.e., Chapter 1), only the chapter number is indicated.
Chapter 5
The Self, Raped: Learning from Insiders Who Experienced Sexual Assault While at University, Part II

This chapter has been prepared for submission as a multi-authored manuscript to the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. The *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* publishes reports on individual studies in which the scientific method is applied to the study of some aspect of interpersonal violence. This journal is devoted to the study and treatment of victims and perpetrators of interpersonal violence, addressing the causes, effects, treatment, and prevention of all types of violence.
5 The Self, Raped: Learning from Insiders Who Experienced Sexual Assault While at University, Part II

5.1 Abstract

It is being increasingly acknowledged that being sexually assaulted during one’s university years holds significant long-term consequences for women’s everyday lives. Recent research suggests that sexual assault has the potential to have a life-long legacy, disrupting women’s everyday lives in important and lasting ways. However, a comprehensive understanding of the lived aftermath has yet to be developed. In particular, the underlying mechanisms that shape women’s doings in the aftermath of sexual assault are not yet well-understood. We thus sought to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Informed by a critical occupational approach, we used thematic analysis to analyze 13 women’s life narratives. Our findings suggest that one’s doing and one’s view of the self are inextricable in the aftermath of sexual assault. Specifically, we found that women described themselves as forever changed by sexual assault, and that their everyday doings reflected and were informed by this change. However, our findings also suggest that, while being sexually assaulted is a significant life experience that shapes women’s selves and doings in important ways, this experience alone does not determine women’s doings. Taken together, the findings of this study highlight the gravity of the experience of sexual assault, as well as the possibility for resilience through doing in its aftermath, and suggest that the continued study of doing following life disruption is warranted.

5.2 Introduction

An emerging body of literature suggests that the experience of sexual assault during university has the potential to disrupt women’s everyday lives in important and lasting ways (Chapter 3; Chapter 4). However, a comprehensive understanding of the lived aftermath does not currently exist. Although research suggests that when sexual assault occurs during university, women’s lives are shaped by expectations for doing in the aftermath of sexual assault (Chapter 3), the mechanisms that underlie women’s doings are not yet well-
understood. This gap in understanding warrants further consideration, not only because what and how individuals choose to “do” both shapes and is shaped by social structures (Gallagher et al., 2015), but also because of the particular importance of the university period for individuals’ academic- and work-related futures, as well as their broad life trajectories (Whiteford, 2017). Thus, we undertook to develop a deepened understanding of the lived aftermath through an in-depth exploration of women’s experiences of everyday living after being sexually assaulted while at university. Specifically, the objective of this study was to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault.

In this paper, we build upon the findings of our previous work (Chapter 4), in which an analysis was performed on participant interview transcripts. Here, we present a second layer of analysis on these same interview transcripts to complement the first layer of analysis presented in the companion paper (Chapter 4). That is to say, different data sets drawn from a common data corpus were analyzed with each respective layer, where “data corpus refers to all data collected for a particular research project, while data set refers to all the data from the corpus that are being used for a particular analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This approach allowed for an examination of different aspects of women’s experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

5.2.1 Background

The sexual assault of university women persists across North America as a prevalent violation of basic human rights (Carey et al., 2015). Although rates vary, approximately 25% of women experience attempted or completed rape while attending university in Canada (Senn et al., 2014) and the United States of America (Cantor et al., 2015; Koss et al., 1987; Krebs et al., 2016; Krebs et al., 2009). The short- and long-term adverse consequences of sexual assault are numerous, and many, including the negative effects on women’s physical and psychological health, are well-documented (Boyd, 2011; Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009). Despite the consequences of sexual assault having been the focus of an extensive body of research, researchers have noted that it is likely that some of sexual assault’s effects remain “hidden” (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical
Medicine, 2010) and that a complete picture of its aftermath has yet to be developed (Boyd, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

We have undertaken a body of work to explore these hidden consequences of sexual assault and have done so from an explicitly occupational perspective. That is, we have sought to consider women’s experiences of everyday living, or human occupation, in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. From the perspective of occupational science, everyday living is understood to involve engagement in a range of “doings,” or occupations (Yerxa et al., 1990), defined as “an activity or set of activities that is performed with some consistency and regularity, that brings structure, and is given value and meaning by individuals and a culture” (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013, p. 19). At the core of occupational science lies an acknowledgement of the complex and multifaceted nature of human occupation (Rudman, 2002). Humans are understood to be occupational beings (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013; Wilcock, 1996, 2006; Yerxa, 1998; Yerxa et al., 1990) and occupation is understood to be intimately tied to the self; occupation is so deeply rooted in human existence (Clark, 1993, 2000), that humans often identify themselves by what they “do” (Polatajko, 1998). Indeed, individuals express their humanity, in part, through engagement in occupation (Yerxa et al., 1990), which results from the interaction between the person and the occupations in which they engage. When significant changes to the person occur, as in sexual assault, the major occupational models (e.g., the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement [Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik, 2013]; the Model of Human Occupation [Taylor, 2017]; and the Person-Environment-Occupation Model [Law et al., 1996]) would suggest broad changes to occupation or everyday living, which has not been a topic sufficiently explored to date.

Our work points to a lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 3; Chapter 4). Specifically, our findings suggest that everyday living is vastly changed in the aftermath of sexual assault in both the short- and long-term (Chapter 3); almost no area of a woman’s everyday life goes untouched by sexual assault during university (Chapter 4). In particular, our previous work points to the enduring nature of the lived aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, with findings that suggest that being sexually assaulted holds serious and lasting implications for women’s academic and work lives and for their
broader life courses (Chapter 4). These findings of our previous studies (Chapter 3, Chapter 4) are perhaps unsurprising, given that the university period is a time of critical development that holds particular significance for individuals’ life trajectories (Whiteford, 2017). During this time, individuals are supported to transition from the role of the student to the roles of worker and professional (Whiteford, 2017). It follows that the experience of sexual assault during university may alter women’s futures in important ways.

Although a developing understanding of the ways in which women’s everyday lives are shaped by an experience of sexual assault during university has emerged (Chapter 3; Chapter 4), the mechanisms that underlie what women “do” in the aftermath of sexual assault have not been sufficiently explored nor explicated. Indeed, Gallagher and colleagues (2015) assert that “an individual’s identity and what an individual chooses to ‘do’ can neither be separated from each other, nor from the social structures that inform each of these entities” (p. 2).

As a first step in our work, we analyzed memoirs written by women who experienced sexual assault while at university. We found that expectations for doing were implicit in the memoirists’ discussions of everyday living and that these expectations shaped doing (Chapter 3). However, the memoirs included in our previous study were produced for the purposes of mass market publishing and were not written with the explicit purpose of exploring women’s everyday doings. As such, it was possible that important aspects of the lived aftermath were not captured in the memoirs. In light of this, we then undertook an exploration of interviews detailing women’s experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred while at university, and which were generated for the express purposes of conducting an occupational analysis. Through this exploration, we conducted two layers of analysis. A descriptive approach was taken (i.e., exploring what women “do”) in the first layer of analysis, the findings of which are described in the companion paper (Chapter 4). By contrast, the findings presented in this paper were generated out of the second layer of analysis in which a critical approach was taken (i.e., exploring how women come to “do”).

5.2.2 Study Objective

To uncover a more complete picture of the lived, or occupational, aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, we sought to conduct an in-depth exploration of women’s
experiences of everyday living. Specifically, the objective of this study was to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault. To inform our study, we drew upon a critical occupational approach as described by Njelesani and colleagues (2013).

A critical occupational approach is one that is mutually informed by occupational and critical social science perspectives, where occupation is considered a site of knowledge production where meanings are both generated and contested (Njelesani et al., 2013). An occupational perspective is defined as “a way of looking at or thinking about human doing, which considers the consistency and regularity of performance of the doing, the structure that the doing brings to one’s life, and the value(s) and meaning(s) ascribed to the doing by individuals and a culture” (Stewart et al., 2018, p. 3). A critical social science perspective applies to an extensive field of theory and research that attends to issues of social transformation, equity, and social justice (Guba et al., 2018). A critical occupational approach may thus be used to examine the “assumptions and ideologies underlying human activity, how knowledge is re/produced through engagement in occupation, who controls the knowledge re/production, the mechanisms of how occupations are taken up, and who stands to gain or lose from them” (Njelesani, Cameron et al., 2014, p. 971).

5.3 Method

Informed by a critical occupational perspective, we analyzed narrative data to examine how women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault. Specifically, we elicited first-hand participant narratives through the method of narrative interviewing, as described by Wengraf (2001). From a critical perspective, narratives are understood to be dynamic, active, and fluid productions that are socially constitutive (Souto-Manning, 2014). Constructing narratives involves “making sense of one’s life as lived within a particular socio-historical context and accomplishing versions of the self that are intelligible within that context” (Rudman & Aldrich, 2017, p. 472). Not only are narratives socially constitutive, but they are also epistemologically constitutive: reality is understood to include both the self and the context, and it is re/produced through the construction of narratives (Tanggaard, 2009). In sum, narratives may be understood as active constructions, shaped by social structures, through which individuals may construct and communicate their
experiences and identities (Bamberg, 2005; Chase, 2011). Narrative inquiry may be used to examine socially situated human experience (Bonsall, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2014), and was thus chosen to analyze women’s accounts of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault. Additionally, the analysis of narrative interviews allows a particular facet of narrative engagement with sexual assault to be explored (Miller-Day, & Hecht, 2013).

5.3.1 Study Recruitment and Participants

Following the receipt of institutional ethical approval, we recruited women who had experienced sexual assault while at university for participation in the study. For the purposes of this study, sexual assault was understood to include any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). Eligibility criteria were the following: (a) identifying as a woman, (b) living in Canada, (c) ability to participate in an interview in English, (d) being 20 years of age or older, and (e) having experienced sexual assault while enrolled in a university program at least two years prior to participation in this study. To recruit participants, we used a variety of means, including postings on social media platforms such as Twitter, postings through electronic newsletter mailing lists, and snowball sampling.

In all, we recruited 13 participants for this study. At the time of their involvement in the study, participants ranged in age from 21 to 61 years and were between 2 and 40+ years post-sexual assault. Ten participants identified their race/ethnicity as white, 1 participant identified as white and Native/Indigenous, 1 participant identified as Iranian, and 1 participant identified as mixed race. Six participants identified as straight, 3 as bisexual, 2 as queer, and 1 as lesbian. Six participants were single, 2 were married, 2 were in common-law relationships, and 2 were divorced. The majority of participants were employed, with 5 participants employed full-time and 4 employed part-time. Participants’ annual incomes ranged from approximately $20,000 to $210,000. All participants, but one, lived in Central Canada, with one participant living in Atlantic Canada.

5.3.2 Data Generation

Data were generated through narrative interviews with participants. As described in detail in the companion paper (Chapter 4), a two-phase approach to narrative elicitation was used, as
per Wengraf (2001). The first phase involved an open-ended interview in which participants were invited to share their stories of everyday living after experiencing sexual assault while at university. The second phase involved a semi-structured interview in which participants were asked follow-up questions based on the information shared during the first interview session, with the aim of eliciting further detail and seeking clarification. Both the first and second interviews ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes. All but one participant completed both interview sessions.

After each interview session, the first author made detailed notes of the events, circumstances, and interpersonal dynamics that occurred before, during, and after. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author shortly after each interview.

Verbal and written informed consent to participate in the interviews and to have the interviews audio-recorded was obtained from each participant at the beginning of the first interview session, and verbal informed consent was again obtained at the beginning of the second interview session. To generate a description of the participants and to contextualize the study sample, each participant was invited to answer a series of open-ended demographic questions at the end of their first interview session. Participants were paid an honorarium in the amount of $25 with each interview session to compensate them for their time.

All interview sessions were conducted by the first author; 22 sessions were conducted face-to-face in one of two major cities in Ontario, 2 sessions were conducted via telephone, and 1 session was conducted via Skype. The interview location and medium were determined based on each participant’s place of residence and personal preference. Neither appeared to affect the interview length, nor the type of information shared by the participant.

Throughout the participant recruitment and interview process, we attended to ethical recommendations for the study of sexual assault (see Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Rosoff, 2017). For example, in an effort to mitigate vulnerability and research risk, participants were required to be at least 20 years of age and two years post-sexual assault. Additionally, to maintain confidentiality, participants selected or were assigned pseudonyms to be used in the dissemination of the study findings. The majority of participants selected their own pseudonyms. The first author assigned pseudonyms to those participants who preferred not to
select their own. In presenting our findings below, we refer to participants by these pseudonyms. These and other ethical procedures are further detailed in the companion paper (Chapter 4).

Given that research on sexual assault constitutes a sensitive topic (Fontes, 2004), we paid particular attention to issues requiring ethical reflexivity during the interview process, or what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) have termed “ethically important moments.” Rather than relating to issues of ethical procedures, these moments are instead understood to arise in the everyday practice of doing research, and to relate to researchers’ ethical responsibilities to engage with study participants in ways that are non-exploitive. Notably, although the participants were never asked to recount their experience(s) of sexual assault, some participants chose to share this information with the first author. The specific details about participants’ sexual assaults remain private. Further, some participants found the interviews to be emotionally difficult. At times, participants became visibly and audibly upset, as evidenced by crying, a shaky voice, or unsteady breathing. Additionally, some participants used strong, emotional language to describe their experiences, which is evidenced in the findings presented below (no quotes were edited to remove such language). In these emotion-laden instances, the first author asked the participants whether they would like to take a break from or terminate the interview. In doing so, the participants were involved in the process of determining whether to continue with their participation in the study (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). In all instances, the participants chose to continue. Although the potential for the experience of distress during interviews on the topic of sexual assault should not be downplayed, research suggests that such distress does not necessarily prohibit participants from deriving a sense of catharsis, meaning-making, empowerment, or validation from the interview (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Rosenthal, 2003).

Before, during, or following interviews with participants, a number asked the first author questions of a personal nature. For example, participants inquired as to the first author’s academic, volunteer, and paid work experiences, my personal experiences with sexual assault, and my preferences around leisure occupations. Being asked such questions is a common experience in the area of sexual assault research (Bergen, 1993). However, deciding how best to address these types of questions required particular forethought on the part of the
first author as a novice researcher. For example, the first author experienced some tension in navigating her positions of occupational scientist and researcher, as well as her position as a woman of a similar age and educational background to several study participants. In responding to participants’ questions, the first author weighed both methodological concerns related to the primacy of attending to participants’ stories (see Patton, 1990), as well as concerns related to avoiding harmful power dynamics and overly-hierarchical relationships with participants (see Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018; DeVault & Gross, 2012; Finch, 1984). The first author endeavoured to be both reflexive and appropriately warm and vulnerable (see Campbell, Adams, Wasco, Ahrens, & Sefl, 2009; Watts, 2006) in her responses to participants. These discussions remain private, as well.

5.3.3 Data Analysis

Within narrative inquiry, a range of analytic strategies may be employed depending on the theoretical underpinnings and aim(s) of the study (Bonsall, 2012; Polkinghorne, 1988). In this study, we used the analytic strategy of thematic analysis of narrative data informed by a critical occupational approach (Njelesani et al., 2013). That is to say, rather than seeking to simply describe what women do in the aftermath of sexual assault, we also sought to examine how women make sense of these doings by attending to discussions of the mechanisms that underlie them. As in the companion paper (Chapter 4), we have included summary narratives for each participant alongside the analysis presented in this paper (see Appendix H for summary narratives). We have chosen to present summary narratives alongside the findings of this study in an effort to offset some of the segmentation inherent to the thematic analysis of narrative data, following common practice in the field of narrative inquiry (e.g., Bailey & Jackson, 2003; Bonsall, 2012).

Specifically, we followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis. That is, the first author familiarized herself with the data, generated initial codes, and searched for themes. The authors engaged in reviewing these themes, defining and naming these themes, and ultimately producing a report on these themes (see Appendix K for thematic map). These stages of analysis are described in further detail in the companion paper (Chapter 4).
We complemented our thematic analysis with memo writing (Birks et al., 2008), which is recommended when analyzing data using a critical occupational approach (Njelesani et al., 2013). All memos were developed by the first author and were used to support the generation and refinement of themes and subthemes. In particular, memo writing was used as an analytic strategy to help the first author consider how the emerging findings related to the mechanisms that underlie what women do in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (i.e., how women come to “do”).

5.4 Findings

From the participants’ accounts of their experiences of everyday living after being sexually assaulted while at university, we developed a description of how they came to “do” in the aftermath. We have captured the ways in which the participants made sense of their experiences of everyday living after being sexually assaulted through the overriding “narrative,” the self, raped. This overriding narrative captures the storied nature of the ways in which the participants discussed themselves as forever changed by sexual assault and how their everyday doings reflected this change. Further it captures how the participants discussed their selves and their doings as greater than the sum of their parts; that is, although changed by sexual assault, the participants discussed their selves and their doings as not solely defined by this experience.

5.4.1 The Self, Raped

The participants discussed their doings and their view of their selves as inextricable in the aftermath of sexual assault. Across their accounts, the participants suggested that what they did was intertwined with who they viewed themselves to be:

I have to make a routine. If I get out of my routines and don’t make it part of my routine to take care of myself, I can very easily stop taking care of myself. And I do attribute that to being a survivor of sexual violence. Just forgetting that my body needs taking care of. And that it’s not to be abused and forgotten about. (Butch Coriander, age 61)

Within the overriding narrative of the self, raped sit three themes which capture the ways in which the participants discussed how they came to “do” after being sexually assaulted during university: (a) I am raped, which details how the participants discussed themselves as
changed by their experiences of sexual assault, (b) *I do raped*, which details how the participants discussed their doings as shaped by their view of themselves as changed, and (c) *not only raped: resilience and the rise of the human spirit*, which details how the participants discussed their experiences of sexual assault as only one aspect of themselves and their doings.

### 5.4.1.1 I Am Raped

Across their accounts, the participants described themselves as changed by their experiences of sexual assault during university. The participants suggested that, after being sexually assaulted, they viewed themselves as different to how they had viewed themselves before the assault:

> I view myself differently. Like I said, I’m constantly worried about what other people are thinking in a way [that] I didn’t really think before. And that’s part of why I think I am not as social. Because I am, I’d rather just not have them think anything about me at all. I’d rather just distance myself. Because I don’t want people to think that I’m any particular way. (Rose, age 22)

Specifically, the participants expressed the sentiment that they now viewed themselves to be sexually assaulted women: “It [being sexually assaulted] has shaped my understanding of myself as a woman and a survivor. And I identify very strongly as a survivor. So, it is kind of central to me” (Butch Coriander, age 61). Further, the participants suggested that this changed view of the self—that is, viewing themselves as sexually assaulted women—carried with it several meanings. The different meanings of being changed by an experience of sexual assault as discussed by the participants are explored through three subthemes: (a) *the loss of a self: a changed me*, (b) *the loss of an imagined future: a wrench in the plan*, and (c) *sexual assault colours everything: a different lens*.

#### 5.4.1.1.1 The Loss of a Self: A Changed Me

In discussing themselves as changed, the participants suggested that a part of themselves was forever lost to sexual assault. Frequently, the participants drew upon metaphors of death or theft to characterize this loss. For example, in describing her experience of sexual assault, Butch Coriander (age 61) remarked: “It definitely killed something in me for sure.”
The participants characterized the loss of part of the self as one that was not only irreversible, but that occurred without their consent: “This thing has been taken away and it’s never going to be given back” (Lucy, age 23). Although the participants described feeling a sense of loss related to the self, they also suggested that articulating exactly what part of themselves was lost to sexual assault was challenging. The participants discussed the ways in which the loss of self in the aftermath of sexual assault was difficult to define, and therefore difficult to clearly communicate to others:

Because this is that invisible illness or invisible thing that, it comes back to if somebody steals something from you and you go to the police, you have a tangible item to talk about. In this, you don’t. You know? It’s your body, it’s your mind, it’s your whatever. And you can’t say, “It’s this ring. And here’s the cut. And here’s the exact value. And here’s where I bought it.” Your body and your mind doesn’t have those characteristics. (Elizabeth, age 40)

5.4.1.1.2 The Loss of an Imagined Future: A Wrench in the Plan

In discussing themselves as changed, the participants also suggested that the futures they had once imagined for themselves—the futures they were hoping to build through their academic pursuits—were lost to sexual assault. The participants described the ways in which being sexually assaulted, and thus viewing themselves to be sexually assaulted women, shaped what they understood to be possible for their futures, particularly as related to their academic and/or career trajectories. For example, Raging Feminist (age 22) discussed how being sexually assaulted destroyed the promise of a hoped-for future that she believed would be achieved through her time at university: “I call [the participant’s sexual assault] my miscarriage. Because I went in [to university] with all these hopes and dreams, and I was supposed to get everything I wanted. And in a matter of minutes, it was gone.” Again, the participants expressed that the loss of their imagined futures was not voluntary, but something that had happened without their consent:

I’d worked so hard at getting back to school and having my life be the way that I wanted it. And I just felt like somebody else, it wasn’t up to me. It felt like, it kind of felt like somebody else had thrown a wrench in it. (June, age 33)

Across their accounts, the participants discussed the loss of the futures they had once imagined in different ways. At times, the participants described experiencing a loss of a
particular aspect of their hoped-for futures. For example, CeCe (age 29) discussed how, after being sexually assaulted, her experience of being a university student differed from what she had initially imagined for herself:

I feel like I lost some of my [university experience]. Not in terms of academically. But I was super involved. I was on the students’ groups. I was involved in my department. I was on [the] admissions committee. And I think that my experience of sexual assault and people’s responses to it severed a lot of relationships. Where now, I go, I TA, I do my office hours. And then I don’t talk to anybody. I pretty much, I don’t go to any of the social events anymore. I don’t, and I’m not involved in any of the student groups. I just felt really abandoned by a lot of my peers and people that were really solid friends, I thought, who just totally bailed on me.

At other times, the participants described experiencing a loss of their hoped-for academic or career futures in their entirety. That is, the participants suggested that particular school- or work-related pathways were understood to be closed to them having been sexually assaulted. For example, Butch Coriander (age 61) described how she understood her school- and work-related pathways to be limited by sexual assault and expressed that she would never know what could have been if those pathways had instead remained available to her:

I don’t regret the pathway that I’ve gone down. At all. At all. It’s fine. But I also, it pissed me off to think that there could have been another pathway. Maybe I would have become a brilliant academic. Maybe I would have become you know, who knows? An urban planner of some sort. And had significant [effects] on a community in a particular way. It pisses me off that that happening threw me off significantly. And limited what I saw to be my options. And that’s what I see it doing to women constantly.

At other times still, the participants described experiencing a loss of their hoped-for futures as they related to their broader life courses. Although discussions of a loss of one’s imagined academic- or career-related futures were particularly evident across the participants’ accounts, the participants also expressed the sentiment that their life trajectories were terribly altered by sexual assault. For example, Rose (age 22) discussed the possibility that her life’s story might have been different had she not been sexually assaulted:

The thing that bothers me, too, is that I will never know what my life would have been like if it hadn’t happened. I’ll never know what could have been. [I] might have had a different career. But that’s just my career. It could have been any, my life could have gone in any direction. And it’s just like any small thing, like I said, that happens to you. But for something like this, it’s pretty, [it] goes pretty deep that you’re like, “My life could have been a totally different story if it wasn’t for what you [the perpetrator] did.”
5.4.1.1.3 Sexual Assault Colours Everything: A Different Lens

In discussing themselves as changed, the participants suggested that they developed a different perspective on life after being sexually assaulted. Being a sexually assaulted woman was discussed by the participants as a particular lens through which they now viewed the world: “It [the experience of sexual assault] just paints over everything” (Raging Feminist, age 22). In contrast to discussions of a changed understanding of the self, characterized by loss (i.e., the loss of self and the loss of an imagined future), the participants discussed this lens as something that they acquired in the aftermath of sexual assault: “For the things I’ve lost, I’ve also gained other things. I lost social skills. I lost the ability to trust people as easily. At the same time, I gained a perspective that I never had” (Rose, age 22).

Although the participants suggested that they acquired a different lens as sexually assaulted women, they did not necessarily characterize this acquisition as positive: “[Being sexually assaulted] really gave me a different perspective on the world, unfortunately” (CeCe, age 29). While the participants discussed this lens as one that coloured their entire world, they suggested that it particularly coloured their experiences while in university:

> Sexual violence. That’s the only description I would give to both my first years at two different universities. That’s the only experience that really, that’s the big experience I remember. I don’t remember it as a student. Or, I don’t remember it as sitting in a class, doing homework, or reading books. It’s just dealing with that [sexual assault], and just feeling like shit all the time. (Raging Feminist, age 22)

5.4.1.2 I Do Raped

Across their accounts, the participants expressed that, in viewing themselves as changed after sexual assault, their doings changed as well. In particular, the participants suggested that being sexually assaulted, and thus viewing themselves to be sexually assaulted women, shaped the choices that they made around doing. This changed view of the self was discussed as central to the ways in which the participants interacted with the world around them and thus what they did in in their everyday lives: “It [being sexually assaulted] literally informed every step of the way [of the participant’s life after] because it changed who I was as a person kind of entirely” (Rose, age 22). The participants suggested that this changed view of
the self shaped their routines, or daily occupations, including those related to caring for the self:

I don’t do [self-care] at all. I think anything that reminds me of my physicality is just a bit off. Not anymore, but I hated my body because this is the body that I was raped in. And I just wanted to get away from it. And I feel like, at some point, I forgot that I had a physical existence at all. (Raging Feminist, age 22)

However, they also expressed that this changed view of the self shaped their broader life choices, particularly related to one’s academic and/or career trajectories:

The day-to-day, like I say, it’s kind of, like, well, my entire day-to-day is due to that [being sexually assaulted], really, given that my day-to-day is spent as a feminist educator and activist. The entire thing is due to that. (Butch Coriander, age 61)

Further, the participants suggested that, in doing in a manner shaped by viewing themselves to be sexually assaulted women, their lives were changed over time:

I feel like somewhere at the back of my mind, that’s something that I don’t actively think about, is just, I do everything I do just because I want to forget about this [being sexually assaulted] . . . I’ve made another life for myself since then [being sexually assaulted]. But I feel like the sense of loss will never go away. (Raging Feminist, age 22)

The participants suggested that doing as informed by this changed view of the self—that is, doing as sexually assaulted women—carried with it several meanings. These different meanings are explored through three subthemes: (a) sexually assaulted women should: navigating expectations, (b) (re)capturing the self: building the self through doing, and (c) sexual assault colours everything but determines nothing.

5.4.1.2.1 Sexually Assaulted Women Should: Navigating Expectations

The participants suggested that being sexually assaulted carried with it expectations for doing. Often implicit in the participants’ discussions of everyday living were assumptions about how sexually assaulted women should behave or “do” in the aftermath of sexual assault. One particular expectation for doing discussed by the participants involved doing for safety. Specifically, the participants suggested that they were expected to protect themselves and others from sexual assault. For example, Alana (age 34) expressed the sentiment that
modifying her behaviour in the aftermath of sexual assault was necessary, and that her modified behaviour would prevent another sexual assault from taking place:

I was looking through the world at, with this really particular view of what might happen. I had this idea of, “Well, if it can happen, it can happen again. You have to be careful around guys because it could just happen again if you’re not careful.” And I tried to modify my behaviour in ways. I stopped doing things that I considered irresponsible. I wouldn’t go out super later at night by myself.

In addition to doing to protect themselves and prevent subsequent sexual assaults, the participants also suggested that they were expected to prevent others from being sexually assaulted. Across their accounts, the participants discussed doing to protect others as a duty belonging to sexually assaulted women: “I think you are kind of responsible for trying to make it less likely that it’ll [sexual assault will] happen to someone else” (Laila, age 49). The participants suggested that, in their everyday lives, doing to protect others meant acting as a constant watchdog. For example, Lucy (age 23) discussed feeling as though she was responsible for watching over her friends at parties to ensure that they were not sexually assaulted:

I feel like the lifeguard in the pool and if I leave, who’s looking out? And I feel like if I don’t directly say it [to watch over the participant’s friends] to someone else, they’re not going to be watching close enough.

Another expectation for doing discussed by the participants involved doing to appear “normal.” In particular, the participants suggested that, after an indiscriminate period of time, they were expected to largely do as they had done before being sexually assaulted. At times, doing to appear normal was discussed in relation to concealing one’s sexual assault from others. For example, Laila (age 49) discussed how she attempted to conceal her sexual assault from her friends because of a sense that, in being sexually assaulted, she was in contravention of the rules of her friend group:

I almost didn’t want them [the participant’s friends] to know that this had happened. Because it was like breaking the rules of our group, right? We were these women that didn’t get pushed around. It was like I betrayed that by having this happen to me . . . [I was] thinking, “This was so stupid that this happened. Better not let it, better not even miss Monday’s classes.”
At other times, doing to appear normal was discussed in relation to the assumption that being sexually assaulted is an experience from which one moves on rather quickly. In particular, the participants suggested that if they were not visibly harmed, others assumed that they were not harmed at all. For example, in describing a conversation with her university professor, Lucy (age 23) stated: “And I remember this one teacher, or professor, really pressing me on it and saying, ‘Well, what’s wrong with you? You look fine.’” The participants expressed the sentiment that a collective understanding about sexual assault and the lasting nature of its consequences is sorely lacking:

Collectively, we, people, experience these [traumatic things] all the time. When you have events like December 6th [the École Polytechnique Massacre], you know, different things. Events like mass murders in any location… Or hurricanes, or typhoons, or whatever. They are these huge eruptions in our lives. And we pay attention for a minute. And then we move along. And it’s like, what kind of impact do these huge disruptions have in all of our lives, collectively, right? We don’t, societally, we don’t really know how to deal with these things. And we just move on to the next thing and the next thing. And I often wonder what really is the impact on all of us? (Butch Coriander, age 61)

Because of this lack of understanding about sexual assault’s consequences, the participants suggested that openly struggling in the aftermath of sexual assault was not always socially acceptable. As such, the participants expressed that, in being expected to do as they had done before being sexually assaulted, they attempted to “pass” as normal. For example, Jessie (age 31) described how passing involved doing to appear normal in public, while at the same time relegating doings that could be perceived as abnormal to the private realm:

I think it means passing and surpassing so someone that you just met wouldn’t know that something was wrong. So, you could still get out of bed. You could still participate. You could still meet your needs. And you know, when you want to cry, you could cry

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3 On December 6, 1989, Marc Lépine entered the École Polytechnique, the engineering school of the Université de Montréal in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. With a rifle, Lépine murdered 14 women, while also injuring another 10, before killing himself. Four men were unintentionally injured, as well. Lépine claimed he was “fighting feminism.” The event is remembered as the École Polytechnique Massacre or the Montreal Massacre, and remains Canada’s deadliest mass shooting (see Scott, 2018).

The women murdered were Anne St-Arneault, age 23; Geneviève Bergeron, age 21; Hélène Colgan, age 23; Nathalie Croteau, age 23; Barbara Daigneault, age 22; Anne-Marie Edward, age 21; Maud Haviernick, age 29; Barbara Klueznick, age 31; Maryse Laganière, age 25; Maryse Leclair, age 23; Anne-Marie Lemay, age 22; Sona Pelletier, age 23; Michèle Richard, age 21; and Annie Turcotte, age 21.
on your own. But you’re still moving forward. And the people that you’re not close to
don’t know the difference. And, I think, in the worst parts after my sexual assault, it
was about having to disclose to people I didn’t know that I wasn’t OK.

However, the participants suggested that doing to appear normal created a sense of tension.
That is, although they did to appear normal, the participants also discussed experiencing a
desire to communicate their suffering to others. For example, Raging Feminist (age 22)
described feeling as though she lived a double life in the aftermath of sexual assault, at once
trying to adhere to expectations for normal behaviour while challenging the notion that the
consequences of sexual assault are insignificant:

I care about my physical representation. I did a lot [at university] because I had to be
the perfect victim. If I was wearing makeup, and if I was well put-together, I thought
that people would think that, “Oh, she’s doing well.” And although I wasn’t dirty, I just
didn’t feel like, if I was representing myself as a normal person, then they would just
keep going on with their whole discourse of, “Get over it, nothing’s changed.” Or,
“You’re making a big deal out of it.” . . . I had this double life of having to look
miserable so that everybody would believe that I’m suffering. And on the other side, I
wanted to look approachable and professional when I was going to [work] things. It’s
like a performance for other people.

In this way, the participants expressed the sentiment that being a sexually assaulted woman
involved occupying the space between normality and abnormality, between ease and
suffering: “And it was being a survivor in the space between. And it was not being this
broken victim, but not being totally OK either” (Jessie, age 31).

5.4.1.2.2 (Re)Capturing the Self: Building the Self Through Doing

Across their accounts, the participants suggested that living as a sexually assaulted woman
involved doing to build a different understanding of the self. The participants expressed the
sentiment that, through doing, it was possible to integrate both the experience of being
sexually assaulted and the view of oneself as a sexually assaulted woman into a broader
understanding of oneself and one’s life:

It [being sexually assaulted] becomes this thing that’s separate. This big bump all of a
sudden on your skin, or something like that. And so, you have to figure out, you want
to live an integrative life, right? You have to figure out how to incorporate that or fit it
in in some way. It has to be seen as part of what’s going on in the day-to-day. (Butch
Coriander, age 61)
Two aspects of building the self through doing were discussed by the participants: (a) *bringing a self forward: giving new meaning to doing*, and (b) *doing differently: taking up new occupations*.

### 5.4.1.2.2.1 Bringing a Self Forward: Giving New Meaning to Doing

In the aftermath of sexual assault, the participants discussed doing to bring forward those parts of the self not lost to sexual assault. The participants described the ways in which, after being sexually assaulted, doing what they had done before becoming sexually assaulted women took on new meaning. The participants suggested that even the most seemingly routine of doings, including caring for the self, carried changed meanings. For example, CeCe (age 29) described how changing her hairstyle took on the meaning of reclaiming control of her body:

> The other thing was just that lack of control after the sexual assault. And if you look at photos of me, every time I have a different hair colour. And it was just a control thing of, I guess maybe a little bit of reclamation of my body? But just being, I just felt like that was the only thing I could really take control over.

In addition to discussing routine doings as taking on new meaning after sexual assault, the participants also discussed how they assigned new meaning to their personal interests or talents. For example, Jessie (age 31) described how engaging in writing, something she did often as a university student, took on the new meaning of connection:

> It’s not just writing. It was the act of researching before writing. And reading about other people delving into something that you’ve experienced. And feeling like you’re not alone. So, when you’re reading work about trauma, or you’re hearing people’s stories, or grappling with it, it makes you feel like you’re not the only one grappling with it and you feel part of a conversation. And that’s a really powerful feeling. Especially when a sexual assault can make you feel really alone. And writing about it was a way of joining the conversation and understanding and processing it. And so, it made me more aware of my experiences.

In engaging in previous doings, the participants suggested that they were sometimes able to recapture parts of the futures that they had once imagined for themselves, particularly as related to their academic or career trajectories. Further, the participants described how working toward or achieving part of their past hoped-for futures took on new and particularly significant meanings after being sexually assaulted during university. For example, Alana
(age 34) discussed what it meant to have gotten into graduate school after being sexually assaulted:

[To] get to a place where I was in graduate school was really monumental. Because that had been a life goal since I was 12. I was like, “I’m going to get a PhD. It’s going to happen.” And so, having that sort of track kind of waylaid really threw me off. Because, you know, I was young and naïve. And I was just like, “No. Life should go how I think it should go.” And then it didn’t. And I didn’t know how to get it back on track. I didn’t know how to fix it.

5.4.1.2.2.2 Doing Differently: Taking up New Occupations

In the aftermath of sexual assault, the participants discussed doing differently to integrate their view of themselves as sexually assaulted women into their everyday lives. In particular, the participants suggested that they took up new occupations, as informed by their changed view of the self. At times the participants attributed the taking up of new leisure-related occupations to their experience of being sexually assaulted and their view of themselves as sexually assaulted women. For example, CeCe (age 29) described how she began engaging in stand-up comedy because of her changed view of the self:

Which is how I got into stand-up comedy. Because I’ve always loved comedy. I never thought I would do comedy because I was like, “Oh, what if people don’t think I’m funny?” And then I was like, “I went through a fucking rape trial . . . You can do stand-up comedy.”

However, the participants more often discussed how their experience of being sexually assaulted and their view of themselves as sexually assaulted women shaped the taking-up of school- or work-related occupations. The participants expressed the sentiment that, after being sexually assaulted, they wanted to devote their lives to advocacy-related doings:

It literally, actually, literally changed the entire trajectory of what I what I thought my life was going to be. In the sense that, it wasn’t so much the assault itself, but what it stood for, more so, that I was like, “I’m going to go to law school. I’m going to be a Crown Attorney. I’m going to be an advocate for this forever. I’m going to write papers about this.” In my whole life, nothing had ever kind of had that effect where I was like, “I want this to be what my life is about.” (Rose, age 22)

Through engaging in new occupations informed by their experience of sexual assault, the participants suggested that they were able to reimagine their futures. The participants
discussed the ways in which they pursued new academic or career paths after their once hoped-for futures no longer seemed possible for them as sexually assaulted women:

It was mostly in terms of my career that I thought was different. But that also is a fundamental piece of life is what you do with your life, right? It’s fundamental. So, the fact that I completely was like, “No. I can’t do this [the career the participant intended to pursue before being sexually assaulted].” And I’m interested in [the participant’s new career path] because, to me, that was a safe kind of place. I would go into [the participant’s new career] and, yes, I’d be talking about these issues. But I wouldn’t be in them. Or, I wouldn’t be out in the field by myself. (Rose, age 22)

The participants suggested that it was through taking up new occupations and altering their school- or work-related trajectories that meaning could be found in their experiences of sexual assault. For example, Jessie (age 31) discussed how she drew upon her experiences as a sexually assaulted woman to inform her work, and thereby give her life meaning:

I think now in my life, I’m trying to find a way to give my life meaning. And use my experience to help people without reliving my sexual assault. And right now, I think the best way for me to do that is through [the participant’s new career].

5.4.1.2.2.3 Sexual Assault Colours Everything, but Determines Nothing

The participants suggested that, although understanding the self as a sexually assaulted woman was a lens through which they viewed the world and that this lens shaped doing, their specific doings were not determined by this lens. Across their accounts, the participants expressed the notion that living in the day-to-day as a sexually assaulted woman does not “look” one way. That is, the participants suggested that there exist multiple possibilities for doing after being sexually assaulted:

Somebody might just expect that you’re going to come in and say, “Yeah. My whole life sucks because of this situation.” Yeah, a lot of parts of it suck because of the sexual assault. But it’s also, trauma doesn’t necessarily look like the helpless victim, right? And so, that’s even as harmful a myth as anything else. That everyone’s going to be helpless. Because, even me sitting in a courtroom, I felt like, sometimes the judge thought, well, maybe, I thought, actually, I had this actual thought while on the stand. I thought, “What if he thinks I’m not crying enough?” If I’m not crying, which I wasn’t, for most of it at least. I was like, “Well, what if he thinks that I’m not telling the truth because I’m not overly emotional?” Or the opposite. If I’m crying too much, does he think I’m lying because you know, or just, I’m stressed, because I’m lying, or whatever. Like trauma doesn’t look like one thing. And life doesn’t really look like one particular narrative after it’s over, I guess. (Rose, age 22)
Further, the participants expressed that, while many of their choices related to doing were shaped by sexual assault, being sexually assaulted did not shape all of these choices. The participants suggested that factors other than being sexually assaulted influenced their doings, as well. As time passed, the participants suggested that it became increasingly difficult to attribute their doings to being sexually assaulted alone:

Thirty years down the road, it’s hard to know how much one event shaped your life. I’m pretty sure it has shaped my life in some ways. But it’s hard to separate out what would have happened anyway, or not, you know? (Laila, age 49)

In this way, the participants suggested that their experiences of sexual assault were both “everything and nothing.” That is, although the participants suggested that being sexually assaulted gave them the particular lens through which they viewed the world afterward, they perceived that this lens contributed less to the shaping of day-to-day doings, over time. Instead, the participants suggested that, with time, this lens became deeply embedded in their view of their selves and their broader lives. For example, Butch Coriander (age 61) described how, at approximately 40 years post-sexual assault, she viewed the experience to be everything in that it significantly influenced her life trajectory:

It’s partly why I embraced feminism. And then, when I embraced feminism, I became involved at the Rape Crisis Centre. And when I became involved at the Rape Crisis Centre, I got involved with political organizing. And when I found my voice. And when I found my voice, I became a bit of a, you know, a media persona and somebody who develops certain kinds of skills, and networks, and community. And so, I really, I don’t say it caused it, but I say that it was definitely part of the path. And a very, very integral part of the pathway that I was on. And that it was a moment when that path could have veered off someplace else. Or, maybe it’s more the path was going that way and it caused the path to veer here.

However, Butch Coriander (age 61) also suggested that, almost 40 years after being sexually assaulted, she also viewed her experience to be nothing in that it no longer significantly influenced her day-to-day doings. Instead, she discussed her experience as central to the way in which she now viewed herself and how she came to move through the world:

Well, kind of everything and kind of nothing. It has shaped my understanding of myself as a woman and a survivor. And I identify very strongly as a survivor. So, it is kind of central to me. And it’s part of my understanding of the abuse of power and my work is focused around the abuse of power. So, it’s pretty central to that. Also [central to the participant’s understanding of herself are] other ways
that I experience oppression as well, as a lesbian and increasingly, as an older woman and that kind of thing. So, it’s kind of part and parcel of all that. And then at the same time, you know, practically, day-to-day in terms of other than the thing I said about folks, if they’re too drunk and they get touchy with me or start to get in on my boundaries, I very quickly stop that. You know, like, “You’re not getting any closer.” So, that’s a way that that affects me. But other than that, not really practically in the day-to-day, I don’t think. So, it’s more on a, I don’t even know how to describe that. The English language is limited, eh? It’s more in a philosophical sense of myself? You know, an understanding of myself. It’s absolutely in there. And it’s pretty important in terms of how I understand myself and talk about myself and move through the world. And then, practically I can’t think of ways other than that one that it affects me.

5.4.1.3 Not Only Raped: Resilience and the Rise of the Human Spirit

Across their accounts, the participants suggested that, although they viewed themselves to be sexually assaulted women, this did not solely define them or their doings. While the participants discussed being sexually assaulted as central to their views of their selves and their doings, they also expressed the sentiment that being sexually assaulted was only one aspect of who they were and what they did. The participants discussed themselves as forever changed by sexual assault and suggested that they were different people from whom they had been before being sexually assaulted:

It wasn’t until this September that I finally felt, I won’t say like myself, because I don’t think I’m, I’m not the same person I was before the assault and I never will be. That’s OK. But I finally felt that I can start doing things. (CeCe, age 29)

However, the participants did not suggest that all parts of their selves were changed by sexual assault. Instead, the participants discussed being sexually assaulted as changing an aspect of the self, and thus an aspect of one’s doings, rather than as wholly changing one’s self and doings. In this way, the participants expressed that, although changed by sexual assault, their selves and doings were not solely defined by this experience:

It was an aspect of myself that if it hadn’t happened, I’m not quite sure if I would have opened up to feminism or become as passionate about that issue as I did become. (Butch Coriander, age 61)

The participants suggested that understanding their selves and their doings as not only informed by their experiences of sexual assault held meaning. In discussing their selves and their doings as not only informed by this experience, the participants expressed hope. At
times, the participants discussed fearing that their selves and their doings would be solely
defined by sexual assault:

But, in general now, I’m just, I worry that, I don’t know. I’ve let it become too much
of my life. That everyone thinks that I’m just kind of, I have this one story and that it
defines me and that it is who I am. I feel like everything’s just different. It’s changed.
Some of the things are OK. And some of the things are for the worse. (Rose, age 22)

Although the participants expressed that being sexually assaulted was neither a positive
experience nor an experience they would wish upon anyone else, they also suggested that
being sexually assaulted contributed to the current state of their everyday lives in important
ways. The participants described how being sexually assaulted led them to where they were
today:

I do not regret that [being sexually assaulted] for a moment. I would not change that
for the world. And so, if it took that to go in that direction, I’m not glad it happened.
But I’m not sorry it happened, either. I would not change my life for a nickel. I’d change
certain things that I’ve done. And I’d change ways I’ve responded to situations, et
cetera. But in terms of where I am, where I am, I’m a very, very happy person about
that. (Butch Coriander, age 61)

Being sexually assaulted was discussed by the participants as an experience that set them on
a particular trajectory, but that it was not the only life experience that shaped their broader
lives. In this way, the participants suggested that they viewed their everyday lives through a
lens of resilience and hope for one’s future. That is, they understood their lives to be
informed, but not only defined, by sexual assault:

If that [being sexually assaulted] hadn’t happened, I might have finished my degree and
then just been done with it. And I don’t know whether I would have gotten involved
with the sex worker activism and then gone back to school. And ended up doing a PhD.
I have no idea. So, in a sense, you know, it obviously put me on a particular path to
where I am now. So, in that sense, I wouldn’t say it was good. But, you know what I
mean? Good things came out of it, eventually. (Alana, age 34)

5.5 Discussion

In light of the recognition that there are hidden consequences of sexual assault (see World
Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010), we sought to
uncover a more complete picture of its aftermath. We used a critical occupational approach
as a means to identify the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday
living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Our findings suggest that doing and the view of the self are inextricable in the aftermath of sexual assault. The participants expressed that they understood themselves as forever changed by sexual assault and that their everyday doings reflected and were informed by this change. However, the participants also discussed their selves and their doings as not solely defined by sexual assault. Across their first-hand accounts, the participants expressed the sentiment that they understood their selves and their doings to reflect and be informed by more than their experiences of sexual assault during university. Our findings support what is now generally accepted: there are potentially significant and lasting consequences of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 3; Chapter 4). Importantly, however, our findings provide a much more nuanced and in-depth understanding of these consequences, including an understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the changes to women’s doings in the aftermath of sexual assault during university.

A central finding of this study relates to the ways in which women’s understandings of the self are shaped by sexual assault. The relationship between sexual assault and the self has been explored in relatively few studies; nonetheless, what findings there are support our own. Both Brison (2002) and Clarke (2008) suggest that sexual assault renders the self subject to destruction, while Twinley (2016) suggests that the self may be disrupted following sexual assault. Further, Brison’s (2002) and Clarke’s (2008) work points to a process of reconstructing and renegotiating the self that women undergo in the aftermath of sexual assault. Our findings expand upon this work by suggesting that, following sexual assault, a change in one’s view of the self also results in a change in doing; that is to say, who we are leads us to our doings (i.e., “I do what I am”). Our findings would suggest that the experience of sexual assault results in a changed understanding of the self—specifically, understanding oneself to be a sexually assaulted woman—which in turn shapes one’s everyday lives and doings. Indeed, the relationship between occupation and the self is believed to be dialectical (Rudman, 2002), although a deep understanding of this relationship remains in its early stages of conceptualization (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009).

The findings of our study add to the growing body of literature on the relationship between doing, or occupation, and the self. As per Phelan and Kinsella (2009), it has long been
assumed that occupation is intimately tied to the self. The construct of occupational identity, defined as “a composite sense of who one is and wishes to become as an occupational being generated from one’s history of occupational participation” (Kielhofner, 2008, p. 106) was developed to capture this relationship. To date, much of the research related to occupation and the self has focused on the ways in which what we do makes us who we are (Taylor & Kay, 2015), commonly captured by the phrase, “I am what I do.” As Nagel (1987) asserts, we decide what we want to become through reflecting on values, making choices, and, importantly, engaging in activities. That individuals become who they are through what they do is reflected in our findings. The participants discussed the ways in which they engaged in doing, or occupation, to build a different understanding of the self in the aftermath of sexual assault. This finding aligns with the concept of occupation-in-conscious-use proposed in our previous work, which suggests that doing may be consciously used by individuals to construct or build (Chapter 4). In particular, the findings of our previous work highlight the ways in which doing may be used to build a different life in the aftermath of sexual assault (Chapter 4), where the findings in this study highlight how doing may be used to build a different self.

This study focused on women who had experienced sexual assault while at university, as the university period is understood to be a particularly crucial time in creating one’s life. The findings reported here add to the findings from our previous study (Chapter 4). In particular, the findings of this study suggest that being sexually assaulted, and viewing oneself to be a sexually assaulted woman, shapes what women understand to be possible for their futures, especially their academic and/or career trajectories, given that they sought to build their futures during this time. The participants suggested that their once hoped-for futures—the futures for which their academic pursuits were preparing them—were largely lost to sexual assault. Ultimately, these findings provide support for the notion that the university period is a time of critical occupational development and transition (see Whiteford, 2017), and that sexual assault that occurs during university has the potential to alter women’s occupational lives and futures in significant ways (Chapter 4).

The literature on the philosophical construct of the right to an open future (see Feinberg, 1980) shares some commonalities with our findings regarding the loss of one’s imagined
future. This construct has most commonly been applied in relation to children and “encompasses a set of moral rights children possess that are derived from the autonomy rights of adults. In brief, the right protects the child against having important life choices determined by others before she has the ability to make them for herself” (Millum, 2014, p. 522). Nonetheless, we feel it has relevance here. Despite that discussions of the right to an open future are most often centred around obligations to children (Davis, 1997; Feinberg, 1980; Krutzinna, 2017; Millum, 2014), we argue that the core premise of this construct—the right to not have one’s future autonomy violated—offers an interesting and potentially useful perspective on the occupation-related consequences of sexual assault that occurs during university. It is possible that being sexually assaulted during university may violate women’s future autonomy in that they may experience real and/or perceived constraints on their abilities to make certain occupational choices, particularly related to their future schooling or career.

The loss of one’s imagined future to sexual assault also speaks to the deep significance of being sexually assaulted during university. Recent research suggests that a sense of loss of future is a phenomenon experienced by grieving individuals (Maccallum & Bryant, 2011; Robinaugh & McNally, 2013). For example, studies have demonstrated that individuals who have experienced the death of a loved one have difficulty envisioning positive futures for themselves (Maccallum & Bryant, 2011), as well as difficulty imagining specific future events without their loved ones (Robinaugh & McNally, 2013). Although bereavement and sexual assault constitute different experiences, both are associated with deep loss and grief (Horowitz, 2011). Given the sense of deep loss expressed by the participants in this study, our findings add to an understanding of the gravity of sexual assault (e.g., Du Mont & White, 2007; World Health Organization, 2013). Also, given the considerable magnitude of change to everyday living described by the participants, our findings further support an understanding of sexual assault that occurs during university as a major life disruption.

Although our findings clearly indicate the gravity of being sexually assaulted during university, they also indicate that the rape-supportive notion that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault still persists. Evident within the participants’ accounts of everyday living were expectations for doing, including the expectation that sexually assaulted
women ought to largely do as they had done before being sexually assaulted. In discussing the ways in which they did to pass as normal, the participants also discussed their experiences of attempting to convince others that they were indeed harmed by sexual assault, or otherwise attempting to conceal this harm from others.

These findings add to our previous work (Chapter 3), in which an aftermyth was identified. That is to say, there exists a false but widely held belief that there is a particular standard of behaviour for women who have been sexually assaulted during university (Chapter 3). Although all manner of doing, including doing in the aftermath of sexual assault, both influences and is influenced by social forces (Gallagher et al., 2015; Njelesani et al., 2013), these underlying influences have the potential to hold deeply harmful consequences, further speaking to the gravity of sexual assault. Not only does the assumption that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault, or that very little harm is done, serve to obfuscate its potentially severe consequences for women’s everyday lives, but it also serves to shape and limit women’s occupational possibilities (see Rudman, 2005, 2010) in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. We argue that the restrictive expectations for doing present within women’s accounts of everyday living (Chapter 3) also restrict the “ways and types of doing that come to be viewed as ideal and possible within a specific socio-historical context, and that come to be promoted and made available within that context” (Rudman, 2010, p. 55). Although our findings suggest that women understand their experiences of sexual assault as informing one aspect of their selves and lives rather than their whole selves and lives, the profound significance of the experience of sexual assault was evident across the participants’ accounts. Rather than constituting a minor perturbation, the findings of this study highlight the potentially life-altering nature of sexual assault that occurs during university. Acknowledging the severity of sexual assault during university is essential to broaden women’s occupational possibilities in its aftermath.

While the findings of our study highlight that being sexually assaulted is a significant life experience that shapes women’s selves and doings in important ways, our findings also suggest that this experience alone does not determine women’s doings. Specifically, these findings suggest that change in doing does not follow a linear path in the aftermath of sexual assault: the response to sexual assault is an idiosyncratic one. Royeen (2013) has argued for
the uptake of chaos theory within occupational science and occupational therapy, calling it the “missing link to help integrate our science and our profession” (p. 613). In particular, Royeen (2003; 2013) suggests that the complexity of human doing is not well-captured by more linear scientific methods and, given its complexity, cannot be accurately predicted. Our findings thereby support our previous work (Chapter 4) in which using chaos theory to frame the study of doing in the aftermath of sexual assault is proposed.

Additionally, our findings add to both the sexual assault literature and the occupational science literature in that they may speak to aspects of resilience through doing, and by extension, the nature of the human spirit, following sexual assault. To date, surprisingly little research on resilience has been conducted with women who have experienced sexual assault in adulthood (Clark, 2017). However, a relationship between resilience and hope in the aftermath of trauma has been proposed within the broader literature (e.g., Panter-Brick, Goodman, Tol, & Eggerman, 2011). Specifically, Panter-Brick and colleagues (2011) suggest that holding hope for one’s future is an essential element in the development of resilience. Although we did not specifically set out to explore resilience within this study, our findings align with Panter-Brick and colleagues (2011) work. That is, although the participants’ accounts were largely marked by significant loss, the participants also demonstrated remarkable resilience and hope. Specifically, the participants described themselves and their lives as not defined by sexual assault alone. The participants discussed the ways in which, both in spite of and because of being sexually assaulted, they engaged in meaningful doings, such as returning to university, and were able to find hope for their futures in the aftermath of sexual assault. In this way, the findings of this study also echo Frankl’s (1962) assertion that hope in the face of major life disruption allows for the turning of suffering into achievement and accomplishment, otherwise termed “the defiant power of the human spirit” (p. 147). As such, these findings suggest that doing may nurture hope and may play a role in resilience in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Finally, although the findings of this study concern women’s everyday lives in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, these findings may also have relevance for understanding the aftermath of other major life disruptions. When considered with the findings of our previous work (Chapter 4), our findings related to the relationship between
doing and the self (i.e., I do what I am, and I am what I do), as well as how doing may be used to build a different life and self, have the potential to inform an understanding of human doing in the aftermath of major life disruption, broadly. Specifically, our previous findings suggest that the lived aftermath of sexual assault follows a particular temporality: that is, after an initial focus on doing to get by, participants built a different life through first re-establishing daily routines of self-care; then interacting with others and the world; and finally shifting their doings in the broader areas of school and work, as well as family roles (Chapter 4). The findings of this study speak to temporality of the response to sexual assault in a different way. Specifically, the findings suggest that, over time, the experience of sexual assault became increasingly incorporated into the participants’ understandings of their lives and selves. Further, while the “lens” of sexual assault significantly shaped the participants’ day-to-day doings after they were first sexually assaulted, with the passage of time, this lens became part of who the participants were and informed their broader life choices and trajectories.

Additionally, while the findings of this study and the findings of our previous work (Chapter 4) suggest that the response to sexual assault follows a particular temporality, they also point to the idiosyncrasy of this response. Particularly, although a broad pattern of change to doing (Chapter 4) as related to one’s view of the self was identified over time across participants’ accounts, the particular changes to specific doings varied greatly from participant to participant. With respect to this study, we found that specific occupational choice and engagement, as informed by one’s view of the self, are particular to the individual. Other patterns of responses to sexual assault (e.g., rape trauma syndrome; see Burgess & Holstrom, 1974) and other forms of major life disruption, such as the diagnosis of a terminal illness (e.g., the five stages of grief; see Kubler-Ross, 1969), that speak to some form of both temporality and idiosyncrasy have been described within the literature. Similarly, with continued research, the findings from this study, as well as the study described in our companion paper (Chapter 4), may have applicability for understanding the ways in which individuals respond to major life disruption, even beyond sexual assault that occurs during university, from an explicitly occupational perspective.
5.5.1 Limitations and Future Directions

As noted in the companion paper (Chapter 4), participants were recruited for this study through electronic postings on various online platforms and snowball sampling. With respect to recruitment through online platforms, several postings were made on the social media pages of individuals and/or organizations with a stated focus on work related to violence against women and/or mental health. It is therefore possible that a number of participants accessed information about this study through these online platforms and make up a significant proportion of the study sample. It follows that the accounts of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university may differ between women who access social media pages of individuals and/or organizations with a focus on violence against women and/or mental health and those who do not.

As with all approaches to research, a number of limitations are inherent to a critical occupational approach. As indicated by Njelesani, Cameron, and colleagues (2014), most significant among these is the relative paucity of occupational science literature. In particular, few studies to date have examined the consequences of sexual assault from an occupational perspective (e.g., Hodge, 2017; Twinley, 2012, 2016). As such, there was a scarcity of literature available from an occupational perspective with which we were able to contextualize the findings of this study. It is possible that this scarcity may be attributed to the comparative infancy of the discipline of occupational science (Rudman & Molke, 2009), as well as to the tendency for occupational science literature in the area of life disruption to focus on illness, accidents, or impairments (Hammell, 2004) rather than life events such as sexual assault.

Given that few researchers have undertaken to study the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective, continued exploration of this topic is warranted. In particular, few studies have examined how social forces (e.g., expectations, assumptions) shape women’s engagement in doing. As such, future research could explore the ways in which women who have been sexually assaulted negotiate (i.e., both accommodate and resist) these social forces, particularly for those women who have not attended university. The inclusion of women who have experienced sexual assault in their teens to early 20s—a group that consistently reports the highest rates of sexual assault victimization (e.g., Conroy & Cotter,
Last, this work could be extended through a consideration of the ways in which these findings might have relevance for understanding an occupational response in the aftermath of major life disruptions beyond sexual assault that occurs during university. For example, more thoroughly exploring the broad pattern of this response, especially over time (i.e., considering temporality), while also exploring the nuances of individual experience (i.e., considering idiosyncrasy), after sexual assault more broadly would contribute to the uncovering of a fuller picture of its aftermath (see World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Further, such exploration would contribute to the literature on life disruption within the field of occupational science, which has been primarily focused on illness, accidents, or impairment (Hammell, 2004). Finally, examining in contrast individuals’ experiences of doing in both the short- and long-term, as well as the mechanisms underlying this doing, across a range of types of life disruption could advance an understanding of human doing, or occupation, in the aftermath of major life disruption, broadly.

5.6 Conclusion

In undertaking this study, we sought to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. Using a critical occupational approach, our findings suggest that one’s doing and one’s understanding of the self are inextricable in the aftermath of sexual assault. Specifically, we found that women’s understandings of the self were discussed as forever changed by sexual assault, and their everyday doings reflected and were informed by this change. However, our findings also suggest that, while being sexually assaulted during university is a significant life experience that shapes women’s selves and doings in important ways, this experience alone does not determine women’s doings. When considered together, our findings highlight the gravity of the experience of sexual assault that occurs during university, as well as the possibility for resilience through doing in its aftermath. Given the
potential applicability of these findings to understanding human doing broadly, we argue for the continued study of doing following a variety of forms of major life disruption both within and beyond the aftermath of sexual assault.
Chapter 6
Discussion and Conclusion
6 Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I bring together the findings of this research to bear on the overall thesis of this dissertation: that women’s occupational lives may be altered in significant and lasting ways following the experience of sexual assault that occurs during university. Despite the presence of restrictive expectations for doing to appear “normal” in the aftermath of sexual assault—which suggest that the notion that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault persists—for the women in this research, sexual assault that occurs during university may be understood as a major life disruption. That is to say, almost no areas of these women’s everyday lives went untouched by sexual assault in both the short- and long-term; however, the hoped-for academic- and career-related futures that these women worked toward through the university period were often particularly affected. Indeed, for the women in this research, sexual assault produced such severe disruption that it necessitated the (re)building of their occupational lives and selves. For these women, sexual assault that occurs during university may be undeniably understood to represent an occupational issue.

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to provide an examination of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university—that is, how women’s lives subsequently unfold—from an occupational perspective. The findings presented in Chapters 2 through 5 addressed the specific objectives of this research. To reiterate,

(a) The first research objective was to explore what is known about whether and how women’s occupations are changed by an experience of sexual assault. This objective was addressed in Chapter 2. Through a review of the sexual assault literature, a comprehensive description of occupational aftermath of sexual assault as presented within the existing literature was provided.

(b) The second research objective was to examine how women textually represent everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. This objective was addressed in Chapter 3. Through an analysis of memoirs written by women who had experienced sexual assault during university, descriptions of what
the memoirists “did” in the aftermath were explored, as were the ways in which the memoirists discussed how they came to “do.”

(c) The third research objective was to explore the breadth and nature of the changes to occupation experienced by women in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, in both the short- and long-term. This objective was addressed in Chapter 4. Through an analysis of women’s accounts of everyday living, an in-depth description of the participants’ experiences of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university was provided.

(d) The fourth research objective was to examine the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. This objective was addressed in Chapter 5. Through an analysis of women’s accounts of everyday living, the mechanisms that underlie what the participants did in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university was explored.

In what follows, I raise the key contributions that are derived from the findings of this research. I then discuss the implications of this research for the sexual assault literature and the occupational science literature. Finally, prior to concluding this dissertation, I discuss the limitations of this research while also presenting suggestions for future research.

### 6.2 Key Findings and Contributions

Through this dissertation, I sought to examine the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university from an occupational perspective; specifically, to uncover a more complete picture of the “hidden” consequences of sexual assault (see World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). This dissertation makes five key contributions to knowledge in the fields of sexual assault and occupational science:

(a) An occupational perspective may be used to uncover some of the hidden consequences of sexual assault.

(b) Sexual assault that occurs during university is occupational life-altering.
(c) Sexual assault alters women’s occupational lives in ways that at once follow a pattern and are particular to the individual.

(d) The alterations produced by sexual assault necessitate the (re)building of one’s occupational life and self.

(e) The ways in which women’s lives are altered by sexual assault during university may be used to inform an understanding of the occupational response to major life disruption.

6.2.1 An Occupational Perspective May be Used to Uncover Some of the Hidden Consequences of Sexual Assault

The findings of this research highlight that a more complete picture of the aftermath of sexual assault may be uncovered through the use of an occupational perspective. In particular, the findings support the World Health Organization’s assertion that the extent of the aftermath of sexual assault is underestimated, in large part because many of its consequences remain hidden (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Although the physical and psychological health consequences have been largely foregrounded within the picture of the aftermath of sexual assault to date, the findings of this research suggest that, if brought into focus using an occupational perspective or lens, occupation-related consequences may also be seen within this picture.

Importantly, the findings of this research provide support for the existence of an occupational aftermath of sexual assault (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018) and contribute to a more fulsome understanding of the aftermath of sexual assault, as such. In particular, the findings point to the ways in which an occupational perspective may be used to identify changes to women’s everyday lives produced by sexual assault beyond the changes to “health risk behaviours,” such as alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking that are frequently discussed within the published literature (see Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018). When examining women’s experiences from an occupational perspective, it is evident that changes to alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking represent only a small fraction of the changes to occupation produced by sexual assault and do not capture the significance that the experience of sexual assault during university may have for women’s broad occupational trajectories (see Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Chapter 5). Accordingly, through the examination of the aftermath
of sexual assault from an occupational perspective, previously hidden consequences of sexual assault may be uncovered. In the following sections, I describe in further detail the specific ways in which this research contributes to an understanding of what everyday living looks like after experiencing sexual assault during university.

6.2.2 Sexual Assault That Occurs During University is Occupational Life-Altering

The findings of this research contribute an understanding of sexual assault, especially as it occurs during university, as an experience that may alter women’s occupational lives in significant and lasting ways. Across the four manuscripts presented in this dissertation, sexual assault was found to have important consequences for women’s lives when considered from an occupational perspective (Chapter 2; Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Chapter 5). Specifically, sexual assault was discussed as a violent incursion into women’s lives that, despite the constricted picture presented in the existing literature (Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018), would seem to leave almost no area untouched: the memoirists and participants described their doings, or occupations, as vastly changed in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred during university (Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Chapter 5). These findings point to the extreme breadth of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, which extends far beyond, for example, changes to alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and smoking as found within the published literature (see Chapter 2; Stewart et al., 2018).

Although all manner of occupations were found to be changed in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurred during university, as the memoirists and participants discussed, academic and career trajectories were found to be particularly altered in both the short- and long-term (Chapter 4; Chapter 5). Given that the university period is understood to be a particularly crucial time in transitioning from the role of the student to the roles of worker and professional (Whiteford, 2017), it was not unexpected that discussions of changes to one’s academic and work lives would be abundant within the women’s accounts of everyday living spanning between 2 and 40+ years post-sexual assault (Chapter 4). Specifically, the participants explicitly attributed lasting shifts in their academic and career choices and trajectories to the experience of sexual assault during university (Chapter 4; Chapter 5).
The findings of this research suggest that sexual assault that occurs during university is life-altering, in part, because it alters one’s view of the self. The memoirists’ and participants’ understandings of the self were found to be shaped by sexual assault (Chapter 3; Chapter 5). Although a relatively limited number of studies have explored the relationship between sexual assault and the self (e.g., Brison, 2002; Clarke, 2008; Twinley, 2016), their findings support those generated from this research: that sexual assault has the potential to alter how women understand themselves. However, the findings build upon this work to suggest that the experience of sexual assault results in a changed understanding of the self—specifically, understanding oneself to be a sexually assaulted woman—which in turn shapes one’s everyday lives and occupations, particularly as related to what women understand to be possible for their academic- and/or work-related futures (Chapter 5).

These findings serve to highlight the critical nature of the timing of an experience of sexual assault that occurs during university. That is to say, the findings of this research suggest that the university period is a particularly crucial time in creating one’s life. Specifically, the participants discussed their once hoped-for academic and work futures—futures for which their time at university was preparing them to achieve—were largely lost to sexual assault (Chapter 5). This loss of one’s imagined future speaks to the deep significance of being sexually assaulted during university. These findings suggest that sexual assault during university may be understood as a violation of women’s future autonomy, or the right to an open future (see Feinberg, 1980). However, these findings also echo previous research in the area of grief in which the phenomenon of a sense of loss of future has been documented (Maccallum & Bryant, 2011; Robinaugh & McNally, 2013). Given the sense of deep loss expressed by the participants in this research, these findings support an understanding of sexual assault that occurs during university as a grave event, with broad and long-lasting consequences (e.g., Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Zinzow et al., 2011).

In many ways, these findings reflect some dominant discourses; namely, the understanding of sexual assault as traumatic (see Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). That is, everyday understandings of sexual assault present its consequences as severe and often life-long (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). However, this discourse is also challenged by other findings; specifically, the notion that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault was reflected within the
memoirists’ and participants’ accounts through the *aftermyth*: the false but widely held belief that there is a particular standard of behaviour for women who have been sexually assaulted during university (Chapter 3; Chapter 5). Importantly, these findings suggest that women are expected to engage in normal occupations in normal ways, and that women’s doings are indeed shaped by this expectation (Chapter 3; Chapter 5). I assert that the expectations for doing in the aftermath of sexual assault parallel harmful expectations embedded within rape myths (see Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), and serve to shape and limit women’s occupational possibilities (see Rudman, 2005, 2010) in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university in important ways. Ultimately, these expectations for doing reinforce the assumption that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault and obfuscate the potentially severe consequences that sexual assault may hold for women’s everyday lives.

6.2.3 Sexual Assault Alters Women’s Occupational Lives in Ways That at Once Follow a Pattern and are Particular to the Individual

The findings of this research add rich, in-depth descriptions of the different ways in which women’s occupational lives are shaped by an experience of sexual assault that occurs during university. In addition to highlighting the breadth of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, as previously noted (Chapter 3; Chapter 4), the findings suggest that the occupational aftermath of sexual assault follows a particular temporality (Chapter 4). That is to say, in the immediate aftermath, participants discussed their lives as so severely disrupted by sexual assault that their everyday lives were focused on getting by. In the more distant aftermath, participants described how they first began to re-establish daily routines of self-care (i.e., micro occupations), then to interact with others and the world around them within a framework of safety (i.e., meso occupations), and finally to shift their doings in the broader occupational areas of school and work, as well as family roles (i.e., macro occupations; Chapter 4). These findings align with aspects of both Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of human needs and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1995) ecological systems theory.

Despite the observation that the occupational aftermath follows a particular pattern over time, it was also found to be idiosyncratic (Chapter 4). By this, I mean that specific changes to occupation experienced by the participants were particular to the individual. Although commonalities were found related to broad areas of occupational change (i.e., changes to
school, paid work, volunteering, caring for the self, caring for others, leisure, and social relationships with acquaintances, friends, family, and intimate partners), the particular ways in which specific occupations within these broad areas varied greatly from participant to participant. An identifiable order to the occupational aftermath of sexual assault only emerged when examining changes to the participants’ occupations over time. Further, while being sexually assaulted during university was found to be a significant life experience that shapes women’s occupational lives in important ways, these findings also suggest that this experience alone does not determine women’s specific occupational choice or engagement (Chapter 5). That is, although women’s occupational trajectories were altered and shaped by sexual assault, they did not all follow the same occupational trajectory. In these ways, the findings contribute to the understanding of occupation as idiosyncratic and deeply personal (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that occupational choice and engagement do not follow a linear path in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. These findings align with the findings of other studies of human occupation that have been framed in chaos theory (e.g., Davis, 2009; Elliot et al., 2001; Haltiwanger et al., 2007; Ikiugu, 2005). Chaos theory purports that there is hidden order in chaos; in cases of disorder, an underlying pattern of order is present (Coffey, 1998). Although chaos theory has roots in the field of mathematics, its principles have been used metaphorically to study phenomena within the social sciences and humanities (e.g., Byrne, 1998; Eve et al., 1997; Kiel & Elliott, 1996). Within the field of occupational science, a number of scholars have highlighted the applicability of chaos theory to the study of human occupation and have suggested a shift away from the use of linear scientific methods (e.g., Eakman, 2007; Fogelberg & Frauwirth, 2010; Ikiugu & Rosso, 2006; Royeen, 2003). Given the complexity of occupation, Royeen (2003) has called chaos theory the “missing link to help integrate our science and our profession” (p. 613). In light of these arguments, I suggest that the study of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault may be well-suited to a framing in chaos theory.
6.2.4 The Alterations Produced by Sexual Assault Necessitate the (Re)Building of One’s Occupational Life and Self

The findings of this research contribute new insights into the ways in which women may (re)build their lives and selves through occupation in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. These findings suggest that, in the aftermath of sexual assault, everyday living is a matter of getting on, but never getting over (Chapter 3). Although sexual assault was discussed by the memoirists and participants as an experience after which their lives and selves were forever changed, the memoirists and participants also suggested that, through doing, it was possible to move forward (Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Chapter 5). In this way, occupation was found to be constructed as a means of responding to and negotiating the changes to one’s life and one’s self produced by sexual assault (Chapter 3; Chapter 5). I have termed the ways in which women use occupation to (re)build their lives and their selves as occupation-in-conscious-use (Chapter 4). Taken together, this research points to the considerable labour performed by women post-sexual assault, as well as to the transformative potential of occupation in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Specifically, the findings of this research point to the ways in which, following sexual assault, daily living becomes work and it is through this work that a different life is built (Chapter 3; Chapter 4). That is, the memoirists and participants described the ways in which they engaged in particular occupations, especially those related to one’s schooling or career, to build a different life for themselves (Chapter 3; Chapter 4). In some ways, engaging in particular kinds of occupations (i.e., related to building a different life; see Chapter 3), may be understood as a means through which women strive to control everyday living. Indeed, the notion that women “do” as a form of control after sexual assault is supported by previous research which indicates that women may engage in alcohol and/or drug use or change their eating patterns (i.e., engage in eating disordered behaviours) in an attempt to exercise control after extreme stress or trauma (Van der Kolk, 2014).

These findings add to both the sexual assault literature and the occupational science literature with respect to understandings of resilience. In particular, few studies have explored resilience among women who have experienced sexual assault (see Clark, 2017). While this research was not focused on developing an understanding of resilience, the participants
conveyed remarkable resilience through their accounts. In particular, the participants discussed how they consciously engaged in occupations to build lives and selves that were informed by their experiences of sexual assault, but were not defined by these experiences (Chapter 4; Chapter 5). The findings of this study speak to Frankl’s (1962) work on the “defiant power of the human spirit” (p. 147). That is, turning suffering into achievement and accomplishment in the face of major life disruption is central to the human spirit.

Further, the findings of this research suggest that a different self may also be built through occupation in the aftermath of sexual assault (Chapter 5). The participants described the ways in which they engaged in particular occupations—again, especially those related to one’s schooling or career, or that reminded participants of who they understood themselves to be prior to being sexually assaulted—to (re)build the self (Chapter 5). These findings add to the growing body of literature on the relationship between occupation and the self in that they reflect the notion, “I am what I do.” Indeed, these findings support the assumption that occupation and the self are intimately related (see Phelan & Kinsella, 2009), as well as the understanding that individuals become who they are through what they do (see Nagel, 1987; Taylor & Kay, 2015).

6.2.5 The Ways in Which Women’s Lives are Altered by Sexual Assault During University May be Used to Inform an Understanding of the Occupational Response to Major Life Disruption

When considered together, the findings of this research are suggestive of a model of occupational response following major life disruption. This research identifies specific dimensions of the complexity of human occupation and may thus be applied beyond an understanding of the intersection of human occupation and sexual assault. That is, although the findings of this research concern women’s everyday lives following sexual assault during university, these findings may also have relevance for understanding individuals’ occupational responses following other forms of major life disruption.

In particular, the findings suggest that occupation may be used to (re)build one’s life and one’s self following the major disruption of sexual assault during university, or what I have termed occupation-in-conscious-use. The notion of occupation-in-conscious-use parallels the
notion of language-in-use, in which language is understood as a channel for how we view and construct the world around us, rather than a neutral communication tool (see Gee, 2014; Mooney & Evans, 2018). Specifically, the findings of this research suggest that, in the aftermath of sexual assault, occupation is so severely disrupted that daily living becomes work and one’s view of the self is so severely disrupted that developing a new view of the self is necessitated. Moreover, the findings highlight that occupation may be consciously used by individuals to do or to construct: through work (i.e., the conscious engagement in occupation), a different life and self may be built in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (Chapter 2; Chapter 3; Chapter 4). However, the specific ways in which the memoirists and participants used occupation to (re)build their lives and selves varied across individuals, thereby reflecting the idiosyncrasy of human occupation, as well as of the individual responses to sexual assault (Polatajko, Davis et al., 2013).

Further, the findings suggest that there is a temporality to the occupational response following sexual assault, which is reflected within a consideration of the hierarchical ordering of human occupation, as well as the ecology of human occupation. That is, following the severe disruption produced by sexual assault, characterized by a focus on getting by in its initial aftermath, participants were found to first engage in those occupations related to caring for oneself, then those related to interacting with others and one’s environment, and then those related to one’s academic or work trajectories or broader life roles (Chapter 4). These findings resonate with other scholarship in the field of occupational science in which Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs has been used to frame an understanding of occupation, which suggest three functions of occupation: “to provide for immediate bodily needs of sustenance, self care and shelter; to develop skills, social structures and technology aimed at safety and superiority over predators and the environment; and to exercise and develop personal capacities enabling the organism to be maintained and to flourish” (Wilcock, 1993, p. 20). Additionally, these findings resonate with previous occupational science and sexual assault scholarship in which Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1995) ecological systems theory has been used to inform an understanding of human occupation (e.g., Dunn et al., 1994; Howe & Briggs, 1982; Law et al., 1996) and sexual assault (e.g., Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Neville & Heppner, 1999; Wadsworth et al., 2018).
However, the findings of this research add to the existing literature in that they point to not only a hierarchy of need for occupation (as per Wilcock, 1993) or a relationship between the individual and their contexts (as per Dunn et al., 1994; Howe & Briggs, 1982; Law et al., 1996), but to the hierarchical and ecological ordering of occupation itself over time (i.e., micro, meso, macro). Specifically, these findings suggest that, following severe disruption to one’s occupational life, the occupational response is such that one begins to (re)build one’s life through first engaging in those occupations foundational to the sustenance of life (i.e., micro occupations), then in those occupations that support one to move about the world (i.e., meso occupations), and finally in those occupations that support personal development and growth, and that broadly shape how one interacts with society (i.e., macro occupations). Further, these findings suggest that this (re)building happens over time.

Additionally, the findings of this research speak to the temporality of the occupational response following sexual assault, as reflected within the development of the view of the self and its relationship to doing over time. That is, occupational choice and engagement was found to be shaped by participants’ view of the self; specifically, viewing oneself to be a sexually assaulted woman. Further, this view of the self was discussed by participants as a lens through which they viewed the world and their occupations. However, the findings suggest that, while this lens primarily shaped the occupations in which the participants engaged in the day-to-day in the time period closest to their experiences of sexual assault, this lens began to inform participants’ broader life choices and trajectories, over time. Together, these findings suggest that, following severe disruption to one’s occupational life, the occupational response is such that one’s changed view of the self first shapes those routine, daily occupations (i.e., micro occupations) before those occupations more closely related to one’s life roles and that are understood to shape how one interacts with the broader society (i.e., macro occupations).

In sum, the findings of this research are suggestive of an occupational response to major life disruption that may have applicability beyond the context of sexual assault during university. The findings suggest that this response involves the idiosyncratic (re)building of one’s life and self through occupation (i.e., occupation-in-conscious-use) but that follows a particular temporality and hierarchical and ecological ordering (i.e., micro, meso, macro occupations).
that transcends this idiosyncrasy. To wit, this research is suggestive of an occupational response that is characterized both by broad patterns of common experience (i.e., temporality), as well as nuanced, individual experience (i.e., idiosyncrasy). Within the existing literature, other patterns of responses to sexual assault (e.g., rape trauma syndrome; see Burgess & Holstrom, 1974), as well as other forms of major life disruption (e.g., the five stages of grief; see Kubler-Ross, 1969), that speak to forms of temporality and idiosyncrasy have also been described. With continued research, I argue that the findings of this research may be used to advance an understanding of the ways in which individuals respond to major life disruption, even beyond sexual assault that occurs during university, from an occupational perspective.

6.3 Implications

Having summarized the key findings and contributions of this research, in what follows, I discuss the implications of this research for the sexual assault literature and the occupational science literature.

6.3.1 Sexual Assault Literature

The findings presented here have relevance for the way in which the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university is understood moving forward. In particular, the findings reveal previously hidden or minimally explored dimensions of the aftermath of sexual assault for consideration within the sexual assault literature.

The findings of this research serve to uncover a fuller understanding of the consequences of sexual assault. In doing so, the findings reinforce the World Health Organization’s assertion that there are consequences of sexual assault that remain hidden, and that its aftermath continues to be underestimated (World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). In uncovering a picture of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university from an occupational perspective, the findings of this research highlight that the occupation-related consequences of sexual assault have been largely hidden to date. This research provides support not only for the existing of the occupation-related consequences of sexual assault that occurs during university, but also emphasizes the significance of these consequences. That the experience of sexual assault that occurs during
university has the potential to produce significant, lasting changes to women’s occupations, or doings, must be considered in future sexual assault research if a true understanding of its full aftermath is to be developed.

Similarly, the findings of this research help to explicate understandings of the consequences of sexual assault on daily “functioning.” Although an acknowledgement that sexual assault may affect daily functioning exists within the sexual assault literature (see Boyd, 2011; Gavey & Schmidt, 2011; National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2010), exactly how daily functioning is affected does not appear to be well understood. In particular, daily functioning is often narrowly conceptualized in relation to sexual assault and its aftermath (e.g., as comprised of engagement in health risk behaviours; see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Instead, these findings point to an understanding of changes to daily functioning (i.e., engagement in occupation) that are much broader than the current literature would suggest.

Further, the findings of this research reinforce an understanding of sexual assault that occurs during university as a major life event or disruption. Indeed, Gavey and Schmidt (2011) suggest that everyday understandings of sexual assault are dominated by the trauma of rape discourse; that is, sexual assault is understood as a traumatic event, with consequences that are primarily psychological and life-long but that will moderate in time. Indeed, the findings of this research suggest that sexual assault has a life-long legacy (Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Chapter 5). In particular, an understanding of sexual assault as an experience that one never gets over (Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Chapter 5) points to the gravity of sexual assault during university. However, in the identification of significant changes to women’s daily occupations, as well as their occupational futures and trajectories, this research offers a challenge to the assumption that the consequences of sexual assault are primarily psychological (e.g., Gavey & Schmidt, 2011).

At the same time, the findings also highlight that an understanding of sexual assault as “no big deal” for women continues to persist, as well. Specifically, the findings suggest that the assumption that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault continues to pervade everyday understandings of sexual assault, as evident in the expectations for doing primarily
informed by a concern for normality reflected within the memoirists’ and participants’ accounts (Chapter 3; Chapter 5). Although the findings of this research suggest that this assumption is incorrect—at least for the memoirists and participants—an understanding of sexual assault as “no big deal” for women appears to continue to inform everyday understandings of sexual assault to some extent.

Additionally, the findings of this research may have implications for understanding resilience in the aftermath of sexual assault and the role of occupation. As Clark (2017) suggests, to date, little research on resilience has been conducted with women who have experienced sexual assault. While this research was not undertaken for the purposes of exploring resilience in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, elements with relevance to resilience emerged from the data. In particular, the findings of this study may be used to inform further understanding of the human spirit in the face of major life disruption, as well as the relationship between doing and resilience.

Moreover, the findings of this research have relevance for expanding an understanding of narrative as a data source within the sexual assault literature. Within the field of occupational science, analyzing narratives has been well-established as a means of understanding human occupation (Bonsall, 2012). However, in other fields, narratives, including written autobiographical narratives, are only recently being increasingly acknowledged as legitimate sources of data (O’Brien & Clark, 2012). The findings of this study were generated from the exploration of several facets of narrative engagement of sexual assault; that is, women’s stories of significant life experiences. As such, these findings have methodological implications for the sexual assault literature: narratives offer important information about women’s experiences of sexual assault.

Finally, the findings of this research have implications for the ways in which the aftermath of sexual assault, beyond its occurrence during university, is understood and studied. This research points to the usefulness of an occupational perspective to uncovering the hidden consequences of sexual assault (see World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Through the use of an occupational perspective, the occupation-related consequences of sexual assault may be identified and foregrounded within
the broader picture of the aftermath of sexual assault. It is through the study of the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective that an expanded understanding of the intersection between human occupation and sexual assault may be developed.

6.3.2 Occupational Science Literature

The findings of this research also hold significant implications for the occupational science literature. In particular, the findings have relevance for the way in which human occupation, especially in the aftermath of major life disruption, is understood moving forward. Specifically, these findings reveal new dimensions of human occupation for consideration within the occupational science literature.

Taken together, the findings of this research have importance for the way in which the experience of sexual assault that occurs during university is understood within the occupational science literature. Apart from this research, few studies have taken an explicitly occupational examination of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs at any point across the life course (e.g., Hodge, 2017; Lentin, 2002; Ratcliff et al., 2002; Twinley, 2012, 2016). However, the findings of this research speak to the worthiness of sexual assault as a topic for study within the field of occupational science. Specifically, the findings point to a number of consequences for women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university and suggest that there is information to be learned about human occupation through the study of the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective.

Although the findings of this research advance an understanding of what women do in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, the findings also provide support for the existing occupational science literature that suggests that doing, or occupational choice and engagement, is shaped by a variety of factors, including social forces (e.g., Gallagher et al., 2015; Njelesani, Gibson et al., 2014; Njelesani et al., 2013). In particular, the findings of this research suggest that expectations for doing (i.e., the aftermyth), which re/produced the assumption that “no harm was done” (see Burt, 1991) by sexual assault, shaped women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault, particularly as related to a limiting of occupational possibilities (see Rudman, 2005, 2010). These findings suggest that, to develop
a robust understanding of human occupation, consideration of the mechanisms that underlie what individuals do is necessary.

Additionally, the findings of this research have implications for the understanding of human occupation as a complex phenomenon. Although the complexity of occupation has long been acknowledged within the field of occupational science (e.g., Yerxa et al., 1990), the findings of this research add to this understanding through identifying specific dimensions of this complexity. Regarding idiosyncrasy, the findings highlight that occupational choice and engagement do not follow a linear path in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university; changes to occupation following sexual assault are highly individual. In particular, these findings provide support for the consideration of chaos theory in developing a deepened understanding of human occupation. Royeen (2003) asserts that linear scientific methods do not adequately capture the complexity of human occupation and proposes chaos theory as the “missing link to help integrate our science and our profession” (p. 613). In light of these arguments for the use of chaos theory in understanding human occupation, the findings of this research point to the applicability of using chaos theory to frame future research related to human occupation.

Regarding the response to major life disruptions, the findings speak to broad patterns related to women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault and suggest that there are temporal aspects to the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. That is, the findings suggest that in the aftermath of sexual assault, women first began to re-establish daily routines of self-care (i.e., micro occupations), then started to interact with others and the world around them within a framework of safety (i.e., meso occupations), and finally shifted their doings in the broader occupational areas of school and work, as well as family roles (i.e., macro occupations). This pattern is reminiscent of both Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of human needs and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1995) ecological systems theory. Although Maslow’s (1943) and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1995) works have been previously applied to the study of occupation (see Dunn et al., 1994; Howe & Briggs, 1982; Law et al., 1996; Wilcock, 1993), these findings have implications for occupational science in that they speak to new facets of an understanding of human occupation. Specifically, the
findings of this research point to the hierarchical and ecological ordering of human occupation in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

Further, the findings of this study have relevance for understanding “what occupation does.” Particularly, the findings suggest that, after being sexually assaulted during university, daily living becomes work, and through this work a different life and self may be (re)built. The notion that occupation functions to “do” and that individuals may consciously use occupation to “do” is captured by the term occupation-in-conscious-use. This term is intended to parallel understandings of language-in-use, which involve viewing language as a channel for how we view and construct the world around us rather than simply a neutral tool of communication (Mooney & Evans, 2018). In particular, these findings acknowledge that occupation is not simply an object of inquiry (see Njelesani et al., 2013). Instead, occupation is productive and may be consciously used by individuals to do or to construct: through occupation, a different life and self may be (re)built in the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university.

When considered together, the findings of this research have implications for how responding to major life disruption is conceptualized from an occupational perspective. That is to say, many of the findings of this research, while specifically related to the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university, have potentially broader implications. For example, findings related to the hierarchical ordering of human occupation (i.e., micro, meso, macro), the temporal and idiosyncratic nature of changes to occupation, and the understanding of occupation as a means through which a life and self may be (re)built (i.e., occupation-in-conscious-use), may have applicability beyond the context of sexual assault that occurs during university. The novel contributions that these findings make to the understanding of human occupation may be sufficiently broad to have relevance to understanding other forms of major life disruption from an occupational perspective. In this way, these findings have the potential for significance beyond contributing an understanding of human occupation following sexual assault during university, to advancing a model of occupational response following major life disruption more broadly.
6.4 Reflections on the Research

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I raised issues of reflexivity, positionality, and rigour as related to this research. I raise these issues again here to provide a final reflexive comment on my engagement in this research process. In reflecting upon this research, I feel it important to acknowledge that mine is one particular interpretation of the data generated through the review of the literature, the analysis of memoirs, and the interviews with study participants. To wit, it is important to note that this dissertation, like all qualitative research, presents only one possible analysis and interpretation or perspective on the phenomenon of interest: the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university. While I have endeavoured to produce an analysis and interpretation of the data that is both rigorous and plausible, and that contributes new knowledge to the understanding of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university from an occupational perspective, a different interpretation of this data could have been produced by other researchers with different conceptual lenses.

Related to this is the level of “convergence” that exists within the findings of this research, particularly between those findings generated from the analysis of memoirs and participant interviews. Within the traditions of qualitative inquiry, making use of multiple data sources and methods is considered to contribute to good quality research (Tracy, 2010). Consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of this research, I understand the practice of using multiple data sources and methods as a form of crystallization (see Ellingson, 2008; Richardson, 2000) rather than a form of triangulation (see Denzin, 1978). That is to say, in drawing upon multiple data sources and methods, I did not set out to achieve credibility based on convergence on the same conclusion (i.e., triangulation; see Denzin, 1978). Instead, turning to multiple data sources and methods allowed for a more complex and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest: the occupational aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university (i.e., crystallization; see Ellingson, 2008; Richardson, 2000).

While the analysis of memoirs and participant interviews facilitated the exploration of different facets of narrative engagement with sexual assault and offered different layers of understanding to the examination of the aftermath of sexual assault during university from an occupational perspective, the findings generated from these analyses do converge
significantly. Given that I am the instrument of my own research (see Guba & Lincoln, 1981) and that all aspects of this research, including data generation, analysis, and interpretation are shaped by my unique attributes (see Pezalla et al., 2012), at least some convergence was to be expected. As previously discussed, in an effort to consider the ways in which I might be shaping the research findings, I engaged in the writing of reflexive memos (e.g., Birks et al., 2008), as well as frequent discussions with my supervisory committee.

Finally, while engaging in this research—particularly as related to reading the memoirs and listening to the participants’ stories—was overwhelmingly rewarding, it was at times demanding, as well. Previous research suggests that I am not alone in these feelings (e.g., Morrison, 2007). Martin (2005) understands such experience as “rape work,” or the “labour involved in doing something to, for, or with victims after they report being sexually assaulted” (p. 2). Further, Martin (2005) suggests that rape work, of which this research is a part, often holds personal and emotional consequences for those involved, including disruptions to sleep and increased sensitivity to violence. Nevertheless, I am incredibly humbled to have had the privilege to bear witness to the stories of the memoirists, as well as the women who so generously gave their time to participating in this research.

6.5 Limitations and Future Directions

To begin the discussion of the limitations of this research, I should acknowledge the conceptual and methodological limitations to taking a critical occupational approach to this research. Although a critical occupational approach has relevance and utility for exploring human doing, it forecloses other conceptually or theoretically informed analyses and alternative insights on women’s experiences following sexual assault that occurs during university (e.g., an intersectional feminist approach exploring the gender, race, and class dimensions of experience). I have attempted to address this challenge by making explicit the assumptions that underlie the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of this research. In doing so, it is my hope that readers may consider how these assumptions have shaped my analysis and interpretation of the data.

Further, this research is arguably limited by its data sources and study samples. With respect to the review of the sexual assault literature, only those articles that were written in English
were included. As such, information about changes to women’s occupations in the aftermath of sexual assault that may be present in articles not written in English was not considered in this research. Additionally, many of the reviewed articles were written by authors affiliated with American universities and research institutions. Although American culture is diverse, these articles primarily reflect an American understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault.

With respect to the memoirs selected for analysis, all were written by women who attended university in the United States of America. As with the articles included in the review of the literature, despite the diversity of American culture, the memoirs only reflect perspectives on life after sexual assault embedded within the American context. Further, and importantly, it must be noted that these memoirs largely reflect a particular type of experience of sexual assault: three of the four memoirs provided accounts of stranger rape. It has been argued that stranger rape represents the classic rape narrative and is much more likely to be perceived as a “legitimate” victimization in public discourse than accounts of acquaintance rape, although acquaintance rape remains far more common an experience (Anderson, 2005; Du Mont et al., 2003). It must be considered that these memoirs were produced for the purposes of mass market publishing and were thus edited in a manner suited to the expectations of a publishing market. It is possible that these market forces have served to perpetuate the classic stranger rape narrative.

With respect to the women who participated in interviews, all were recruited through electronic postings on online platforms or through snowball sampling. Several recruitment postings were made on the social media pages of individuals and/or organizations who perform work related to the topic of violence against women. As such, it is possible that only women with an interest in the topic of violence against women were exposed to these postings, and thus make up the study sample. Further, it is possible that accounts of everyday living in the aftermath of sexual assault may vary between women with an interest in the topic of violence against women and those without such interest.

In considering its limitations, as well as its key findings and contributions, this research may be extended in a number of important ways. First, future research should attend to the ways
in which an occupational perspective may be used to examine the aftermath of sexual assault with populations other than women who were sexually assaulted during university. Although the university period holds particular significance from an occupational perspective (e.g., Whiteford, 2017), sexual assault has the potential to significantly shape women’s occupations when it occurs at any point across the life course. Currently, an understanding of the occupational aftermath of sexual assault as it occurs across adulthood has not been developed. Further exploring women’s experiences outside of the occurrence of sexual assault during university may contribute additional, important information about the occupational aftermath of sexual assault, including a deepened understanding of what women do and how they come to do in sexual assault’s aftermath.

Additionally, this work could be extended through a consideration of the ways in which the findings of this research might have relevance for understanding human occupation following major life disruptions beyond that of sexual assault. In particular, a consideration of the applicability of the findings related to a hierarchical ordering of human occupation (i.e., micro, meso, macro), a temporal and idiosyncratic nature of changes to occupation, and an understanding of occupation as a means through which a life and self may be (re)built (i.e., occupation-in-conscious-use), may advance an understanding of human occupation in the aftermath of life disruption, broadly.

6.6 Conclusion

This dissertation provides an examination of the aftermath of sexual assault that occurs during university from an occupational perspective, bringing to light previously hidden consequences of sexual assault to uncover a more complete understanding of its aftermath. In particular this dissertation lays bare the ways in which the occupational lives of the women in this research were altered in significant and lasting ways following the experience of sexual assault while at university. Together, the findings of this research suggest that, contrary to the assumption that sexual assault is “no big deal” for women, it was indeed a major disruption with a life-long legacy for the women in this research. Almost no areas of these women’s everyday lives went untouched by sexual assault during university, whether in the short- or long-term; however, their academic- and career trajectories were particularly affected. The
findings of this research suggest that the disruption—or irruption—produced by sexual assault was so severe that it necessitated the (re)building of the women’s lives and selves.

Continued research is needed to more deeply understand not only the aftermath of sexual assault from an occupational perspective, but also human occupation following major life disruption more broadly. It is my sincere hope that this dissertation conveys the profound significance that sexual assault that occurs during university may have for those who experience it. From an occupational perspective, a disruption to occupation is a disruption to the human condition: “Individuals are most true to their humanity when engaged in occupation” (Yerxa et al., 1990, p. 7).
References

References marked with an asterisk indicate articles included in the narrative review (Chapter 2).


Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English Language Teaching, 5*(9), 9–16.


Appendix A: Letter of Ethics Approval

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 33623

January 2, 2017

Dr. Helene Polatajko and Dr. Janice Du Mont
DEPT OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

Ms. Katherine Stewart
DEPT OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

Dear Dr. Helene Polatajko, Dr. Janice Du Mont and Ms. Katherine Stewart,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "The occupational sequelae of sexual assault"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHICS APPROVAL</th>
<th>Original Approval Date: January 2, 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expiry Date: January 1, 2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Review Level: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are writing to advise you that the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB's delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Research Oversight and Compliance Office - Human Research Ethics Program as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Ethics Renewal Form or a Study Completion/Closure Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that ethics renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Please note, all approved research studies are eligible for a routine Post-Approval Review (PAR) site visit. If chosen, you will receive a notification letter from our office. For information on PAR, please see http://www.research.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/documents/135459/PAR-Program-Description.pdf.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Peter, Ph.D.
REB Chair
Appendix B: Letter of Ethics Amendment Approval

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 39023

September 28, 2017

Dr. Helene Polatajko and Dr. Janice Du Mont and Ms. Katherine Stewart
DEPT OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

Dear Dr. Helene Polatajko, Dr. Janice Du Mont and Ms. Katherine Stewart,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "The occupational sequelae of sexual assault"

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to an amendment (Received August 29, 2017) to the above-referenced research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. This amendment approval letter only applies to what was outlined in the request form under section 5.a) or otherwise marked in the revised protocol.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Elizabeth Peter, Ph.D.
REB Chair
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Did you experience sexual assault while in university? Did it change you?

I am interested in hearing your life story.

Help us learn more about the effects of sexual assault during university on women’s lives. How have your experiences influenced the activities you need and want to do on a daily basis, both in the short and longer term?

To participate, you must:

- Self-identify as a woman
- Be between the ages of 20 and 90
- Have experienced sexual assault while in a university program
- Have experienced sexual assault at least two years prior to your participation in this study
- Live in Canada
- Be able to read and understand English
- Be willing to share the story of how your experience has affected your life

This study will involve two interviews of approximately 60 minutes. To thank you for your participation, you will receive two $25 VISA gift cards (one card after your first interview and one card after your second interview). Your participation is completely voluntary and your anonymity will be protected.

This study is voluntary and confidential.

If you are interested in participating, or if you would like to know more, please contact me:

Katherine Stewart, OT Reg. (Ont.)
PhD Candidate
Rehabilitation Sciences Institute, University of Toronto
Email: ke.stewart@mail.utoronto.ca

If you have questions about your rights in this study, please contact Rachel Zand, Director, Human Research Ethics, Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto by telephone at (416) 946-3389 or by email at rachel.zand@utoronto.ca.

Protocol Reference #: 33623
Appendix D: List of Posting Locations

The recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) was posted to the online platforms listed below.

Listserv Mailing Lists

The recruitment flyer was posted to the following listservs:

1. Best Start Listserv: The Best Start listserv discusses maternal and child health promotion. Under the umbrella of the Best Start listserv are a number of online networks, including the Maternal Newborn and Child Health Promotion Network, the Best Indigenous Sharing Circle Network, the Réseau Santé Maternelle et Infantile, the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Network, and the Ontario Prenatal Education Network.

2. Click4HP Listserv: The Click4HP listserv discusses a wide range of health promotion topics, including the concept of health.


7. Social Determinants of Health (SODH) Listserv: The SODH listserv discusses issues related to the social determinants of health.

Twitter Accounts: Organizations

The recruitment flyer was posted through re-tweet to the following organizations’ Twitter accounts. Twitter accounts belonging to individuals through which the recruitment flyer was re-tweeted are not listed here out of concern for privacy.

1. @AWHL (Assaulted Women’s Helpline)
2. @CMHADurham (Canadian Mental Health Association Durham)
3. @cmhagb (Canadian Mental Health Association Grey Bruce)
4. @cmhahahkpr (Canadian Mental Health Association Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge)
5. @cmhahalton (Canadian Mental Health Association Halton)
6. @CMHAHamilton (Canadian Mental Health Association Hamilton)
7. @CMHAKingston (Canadian Mental Health Association Kingston)
8. @CMHAMiddlesex (Canadian Mental Health Association Middlesex)
9. @cmhaniagara (Canadian Mental Health Association Niagara)
10. @CMHANipissing (Canadian Mental Health Association Nipissing)
11. @CMHA_NTL (Canadian Mental Health Association National)
12. @CMHАОntario (Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario)
13. @CMHAOttawa (Canadian Mental Health Association Ottawa)
14. CHMAPeelDuff (Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Dufferin)
15. @CMHToronto (Canadian Mental Health Association Toronto)
16. @CMHAWECB (Canadian Mental Health Association Windsor-Essex County)
17. @CMHAWWW (Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington)
18. @CMHAYork (Canadian Mental Health Association York Region & South Simcoe)
19. @learntoendabuse (Violence Against Women Learning Network)
20. @METRACorg (The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children)
21. @SACHA (Sexual Assault Centre Hamilton & Area)
22. @SADVTC (Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres)
23. @trccmwar (Toronto Rape Crisis Centre)
24. @WSNYorkRegion (Women’s Support Network York Region)

**Twitter Hashtags**

The recruitment flyer was posted to the Life Story Study Twitter account (@lifestorystudy1) along with various combinations of the following hashtags:
1. #BeenRapedNeverReported
2. #CampusRape
3. #DearBetsy
4. #EndRapeOnCampus
5. #EndVAW
6. #IBelieveSurvivors
7. #IBelieveYou
8. #MeToo
9. #NotOK
10. #RapeCultureIsWhen
11. #SexualAssault
12. #SexualViolence
13. #SupportSurvivors
14. #TakeBackTheNight
15. #UseTheRightWords
16. #WeBelieveSurvivors
17. #WhyWomenDontReport
18. #YesAllWomen
Appendix E: Study Information

Title of Study: The Life Story Study: Occupational Sequelae of Sexual Assault

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator:</th>
<th>Faculty Supervisors:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katherine Stewart, MScOT, OT Reg. (Ont.), PhD Candidate</td>
<td>Dr. Helene Polatajko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Sciences Institute</td>
<td>Rehabilitation Sciences Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Toronto</td>
<td>University of Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160-500 University Ave.</td>
<td>160-500 University Ave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto, Ontario, M5G 1V7</td>
<td>Toronto, Ontario, M5G 1V7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:ke.stewart@mail.utoronto.ca">ke.stewart@mail.utoronto.ca</a></td>
<td>Phone: (416) 978-2042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:H.Polatajko@utoronto.ca">H.Polatajko@utoronto.ca</a></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory Committee Members:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Andrea Charise</td>
<td>Dr. Janice Du Mont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Anthropology and</td>
<td>Women’s College Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of English</td>
<td>Women’s College Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Toronto Scarborough</td>
<td>76 Grenville St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1265 Military Trail</td>
<td>Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto, Ontario, M1C 1A4</td>
<td>Phone: (416) 351-3732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: (416) 208-4786</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:Janice.DuMont@wchospital.ca">Janice.DuMont@wchospital.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:acharise@utsc.utoronto.ca">acharise@utsc.utoronto.ca</a></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr. Patricia O’Campo</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, St.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael’s Hospital</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Centre for Research on Inner City Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209 Victoria St., 3rd Floor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto, Ontario M5B 1T8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: (416) 864-5403</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:pat.ocampo@utoronto.ca">pat.ocampo@utoronto.ca</a></td>
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</table>

**INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you agree, it is important that you read and understand what will be done in this study. The following information describes
what the study is about (purpose), what will be done (methods), and benefits and risks of this study. It also describes your right to not take part or to remove yourself from this study at any time. You should be able to understand what you will be asked to do, as well as the risk and benefits, to be able to make a decision. This is called the informed consent process.

If there is any information on this consent form that is not clear to you, please do not hesitate to ask the study investigator, Katherine Stewart, to explain any part of this form that you wish to understand more clearly. You may talk about this study with your friends and family before you decide. Make sure all of your questions have been answered before signing this form. If you decide that you do not want to take part, you do not have to explain why.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Women who are enrolled in university programs may be particularly vulnerable to sexual assault. Although we know that sexual assault often has many negative impacts on women’s lives, including to their physical, psychological, and emotional health and well-being, not much is known about how sexual assault affects the things women do in their everyday lives. In this study, you will be invited to share the narrative of your life after sexual assault. This study aims to explore how women’s daily lives unfold following sexual assault while in university, and how their experiences have affected their sense of self. This study is part of a PhD thesis.

**WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?**

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of sexual assault on women’s lives and daily activities. The interviews from this study will show how women who experienced sexual assault while enrolled in a university program understand the ways in which sexual assault has shaped the things they do and how they understand the self.

**CAN I TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Persons who: (a) identify as women, (b) are 20 years of age or older, (c) have experienced sexual assault while enrolled in a university program, (d) are at least two years post-assault, (e) currently reside in Canada, (f) are fluent in English, (g) are willing to have their interviews audio-taped, and who wish to share their stories are invited to participate in this study.

**WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO IF I PARTICIPATE?**

**If you decide to join this study: Specific procedures**

You will be asked to participate in two interviews. All interviews will be held in a private room on the University of Toronto campus or another location in which you feel comfortable, or via Skype. However, it is important to note that Skype is not necessarily secure. Interview location will be collaboratively determined by you and the principal
investigator (Katherine Stewart). Each interview will last for approximately one hour and will be with the principal investigator (Katherine Stewart). With your express permission, audio recorders will be used during the interviews so that nothing is missed. Everyone has their own personal story. During your interviews, you will be asked to share your story about how your life unfolded after experiencing sexual assault while in university. Specifically, your first interview will be used to tell the story of your life after sexual assault. Your second interview will be used to follow-up on details provided during your first interview, with the aim of clarifying and elaborating on the information you shared in your first interview. Your second interview will take place approximately two weeks to one month after your first interview. Each interview will range in length between 45 minutes to one and a half hours, depending on what you choose to share.

The audio recordings of the interviews will be transcribed by the principal investigator (Katherine Stewart) or a research assistant and transcriptions will be kept on an encrypted memory stick in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Helene Polatajko’s HOEP lab. Audio recordings of the interviews will be deleted immediately following their transcription.

At the end of the first interview, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire to allow us to generally describe the group of participants included in this study (see attached). None of your personal information (e.g., contact information) will be disclosed when describing the participants as a group. The questionnaire asks questions about your age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, educational level, employment status, household income, and area of residence in Canada. Filling out the questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

By consenting to participate in this study, you do not waive your legal rights.

**WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES?**

Please let the principal investigator (Katherine Stewart) know if there are any changes to the interview time, if you wish to stop participating in this study, or if you have any questions.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OF HARM AND INCONVENIENCES OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Possible risks of the study are psychological/emotional in nature. Although the interviews will focus on constructing your self and your life story through narrative, and will not necessarily focus on experiences of sexual assault themselves, the subject of sexual assault is a sensitive one. In sharing your story, you may experience feelings of discomfort or upset. At any time during the interviews, you do not have to talk about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. You are able to pause or stop the interviews at any time, for any reason without explanation, and without any consequence.

You will be provided with information about services you may access should you need
support after the interviews. Information will be provided about services that provide timely telephone support (e.g., crisis lines) and follow-up, as well as those that provide longer-term support (e.g., counseling services).

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not receive any direct benefits from taking part in this study. However, you may find it helpful to talk about your experiences. Hopefully, this study will help explain women’s everyday lives and activities after an experience of sexual assault in university. The information from this study may help to improve support for women who experience sexual assault while enrolled in a university program in the future.

**WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR COSTS?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study. But, if you ask, some travel and/or parking costs will be covered. Instead, you will get one $25 VISA gift card at the end of your first interview, and one $25 VISA gift card at the end of your second interview. You will be given the VISA gift cards even if you cannot or choose not to complete the interviews.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BY PROTECTED?**

You have a right to privacy. All information from this study will be confidential according to laws and regulations. No personal information about you will be disclosed or made public. Every effort will be made to protect the privacy of your information. However, some limits to confidentiality exist. For example, the principal investigator (Katherine Stewart) has a “duty to report” information that comes to light about harming yourself or others, or about children being harmed or at risk of being harmed. There is a remote chance in every research study that the information from this study may be subpoenaed for legal purposes.

Your name will never be used to identify the information given to the faculty supervisors and advisory committee members. Instead, you will be assigned a numbered informant code which will be used to identify the information you share. If the results of this study are written up in a medical/professional journal or presented at a conference, your identity will be kept strictly confidential and a pseudonym of your choosing will be used to protect your identity.

As the principal investigator (Katherine Stewart) is a PhD student, the study information will be looked at by the faculty supervisor and advisory committee members. Further, representatives from the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto can access study information for auditing purposes. In reports about the study, your experience of everyday life after sexual assault will be grouped with the experiences of other women, but individual quotes from your interview may be used to illustrate these experiences.

Your anonymous study information will be kept in a confidential place for seven years. This
information may be used for future research purposes, anonymously. This information will be destroyed according to proper laws and regulations. Your name will not be placed on any mailing lists or sold to anyone for marketing purposes. You do not have to sign this document if you do not agree with anything that you have read thus far. If you do not sign this form, you will not be able to participate in this study.

**HOW DO I REMOVE MYSELF FROM THIS STUDY?**

Please tell the principal investigator (Katherine Stewart) if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You do not need to give a reason for this. The code assigned to your information will be used to withdraw your data from the study.

You may choose to withdraw from the study up to two weeks following your second (final) interview. After this two-week period, your recorded interviews will be transcribed and analyzed.

**WHAT DO I DO IF I AM UNCOMFORTABLE ANSWERING A QUESTION?**

During your interviews, it is important to remember that you do not have to talk about anything that you are not comfortable talking about. You are able to refrain from answering any questions without experiencing negative consequences.

**WHO DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

If you have any questions, please call the principal investigator, Katherine Stewart, by email at ke.stewart@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also contact the faculty supervisors, Dr. Helene Polatajko by telephone at (416) 978-2042 or by email at H.Polatajko@utoronto.ca, or Dr. Janice Du Mont by telephone at (416) 351-3732 or by email at Janice.DuMont@wchospital.ca.

If you have questions about your rights in this study, please contact Rachel Zand, Director, Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto, by telephone at (416) 946-3389 or by email at rachel.zand@utoronto.ca.
Appendix F: Participant Consent Form

**Title of Study:** The Life Story Study: Occupational Sequelae of Sexual Assault

I have read and understand the purpose of this study, the procedures that will be used, and the risks and benefits related to taking part in this study. I understand how this information will be kept confidential.

I have had enough time/sufficient opportunity to ask questions about this study and they have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I have the right to ask any questions about this study for as long as I take part in it. I understand that I do not need to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering without experiencing negative consequences.

YES  NO

I agree to allow the information collected during this study to be used for future research purposes.

YES  NO

I agree to allow my interviews to be audio-recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to take part in this study and give permission to collect and use my personal information as explained in this information and consent form. I understand that I will be given a copy of this signed information and consent form.

Printed name of study participant

___________________________________________

Signature of study participant  Date

I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this study to the participant named above.

Printed name of individual conducting the consent discussion

___________________________________________

Signature of individual conducting the consent discussion  Date
# Appendix G: Interview Guide

Text in *italics* indicates what the student researcher will say during the interview.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong></td>
<td>Introduction and brief description of the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong></td>
<td>Allow for questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Do you have any questions for me about the study or about taking part in the study?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong></td>
<td>Inform the participant of potential risks:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>You may feel uncomfortable talking about your experiences of life after sexual assault.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>You do not need to talk about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>You can stop the interview or stop taking part in the study at any time.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>You will have your name removed from any written documents related to the data from this interview, and any manuscripts, publications or presentations about the study.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Do you have a pseudonym that you would like to use in this study?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong></td>
<td>Allow for questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Do you have any questions before we begin?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong></td>
<td>Obtain written and oral consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.</strong></td>
<td>Begin interview:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I would like to talk with you about the activities that you do in your daily life. This could include anything from brushing your teeth to cooking meals to playing soccer with friends to attending work or class. From our conversation, I will try to learn more about your life after sexual assault.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview I**

Wengraf’s (2001) biographic narrative method uses multiple interviews to allow for participants to construct their narratives. In the first interview, the interviewer offers only one carefully constructed narrative question.
Interview guide:

Please tell me the story of your life. Please include all events, experiences, and things you have done that have been important to you. Begin wherever you want to begin. I will not interrupt, and will only ask questions once you have finished telling your story.

Interview II

In the second interview, the interviewer may offer follow-up questions to encourage participants to elaborate on or clarify the narratives told in their first interview. Further, follow-up questions related to the concepts of interest may also be posed. The below questions are examples of questions that might be posed during the second interview. Other questions will be posed to participants depending on the information provided in the first interview.

Can you tell me about the activities you do on a daily basis?

What did a typical day look like before you were sexually assaulted?

What did a typical day look like in the immediate time after?

What does a typical day look like now?

Would you say being sexually assaulted has changed your everyday life? If so, how?

Would you say being sexually assaulted has changed the relationships with people in your life? If so, how?

Would you say being sexually assaulted has changed the relationship you have with yourself? If so, how?

Would you say being sexually assaulted has made it difficult moving forward through your life? If so, how?

Did you tell your family and friends about your sexual assault? If so, how did they respond? Has it changed your relationship with them? If so, how?

Do you have any future concerns about your everyday life? Do you have any future hopes for your everyday life?
7. **Probes:**

   *Can you tell me more about __________?*
   
   *Can you tell me about your experiences with/doing...? (i.e., performance of or participation or engagement in occupations)*

   *Can you say more about any changes to your...? (i.e., performance of or participation or engagement in occupations)*

8. **To demonstrate my interest in the participant’s experience and understanding of the ways in which their occupational performance, participation, and/or engagement has been shaped by being sexually assaulted, as well as to clarify my own understanding of what was said during the interview, I will use the following statement:**

   *Let’s see if I have understood...*

9. **Interview closing:**

   *Thank you for sharing your story. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that you have not yet shared?*

   *Once this study is finished, I would like to share the findings with you. Would you like to receive a summary of the findings? Would you like to know if I write up the findings in a journal or for a conference presentation? How would you like to be contacted?*

10. **At the end of the first interview session, invite each participant to complete the demographic questionnaire.**
Appendix H: Summary Narratives

The summary narratives presented here were developed out of the interview session(s) conducted with each study participant. As previously noted, to maintain confidentiality, participants selected or were assigned pseudonyms to be used in the dissemination of findings. In what follows, I refer to participants by these pseudonyms.

Alana

At the time of her participation in this research, Alana was 34 years old. Alana experienced a sexual assault while completing the third year of her bachelor’s degree.

Before she was sexually assaulted, Alana was experiencing difficulties in school, as well as with her mental health. However, Alana believes that being sexually assaulted only served to exacerbate these difficulties. After she was sexually assaulted, Alana stopped taking care of herself almost completely. In the time period immediately following her sexual assault, Alana rarely showered or brushed her teeth. Further, she began “punishing” herself for her own sexual victimization through engaging in self-harm. To avoid thinking about her experience of sexual assault, Alana began to eat more and to smoke marijuana. Alana filled much of her days with sleep. As such, Alana began having even more difficulty attending classes and completing her schoolwork.

Alana also began to withdraw from social interaction. She began to modify her behaviour in an attempt to protect herself. Often, this involved avoiding leaving the house late at night or dressing “provocatively.” When Alana did leave her house at night to go to a bar, she would guard her drink. At times, Alana would engage in “meaningless sex” after going out at night. Because of these changes in behaviour, Alana experienced conflict within her friendships. Alana often felt a lack of understanding about her experience of sexual assault from her friends. Many of Alana’s friendships ended as she and her friends slowly “drifted apart.” Further, these changes in behaviour sparked a great deal of conflict between Alana and her roommates. Alana’s roommates held an intervention to confront her about her drug use and self-harm. Eventually, as Alana’s drug use and self-harm continued, she was asked by her roommates to leave their house. As a result, Alana was forced to find new housing.
At the end of her fourth year of university, Alana discovered that she had failed two classes and would not be graduating. Alana remembers feeling “shocked” by this discovery, although she knew that she was not attending classes nor turning in her schoolwork as expected. Alana decided to move in with her partner, whom she had met about eight months after her sexual assault, and found a job at a clothing retailer at her local mall. Alana recalls feeling as though her “life was over”: while all of her friends and classmates were graduating university and starting graduate school, she was working at a minimum wage job that she strongly disliked.

During this time, Alana continued to engage in “meaningless sex,” and did so with people other than her partner. Alana experienced feelings of extreme guilt and later told her partner that she wanted to have an open relationship. Out of her relationship with other men, Alana decided to try sex work. Alana’s entry into sex work was a “turning point” in her life. Although Alana initially began engaging in sex work to supplement her income, she found purpose in her work. Alana used her work to address her fear of men brought on by her experience of sexual assault. Through planning for her safety when working with clients, Alana began to work on establishing healthy boundaries with men. Alana feels that sex work allowed her to reclaim her power after being sexually assaulted.

Over time, Alana began to engage in advocacy work related to sex work. Through joining an advocacy group, Alana met women who encouraged her to go back to university. Alana believes that the women she met while doing advocacy work “gave her the confidence” to obtain a letter of permission to graduate from her bachelor’s degree program and to apply for her master’s degree program. Alana chose to focus her graduate studies on a topic about which she was passionate: women’s studies.

While completing her master’s degree, Alana began writing about her experience of sexual assault through an online journal. She found this writing to be “cathartic” and she connected with other women who had similar experiences. On occasion, Alana has written academic papers about her experience of sexual assault and how it shapes her identity as a disabled sex worker.
Alana believes that her experience of sexual assault “put her on a particular path.” Without having experienced sexual assault, Alana is unsure whether she would have ever gone back to university. Alana is currently pursuing her doctorate, also in women’s studies.

**Butch Coriander**

At the time of her participation in this research, Butch Coriander was 61 years old. Butch Coriander experienced a sexual assault while completing the second year of her bachelor’s degree. Butch Coriander also experienced sexual abuse as a child.

Butch Coriander believes that her experience of sexual assault during university “severely altered the way she was going” in her life. Further, Butch Coriander describes her experience of sexual assault as one that “killed something inside her.” Butch Coriander was sexually assaulted by a friend and as a result, their friendship was destroyed. Because she wanted to avoid her perpetrator, Butch Coriander slowly stopped spending time with her friend group. As Butch Coriander stopped spending time with her friends, her social circle severely diminished.

After being sexually assaulted, Butch Coriander began staying home more. She also started drinking alcohol more frequently. Because of her experience of sexual assault and the loss of her social circle, Butch Coriander stopped finding enjoyment in school. She describes her life at this time as simply “going through the motions” to graduate. Butch Coriander left university with a three-year bachelor’s degree. She believes that had she not been sexually assaulted, she would have gone on to complete a four-year degree.

After graduating from university, Butch Coriander started playing baseball and met many new friends. During this time, she fell in love with one of her teammates. However, Butch Coriander experienced difficulty with this relationship: her teammate was married and straight. Butch Coriander talks about this period of her life as one during which she experienced a great deal of shame. Along with falling in love with her teammate, she felt “divorced from her body.” To cope, Butch Coriander began eating more and eventually developed bulimia.
After some time had passed, Butch Coriander decided to remove herself from her relationship with her teammate. She moved in with her grandmother and enrolled in college classes. While at college, Butch Coriander attended a lecture given by a woman from a rape crisis centre. The lecturer identified herself as a lesbian, a feminist, and a rape survivor; Butch Coriander became aware that she identified in the same way. Butch Coriander’s attendance at this lecture sparked a relationship with the rape crisis centre that would span more than 20 years.

Butch Coriander began attending a support group held at the rape crisis centre. She found that she could express her anger through talking about her experiences of sexual assault and abuse. Butch Coriander then started to volunteer at the rape crisis centre, organizing and participating in demonstrations against sexual assault. In volunteering, Butch Coriander developed friendships with others who worked at the rape crisis centre. Over time, her social life became anchored in her work there. Butch Coriander met her ex-wife, with whom she has two children, volunteering at the rape crisis centre. After their divorce, Butch Coriander met her now-partner of 22 years at the rape crisis centre, as well.

Today, Butch Coriander no longer volunteers at the rape crisis centre. However, she feels as though she is able to integrate feminism into her day-to-day life in her current role working as a college instructor.

Although Butch Coriander does not believe that her experience of sexual assault has shaped her relationships with her partner or her children, she does believe that the experience shaped her life in other ways. Immediately following her sexual assault, Butch Coriander avoided dating as she did not want to be vulnerable to men. Her experience of sexual assault cemented the belief that she was “not a sexual person.” It took Butch Coriander years to get “in touch” with her body after being sexually assaulted. She now knows that she is “getting into trouble” when she starts to fall out of her self-care routine and begins to lose touch with her body. Butch Coriander can easily “forget” to take care of herself; she schedules her daily exercise and water intake. Throughout her life, Butch Coriander has used drugs and alcohol as a means of “self-medication.” Today, too frequently using drugs or alcohol causes Butch Coriander to lose touch with her body. She also loses touch with her body when she isolates
herself and stops socializing. As such, Butch Coriander “forces” herself to be around people, at times.

Butch Coriander is generally fearful around people who are drinking alcohol and appear to be drunk. In particular, Butch Coriander avoids being around people who are drunk if they are unfamiliar to her. At times, she has had to leave parties and other gatherings with friends because of this fear.

Butch Coriander believes that her experience of sexual assault shapes both “everything and nothing” that she does today. Butch Coriander feels that being sexually assaulted led her to choose a particular “pathway”: embracing feminism and beginning her volunteer work at the rape crisis centre. Butch Coriander believes her advocacy work started out of her experience with sexual assault; however, her advocacy work has since expanded to include other issues related to equity and human rights. Although Butch Coriander feels that her experience of sexual assault “limited what she saw to be options” for her future—she might have gone on to become an academic or an architect instead of leaving university after three years—she is grateful to have her day-to-day structured around her work as a feminist. Almost 40 years post-sexual assault, Butch Coriander understands her experience of sexual assault as central to her identity; the experience has influenced many of her life choices and shapes how she views herself and the world around her, but now has much less influence on practical, everyday doings than it did in the time period immediately after she was sexually assaulted.

**CeCe**

At the time of her participation in this research, CeCe was 29 years old. CeCe experienced a sexual assault while completing the first year of her doctoral degree.

Before being sexually assaulted, CeCe’s life “revolved around” school, volunteering, and paid work. However, CeCe’s “day looks so different” when comparing her life pre-sexual assault, post-sexual assault, and today. Immediately after being sexually assaulted, CeCe began having difficulty with her school-related responsibilities, something that had never happened before. CeCe began having trouble focusing, which affected how well she was able to pay attention in class, to write papers, and to grade assignments as part of her job as a
teaching assistant. After being sexually assaulted, “everything became a chore” for CeCe. She experienced difficulties eating and sleeping. Ultimately, she stopped taking care of herself.

CeCe reported her sexual assault to her university and to the police. After this, her life began to revolve around “mundane tasks,” which typically involved waiting for the university or the police to communicate with CeCe. Her life was “coordinated around” how the university and the police responded to her report. CeCe experienced some difficulties in her interactions with her university in particular; the university would not grant her accommodations for her schoolwork or her work as a teaching assistant.

While preparing to testify in court against her perpetrator, CeCe moved out of her apartment where she lived with several roommates in order to live alone. At this time, CeCe adopted a dog. She feels that taking care of her dog after being sexually assaulted helped her to cope with the experience. Caring for her dog “forced her out of the house to do activities,” such as going to the park. CeCe found it helpful to care for another living being and to focus her energies on her dog after being sexually assaulted.

Eventually, CeCe testified in court against her perpetrator. Retelling her experience of sexual assault and being cross-examined was challenging for CeCe. Before, during, and after the trial, CeCe “poured her anger into activism.”

CeCe’s doctoral supervisory committee noticed that she was doing a great deal of “extra” work outside of her thesis topic in the form of activism and advocacy work. Her supervisory committee members suggested that she change her thesis topic. CeCe decided to focus her research on the topic of sexual assault, one with which she was quickly becoming familiar due to her activism advocacy work and with which she had a personal connection. CeCe believes that her experience of sexual assault led her to have an “attachment to doing meaningful research.”

Although many of CeCe’s friends were incredibly supportive after she was sexually assaulted, she did experience some conflict in her friendships. Some of CeCe’s friends stopped speaking to her. She later discovered that this was because these friends had their
own painful experiences of sexual assault. CeCe also felt “abandoned” by many of her schoolmates. At one point, CeCe considered not only switching academic departments but switching universities altogether. Although CeCe was once involved in her academic department’s social event planning, she stopped going to social events after being sexually assaulted. Because of her “severed relationships” with her schoolmates, CeCe no longer speaks to many of her peers. CeCe feels that she has “lost some of her PhD” because of being sexually assaulted in the sense that she is no longer as involved in student groups and departmental committees as she once was.

CeCe began seeing a therapist after being sexually assaulted. She credits much of her “healing” to the work that she has done, and continues to do, in therapy. CeCe also sees a physiotherapist and a message therapist to help her deal with the after-effects of being sexually assaulted.

CeCe has begun to engage in a number of doings that have helped her to further cope with her experience of sexual assault. For example, writing has become a large part of CeCe’s everyday life. She journals every day. For CeCe, writing is a form of expression. Also, CeCe makes sure to schedule time for self-care each day. Because she found it difficult to remember to brush her teeth or to wash her face immediately after being sexually assaulted, CeCe now sets reminders for herself to do these things.

CeCe believes that her experience of sexual assault shaped her life in a number of ways. She feels that her assault gave her the “confidence to deal with everyday problems.” For CeCe, no problem seems greater than that of participating in a sexual assault trial. CeCe’s growing confidence has led her to do things that she might not have before being sexually assaulted, such as trying her hand at stand-up comedy.

CeCe feels that she is “doing well” now. For CeCe, doing well means being able to do “multiple things in a day.” She is no longer doing only the “bare necessities” as she was immediately after being sexually assaulted. CeCe now finds herself acknowledging that she has a body that needs to be cared for; she is “learning to take care of herself” by cooking healthy meals, stretching daily, and going to the gym. CeCe is starting to “feel like she can do things” again.
CeCe considers her experience of sexual assault to be a significant life event. She feels that she is “not the person she was before the assault.” Accordingly, CeCe got a tattoo to commemorate her sexual assault and to recognize the centrality of this experience to her sense of self. CeCe believes that being sexually assaulted “totally shifted her life course.”

**Elizabeth**

At the time of her participation in this research, Elizabeth was 40 years old. Elizabeth experienced a sexual assault while completing the fourth year of her bachelor’s degree.

Elizabeth is a mother of four. After her divorce from her husband, Elizabeth enrolled in university with the aim of becoming financially independent. Before being sexually assaulted, she spent much of her time at university, at the hospital with her ill daughter, in court with her ex-husband, and commuting between these places. Elizabeth likes to say that before being sexually assaulted, she was going “full-tilt” and that being sexually assaulted caused her to come “full-stop.”

Immediately after being sexually assaulted, Elizabeth “couldn’t function.” She experienced difficulties with sleeping, eating, cooking meals, and attending classes. Elizabeth began having trouble leaving her house, even to go to the grocery store. She would get out of bed in the mornings to get her children ready for school and would get back in bed once they had left for the day. When her children returned home from school, Elizabeth would again get out of bed to make them dinner. She would get back in bed a few hours later when her children went to sleep. For Elizabeth, “normal things became a chore.” She used to love going apple picking with her children or cooking them their favourite meals, but Elizabeth stopped doing these things after being sexually assaulted.

Eventually, Elizabeth disclosed her experience of sexual assault to a trusted professor. Elizabeth’s professor discouraged her from reporting her sexual assault to her university or to the police. Initially, Elizabeth heeded her professor’s advice. However, with time, Elizabeth decided to report her sexual assault to her university and to the police because of her difficulties with her schoolwork. At just six months after being sexually assaulted, her university expected Elizabeth to be “better.” Elizabeth was still having trouble with her
school-related responsibilities and decided to drop out of university less than one year away from obtaining her bachelor’s degree.

Elizabeth began seeing a therapist to discuss her divorce and her daughter’s illness; however, she also ended up disclosing her sexual assault. Elizabeth has found therapy to be helpful to her “getting control of basic things.” Although she still experiences difficulty with getting out of bed, Elizabeth has started to clean the house and to cook more frequently. Elizabeth feels like a “kid learning to walk again” as she is increasingly doing “simple cooking, dishes, and laundry.” Although it took her about ten months to start feeling more in control of basic doings after being sexually assaulted, Elizabeth feels that she is “getting back to old routines” and starting to live a “normal person life” again.

Today, Elizabeth chooses to celebrate the “little things” that she is able to do. For example, after being sexually assaulted, Elizabeth found it difficult to change out of her pyjamas every day. With time, Elizabeth began working toward changing into a clean pair of pyjamas every morning and viewed this as an “accomplishment.” Now, Elizabeth dresses in jeans and a t-shirt some days.

Despite the advances that she has made, Elizabeth feels that much of her daily life continues to be affected by her experience of sexual assault. In particular, Elizabeth has difficulty with being in open, public spaces. She often finds herself frightened and disoriented in big box stores like Wal-Mart or Costco. Elizabeth also has difficulty with driving. For some time after being sexually assaulted, she could not drive and needed assistance from her family to leave the house. Because Elizabeth lives in a more rural area, where shops are not within walking distance, she worked hard to get back to driving. Today, Elizabeth is able to drive around her neighbourhood. If she needs to drive into more urban areas, she needs to plan ahead to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Elizabeth feels that her social life has been greatly affected by her experience of sexual assault. She rarely goes out to restaurants or bars to meet her friends. On the rare occasion that she does go to a restaurant or a bar, Elizabeth physically positions herself against a wall for safety and often has difficulty carrying on conversations. In particular, Elizabeth’s relationships with her two best friends have changed drastically since she was sexually
assaulted. Her friends responded quite negatively when Elizabeth disclosed her sexual assault to them. Since then, Elizabeth feels a distance between herself and one of her friends; she has not spoken to her other friend at all.

Elizabeth has become involved with sexual assault prevention advocacy groups since her own experience of sexual assault and has found tremendous support through these groups. Elizabeth has also found support through connecting on social media with other women who have experienced sexual assault. Further, Elizabeth finds that writing about her experience of sexual assault helps her to cope. One day, she intends to write a memoir about her experience.

Immediately after being sexually assaulted, Elizabeth felt like she was not living. Instead, she was simply responding to demands from her university or from lawyers. From her time in therapy, Elizabeth has learned how to recognize behaviours that perpetuate the feeling that she is only responding to demands. Today, Elizabeth is working toward living again, which includes getting back to cooking and baking, as well as spending time with her family.

Fiona

At the time of her participation in this research, Fiona was 27 years old. Fiona experienced several sexual assaults during the completion of her bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

Throughout her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, Fiona took several women’s studies courses. It was through these courses that she began to develop her “feminist consciousness.” In reflecting upon her past sexual experiences through a feminist lens, Fiona discovered that she had experienced several sexual assaults. Shortly after this discovery, Fiona was sexually assaulted again. Immediately following this sexual assault, Fiona began having trouble sleeping. She also began drinking “heavily” and drinking alone. Additionally, she found it hard to be out in the world. At times, when she was attending classes, Fiona would be overcome with the need to leave campus and to go home to shower or change her clothes. Although her difficulties being out in the world did not affect her grades, Fiona believes that her classmates found her behaviour odd.
Fiona has experienced some difficulty with talking to her family about her experiences of sexual assault. Her parents and siblings are aware that Fiona was sexually assaulted, but it is not often a topic of discussion amongst them. However, Fiona has had no difficulty talking to her friends about her experiences. Through disclosing her sexual assault, Fiona believes that her friendships have been strengthened as sexual assault is an experience that is shared by many in her friend group. She feels that her friends have been very supportive of her and is glad that they “know these parts of her.”

In other social relationships, Fiona has experienced further changes. She feels that, since being sexually assaulted, she is less trusting of others. In particular, Fiona has become untrusting of men who are unfamiliar to her. As such, she has stopped dating and having sexual relationships with men.

After being sexually assaulted, Fiona found comfort and familiarity in reading. Although she spent much of her free time reading novels, Fiona also read other women’s stories of sexual assault. Similarly, Fiona chose to write about her own experiences of sexual assault as part of her master’s thesis. She views reading and writing about sexual assault as an act of activism; Fiona sees these doings as ways of communicating a wide variety of experiences of sexual assault to the world. Currently, Fiona is continuing her activism around women’s issues through pursuing a PhD in women’s studies.

Today, Fiona has taken up swimming as a means of coping with her experiences of sexual assault. For Fiona, swimming is a “time to feel OK in her body.” Fiona notes that no one can “hit on you in the pool.”

Fiona does not want her experiences of sexual assault to “ruin her life.” However, she has “more fears than hopes” when she looks towards the future.

**Frances**

At the time of her participation in this research, Frances was 25 years old. Frances experienced a sexual assault while completing the second year of her bachelor’s degree. Frances also experienced two other sexual assaults before attending university.
Frances was sexually assaulted by a friend after they had attended a protest together. Frances had been politically active her whole life but found it difficult to attend protests after she was sexually assaulted. In fact, Frances found it difficult to be “out in the world” at all. For a time, Frances had difficulty leaving her house, especially at night. Her difficulty with leaving her house negatively affected Frances’ social life as she spent a reduced amount of time with her friends.

Frances’ concern for her safety shaped her behaviour in ways other than remaining at home. She stopped drinking alcohol. Frances found it difficult to date or to be alone with men who were unfamiliar to her. Shortly after being sexually assaulted, Frances started dating her now-partner. Frances believes her experience of sexual assault led her to marry her partner. After being sexually assaulted, Frances was scared and was looking for security. She found security and comfort in her partner and decided to stay with him as such.

After her wedding, Frances moved away from the city where her university is located, in which she was sexually assaulted. Almost immediately, Frances felt safer in her new city. With this newfound sense of safety, she disclosed her sexual assault to her friends. Because of their negative reactions, Frances lost many friends after disclosing her sexual assault, but she felt liberated by no longer holding on to this secret.

Shortly after moving, Frances also began graduate school. She chose her thesis topic, in part, because of her experience of sexual assault. Frances found herself taking on the role of a “flashlight” for others; she became someone who shined a light on issues around violence against women and was known as someone who others could turn to for support. Frances chose to take on this role because it was something that other women had done for her after her own experience of sexual assault. After being sexually assaulted, Frances turned to the internet to find stories of other women’s experiences of sexual assault. She found a supportive community online and, through others’ stories, began to realize that it is possible to live a good life after experiencing something horrible. Frances started to write about her own experiences online so that she could tell others, “You’re not alone. I am here, too.” Frances believes her experience of sexual assault has made her feel more confident about speaking out against violent behaviour.
Despite her increased confidence in speaking out about violence against women, Frances still finds herself feeling scared, at times. She likes to “keep tabs” on her perpetrator through the use of Facebook. Frances finds it particularly “hard to live” each year around the anniversary of her experience of sexual assault. From April to June, Frances’ partner takes a larger role in caring for her. For example, her partner will prepare meals for her or take her on walks so that she can leave their house. Frances believes that her experience of sexual assault has affected her sex life with her partner, but feels that she is not certain of all of its implications.

Frances thinks about her experience of sexual assault every day, but feels her experience is almost invisible to her friends and family members. Although her friends and family are aware of her experience, Frances wishes that she were able to talk about her experience more freely. She wishes that her friends and family members would check in on her more often, asking her how she is feeling, especially after major news stories break about sexual assault.

Frances believes that her experience of sexual assault has heightened her desire to help others. In particular, she is interested in working to provide others with information about respect and healthy relationships. Today, Frances volunteers with youth and has found meaning in this work. In the future, she hopes to pursue a career in nursing.

**Jessie**

At the time of her participation in this research, Jessie was 31 years old. Jessie experienced two sexual assaults during the completion of her bachelor’s degree. She found her first experience of sexual assault to be the “most damaging.”

Immediately after being sexually assaulted, Jessie experienced difficulty sleeping. In turn, her ability to complete her schoolwork was affected. Jessie also experienced a fear of being on campus. She was afraid that she would see her perpetrator there. Accordingly, Jessie found it difficult to attend classes after being sexually assaulted. Because of these difficulties, Jessie sought therapy and accommodations were put in place by her university to support Jessie in the successful completion of her schoolwork.

Shortly after being sexually assaulted, Jessie changed her major from psychology to women’s studies. She began writing academic papers informed by her experiences of sexual
assault. After a period of difficulty with completing her schoolwork, Jessie started to flourish academically. However, she felt that applying to graduate school was “not possible” for her because of her experiences of sexual assault. Jessie felt a great sense of loss and believed that the opportunity to continue her schooling had been taken away from her.

After completing her bachelor’s degree, Jessie began working as a camp counselor. Because of her experiences of sexual assault, Jessie worked to implement a workshop on consent for her campers. This consent workshop marked the beginning of a pattern of advocacy work in Jessie’s life.

Later that year, Jessie was encouraged by a past professor to apply to graduate school. Jessie was accepted into graduate school just weeks before the start of the term. Jessie chose to focus her graduate work on the topic of sexual assault on university campuses.

During the completion of her master’s degree, Jessie began dating a man who was loving and supportive. Through this relationship, Jessie started to see herself as deserving of love after feeling so undeserving following her experiences of sexual assault. Although Jessie and her then-partner eventually ended their relationship, she credits him with helping her significantly after she was sexually assaulted. In particular, Jessie believes that the support she received from her ex-partner propelled her to apply for law school.

Jessie became interested in attending law school after having several negative interactions with the legal system following her experiences of sexual assault: Jessie reported her first sexual assault to the police, but her claim was later deemed to be “unfounded.” Eventually, Jessie was accepted into law school, graduated, and became a practising lawyer. She now uses her work to support other women who have similar negative interactions with the legal system. Jessie draws upon her experiences of sexual assault to help her clients. In doing so, her ultimate goal is to give voice to “vulnerable people.”

While in law school, Jessie met her now-partner. Jessie’s partner has been supportive of her around her experiences of sexual assault. However, at the beginning of their relationship, Jessie felt as though she had to teach her partner about issues around violence against women. At times, Jessie experiences conflict in her relationship around these issues: her
partner is a criminal defense lawyer who sometimes defends individuals who have committed sexual assault, which can create tension between Jessie and her partner.

Jessie believes that her experiences of sexual assault have not only affected her relationship with her partner, but with her mother, as well. Jessie feels that her experiences have helped her to better understand her mother’s experiences of trauma in childhood. Jessie believes that she has a much closer relationship with her mother now then she did before she was sexually assaulted.

Jessie feels that her experiences of sexual assault continue to affect her life in some ways. In particular, she needs to remind herself to take time to care for herself through cooking or exercise. Additionally, Jessie believes that being sexually assaulted has influenced her decisions about becoming a mother. At this time, Jessie does not have a desire to bring children, especially girls, into this world knowing how much she has suffered from experiencing sexual assault.

Over time, Jessie has come to realize the significant meaning that she placed on her engagement in schoolwork following her experiences of sexual assault. For Jessie, being able to complete her schoolwork meant that she was “still OK.” Jessie feels that she used her schoolwork as a means of “passing” as someone who was not affected by sexual assault; as long as she was getting out of bed and attending classes, Jessie believed that others would think that she was functioning well. Now that Jessie is no longer in school, she is focusing on bringing meaning into her life through other means. Specifically, Jessie is focusing on doing yoga and spending time with friends and family members as a way to thrive instead of just get by.

**June**

At the time of her participation in this research, June was 33 years old. June experienced a sexual assault while completing her bachelor’s degree.

Attending university was deeply meaningful for June. It represented an accomplishment that, as a child, did not seem possible. However, while at university, June was sexually assaulted on campus by a member of her department. As a result, she changed her major from
psychology to Indigenous studies and women’s health to avoid seeing her perpetrator. June believes that her experience of sexual assault delayed her degree completion; she completed her bachelor’s degree in six to seven years rather than four.

After being sexually assaulted, being on campus was difficult for June. Often, she would arrive late to classes or would skip classes to avoid being on campus altogether. At one point during her bachelor’s degree, June took some time off from physically attending classes and instead enrolled in several online courses.

June did not disclose her sexual assault to her university or to the police. She was concerned that, if she were to disclose, others would view her as weak or vulnerable. June disclosed her sexual assault to some friends and family members, although they do not often talk about her experience today. In particular, June chooses not to discuss her experience of sexual assault with those to whom she is closest: her partner and her sister. June sees herself as a “caretaker” in these relationships and does not want to “burden” her partner or sister. However, she sometimes feels resentful of the care she gives to her partner and sister. June feels as though she does not have anyone to care for and support her. At one time, June sought the support of a therapist. However, she does not see her therapist on a regular basis today.

After being sexually assaulted, June stopped cooking as often as she did before. She loved cooking, especially if it meant that she would have leftover food for her school lunches. Following her experience of sexual assault, June found herself forgetting her school lunches on the rare occasion that she cooked. She also found herself forgetting her house keys. Being forgetful made it difficult for June to get herself organized to go to campus, adding another layer of stress to attending classes.

June believes her experience of sexual assault caused her to stop socializing. Before being sexually assaulted, she was a social person with many friends. However, after being sexually assaulted, June stopped spending time with her friends, preferring not to leave her house. She also stopped going to the gym, another doing she had previously enjoyed.
For June, her experience of sexual assault shapes her broader experience of attending university in a major city. When June moved to this city for university, it represented possibility; however, June no longer feels this way. Today, she is in the process of applying for graduate programs “everywhere but” the city where she lives now. June hopes to have a “break” from the city but is worried that the poor grades she received after being sexually assaulted during her bachelor’s degree might prevent her from pursuing further schooling.

**Laila**

At the time of her participation in this research, Laila was 49 years old. Laila experienced a sexual assault while completing the second year of her bachelor’s degree. Laila also experienced several other sexual assaults over the course of her lifetime.

Immediately after being sexually assaulted, Laila worked to appear “normal.” She made an effort to continue to attend classes and she did not speak to her friends or family members about her experience of sexual assault. Laila eventually went on to attend law school, get married, and have two children.

Laila believes that her experience of sexual assault has had an effect on her life, but that its exact effect is difficult to pinpoint almost 30 years later. However, Laila feels that she is braver than other women because of her experience of sexual assault; she travels alone, lives alone, eats dinner alone, and walks alone at night without fear. At other times though, Laila feels that she thinks about her safety more than women who have not been sexually assaulted. Because of her concern for her personal safety, Laila has actively avoided interacting with particular people or entering into particular situations over the years. In particular she avoids working alone with men. Further, Laila was very concerned about her safety and protecting herself during childbirth. She elected to have home births with only her partner and a female attendant present to reduce feelings of vulnerability.

Laila believes that being sexually assaulted has shaped her choice in romantic partners; she prefers to be in relationships with men who are “inexperienced,” younger than she, and not “macho.” After being sexually assaulted, Laila decided that she was not going to allow her experience to “ruin” her sex life. She became dominant in her subsequent romantic
relationships. Today, Laila is divorced and has been in a new relationship for approximately four years. Despite her partner’s asking, Laila has declined to move in with him. Laila feels that she needs to spend a significant amount of time alone every week. When she is around men for too long, even her partner, she experiences anxiety and feels as though she must be “on guard.”

For Laila, it is important that others see her as leading a “normal” life. While working as a college instructor, Laila encountered a student who was experiencing difficulty with completing her schoolwork. Upon further discussion, the student disclosed to Laila that she had been sexually assaulted and that this experience had “derailed her life.” In an effort to demonstrate that being sexually assaulted need not “ruin” one’s life, Laila told the student that she, too, had been sexually assaulted while at university. Laila wanted to communicate to the student that it is possible to lead a normal life after sexual assault. To Laila, a normal life is one that is happy, where it is possible to hold down a job, have a family, and have a romantic partner.

Laila tries not to focus too much of her energies on thinking about her experience of sexual assault as she believes that “dwelling” on negative events does more harm than good. For much of her life, Laila has avoided thinking or talking about her experience of sexual assault because she was “embarrassed” that it happened to her. In particular, Laila was embarrassed to disclose her sexual assault to her roommates at university because she felt that, in being sexually assaulted, she was “breaking the rules of the group.”

Laila has not disclosed her sexual assault to many people. She believes that she has refrained from talking about her experience of sexual assault because “people will not believe you.” Shortly after being sexually assaulted, Laila disclosed her sexual assault to her mother and was told “that didn’t happen.” Instead of talking about her own experience of sexual assault, Laila has chosen to write generally about the topic of sexual assault. For example, when in school, Laila wrote several academic papers about sexual assault and the law, a topic that she believes she would not have written about if she had not been sexually assaulted.

Laila believes that women who have been sexually assaulted have a “responsibility” to stand up for other women. In particular, she feels that women who have experienced sexual assault
are responsible for working to prevent others from being sexually assaulted. Laila fulfils this responsibility by attending protests against violence against women and by teaching her children about issues of respect and consent.

For Laila, the most significant negative consequence of her experience of sexual assault has been the guilt that she has felt about not reporting her perpetrator to the police. She struggles with knowing whether choosing not to report was the “right thing” to do for herself and for other women. Laila often questions whether she should have “done things differently.” She feels that not reporting to the police created a lasting pattern of letting herself down in other areas of her life. For example, Laila believes that she stayed in an abusive marriage and let promotions pass her by at work because she had become comfortable with being “unassertive.”

Today, Laila has difficulty with identifying hopes for her future. However, she has trouble saying whether this is related to her experience of sexual assault. Nevertheless, Laila does know that she wants to travel more in the future.

Lucy

At the time of her participation in this research, Lucy was 23 years old. Lucy experienced two sexual assaults while completing the third year of her undergraduate degree.

Lucy’s sense of self is closely tied to her role as a student. Throughout her life, she received excellent grades and spent a great deal of time on her schoolwork. After being sexually assaulted, Lucy had trouble getting out of bed. As such, she experienced difficulty with attending classes, as well. When she was able to attend classes, Lucy found herself unable to concentrate. At times, the subject of sexual assault was raised in her classes and Lucy would subsequently experience emotional distress. Lucy began having difficulty with successfully completing her assignments and she experienced a reduction in her grades. However, because she had received such high grades before she was sexually assaulted, Lucy ultimately graduated with honours.

In addition to experiencing difficulties with her schoolwork, Lucy also began having difficulty with taking care of herself. Immediately after being sexually assaulted, she spent
most of her days watching TV or playing video games. She began to drink more frequently. Lucy’s friends and family members started to notice that she was not “acting like herself.” When she then disclosed her sexual assaults to her friends and family, she was told to “let it go.”

Since then, Lucy feels that her relationships with her friends have changed. Because Lucy feels an “obligation” to work to protect others from being sexually assaulted, she has taken on the role of watchdog within her friend group. When she is spending time with her friends, she feels as though she has to protect them by keeping her friends in her sight. If a rape joke is made, Lucy feels like she has to protect her friends by challenging rape-supportive comments. Lucy believes that her friends have become annoyed and frustrated with her for behaving in this manner. Some of Lucy’s friends have stopped talking to her because they think Lucy talks about sexual assault too much. However, Lucy feels that some of these changes in her friendships are for the better; she now knows with whom she would most like to spend her time.

Lucy not only works to protect her friends, but now also works to protect herself. Since being sexually assaulted, Lucy has made changes to the way in which she moves about the world. She now prefers to have her partner accompany her when running errands. Sometimes, she finds herself “triggered” by watching TV shows or movies that discuss or depict sexual assault. To avoid feeling triggered, Lucy uses parental monitoring controls on her TV to protect herself. Additionally, after she graduated from her bachelor’s degree, Lucy moved away from the city in which her university is located. She moved to protect herself from others’ reactions to her status as someone who has been sexually assaulted.

In an effort to combat negative emotions related to her experiences of sexual assault, Lucy now engages in doings that she finds to be “restoring.” Spending time in nature and working as a leader for a youth group are doings that Lucy finds particularly meaningful and healing. It has been through her work as a youth group leader that Lucy has found a way to engage in advocacy work related to the topic of sexual assault: she educates young people about issues of consent and respect.
Despite finding a passion for educating youth as a result of her experiences of sexual assault, Lucy feels like “something” has been taken away from her forever. Although Lucy has worked hard to understand her experiences of sexual assault within the context of her life, she continues to feel a great deal of shame around having been sexually assaulted. These feelings of shame have affected Lucy’s daily life at times, especially in relation to her schoolwork. Because of her difficulties with attending classes and completing her assignments, Lucy sought academic accommodations while still in school. However, many of her professors initially refused her requests for accommodations, stating that there “did not look like anything was wrong” with Lucy. Lucy believes that her feelings of shame were a barrier to accessing accommodations; she often did not want to disclose her sexual assaults to her professors.

Lucy believes that her experiences of sexual assault have been “important to go through.” She feels that being sexually assaulted has opened her eyes to injustice. Today, Lucy believes that her duty in life is to work to prevent sexual assault.

**Natalie**

At the time of her participation in this research, Natalie was 21 years old. Natalie experienced a sexual assault while completing the second year of her bachelor’s degree. Natalie was sexually assaulted while on a school trip abroad.

Before being sexually assaulted, Natalie was extremely active on campus. She participated in a number of extracurricular activities and clubs. However, after being sexually assaulted, she severely decreased her participation in these extracurriculars, although she continued to attend classes and to work. In the period immediately following her experience of sexual assault, Natalie’s time at school and work was marked by “outbursts.” She found herself crying often but felt that she needed to keep up with her schoolwork and paid work to “get over” being sexually assaulted. As such, Natalie felt a sense of guilt when she took any time off of school or work.

Natalie’s “outbursts” not only affected her school and work, but her relationships, as well. She began avoiding her friends and her classmates, while spending time with people who
were unfamiliar to her. At this time, her behaviour became “reckless.” Although Natalie was not interested in attending parties before being sexually assaulted, she began going to nightclubs, drinking, and using drugs after being sexually assaulted. Natalie used an online dating app for casual sex. During the summer following her experience of sexual assault, Natalie met a man through a dating app and moved in with him shortly thereafter. She began spending increasing amounts of time with people who frequently used drugs and alcohol. Natalie also started spending more money than she could afford on clothes. She feels as though she became “someone she completely was not” during this time.

Eventually, Natalie met her now-partner and stopped attending parties and using drugs and alcohol. Attending parties and going to bars became a “trigger” for Natalie; doing so would bring about an “outburst.” If she did attend a party or go to a bar, Natalie would bring along her partner for protection. Knowing that her partner is able to protect her from harm has been “healing” for Natalie.

After being sexually assaulted, Natalie felt uncomfortable in her body. Today, Natalie covers her body when she goes out in public. For example, she chooses not to wear shorts or low-cut shirts outside of her house so as not to “provoke” men. Natalie is working toward becoming more comfortable in her body and finds that spending time outdoors is helpful. She has also found attending church to be a helpful coping strategy. Natalie credits her attendance at church with her ability to forgive her perpetrator. Despite this sense of forgiveness, Natalie continues to be afraid for her safety, particularly when she is out alone at night. When she finds herself out at night, Natalie speaks to friends or family members on her cell phone until she makes her way home. Natalie believes that she is less likely to be sexually assaulted again if she is on her phone while out alone at night.

Since being sexually assaulted, Natalie has become involved in advocacy work related to the prevention of violence against women. She has organized sexual assault awareness campaigns at school and has spoken to politicians about the problems with the sexual assault policies at the universities in her province. Through her advocacy work, Natalie hopes to make policy changes to adequately protect university students who are sexually assaulted while on school trips abroad. She believes that her advocacy work allows her to share her
experience of sexual assault with others, without having to share specific details about her experience. Natalie does not often discuss her experience of sexual assault with her friends or family members. Although she feels that there is a stigma around sexual assault, Natalie posts her thoughts and feelings on social media relatively frequently, in an attempt to “start a conversation.”

Natalie believes that her experience of sexual assault has affected her relationships. In particular, she feels that she now knows which types of friendships are most valuable to her and has worked to cultivate these relationships, as such. Additionally, Natalie has since pushed herself to be more talkative and to interact more frequently with strangers. She believes that most women who have been sexually assaulted are perceived to be quiet or timid by others. Accordingly, Natalie feels that, through being more talkative, she is doing her part to fight against such stereotypes.

Natalie does not characterize her experience of sexual assault as traumatizing. However, she does feel that it has been a significant event in her life. Natalie does not know what she would be doing today if she had not been sexually assaulted. She feels that she is now more motivated to be “successful” and credits her experience of sexual assault with providing her with an increased level of drive to pursue success.

**Raging Feminist**

At the time of her participation in this research, Raging Feminist was 22 years old. Raging Feminist experienced two sexual assaults while completing her bachelor’s degree; one while completing her first year and one while completing her second year.

Raging Feminist feels as though there have been two major events in her life to date: her immigration to Canada and her experiences of sexual assault. Before first being sexually assaulted, Raging Feminist was heavily involved in advocacy work. Her schooling, paid work, and social groups revolved around her advocacy work. Because of this, Raging Feminist feels that her life changed when she was sexually assaulted by someone from within her social group during her first year of university. She refers to her first experience of sexual assault as her “miscarriage” because she feels as though she lost her hopes for her future at
that time. Initially, Raging Feminist continued to engage in her advocacy work after being sexually assaulted. However, with time, she began having difficulty leaving her dorm room. She began sleeping most of the day. As such, Raging Feminist experienced difficulty attending classes. She sees her first year of university as “coloured” by her experience of sexual assault. Raging Feminist has no memory of attending classes or doing schoolwork after being sexually assaulted during her first year. Instead, she remembers waiting: waiting for help from her university, from lawyers, and from her contacts through her advocacy work. At the end of her first year of university, Raging Feminist had failed 10 courses.

Raging Feminist feels that she was “not functioning well” after her first experience of sexual assault. In addition to having difficulties with her schoolwork, she stopped taking care of herself. Raging Feminist’s body was disgusting to her. She began showering more frequently, eating “junk food” constantly, and exercising less. Raging Feminist believes that she did these things to avoid being reminded of the “body she was raped in.”

Raging Feminist feels that she was abandoned by her friends and colleagues associated with her advocacy work. She stopped being invited to social gatherings. Eventually, she was asked to leave her job for speaking out against her perpetrator. Raging Feminist believes that, during this time, she had to be the “perfect victim” in order to be believed. However, despite spending a great deal of time considering how to dress and how to behave, Raging Feminist feels that she was not believed.

At the end of her first year of university, Raging Feminist’s parents discovered that she had been sexually assaulted. They insisted that she move home and transfer universities. Raging Feminist feels that her relationship with her parents changed after she was sexually assaulted. Although she feels that her parents have been caring and supportive, she also believes that they feel a sense of shame around her experiences of sexual assault.

Before her second year, Raging Feminist transferred universities. However, shortly after beginning her second year, Raging Feminist was sexually assaulted again. She feels that her second experience of sexual assault has not had as significant of an effect on her life as her first experience. Raging Feminist attributes this, in part, to the sense of community that she developed at her new university. She has made friends with other women who understand
what it is like to have been sexually assaulted. Raging Feminist has also made several friends through social media in the time since she was sexually assaulted. In particular, she has reached out to other women who have been vocal about their experiences of sexual assault. Raging Feminist credits her friendships with these women as the reason that she is still alive today.

After transferring universities, Raging Feminist also changed her major from political science to equity studies. She has tried to distance herself from her previous advocacy work and has taken up new work in promoting equity through a role on her student union. However, Raging Feminist sometimes finds herself “triggered” by this work. When people ignore or “delegitimize” her opinions, she feels silenced and is reminded of how she was silenced by her friends and colleagues associated with her previous advocacy work. Raging Feminist believes that her social locations of being a woman and an immigrant prevent her from doing or saying what she would like to do or say, especially in the context of her new advocacy work in the area of equity. However, Raging Feminist feels that her advocacy work is something that she “has” to do.

To avoid thinking too much about her experiences of sexual assault, Raging Feminist tries to fill her days to the brim. She “drowns” herself in schoolwork, often working from 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. Raging Feminist leaves herself very little time to socialize and instead devotes much of her free time to fighting sexual assault and other forms of social injustice. Despite her focus on schoolwork, Raging Feminist feels she is not a “normal” student. Instead of worrying about classes or assignments, she worries about sexual assault. Raging Feminist is deeply upset that she will not finish her bachelor’s degree within four years. She feels that her experiences of sexual assault prevent her from finishing her degree sooner, and that they will ultimately have a significant effect on her future job prospects.

Raging Feminist feels that her experiences of sexual assault are “ingrained into every aspect” of her sense of self. Today, she views herself and the world through a different lens. Although Raging Feminist one day hopes to travel the world to “get away” from the places that remind her of her experiences of sexual assault, she believes that these experiences have created a “sense of loss that will never go away.”
Rose

At the time of her participation in this research, Rose was 22 years old. Rose experienced three sexual assaults while completing the third year of her bachelor’s degree.

For Rose, the story of her life begins with her experiences of sexual assault. Rose feels that being sexually assaulted has been one of the most significant experiences in her life to date. At the time of her experiences of sexual assault, she was working as a residence don at her university. Rose was sexually assaulted by two men who also worked in the residence building. Immediately following her third experience of sexual assault, she left residence for a period of time to distance herself from her perpetrators. Rose moved into her best friend’s apartment for several days. During this time, she did not leave her friend’s apartment. Rose spent her time crying and talking to her friend about her experiences of sexual assault.

Rose reported her sexual assaults to her university and to the police. Criminal charges were brought against one of her perpetrators. She began attending court hearings and eventually testified against her perpetrator. Rose’s perpetrator was ultimately convicted, but not before Rose experienced extreme feelings of guilt and shame as a result of her participation in her perpetrator’s trial.

During the time that her perpetrator’s trial was taking place, Rose remained a student. She believes that her experiences of sexual assault caused her to begin having nightmares, something that she still experiences today. Because her sleep was disturbed by these nightmares, Rose began sleeping less. She started to focus her energies on her schoolwork until she was working for 20 hours per day.

Rose believes that many of her relationships with her friends changed because of her experiences of sexual assault. Although she did not often talk about her experiences with her friends, she feels that her friends found her “exhausting” to be around. After being sexually assaulted, Rose stopped going out at night with her friends and she and her friends drifted apart. At this time, Rose developed new friendships with other students in her degree program. This new group of friends had different interests than Rose’s previous group of friends. Rose felt that her new friends were more socially conscious and better understood
that sexual assault is not something you “just get over.” Although Rose believes that her experiences of sexual assault led her to make new friends, she also feels that she has significantly reduced her engagement in social interaction since being sexually assaulted.

Shortly after being sexually assaulted, Rose began dating her now-partner. She believes that the one area of her life most affected by her experiences of sexual assault is her relationship with her partner. Although Rose feels that her partner has been supportive of her needs following her experiences of sexual assault, she has also experienced a great deal of conflict in her relationship. Rose believes that her partner can never understand her experiences of sexual assault and it is a topic that they no longer discuss.

Immediately after being sexually assaulted, Rose felt like her experiences “ruled her life.” She stopped drinking, began eating much less, and stopped taking care of herself; specifically, Rose began showering less frequently and wearing less makeup than she had before. She also experienced difficulty with brushing her teeth because the task would cause her to recall memories of being sexually assaulted. Rose feels like she “lost who she was” during this time because she would often “fluctuate” between engaging in her “normal” routine and not engaging in her normal routine. Today, Rose believes she has found more of a balance between doing and not doing, and feels that having “down time”—for example, watching “mindless” TV shows—helps her to cope.

Since being sexually assaulted, Rose has experienced increased concern for her safety. She feels she is more cautious about how she moves about in the world. While she once felt safe travelling alone, Rose no longer feels comfortable doing so. In the latter part of her third year of university, Rose opted to travel to a different continent for a fieldwork placement so that she could place as much distance between herself and her perpetrators as possible. It was during this time that Rose realized that she had begun to feel unsafe while travelling alone. As her intended career path would have involved a great deal of solo travel, Rose decided she needed to pursue a different career.

Rose began volunteering at a sexual assault crisis phone line and reaching out to other women who had been sexually assaulted through social media. Although reaching out to others started as a strategy for coping with her experiences of sexual assault, it was through
reaching out that Rose began to realize that other women had also had negative experiences with the legal system following sexual assault. From connecting with other women via social media, Rose decided to apply for law school to try to make changes to the system.

Rose believes that her experiences of sexual assault changed her career trajectory and “100% propelled” her into a law career. At law school, Rose has joined a support group for those who have been sexually assaulted. She has also worked to bring consent training to her university. Every paper that Rose has written in law school has been related to sexual assault in some way. Although she wishes that her experiences of sexual assault “never happened,” Rose feels that she now “wants her life to be about” helping others who have been sexually assaulted.
Appendix I: Thematic Map for Chapter 3

The Aftermath: Never Getting Over, but Getting On
- Fractured Selves, Fractured Lives
  - Wearing My Rape Eternally
  - Haunted by Sexual Assault
- Doing to Move Forward
- Doing Safety
- Doing Normality
- Doing Healing

The Aftermyth: I’m Supposed To
- Doing Safety
- Doing Normality
- Doing Healing
- Doing Healing
Appendix J: Thematic Map for Chapter 4

Life, Irrupted

The Irruption: A Different Perspective

The Initial Aftermath: Getting By, but Not Living

Hypo-Engagement: Doing Less

Hyper-Engagement: Doing More

Stable Engagement: Doing the Same

The Protracted Aftermath: Continuously Working at Living Through Occupation-in-Conscious-Use

(Re)Establishing Daily Routines: Caring for Oneself

Searching for Safety: Interacting with Others and One's Environment

Propelled into New Life Choices: Shifting One's Trajectory
Appendix K: Thematic Map for Chapter 5

The Self, Raped

I Am Raped

The Loss of a Self: A Changed Me

The Loss of an Imagined Future: A Wrench in the Plan

Sexually Assaulted Women Should: Navigating Expectations

(Re)Capturing the Self: Building the Self Through Doing

Sexual Assault Colours Everything: A Different Lens

Not Only Raped: Resilience and the Rise of the Human Spirit

Bringing a Self Forward: Giving New Meaning to Doing

Doing Differently: Taking up New Occupations
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