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THE HEALING JOURNEY:
SURVIVORS OF RITUAL ABUSE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Nursing at Massey University.

Joanne Leamy
1994.
ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a feminist analysis of how women heal from ritual abuse. Ritual abuse has only recently come to public attention, and is currently the focus of considerable debate. Nurses, who are often in the position of caring for women and children who have been ritually abused, have little knowledge of this abuse or how women heal.

Feminist theoretical assumptions underpin the case study approach and the data analysis. In depth, unstructured interviews are the primary method of data collection, with some reference to field notes. The data from each participant is presented in separate chapters.

The analysis of the data demonstrates that ways that each participant has developed in order to enhance her own healing. The analysis highlights the similarities and differences between the participants.

It is suggested that nurses play a critical role in the care of survivors of any abuse, and that nurses have a particularly important role to play as advocates. This study also highlights the strengths that feminist research has to offer nursing research.

This research provides valuable knowledge and a source of hope for the participants, myself, other survivors, health professionals, and particularly nurses.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been possible with the inspiration and support of many people, who are either survivors, supporters of survivors, health professionals, or academic staff. Many of you are unable to be named, but I am sure that you will know who you are.

To Moira, Janice, Kirsty, and Michaela a special thanks. Your courage, time, and energy is acknowledged and much appreciated. In order to participate, you had to trust me and my stated motives and objectives. I hope that this is perhaps part of your individual healing processes - that you have demonstrated to yourselves that you can place your trust in another person.

I would like to say that as my thesis supervisor, Valerie Fleming, has been a wonderful source of encouragement and support at all times. She had a difficult task at times, and has yet to persuade me to participate in a full triathlon.

I would also like to thank the readers of the final drafts for their corrections and comments - Maureen Leamy and Jan Rodgers. A special mention must be made of my fellow masters students, who have also been an invaluable source of inspiration, support and humour.

Finally, I would like to inform my family and friends that I am now back on the social scene full-time.
PREFACE

As this study uses feminism as the theoretical framework, the researcher is also a participant in the research process. Consequently throughout the research I use the first person, rather than the third person. While this is still not common in academic writing, by using the first person and making my thoughts explicit, I remain true to the method. The use of the first person in academic writing has recently been demonstrated by Fleming (1994) and elaborated on by Webb (1992).
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS  
PREFACE  

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION  
INTRODUCTION  
AIMS  
THE CONTROVERSY  
DEFINITION  
   Psychological and emotional abuse  
   Spiritual abuse  
   Ritual abuse  
   Survivors  
HOW WOMEN TELL OF PAST ABUSE  
HEALING  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK  
THESIS OUTLINE  

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW  
INTRODUCTION  
   The context of abuse and its effect on women's health  
NURSES AND HEALING  
HEALING  
HEALING FROM RITUAL ABUSE  
RITUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS AND MENTAL HEALTH  
   Multiple personality  
   Post-traumatic stress disorder  
DEBATE  
CONCLUSION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALING</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between surviving and healing</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First healing</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORGIVENESS</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN’S STRENGTH</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROTECTION OF OTHERS</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPIRITUALITY</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualisation</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALING METAPHOR</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE FUTURE</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising self esteem</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: JANICE</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFLECTION ON THE PAST</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on reality</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for meaning</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPRESSING EMOTIONS</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing anger</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending isolation</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUTUALITY</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Believed</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with another survivor</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SEVEN: KIRSTY

BACKGROUND

REFLECTION ON THE PAST

Leaving the area

EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Creativity

Talking

MUTUALITY

Contact with another survivor

Unconditional acceptance by others

COUNSELLING

Safety

HEALING

Difference between surviving and healing

Healing as a continuous process

Being Normal

BALANCING

PERSONAL STRENGTH

WOMEN'S STRENGTH

PROTECTION OF OTHERS

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 167

INTRODUCTION 167

How the study has met its aims 168
Reliability and Validity 169
Discussion 170
Implications for nursing 171
Limitations of the study 173
Concluding Statement 176

APPENDIX ONE 177

Some say I've got devil (And some say I've got angel) 177

APPENDIX TWO 178

Information for Counsellors 178

APPENDIX THREE 180

Information For Intending Participants 180

APPENDIX FOUR 182

Consent To Participate In Research Project 182

REFERENCES 183