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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.**

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## 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).

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