You Are Not Alone:
An Existential-Phenomenological Exploration Of How Inner Dialogue Is Experienced By Rape Survivors

Doctoral Thesis

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Statement of Authorship

This dissertation is written by Natalie Fraser and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctor of Counselling Psychology and Existential Psychotherapy. The author reports no conflicts of interest, and is solely responsible for the content and writing of the dissertation.

Abstract

This research investigated how inner dialogue is experienced by rape survivors. Eight women were interviewed about their experiences and the data was analysed using Structural Existential Analysis (SEA). A novel application of SEA was developed and a step-by-step model for application and verification is provided. The findings are presented in two parts. Part 1 ‘‘Characteristics of Inner Dialogue” provides a novel conceptualisation of a personalised inner dialogical community, detailing its development, dominance, and functions with specific emphasis on self-creation, healing, and meaning. Part 2 ‘‘Long-Lived Experiences” offers in-depth understandings of how inner dialogue is experienced in the aftermath of rape. Implications and specific interventions for counselling psychologists, practitioners, the judiciary system, the general public, and survivors of sexual trauma are suggested and discussed in detail.

The findings conclude that inner dialogue is a multifaceted innate phenomenon, not a pathological symptom of mental unwellness. Active engagement with inner dialogue facilitates deeper connection with the self and increased control over life experiences. The experience of rape is not an isolated physical violation, it has the potential to violate all areas of a person’s lived experience, shattering previously held values with long-term implications for the victim and the people in their lives. The healing process is individually unique. Societies’ perceptions of stigmas, stereotypes, and rape-myths create hostile environments and directly impede healing from trauma.

Keywords: existential; qualitative; phenomenological; inner dialogue; healing; rape; sexual assault; trauma; stigma; survivor; meaning; PTSD; narrative

Introduction

"You become an embarrassed, shameful fool of your former self - a self that becomes a myth as you begin to doubt that you could ever have been worth more than the frightened blur of exploited shadow that you exist as now.

Reality becomes a distorted, ever-so-distant fantasy.

And from here, they expect you to fight your battle?"

(Personal Reflection, February 2020)

This research project has been developed in response to a reality that hundreds of thousands of people from all ages, genders, and backgrounds experience across the world today, and have done throughout human history.

This project should not *need* to provide a valuable original contribution to the field of counselling psychology, nor to the education system, nor to the judiciary system, nor to the general public.

But it is needed, it is valuable, and it aspires to be the first of many empirical contributions to the field of humanity which I plan to make in my career as a researcher, as a counselling psychologist, and as a voice of abuse survivors.

"Just because we've never done it doesn't mean we can't do it."

- Eva Ibbitson, (2009, p. 65)

The above quote sets the philosophy from which this study developed. No study quite like it has ever been conducted. Its originality lies both in its specialised focus on the complex phenomena of inner dialogue as understood by rape survivors, and the novel outright application of an existential research method.

This study aims first and foremost to give a voice to survivors of sexual assault and rape, both within the parameters of this study, and beyond.

By giving a voice to survivors, this study aspires to increase the currently scarce understanding of how inner dialogue is experienced for those who are living beyond trauma. While this study has elected to focus on survivors of rape due to my personal connection with this particular trauma, the findings of this study invite readers from a multitude of disciplines to explore the phenomena of inner dialogue and trauma in more detail, and consider how this knowledge can be beneficial for themselves and their clients when applied to understanding the many different facets of traumas which occur as an inevitable part of human existence (Jacob, 2019; Frankl, 1973).

The study commences with a review of existing literature, which for clarity has initially explored the phenomenon of rape and the phenomenon of inner dialogue separately. Following this, various methods of phenomenological qualitative research are explored and compared, before presenting a novel way of applying the lesser-known phenomenological method of analysis called Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) (van Deurzen, 2014).

The findings obtained resulted in a number of emerging themes which capture the interwoven lived experiences of the role that inner dialogue plays in life beyond rape. These discoveries are subsequently discussed from an existential-phenomenological lens in relation to the field of counselling psychology, in light of the literature review and relevant additional literature. This process subsequently provided novel pluralistic insights into therapeutic approaches which may be suitable for supporting trauma survivors, as well as a number of additional interdisciplinary discoveries which are presented accordingly. The thesis closes with a conclusion, bringing together the key offerings of this research project in relation to answering this study's research question: *How do survivors of rape experience their inner dialogue?*

Literature Review

Introduction

"Man's search for meaning is not pathological, but rather the surest sign of being truly human"

Victor Frankl (1973, p. 93)

The following chapter will offer a literature review exploring existing definitions, historical and phenomenological understandings, and existential interpretations of the phenomena of rape and inner dialogue, providing a foundation for investigating the study's research question "how is inner dialogue experienced by rape survivors?". These experiences will initially be introduced as separate phenomena for the following reasons. As an intellectual task, initially separating the two phenomena was deemed the most adequate means of providing a concise introduction and overview of each phenomena. This knowledge is foundational for both the development of this research and for understanding and validating the knowledge gained by this research. Secondly, to date there is a relatively limited body of research that specifically provides empirical understandings about how rape survivors experience their inner dialogue. This research project aspires to provide an original, in-depth contribution to begin bridging this gap in knowledge.

As this project will explore how rape survivors experience their inner dialogue through an existential lens, it seems appropriate to begin by briefly introducing the existential lens itself before further elaborating on relevant theories as the chapters develop. The term existential derives from the Latin *'existentia'* meaning 'existence' and can most basically be understood as the exploration of what it means to be alive (Spinelli, 2014; Cooper, 2016; Jacob, 2019). With focus on various common themes such as freedom, responsibility, choice, and meaning, existential literature draws on philosophical ideas to answer what Jacob (2019, p. 1) describes as "the eternal human questions", attempting to understand how human beings experience a uniquely meaningful

existence (Cooper, 2016; Längle & Wurm, 2018). Leading thinkers in the field acknowledge that existential meaning is a subjective and complex phenomena to investigate, with clinical experience, empirical research and philosophical works showing that 'lived experiences' and 'existential ideas' are continually intertwined (Spinelli, 2014; Cooper, 2016). Existential research proposes that each individual's quest for meaning is essentially personal, yet there is value in learning from each other's experiences (e.g. Nietzsche, 1909; Frankl, 1985; van Deurzen, 2009; Spinelli, 2014; Cooper, 2016). This research will therefore draw on both existing research and the lived-experiences of eight participants to evolve the knowledge base surrounding the phenomena under investigation: inner dialogue and trauma.

Literature searches conducted between 2019 and 2021 using the databases: ProQuest Research, ResearchGate, PsychINFO, PubMed, SAGE, Science Direct and Google Scholar were used to retrieve relevant literature. Search strategies included the key words: "Phenomenology" OR "Experience" OR "Meaning" OR "Existential*" AND "inner/internal/self/private" OR "narrative/dialogue/talk/speech" AND "Rape" OR "Sexual Assault" OR "Rape Victims" OR "Rape Survivors". The following inclusion/exclusion criteria of articles was used to provide a focused and systemic literature review relevant to the research question. Papers were included if they met the following criteria: empirically supported/peer reviewed; historical overviews; contemporary findings; original texts; written or translated into English; demographically representative using adult participants. Articles were excluded if they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Furthermore, articles specifically focused on childhood sexual abuse were excluded, as literature suggests fundamental differences between the impact of these experiences as elaborated later, and this research project aspired to focus on sexual assault in adulthood.

Defining Inner Dialogue

The experience of conversing internally with one's self has been an intriguing subject for philosophers and psychologists for decades. A large and varied body of research offers different

insights into its purpose, manifestation, experience, and qualities (Albarracín, Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). While no 'ultimate explanation' has been agreed upon, there is an overarching acknowledgement of both the importance of this human experience and the need for further research into its phenomenological and existential qualities (Hurlburt et al., 2013). Due to its invisible and subjective nature, researchers note that it is exceptionally difficult to measure population prevalence of inner dialogue. Hulbert (2013) suggests 30-50% or the population experience inner dialogue in some form. Self-report research using Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) suggests a huge variation in inner dialogue frequency, with participants reporting everything from zero to 100% frequency with an average of 23% (Hurlburt et al., 2013; Mihelic, 2010).

With different justifications into how it occurs, it has been widely established that inner dialogue is innate and fundamental to the creation of a meaningful existence (Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014). As a sense of meaninglessness and disorientation with the self are commonly experienced by survivors of sexual abuse (Lebowitx and Wigren, 2005), exploring these conjoined lived experiences may provide valuable insight into how specialised support may be provided by counselling psychologists and psychotherapists.

Existing literature exploring this phenomenon has offered a number of different terms of reference, such as: inner monologue or dialogue, auditory imagery, private speech, inner speech, self-talk, and self-statements etc. (Albarracín, Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015; Brinthaupt, Hein & Kramer, 2009; Morin, 2005). This research will use the term "inner dialogue", exploring both the objective phenomena as a noun and the subjective experiential qualities for which inner dialogue may be better understood as a verb. The word dialogue originates from the Greek *dialogo*s - from *dialegesthai* ‘ converse with ’- from *dia*‘ through ’and *le*gein‘ speak ’(Oxford Dictionaries | English, 2019). By this definition, in the context of this study inner dialogue refers to the experience of conversing with oneself within one’s thoughts. Furthermore, this study reflects existing research which describes inner dialogue as “our consciousness” (e.g. Penn and Frankfurt, 1994; Andersen 1995; Anderson 1997) and refers to the inner dialogue as “what the individual experiences, feels,

and thinks, but does not yet necessarily share in actual conversation." (Lidbom, 2015). These definitions are provided as an intellectual task to describe the phenomenon under investigation, yet within the realms of this research are explored with an openness to observe how they are uniquely experienced by each participant.

A History Of Inner Dialogue

As this research is conducted in part fulfilment of a doctorate in counselling psychology, this section will present a historical overview of inner dialogue as investigated within the field of psychological science. Some of the first psychological theories on language and its role in development came from the psychologists Vygotsky and Piaget during the 1920s (Holzman, 2014). While Piaget (1959) argued that thoughts come before language, Vygotsky (1987) theorised that thoughts and language are different systems. Despite working quite separately, in their revolutionary thinking they distinguished between private inner speech and external speech. While Piaget (1959) stated that inner dialogue was a failed attempt to communicate, Vygotsky (1987) proposed that inner dialogue plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive and emotional development suggesting that thoughts and understandings of existence develop through internal language.

The development of scientific research since his time has led to a critique of the validity of these theories. Vygotsky proposed that internal dialogue - and then cognition - develops only through the external dialogue of others through a process which he termed 'internalisation'. While contemporary research (e.g. Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014) has evidenced that this may in part be the case, it has revealed that this isn't *always* the case. For example, studies conducted exploring inner dialogue as experienced by deaf people who have never heard external dialogue has shown that while greater difficulties surrounding perception, emotions and language development are often experienced, the majority of hearing impaired children and adults are ultimately able to cognitively develop and integrate successfully within hearing societies (Kiff & Bond, 1996). This is

further supported by contemporary research, with neurological studies suggesting that inner dialogue does manifest for deaf people in different degrees of abstraction (Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014).

While I respect the gaps in the contributions of such thinkers as Vygotsky and Piaget, I am aligned to the belief that the value of a theory does not lie in its perfection, but rather in what inspiration it offers. The discussions and critiques of what their theories lack in validity lead continually towards enhancing knowledge in the field as future researchers added to their ideas and findings. Throughout inner dialogue literature it is widely appreciated that their work lay a foundation for a notable increase of research into the phenomenon during recent years (Winsler et al., 2009) resulting in a vast number of different theoretical perspectives across a number of psychological fields (Larrain & Haye, 2012) which will hereby be explored.

Psychological Understandings

Developmental psychologists have suggested that inner dialogue plays a central role in regulating behaviour and supporting cognitive functioning in both children and adults, with a wide inter-individual variation concerning its purpose and how it is experienced (Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Sports specialists have investigated the facilitative and debilitative qualities of inner dialogue and it's relation to improved performance (Hardy, 2006). A large majority of the research surrounding inner dialogue has focused on pathological perspectives of the phenomenon (Brinthaupt, Hein & Kramer, 2009). Negative self-statements have been found to correlate with depression and anxiety (Schwartz & Garamoni, 1989; Brinthaupt, Hein & Kramer, 2009), and atypical self-regulatory inner dialogue development has been explored in relation to people with schizophrenic experiences (Day & Fernyhough, 2015). As acknowledged within their discussions and further elaborated below, a limitation to these research projects is the focus on negative and functional aspects of the phenomena, lacking holistic and lived-experience insights.

This was further demonstrated as I engaged in the review of literature and noticed value in certain lesser-known concepts and ideas. For example, while Vygotsky's theories concerning the

role which inner dialogue has in regards to cognitive capacities responsible for the planning, inhibition and behavioural control have received attention from fields of empirical research, Holzman (2014) notes that Vygotsky's lesser appraised contribution concerning the duality of emotion and intelligence has been relatively overlooked. Vygotzky (1987) proposed that language is a meaningful system of emotional and intellectual processes which work in dialogical unity, a notion which has been supported by a smaller body of contemporary research demonstrating the relationship between inner dialogue and creativity (Winsler, Fernyhough & Montero, 2009), self-awareness, and self-understanding (Morin, 2005).

Holzman (2014) draws attention to the influence that Vygotsky's holistic theory of inner dialogue has had on research investigating the individual process of meaning making. This has directly influenced fields of counselling psychology such as that of narrative (White et al., 1990), discourse (Lock & Strong, 1012), and existential (Anderson, 2005) approaches. Such approaches highlight the change in how language is understood within the field of psychology (McLeod, 2000). Rather than words being understood as having concrete meanings, narrative thinkers have been influenced by the work of Wittgenstein (1921) who proposed that the meanings of all words and all experiences are subject to each individual's interpretation. Wittgenstein's work has been highly influential within narrative realms, such as in the development of relational constructivist thinking which offers a number of conceptualizations relating to how individuals develop meaning through their inner dialogue (Botella and Herrero, 2000).

To elaborate: rather than considering experiences of reality and self as concrete facts, relational constructivism proposes that meaningful identities are both the product and process of one's inner dialogue. Each individual is creatively responsible as the author of their meaningful lives and being mindful of the synonymity of authorship and meaning lies at the heart of existence (Botella and Herrero, 2000). I have noticed in my personal life and professional work that this creative freedom can be exceptionally beneficial when considering experiences of trauma and suffering; an inevitable aspect of human experience which some of the most profound existential

thinkers consider to lie at the heart of existence (Frankl, 1967). While this research project does not adopt a constructivist position, as further explained in the methodology section, it is this philosophy of the human capacity to interpret and create their own meaning through external and internal language which lies at the heart of this research project.

The Phenomenology of Inner Dialogue

As previously indicated, while an increasing body of literature has developed over the past decades which suggest the importance of inner dialogue for functional, emotional and meta-cognition in human existence, a relatively small body of literature has explicitly phenomenologically investigated the experience of inner dialogue (Hurlburt, Heavey and Kelsey, 2013). It is suggested that this may be due to the methodological challenges involved in investigating subjective invisible experiences (Albarracín, Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

One of the most comprehensive overviews of existing literature investigating inner dialogue is provided by Perrone-Bertolotti et al. (2014), in their detailed meta-analytical comparison of neurobiological and cognitive research from the past 50 years. Exploring the difference between internal and external dialogue, their overview found that inner dialogue is a common everyday experience and plays a central role in human consciousness at the interplay of language and thought. They highlight the important difference between what they term 'willful inner speech' and 'verbal mind wandering', otherwise explained as the deliberate engagement and non-deliberate engagement with oneself within ones' inner dialogue. Perrone-Bertolotti et al. (2014) also explored the inner dialogue properties experienced by deaf people and found it to manifest with different degrees of abstraction, with multi-modal sensors working interactively. While their study may be limited in its focus on pathological associations, their research can be considered as an important contribution to the field as it suggests correlation between negative, ruminative inner dialogue and disrupted cognitive performance. As demonstrated in their overview, many different studies have provided different understandings, and the precise nature of the relationship between internal and

external dialogue remains a matter of debate. They suggest that further understandings could provide therapeutic interventions to train those with disruptive inner dialogue in ways to reduce negative experiences.

This section will introduce a number of notable contributions made by leading researchers in the field, which have used different methods in attempt to explore the phenomenological qualities of inner dialogue. Building on these contributions, it is an objective of this research project to further contribute phenomenological research into the experience of inner dialogue.

Varieties of Inner Speech Questionnaire (VISQ)

McCarthy-Jones and Fernyhough (2011) developed the Varieties of Inner Speech Questionnaire (VISQ) designed to empirically assess the phenomenological properties of inner speech. The 18-item questionnaire uses an empirically tested self-report assessment model developed based on Vygotskian (1987) concepts of inner speech, with phenomenological properties identified based on four factors: dialogicality (inner speech that occurs as a back-and-forth conversation), evaluative/motivational inner speech, other people in inner speech, and condensation of inner speech (i.e. abbreviation of sentences in which meaning is retained).

With regard to negative inner dialogue, their findings supported current literature suggesting higher levels of self-assessing inner dialogue correlated with a negative self-concept. They propose that while little research has yet been conducted, the VISQ can be used to investigate the relatively underexplored positive potential for inner dialogue, which is currently present in sport research - though without distinction between inner dialogue and overt (spoken) self-dialogue. The dialogic component of their questionnaire suggests that individuals experience inner dialogues narratively comprising of themselves and others, although further research into this is suggested. While their current VISQ provides insight into the content of inner dialogue, they suggest the phenomenology of inner dialogue may be less ambiguously investigated using face to face interviews (Alderson-Day et al., 2018). Furthermore, they highlight a possible shortcoming of the

emphasis on negative features of inner dialogue and advocate further research into positive features, identified in such work as Puchalska-Wasyl (2007).

Dialogical Self

Puchalska-Wasyl (2007) conducted four studies into the phenomenon of inner dialogue which they developed based on both Vygotskian (1987) and contemporary theories of inner dialogical activity, personality, and imagination. Their findings from these four studies were critically evaluated and discussed in their overview. Supporting existing literature, they noted that while psychological literature mentions many functions of inner dialogues, analyses commonly only consider single types of inner conversations and as a consequence only describe their single functions. Therefore, only a fragment of the reality is explored. Puchalska-Wasyl (2007) also found that while research primarily focuses on the pathological and 'negative' functions of inner dialogue, their detailed studies revealed several 'positive' functions which they summarise as 'support, bond, and exploration' characteristics. They propose the importance of further research into functions of adaption, changes of identity, self-esteem or self-efficacy, internal integrity vs. multiple organization of the self, individual differences of internal dialogical activity, and specific profiles of dialogical activity in different cultures or social groups.

Self-Talk Scale

Brinthaupt, Hein & Kramer (2009) also note that most research into inner dialogue concerns the dysfunctional or negative elements which has led to cognitive therapeutic interventions. Noticing a gap in literature focusing on the general individual differences of inner dialogue, they devised The Self-Talk scale (Brinthaupt et al., 2009) which requires respondents to report the frequency and self-regulatory features of inner dialogue on a rating scale of 90 statements developed from in depth investigation of existing self-talk literature. They found that inner dialogue manifests within individuals in different ways and serves different functions to different individuals which they found corresponded with personality types. For example, higher levels of critical inner dialogue corresponded with lower self-esteem, while higher levels of self-reinforcing inner dialogue

was associated with higher levels of self-esteem. Their findings have provided valuable insight into the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon, and the individual differences within the context and function of inner dialogue. While this offers in depth insight into the variations in functional experience of inner dialogue, it provides little insight into the phenomenological properties (Hurlburt & Heavey, 2015).

Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES)

Hurlburt et al. (2013) introduced Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) as a qualitative method for producing "high fidelity descriptions of randomly selected pristine inner experience". Their study has been criticized for misinterpreting the subjective experience of inner dialogue in the strict and complicated way that it differentiates inner dialogue and inner images (Martínez-Manrique & Vicente, 2010), yet their extensive 30 years of research has produced substantial grounds for further research. While current understandings about inner dialogue suggest that the experience occurs all the time, as with the Self-Talk Scale (Brinthaupt et al., 2009) research using DES also suggests a huge variation in inner dialogue frequency, with participants reporting everything from zero to 100% frequency with an average of 23% (Hurlburt et al., 2013; Mihelic, 2010). While their research has provided a rich phenomenological understanding, the extensive reiterating process of the interviewing is criticized to potentially change the experiences which they are attempting to measure (Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2011).

This brief overview of existing phenomenological investigation into inner dialogue can be summarized with several key insights. Inner dialogue can be understood to be widely experienced, with individual differences in its frequency, function, and features. Methodological challenges are emphasized as shortcomings in existing research which has attempted to empirically measure the complex phenomenon of inner dialogue, with recommendations made for more qualitative studies. Furthermore, existing research acknowledges its emphasis on pathological and ‘negative’ features, with recommendations for a more holistic investigation.

Inner Dialogue and Existential Meaning

Within the realms of existential philosophy, there is limited explicit mention of inner dialogue. However, immersion into existential literature reveals distinctly relevant themes and concepts which may provide theoretical foundations from which to build on. The role of inner dialogue as a feature of human existence dates back to the ideas of early philosophers such as in the work of Plato, who noted that the dialogical conversation with the self is a natural part of human existence (Chisea, 1992; Albarracín, Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Plato's ideas directly influenced the development of many existential and phenomenological theories still widely applied today (Lobo et al., 2015). A thorough investigation into the vast existential-phenomenological field is not feasible in the scope of this thesis. It will therefore stay aligned with themes and theories most relevant to the existential influence on the field of counselling psychology in relation to inner dialogue and healing from trauma which this research project is committed to exploring. As the previous section demonstrated, existing theories of inner dialogue have indicated its role in self-creation and meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1987; Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014). It was therefore deemed relevant that a specific focus on self- and meaning-focused existential theories will lie at the heart of this research.

Existential meaning philosophies can be dated back to some of the earliest known thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle (Vos, 2018) and have since been developed by numerous existential philosophers. The 20th Century psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and philosopher Victor Frankl (1965) is widely recognized as one of the most influential meaning-focused existential thinkers. He posits that all humans are inherently meaningful, and that life is a continuing journey of discovering one's personal meanings. Specifically relevant to this research is Frankl's notion that humans are able to find meaning in suffering, which he conceptualized during his time in Nazi concentration camps and presented in his book *Man's Search For Meaning* (1965). While Frankl's literature does not directly reference inner dialogue, he famously proposes that the last of humans' greatest freedoms is one's attitude towards any given situation. In other words, in spite of the context one finds themselves in,

their private inner consciousness can never be accessed by others and can therefore be the source to experience meaning even within the most horrendous circumstances. Frankl (1973) specifically refers to the power of memories and love, suggesting three ways of discovering meaning: through creating, encountering, or experiencing life, and through our attitude towards unavoidable suffering. These lay the foundation for his psychotherapeutic approach Logotherapy, still practiced today. Viennese philosopher Alfried Längle collaborated with Frankl until their paths separated, with Längle pursing a more 'lived-experience' approach in comparison to Frankl's 'theoretical' approach. Längle's existential psychotherapies explicitly advocate the central role of inner dialogue in meaning making, directly resonating with the investigation of the current study.

The existential-phenomenological field has been described as an ever-evolving 'rich tapestry' (Cooper, 2016). Elaborating on the Vygotsyian (1987) and Wittgensteinian (1920) informed theories introduced in the previous section, the value of integrating narrative and existential approaches to meaning has been highlighted by contemporary practitioners, who emphasize the interplay of bodily, lived experience and socially constructed meaning in line with the creation of an individual's self and world (Richert, 2010). By moving away from a molecular view of language and thereby letting go of concrete understandings of meanings, the complexity of human experience may be better understood. While humans may experience a felt sense in relation to a life experience, only through the tool of self-communication within their inner dialogue can they create, identify and process meanings connected with it (Längle, 2003). That is to say, all meanings are situated within the private narrative of their inner dialogue used by each individual to comprehend their experiences (Gonçalves and Machado, 2000). It is widely acknowledged that deep healing requires deep understanding of one's reality. An existentially informed counselling psychologist may practically apply these theoretical understandings by facilitating change through a variety of interventions which incorporate existential and narrative perspectives of meaning making (Richert, 2010; Längle, 2003). By this very nature, clients are empowered by the creative understanding of active inner dialogue to construct and adapt their own meanings in any given situations.

Defining Rape

As previously explored, research suggests that inner dialogue may be a powerful tool for individuals to explore their sense of meaning and identity, and to overcome times of suffering. This section will introduce a specific form of suffering: living beyond the experience of rape. There are numerous definitions of what constitutes rape and sexual assault which differ between cultures and contexts, and subsequently numerous discussions surrounding these definitions (Brown & Walklate, 2011). As this research project has been conducted in the United Kingdom, the definition provided by the metropolitan police will be used:

> *"Rape is when a person intentionally penetrates another's vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, without the other person's consent. Assault by penetration is when a person penetrates another person's vagina or anus with any part of the body other than a penis, or by using an object, without the person's consent."*
>
> *(Met.police.uk, 2021)*

A differentiation is made between rape and sexual assault, with the notion of *consent* being a paramount feature of both experiences. The current study will specifically focus on rape, with future implications for research into sexual assault. Recent UK statistics suggest that 21.1% of the population, equivalent to 4 million people, have been the victims of rape or sexual assault (Ons.gov.uk, 2021). Of this population, police statistics suggest that 17% of victims were males and 83% of victims were females (Ons.gov.uk, 2021).

Research drawing on historical, legal and social anthropological understandings of rape indicate the association of power and violence as a social feature of masculinity, with a social discourse permitting and advocating the behaviour often as an achievement or game (D'Cruze, 1992). While the majority of rape research has focused on male perpetrators and female victims there is clear evidence that sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and sexually violent behaviours are not only committed by males to females (Vandiver & Walker, 2002). Furthermore, notions of

masculinity and sexuality are understood in the realms of this research project as complex and multifaceted aspects of existential humanness, not as functions of gender-bound identity (Rodrigues, 2014).

For reasons explicated in the Methodology section, this research project will focus on the rape of females as understood according to the above definition by the Metropolitan police (Met.police.uk, 2021). The following literature review will therefore primarily review rape literature in this context.

A History of Rape

The experience of rape has been recorded since early history, and across the globe (Bourke, 2015). Cater (1984) examined recordings of rape in medieval times, finding that in the 12th Century rape was a crime punishable by death, which was then reduced to a lesser crime in the 13th Century with punishment by a fine. At that time, rape was defined as "illegal intercourse with any woman". In the 13th Century, the experience of reporting a rape was a long-drawn out humiliating process for the women, who had to share their story with 'men of good repute' before being judged by several authority figures including the hundred reeve, the king's serjeant, the coroners and the sheriff before making an appeal to the county court. In the 13th Century this humiliating process and common lack of punitive outcome for the perpetrator meant that reporting of this crime was incredibly low (Cater, 1985). In her research of 18th and 19th Century rape, Clarke's (1987) findings reflected a very similar experience. Vaughan's (2002) more recent study of 'the evolution of rape' empirically explored a historical overview of rape cases. Her findings supported the work of her predecessors, demonstrating based on prevalence rates from modem society across the globe that rape is one of the most common crimes that a female may experience.

As I engaged with this literature, I became aware that the experiences documented from centuries ago were not dissimilar to the experiences of women in the 21st Century today. While I acknowledge that research collected from dated documentation may be limited and may not have

the capacity to represent an entire picture of the lived-experiences at the time, with the critical realist epistemological position in mind as it is in this study, it is necessary to appreciate the subjective value of each individual's experience which is commemorated in the dated literature being reviewed.

As demonstrated, throughout history quantitative and qualitative studies such as these have clearly demonstrated that few rape cases reach the courts (Vaughan, 2002; Flo Arcas, 2018). Despite clear records and research into the experience, it is noticeable that the cases which have successfully reached the court historically share similarities such as the victim being: a young girl, a virgin and therefore seen as 'innocent', raped by strangers, and having visible physical injury (D'Cruze, 1992). In contrast, cases which have not successfully reached the courts also share similarities and can be understood at a general level in modern theory and language as being associated with "rape myths" (Deming et al., 2013; Elmore et al., 2020).

Following the attempted reframing of social attitudes towards rape in the 1970s (Wright, 2019), rape myths became defined as false cultural beliefs that exist to shift the blame from perpetrators to victims (Burt, 1980). These prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists were found to create a hostile climate for rape victims (Burt, 1980; Rollero & Tartaglia, 2019). To-date research highlights that both the definition and impact of the rape myths on survivors remains the same, with significant implications into the underreporting of this crime (Rollero & Tartaglia, 2019). For decades, research has evidenced that rape myths prohibit the reporting of rapes, perpetuate societal misconceptions of the experience, and cause additional trauma to victims. Yet research continues to indicate the prevalence of rape myths in society today, for example in the lived experience study of Flo Arcas (2018), the detailed meta-analysis of rape myth acceptance by Suarez & Gadalla (2010) and the self-report questionnaire study by Rollero & Tartaglia (2019) which from a sample of 264 found statistically significant evidence demonstrating hostile attitudes and attribution of blame towards the victim, and acceptance of rape myths. With such an expansive repertoire of rape myths embedded in different social contexts it is impossible

within the scope of this paper to offer a complete list. Therefore, a few examples as identified in the aforementioned studies are hereby provided to give context to the phenomenon: “women ask for it”, “women cry rape when they’re hiding something”, “men can’t be raped”, “it’s not rape if you know the person”, “it’s only rape if it is violent”, etc.

Extensive literature suggests that rape is *not* clear-cut. As the above studies highlight, and the globally occurring experiences suggest, penetration without consent is not bound by age, race, gender, or class. For decades, research has identified the internal and external factors which prevent people reporting their experiences of rape (e.g. Binder, 1981; Day, 2009), attempting to bring this issue to public attention and offer insights which may enable rape survivors to share their story in their healing process (Flo Arcas, 2018). Yet studies continually show that only a small percentage of rapes are reported to the police (Jones et al., 2009) and that numerous *preventable* internal and external factors continue to contribute towards survivors suffering in silence (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Flo Arcas, 2018). Following engagement with such studies, this project endeavours to explore some of these factors and how they may relate to the experience of inner dialogue.

The Phenomenology of Rape

The small yet significant body of research which has attempted to explore rape phenomenologically has distinguished several prevalent themes commonly experienced amongst rape victims. The most profound theme, however, is deemed to be that of a changed sense of self, which many existentialists acknowledge in relation to an altered or lost sense of meaning (Frankl et al., 1967; Winkler, 1994; Lebowitx and Wigren, 2005). The challenge to the previously-meaningful understandings of their existence may manifest as an underlying sense of meaninglessness; a disconnect with their self-identity; the narratives of which may be reinforced by their internal dialogue (Beaudoin, 2005; Day, 2009). As an existential researcher, I value this knowledge as an offering of understanding, yet do not assume that each rape survivor has either lost their sense of meaning nor that the sense of meaninglessness is universally experienced in the same felt way.

Exploring therapeutic implications for working with survivors of interpersonal violence such as rape, Day (2009) proposes an integration of narrative and existential approaches. Her theoretical overview highlights the complex and holistic impact that rape has on individuals, nodding to the common diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Supporting the work of Kroll (2003), Day iterates that PTSD is not merely a biological pathological response to interpersonal violence, it is both individual and simultaneously embedded in culture, with "symbolic and moral meanings attached to the traumatic events" (Kroll, 2003, p. 669). This supports understandings which emphasize that rape is not merely a one-off event it is an event that is proceeded by long-lasting implications. Furthermore, a call for more holistic and culturally sensitive interventions is emphasized, with recommendation for existential approaches.

In-depth phenomenological exploration of rape is also offered by Flo Arcas (2018) who conducted a qualitative study exploring the inner resources experienced by women after sexual assault. Drawing from existing literature on rape and the analysis and discussion of detailed interviews with her participants, her contribution to the field highlights several important implications. Firstly, research into the experience of rape has to-date primarily been quantitative, providing statistics on prevalence without honouring the subjective experiences. Secondly, she noticed a cultural shift towards the "taboo" subject of rape, with a small but important body of research beginning to explore the experience phenomenologically. This is fundamental for survivors regarding reducing self-stigma and unwillingness to report or share their experiences. Thirdly, she notes that only recently has research begun to focus on the healing process from rape experiences, finally stating the necessity and urgency for more research in this field.

To-date lived-experience research conducted by Brooks-Hay et al. (2019) provided detailed insights into how victim-survivors who reported rape and/or serious sexual assault experienced the justice system. Through in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, vivid narratives of participants demonstrated the re-traumatizing impact that many stages of their cases had on them. 0 out of 20 participants felt ‘justice’ was achieved, with the traumatizing handling of their case being stated as

reducing any possibility of justice regardless of case outcome. All 20 participants expressed that the attitudes of others and the re-telling and re-hearing of their story was deeply traumatizing.

The findings from such studies highlight the holistic impact that rape has on individuals. Sharing one's story can be both therapeutic or re-traumatizing depending on how the other person responds. Each study promotes the need for future lived-experiences research and provides a foundation of knowledge and inspiration for future researchers to build from.

The Experience of Rape and Existential Meaning

Rape: The Pathology

Traumatic experiences are existential in the very nature of the impact which they have on the experiential world of the victim (Jenmorri, 2006). Research investigating the experience of those who have been subjected to sexual violence has suggested the profound impact it has had on victim's internal battles with their personal understandings of meaning (Lebowitx and Wigren, 2005). As mentioned, a common diagnosis given to those who have experienced rape is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Philhps, Rosen, Zoellner, & Feeny, 2006). While clinical treatment of PTSD focuses on adjusting the biological and cognitive reactions to trauma, critics coming from more holistic understandings argue that this does not acknowledge that each trauma is a subjective individual experience (Kroll, 2003; Lebowitx and Wigren, 2005). Clinical diagnosis and treatment of PTSD is criticised for failing to consider the complex, unique and existential impacts experienced by the victim (Day, 2009).

While clinical approaches primarily treat the physical and cognitive impacts of trauma, existential approaches working therapeutically with rape victims acknowledge that the trauma may impact all dimensions of their existence (Van Deurzen, 1997; Winkler, 1994). With rape literature highlighting the significant and detrimental impact which rape myths (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) and victim-blaming has on victims of rape (Grubb and Turner, 2012), a key aspect noted by those

working existentially with victims is to explore the emotional impact which blame has on the client and the meaning attached to it.

Rape: The Existential Shattering

> *"Existential Shattering: A devastating, unexpected, irreversible event, a trauma, in which one's fundamental meaning and relating systems are irreparably shattered."*
>
> *Greening's personal communication with Hoffman (2013, p. 2)*

Contemporary existential literature conceptualizes trauma such as the experience of rape as "existential shattering", first termed by Tom Greening (1990) and later elaborated by Louis Hoffman and colleagues (Hoffman et al. 2013). While PTSD focuses on trauma and stress characterized by disruptive symptoms, existential shattering refers to an event which annihilates one's sense of self and worldview as was previously known. The focus is not on the event, but on how the event was experienced and the underlying impact of it over time. Hoffman et al. (2013), make a valuable distinction between PTSD and existential shattering, not rejecting or valuing one conceptualization over the other, nor indicating that one conceptualization is superior. An individual may experience neither, either or both simultaneously. While the experience of rape may have an existentially shattering impact on some individuals, the conceptualization values the subjectiveness of the experience and does not suggest that each traumatic event will have this effect.

Existential and philosophical rape literature promotes the importance of survivors making meaningful interpretations of their experience as a fundamental part of the healing process, as demonstrated in the work of Day (2009) and Du Toit (2009) which explores the experience of rape from a philosophical lens. Such literature focuses on exploring the meaning of rape rather than merely the statistics of the event (Du Toit, 2009, p.14). It is the unique meaning of rape and recovery which this piece of research aspires to explore.

Exploring Inner Dialogue and Rape

As previously explained, the phenomenology of inner dialogue and rape have initially been introduced in this literature review as separate phenomena, as they are most commonly understood as separate outside the context of this project. However, as this project aims to discover how rape survivors experience their inner dialogue, the following section will build on the foundational knowledge provided in the literature review and begin to draw together the phenomena of inner dialogue and rape in accordance with how they are investigated within the context of this study.

Lebowitx and Wigren (2005) collected personal accounts of rape experiences from survivors and presented 11 themes derived from thematic analysis including: shame, loss of meaning, guilt, diminished sense of self, and grief. They found that the inner dialogue surrounding their experience of rape changes over time for survivors and highlights the importance of giving them a voice, as by telling their story they may process their experience in a more personally meaningful way. Despite the use of a small sample of 9 participants, the hermeneutic-phenomenological study of sexual assault by Hellman (2016) supports current understandings of themes relevant to experiences of rape and highlights the importance of survivors speaking about their experience. Furthermore, it suggests the need for further research into the meaning of the experience for recovery.

In earlier literature, Winkler (1994) existentially explored rape in relation to embodiment and experience, arguing that the survivor's ability to interpret a meaningful (spiritual dimension) dialogue about their rape bridges the gap between their self (personal dimension) and their body (physical dimension), and heals disconnect with interpersonal relationships (social dimension).

While limited by the single participant in the 1994 article which contributed to a larger study, Lempert (1994) studied rape from a narrative perspective and promotes the significant role which inner dialogue plays in the meaningful understanding of rape. The study suggests that when suffering can be integrated meaningfully within their inner dialogue, survivors may experience a

process of transformation and alternative understandings of their experience may be brought into their future dialogues (Speedy, 2000).

Day (2009) conducted a historical and current review of treatment for recovery from interpersonal violence with a specific focus on treatment models. While her research does not explicitly focus on inner dialogue, her investigation makes explicit reference to the individuals 'stories' about their experience, which may be interpreted in relevance to this paper as working with their inner dialogues. Day iterates the loss of meaning symptomatic to experiencing rape trauma, noting the role of "internal and external forces" that help shape a client's subjective worldview. She concludes by recommending an integration of narrative and existential therapies, building on previously mentioned conceptualisations such as the work of (Richert, 2010).

The aforementioned research by Flo Arcas also specifically investigated the 'inner resources' of sexual assault survivors. While the focus was not explicit to inner dialogue, Flo Arcas ultimately concludes that "Women's accounts show how they are active and creative agents who, through their minds, bodies, objects, or significant others, become aware of, create, and strengthen their inner resources" (Flo Arcas, 2018, p. 109). The current research project could be understood as further investigating the qualities of the innate resources which sexual assault survivors possess with specific focus on the resource of inner dialogue.

Research Rationale

As previously discussed, contemporary research has explored the phenomenology of inner dialogue from several different approaches, including in realms of, development, pathology, meaning, and trauma. Different assessments provide divergent characterizations of the phenomena (Albarracín, Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015), yet few have explored this deeply from the lived-experiences of the individual. While the findings may range drastically in some aspects, all studies have highlighted the importance of the role which inner dialogue has in human experience, coping with challenges, and finding personal meaning. Furthermore, all studies recommend that a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon from a qualitative perspective would benefit scientific knowledge.

While orthodox psychological science considers it appropriate for participants to share as identical experiences as possible when empirically researching phenomena, Hurlburt et al. (2013) propose that due to the subjective and unique nature of the experience of inner dialogue, these methods are neither desirable nor phenomenologically possible. While their DES method of investigation has added to the growing body of literature on the phenomena, it is not proposed to have provided an 'ultimate understanding' of inner dialogue and the researchers state their hope that further research will be conducted to provide more in-depth understandings of the experiential and phenomenological aspects of inner dialogue (Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2011; Hurlburt et al., 2013). Other contemporary contributors to the field of inner dialogue have also suggested that further research is necessary to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon, specifically that of first-person subjective information and third-person objective measures (Petitmengin & Lachaux, 2013; Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014).

Studies consistently highlight the individual differences experienced, including that of the purpose of inner dialogue. While evidence suggests it is ultimately multi-purposeful, research suggests that further investigation is needed into whether inner dialogue causes or reflects emotional and behavioural experiences, with evidence suggesting that both processes can operate within an individual (Brinthaupt et al., 2009). Phenomenological explorations into the lived experience may offer suggestions for how those who experience intense high frequency inner dialogues may better cope with living with this inner experience. Alderson-Day & Fernyhough (2015) go as far as to state that further investigation into the phenomenological qualities of inner dialogue is a research priority, not just for the psychological field but for human beings in general to have a greater understanding of their inner lives.

Jenmorri (2006) notes that despite the significant existential themes manifesting as an impact of rape, they are relatively underexplored within trauma literature. As an existentially

orientated researcher and practitioner myself, I too noticed with some surprise this to be true and feel passionate about my role in contributing to bridging this gap through meaningful and empirical endeavours such as this research project.

Existing literature is abundant with recommendations and statements that there is a need for deeper research into the unique and traumatic experience of rape (Jenmorri, 2006; Lebowitx and Wigren, 2005; Flo Arcas, 2018). The current existential and phenomenological rape literature has offered a number of corresponding themes derived from analysis of the lived experience of rape. The importance of survivors communicating their experience is highlighted (Flo Arcas, 2018), and future research into the personal meaning of rape has been recommended as a research priority for individuals and professionals to have a better capacity to facilitate the healing process (Hellman, 2016; Lebowitx and Wigren, 2005). Furthermore, modern research highlights the value of further investigating the inner resources of abuse survivors (Day, 2009; Flo Arcas, 2018).

This project therefore aspires to enhance and disseminate knowledge pertaining to the experience of inner dialogue and trauma providing crucial contributions towards more successful therapeutic healing (Jenmorri, 2006; Lebowitx and Wigren, 2005; Hellman, 2016; Flo Arcas, 2018).

Methodology

Epistemological and Ontological Position

I act with complete certainty, but that certainty is my own.

Roughly translated from Ludwig Wittgenstein (1970)

To select a research method, researchers must be aware of their ontological position concerning what there is to know, and their epistemological position of how they can come to know it (Willig, 2013; Pernecky, 2016). This research assumes the critical realist position that phenomena exist independently of knowledge, that 'knowledge' itself is subjective, and that therefore 'concrete knowledge' of any phenomena is unattainable. While an absolute truth may not be attainable, the critical realist position proposes that individuals may intuitively experience differences between what is more and less meaningful in their lives (Archer, 2013). In the context of research, this has been described as the researcher listening to their "phenomenological intuition" (Vos, 2020; see: Appendix). By critically reflecting on my role, position, and the context that the knowledge I am gaining is embedded in, I was able to continually consider the validity of the meanings being revealed.

Data concerning the meaningful understanding of the phenomenon of inner dialogue as experienced by rape survivors was collected and understood as each individual's subjectively meaningful accounts. These accounts are viewed as holding validity to each individual's lived experience, with predicted similarities and differences demonstrating the complex and multivariate ways of phenomena being experienced (Maxwell, 2011).

Methodologies: Quantitative vs. Qualitative

The term 'methodology' in research refers to a general approach to studying a particular topic, with each methodology comprising of several 'methods'. A methodology offers a system of methods directed towards a branch of knowledge, while each method aspires to provide a solution

towards gaining the required knowledge (Willig, 2013). Examples of methodologies are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods, with each methodological approach offering a different theoretical analysis behind its body of methods.

The methodology of quantitative research comes from a 'quantity' focused theoretical approach, and therefore the methods developed for quantitative study of phenomena are reliant and interested in numbers and calculable data (Martini, 2017). By using methods such as closed-question questionnaires, rating scales, and experiments, quantitative research data can then be categorised, ordered, and measured, often with the aim to establish general laws or understandings of behaviour. In the field of psychological research, quantitative approaches remain the dominant chosen methodology, however, qualitative approaches are becoming increasingly popular due to the detailed nature of the findings various qualitative methods can provide (Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson, 2009).

In contrast to the statistic-focused approach which most quantitative research subscribes to (Martini, 2017), qualitative research adopts a more meaning-focused approach (Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson, 2009) providing *transferable* rather than *generalisable* understandings of phenomena. As this project aims to answer the research question “How do survivors of rape experience their inner dialogue?”, a qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate. The following section will therefore consider in detail several qualitative research methods in relation to the existential research project being conducted.

Qualitative Research Methods

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was developed from sociological understandings of symbolic interactions, and posits that meanings are developed and understood through social interactions (Starks & Brown, 2007). This interpretive approach aspires to develop a theory and research question based on basic social processes. It studies the environments in which social experiences take place and

examines the “six Cs” of social processes (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While phenomenologists discover new meanings by looking at lived experiences and discourse analysts do so through language analysis, grounded theory looks at the patterns and relationships within the social processes. Participants are therefore selected using theoretical sampling methods, with the notion that their different experiences of a phenomenon will allow the researcher to explore the different elements of the phenomenon in relation to different social processes. This contrasts to discourse analysis which uses deep exploration of narratives to elicit meaning, and phenomenological approaches which explore commonalities in participant’s lived experiences (Starks & Brown, 2007).

Grounded theory is widely understood to differ from other methods in its objective to reveal a research question and develop a theory (Starks & Brown, 2007). In the context of this project, the research question had developed organically leading to the project being developed in the first place. Furthermore, while this research project considers that social processes may influence the meaningful understanding of the phenomenon, the social influence on the phenomenon was not the primary feature of inquiry. Grounded theory was subsequently not selected for these reasons.

Discourse Analysis

In view of this research project's focus on inner dialogue, qualitative methods with a focus on language were considered such as discourse analysis. As psychologists drew inspiration from the work of Wittgenstein and Foucault during the 1970s, language began to be valued for both its action-orientated ability to *do things* (e.g. persuade, justify, excuse) and *create* things (e.g. meaning, subjective reality, selfhood), rather than being viewed as simply a means of communicating and describing inner and outer experiences (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Traditional approaches appeared to accept the existence of phenomena and investigated attitudes *towards* phenomena. Discourse analysts became interested in *how* phenomena exist. Furthermore, discourse analysts noticed that the social context was not traditionally considered in most research

and argued that it was essential for understanding the world (Potter & Wetherhall, 1995), adopting an epistemological position of social constructionism. Discourse analysis developed from this stance. Rather than investigating people's *attitudes* towards an object, it qualitatively investigated how individuals use language to *construct* their experience of the social world (Potter and Wetherhall, 1995).

Despite sharing a similar position about the *value* of language in how humans construct their existence, discourse analysis was dismissed as a research method for this project for the following reasons. Attempting to provide a truly social psychology, it has been criticised as focusing on the 'text' with little concern for the person behind it which is incompatible with the personally meaningful investigation of this study. Discourse analysis also relies on the assumption that each individual exists as an active language user, yet research suggests language-use differs between individuals (Alderson and Day, 2015). Furthermore, discourse analysis posits a constructivist position, whereas this research is developed from a critical realist position.

Phenomenological Research Methods

Phenomenology began to develop as a philosophical methodology in the 19th century (Moran, 2000), and can be defined as the science of describing what is perceived in consciousness, emphasizing investigations of people's meaningful perceptions of the world as it appears to them. This has grown in popularity in recent years within psychological research and is often referred to as 'lived experience' research.

Different phenomenologists posit different positions when it comes to understanding the epistemological essence of experiences (Zhavi, 2019). For example, Husserl (1999) and Giorgi (1992) argue that it is possible to find universal underlying meaning in experiences. In contrast, Gadamer (2004) and Ricoeur (1981) argued that it is impossible to identify universal underlying meaning as each meaning is filtered through the subjective interpretation of: the research, the participant, and the research-participant's relationship. This is known as the 'double hermeneutic': the researcher

making sense of the participant making sense of their experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin,2008). It is this position which this research project adopts.

While there are numerous different phenomenological approaches based on these different theoretical positions and philosophies, the two most popular are: Descriptive Phenomenology founded by Giorgi (Giorgi, 2009) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) founded by Smith (Smith, Flowers and Osborn, 1997). Using different methods of analysis, both approaches attempt to capture the lived experience of a phenomena from the perspective of each participant, providing new insight into the essence of the phenomena. This differs from the insight given by discourse analysis in its argument that there is more to human experience than language. Both Descriptive Phenomenology and IPA have been critiqued by fellow researchers. Descriptive Phenomenology has been criticised as being too reliant on description and the over-simplification of language, while IPA has been questioned in its authenticity either as a phenomenological or a unique method - sharing many similarities with both Grounded Theory and thematic analysis (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2000; Willig, 2013). Therefore, alternative phenomenological methods were considered for this study.

Structural Existential Analysis (SEA)

Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) was developed from years of clinical work utilizing existential models such as the four dimensions, the emotional compass, the notion of time, and working with tensions and paradoxes (van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). These elements had been included in research projects for several years before the approach was formally published and introduced as a method of existential phenomenological research (van Deurzen, 2014). SEA offers structural guidelines that facilitate an existentially influenced exploration of phenomena through various heuristic devices, such as: bias awareness, existential models, and hermeneutic interviewing. These are introduced below, and more deeply explored in later sections.

Bias Awareness

SEA research is continually approached from an open attitude, cultivated by 'intentional reductions' which correspond with the notion of phenomenological intentionality towards bias awareness (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality refers to consciousness; the internal experience of being aware of something. Reduction is achieved by cultivating an attitude of epoché. Epoché derives from the Greek word meaning to 'refrain from judgement' and refers to the process of surrendering one's natural human understandings in order to revisit phenomena from a fresh vantage point (Moustakas, 1994). van Deurzen (2014) offers three levels of intentional reduction based on the work of Husserl (1977): the *phenomenological* reduction applies to the *process* of intentionality, the *eidetic* reduction applies to the *object* of intentionality, and the *transcendental* reduction applies to the *subject* of intentionality. However, as van Deurzen points out, Husserl (1977) continually devised different reductions that may offer researchers the capacity to ensure that reality is fairly represented. These three reductions provide a guideline to enhance awareness of bias, however, are neither guaranteed to do so nor the only means of doing so.

Hermeneutics

Data is collected and analysed through hermeneutics, following the principle that: interpretation of dialogue ensures that the meaning retrieved corresponds with what the participant intended it to (Moustakas, 1994; Van Deurzen, 2014). This relies on the researcher's capacity to feel an intuitive rightness when exploring the meaningful essence of the dialogue, and continually returning to the text for verification. Personal meanings are not applied to the text; meaning is exposed through heuristic devices used within the construction of questions; throughout the interview; and throughout the analysis. SEA goes "beyond" the distant interviewing techniques of other methods, valuing the co-discovery of meaning through interviewer and participant. The researcher is seen as offering their trained sharpened capacity for consciousness to the client, in order to explore the phenomenological experience as closely as possible (Van Deurzen, 2014).

Existential Models

SEA can be differentiated from other phenomenological approaches which do not provide empirically developed existential lenses from which to conduct the research. SEA presents three adaptable heuristic models which enable thorough existential investigation of the lived experience of phenomena (Van Deurzen, 2012; 2014), and are briefly outlined below. Copyright diagrams representing the models are available in van Durzen's 2014 paper.

The 4 Worlds Model enables investigation across the 4 dimensions of the life-world (Van Deurzen, 1997); the physical, social, personal, and spiritual dimensions of experience. These dimensions exist in an innate and intertwined capacity within each individual and are explored through this heuristic device in the context of time and space where humans are inevitably located in their lived experiences. Exploring the impact of the phenomena across the 4 dimensions facilitates investigation of the paradoxes and tensions relating to the phenomena which invariably exist within each realm.

The Timeline of Life-world Model focuses on the temporality of experiences, adapted from the original work of Heidegger (1962). This model explores where in time the phenomena is being experienced at the moment of questioning and reveals the direction towards which the narrative is proceeding. This may be specifically important for the current study, as research suggests that the inner dialogue of rape victims changes over time and plays a fundamental part in recovery (Lempert, 1994).

The Emotional Compass Model considers participants' emotional attunement to the world. Existential thinkers consider emotions to be intrinsically connected with one's values, acting with their own intelligence and intentionality to guide people towards a more personally meaningful existence (Van Deurzen, 1997). Philosophers such as Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1939, 1943) wrote extensively about human emotions, and attempted to understand them by applying phenomenological methods. For example, Heidegger suggests that emotions are like the weather and Sartre saw them as a magical way in which humans create different relationships to the world. The emotional compass was built on such ideas about human emotion (Deurzen, 2010; 2012).

Working collaboratively with participants during the interview process to examine their emotional relationship to their experience of the phenomena provides both the researcher and participant with an authentic understanding of what their experience means to them in relation to their values and worldview. The unembellished information revealed within the emotion may act as a reliable ground for comparison between the experiences of different participants.

Choosing SEA

While quantitative research has provided numerical evidence of the frequency of the experiences of rape and inner dialogue, qualitative research highlights the necessity for further research into the unique lived experiences (Lebowitx & Wigren, 2005; Flo Arcas, 2019). This section will critically evaluate the qualitative method of SEA and explore how it was selected as the most appropriate method to provide valid findings for this research project.

SEA is a research method providing an empirically supported framework for existential-phenomenological enquiry; for gaining deeper knowledge about the lived-experience of phenomena. Aligned with one of the over-arching ethea of existential thought, SEA does not boast a one-size-fits-all format. To date SEA has primarily been used as a secondary level of analysis alongside other widely established qualitative methods such as IPA (Smith, 2011) and rarely as a method outright. While this may be considered a limitation of this method, its validity has been evidenced in decades of clinical practice (van Deurzen, 2010) and the increased application in current research from the British School (e.g. Cristophy, 2019; Garland, 2019).

Reviews in published research have highlighted a number of shortcomings. Garland (2019), suggested its development from a Husserlian descriptive phenomenology focuses on the phenomenon rather than the live experience and Zhavi (2019) proposes that “what is quite certain, however, is that van Deurzen’s description has no basis in Husserl’s writings” (p. 10) noting that the use of Husserl in SEA “are all claims that fundamentally fail to respect and acknowledge Husserl’s correlationism, the fact that the aim of his phenomenological analysis is not to investigate either the object or the subject, either the world or the mind, but to investigate their very intersection,

interrelation or correlation" (p. 10). Furthermore, it is suggested that the heuristic models create pre-determined categories of focus which contribute to a bias for the researcher and participant (Vos, 2020).

The criticisms and limitations of SEA have been considered in relation to this project. As Cooper (2016) points out, the existential field is a rich tapestry which continues to emerge and evolve over time as students and practitioners expand on the models of their predecessors. This project therefore utilized SEA as guidelines from which I developed a method of analysis suited to the purpose of attending to the research question. Bias and rigidity were accounted for through engagement with reflexivity and awareness developing techniques as further explained later in the paper, and SEA was chosen for the following reasons.

No other methods offer the heuristic devices necessary to facilitate the deep existential exploration of the lived experience across the four life worlds; across experiential time and space; and across the inevitable tensions and paradoxes of human existence. These heuristic devices are especially valuable for this study, as thoroughly reviewing the literature revealed that the phenomenon of inner dialogue as experienced by rape survivors strongly resonates with existential theories (Jenmorri, 2006), and emphasizes the holistic and embodied complexity of this lived experience (Kroll, 2003).

As van Deurzen (2014) states, no ultimate 'truth' can be established by any phenomenological methods, but the use of heuristic devices and continuous reiteration of the verification process enables researchers to come to their findings with greater perspectives on the complex reality of a phenomena. Aligned with its epistemological stance, this research aspires to explore the phenomenon as it unfolds in the realities of the participants.

The project is developed from a philosophical ethos which values the complexity and holism of human experience. It therefore aspires to explore the phenomenon with the same egalitarian rigor and the SEA heuristic devices provide a balance between openness and structure from which to do so. By exploring a phenomenon from as many angles as possible the research is better

equipped to discover a more complete and more deeply meaningful level of understanding (Vos, 2020), which the heuristic devices of SEA enable (van Deurzen, 2014).

Application of SEA

This section will detail how Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) was used as a research method in this study. At the heart of SEA lies an emphasis on flexibility and creativity. I found it to be the responsibility of the researcher's professionalism and intuition to find the balance between *structure* and *flexibility* when conducting this research. This may be described existentially as navigating the tensions of our *freedom* to be creative and our *responsibility* to develop a framework which will be suitable and valid for the research project. To develop this framework, this project drew on examples of empirically supported research methods, the values and aim of this research project, and relevant existing literature for inspiration (e.g. Garland, 2019; Christophy, 2017; van Deurzen, 2014). This section will present the step-by-step framework that was developed and applied. Further details can be found in the Appendix.

Step 1: Immersion Into Philosophy

As outlined by van Deurzen (2014), it is fundamental that the researcher has a background in existential-phenomenological psychotherapy training before they embark on conducting research using Structural Existential Analysis. The scope of this paper does not permit a detailed explication of the extent of my training. However, the inclusion of existential literature throughout the paper may illuminate how such philosophies have contributed to the validation of the findings. Furthermore, I would emphasize that accredited training in counselling psychology is a necessary but not sufficient asset to successful application of SEA, as this training provided a thorough and informed framework of knowledge and understanding in regard to the practical and ethical application of research with human participants.

Step 2: Mindful Reflexivity | Validity

In qualitative research, reflexivity and bias awareness is fundamental for researchers to systematically attend to valid and accurate findings emerging (Malterud, 2001), allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in multiple layers of meaning by moving between engagement with the experience and their awareness (Finlay, 2003; Wharne, 2019).

Epoché

Phenomenological researchers dispute the role of epoché and reduction of awareness in relation to bias and reflexivity (Zahavi, 2019). In her paper on SEA, van Deurzen (2014) promotes the three aforementioned basic principles of reduction relating to aspects of the arc of intentionality (phenomenological, eidetic, and transcendental reductions). However, she notes that Husserl (1977) continually devised different reductions and methods throughout his career. Furthermore, the Husserlian approach to reflexivity within SEA is commonly considered to be theoretically and empirically flawed (see above. E.g. Garland, 2019; Zahavi, 2019) and adopts a distinctly constructivist perspective (Vos, 2020).

Therefore, to conduct this research I moved away from the Husserlian principles of reduction and epoché and adopted structured and empirically supported methods of approaching and verifying the meanings and truths which unfolded, drawing on the evidence-based work of phenomenologists (Kockelmans, 1967; Van Manaen, 1990; Smith, 2011; Wharne, 2019) and meaning-focused practitioners (Frankl, 1975; Vos, 2018; 2020). This enabled data to be investigated from a lived-experience rather than constructivist or descriptive lens.

Mindfulness

While van Deurzen (2014) attempts to differentiate between phenomenological reduction and meditation, this research project draws on existing literature that promotes the value of incorporating meditation as an empirically supported means of cultivating the state awareness and reflexivity necessary for phenomenological investigation (Hoffman et al., 2010; Vos, 2018).

In his evidence-based handbook for practitioners, Vos (2018) highlights how researchers are able to use their phenomenological intuition to ensure that reality is fairly represented. Phenomenological intuition is "the individual's embodied, full-sensory receptivity towards their true self and an unconscious understanding of what is meaningful and valuable, and what is not." (Vos, 2018, p. 44). According to Vos (2020), a researcher will need to be critical and reflexive to differentiate this intuition from their subjective opinion. Evidence-based mindfulness techniques that may facilitate this critical reflection are offered in this text and were utilized in this research.

Combining theoretical understandings and practical techniques enabled me to intuitively discover emerging themes, and critically evaluate them to distinguish between my own and the participant's experiences. Furthermore, the use of meditation was advantageous in this research project, as meditation attends to the *embodied felt* element of experience as well as the *conscious* element (Vos, 2018), necessary for embodied nature of rape trauma being explored (Mui, 2005).

To provide an example of how mindfulness was practically incorporated into the research process, I engaged in a mindfulness exercise prior to each step of the process (interview, transcription, analysis, write-up) with the intention of clearing my mind of theories, expectations, and biases; and my body of tensions and anticipatory sensations (Lazar, 2005; Kerr et al., 2013). This enabled me to become present and open to the new information being unveiled. Further details can be found in the Reflexivity section and the Appendix.

Throughout the research process, I reflected my attention between the research question, the lived experience occurring for myself and when applicable for others, and the knowledge being revealed in each moment. This feature of the process has subsequently been entitled 'Mindful Reflexivity.' More extensive details about the reflective, meditative, and intuitive processes can be found in the Appendix.

Step 3: Creative Formulation | Reliability

This stage of the process involved creating a unique and appropriate foundation from which to conduct the analysis. While approaches such as IPA (Smith et al., 1997) provide a clear and rigid

structure, the existing literature on SEA (van Deurzen, 2014) does not. Based on existing applications of SEA and my investigation of other potential research methods, I realised that it was important to creatively formulate a clear structure from which to conduct the analysis. This foundation refers to practical elements of the process such as understanding what tools are required, and theoretical elements of the process such as an awareness of existential-phenomenological heuristics. Furthermore, a novel interpretation of the Four Worlds Models was formulated.

The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions

To prepare for the application of the Four Worlds Model, I drew on my awareness that this model can be represented differently, such as the spherical 'Four Relational Layers' format and the triangular 'Dimension of Existence' hierarchical format as presented above (see: van Deurzen, 2014; 2010). In existing research, each project focused on different elements within the Four Worlds Model. For example, Garland (2019) draws strongly on the preoccupations within the existential dimensions, whilst Christophy's (2017) work emphasizes the tensions within the four dimensions. When reflecting on existing applications in relation to the current research question, neither presentation felt intuitively right for this project, as both the circular and hierarchal depictions give visually implicit emphasis to the size and experience of different dimensions, which may wrongly be interpreted as related to the significance of each dimension.

Therefore, I created a 'Blueprint' of the four existential dimensions which can be found in the Appendix, detailing the elements of the combinative work of my predecessors to provide a more detailed overview (e.g van Deurzen, 2014; Cooper, 2016; Christophy, 2017; Garland, 2019). It must be reiterated that the separation of dimensions is purely a task of organization, and each dimension should be considered as interlinked.

I found the process of formulating and creating this blueprint a valuable addition to the pre-analysis process. The experience of researching the features of the four dimensions from many different sources, exploring them carefully, and presenting them concisely to create a

comprehensive overview enabled me to gain a far deeper understanding of the meanings found within each dimension. This was integral to the emergence of themes during the analysis process.

Creating The Interview Questions

Qualitative research invites the use of unstructured, structured, and semi-structured research questions to obtain data. While structured interviews provide concise and controlled parameters, unstructured and semi-structured interviews provide an open scope for the direction of information provided (Malterud, 2001). However, this may be disadvantageous due to the quantity of data collected, resulting in a time-consuming collection and analysis process. Furthermore, the quality of data collected is dependent on the rapport between researcher and participant (Polkinghorne, 2005). As the sole researcher, awareness and consideration of this enabled me to establish my willingness to commit to this timely process. Several measures were implemented to overcome the reliance on rapport. While these are further explained below, they can be briefly summarized as: engaging with hermeneutic interviewing techniques, training in counselling psychology, and self-disclosure.

Drawing on existing qualitative research methods (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009) the use of a semi-structured interviews was deemed most appropriate for this study for the following reasons. They provided consistency in the foundation from which each interview developed, strengthening reliability in the investigation of the phenomena whilst simultaneously providing an openness and flexibility. This facilitated participants to authentically explore and expand on the phenomena being investigated whilst staying aligned with the research question.

Developed based on the SEA heuristic devices (Van Deurzen, 1997; 2014), and in line with the research question being investigated, the following eight semi-structured questions were asked in each interview:

1. How do you experience your inner dialogue?
   + How would you describe your inner dialogue?

2. How has your inner dialogue enabled you to understand your life experiences, such as your experience of rape?

3. Do you feel your experience of rape has shifted the way you experience your inner dialogue?

4. How has your experience of rape affected the way you experience your self, as understood through your inner dialogue? (eg. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, socially)

5. Have you noticed if your experience of rape has altered the emotional tones of your inner dialogue, and what are the emotional tones of your inner dialogue?

6. Has your experience of rape altered the beliefs & values which you hold of the world and others, as you understand them through your inner dialogue?

7. Do you notice similar qualities between your inner dialogue and the way you experience yourself in the world? (e.g. distracted inner dialogue/distracted attention to tasks; repetitive inner dialogue/ repetitiveness in lifestyle)

8. Do you feel that your inner dialogue contributes towards the way you develop as a person, since your experience of rape?

Prior to conducting the study, I undertook the complete interview experience with a trusted colleague. This enlightened my understanding of my biases, providing a deeper understanding of my own position in relation to the research area and thus enabling me to bracket this during the interview and analysis process. This exercise enabled clarification of whether the proposed interview would facilitate the emergence of valid and deep knowledge which the research question is exploring. Furthermore, this process indicated from an ethical perspective whether the questions would provide a comfortable-enough experience for my participants.

Step 4: Recruiting Participants | Sampling Rationale

This project aimed to explore how survivors of rape experience their inner dialogue. Therefore, a purposeful sampling method was used to recruit participants who met these criteria. Recruitment was achieved by communicating with organisations who provide a support service for survivors of sexual abuse and accessing private rape survivor groups on social media. At all times,

ethical guidelines were adhered to, details of which can be found in the Ethical Considerations Section. While people of all genders may be subjected to rape and sexual assault, statistics suggest that 83% of this population of are women (Ons.gov.uk, 2019). This study focused on female participants between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, who have had an experience of rape within the last 5 years. The rationale for these inclusion criteria is hereby presented.

Sampling Method Rationale

Purposeful sampling is a popular method of sample selection within qualitative methods, selecting participants who have detailed knowledge or experience with the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al, 2015). Beyond their experience of the phenomenon, research highlights the importance of participant's willingness and capacity to communicate their experience in an expressive and reflective manner (Bernard, 2002), qualities which lie at the heart of hermeneutic interviewing (Van Deurzen, 2014). Due to the necessity to develop a genuine co-presence between researcher and participant (Van Deurzen, 2014), and to avoid complications which may occur with translation or miscommunication, participants were required to speak English as their first language. Therefore, a purposeful sampling method was elected as the most appropriate method to obtain eligible participants.

Gender Rationale

Within the scope of any research project there is a necessity to select a homogenous sample, and for the below reasons it was established as most appropriate to select participants who identify as females. Leaders in the field of lived-experience research highlight the importance of the researcher needing to maintain a strong pedagogical or psychological relationship with the phenomenon being investigated (Van Mannen, 1990). With this in mind as the researcher who developed this piece of research, during the process of selecting an inclusion criterion I reflected that I feel the strongest pedagogical and psychological affiliation in relation to this phenomenon with those who identify with a female gender. This may be because I was born biologically female and have continually identified as being a female. Furthermore, the shared nature of experience

between myself and my participants may enable a connected level of empathic understanding and balance any perceived power levels which are commonly experienced within interview settings (Edwards and Holland, 2013). This combination aligns me in what Winkler (1994) referred to as the 'investigator-victim' position, enabling me to frame questions more appropriately for the interview which for example male 'nonvictim-investigators' may not be so apt to. Potential issues which may arise when investigating a similar experience to ones' own are explored in the Reflexivity section.

Experience-Time Rationale

Based on statistical evidence and existing research (Nishith et al., 2000), the likelihood that women may have been subjected to more than one rape and/or childhood rape was considered when developing the inclusion criteria. The timeframe of a rape having occurred *within* the past five years was selected on an ethical basis as it did not obligate the experience to have been so recent that the rape may be too raw, such as if a timeframe of 'within the past 1 year' had been selected. Furthermore, this allowed for a duration of time during which the participants may have had time to process their experience and receive psychological support (see below). As evidenced by the richness of content expressed in the transcripts, the participants included in this study demonstrated a clear ability to access the this lived experience in the time lapse between their experience of rape and the interview, indicating that the experience-time ratio did not discount their valid contribution to the study.

This inclusion criteria was also linked with the age criteria, which mathematically excluded the focus from being specifically childhood sexual assault as this was not the phenomenon being investigated by this study. Participants who met the criteria who may also have experienced one or more other rapes prior to the past five years were also invited to participate. The justifications for this are as follows.

As evidenced by existing research and within this study, due to several factors including culture and rape myths, many rapes are not identified as such by the victim (Brown and Walklate, 2011). Furthermore, research into childhood trauma indicates a lapse or removal of this experience

from memory, sometimes referred to as 'subjective forgetting' (Ghetti et al., 2006). Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that a history of sexual victimization is the single best predictor of subsequent victimization (Nishith et al., 2000). It may therefore have been an impossibility to find a sample of participants who could be guaranteed to never have previously experienced rape or sexual assault. Based on this understanding, participants who had identified an experience of rape which had occurred within the past five years were invited to take part. Those who had - either to their knowledge or not - experienced additional rapes were also invited to take part. The justification for this beyond what has previously been stated is that existing research into the phenomenon of inner dialogue as it is experienced by those who have experienced a rape does not provide substantial evidence to suggest that the number of sexual assaults are a variable factor influencing the phenomenon being explored.

Therapy Rationale

An inclusion criterion of participants having undergone at least 12 sessions of therapeutic support since their rape has been included for the following reasons. Firstly, research suggests that rape survivors frequently refrain from discussing their experience (Lebowitz and Wigren, 2005); having spoken about their experience in therapy this may indicate a willingness and capacity to discuss their experience within the parameters of the interview. Secondly, the inclusion criterion of therapy sessions was also implemented for ethical reasons, indicating that participants may have processed some of their feelings about the experience so it may not be so raw. Thirdly, the specification of 'at least 12' sessions was chosen based on most commonly offered therapy lengths by organizations. This therefore did not ostracize participants who were not in the position to engage in long-term therapy, whilst ascertaining an understanding that they may have benefited from a brief amount of therapy which is evidenced to provide therapeutic value (Dryden, 2018). Finally, research suggests that engagement in therapy may have an impact on how clients experience their inner dialogue (Schwartz, 1986). This is the rationale for these specific sample

criteria in attempt to account for the variables which experiences of therapy may have on the phenomena in question.

Unique Experience Rationale

With varying definitions of inner dialogue and rape provided by existing literature (Alderson and Fernyhough, 2015; Brown & Walklate, 2011), the information sheet also included a brief description of the phenomenon as it is understood within this study. This intended to provide participants with the opportunity to understand whether they are interested in exploring their experience as part of the project or not. However, it was clearly stated that the experiences of both inner dialogue and rape are acknowledged as unique to each individual, and the true objective of this project is to understand their unique lived experience of the phenomena.

Sample Size Rationale

It is suggested that large studies with multiple participants and researchers may provide a more universal understandings of phenomena (Van Deurzen, 2014) as correlating with Husserl's phenomenology which is built upon the notion of intersubjectivity (Zahavi, 2001). Yet as previously detailed, this research does not seek from a constructivist position to provide one universal truth based on intersubjective experiences, this research values the unfolding of multiple valid truths from a critical realist stance, seeking deeper meaning through interpreted experiences of the researcher, participants, and the researcher-participants relationship.

Furthermore, Englander (2012) proposes the necessity to refrain from accepting the common misconception that large sample sizes are a pre-requisite to generalizable findings, especially when considering qualitative and phenomenological research. While large samples may offer an understanding of how commonly the phenomenon is experienced amongst a population - as achieved by quantitative research - small sample sizes in qualitative studies offer a detailed understanding of the meaning of the unique experience of the phenomenon. This is further emphasized by Crouch & McKenzie (2006) who acknowledge and explored the invalidations of ‘small’ sample sizes perpetuated in research fields. They highlight that with in-depth interviewing

methods a participant is not ‘just’ one participant offering one experience, it is a ‘case’ offering a plethora of social and historically grounded experiences. For research based on depth strategies as within this project, sample sizes less than 20 are deemed preferable (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006) and a sample of more than 3 is suggested to enable comparison (Giorgi, 2009). Based on this guidance 8 participants were recruited for this project. The data from all eight of these participants’ data was included for use in the analysis having been established as meeting the validity and criteria measures explained above.

Step 5: Hermeneutic Interview | Data Collection

The hermeneutic interviewing stage of data collection drew on my skills and training in existential-phenomenological psychotherapy and counselling psychology. The term 'hermeneutic' derives from the ancient Greek meaning "to interpret". In the field of psychology, hermeneutics refers to the process of the interpretation of meaning through dialogue (Plager, 1994) and ‘double hermeneutic’ refers to the researcher interpreting the participant’s interpretation of their experience, or “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Not only does a training in existential-phenomenological psychotherapy provide the researcher with these *interpretive* skills, but this training also provides individuals with the *phenomenological* skills which enables the researcher to gain a deep awareness and insight into their own biases (van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). It is only after honing this skill that the researcher can be "conscious, articulate and reflective" (van Deurzen, 2014) of their own process of perception and in turn able to put it aside. By being aware of and 'putting aside' my own understanding of reality, I was able to have the capacity to facilitate my participants to get closer to their own experience. My ability to do so was further supported by the practice of meditation as explicated in Step 2.

Creating a Safe Space

Drawing on my training as a psychotherapist and counselling psychologist I made myself fully available to the participant during the interview, going beyond the "relatively distant ways of

interviewing" offered by most phenomenological methods (van Deurzen, 2014). I mindfully cultivated a sense of calm within my mind and body before entering the interview and approached my participant and their words with open curiosity, gratitude, and compassion. Relational skills of transparency and self-disclosure were applied to create a safe environment and during the "dialectical movement" (van Deurzen, 2014) of the interview a genuine co-presence was cultivated, with both parties being inevitably altered by the experience. The effectiveness of this was demonstrated by verbal feedback from participants and the depth of data which they provided. This has been described as a 'feeling into the other'; *Einfuhlung* (Jaspers, 1951) or being-with-the-other; *Mitsein* (Heidegger, 1927), and refers to the 'dynamic dyadic interaction' (van Deurzen, 2014) through which the phenomenon under investigation is explored and deeply scrutinized through the heuristic devices during the data collection process. Upholding my roles and responsibilities as a researcher were fundamental, especially due to the potential emergence of traumatic memories, realities, and emotions associated with the phenomenon being explored.

Data Collection

Routine questionnaires or questioning techniques are not appropriate within hermeneutic interviewing as the interview process is described as a "co-creation of reality" (van Deurzen, 2014). This required me to have an openness to others and cultivate an engaged and authentic relationship between the participant and myself. It felt important to have constructed eight questions (see: Step 3) to act as a foundation from which to build our collective knowledge base from, as this provided a sense of structure and coherence. Yet the open nature of the questions and the way they were asked without judgment and with my genuine compassion made space for the participants to calmly and authentically explore their own unique experiences (Finlay, 2009). All interviews were conducted by me and each interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. The audio was recorded by me, the researcher, on two audio devices to control for technical error or loss.

In her paper, van Deurzen (2014) offers the acronym "SOAR" referring to the mnemonic prompt for tracing bias. SOAR reflects upon the State of Mind, Orientation, Attitude, and Reaction

of both the researcher and the participant. Throughout the hermeneutic interview, I was attentive and reflective of what manifested in relation to each prompt, making notes and observing connected flows on a sheet of paper inscribed with each interview question. This later assisted the analysis process.

An initial participant was interviewed using this format, and the data collected contributed to the pilot study of this research project. The initial interview was conducted in-person at an agreed location which met the standards approved by the overseeing ethical body. Shortly after the initial interview, the world was impacted by the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, preventing all further interviews from being conducted in person. Following ethical approval, the final 7 interviews were therefore conducted via video conferencing using the platform Zoom. I conducted all interviews from my private home office. The participants were requested to be in a private and confidential space where they would not be interrupted, with a working webcam and internet connection. Participants received my personal Zoom link via email and for increased confidentiality all 'zoom rooms' used were password protected. Consent forms were signed and shared via email, as were information sheets and debrief forms. Further details of the process can be found in the Ethical Considerations section.

Step 6: Transcription

Following the hermeneutic interviewing stage, the collected data was ready to be converted from the audio recording into a typed transcript. A pseudonym was chosen to respect the participants' anonymity and confidentiality, and as elaborated in the Ethical Considerations section all data was anonymized in accordance with the ethical policies.

While it is not uncommon for researchers to delegate this task to someone else (Tilley and Powick, 2002), this process of transcription is far from an administrative task. In the process of personally transcribing the audio recordings, I found myself able to continue developing my relationship with both my participant, their data, and the phenomena being explored. During the transcription process I was acutely aware of the nuances and non-verbal information which

continued to reveal insights into the phenomenon, similar to the experience expressed by Garland (2019) who's use of SEA also promotes the researcher's personal and immediate transcription of data.

To keep the connection and momentum of the project, I elected to transcribe my interviews the day after I conducted them. As the ethical declaration states that the recording will be deleted on completion of transcription, creating this short lapse also aligned with ethical handling of data. I played and re-played the tape during the transcription, absorbing not only the participants' words but drawing my awareness to the non-dialogical information within them, such as hesitations, silences, stutters, laughter, tone changes and pitch changes. I made notes of these in a diary as I transcribed, as well as noting my own emotional responses. Practicing continued mindful reflection helped draw attention to my biases, allowing me to separate my own experience from my participant's experiences' later in the analysis.

Satisfied that the transcription represented the dialog as accurately as possible, the transcripts were saved as word files in multiple password-protected locations on my computer to avoid loss or damage and the audio recordings were deleted in accordance with the ethical guidelines and agreed consent.

Step 7: Application of Heuristic Models | Analysis

This stage of the process involved structurally analysing the data. Detailed examples of this are clearly presented below. The word 'heuristic' derives from ancient Greek meaning "to find or discover". In research, heuristic devices (Myers, 2010; Ippoliti, 2014) are techniques or strategies used for the purpose of problem solving or self-discovery. There are many types of heuristic devices, each developed from previous problem-solving experiences. These act as simple but efficient guides for people faced with situations requiring a deeper understanding of complex information. No heuristic device is considered to be perfect, yet the appropriate application of heuristic devices assists the process of gaining insight into the complexity of the 'truth' (Myers, 2010). The heuristic devices presented in SEA aligned with the critical-realistic position from which

the research project has been developed and provided an empirically supported means of uncovering valid findings.

As within the literature review, the phenomena of inner dialogue and rape were explored both separately and interwovenly throughout the analysis. In her article, van Deurzen, (2014) presents the three heuristic models in the natural order with which they offer a structure for the analysis process. This project followed the process accordingly in the following order: The Four Worlds Model, The Timeline of The Lifeworlds, The Emotional Compass. The model-specific analysis process can be briefly understood as follows: line-by-line analysis, notation of emerging themes, organization of data. Continued reflection and verification of the emerging meanings was noted throughout all stages of the analysis process.

Inspired by the work of Van Manen's line-by-line analysis (1984), each transcript was analysed from start to finish, line by line. Words, phrases, and sentences which stood out as significant were marked using coding techniques which are further described in the Appendix. These were then transferred to four Word documents representing the four existential dimensions. Elements were deemed 'significant' for several reasons related to: researcher's intuition; tests of validity, reliability and meaning; observation of holism, semantics and hermeneutics.

To elaborate, each transcript was read and re-read in the context of the research question through the lens of the phenomenon being explored. Each word, phrase, sentence and paragraph were holistically examined both in light of how it reliably revealed a deeper understanding of the lived experience as a part in itself, as an element of the whole interview, and as an element of the larger phenomenon. In other words, the meaning and reliability of significant excerpts was achieved through a conscious exploration at a micro-, meso-, and macro- level (Vos, 2018). This intuitive practice has been termed a process of letting the phenomenon reveal itself, or "let-it-be" (Vos, 2013; 2020) and has been an integral part of producing valid qualitative research for decades (Yardley, 2008).

These approaches to establishing significance from transcripts draw on insights from original hermeneutic traditions that suggest any description of dialogue is an interpretation (van Manen, 1990). They are further supported by contemporary insights based on extensive immersion into qualitative research such as Langdridge (2008), who suggests that laying down artificial boundaries between descriptions and interpretations is not authentic and truthful, and that this contradicts the true essence of phenomenology.

Reflexivity is a fundamental element of phenomenological research, adding to the validity of the analysis (Yardley, 2008) and is further explore in the Reflexivity section and the Appendix. Throughout the process, I made notes pertaining to any theoretical concepts emerging from the data, which ultimately evolved into a mind-map-like diagram for each heuristic, subsequently forming the basis of the themes. Furthermore, I recorded all personal reflections of my experiences and any biases which came up during the process.

Application of The Four Worlds Model

Line-by-line analysis

For the application of The Four Worlds Model, each transcript was opened on my personal computer. A colour coding was created based on the Blueprint of Existential Dimensions and used for enhanced clarity: Personal - Social - Spiritual – Physical, and this colour and dimension name emblazoned the title of a word document which was created for each of the four worlds. The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions was continually referred to for validity.

Each significant sentence from the transcripts were copied into the corresponding word document, resulting in all sentences relating to each dimension collected into one place in the order in which they were shared in the interview. Sentences relating to numerous dimensions were multiplicated on each document and marked as such. It was imperative that the line number and participant pseudonym was noted with their excerpt before being copied, to prevent any confusion surrounding which excerpt belonged to which participant, and at what point in the interview the excerpt was shared.

I also made note of my own biases which arose in a reflective journal, such as connection or dissimilarities to my own experience relating to the four dimensions of existence. I became aware that throughout the transcripts the participants' experiences relating to the existential dimensions were expressed independently and interwovenly regardless of the content of my questions.

Emerging Themes

The data from each dimension was then analysed for emerging themes. I was aware that themes had started to emerge naturally from as early as the interview which were evidenced in my notes. The process of organising the data into emerging themes involved re-reading the statements within each dimension's document, observing the annotations from the line-by-line analysis, and continually referring to the transcripts. I noted the themes as they emerged on a separate piece of paper which evolved into a mindmap, linking main themes with related sub-themes.

Example of the Process:

To illuminate the process, some excerpts are shared below. These excerpts reflect how the theme of personal meaning began to emerge.

For example, an implicit reference to meaning:

> *"I want to make the world a better place and I feel that this is one step towards making it a better place. So thank you. That's important to me, that's my number one priority. To stop it happening to others. I reported it because I don't want to this happen to any other girls, to anybody." (Silvia, line 24)*

For example, an explicit reference to meaning:

> *"Umm... yeah so I'm sort of like - I constantly think about... ways to like... make life more meaningful, like my part in life more meaningful." (Ely, line 21)*

Analysis:

The word 'meaning' was mentioned frequently, as were statements that I interpreted as relating to the experience of meaning-making. This contributed to me noticing the theme of 'meaning' emerge from the data across all dimensions of existence. The concept of meaning seeking/making appeared in dialogue referring to rape and inner dialogue, and was often expressed to be made sense of in the inner dialogue. Synonymously, when no meaning was understood in the inner dialogue, a sense of meaninglessness was expressed to be felt. As I meditated on this notion, I recognized that I could relate to this experienced yet had never previously understood it so clearly. It feels that this highlight how powerful our inner dialogue can be as a resource for experiencing a meaningful existence.

Reflection Notes:

I had not considered to what extent I would witness and *experience* the meaningful impact that this project would have on my participants as I walked with them on this journey of heroic curiosity into their private inner worlds. While van Deurzen suggests both will be moved in the experience of interviewing, and I had been meticulous in my quest to develop ethically sound questions and interview environments, I had not considered the human-to-human meeting in relation to this. I felt shyly heartened when each participant expressed deep gratitude for this project being conducted and returned the compliment by thanking them back and mentioning that none of these meaningful understanding could have been uncovered without what they shared. I was in awe of each participant finding meaning in their suffering.

Application of The Timeline of The Lifeworld Model

Line-by-line analysis

Prior to conducting the analysis, I had envisaged creating six working word documents, one for each of the four dimensions, one for the timeline of the lifeworlds, and one for the emotional compass. Drawing on the experience gained from conducting the pilot study of this research and van Deurzen's (2014) advice to be open and creative with the process, I learned that the thoroughly

interwoven nature of existence, time, and emotional experiences were such that it would not have been appropriate to continue separating the transcripts 'widely' from the four worlds into the timeline and then further into the emotional compass. Instead, the four worlds became the landscape, and the timeline and emotional compass heuristics decorated these realms through deeper exploration within.

Resembling the process conducted during the Four Worlds layer of analysis, I conducted a line-by-line analysis this time with my intentionality focused on elements of time. I first conducted this within each of the four dimensions documents, before returning to the initial transcripts with the same focus to make sure no significant time reference had been overlooked. Significant sentences were copied into the relevant dimension/s document. Words and phrases indicative of or directly referencing time were initially underlined for clarity.

I also noted my own biases which arose during this part of the analysis, such as connection or dissimilarities to my own experience of time. It was apparent that a fluency in the participants language was important here, so that nuances and subtleties were not missed. I became aware that throughout the transcripts their experience of time was expressed independently of any time- or non-time related dialogue within my questions.

Emerging Themes

With all sentences relating to moments in time and movement through time identified, the data was then analysed for emerging themes, which were determined by re-reading the excerpts, and observing my notes from the line-by-line analysis. These themes were noted on a separate paper and evolved into another mindmap, linking main themes with related sub-themes. It became apparent that within the dialogue and the data, there was a continual movement between time for both the experience of inner dialogue and the experience of rape.

Example of the Process:

Example of time theme emerging:

"-after it happened, it got quite instantly into the darker and depressing... probably for the year after it happened it was very much like that. And then it's sort of slowly evening itself out." (Ely, line 34)

Analysis Notes:

"After it" referring to the time after the rape. *"Quite instantly"* referring to the speed of time and a transformation during that time.

"For the year after it" referring clearly to the year after the experience of rape. *"it was"* referring to the emotional nature of the inner dialogue being described as having characteristically similar qualities for that specific time period.

"And then it's" + "evening". Linguistic abbreviation of, *"And following that, it currently is..."* nuanced reference to the present continuous experience.

Mindful Reflexivity Notes:

Careful observation of the difference between our experiences: her time is experienced in more clear and distinct phases than my own.

Burning sensation in my heart both during and after the interviews when I reflect upon the long-term impact that rape has on the participants. I feel committed to changing this misconceived narrative about rape being understood and worked with as a single, physical event, and instead highlighting that rape is experienced as a long-term violation across all dimensions of existence.

Application of The Compass of Emotions Model

Line-by-line analysis

Resembling the process of line-by-line analysis as conducted within the Four Worlds layer of analysis and the Timeline of the Lifeworlds layer of analysis, I conducted a line-by-line analysis this time with my intentionality focused on words, phrases or nuances which indicated emotional experiences. This included changes in emotions, hidden emotions, lack of emotions. I first conducted this within each of the four worlds documents, before returning to the initial transcripts

with the same focus to make sure no significant reference to emotional experiences had been overlooked. For clarity, emotion words were made **bold** at this stage. Again, these sentences were copied into the relevant dimension/s document. I became aware that throughout the transcripts their emotional experiences were expressed in intricate connections with their experiences of temporality, and furthermore were frequently shared even when my questions had not intended to emotionally evoke them. There was no coherent single emotional tone across either dimension, many were evoked across the landscapes of the four worlds.

Emerging Themes

At this point in the analysis, with all sentences relating to emotional experiences identified, the data was then analysed a third time for emerging themes. These themes were determined by re-reading the statements and observing the notes from the line-by-line analysis. These themes were noted on a separate paper and once again evolved into a mindmap, linking main themes with related sub-themes. It became apparent that within the dialogue and the data, both the experience of inner dialogue and the experience of rape provoked powerful emotions for each participants, with distinct similarities emerging across the transcripts. Once again, I noted my own biases and felt experiences which arose during this part of the analysis. My embodied self became a senior guide in this level of analysis.

On reflection perhaps due to the specific intentionality focused on emotions – and many powerful and traumatic emotions at that; perhaps due to the fact that this level of analysis was the third heuristic level of analysis which subsequently meant that it coincided with the greatest length of time that I had been immersed in the data; and perhaps due to the shared experience and subsequent emotional connection that I have with this phenomenon, this level of analysis was one of the most emotionally challenging elements of conducting this research project.

Example of the Process:

To illuminate the process, some excerpts are shared below. These excerpts reflect how the theme of fear began to emerge:

Example of emotion theme emerging:

> *"It's difficult for me to **trust** people. I **assume the worst** of everybody all the time. Again, that kind of **fear based** thing. And there are a lot of reasons, like, **people didn't believe me** and people just didn't want to deal with having a rape victim for a friend." (Adriana, line 5)*

Analysis Notes:

A distinct emergence of 'fear' and 'trust' in relation to Others. Repetition within Adriana's transcript of this theme – it seems a significant interpretation of her own experience.

This theme of navigating the world from a place of fear emerged within many other transcripts so far. No questions elicited this intentionally, yet there is an obvious parallel and immediate association of 'other' and 'fear' and 'values'.

Mindful Reflexivity Notes:

I have navigated the world through a sense of fear for so long that I had not consciously connected it to my experience of rape. As I reflected upon this and discussed this with my therapist, I was able to identify a sense of freedom prior to the rape; a sense of youth and uninhibited joy. I am aware that this aspect of my self is still alive, but only when I am surrounded by friends who make me feel truly safe, truly valued. And interestingly, it does not exist when I am alone – when I am alone, I am in fear.

Step 8: Presenting the Findings | Thematic Overview

In accordance with the requirements of a doctoral thesis, this project returned to the careful use of the written word and visual overviews, to provide a concise, articulate and reflective (van Deurzen, 2014) presentation of the new and deeper knowing of the phenomenon being

explored. This followed the principles of hermeneutic interpretation gained through phenomenological intuition (Vos, 2018; 2020), ensuring that the meanings expressed by the participants corresponded with the newly exposed meanings as understood from the analysis (Yardley, 2008).

Having moved through the aforementioned layers of analysis, the resulting data was displayed in four Word documents, with theoretical notes pertaining to the emerging themes documented on notepaper, and reflective notes documented in my journal. Due to the volume of data, it was important to provide a clear presentation of the meanings found from the data. The themes which emerged through the analysis developed into two distinct parts, which attempt to provide a detailed overview of the phenomena. Throughout this process, I continually referred to the research question, transcripts, emergent themes, and my phenomenological intuition to guide me towards what felt most appropriate. The emergent themes became the headings and subheadings of the findings, expanded by a written narrative and further illuminated by excerpts of verbatim which were copied from the four dimension documents into a main document.

As I sat with the data, the understandings which emerged through the analysis developed as eight personified themes which I felt represented the characteristics of inner dialogue as they are experienced by the participants in this study. These are presented in part one. The emergent themes aligned with each dimension are presented in part two, with a separate graphic for clearer reading. These separated dimensions must be understood as 'magnified' from the wider graphic overview containing all four dimensions which is displayed as a table. That is to say, each dimension is presented separately for clarity, yet all four dimensions are ultimately viewed as interwoven and interconnected. Features of time and emotions emerged interwoven throughout the analysis. The findings from the analysis are presented in the next chapter.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to developing any research project, the researcher must thoroughly consider all ethical elements in relation to the safety and wellbeing of their participants. Most specifically, this relates to respecting their autonomy by concealing their identity and anonymizing all data, constructing a process which values their emotional safety and dignity at all times, and providing the participants with an ethically approved means of providing their consent for participation and use of their data. The Appendix Section includes documentation used in the ethical process.

Documentation

A number of documents were developed to support this process. The recruitment poster, and the consent and debrief forms included sections which transparently explained the project's intentions, purposes, confidentiality procedures, schedule, and method of data collection. It was clearly mentioned in the documentation, the communication prior to the interview, and during the interview meeting, that participants were able to refuse any questions, and pause or stop the interview process without explanation or judgement at any stage. It was also clearly explained that participants could withdraw their data up until the point the data was analysed. In the context of this project, no participant chose to pause or stop the interview, nor withdraw their data.

Recruitment

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it was especially necessary to approach the recruitment process with ethical care. I created a recruitment poster which transparently provided the project title, aims, inclusion criteria, schedule, and my contact details. The procedure of advertisement was carefully considered, and participants were recruited via private social media groups, moderated by independent individuals or sexual-assault support organizations. Potential participants were provided with an information sheet which included transparent possible advantages of taking part such as giving survivors of rape a voice, and disadvantages of taking part such as the possibility of having traumatic memories and emotions resurfacing. All questions that

would not invalidate the data collection – such as providing the interview questions - were answered transparently prior to participants taking part.

Data Control

It was transparently explicated both on the documentation provided prior to the interview, and during the interview, how the data would be collected, stored, and used as hereby explained. Digital recording devices were used to record the interviews, and the data was immediately copied and stored on my secured personal computer. These audio-recordings were transcribed within 48 hours of the of the interview, and immediately deleted after transcription. The transcription process involved anonymizing all data, removing any identifiable details such as person and place names. The transcripts and analysed data were consented to be stored on my personal computer and by the overseeing body (NSPC) for up to 10 years. All personal details were always stored separately from the transcripts. Dissemination intentions and strategies, such as the data being used as part of a final thesis or journal articles which may be published, were disclosed in the documentation. All eight participants expressed enthusiasm and encouragement for the dissemination of the findings.

Interview Experience

Due to the nature of the research topic, it was predicted that the interview may evoke painful memories and emotions for the participants. At all points during the interview, whether powerful emotions were displayed by participants or not, I drew on my therapeutic skills to create a safe environment and met the participants with the sensitivity and empathy required in therapy which is an imperative component of lived experience research as pointed out by Finlay (2009) and van Deurzen (2014). Participants were thoroughly debriefed after the interview, enabling them to talk with me about their experience of being interviewed. A debrief form was also provided with my contact details and my organization's contact details was provided to each participant directly after the interview took place, accompanied by a list of accessible support organizations. In the context of this research project, no lasting distress was reported to me by any of the eight participants.

While the scope of this thesis is not the time nor place for an in depth discussion on virtual therapeutic and interview conditions, it feels pertinent to mention that the seven out of eight interviews which were conducted via video conferencing rather than in-person prompted by the covid-19 pandemic were not experienced by myself nor participants as detrimental or impinging on the rapport nor safety, as evidenced by the transparent communication between myself and the participants, and the depth and significance of the experiences shared.

All participants expressed the personal benefit which they experienced from participating, namely that the interview felt like a truly safe space, that it felt meaningful to share their experience with someone who "understands", that sharing their experience was an important part of their healing, and that the exploration of their inner dialogue has provided an important new resource for them to have access to beyond the realms of this project.

Ethical Reflections

Self-disclosure was a significant element of ethical considerations in this study, and I valued the open dialogue and professional support provided by my supervisor, who worked with me to establish from the outset to what extent my own lived experience could be appropriately and relevantly shared within this project. On grounds of ethical transparency and openness I elected to disclose on the recruitment poster that the project was "developed based on my own experiences". The use of my professional training and a reflective journal contributed towards the preparation for self-disclosure which I brought to the interview process. If asked, I shared openly that I experienced an inner dialogue and had experienced rape, and I refrained from sharing unnecessary details. Several participants expressed that this disclosure strongly contributed to the safe space and participant-researcher rapport which they experienced, and that this transparency and honesty contributed to the level of depth that they felt willing and wanting to share. This was further evidenced by the depth and significance of the experiences which were shared.

Validity

This section will consider the validity of this research, that is to say, it will consider to what extent this research project has achieved its aim and answered the research question: ‘‘How is inner dialogue experienced by rape survivors?”. Different criteria have been offered in psychological literature for assessing validity of qualitative studies (Benning, 2013; Wharne, 2019). Achieving valid findings began at the initial stage of project development when I explored my epistemological and ontological position on what makes knowledge valid in the first place, and how valid truths can therefore be acquired. As previously mentioned, this research posits a critical realist position, and the findings are considered valid in their presentation of my interpretation of the participant's interpretation of their lived experiences. They do not propose to be valid in their attempt to provide a singular concrete truth about this multifaceted experience.

Another effortful factor in achieving validity was the purposeful sampling recruitment of participants who represent a homogeneous sample. The findings are considered valid representations of these eight women's experiences which may be representative of other women between the ages of 20 and 30 who experienced rape within the past five years. Further research would be required to enhance the reliability of how representative this knowledge is.

Phenomenological researchers promote the use of Yardley's (2000) four criteria that can be applied to a range of qualitative methodologies (Benning, 2013; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). His principles enable qualitative researchers to assess the validity of their findings, and have been successfully implemented by senior researchers in the field (e.g. Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009; Langdridge, 2007). This criteria will therefore be used to assess the validity of this research.

The first assessment relates to the sensitivity to context, that is to say: that the researcher should be well grounded in the method, methodology, socio-cultural context, and philosophy behind the analysis. This principle is supported by my deep enquiry of the method in critical comparison to alternative phenomenological methods, continued reflexivity, and dedicated engagement with the data from a holistic investigative and experiential lens.

The second assessment relates to the commitment and rigour with which the methods are applied and the interviews are conducted with. This is supported by my extensive dedication not just to the application, but to the empirically influenced development of the method. My continued supervised training as a counselling psychologist and psychotherapist contributed to the rigour with which the interviews were conducted, and the detailed in-depth experiences shared further indicate this.

The third assessment relates to transparency and coherence. This is supported throughout the thesis, where I have attempted to demonstrate transparency through continued reflexivity and critical questioning of why and how the knowledge is being gained at every stage. The coherence is supported by the clear and appropriate presentation of the findings and the depth in which they answer the research question.

The fourth assessment relates to the impact and importance of the findings. In line with the critical realist position of this research, I would not propose that these findings would or should be equally meaningful for each reader, as meaning and importance is understood as intuitively experienced by each individual (Vos, 2020). However, all eight participants explicitly referred to the immediate and potential lasting meaningful impact that they experienced when taking part in this research. All eight participants expressed the importance of such studies being conducted and disseminated to provide a deeper understanding into the phenomenon of inner dialogue as it is experienced from the perspective of rape survivors.

Reflexivity

"We know through painful experiences that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

- Martin Luther King (King Jr, 1992, p. 2)

The above quote was taken from Martin Luther King's reflections on the human condition in his published 'Letter from Birmingham jail '(1992). These reflections resonate with the objective of the current study.

Reflexivity can most basically be understood as the experience of deep consideration and can be understood in the context of research as the methods a researcher has used to systematically attend to how knowledge is emerging (Malterud, 2001). In qualitative lived experience research, reflexivity is a fundamental part of the process for several reasons which will hereby be discussed. All qualitative research is contextual, occurring at a specific time and place involving two or more people. Researchers describing the contextual intersection between the participants and themselves (reflexivity) increases the creditability of the findings, and deepens the understandings of what the findings mean (Dodgson, 2019). In all research, the researcher's background and position will impact the project's development by influencing: what they choose to investigate, the angle from which they do so, the methods selected as most appropriate, the findings presented as most adequate, and how the conclusions were drawn (Malterud, 2001). By presenting their reflexive processes the researcher may transparently illuminate how their perspective shaped the research (Wharne, 2019).

As suggested by Willig (2013) I have included reflexivity throughout this thesis to provide context, however, this section will address certain elements of reflexivity more explicitly. I have not elected to separate my methodological reflexivity section from my personal reflexivity section which some researchers prefer to do (Wharne, 2019), having found that both exist in relation to each other. This section will therefore attempt to transparently present the reflexive processes which I engaged in throughout the development of this research. This aims to illuminate how the deeper understandings provided by this study were gained and subsequently demonstrate their validity.

I engaged in an active and continuous reflexive process, honing my awareness at a micro- mecro- and macro- level (Vos, 2018). The main resources to do so were: my doctoral training,

supervision, and personal therapy, as well as several empirically tested reflexivity methods which are outlined in the Methodology and Appendix. I kept an anonymized reflexive journal throughout the study which increased my awareness of personal biases that arose and allowed me to differentiate them from my participant's experiences. Examples are provided below. Firstly, I will speak towards my personal interests, biases, and positionality to provide some transparency on my relationship to the research subject. I will then elaborate my reflective insights later in the section.

My personal interest in investigating the phenomenon of sexual violence is due to the numerous instances of sexual violence which I experienced as a young adult. I am aware that this puts me in the position of having a so-called 'shared experience' with the participants in the study. I write shared-experience in quotation marks, because my philosophical position on lived experiences is paradoxical. To elaborate, humans may have experiences with vivid similarities, and by use of language categorise them as the same or shared. A sense of relief, connection, and validation can be felt when understanding an experience as 'shared' with another human. Simultaneously, all humans experience the world from a unique and complex history of infinite variables which causes each human experience to be unique. This can cause a felt sense of independence or isolation depending on the context. Due to the shared experience of the research subject, it was especially important for me to distinguish between my biases, beliefs, reflections and feelings and the participants' throughout the analysis process. I dedicatedly recorded these distinctions in an anonymised journal.

I will hereby attempt to outline my bias in relation to the research subject. I come from a place of reflecting that my experiences of sexual abuse impacted me in deep, subtle ways that to this day infiltrate who I am, how I experience the world, and how I relate to other people. Hindsight, and conducting this research, has enabled me to understand that the 'hurt' during the moment of being raped, as excruciating as that can be, is not comparable to the hurt of living in the aftermath of rape. It felt probable therefore that rape would impact the participants beyond the moment of being raped. Furthermore, that this could be a combination of obvious and subtle impacts. Neither

being a ‘victim’ nor a ‘survivor’ ever became part of my identity. I reflect that I was unaware of the significance that certain related terms (survivor, victim) may have for the participants in this study within their internal and external worlds. Supervision was especially valuable when considering this during the project’s development. I have experienced a furious passion within me for supporting others for as long as I can remember, which unmistakably has led to my choice of career, and the development of this project. However, I had not truly understood its source or meaning, nor identified this as an ‘inner advocate’ until I recognised this shared characteristic within myself and the participants in this study. I do not feel that I ‘chose’ this research subject from a place of cognition, I feel that it arose intuitively as an inevitable chapter of my past, present, and future.

As briefly outlined above, continually reflecting throughout the entire research process enabled me to identify how I am participating in the world, how I am subsequently participating in the research through my own experiences, and how these experiences brought me closer to understanding the underlying meanings being explored in the research question (Gadmer, 2008). These experiences are my lens of observation and having a heightened consciousness of these acted as a way of “polishing my lens” (van Deurzen, 2014), providing me with a more precise understanding of the reality unfolding as part of the analysis process. I will hereby elaborate my reflections.

On Validity:

Listening to the participants with a trained and mindful openness during the live interviews, and again and again through my inner dialogue during the transcription and analysis process, allowed me to meet their lived experiences and mediate the biases which I bought. As the themes emerged, they were considered not only in relation to my phenomenological intuition, but in relation to the research question and to whether one or more participants expressed this experience. This mindful and active engagement with the double hermeneutic process enabled a verification process, allowing me to validate the themes in relation to the research aim and distinguish them from my own experiences.

On Bias:

I began this research with assumptions and curiosity based on my personal experiences and was compelled to understand to what extent these experiences were similar to those of other people. These experiences contributed to a bias that I inevitably brought to the research. Bias is not considered to be a hindrance in phenomenological research which has been described as the investigation of biases, but rather it is considered inevitable (Van Deurzen, 2014). However, it is fundamental as a researcher to cultivate awareness and recognition of one's biases, with different phenomenological thinkers providing different methods to do so. My reflective process in relation to cultivating a heightened awareness of my biases are explored in detail in the Methodology and Appendix sections and are exemplified below.

For example: I recognize that my biases have brought the assumption that inner dialogue may play a key role in one's experience of self-creation, meaning making, and reflection in relation to the self and others. I have assumptions about the traumatic and long-lasting impact of rape across the dimensions of existence, and that the experience may somehow affect one's inner dialogue. Noting the details of my own experience during my trial interview with a colleague, and during the process through continued exercises, enabled me to explicitly address my own biases and distinguish similarities and difference between my own and the participants' experiences.

On Recruitment:

One of the elements of this project which I did not foresee being as impactful as it was, was the recruitment process. Fully aware of the sensitive and stigmatised conceptions of rape and internal dialogue, I had expected and prepared to be tactful in the manner in which I invited participants to take part. I aspired for this research to offer an opportunity to mutually explore new unfolding knowledge, rather than 'use' them to support pre-assumed knowledge.

Alongside communicating with organisations that specialise in supporting abuse survivors, I requested to join a number of private moderated social media groups specifically functioning to provide a safe space for rape and sexual assault survivors. All submissions from members are

carefully moderated by an overseeing team, thus enabling me to know that my poster would not be shared with the members if it was deemed unethical or asynchronistic with the group's ethos. Where the poster was approved, I reflected upon the respect and ethical boundaries of myself and the members. I refrained from posting more than twice in any group nor engaging with other members' posts so as not to interfere with any potential researcher-participant relationships.

A significant use of my reflective process in relation to this project has been coping with the new content which joining these groups exposed me to. Each day, my screen was abundant with graphic and harrowingly emotional lived-experiences shared by thousands of people on these groups as they sought a space to share their story and receive support. Meditating on this impact as part of my reflexive process, it feels pertinent to share two insights. Firstly, I was required to mindfully 'bracket 'these stories from my own experience and the participants experience in relation to this research so as to prevent the 'contagion 'of data. I did so by dedicatedly keeping note of all emotions which emerged in my inner dialogue during these experiences, and systematically considering them in relation to the data. Secondly, I was aware of the shock, distress, and heartache that I permanently lived with being continually exposed to the brutal reality of so many people suffering across the world due to sexual trauma.

Quantitative research provides 'statistics 'demonstrating the extent to which people suffer from sexual abuse; these social media groups transcended these statistics into a vivid and undeniably reality. By continually exploring this in supervision and personal therapy, I became aware that this added deep horror and grief to my reality, yet simultaneously enabled me to understand how important this research project is. When reflecting on this, I was reminded that all eight participants disclosed that their experience of suffering had enhanced their understanding and connection with the suffering of others. This was both a blessing and a curse, and had developed organically via the existential shattering associated with being raped. This concept is explored in the Findings, and is one I can resonate with deeply. I would not change my capacity for

connection nor the passion I have for supporting others through suffering, yet likewise I am aware that I find it haunting to continually live with an awareness of the pain in the world.

On Language:

As identified in the literature review and further explored in the Findings, language can play a significant role in the life of people who have experienced sexual abuse. From the outset, I reflected upon this with my primary supervisor, and we discussed the importance of the implications that words such as 'victim' and 'survivor' may have on the research. I refused at all points to depersonalise the participants and their experiences by abbreviating sexual assault and/or rape which some literature, assessments, note taking, and organisations systematically do (Flo Arcas, 2018). For matters of respect based on: analysing the preferred terms used by the eight participants in this study, the investigation of preferred terms by the thousands of individuals using the aforementioned social media groups, and observation of the preferred terms used by my clients who have experienced sexual abuse, I decided that this study will primarily refer to people who have experienced sexual assault with the term 'survivor'.

When reflecting on this term from a personal perspective, I noticed that I felt uncomfortable when applying this term to myself. I noticed that this is also reminiscent of how some participants in my study felt; a shared facet of experience. The discomfort was not revealed to come from a place of feeling insulted, but rather from the associated meanings attached to the word. For example, common dialogue often uses the term 'survivor 'in relation to battles of war or health. As part of my reflective process regarding the relationship I was having with this word, I drew on my training as an academic researcher and explored the word's origins. As is often the case, I found this beneficial.

The word survivor derives from the Latin *supervivere* "live beyond, live longer than" from *super* "over, beyond" + *vivere* "to live" (Harper, 2021). This etymological understanding provided a new clarity which soothed the previous discomfort that I had with the word. It now felt entirely

appropriate to use in reference to people who had experienced rape, for it speaks an existential validity in their reality: they are living beyond this experience.

Having made this statement, I would like to express in relation to the aforementioned connotations with the word 'survivor' that it is not farfetched to suggest that there *is* a heroic element to people who have lived beyond rape, and that the experience of rape has been likened to battle. Explications of this concept are illustrated in the Findings section. Furthermore, deeper reflection into the language revealed to me that to identify with a term, we must identify with the experience related to it. In other words, you cannot be a survivor of rape without being raped. If we are a 'survivor' or described as 'courageous' or 'heroes', while intended to be complimentary, it nonetheless is a label affiliated with being raped. Despite having lived for many years beyond my experiences of sexual assault and rape; despite having dedicated my life and career to advocating for survivors; despite having explored this in depth in personal therapy and reflection, there are many moments where it feels safer not to identify with terminology associated with rape, and instead lend my focus towards labels or versions of my self that are not related to my experiences of trauma.

On Suffering

I'M TRAPPED IN A GLASS CASE OF EMOTION!

Paraphrasing Ron Burgundy

The above quote was taken from the movie Anchorman (Apatow & McKay, 2004) and has, somewhat jokingly, been selected as the most adequate representation of how I have experienced suffering in relation to this research project. Conducting this during the covid-19 pandemic added to the intensity, and at times there was quite literally no escape from this project either physically or within my private inner domains. My dedicated engagement to my reflective journal, supportive dialogue with my research supervisor Simon Cassar, personal therapy, and extensive discussions

with trusted peers were pinnacle to enabling this study to be developed with valid and comprehensible findings.

As part of my doctoral training, I was aware from the outset that this immense intellectual task would be bestowed upon me. Yet despite having personally selected the research focus, I could never have predicted the profound extent to which this task would irreversibly move me. Not one day of one week has gone past in over three years that I haven't been emotionally and intellectually immersed in some form of lived-experience exploration of rape and sexual trauma. Meditation, journaling, and open dialogue with supporting professionals has enabled me to notice that this is manifesting less within my inner dialogue or consciousness, but increasingly as an embodied agony: primarily in my chest as restricted breath, my heart as a slow-burning pain, and throughout my limbs and shoulders as a near-permanent tension. It is through dedicated reflective engagement that I have identified these embodied feelings to be representative not only of suffering but of passion for developing and disseminating this research with the aim of contributing to a significant shift in the field of counselling psychology, the judiciary systems, the education systems, the general public, and rape survivor's understandings of the phenomena. I feel like I am carrying a huge weight, but it is one that I am waking up each day and choosing to carry. In every moment of this project's development, there has been meaning found in suffering (Frankl, 1985).

Final Reflections

Reflecting on the three years that I have been developing this thesis, it feels impossible to distinguish where this project ends, and I begin.

As Windy Dryden (2018) advocates, while long lasting relationships have their merits, it takes a 'single session'; one fleeting encounter with another, to change a life. The eight interviews lasted mere minutes in the scheme of my lifespan, yet each encounter has moved me and become part of me ever since. Implicitly and explicitly, their words have been embedded in my inner dialogue, sometimes provoking great sadness, sometimes provoking deep validation and meaning.

In turn, the essence of each participant colours the background and illuminates the foreground of this entire thesis.

Never could I have imagined that eight distinct characteristics would emerge so vividly from the transcripts of these unique individuals who walked such vastly different paths of life. Nor that despite the painful topic under investigation, these characteristics would move away from the 'either-or; good or bad' worldview and instead promote such holism. Not only does the Self appear to have many parts, but each part has 'good' and 'bad' and 'everything in between'. I reflect on common social sayings about "inner critics" and "overthinkers", and value the findings of this study for providing an alternative perspective from which to view the aspects of oneself with more curiosity and acceptance and less judgement and frustration. This has changed how I understand my own identity, and as I developed this project, I noticed the 'real life' application of the concept within my own inner dialogue. I catch myself 'overthinking' and privately reframe it as "oh hello detective, I see you're working over-time today… fancy a break?!". I notice that practicing humour and compassion towards the characteristics of my inner dialogue enables me to lower my heartrate and shift overwhelming anxiety towards feeling calm and grounded. During a recent conversation with Alfried Längle (A. Längle, personal communication, 28th May 2021), he shared that he wakes up each day with phenomenological curiosity and excitement to see what the world has to offer. By doing this, each day is a new day of opportunity, and the self in turn has an opportunity to reflect and create who it wants to be. His long-lived engagement with living a personally meaningful life summarises a significant finding in this research: that despite the traumatic past we are not obligated nor destined to wake up each day as a traumatised person. "We are not born to be a threat to ourselves" (A. Längle, personal communication, 28th May 2021), and if overtime we are exposed to external situations and dialogues which pollute our peace of mind, we have an innate capacity for reframing our inner dialogue and changing how we treat ourselves.

As more extensively discussed in the Reflexivity section, a rigorous and empirically supported process occurred throughout each stage of the research which enabled me to investigate

an experience with which I have such a deep personal connection. Without such a dedicated reflexive, supervised, and emperically analytical process the proximity of the material could have been an issue. Extra caution was exercised based on awareness of this (Serning, 2011), and the project developed through a balance between establishing an awareness of assumptions whilst using my familiarity and truths to be of investigative use. It became clear, however, that paradoxically alongside the overlap of experiences – for example: that both me and each participant experienced rape in the past, and our self and inner dialogue have been changed by this experience - there is an emphasis on the uniqueness of each of our experiences. This can be summarised in a deep understanding that our rape experiences, our sense of self, our inner dialogues, and our healing journey are uniquely are own.

Findings

This research project aimed to explore how inner dialogue is experienced by rape survivors. An existential-phenomenological hermeneutic interview was conducted with eight participants and the data was analysed utilizing the methodology of Structured Existential Analysis (SEA). Through the interview as we co-created a deeper understanding of their reality, a coherent transcript was formed. By analysing the texts collected during these hermeneutic interviews, I have captured 'themes' which are presented below.

Before exploring the themes, it may be necessary to consider the essential value which they intend to offer. Bearing in mind the ontological and epistemological realist position from which this study developed, all knowledge is considered as the subjective truth to the individual sharing them and the researcher interpreting them. My own experiences are an integral part of my researcher's perspective and have provided the lens from which the analysis was conducted. Therefore, the findings reflect how I have experienced and resonated with the participants' stories during the interview and analytical process.

The findings may best be described as a valid part of the 'hermeneutic circle' of understanding (Gadamer, 1989) in so far as they represent and capture an element of the whole, and the whole exists as such because of its parts. Heidegger conceptualises that truth and understanding go beyond subjective and objective interpretations towards an inter-understanding; a mode of being. In this essence, truth transcends methodological investigation and can be found through discovery and meaning (Gadamer, 1989).

To present the meanings discovered most coherently for the reader, I have elected to continue using the heuristic devices consistent with SEA and the project thus far. The emergent themes and sub-themes from the data analysis are presented in a written report. Each are supported by a visual representation in the form of a graphic, as well as selected quotes taken directly from the transcript of each participant. More extensive verbatim support can be found in the Appendix. Each theme and subtheme aspire to represent the different elements of the

participants' individual and collective experiences of inner dialogue, and how this may relate to their experiences of rape.

It feels necessary to iterate that each participant's lived experience is a profoundly unique and complex one. Their lives before, during, and after their experience of rape are invariably different and inherently theirs and theirs alone. I have been privileged in my role of researcher to discover deeper understandings about this phenomenon and to identify several significant shared experiences that emerged during the analysis. The themes captured in this project would be incorrectly understood as attempting to merge eight unique experiences into a one-size-fits-all description. On the contrary, this project merely invites the reader to appreciate potential commonalities of human experience, and should they wish to, explore within themselves their own multifaceted experience of inner dialogue.

The Participants

This is not a narrative analytical venture, and no biographical accounts of the participant's past, present, or future existence will be attempted to be born from the moments we shared during the interviews. Instead, their words are presented verbatim by use of quotes from the original interviews to illuminate the deeper understandings gained by this research.

Given the sensitive nature and potential legal implications of the phenomenon being explored, for enhanced respect and anonymity no demographic details are shared which may identify the participants. Furthermore, the collection of demographics to study context was deemed unnecessary as this was not the focus of the research question. However, it feels pertinent to explain that the stories and experiences presented below were collected from participants which met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The participants are eight women between the ages of 20 and 30, who experienced at least one rape within the past five years. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing with participants from England, Europe, Asia, and across The Americas. Strengths and limitations of recruitment are examined in the Discussion.

Their lived experiences both unique and shared are interwoven to illuminate the phenomena being explored. Their physical, relational, emotional, embodied, and spiritual characteristics are left to shine through the forthcoming texts, whilst protecting and respecting their anonymity by using pseudonyms.

We exist in everlasting time through the stories that are told about us. These stories speak with a kind of honesty and courage that have evoked every emotion within me many times throughout the evolution of this project.

Part 1: Characteristics of Inner Dialogue

While the features of inner dialogue will be explored in depth throughout the paper, the first part of the analysis entitled "Characteristics of Inner Dialogue" aspires to provide a more tangible grasp on the nature of this phenomenon and how this relates to living beyond the experience of rape. Despite an initial sense of duality and paradox emerging within each verbatim: "good and bad; supportive and critical", when deeply exploring this through the aforementioned heuristic lenses, a more complex and holistic inner dynamic began to transpire.

While another complicated, academically-termed model could have grown from this research, as the themes emerged I reflected on my values both as a professional and as an everyday human and became aware that my intention is to produce findings which offer relatable understandings to the reader. As emphasized by leading voices in the investigation of human experience, we should avoid psychologization in our research projects and dissemination when our aim is to understand the subjectively-lived, everyday experiences of individuals (Heidegger, 1914; Sommer, 2006; Vos, 2020).

This philosophy influenced the understandings that emerged through the analysis, which developed as somewhat whimsical 'personified' features that I found most organically and adequately represented the characteristics of inner dialogue as experienced by all eight participants

in this study. The value of a slightly humorous framing of a serious phenomenon is explored in later sections.

It feels important to state that each of these features were found in all eight transcripts. Additional verbatim from participants' transcripts to further illuminate the characteristics are provided in the Appendix due to the limited scope of this paper. The characteristics are not proposed as steps in an internal process. Instead, the characteristics appeared to be existing simultaneously together, a so-called 'inner community'. Different states of being (for example: emotional states) appeared to have significant impacts on how dominant each characteristic felt for each participant, as further explored below. These features elaborate more deeply the different 'parts' of the "self", "soul", "consciousness", "brain", "mind", "me" which each participant referred to when explaining the nature of their inner dialogue.

The features of inner dialogue as identified during the analysis process have been presented in the following eight subthemes: The Best Friend, The Dreamer, The Detective, The Enlightened, The Time Traveller, The Critic, The Chameleon, and The Professor.

These subthemes attempt to provide a new and creative understanding of the expansive nature of inner dialogue. The reader is invited to engage with these new understandings and gain a practical idea of how this knowledge can help individuals to become more connected with the multifaceted aspects of themselves. Through this, we may begin to untangle our embodied consciousness, and empower ourselves to explore the multiplicity of our inner world.

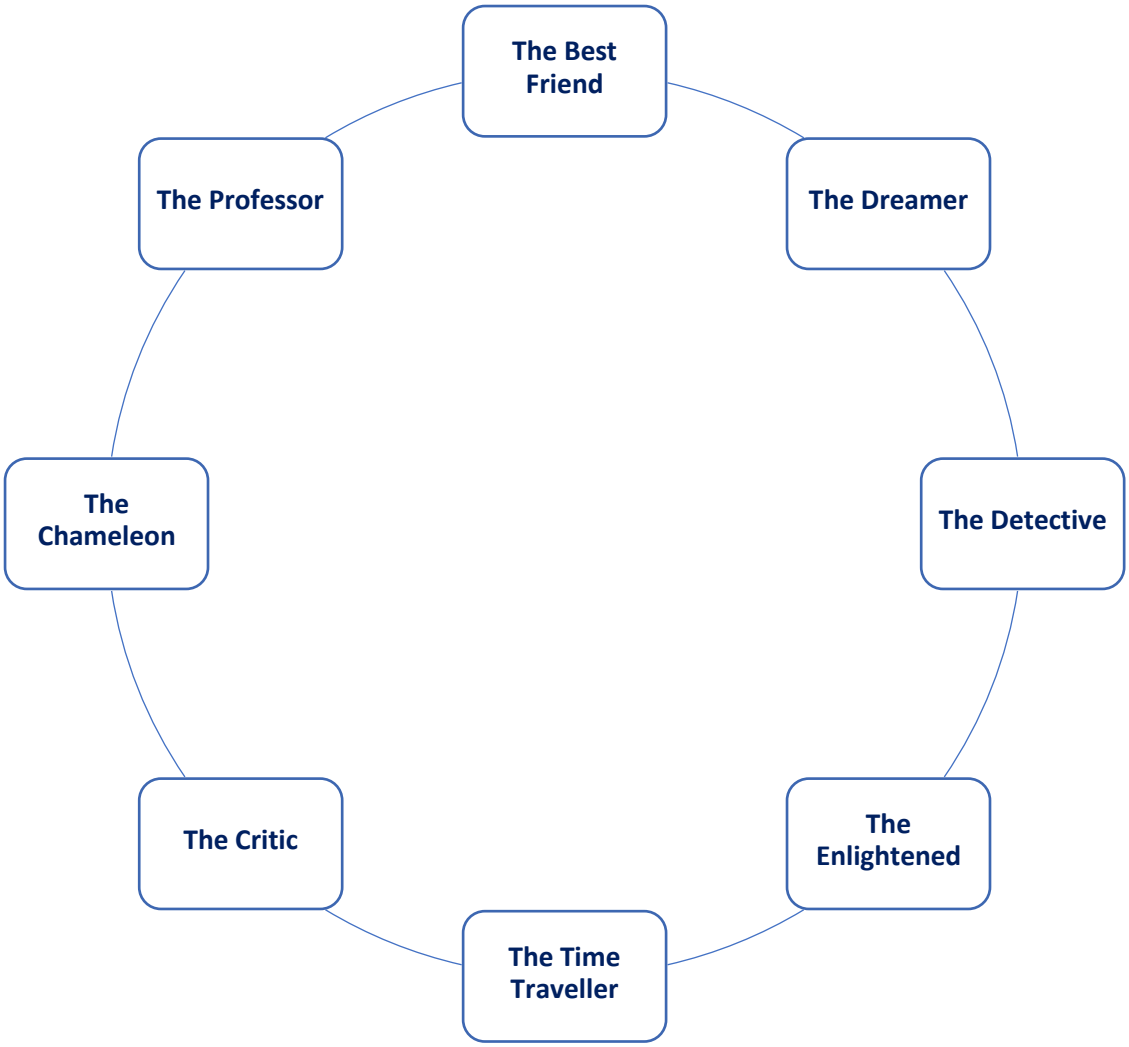

Figure 1 The Characteristics of Inner Dialogue

The Best Friend

> *"Okay so I think my inner dialogue in my head... my whole experience is that I basically am telling myself: I'm not alone, I'm not alone in the sense of this particular person I'm not alone. Which has been really supportive to myself to tell myself that I'm not alone and I know that as for fact." (Silvia, line 1)*

Within the transcripts of all eight participants, it became apparent through the analysis that one feature of inner dialogue enabled them to converse with themselves in a caring and nurturing way, akin to having a private inner best friend. This manifested slightly differently for each participant and is termed "The Best Friend" in the context of this project. The inner Best Friend represents a collective emergence of an internal voice which is an empowering, organic force of determination to support and understand; a secret keeper and confident; a constant in the chaos of pain; a source of both rationality and biased compassion. It appears that friendship with the self takes effort, and for each of the eight participants this feature of inner dialogue does not effortlessly exist, but rather takes investment and communication to grow. This feature was found to develop with similarities and differences for each participant, for example: through the words of others, through self-exploration and through authentic self-care. Through actively cultivating a discourse between inner dialogues it appears that The Best Friend offered the participants logic and assisted them when fighting inner battles.

With focus and nourishment, it appears that the inner Best Friend can become more dominant yet when overshadowed by trauma, it can be diminished. The Best Friend within appears to manifest in a variety of contexts depending on the needs of the participant, and actively evolved when it was acknowledged and explored. In this context, the participants expressed feeling able to support themselves and enhance their connection with their own nurturing. In relation to healing from trauma, when their Best Friend was dominant within their inner dialogue it allowed the

participants to truly understand what they need from each moment. The experience of being raped and the aftermath that pursues is often spoken of as an isolating and lonely time by the participants in this study which is further explored in Part 2 of the findings in the subtheme 'Intimacy and Isolation', yet when their relationship with their nurturing inner dialogue was strong no participant felt completely alone. In each moment, no matter who else is around them, when their inner dialogue was speaking with compassion and understanding the participants felt able to be their own best friend.

The Dreamer

> *"Doing affirmations and reminders, I've worked on that a lot in therapy -- that's something that's really helped me. CBT - cognitive behavioural therapy - of trying to recognize my thoughts and more logically address them rather than letting them wash over myself." (Adriana, line 1)*

Within all eight transcripts, the participants made explicit reference to dream-like experiences within their inner dialogues. This project has revealed the ambiguous line between the realities of dreaming and waking. Beneficial and detrimental aspects of this phenomenon will be further explored on a collective and individual basis below. All eight participants expressed that 'The Dreamer' feature of inner dialogue is available around the clock, as present in day as it is at night. In some cases, this was expressed as an active choice in the form of an 'affirmation', whilst others expressed a lack of choice such as in a 'flashback'. Furthermore, all participants were found not to be bound to having one form of The Dreamer, and each expressed a combination of both actively and passively experiencing this feature of their inner dialogues. Exploring this feature of inner dialogue deeply in the analysis, there appears to be immense potential value that it has for self-healing and manifesting the futures that the participants desire.

It appears that for the eight participants in this study The Dreamer is a feature of their inner dialogue which develops akin to imagination and fantasy, unique within each participant to serve its

own purpose. This function of inner dialogue can become more dominant in different contexts, sometimes as a healer, sometimes to clear the mind. Yet for all participants there is a darker side of The Dreamer when it becomes fixated on traumatic history. It can paradoxically manifest as an escape and as a trap. By acknowledging its presence and exploring its qualities, the participants were able to be more in control of where their inner dialogue and imagination takes them. In relation to healing from trauma, this feature of the inner dialogue allowed them to rewrite the past and escape to a remedial alternative reality. When the experience of rape is left to overwhelm this feature of inner dialogue it appears to become a vivid and tactile nightmare, leaving the participants to relive their rape indefinitely. Yet when the participants were able to cultivate a controlled conversation with their imagination, their reality became as carefree and victorious as they dared to dream.

The Detective

> *"And the dialogue was always kind of had that resentful, regretful element. And as I've got more information it's kind of forced me to be more comfortable, and call things for what they were." (Viola, line 3)*

A popular colloquial term used in public discourse is the notion of 'overthinking' (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003). This relates to when the inner dialogue attempts to process and make sense of situations and is commonly researched in association to pathological conditions such as depression. Yet through the transcripts of all eight participants the analysis revealed powerful investigative capacities of inner dialogues. This feature has been termed 'The Detective', moving beyond the pathological problematic term of 'overthinking' towards a more optimistic framing of inner curiousness. This feature is responsible for the private, complex, and invariably necessary process of self-discovery and understanding life experiences. The Detective can work independently or as part of a multidisciplinary collaboration – such as with other people or with other features of inner dialogue. Sometimes The Detective was active in the moment of an event, and at other times it

began its investigation later. It appears that the participants' capacity to investigate were limited only by their imagination and willingness to explore, which was impacted by their emotional state.

It appears that for the eight participants in this study The Detective feature of inner dialogue is an inherent source of puzzle piecing and problem solving. It was expressed by all eight participants to develop innately, experientially, and collaboratively, manifesting as a source of self-exploration that works tirelessly to uncover truths. By acknowledging its presence and exploring its qualities, the participants were able to enhance their unique understanding of their inner dialogues, their life experiences, their social realms, and their authentic selves. In relation to healing from trauma, this feature of inner dialogue allowed the participants to distinguish between truth and stigma. While the experience of rape may be shrouded in lies, labels, and misunderstandings, by connecting with their inner dialogue the participants were innately able to deepen their knowledge and realize that no information is more valuable than their own truths.

The Enlightened

> *"Yeah aware, that's the right word. It's made me aware of everything. Like, I'm a very oblivious person. Like, normally - If people like - I just wouldn't notice anything going on, I'm in my own little world. Whereas since it happened I've been a lot more like switched on about things. And yeah noticing like, "what's that man doing over there" Little things like that, that I just wouldn't have noticed before. I guess now gets my attention. (Ely, line 45)*

A unanimous theme which emerged from the eight participant's transcripts was a heightened sense of awareness. This 'Enlightened' feature of inner dialogue seems to have evolved organically for each participant following their experience of rape. The reader is invited to put any religious and spiritual connotation with the term 'enlightened' aside and grasp this theme as deriving from its original Latin meaning of having light shed upon something; a sense of clarity; having an enhanced awareness.

We learn from the analysis that The Enlightened feature of inner dialogue is present within all the participant's inner dialogues, akin to that of a eureka moment. It appears to result from moments of shattering clarity when mysteries are unveiled. During dominant Enlightened moments awareness was expressed by each participant as an awe inducing sense of clarity. By acknowledging its presence and exploring its qualities, the participants appeared able to experience moments of embodied and felt healing.

However, further exploring this feature illuminated that this heightened awareness also caused a heightened experience of fear and pain. This is further elaborated in the theme "The Myth of Sanctuary", with each participant expressing that their experience of rape had caused them to become more aware of the darker aspects of life than they ever had before their rape.

Is it always an asset to see what lies in the darkness? How empowered are we to prevent our Enlightened awareness from being so dominant when we do not want it to be? And when it comes to the shadow side of life, is ignorance bliss after all?

The Time Traveller

> *"The rape happened 2 years ago for me, and the abusive relationship was 3 years ago, and I look back and I don't even recognize that girl. In a good way… So I'm into meditation and I'll think back and think "who was my younger self?" and talk to her. I do have that inner dialogue and with my older self, like how she's proud of me and how she'll get through that. That's part of my inner dialogue and I think it forced me to take care of myself, and look deep within."*
>
> *(Octavia, line 6)*

Throughout each transcript all eight participants made implicit and explicit mention of how time is non-linear in relation to their memories, emotions, felt senses, pain, and inner dialogues. 'The Time Traveller' refers to the feature of inner dialogue which appeared within each participant's transcripts relating to the private discourse through which they navigate their complex lived

experience of time. Within each moment, the inner dialogue was expressed to have access to the past, present, and future. At times this was in their control, at times it was out of their control. It appears that for each participant The Time Traveller can be a source of great healing, transporting them towards hope and away from pain. Yet there is a darker side of this for each participant, especially when The Time Traveller becomes dominant, feels out of control, or becomes overly-focused on traumatic events.

We learn from the analysis that The Time Traveller is a powerful feature of all eight participant's inner dialogues and was expressed as an inevitable development due to the complex and untethered quality of the phenomenon of time. The dominance of The Time Traveller was expressed as sometimes being euphoric yet sometimes being exhausting, especially when experienced as out of control. The context, embodied emotions, and expectations of the participants was revealed to impact how dominant this feature of inner dialogue is for them. The very essence of their inner dialogue was found to be experienced in different time states, which could be understood as 'on a spectrum of lightspeed to standstill'. By acknowledging its presence and exploring its qualities, the participants were able to have a deeper understanding of their own temporality, what they like and dislike, what feels balanced and what feels overwhelming. In relation to healing from trauma, this feature of inner dialogue was found to enable all eight participants to experience more control over their lived experience in time when they were able to feel in control of this feature, such as enabling them to move away from fixating on traumatic memories and find safety in the present moment.

The findings which emerged within this study strongly indicate that the re-lived experiences of rape and sexual assault are a prominent feature occurring within the inner dialogues of all eight participants in this study. The inner dialogue's capacity to bring forth images and sensory stimulation rectifies their past in a horrific reality. It appears that this can occur for the participants at any time in any place.

As the multivariate nature of inner dialogue is better understood and control over its time travelling abilities was mastered with more confidence, the participants appeared to become armed with a defense to propel themselves to a moment of peace and sanctuary. This may be a comforting memory, a fantasy dream, or a clear stillness in that moment. It appears that due to this feature of inner dialogue and memory, the participants are not merely survivors of a traumatic event; they are continually surviving the survival process.

The Critic

> *"I try to get the positive side to become what I'm more aware of and what I listen to. But it's hard. The negative one influences me a lot: feelings like I'm guilty, like I did something wrong. And then usually I just kind of like... drink. If a negative voice gets too strong. And then it can also lead to other things."*
>
> *(Mariana, line 3)*

In both colloquial and academic literature, the "inner critic" is the most commonly identified and spoken of aspect of inner dialogue (see: Kross, 2020). All eight participants explicitly referred to this phenomenon during their interviews. As the analysis further investigated the nature of this inner critic, a deeper insight into the impact it has on their life beyond rape was gained. A clear correlation was made between the experience of rape and the development of a more critical inner dialogue in all eight transcripts. All participants expressed that their inner dialogue had changed and become more negative and discouraging following their experience of being raped.

We learn from the analysis that The Critic feature of inner dialogue is universally experienced for all eight participants. It appears to have developed in direct correlation to traumatic experiences such as the experiences of rape and sexual assault. It develops for the participants through the internalization of the words, opinions, beliefs, and views of others. It also appears to develop based on the participant's personal self-perception. It becomes especially dominant when left to take over and can lead to real-world behavioral changes for each participant,

such as isolation, suicidal ideation, and substance misuse. To overcome The Critic the power appears to lie within its identification. By acknowledging its presence and exploring its qualities, the participants seemed to be able to creatively identify their unique ways to take control over it, for example by cultivating an open conversation between The Critic and other features of their inner dialogue which can challenge the critical, self-deprecating messages.

The Chameleon

> *Yeah that it's allowed me to, overtime it's really allowed me to look back at my experiences through a lens of compassion and self-forgiveness. And that's really transformed from the beginning, when I was feeling nothing but guilt and shame, and feeling like it was my fault and like I had something to do with it.*
>
> *And I really attribute that transformation to my inner dialogue allowing me to be more self-compassionate and really being able to almost remind me that it wasn't my fault, and give me back my sense of control that I really lost when I was going through it." (Hermia, line 3)*

Each participant clearly identified the fluid nature of their inner dialogue and this changeable, adaptable quality has been termed "The Chameleon" in this theme. When exploring the nature of changes more deeply, the analysis revealed that these changes can occur based on elements such as: emotional state, context, space in time, social setting, and level of self-care. This is further illuminated in the appendix, supported by examples from the participants' collective and unique experiences.

The transformative nature of inner dialogue appeared to play a fundamental role in the healing process for all eight of the participants. The innate capacity of inner dialogue to change was identified to be crucial as it allowed the movement from feelings of guilt, shame and blame towards a place of self-compassion. A general understanding unanimous in the transcripts is that this feature of inner dialogue is emotionally toned. This feature was found to develop differently for each

participant, sometimes experienced in chunky emotional changes whilst at other times experienced in a more fluid, continuous shifting.

There appears to be a distinct correlation between the experience of rape and a transformation of sorts occurring, yet the nature of the transformation was found to be unique to each individual. Furthermore, the nature of the inner dialogue's transformation was found to be an ongoing experience as each individual developed themselves, rather than a 'one-time' shift. It appears that this transformative feature becomes more dominant when the individual is not feeling in control of their physical, psychological, emotional, or experiential world. For each participant, fluctuation within their inner dialogue was found to be uncomfortable and unsettling, yet the fact that change can occur was expressed by each participant to offer them hope for a movement out of suffering. In relation to healing from trauma, the inner dialogue was found to enable each participant to transform their suffering into survival, yet only when they felt in control of the transformation. This control was gained by acknowledging its presence and exploring its qualities. The experience of rape may have changed their life, but in each moment, it seems that each participant has the innate capacity to change themselves.

The Professor

> *"And so, I don't think... I can barely remember what my inner dialogue was like before this happened, because I don't think I thought about it.*
>
> *But now I've done so much time working on myself and my thoughts and my own healing process. That I think I've learned to be kinder to myself." (Helena, line 14)*

One of the unanimous qualities which emerged from each transcript was the participants' openness and capacity to utilize their inner dialogue to learn and gain deeper understandings from their traumatic experiences. This feature has been termed 'The Professor' and was found to act as a teacher, a mentor, and a guide towards a journey of healing and deeper self-connection. It feels

poignant to note that The Professor is differentiated from The Detective and from The Enlightened theme. To clarify: The Professor feature relates to participants mentor-like activity of 'learning from' experiences. The Detective feature relates to the active process of curiosity and discovery 'learning about' experiences, and The Enlightened feature describes a non-actively gained sense of 'innate awareness'.

When reflecting on the most physically, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally painful experiences, each participant expressed that they experienced an innate and powerful inner capacity to repair the shattered remnants of their life before rape. It appears that while they did not ask for all the lessons that life bestowed upon them, when the participants felt willing and able to take the responsibility on their shoulders, they could use their inner dialogue to find meaning in their suffering by learning from their experiences. The analysis highlights the different lessons made available by The Professor, which are further illuminated in the Appendix and the Discussion. All participants referred to having become a 'stronger' person due to the life lessons learned from their experience of rape, for example in their capacity to advocate for others. This is further explored in the theme 'This Spoke The Survivors'. Other key lessons include learning their boundaries, learning their values, and learning what is and isn't comfortable for them.

This feature of the inner dialogue appeared to develop organically and became more dominant or diminished in response to the participant's life events such as traumas, including but not limited to their experience of rape. Using their inner dialogue as a tool for learning was identified by the analysis as a skill that all eight participants demonstrated can be honed. It was found to be a skill that must be accepted and willed by the participant to feel in control of it. This control was gained by compassionately acknowledging its presence and curiously exploring its qualities. To clarify: a will to learn appeared to enable their capacity to learn and find meaning from their experiences, in comparison to a resistance to learn which appeared to prevent them from finding meaning in their experiences.

By acknowledging its presence and exploring its qualities, the participants were able to gain new understandings of past events, future aspirations, and present situations. In relation to healing from trauma, The Professor within their inner dialogue allowed the participants to connect more deeply with their own emotional experiences and critically evaluate the meanings of their traumas. The most unanimous value of learning through the inner dialogue within the participant's experience pertains to a greater sense of self-compassion and meaning in life. As further explored in part two of the Findings, social understandings about the experience of rape may be tainted with judgement and stigma, yet each participant was found to have within them an immense power to transcend any labels imprinted upon them and discover their own truth through this feature of their inner dialogue.

Part 2: Long-Lived Experiences

As we continue to discover the characteristics of inner dialogue as experienced by rape survivors in the second part of the findings, this section: "Long-Lived Experiences" aspires to provide an in depth understanding of how the phenomenon can be understood through different existential dimensions.

During the analysis, four main themes emerged corresponding to the four existential dimensions:

- The Personal Dimension: " The Search For Meaning "
- The Social Dimension: "Hell is Stigma"
- The Spiritual Dimension: "Thus Spoke the Survivors"
- The Physical Dimension: "The Myth of Sanctuary"

Within each of these four main themes, eight related sub-themes were born. Each provides the reader with an insight into how experiencing a rape may impact not only the inner dialogue of

the participants, but all areas of their existence and ways of being-in-the-world. An overview of the themes, subthemes, and relevant existential dimension is hereby presented:

Theme	Subthemes	Existential Dimension
The Search For Meaning	The Burden of Self Creation	Personal
	Blame	
	Self-Esteem	
	Sex & Virginity	
The Myth of Sanctuary	Thrown into Danger	Physical
	Wolves in Sheep's Clothing	
	Suicide	
	Power	
Hell is Stigma	Therapy	Social
	Myths & Stigma	
	Intimacy & Isolation	
	A Labelled Life	
Thus Spoke the Survivors	Inner Advocate	Spiritual
	The Injustice System	
	Religion	
	New depths of Evil	

Figure 2 Table of Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: from The Personal Dimension: "The Search for Meaning"

The foundations of the Personal Dimension are concerned with the relationship to the self, the *Eigenwelt* (Binswanger, 1963; van Deurzen, 2010) and meaning in life is considered to be found through creation of an individual sense of self and self-worth. When applying the heuristic model of The Four Worlds with focus on the Personal Dimension it became clear that the experience of rape has had - and continues to have - a powerful impact on each participant's experience of self.

Regardless of the question asked during the interview, it was apparent throughout the transcripts that this impact is experienced as a *changed* self. More specifically: their self-esteem has been damaged, their sense of freedom has been reduced, their self-creation now carries an unwanted burden, their feeling of authenticity is called into question, and their most intimate experiences of being-with-themselves have been violated by external forces and unwanted memories.

The overriding theme which emerged from exploring the lived experiences through the lens of the Personal Dimension was that each participant's inner dialogue was pivotal in their search to find meaning. This theme has been termed "The Search for Meaning", paraphrasing the book title of Victor Frankl (1995). In Man's Search for Meaning, Frankl proposes that human existence is inherently meaningful and that each individual is responsible for and driven by their search for a personally meaningful life. In a life after rape, this search for meaning involves a delicate process of rebuilding a life from the shattered remnants of previously held meanings. The inner dialogue plays a complex role in this process, coming to terms with what has happened and understanding how to live beyond this experience. Four related subthemes were identified and are explored below to expand the insights into their lived experiences: "The Burden of Self Creation", "Blame", "Self-Esteem", and "Sex & Virginity".

Subtheme 1: "The Burden of Self-Creation"

The analysis revealed that the inner dialogue plays a central role in how the participants create a sense of self. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), self-creation relates to the personal dimension's 'outlet' of creating a sense of individuality (van Deurzen, 2010). The most profound theme emerging in relation to self-creation within the transcripts of the participants is that their experience of rape has become interwoven in their identity. This was experienced differently by each participant on what could be described as a spectrum ranging from: loss to embracing to confusion to rejection.

The relationship between inner dialogue and self-creation was explicitly asked in one of the interview questions, and a direct correlation between self-creation, inner dialogue, and the experiential way of being in the world was expressed. This capacity for active self-creation is further explored in both 'The Dreamer' and 'The Professor' theme.

"So I definitely think that inner dialogue is playing a big part. And it just reminds me of that one quote by Ghandi, "your thoughts become words, your words become actions, your actions become habits". There's a quote like that, and I really firmly believe that that's true." (Octavia, line 11)

The findings reveal that the experience of self-creation can be like "stepping stones" (Viola, line 5). It appears that the participants were not born into this world with a fully formed sense of self, but instead step by step; moment by moment they created their sense of identity. Yet Viola draws attention to the limited control over which stones she was forced to step on, and raises the transferable questions: how much of our identity is shaped by our past experiences? How much of our identity is truly ours, and how much will be inextricably bound to the traumas that we have faced?

"It was kind of like stepping stones… but the way it is now, even when I do find out my sexual identity, I will always think, "is it truly because I've always

been that way, or is it because I was raped?" Even if I were to find out that I was a lesbian, I will never know how much the trauma played a part." (Viola, line 5)

Grief over a lost childhood was identified as an element of the burden of self-creation in each of the interview transcripts. The inner dialogue offered an opportunity to validate and honor their feelings. All participants expressed a sense of growing up faster than they would have expected or hoped to due to being raped.

"And I think that there is occasionally some grief. Sometimes I think like, "wow, I really had to grow up so much faster than a lot of other people" because this happened to me first when I was 16 and I didn't realise what was going on but that didn't mean that it was any less significant.

So I think my inner dialogue allows me to kind of honor that grief when I feel it and know that it's all part of the healing process." (Hermia, line 7)

Hermia provides a deeper understanding about the impact that experiences can have on an individual, regardless of their ability to comprehend its significance at the time.

As illuminated by Mariana below, participants found hope in their understanding that despite the long-lasting impact of rape, it does not take away their inherent sense of self.

"If sometimes I had like a vision of rape and I didn't ever want to think that something like that could happen to me. I realise that when it did, it didn't ruin me. I'm still the same person, I'm still myself, and nothing that anyone does to me can change that." (Mariana, line 17)

Yet simultaneously, all participants expressed a permanently altered and lost sense of their former self, which they directly associated with their experience of rape. Details of specific qualities that were lost are further explored throughout this section, examples of which include a lost sense of safety, carefreeness, and innocence.

This was especially present for Silvia in social settings where she found it necessary to hide herself at the risk of being judged by others about her experience of rape. Even her private reality was one of secrecy and confused identity, a phenomenon further explored in 'A Labelled Life'.

"So the social aspect of everything, it's just been like hiding. Hiding for two and a half years. And feeling like I'm not myself and like I can't engage normally with people. Because I feel like I have this secret. And I feel... feel like I could be judged at any moment if I told my story." (Silvia, line 13)

The value of actively engaging in communication within one's inner dialogue was identified as a key element of self-creation within all eight transcripts. A deeper understanding of how healing can develop by acknowledging and sitting with the world's truths and one's own pain is emphasised in this excerpt.

"Its through my inner dialogue that I could speak with myself and really encourage myself to really be with myself. And to take time to really feel my emotions and sit with them and sit with my pain and really be inside it. And I think that that really allowed me to grow and to heal..." (Hermia, line 10)

It became apparent through the analysis that the when the participants actively became more aligned with themselves, this had a tangible impact on their relational experiences with others. Hermia's transcript suggests the importance of 'looking inside 'oneself and reiterates the value of inner dialogue as a means of cultivating self-awareness, self-creation, and healing.

"And I translate that into other experiences, like, if I can't be gentle with myself then how can I be gentle with others who might not be as easy to communicate with at some point in my life. So I think like, taking that time to really look inside is crucial. And I think that the way that I speak to myself has

really spoken volumes and brought so much light and inner healing as time went on." (Hermia, line 10)

This was echoed in verbatims such as Octavia's.

"I see my inner dialogue as: it's made me stronger so that I can help others. It's helped me, I've used it as a lesson... even though it was injustice and an act of violence, I try to see the positives of it and how I can grow." (Octavia, line 2)

For other participants, this was a new skill introduced to them by participation in this research project.

"I've never really looked within myself, and thought "I can change how I'm feeling, how I'm acting, what I'm thinking in my inner dialogue"." (Silvia, line 26)

The findings indicate not only the responsibility of each participant to create and develop their self-identity, but a variety of distinct burdens which the experience of rape causes them to carry. The inner dialogue was identified to play a central role in both the destruction and creation of their meaningful identity, with the value of being able to take control over their inner dialogue highlighted as an influential part of becoming connected with their self and emotions.

Subtheme 2: "Blame"

All eight participants disclosed that they had struggled with feeling at blame for their rape. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), blame relates to the personal dimension's preoccupation of responsibility.

"This is the only crime where people feel okay like more than willing to empathise with the perpetrator and while do nothing for the victims and survivors." (Viola, line 10)

Through the analysis of each participant's transcript, a deeper understanding of the development of self-blame and feeling responsible for being raped was uncovered. The inner dialogue was identified to have played a significant role in the blaming by, for example, internalizing social narratives. Through the transcripts, blame was associated with hindsight's questions of "what if?" surrounding the events leading to the situation.

"…it's been a shift of the blaming of myself. The: "you're so stupid, why didn't you see the red flags? why didn't you sense that this guy is dangerous?" (Silvia, line 4)

Internalized social narratives, religious values, and attitudes of other people were also revealed to play a fundamental role in the development of self-blaming inner dialogues.

"But at the same time… I still associate those heavily with Christianity. And when it pertains to the rape, I think back to kind of having those Christian beliefs kind of forced upon me at the time. Wondering if one of the reasons that I didn't see what I should have seen back then, was this narrative of kind of like, "it was my fault…. if you're in this situation you're a whore"… that's where a lot of the regret started, before it shifted into regret for not seeing things and protecting myself." (Viola, line 6)

The non-liner nature of time, further examined in 'The Time Traveller' theme, emerges to be both an asset and detriment to the participant's healing process. Silvia acknowledges the value of gaining awareness as time moves forward, such as during the interview process, and how this knowledge about inner dialogue may empower her to transcend the trauma of her past.

"You've really helped me to see things differently. Because for the past two years, I've been looking at that night, and nothing but that night. Just beating myself up for it. I've never really looked within myself, and thought I can

change how I'm feeling, how I'm acting, what I'm thinking in my inner dialogue. Because I'm my number one biggest fan, and I want to heal more than anything. But I'm my biggest critic, at the same time. So I think just looking within, which I've never done, is a technique I'm really going to use moving forward. And so thank you." (Silvia, line 26)

This tool to look within one's own experience and empower oneself to transform experiences using inner dialogue was identified and valued by all eight participants. It emerged that this requires a meaningful focused process and is not a given. The inner dialogue has the capacity for all participants to both fight *for* oneself and *against* oneself.

"Because there's a sort of dialogue in my head it sort of talks me through the situation. With the rape I've had the overthinking of all the traditional like the normal - like - the stereotypical things like feeling blame and guilt and all that kind of stuff." (Ely, line 9)

"And that's really transformed from the beginning, when I was feeling nothing but guilt and shame, and feeling like it was my fault and like I had something to do with it." (Hermia, line 3)

The experience of blame appears to be a near-immediate response to being raped for all eight participants. Each expressed that time and an active engagement with different features of their inner dialogue (see Findings Part 1) reduced their sense of feeling to blame.

"So there is a little bit of that [blaming]. And it doesn't creep in as much as I get further away from it. But, struggling with a little bit of self-blame is definitely the hard part." (Helena, line 7)

A significant finding emerged that the more connected participants felt with their inner dialogue, the more they were able to move towards a new perspective and begin to heal from their

trauma. This experience of blame has been identified at one of the hardest aspects of life beyond rape.

"Yes. I think for a while I wasn't aware of the inner dialogue.

I just had this feeling that I was very guilty, and that I was to blame.

And that was my understanding of the situation." (Mariana, line 8)

When exploring where self-blame develops from, it was revealed through numerous transcripts that this frequently grew from the internalization of others' words. As is further explored in the "Myths & Stigma" subtheme, for all participants blaming and shaming comments were frequently made by family members, loved ones, and professionals such as those in law enforcement. Not only was this painful in the moment, but the analysis also reveals that it can create the very foundation for their life beyond rape.

"But that, that opinion alone, from somebody that I looked at as my best friend that was supposed to have my back and support me. That brought me down to zero, when I didn't think that I was gonna get to zero. Because she put it out there like: "you fucked up. You screwed up. You shouldn't have done that."

When really what I needed was, "Okay. This is not okay. I'm gonna be here for you moving forward and it's gonna be okay."

I needed support, and I didn't get support.

And I think she set the tone completely." (Silvia, line 14)

The inner dialogue appears to internalize the assumptions and world views of others, in turn becoming interwoven with the participant's personal views about themselves and the meanings they associate with their experience. The experience of rape was revealed to be related to blame and responsibility, with the victim rather than the perpetrator being viewed as responsible

for the situation by both themselves and others. These associations were commonly held by loved ones and family members, resulting in the participant's inner dialogues becoming self-punitive instead of self-nurturing.

While it did not change the past, all eight participants referred to a reduced feeling of blame when they were able to share their experience with someone who believed them (see subtheme 'Therapy').

> *"And I think ever since [sharing] my inner dialogue has changed in reference to understanding that night, because, I know I wasn't - I know I've been blaming myself for so long about something that I never needed to." (Silvia, line 3)*

Subtheme 4: "Self-Esteem"

Emerging from the transcripts of all participants was a deeper understanding of the relationship between rape and self-esteem. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), self-esteem and self-worth relate to the personal dimension's sense of meaning. The experience of self-worth was frequently expressed in relation to both self-esteem and blame. Shame appears to diminish self-worth.

> *"I'm understanding that shame is a shared humanity and it's not very helpful - it's like the complete opposite of self-compassion." (Octavia, line 4)*

> *"Like my inner dialogue is kinda like... linked to my self-esteem and sort of like you know I have a voice in my head telling you, "you're not good enough" or I don't know like low self-esteem things. And I think... that was made worse by the rape." (Ely, line 13)*

As with all participants, Helena identifies the importance of self-care in the healing from damaged self-esteem. Furthermore, Helena's transcript offers insight into how her experience of rape led her to become more aware that her inner dialogue existed and was a necessary aspect of her healing process, whilst prior to her experience of rape she does not remember her inner dialogue being an important feature of her life.

"I think that how you treat others and how others treat you is extremely important. But how you treat yourself and the way if you talk to yourself - in inner dialogue, like I do - is so make or break regarding your self-esteem.

And so, I don't think... I can barely remember what my inner dialogue was like before this happened, because I don't think I thought about it.

But now I've done so much time working on myself and my thoughts and my own healing process. That I think I've learned to be kinder to myself." (Helena, line 14)

Despite identifying herself as being on a healing journey, years beyond her experience of rape Silvia expressed that she feels she may never develop a sense of self-worth akin to life before rape.

"I had a lot of self-esteem and I held that like a badge. Up until that night - it was ripped away from me. And I've never had that back." (Silvia, line 5)

All participants expressed an almost-immediate decreased sense of self-worth following their experience of rape. Each expressed needing to undertake a 'healing' journey which included re-developing more self-worth. It appears that the participant's inner dialogues were central to perpetuating thoughts of both self-criticism and self-worth. A deeper sense of personal meaning in life was revealed to correspond with a deeper sense of self-worth.

Subtheme 3: "Sex & Virginity"

While the topic of sex was not explicitly elicited by the interview questions, at different points in participants' interviews the theme emerged. While this experience may be relevant to all world dimensions, there was an overriding emergence that the lived experience of both rape and sex is as much a personal experience as it is a shared or physical experience. When considering sex in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), it relates to the Personal Dimensions' preoccupation with strength, weakness, and selfhood.

> *"I think that the ... I might get a little emotional here... umm... the physical part is like, newer to me. Where I am discovering new triggers that I might not have had otherwise. And I actually realise that most of that is emotional, rather than physical. I don't feel really physically affected. Which I'm grateful for." (Helena, line 4)*

The analysis highlights the lasting impact that rape can have on the lived experience of individuals. Participants expressed that bring raped added a new effort and strength required to engage in sexual activities.

> *"And I really do think that its affected how we are together... not only emotionally, but like physically too. Like its sometimes hard for me to "be in the mood" to do anything, and it's.... I don't like feeling pressured, because of that night." (Silvia, line 6)*

The visual appearance and dress of women, and how this is perceived by others – of all genders - as an attempt to attract the opposite sex were recurring themes identified in the analysis, specifically in the transcripts of Ely, Mariana, and Viola. This caused Viola to dislike being sexualized, especially by males.

"I don't want men to like, see me sexually.

It sounds really silly, because I like dressing up and stuff, but I like doing that for myself, or do it because I want to feel confident. And then people will be like, "oh who's the lucky guy, who're you dressing up for?". And I'll react very different when a girl gives me a compliment like, "oh you're very pretty you always dress up" to like when a guy says it.

Because I'll always assume bad intent when a guy says it." (Viola, line 7)

All participants indicated that their experience of rape caused them to feel objectified by others and that this feeling continued in their life after rape. Each participant responded differently to this feeling. Furthermore, all changed their behaviours after their experience of rape.

For example, Mariana shared that she began to dress in a way that matched her sense of objectification. Despite actively drawing attention to her sexual appearance, Mariana expressed that this was masking a private feeling of insecurity. Inner dialogue after rape was found to include a reduced sense of self-esteem and self-appreciation for all participants. This corresponded with an increased need for validation from others.

"Umm... how I see myself. I think for a while I felt very objectified... and I wanted to be, kind of in a way, I wanted people to notice my body. I wanted people to see me. I wanted people to think I was good looking. And I would just dress in a way that - that's what I wanted, I wanted to call after me, I wanted people to look... And it made me very, very self conscious I think... very insecure. But I didn't really know it. Like, I was kind of like, "wow, I'm the shit" but... I always needed people to tell me." (Mariana, line 9)

The objectification of females is not only highlighted within the transcripts regarding their looks, but also regarding their sexual status. Viola highlights the difference between males and

females in regard to virginity and sexual expectations, addressing the understanding that the common social narratives around sex and sexuality are damaging and homophobic.

> *"Really just coming to learn how problematic that was. Like how typically it's we rarely talk about a man's virginity. But there's a big focus on the women's. And this whole narrative of like, "is she a virgin?" how that means that she's pure but then also it's like she's a prude.*
>
> *And there's something about her entire being changes the minute that she has sex.*
>
> *There's this insinuation… just seeing how harmful it is.*
>
> *And that view is incredibly homophobic. You know, gay experiences aren't taken into consideration when we talk about loosing virginity and stuff." (Viola, line 10)*

Furthermore, this research reveals the damaging implications of emphasising virginity as an experience which changes a women's entire being. This narrative is understood by Viola as a social construct which much of the population accept without critically evaluating its implications. Special attention is drawn to the repercussions of this narrative on those who lost their virginity against their will.

> *"And also for sexual assault survivors and rape survivors. What does that mean about how they get to lose their virginity? This experience that they didn't want to happen or didn't ask to happen. Like does this have to be their defining experience where their whole being changes? Just seeing how that this social construct that we've been forced to accept. And now I kind of reject it.*

It's something I speak out against. Definitely there are people who are struggling with it. Like, people who didn't want to loose it the way they did, or sexual assault survivors. And I tell them its not a real thing.

And really when you look at it is really is just problematic. Especially the way that it's portrayed in western culture." (Viola, line 10)

Viola's personal experience with losing her virginity by rape shares her first-hand experience of the repercussions of living in a society which espouses the binary sexist narratives around virginity. She expressed being overtly told by members of society that she was ‘‘damaged goods" for having her virginity taken against her will.

‘‘But again I wonder if that would have changed or if I'd be open to even seeing it as this social construct and problematic in all these ways had I not, you know… had the experience that I did. Had I not lost my virginity that way.

And again, I'd been told for so long that I was now tainted; almost like damaged goods, for losing it that way." (Viola, line 10)

Viola finds meaning in her suffering by acknowledging that this experience threw her into a position of openness towards critically evaluating the meanings associated with virginity and advocating to other women and survivors of rape and sexual assault that this narrative is a social construct not a fact of life.

This theme emphasizes that despite sex most commonly being understood as an activity involving two or more people, the physical, emotional, and psychological features are exceptionally personal and individual for the participants. Inner dialogue was found to be influenced by internalizing the expectations and assumptions of others, leading to active behavioural changes in social and intimate situations. When the views of others were not challenged or were considered more important than their own, the participants found themselves feeling uncomfortable in the

way that they felt, looked, and were intimate with others. Values and narratives about appearance and virginity were identified as having powerful influences on those who have experienced rape, with extremely damaging potentials for their meaningful understanding of sex and sexuality.

Theme 2: from The Physical Dimension: "The Myth of Sanctuary"

The foundations of the Physical Dimension are concerned with the relationship to the natural world, the *Umwelt* (Binswanger, 1963) and meaning in life is considered to be found through making changes through actions.

When applying the heuristic model of The Four Worlds with focus on the Physical Dimension it became clear that the participants experience the physical world with a new awareness of its danger. The main theme of "The Myth of Sanctuary" has been identified, inspired by Albert Camus' (1942) essay entitled "The Myth of Sisyphus". This theme emerged due to its shared nature with a central theme of The Myth of Sisyphus: The Absurd. Camus suggests that life is ultimately absurd; that existence is a conflict between what we want in life and what we actually find in life; between meaning and chaos.

Emerging through the analysis came the understanding that regardless of the order and meaning each participant strove to navigate life with, they were presented by situations of trauma and chaos. Camus proposed that only by accepting the absurdity of existence can one live their life to the fullest. The participants were each thrown into situations where they were required to reach a place of acceptance of life's givens, and their inner dialogue was found to play a pivotal role in enabling them to do so. When acceptance was resisted, the horrors of facticity traumatized them, in some cases to the point of contemplating suicide. Four related subthemes were identified and are explored below to expand the insights into this lived experience. The subthemes are: "Thrown into Danger", "Wolves in Sheep's Clothing", "Suicide", and "Power".

Subtheme 1: "Thrown into Danger"

While each participant grappled with a sense of blame there is an ultimate understanding that not one participant chose to be raped. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), such situations relate to the physical dimension's preoccupation of thrownness. In existential terms, the Heideggerian (1962) concept of "thrownness; *Geworfenheit"* refers to the notion that humans are situated in given situations not by choice but by circumstance.

Not only were the participants thrown into the experience of rape, but they were also thrown into a world which holds them accountable for a traumatic experience that they did not choose. Furthermore, each found themselves responsible for coming to terms with this reality.

All participants revealed that they felt it was impossible for those who had not been through something similar to truly understand the dangers of the world. The analysis reveals that this may be a feature of the sense of isolation and misunderstanding experienced by survivors.

Silvia highlights how those in society that question the lived experience of the rape victim are not only harming them further but are doing so from a place of obliviousness. This was found to manifest from stereotypical understandings held by the public, which the analysis reveals became internalized by the participants.

> *"So victim blaming, that is just one thing that makes me so mad. That somebody could do that to another person without even knowing the slightest feeling of how it feels to be in that dangerous situation. Its just not fair to me. Its not fair to people that are survivors. Its not fair to anybody that's ever been through anything traumatic. Cause its not our fault. We didn't ask for it." (Silvia, line 19)*

Finding herself in sexually abusive situations caused Mariana to feel at danger in the world. Evidenced in the analysis is a deeper understanding that the increased sense of danger which was expressed by all eight participants develops from the uncertainty about what may lay in wait.

"But like, in the moment it feels like to me like the whole world is against me. Like the whole world is out to get me. And I guess like that can definitely be um something that I think is because of the rape and the sexual abuse."

(Mariana, line 12)

"I do have this feeling that the world is a very dangerous place and people are very complicated. And people hurt other people... in terrible ways, in ways that sometimes I can't understand.

"- And so, I think it's made it very hard to trust people, scary... and sometimes dangerous, and .... that no one's really going to look out for me, but me." (Mariana, line 15)

"...you hear about things. But you just think it would never happen..."

(Ely, line 28)

The analysis reveals a sense of shock and uncertainty related to being 'thrown' into a situation of being raped. Some participants were children when their first sexual assaults occurred. Others were teens and young adults. Some had an awareness of its existence, yet never expected to experience this in their reality.

Other participants acknowledge that it is statistically likely that women will be raped or sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. The lived experiences of the women in this research are painfully representative of supporting these statistics. Helena expressed feeling the need to remind herself of this at times when she questions her thrownness.

“So I have to remind myself that... well... statistically it would've probably happened eventually. Because statistics are so against us, you know?” (Helena, line 7)

Subtheme 2: "Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing

It emerged clearly from the analysis that rapists walk among the population without distinguishing features. As this subtheme suggests, it appears that rapists are akin to ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’. Yet the analysis revealed that even when they are proverbially led to slaughter, the justice system frequently sets them free.

It emerged through the transcripts that this terrifying awareness is embodied by all eight participants. The analysis revealed that the experience of rape altered each participant’s interpersonal relationships, with a new and heightened sense of fear towards those whose characteristics are similar to the person who raped them. This change appeared not only deep rooted, but against their will. Despite wanting to trust those around them, the participants expressed feeling forced to accept the danger as their new reality. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), it relates to the physical dimension’s preoccupation with embodiment, survival, and the tension of acceptance.

“And I guess like that can definitely be um something that I think is because of the rape and the sexual abuse.
Because at a certain time I was very, very trusting and very innocent and anything anyone said to me I was sure they were telling the truth and they really wanted what's best for me. And then I kind of realised like, "no. some people will hurt you". Umm, and, that kind of gave me a shock like it kind of made me feel like everyone's out to get me. And that's kind of how I now perceive situations.”
(Mariana, line 12)

The experience of having a shocking and unignorable realizing that rapists walk among the population in the guise of everyday people was shared within all interviews. When exploring the phenomenon in relation to beliefs and values, participants expressed a shattering of previously held givens about others in the world. Their vulnerability now became the lens through which they saw the world.

"It was something that I just thought: "that's how life goes and that's how people treat you." And then after the first rape, and after the two that came after it - it just completely shattered all of that" (Adriana, line 12)"

"I think it's definitely altered my values. So, kind of like I mentioned before, I think I really do value honesty and safety. So much more than I ever did. I know that trust - I've always been a person that puts a lot of trust in others. And I think that after my experiences.... I think because, it wasn't until then that I really had to question my trust in others." (Hermia, line 8)

The theme of trust and safety was starkly present throughout all the transcripts. Silvia shares another tangible example of this, and furthermore expresses and reiterates the associative damage that one person's actions can have on the wider population's reputation. Analysing this at a new depth, the findings of this research indicate the weight that one negative action can have on an otherwise positive worldview.

"That's a great question because obviously it was a police officer which did it to me.... I'm the daughter of a police officer. My step-dad's a police officer. I come from a long line of police officers. And I was always raised to trust them. I was raised that in times of need always go to a police officer. And um... he used that badge and manipulated me with that badge. And it made me look at police

officers completely differently. It made me look at my dad differently. It made me look at all my family members differently." (Silvia, line 12)

An excerpt from Adriana's transcript is shared below to illuminate how she processed being raped by two 'normal' people. Due to the seemingly unexpected actions of these two individuals, Adriana shares how this transformed into a questioning of herself rather than the rapists. As she explored her experiences, she held an awareness that the fault did not lie with her, yet she continues to live with a sense of questioning the intention of others.

'I think that was the most extreme example of being kicked while you were down.

I was already experiencing the deepest, deepest trauma I'd ever experienced in my life, and was really changing the way that I lived my life and it was already really awful. And then for it to happen again two more times, and by people that were normal. They were normal, normal guys... like, I don't think they've ever done it to anyone else as far as I know. The other guy was a serial rapist, he was really violent. It was easy for me to see in hindsight that that's just the kind of person he is. The other two times it was difficult for me, because it felt like it had happened because of who I am instead of who they are. Which of course isn't true. But it just really starts messing with the way you see people."

(Adriana, line 10)

While each participant generously shared deeply personal experiences in their first and only interaction with me during the interview, I reflected during the transcription and analysis processes that the discussions around this 'wolf in sheep's clothing' phenomenon were the only times participants hesitated or spoke with trepidation as they answered. As I analysed the transcripts, I noticed that all participants either explicitly or implicitly indicate that they experience a sense of

guilt for their inner dialogues specifically regarding the heightened fear and suspicion towards men and individuals who share characteristics of their rapist following their experiences of rape.

Ely: "I feel bad just saying it!"

Researcher: "Oka-"

Ely: "[interjects] Like even to myself! Like I don't... I don't think that everyone of his race is like that. But I think it's just that it would remind me. Like that similarity maybe makes me question them more.

"Yeah I'd say definitely about men. I don't get the same about women whatsoever. Yeah, only men.

"And I'd say exaggerated more about, slightly, like of the same age group. Like I don't know exactly how old he was but probably about 10 years older than me. Like so about 30s, and stuff. I'd say that would make me question more. Yeah." (Ely, Lines 43-44)

The findings highlight not only the damaging effect that rape and sexual assault has had on the participants, but on their wider society. It appears that one act from one person causes a ripple effect - a long-lived fear and mistrust of the entire population, burning bridges and putting up barriers to innumerable potential social interactions. Leaving the abused participant suddenly responsible for painstakingly seeking the cure for an affliction of fear and guilt which they never requested.

The time-gap after rape and spending more time connecting with people than during life before their rape was identified as a potential example of how this new deep sense of mistrust and fear could be overcome.

"And so I think since then I've really needed a bit more time before I can fully trust someone, or before my trust can really grow for someone." (Hermia, line 8)

Subtheme 3: "Suicide"

The topic of suicide was not raised in the research questions guiding the interviews (see Methodology). Yet the theme of suicide emerged organically across all transcripts in either implicit or explicit examples. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), suicide relates to the physical dimension's tensions of life and death; limitations and possibilities. The findings suggest that being raped can lead to the victim considering taking their own life. Being raped can cause the inner dialogue of the survivor to say, "just do it" (Ely, line 32).

Eight out of the ten participants felt compelled to share that they had seriously considered suicide after their rape, and that these thoughts had surfaced for many years following. Each participant expressed that it was within their inner dialogue that this decision was considered.

"And there was a point I was going through a depressive episode, and I would feel like this void, and really not enjoy life. And I wouldn't say that I was suicidal, but I guess you could say implicitly that there were thoughts that were suicidal, and I contemplated ending my life." (Viola, line 9)

As stated previously, a conflicting inner dialogue is experienced as both an asset and detriment to the participants' well-being. Prior to her experience of rape, Ely could relate to what she describes as 'normal' or 'hormonal' teenage experiences of internal struggles with the world's darkness and as decades of philosophy suggests, this is a very normal and natural part of being human (Timoszyk-Tomczak & Bugajska, 2019). Yet following her experience of rape, Ely's inner dialogue began introducing suicide as a viable reality. This was echoed by Viola, Hermia, and

Mariana, and Adriana. In Ely's case, it was the duality of her inner dialogue, the complex two-sided debate, which fought and thus-far won her fight for survival.

"And I'd say afterwards then I started having like - suicidal thoughts - and things. Literally sort of like, anytime, like I'd have a little voice in my head just saying just like, pause, "just do it" I guess. Sort of like the pessimistic one.

And then there'd be that conflicting thing again like the rational one saying, "it's stupid" like, "what are you doing? You're absolutely fine"

And the other one would be like, "no, this is too much"" (Ely, line 32)

The findings suggest that the internal dialogue plays a distinct role in both the cause and prevention of suicide as evidence by the above and below verbatims.

"I think it's - this is where sometimes my conflicting voices come slightly in handy like, I think - all the critical ones in my head - I try and listen more to the rational voice.

I guess it depends on how people think in their heads I guess.

Like, if you're someone that has always been self-judgemental and you've only got one voice... then maybe you can't. I dunno." (Ely, line 93)

A clear message emerges directly to professionals involved in the well-being and safeguarding of the population, indicating in no uncertain terms that the participants in this study expressed a correlation between inner dialogue, mental wellbeing, and suicide.

The scope of this paper does not permit an in-depth exploration into what it is about being raped which leads to suicidal thoughts and/or actions. However, a number of reasons were expressed by the participants including: increasingly critical inner voices, experiencing psychological unwellness such as PTSD and depression, not being able to stop thinking about the rape, a sense of

blame and shame about the rape, internalizing judgement from society about their experience, and feeling empty and void.

Subtheme 4: "Power"

The theme of power emerged from the analysis in a variety of forms. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), power relates to the physical dimension's polarity of dominance and acceptance. This theme provides another example of how phenomena often overlap across multiple dimensions of existence. This theme primarily emerged across all eight transcripts in relation to three phenomena: the rapist, the society (see Theme 3), and the inner dialogue.

<u>The Rapist</u>

By nature of the act of rape, a rapist exerts physical power over the victim in their active penetration of the victim's body. However, revealed in the analysis is a deeper understanding of the emotional, psychological, and social power which the rapist may have over their victim.

> *"- he had his pistol and his badge shoved in his pants while he was undressing. And that was intimidation. That was: "I'm a cop and you're gonna do what I say". And there were guns everywhere, everywhere. And he used that power, he used his job title against me. And he intimidating me, and it was threatening. So that if anything - that's where my view of the world has changed. From that night." (Silvia, line 12)*

Two excerpts from participants' transcripts are shared here, providing an example of social and physical power being both implicitly and explicitly used by rapists to achieve their goal.

> *"I feel like since this has happened... I don't know but I think that his motive was a power thing because, like, he's a man and... I just hate that sort of thing... And I know that there's like 'rape of men', but the majority it is men: man raping a woman. And I hate the fact that men can take that control." (Ely, line 70)*

"- I think he saw a young girl who like wasn't wary of anything and took advantage. Which I think just wouldn't happen, like gender... the other way around. I don't feel that women have that same need for power over men. Like there is for men over women. Its different, I think, you know - for women." (Ely, line 70)

Viola draws attention to the understanding that some rapists may not purposefully be asserting their power, and she calls for increased education over consent for all genders. Octavia and Hermia echoed similar views. Yet Viola expresses a sense of hopelessness. Her lived experience of advocacy, support groups and legal panels gave her an understanding that some individuals are fully aware of their ability and desire to rape others.

"I feel like there are two groups when it comes to rapists and stuff. There's people who genuinely didn't know that what they're doing is wrong. Typically they're doing something and things get lost in translation; there's a lack of communication. One of those very simple things like, "hey if someone is x y and z and they're doing a b and c then this isn't consent. One of those very small kind of easily fixable things. They just need to be taught and just better taught and that's that.

But the bulk of people who do stuff like this are just full-blown rapists and predators. There's nothing we can do about them. No amount of consent videos and "this is consent" posters is going to help them. They're choosing to do that and they're going to. And we really need to make sure that they get consequences. And that those who are vulnerable are kept safe." (Viola, line 10)

It appears that this domination of power is not experienced only during the physical act of rape, but years after. Emerging through the transcripts was evidence of the long-term power that

the rapist holds over them in life beyond rape. All participants expressed that reclaiming the residual power that rapists hold over them was deeply challenging and significantly interrupted their healing process. Examples of this were explicitly mentioned in relation to anniversaries of their attack, intrusive thoughts, and fixation on the trauma.

"So I just have a hard time giving power to this guy who is not in my life. Like, he's probably not thinking about me! Why would I give power to him, when I could work hard on creating my own joy and happiness." (Helena, line 10)

The inner dialogue

As explored in detail during Part 1 of the findings, participants expressed different amounts of control or power that they had over listening to or ignoring their inner dialogue. The analysis reveals how this power relates to the experience of being raped. Mariana expresses that ignoring the inner voice telling her to put her needs first may have contributed to her being raped. This iterates the subtheme of 'Self-Esteem'.

"And my perception of the rape was just that I didn't want to put what was good for me before what was good for the rapist. And it was easier for me to just kind of... not listen to that voice. Just to say, "it's fine... just got with it"." (Mariana, line 6)

Yet through the analysis it is evidenced that power over the inner dialogue does not protect individuals from enduring such an experience.

"- I've never thought of this as inner dialogue before... even while I was being assaulted, I remember thinking in my head, "I am being sexually assaulted right now". That sentence went through my head." (Helena, line 3)

In relation to inner dialogue, societal influences, and the rapist, a lack of power was identified in all transcripts to be disturbing and left the participants with a sense of helplessness. Power was perceived by participants to be experienced differently across genders. The themes of human's freedom and responsibility were expressed to be associated with the human capacity of choice. A significant finding which continues to be explored within following sections is the implications of having power or control over ones inner dialogue.

Theme 3: from The Social Dimension: "Hell is Stigma"

The foundations of the Social Dimension are concerned with the relationship to others, the *Mitwelt* (Binswanger, 1963) and meaning in life is considered to be found through shared values with others (van Deurzen, 2010).

When applying the heuristic model of The Four Worlds with focus on the Social Dimension it became clear that the experience of rape has had - and continues to have - a powerful impact on each participant's interpersonal relationships. Social stigmatic attitudes towards the experience of rape were revealed to be the biggest contributor to this impact, creating an experience of distance and isolation. This theme has been termed "Hell is Stigma", playing on the popular quote of Jean-Paul Sartre's in his play "No Exit" during which the protagonist concludes that, "Hell is other people!" (1963, p.47). This reference is an observation that the gaze of other people; the judgements of other people, perpetuate the experience of 'hell'.

The inevitability of living in a world of others and never truly being able to escape their influence is a significant feature of this concept. In a life after rape for the participants in this study, the analysis reveals that this inescapable gaze is shrouded with stigma and assumptions. The inner dialogue plays a complex role, internalising the stigmas of others in the form of self-stigma and shame, whilst negotiating the terms of healing in the form of sharing one's experience with others. Four related subthemes were identified and are explored below to expand the insights into their

lived experience. The subthemes are: “Therapy”, “Myths & Stigmas”, “Intimacy & Isolation”, and “A Labelled Life”.

Subtheme 1: “Therapy”

Many participants brought the topic of therapy into the interview. Therapy was not mentioned in the interview questions, however, having undergone at least 12 sessions of therapeutic support following their experience of rape was an inclusion criterion for participation. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), therapy relates to the social dimension’s outlet of communication. The findings are uncomplicated: there was a resounding emphasis on the value each participant found in having access to therapy following their experience of rape.

As identified throughout the analysis of all eight transcripts, a personal responsibility for making sense of their situation and “working on” their inner dialogue was considered necessary for healing. Furthermore, the findings suggest that this process was supported by therapy.

> *“Over time though, I think again with therapy - I probably wouldn't have gotten here without it – I’ve worked really hard to re-structured those thoughts and those conversations with myself about - even if this is something that's happened to me multiple times like - some people just get dealt a shit hand, excuse my language, but that doesn't need to mean that it's anything about me that's causing that. So that's definitely something that I've been working on.”*
>
> *(Adriana, line 2)*

Therapy was expressed by participants as a means of gaining new perspectives on their given situations. The ability to transcend previously understood meanings of their experience through their inner dialogues appears to have enabled a realization that their trauma was not implicit of their identity.

"And it helped talking to my therapist, because she told me "instead of wearing that hat 'survivor' which seems pretty permanent, you can change it into a verb, "that you survived" so it's something you went through; it's not your identity." (Octavia, line 4)

The analysis further revealed what elements of therapy facilitated healing. The act of sharing one's story was unanimously expressed as important, and the therapeutic space became a place to connect more deeply with the self. This was found to be conducive to individual and group therapy.

"So, joined an art therapy group recently. And it has just been the greatest thing for my self-healing. And those girls are now some of my best friends. And that group not only taught me about how I can talk about my own trauma and relate to others, but it really made me get a sense of self and the ability to label and title what I'm really feeling on my own. Where I didn't really have to rely on other people as a crutch anymore. So listening to other people and finding ... making sense of other people's stories really helped me make sense of my own." (Helena, Line 2)

"But what I've learned in therapy and groups and what not is to be able to give yourself grace. So, I'm trying to be kinder to myself." (Helena, line 7)

Yet in spite of a unanimously expressed appreciation for therapy, Silvia, for example, revealed that regardless of the job title she remained concerned that therapists may judge her. This analysis may provide a deeper understanding of the barriers which may prevent survivors of rape and sexual assault from engaging as deeply as they would like to in the therapy process. Furthermore, this may further illuminate the intrusive level of internalized shame and stigmas.

Silvia expresses that these “emotional barriers” kept her silenced, preventing her being able to share the full truth of her story. Furthermore, she identified the exhausting nature of living behind a mask.

“But for myself, I think I've had a lot of metal exhaustion, a lot of emotional exhaustion from this the past two years. And, I think that it's definite my mental health has declined since that night quite a bit. And I've seen therapists, but I've never met a therapist which I feel comfortable with.

But I'm supposed to be hearing back from a sexual assault advocate later this week.

But I haven't really had the chance to tell a professional what truly happened to me. And I think that's because I've just had all these emotional barriers to get past and get past. And now I think I could go in and tell someone everything.” (Silvia, line 6)

This study has also uncovered flaws in the current therapeutic systems. Participants disclosed that their “textbook” symptoms of trauma caused by rape were not adequately supported by mental health professionals. This was especially relevant in the cases of Viola and Adriana. Each based in different geographical locations, appropriate referrals and diagnoses were required before mental health services were made accessible to participants.

“I only recently got this diagnosis in the past year of PTSD, and I guess I've been processing the nature of having a mental illness like that. And it having to be really severe before I had to get diagnosed. I was diagnosed after I was voluntarily hospitalised. And it was just like really intense depression.

Looking back it was textbook PTSD. And the fact that it was just one thing on top of another, um, and just going unchecked for so long.

I had a lot of anger about that, in terms of therapists and other professionals. They didn't catch that in time before it had become so bad... basically until it had become chronic." (Viola, line 2)

A unanimous understanding emerged from the analysis that therapeutic support for these survivors of rape can have a deeply beneficial impact on their healing process. Exploration of the inner dialogue as a resource for self-care and healing is revealed to directly correlate with an increase in the participant's capacity to transform their lived experiences and find meaning in their suffering. Yet an awareness that therapists are not exempt from being perceived as possible sources of judgement or disappointment is suggested. This research project also transparently reflects that at least two participants expressed feeling let down by the current systems in regard to support provided for sexual assault survivors.

Subtheme 2: "Myths & Stigma"

The subtheme of myths and stigma emerged in relation to two phenomena during the analysis process: assumptions surrounding rape and assumptions surrounding inner dialogue. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), myths and stigma relate to the social dimension's sense of meaning through shared values and connection to others. It is surrounding stigma that these shared values can be incredibly harmful.

Myths and Stigma of Rape

All eight participants expressed an awareness of rape myths and stereotypical understandings surrounding the experience of rape. The analysis revealed the powerful impact that these myths and stigmatic assumptions have on their life beyond rape, and the damaging impact they have on their healing process. Myths and assumptions were identified to come from close friends, family, and people in authority such as law enforcement. These were often in the form of statements, questions, and accusations. A brief non-exhaustive list presenting examples of rape myths and stigmatic assumptions identified within this research is hereby presented:

1. You can't be raped by someone you're in a relationship with
2. If you are dressed up nicely this is an invitation for sex
3. If you chose to go into their home it doesn't count as rape
4. If you are drunk this is an invitation for sex
5. If the rape is not violent and graphic, it is not rape
6. If you have been raped you are damaged goods
7. Jokes and memes about sexual exploitation aren't harmful if they're said in a humorous way
8. The responsibility not to be raped lies with the victim not the perpetrator

The experience of rape is defined and most commonly described as a physical experience. The definitions (see: Literature Review) speak of physical penetration by physical body parts. Yet the findings of this study suggest that rape is far more than a physical experience, and furthermore that the participants struggle to validate their experience due to myths of what a rape 'should' be like, and comparisons with other's experiences.

"Yeah... I feel like I don't have the right - compared to other people who have had really traumatic experience with it... " (Ely, line 91)

These were found not only to invalidate the participant's traumatic experience, but often to indicate a shameful and blameful sense of responsibility for their experience. Often this put the participants in a position of feeling expected to explain their situation. An example of this is shared in this excerpt from Ely.

"Because like, I had - even when I told my cousin about it and I told her I was drunk I don't really have much memory of it - and she asked me if I did it to piss off my boyfriend.

And I was like, oh well no... like... that's not what happened.

Because people – unless there's like some sort of... unless it literally happened where you were blindfolded and tied up, people think - like some people think it just isn't the same.

Like if someone came forward to and said, "my boyfriend raped me" then some people would think "well that can't happen". There's all that sort of myths and stuff about it all." (Ely, line 88)

All eight participants expressed on numerous occasions that blame and accusation was perpetually given to the victim without mention or regard for the perpetrator. On multiple occasions, each participant disclosed their trauma to someone who responded without understanding and from a place of absolute naivety. Silvia highlights how many people are ready to confidently express their opinion about an experience which they are completely unknowledgeable, and how harmful this can be surrounding the experience of rape.

"And I've stopped listening to the people that said, "you screwed up. You should have come forward sooner." Or, "you shouldn't have gotten yourself in that situation. Why didn't you just say no. Blah blah blah". They just don't understand.

Like you're there - until you know what it's like, you'll never be able to have an opinion on how that situation could go." (Silvia, line 19)

All participants described the experience of having their truth questioned by others, many of whom were close friends or family members. This oftentimes occurred at a moment when the participant most needed support, validation, and nurturing after their trauma.

"And I tried to go to her [my mother] for advice… I didn't want to tell her that I'd had sex with him at first, but eventually it became easier to tell her I did.

But she insinuated that… well basically that I'm a whore really.

And when I told her eventually that what happened was sexual assault, she still didn't believe me." (Viola, line 6)

The analysis also illuminates the immense presence of sexually exploitative content shared nonchalantly within societies today, and how this added to the participant's challenges of living beyond rape.

"I think I've been thinking a lot about the misconceptions of rape culture. And like whenever people make jokes with sexual innuendos within them, or whenever they show a funny video or funny pictures or memes that have undertones of sexual exploitation or objectification in a negative way. I think, as a survivor, I sometimes don't know how to respond." (Hermia, line 8)

All eight participants highlighted their desire for safe places to be created where victims would be believed instead of blamed. Some found meaning in their suffering through taking personal responsibility for creating such places themselves. Even through their suffering the participants fought to find meaning in their quest to make the world a more bearable place for future survivors.

"So I really feel that this is one of my purposes; one of my missions in life to be able to provide that support and provide avenues for people to share themselves and feel like they are really genuinely believed for what happened. And I feel like I almost wouldn't be living my true self, or my true potential, if I wasn't able to do that." (Hermia, line 7)

"[Crying] It's so tough. It's not fair... to feel this way. -but if I can help change the view and the stigma against people who've gone through this, and have come forward later, or have come forward in general, I

hope that's something that I can give back. So that's important to me." (Silvia, line 24)

Speaking about their experience of rape was identified as fundamental to the healing process, yet social attitudes and stigmas prevented the participants from being able to do so safely.

"And just the fact that, like you see the impact of Me Too movement - although they're not helping people in the way that they used to which is a shame. But people encouraging each other to speak out, to know that they're not alone, and that you do have a voice. I guess that those kind of activists. People that are more inclined to believe you even in the absence of evidence – like, credible evidence – you know like feminists." (Viola, line 10)

Attention was drawn by all participants to the relationship between belief and the ability to provide evidence. Furthermore, it was iterated that by the very nature of the experience of rape this 'evidence' is oftentimes impossible. Not only does this have social implications, but significant legal implications too.

"And the law is that it has to be - what is it like - proven guilty beyond unreasonable doubt. Like, it has to be 100% sure that the person did it. Which, the problem with rape is that it's generally like two people – alone. (dismayed short laugh)

Like there's no witnesses. There's not – unless you're; unless there's dramatic force, which normally there's not. There's no like evidence. So, there's no way to ever prove anything. Which… (sigh)" (Ely, line 79)

This societal lack of understanding and empathy towards individuals who have experienced rape was identified through all eight transcripts as a reason that survivors stay silent. Ely feels strongly that speaking about one's experience is a powerful part of the healing process.

"Even if you've got good family support, or friends, or whatever - if they haven't been through it... they never quite understand.

"But then people are too scared to talk about it. And then it's more and more thoughts in your head going round." (Ely, line 36)

This casts light onto a tangible circle of silence which exists within society and overtly damages the healing process of people who have experienced rape. It appears that those who have not experienced rape are comfortable in their misconception and judgements around it, leaving those who have experienced rape uncomfortable in their silence and inability to share and heal.

"Like I said about 'I want to get something out of it' and the main thing is that: I want people to be able to talk about it." (Ely, line 36)

"If you cut out the victim blaming, there's so much room to be proactive and to grow from your experience." (Silvia, line 19)

This subtheme offers insight into the tensions of living in a social world after rape and the damage which a lack of understanding and empathy can have on those trying to live beyond the experience. Stigmas and social stigmas, victim blaming, and rape myths were identified as significant barriers towards participants seeking therapeutic and social support. Due to these conditions the inner dialogue appears to become introverted; trapped as it attempts to make sense of the suffering in isolation. Some participants found meaning in trying to cultivate a safe space in society for survivors where these social judgements and attitudes were not present. Even whilst fighting their own personal battles, the participants expressed a passionate desire to wage war on the stigma that continually damaged their fellow survivors.

Stigma of Inner Dialogue

Despite the vivid emergence of understandings about the multiplicity of inner dialogue which this research provides, all eight transcripts highlighted a perceived sense of stigma

surrounding this. Participants courageously shared their experiences of inner voices yet often felt the need to offer an explanation.

Ely: "Like I normally think before I speak. So normally I say everything in my head and then I say it out loud, generally. Unless it's like a really quick conversation.

Yeah, I don't really know like - I guess that's the basic of it."

Researcher: "Okay yeah. So the basic idea is that it's your voice in your head."

Ely: "Yeah… without sounding crazy!" (Ely, lines 3-4)

A number of implicit and subtle comments within the transcripts were identified to have connotations with a perception that it was pathological or shameful to "speak to oneself".

"I'm definitely someone who talks .... I don't want to say talks to themselves.... but my mind is definitely constantly running in words." (Adriana, line 1)

It became increasingly apparent that despite the phenomenon being innately experienced by each participant, not only are the qualities, characteristics, functions and reasons for inner dialogue not common knowledge, but are rarely discussed in social circles.

"I've never really thought about that before, like how I've been having that conversation with myself. How I've been treating myself. But it's definitely shifted, since I have come out with it [reported my rape]." (Silvia, line 1)

Stigma was revealed by the analysis to exist in relation to both inner dialogue and rape, and the existence and development of stigmas was identified as a social construct which has the potential of being internalized into the participant's inner dialogue. This was found to be perpetuated by numerous members of the population, including friends, family members, the

authorities, and the participants themselves. The existence of myths and stigmas were found to directly correlate with barriers and shame surrounding the phenomena on a personal and social level, actively preventing open discussion and in turn impeding the healing process for the participants.

Subtheme 3: "Intimacy & Isolation"

The experience of rape significantly shifted the participants' desire and ability to have contact with other people in the same way as before their rape. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), intimacy relates to the social dimension's polarity between belonging and isolation.

The experience of isolation does not refer to a physical distance here, but rather an experienced relational distance, manifesting as *not being understood* and a *diminished ability to trust others*. Experiencing rape was found to directly correlate with a struggle to both form and maintain relationships with others.

Intimacy

A resounding understanding gained by the findings is that each participant's innate ability to trust others was destroyed by their experience of rape. This has had different impacts on each of their lives. At times, participants were to sit-with or hide their fear and engage socially, while at others they were unable to. All eight participants expressed that years after their experience of rape, their social lives are navigated through a lens of suspicion and fear. The transcripts revealed that despite this fear being identified and acknowledged by participants, there was a unanimous belief that this change was irreversible. Each disclosed that they felt it impossible to return to having the same level of social trust that they experienced before their rape.

The findings also indicated how and why this sense of intimacy between self and others is tarnished by rape. It appears that several factors are involved such as: the physical violation of being raped, not being believed, or understood by others, having a changed sense of identity which

is no longer enjoyed by others, and becoming more inclined to self-question and retreat to the safety of the private self.

> *"Basically the day that I was raped and then since, my social life has just been dropping and then... I don't really have any social connections anymore. It's difficult for me to trust people. I assume the worst of everybody all the time. Again, that kind of fear based thing. And there are a lot of reasons, like, people didn't believe me and people just didn't want to deal with having a rape victim for a friend." (Adriana, line 5)*

It appears that the aforementioned changed sense of self was not only experienced by the individual but by others in their life. Unable or unwilling to sit with their friend's trauma, Adriana shared how her rape impacted her existing relationships. Helena shares her struggle with forming new relationships.

> *"But when it comes to embarking on... - it happened 2 years ago, which is relatively recent- um, when it comes to establishing new relationships of any sort that involve trust... I find that I get a lot more in my head and self-conscious than I did before. And I can only attribute that to what I went through." (Helena, line 4)*

The findings also suggest that life beyond rape is a life of vulnerability and secret keeping. The social world was no longer the safe place that it previously had been for the participants, and there is a need not only to hide one's story, but to hide the emotions which lie beneath the surface. Silvia's social world changed, and as she reflected on her transformation, she expresses how life is now taken more seriously than before.

> *"But in social situations with friends and family... I feel like I have a dirty little secret. And only my closest girlfriends know. And my parents just found out everything. And so I really closed off in social situations. I always feel super*

vulnerable. I always feel like I could break at any moment. I feel like I take things a lot more seriously." (Silvia, line 13)

In contrast, it was also revealed that a sense of intimacy to *certain* others was *heightened* by the experience of rape, in regard to other victims of abuse. The transcripts revealed that all eight participants experienced a paradox of deeply feeling the pain of others in a way that they hadn't before, leading to a deeper sense of connection with fellow abuse survivors.

"I think it's allowed me to develop more empathy and compassion for others who struggle with mental health or with other disorders like anxiety and depression and things. Because I think this experience has really opened my eyes to what those experiences feel like. Also really what it means to feel alone in the moment, but also how much support really does give you hope." (Hermia, line 5)

This enhanced sense of empathy for others was expressed as a source of deeper meaning, further explored below in the 'Inner Advocate' subtheme.

"- There's so much more meaning behind it now. Like now if there's a story about a girl being raped, I just think so much more about it. And then I think that I feel like - I feel like I feel her or his pain. I feel like it comes back again. It's that thing of knowing - well, it's all different but - more of an idea of what they're going through than you would do if you hadn't experienced anything similar.

And I think that's why I want to try and - once I've sort of more got out this phase of sort of me coping with it myself - then I want to help other people." (Ely, lines 73-74)

This points to the complexity of human connection. A news story of a stranger can awaken the inner dialogue of an individual, triggering real memories from the past and real pain in the moment. On one hand Ely finds meaning in this heightened attunement with the other and has

found a new purpose in life focused on helping others. On the other hand Ely is burdened with an ongoing, unwanted, indeterminately long journey of healing: "once I've got out this phase..."(Ely, line 74) before she is able to do so.

Romantic Relationships

A number of participants disclosed being involved in romantic relationships at the time of the interview, some of which had developed prior to their experience of rape, some of which had developed since. Each participant expressed a change across all dimensions (personal, physical, social and spiritual) when considering their desire and ability to engage in romantic relations, and for all participants this was a problematic and unwelcome change. Three of the participants disclosed a significantly diminished sex drive. Two of the participants disclosed an overactive sex drive or desire to be considered sexual by others.

> *"But that has affected my relationship a lot. And it took me a year to tell my partner what happened to me. And for him to process it. And obviously it's really hard, because he loves me and he wants to make everything better. And I really do think that it's affected how we are together... not only emotionally, but like physically too. Like it's sometimes hard for me to "me in the mood" to do anything, and it's.... I don't like feeling pressured, because of that night." (Silvia, line 6)*

The analysis reveals a deeper understanding of how rape not only impacts the participants in the moment, it impacts those in their lives during and beyond the experience. Establishing new bonds and relationships with potential romantic partners was found to have become layered with an awareness of social stigmas that may be held by the other, and self-stigmas that may be sitting within.

"You start to wonder if everybody sees you that way and does everybody that I come into contact with somehow know that I'm damaged or whatever. That was the kind of lingering feeling that stuck with me. Especially about men in particular. Especially about men in any kind of romantic context.

I am married now, he's upstairs. But it was difficult for me to trust him too." (Adriana, line 10)

Isolation

The analysis revealed that for all eight participants the aftermath of rape can be a scary and isolating experience. A felt sense of otherness was expressed to have developed, existentially isolating the participants from the rest of humanity. The analysis reveals that this may develop due to implicitly and explicitly not being or feeling believed by others. The importance of feeling believed was highlighted in all eight transcripts.

Adriana offers an example of the tangible real-life dangers that can come from living in a society which questions or disbelieves survivors' stories. Her perpetrators used this knowledge as motive and confidence for choosing to rape her.

"And then the other two men were men that knew I'd reported and that everyone had thought that I was a liar. And, that's why they raped me. One of them told me that was why. He said, "nobodys going to believe you". And I think that's one of the things that really, that sticks with me still. As much as the trauma of those two assaults don't stick to me in the same, like, I'm not scared of those men. But it makes me, it changes the way I see everybody. Because they were both people that I would never have had any idea that they would do anything like that to me." (Adriana, line 10)

Six out of the eight participants involved in this study disclosed having experienced multiple sexual assaults and rapes. It continued to emerge through the analysis of all eight transcripts that the shattering of beliefs and trust in the world, and the ongoing implications of life beyond rape, can be more traumatic than the rape itself.

"Because I think that one of the scariest things about going through that kind of trauma is when you feel super alone.

And the fact is, that you're not.

And I think it's very important that everybody has a support group, or a support system, that can help you through.

Because feeling alone is the worst part." (Helena, line 9)

All eight participants highlight that not only is the experience of being raped scary, so is the sense of isolation in life after rape. In Helena's experience, this sense of isolation and feeling alone is one of the "scariest things" about experiencing sexual trauma. Ely indicates how this sense of isolation may develop, such as due to survivors of rape not sharing their experience. This leads to unanswered questions continually present and trapped within the individual's inner dialogue.

Ely: "I guess, no one shares their experience that much. So there's a lot of questions in your own head. Especially if you don't speak about it."

Researcher: "And you feel that speaking about it has helped?"

Ely: "Yeah speaking out about it has definitely helped." (Ely, lines 34-35)

Attention is drawn by participant's verbatim to how fundamental it is for survivors to be made aware that they are not alone and to be given the space to share their experience with others. There is a paradoxical irony in this observation that so many people experience this form of suffering, yet this shared experience creates a valuable connection between them.

"Yeah, it's scary.

And I think that when you feel that way you can think that you're the only one that feels that way.

And I think it's important to remember - which you're helping - is that there's a whole community of people who've gone through one or numerous traumatic experiences. but, that gives you a weird family, that I have found super empowering.

So I hope that other people do too!"

(Helena, line 13)

The impact of rape was identified to have a profound and long-lasting impact on many areas of the participant's relational worlds. One of the most painful elements of being raped was the sense of isolation that follows, both in the experience of not being believed and not being understood by others, and in their physical need to isolate themselves from others. The inner dialogue appears to play a central role in these experiences as participant's communicated within themselves to process their experience. Emotional and intimate relationships were damaged, as were the participant's ability to develop new ones. This was influenced by a new inability to trust others as a result of their trust being breached by the act of rape and the response of others towards their rape. Emphasis was expressed surrounding the importance of creating and maintaining respectful and open connections with others in regard to the healing process.

Subtheme 4: "A Labelled Life"

Emerging through the transcripts of all eight participants was a shared experience of living with certain labels following their experience of rape. Specific labels identified were "survivor" and "victim" and specific terminology such as "sexual assault" and "rape" were explored. While each participant spoke of these labels and used these terms, the analysis reveals that their implications and meanings are held differently for each participant. When considering this theme in relation to

The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), labels relate to the Social Dimension's tensions and polarities surrounding belonging and isolation.

For some participants, having these labels has become an important part of their personal identity. The label of survivor has both individual and social meaning for some participants, bringing them closer to themselves and to others who have shared their experiences.

> *"I think it definitely does. I kind of see this one in a more positive way. I've really been identifying heavily, especially after my diagnosis, with this idea of being a survivor and being someone who is still standing despite going through a lot." (Viola, line 12)*

> *"I did like a charity event where on social media I stated that I was a rape victim survivor. Which, that was very therapeutic. Like I even had a few people message me saying like, "ahh something happened to me and I've never been able to, like, tell anyone" (Ely, line 35)*

Yet the lived experience of a labelled world is not always comfortable. Some participants expressed struggling with what these labels mean to them, and how the gaze of others influences their own self-perception.

> *"I struggled with labelling myself - the word: survivor; abuse and trauma; even the word rape, or sexual assault. I struggle with having that attached to me." (Octavia, line 4)*

> *"And I look at myself in a different way too, because it's hard not to see yourself through the lens of how everyone else sees you." (Adriana, line 5)*

Not only did the participants not choose to be raped, they expressed not having the choice over how others label their experience and the assumptions and meanings ascribed to it. This was relevant in relation to the terms: survivor, victim, and rape.

"Yeah and it's just a word that's not said much. If someone says it, your brain's like…. BOOM" (Ely, line 87)

As evidenced by most transcripts, the findings suggest that the participants in this study live in a world where they do not feel worthy of being able to use the word rape. This is exemplified by Ely who stated, "I feel like I don't have the right" (Ely, line 91).

"But the ones in the news are obviously the more – not more serious ones – but more violent ones. So I feel like people think of that… They think we've been drugged and kidnapped and held in a basement or something. Normally it's the bigger stories that are reported and people know about, and no one talks about the little ones – little's not the right word again but... no one talks about the other ones. " (Ely, line 88)

The analysis revealed that words are not inherently meaningful but rather may take on the meaning which an individual or society ascribes to it. When the meaning of words and labels is not negotiated by the participant in relation to their meaning system and identity, the labels can exist in a damaging way within their inner dialogue and lived experiences. Certain labels emerged to be especially affiliated with people who have experience rape, such as "survivor" and "victim" and "rape". It appears that due to the misinformed and stigmatized understandings surrounding these words – especially the word rape – the participants expressed finding it challenging to identify and validate their experience as part of their own reality. By not being able to validate their experience, their healing process was obstructed, and their identity became confused.

Theme 4: from The Spiritual Dimension: "Thus Spoke The Survivors"

The foundations of the Spiritual Dimension are concerned with the relationship to the meta-world, the *Uberwelt* (van Deurzen, 2010) and meaning in life is considered to be found through a sense of purpose. When applying the heuristic model of The Four Worlds with focus on

the Spiritual Dimension, each participant's worldviews were revealed to have been deeply altered by their experience of rape. Their previously held givens were shattered (Hoffman et al. 2013), and a window to the shadow side of life was swung open (Bolea, 2018). The inner dialogue enabled a philosophical interaction within the depth of their private selves. Once "innocent" (Mariana, line 12), "care-free" (Ely, line 27) individuals were exposed to a new reality where justice is mythical.

This theme has been termed "Thus Spoke the Survivors", inspired by Nietzche's popular book title "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" (1885). In "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" Nietzsche proposes that human values are created by humans rather than a God, nature, or a deeper reality. A central theme of this book is synonymic with a central theme that emerged through the analysis: 'the herd'. The herd in this context refers to a vast majority of society holding a common mentality, often in relation to assumptions and beliefs which have experiential implications for humanity. The inner dialogue for the participants in this study played a central role in re-evaluating the social 'herd's' beliefs. The participants found themselves newly responsible for questioning the attitudes and actions of others and subsequently breaking away from it by connecting with their unique authentic meanings. Four related subthemes were identified and are explored below. The subthemes are: "Inner Advocate", "The Injustice System", "Religion", and "New Depths of Evil".

Subtheme 1: "Inner Advocate"

A unanimous theme which emerged through the analysis was that each participant found meaning in advocating for other survivors; in giving others a voice. All eight participants referred to wanting to "make the world a better place". All identified several societal limitations related to phenomena such as rape, mental health, labels and myths, sex, and virginity. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), advocacy relates to the spiritual dimension's sense of meaning, finding a sense of purpose in the world. Through their own challenges it appears that the participants became determined to make changes, and each participant had a unique passion and focus of how they would like to do so. A non-exhaustive list of the changes that participants expressed feeling passionate to create is as follows:

1. Creative art and media projects raising awareness and understanding through non-verbal and universally relatable communication
2. Changing social attitudes to be more accommodating for people of all genders to be able to express their emotions
3. Changing social attitudes around victim-blaming, creating a non-judgmental and empathic society
4. Raising awareness and connecting survivors of rape to prevent them from feeling afraid and alone
5. Changing education policy to include more realistic, protective, and informed teaching on sex education

"And I want to do more. I want to help people around the world now. It woke up like an advocate in me." (Helena, line 5)

"And like you're doing, I have projects that I'm working on and it released this ... activist inside of me that I didn't know was there." (Helena, line 9)

Each participant believed it important to heal themselves before being ready and able to support others in their healing journey. Projecting themselves forwards in time via their inner dialogue (see: The Time Traveller) to a place where they will be well enough to support others was revealed to be a source of hope, providing a goal to focus on even during dark moments.

"Yeah. And I think that's why I want to try and - once I've sort of more got out this phase of sort of me coping with it myself - then I want to help other people. That's the plan for the future anyway." (Ely, line 76)

Octavia draws attention to the importance of supporting people of all genders. She suggests that the lack of space society offers males to express their feelings may be connected to the experience of rape. Providing such a space is an important aspect of her own advocacy work. Her views on a need for change, support groups, and increased awareness across genders was echoed by Viola and Hermia.

"I just think that the world would be a better place if it was seen as societally acceptable for males to talk about their feelings and work it out, and not have it demasculate them. Because I feel there's an issue with that. So I'm trying to look at it in terms of not just focusing on women - supporting women who have been through that - but trying to come from both angles."

(Octavia, line 9)

The education system is also revealed in this research to be a valuable resource for the prevention of rape and the support of rape victims. Helena proposed 'non-verbal' educational resources to overcome language barriers, such as via art and film. Hermia shared that she has transcended her trauma to a place of gratitude for the suffering she survived by validating and sharing her reality. She felt that this has contributed towards her passion for supporting others.

'I often find that now, kind of similar to you, I'm diving into advocacy work. And I really want to support survivors and I really want to focus on educational programming or survivor support. I've really found that I'm not sure if my passion for that would be as alive as it is today if I hadn't gone through that experience. So I almost feel grateful for the journey that I've been on, and I often say to myself, "I'm not sure if I would be my entire self if I hadn't gone through this, hadn't survived."" (Hermia, line 7)

The findings suggest that the advocacy journey is an individually meaningful one, and each participant shared different areas of interest. When exploring their area of interest, each participant expressed an emphasis that it was important for them to feel morally and ethically aligned with the setting they aspired to advocate in. An example of this is shared by Viola, who feels that certain organisations which claim to offer support tend to have grey areas which can be in the perpetrator's favour until they are proven guilty. She noticed that this setting would not suit her and indicates the damaging implication these settings can have on survivor's ability to come to

terms with their situation when they are unable to provide ‘‘evidence” of what they have been through.

‘‘This is the only crime where people feel okay like more than willing to empathise with the perpetrator and while do nothing for the victims and survivors. And that makes me really angry.

And I want to do something to help and advocate for rape and sexual assault survivors. To like give back or something. But I don’t know if I could do that in a setting where there’s this ‘innocent until proven guilty’ situation.” (Viola, line 10)

The opportunities for advocacy and finding meaning in life beyond rape through supportive contributions are revealed through the analysis to be available in different forms and across the globe. The participants expressed that taking part in this research project felt like a meaningful endeavour and shared their gratitude towards this project for providing an opportunity for them to contribute towards the support of their fellow survivors. For example, Silvia suggests how these small contributions are steps towards making the world a better place.

“I want to make the world a better place and I feel that this is one step towards making it a better place. So thank you. That's important to me, that's my number one priority. To stop it happening to others. I reported it because I don't want to this happen to any other girls, to anybody.” (Silvia, line 24)

Each participant had a unique experience of rape, and similarly have found unique ways to find meaning in their experience. One of the unanimously found sources of meanings has been through their desire to support others who have experienced similar experiences. The analysis reveals how each participant re-evaluated the social ‘herd’ understandings about different

elements of the healing journey and began to stand against social narratives and activities which they identified as harmful to survivors of rape and sexual assault.

Subtheme 2: "The Injustice System"

Despite no mention of the justice system within the interview questions, all eight participants referred to the police and law enforcement in their interviews. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), the justice system theme relates to the spiritual dimension's tensions between purpose and futility. The participants expressed an awareness of the purpose which the justice system is supposed to have, yet a unanimous sense of futility was expressed about the reality of the justice system's actual support and prevention pertaining to the crime of rape.

Despite having had a positive experience of reporting her perpetrator, Silvia expressed that she is unable to trust the individuals involved in the justice system.

> *"I can count on one hand the people that I trust in law enforcement. And that was different before the night [of the rape]" (Silvia, line 12)*

Many participants expressed that reporting their assault was challenging. The analysis reveals that many factors contribute to this challenge, such as a concern that the police officers would not respond in the way that they needed them to or that their stories would not be believed. This appeared to be exceptionally present in cases where the perpetrator was in a position of power. Silvia's case provides a vivid example of this due to the fact that it was police officer that raped her.

> *"Because that's been the biggest problem coming forward, and telling my truth.*

Because it was a police officer. The officers that I am working with on my case, I was fearful that they'd feel the same way. Like, "you shouldn't have gone in. Why didn't you come forward sooner?"

But not one of them said that." (Silvia, line 19)

In many cases, this concern about reporting was proved correct when they did choose to. An excerpt from Ely's transcript reveals how this sensitive topic was not handled appropriately within the police service. Furthermore, she highlights that this may be due to a lack of understanding, knowledge, or training surrounding how best to respond to rape survivors.

"It's the whole thing of… because it's still not really spoken about. Like, it's such a taboo subject… even police officers who specifically work in sexual assault still aren't …still don't really act the best. Like, they just don't know what to do." (Ely, line 79)

As these interviews took place with women across the globe, the implication of these findings is that there is an international issue with how those in authority understand and respond to rape. Viola draws attention to how rape and sexual assault is a unique crime in that it is not uncommon for society and those in positions of power to have an empathetic alignment with the perpetrator instead of the victim.

"And it was funny because at a panel about consent that I attended there was a police officer and the district attorney, and they both insinuated, "these are just mistakes. People make mistakes. They just need to know that it was a mistake and that's that."

And it was just so funny seeing that people have to deal with this on a constant basis… actually being okay to say that "these were just mistakes and you just have to deal with that it's fine"

And you wouldn't see this with any other crime. You wouldn't have someone murder someone and the police say, "yeah it was just a mistake"."

(Viola, line 10)

All eight participants expressed feeling forced to internally grapple with the paradox of society encouraging them to report their experience, yet their awareness of how damaging the process of reporting can be.

"…and I kept having an inner dialogue saying "was that rape, was that rape, was that rape?" (Octavia, line 1)

"- it's two years of torture for nothing. And I wouldn't want to put that on anyone else. But then, there's obviously a massive problem with people not reporting things.

"There's no win either way really, is there – that's the problem." (Ely, line 82)

In some cases, it became apparent that how the reporting was handled by the police was an additional contributing factor to the long-term trauma experienced following the rape.

This was further demonstrated by Octavia's transcript, who shared her lived experience of police officers perpetuating stereotypes and exposing her to an inquisition when she was at her most vulnerable. As she attempted to report to law enforcement that she had been raped, the experience of reporting was damaging in itself and became a source of self-doubt which paved the unsteady ground from which she attempted to move forward.

"And he was trying to give me all these scenarios - and then he said, "so there's this thing called implied consent, do you know about it?"

And I was like, "no...", so I was like, Googling it there. It just made me feel a lot of self-doubt about what was happening. Because I had not told anyone aside from my therapist and some really close friends. And these were the two first males that were hearing this. And they were police officers. And then he was saying, "rape is usually with violence by someone who's aggressive"

And I was just starting to say things like, "my understanding from what I'd learned was that it's not always violent, it's oftentimes someone close to you that you know."

And he was like, "no that's not the case"" (Octavia, line 7)

The legal process which was started with a respect to the system ended up providing a lost sense of hope for Octavia, Ely and other participants.

[Referring to the low rate of prosecution]

"It's frustrating. But I think… unfortunately it's one of those sort of facts of life. It's just a shitty thing. And that's just how it is.

And I think that's why you really need erm… I think that's why people need better ways of (pause) getting over it."" (Ely, line 80)

Having come face to face with 'wrong' and through the actions of the justice system - a system much like the spiritual dimension: preoccupied with connection, values, and beliefs - Ely has become more confused about doing what is 'right' or knowing what she would recommend to others in a similar situation.

"Hmm It's very iffy. It's not really black and white whether you should or shouldn't't. But I don't really know where I stand on it. " (Ely, line 82)

While one participant out of the eight participants expressed having had a positive experience when reporting their rape and subsequently found that this was beneficial to their healing process, despite not being explicitly elicited by the interview questions the downfalls of the justice system and law enforcement teams surfaced unanimously across the transcripts.

Subtheme 3: "Religion"

With their innate capacity to find meaning (Frankl, 1985), evidence suggests that humans have looked towards religion since history began (Hume, 1973). While the interview questions did not explicitly mention religion, they did invite exploration around spirituality (see Methodology or Appendix). As suggested by trauma literature (Greening, 1990), traumatic experiences can shatter previously held ideals. The analysis demonstrates unanimously across participants that the experience of rape has had a transformative impact on their experiences of spirituality. When considering this theme in relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), religion relates to the spiritual dimension's world of faith and systems of belief.

In Mariana's case religion was pivotal in her healing process and provided her with a space to deeply explore and understand her experiences.

"- After high school I went to learn [my religion's] studies. And that was like, a lot of thinking throughout the day. Learning, and thinking, and contemplating. And then it all came up I think. And helped me deal with it."

(Mariana, line 24)

Yet the analysis revealed a correlation between being raped and having their belief in an organized religion transforming to a sense of betrayal. For some participants this was repaired over time, for other participants the damage was irreversible.

"In church they're preaching about like, how great this person is, and like how they can 'protect and love you'. Then I'm sitting there thinking like, "what a

good lot that was" because.... (Laughs shortly) well that hasn't worked has it!"

(Ely, line 46)

Each participant expressed a shift in their relationship with religion and spirituality. This shift appears to have manifested differently and uniquely for each participant and for each was a fluctuating process which they invested their time and emotional resources into. At times participants were drawn away from their religious beliefs. At other times they were drawn closer. Prior to her rape Ely enjoyed attending church, describing herself as "agnostic, 50/50" (Ely, line 47). Her experience of rape caused her to seek meaning in religion, yet she was unable to feel protected by a God who did not protect her from being raped.

"I mean I tried... it did actually make me try to look into faiths to kind of give me some sort of meaning in it. I know people obviously if they believe in a God that gives them comfort but... it wasn't really for me." (Ely, line 24)

The analysis revealed that family history of religion was a factor of the participant's own experience of religion, however, there was not a direct correlation between family history of religion and the participant's personal identification with it at the moment the interviews were conducted. The findings suggest that those from a religious upbringing initially navigated their spiritual world in line with the religion they were raised in. For example, those from a Jewish background navigated their spiritual world from a framework of Jewish beliefs. However, the experience of rape was found to directly correlate with five out of the eight participants actively choosing to renounce their religion.

The analysis also revealed specific narratives and beliefs surrounding sex, virginity, sexuality, and rape which are believed and promoted in religious communities. Viola shares how these narratives contributed to her sense of blame and the anger towards religion which grew within her as she reflected on the damage it caused her. Despite seeking a spiritual source of healing and meaning, Viola struggles to logically understand how this is possible due to her

experience of rape and feels that she will not be able to return to her previous faith in organized religion.

> *"So I definitely have a lot of anger I guess, at how religion was used to shame me. And that's playing a part into one of the reasons that I can't go back to it.*
>
> *But definitely to cope with this, and to stop it hurting and deal with it in a better way, I do want some sort of spirituality. But I don't know what that would look like. I guess how do you even make it make sense logically?" (Viola, line 6)*

While a transformation within their spiritual world was expressed by each participant, the analysis reveals that this shift was uniquely experienced. The inner dialogue played a central role in their evaluation of previously understood spiritual values and enabled the participants to identify what values were authentically theirs and which were promoted by religious or spiritual teachings. A tension lies between being able to believe in a God that is advertised as a healer and protector, when that very God did not protect and heal them during or after their experience of rape.

Subtheme 4: "New depths of Evil"

The tensions of good and evil lie at the heart of the Spiritual Dimension. Existence is understood by many existential philosophers to be infinitely complex with suffering an inevitable part of life. The analysis revealed that each participant experienced suffering at a deeper level than before their experience of rape and in their life beyond it. In relation to The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions (see Appendix), this theme relates to the spiritual dimension's tension and polarity concerning good an evil.

All eight participants expressed that their experiences of rape and sexual assault revealed a darkness about the world that they had not known previously. This darkness appeared to impact the private inner world of each participant.

"Like it was coming from an inside something... trying to like scream. But it wasn't coming out." (Mariana, line 17)

The findings of this project iterate that the experience of rape does not merely conjure a fear towards the individual rapist but casts a fearful understanding that one can never be certain of what another person is capable of. Secure personal philosophies based on an inherent trust for humanity were shattered and replaced with a haunting realization that potential danger is embodied by all living beings that might cross our paths.

"As much as the trauma of those two assaults don't stick to me in the same, like, I'm not scared of those men. But it makes me, it changes the way I see everybody. Because they [the second two rapists] were both people that I would never have had any idea that they would do anything like that to me. So I think it's - that's the thing that colours the way that I think about everybody else and the way that I think about the world. As much as I may not be afraid of a certain person, I don't know what they're capable of and so I don't trust my own instincts and I don't trust other people's judgements.

That's definitely what colours it more than anything, that kind of experience." (Adriana, line 10)

As the analysis explored the relationship between actively raping someone and the values of good and evil, attention is drawn to the role of choice. The participants grappled to comprehend why another human would use their free will to harm another in such a way.

Ely: "- I'd say it makes me question the meaning of life a lot more. Sort of what I do. And WHY?"

Researcher: "Like those big philosophical questions. Like why-"

Ely: [interjecting] "Yeah, why! Like obviously you've got the whole 'free will' and things like that. But what's the need of something bad happening, like that. I guess."(Ely, line 25)

The questions present within all eight of the participants' inner dialogues are not only focused on why people intentionally choose to rape others, but why it was them who were subjected to this experience?

"I feel like I have more of a victim mentality - and of course the other things in life that have happened have also contributed - but that idea of like, "why me?"; "I was a good person, he could've left me alone. He didn't have to do this." You know?" (Viola, line 4)

As the implications of these questions were explored within the interviews and analysis process, it was revealed that they may never be answered and that trying to answer them can itself be a source of suffering. An inner dialogical torture of unanswered questions. Also explored in the 'Power' subtheme, participants expressed an awareness that not only were the choices and actions of others out of their control, their inner dialogues often were too.

"So that bit I don't like.

And I can't really like...

I find it hard to pick and choose what I'm deep thinking about.

And I very much go on a tangent on a lot of things.

So like, I can start off thinking about my lunch, and end up thinking about the rape.

I have no idea where the connections are in between. But like, it will spiral in my head. From like a small thing to something really deep. And then I end up feeling really upset.

And then I'm like, "what on earth's happened in these like 5 minutes?!"" (Ely, line 57)

Clearly expressed by all eight participants in this study was the understanding that rape is not merely a physical violation of the body, but a violation of the personal, social, and philosophical world. All participants expressed that prior to their experience of rape they enjoyed contemplating the deep philosophical questions of life. Inner dialogue was enjoyable philosophical "daydreaming". Their rape altered this as dark realities of the world's dangers were unveiled. As understood through this research, rape appears to have carved an unwanted passageway within the private world. Now even at moments of peace, within minutes and without their consent, their internal dialogues slip down this new passage into the depths of their darkest memories. The world is no longer perceived as a safe place, and the potential for inflicting pain is shrouded in the guise of everyday people.

Discussion

Introduction

This research project set out to explore how inner dialogue is experienced by rape survivors. Semi structured interviews were conducted with eight women who had experienced rape within the past five years and Structured Existential Analysis (SEA) was used to analyse the material. Through the analysis, several themes emerged which have been presented in detail within the Findings section.

To enhance the investigation of inner dialogue as it is experienced by rape survivors, inspired by the two-part findings the discussion will also be presented in two parts specifically considering the features of inner dialogue and the role inner dialogue plays in each participant's life beyond rape.

This section will draw on existing research as introduced in the literature review and new relevant literature for a deeper evaluation to critically discuss the strengths and limitations of the method and findings. Implications for how this research may contribute to professional fields will be discussed, offering multi-disciplinary recommendations.

The new knowledge is acknowledged as one of many possible due to the inevitable subjectivity of meaning as experienced through the researcher's interpretation of the participant's experience; the double hermeneutic (Serning, 2011). This discussion is one of many possible and based on my training I have chosen to discuss the findings through a pluralistic-existential lens (Cooper & Dryden, 2015). To clarify, I will draw on existential philosophies and multiple relevant approaches to psychology. However, I acknowledge that many other approaches may valuably illuminate and interpret the findings of this research.

Methodological Discussion

The strengths and limitations of the current study will hereby be discussed, with reference to the reflective, creative, and structured analytic processes which enabled this this research to develop and provide valid and reliable contributions to the field.

A preliminary literature review revealed limited research into how inner dialogue is experienced by rape survivors, with even less research providing a lived-experience perspective (Petitmengin & Lachaux, 2013; Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014). Recent literature overviews continue to highlight the importance and implications that qualitative investigation could bring to this field of psychology (Geurts, 2018). It was therefore evaluated (see: Methodology) that an existential-phenomenological research design would be most appropriate to provide an original, credible and informative account of the area of study. The method of Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) was therefore chosen as most suitable, providing the structure and validity required for a doctoral thesis.

SEA has been used in a comparatively smaller quantity of research publications than other phenomenological approaches such as IPA (Smith, 2001), which may be considered a limitation to this methodology. To overcome this potential limitation, deep immersion into existential-phenomenological research methodologies such as that of Husserl (1977), Giorgi (2009), Heidegger (1962), Moustakas (1994), and Gadamer (2008) was undertaken, enabling me to conduct this phenomenological research in an informed and empirical way. Evidence to support the efficacy of this is demonstrated in the deep and subjectively valid findings which emerged, the dedicated reflective process (see: Reflexivity), and the comprehensive recommendations made available (presented below).

With the participant's voices laying at the heart of this study, participant recruitment strengths and limitations must also be evaluated. A purposeful sample strategy was use to find a representative sample. As evidenced in the findings, all eight participants experienced inner dialogue. A potential limitation to the transferability of this discovery is that project recruitment

was advertised as exploring inner dialogue and it may be rightfully assumed that participants subsequently volunteered to participate due to a pre-held resonance with the phenomenon. Yet as highlighted in the findings, Silvia, for example, had not considered the concept of 'inner dialogue' prior to the interview, in contrast to Octavia, for example, who' had been actively engaging with her inner dialogue for a number of years. The findings may therefore be understood to represent both passive and active inner dialogical experiences.

While qualitative research utilizing small participant samples is acknowledged to be considered a limitation in research fields, as outlined by Couch & McKenzie (2006) research investigating the depths of phenomena rather than the quantity of phenomena, as within this project, are evidenced to be strengthened by the inclusion of more than 3 and less than 20 participants (Giorgi, 2009). Based on this guidance 8 participants were recruited for this project. The strength of this sampling is evidenced by the depth of knowledge which emerged from the interviews.

The age range of 20-30 may be considered a limitation, impacting the research by not providing insight into how younger or elder individuals experience the phenomena. The advantage of having this homogeneous population is that the findings provide insight into how that age range experienced the phenomena. However, participants were recruited from across the continents, providing limited homogeneity in ethnicity and background. The advantage of this lack of homogeneity is that it accounts for individuals from different contexts, yet disadvantages include a lack of location-specific data.

Finally, the sample included participants who identified as women, with the data subsequently lacking insight into how people of other genders experience the phenomena. It is therefore evaluated that the findings do not provide a universal depiction of inner dialogue as experienced by rape survivors, but rather illuminate how it is experienced by the eight participants in this study.

While there was extensive diversity between participants' contextual demographics, the themes which developed encompass these variations (Wharne, 2019), encapsulating the distinct similarities and differences between their experiences and subsequently providing a coherent picture of the phenomena under investigation (Maxwell, 2011). Furthermore, the analysis revealed similarities with previous research as discussed below. Future research using different sample populations is recommended to bridge this project's gaps in knowledge and to build on its strengths.

It is acknowledged that the experiences of 'inner dialogue' and 'rape' have been considered both separately and interconnectedly within wider literature and within the context of this thesis. As the research set out to answer the question "how do rape survivors experience their inner dialogues?" it was deemed necessary throughout this paper to reflect the complex interplay between the two phenomena which the participant's experiences highlight. Continuous reference to the research question, the original transcripts, my reflective notes, and the Blueprint of Existential Dimensions enabled this complex interplay to be validated and reflected within the emergent themes, and further explicated within the discussion.

Hulbert et al. (2013) highlight the methodological difficulties of investigating a phenomenon that is by its very nature invisible, internal, and private. While their work references inner dialogue, so too is this true of the phenomenology of trauma. The findings do not therefore aspire to present concrete facts, but subjective meanings. The meanings which emerged were unique to the time, context, and place that the participant and I met. Beyond this, I was required to present these meanings as doctoral research findings, providing a valid offering of knowledge which may be understood not only in the context of this project, but in the wider field beyond this project. The structural thematization of the findings coupled with deep, transparent reflexivity enabled this meaning to be distilled.

Literature exploring the development of qualitative research suggests the subjective process of how themes emerge (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009; Willig, 2013). The potentially

elusive and creative nature of how valid findings can emerge is poetically described by Hunter et al. who write, “There is magic within the method of qualitative data analysis.” (2002, p. 388). While many researchers may select more ‘dry and factual’ (p. 388) specific theme titles based on recurring words or concepts, meaning-making approaches to thematic emergence in qualitative research highlight the value in creativity (Morse, 1994; Hunter et al., 2009). The creative and poetic themes and theme-titles presented in this research emerged through a subjective, rigorous, reflective analytic process; a culmination of my ‘self’ as a researcher and my dedication to capture the voices of my participants. This reflects the experience of Hunter (2009, p.392) who discusses her creative choice of theme titles: “The use of metaphors to capture the tenor of the voices of these adolescents brought life to my findings.”. Despite the trauma each participant had experienced, I was moved by a unique poetry within each of their transcripts. By curiously sitting with the meanings within their words, and considering these meanings in relation to existential philosophies, the two-part format and theme titles which most adequately represented their experiences gradually developed.

Where appropriate, reflective, emotive language has been used throughout this research as a reflection of how the discoveries exist to me, rather than attempting an emotionally neutral account. As argued by Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) and Wharne (2018) this is necessary for Hermeneutic Phenomenological research, with researchers expecting to be moved by the process (van Deurzen, 2014).

Part 1 – Features of Inner dialogue

Part 1 of the Findings unveiled discoveries about the phenomena that support, refute, and build on existing research. This section will critically discuss these findings in relation to published research attempting to further discover what inner dialogue is and how the experience of rape may influence its features.

Defining

The literature review indicated that concepts of inner dialogue – including self-talk, inner speech, etc – exist with no single agreed upon definition, understanding it in the context of this research as: *the experience of conversing with oneself within one's thoughts*.

Interestingly, the findings suggest it appropriate that the phenomenon continues to exist with an amount of ambiguity. While overarching characteristics were uncovered, the analysis continually revealed how *unique* each participants' experience was: not only between each other but between their own lived moments in space and time, supporting the work of Hulbert et al. (2013) who emphasize that inner dialogue is not monolithic. As suggested in existing research, the findings demonstrate that inner dialogue is a complex and multivariate entity (Hurlburt et al., 2013; Mihelic, 2010). All participants stated that it continually changed in its essence, frequency, and speed while further expanding by emphasizing changes in temporal focus, and emotional tone. Extreme life events such as their experience of rape were identified to enhance these changes.

Furthermore, beyond merely a word-based experience it was rooted within the emotional, embodied, temporal layers of experience. Bridging the gap in knowledge identified by Brinthaupt et al. (2009) inner dialogue was found to both causes *and* reflect, emotional *and* behavioural experiences. The definition by Lidbom (2015) represents the findings of this study:

> *"what the individual experiences, feels, and thinks, but does not yet necessarily share in actual conversation." (Lidbom, 2015, p. 2).*

The experiences shared by participants reveal that inner dialogue is the private communication that we have with ourselves. Words are one form of communication, yet inner dialogue contains the individuals' time, emotions, and felt senses, with subtleties of communication which may never be justly captured and bound in a single definition.

Development

Supporting existing theories, inner dialogue was found to develop through internal and external influences (Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014). This supports the refutation that inner dialogue is *only* internalized external dialogue as proposed by Vygotsky (1987), explicating why those born deaf are still able to develop an inner dialogue (Gutiérrez, 2006). This differentiation between the development of internal and external dialogue is further supported by cognitive and self-report research into participants with brain damage, who's inner dialogue remined intact when overt dialogue became deficit (Geva et al., 2011).

Within the context of this study, the understanding that inner dialogue development is strongly influenced by external sources was specifically relevant when considering the impact of how people responded to the participants disclosing their experience of rape. The findings suggest that inner dialogue does not merely develop in word form but is embedded in the emotions surrounding the situation. This has been demonstrated by recent neuroscientific research observing the relationship between inner language and sensory function (Lœvenbruck et al, 2018). Not only were emotions internalized, but they were also *felt* alongside the inner dialogue. These emotional sensations were expressed as similarly-or-equally strong at the time of internalization as when replayed later in time – in all cases, this included years later.

The internalization process is complex and varied. For example, described by all participants: *general* ideas and attitudes are absorbed and influence the *tone* of inner dialogue. In contrast, at times certain *significant phrases* are internalized and are *replayed in replication* within the inner dialogue. Inner dialogue can therefore be understood as developing from explicit and implicit words, attitudes, and emotions from the self and other.

These findings suggest the process of how inner dialogue is influenced, seemingly absorbing and 'becoming' akin to what it is exposed to. These findings suggest the process of how inner dialogue is influenced, seemingly 'absorbing' and 'becoming' akin to what it is exposed to. To further illuminate this invisible phenomena with a more tangible analogy, this can be likened to the work of Radin et al. (2008) who's research investigated the effects of distant intention on water crystal formation. Not only did they find that human intentions directly influence the formation of water crystals, but water crystals receiving good intentions formed with more aesthetic beauty. Inner dialogues are the metaphorical crystals carried within individuals, ever changing and acutely susceptible to the attitudes it is exposed to.

Function

Humans are not only "Being in Time" (Heidegger , 1962), they are "Being in language" (Anderson, 2005). Building on literature which highlights language as central in human experiences (Whittgenstein, 1921; Vygotsky, 1987; Richert, 2010) this study found inner dialogue to be multi-functional and purposeful (e.g. Puchalska-Wasyl, 2007) across all dimensions of existence (van Duerzen, 2014). Inner dialogue facilitates communication with the self, exploration and discovery of the self, a navigation system throughout lived time, and provides individuals a lifelong companion.

Research developed beyond the work of Piaget (1959) refutes his notion that inner dialogue is 'a failed attempt to communicate' (Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014), and this current study accentuates this refutation with findings suggesting that inner dialogue is not only a form of valuable communication in itself, but provides a foundation from which one may communicate more effectively with others (Längle, 2003).

All but three participants revealed that prior to this research, they had never thought about their inner dialogue before, yet analysis identified that they had nevertheless been engaging and exploring their existence through their inner dialogues. This suggests that inner dialogue can function with or without active and conscious engagement from the individual, similar to the

differentiation between 'willful inner speech' and 'mind wandering' that Perrone-Bertolotti et al. (2014) discovered.

Three participants spoke of active engagement with their inner dialogue and emphasized with passion the positive implications that this has had on their wellbeing and sense of self, supporting the work of Morin (2005) who developed a neurocognitive and socioecological model of how self-awareness and inner dialogue are linked and Längle (2003) who's existential psychotherapeutic approach promotes active inner dialogical engagement as fundamental to healing and self-understanding. Furthermore, the findings suggest that existence is externally and internally relational, and much like social relationships, through awareness and active engagement one can cultivate stronger relationships with their inner dialogue and subsequently with themselves.

Purpose

First and foremost, the purpose of inner dialogue for each participant was found to be unique both to themselves and to where they existed in time. Overarching purposes identified within all transcripts are hereby discussed. It is worth clarifying that the *function* is understood as the *role* of inner dialogue, and the *purpose* refers to the *'why'* behind the function. In other words, the following discussion will consider why [purpose] the inner dialogue plays certain roles [function] in human experience.

Existential philosophers Nietzche and Frankl (1985) famously stated that humans who have a why to live can bare almost any how: when humans have meaning they can bare almost any suffering. It appears that inner dialogue is host for where the 'whys' and 'hows' of life are created and discovered, providing empirical support for the efficacy of the Personal Existential Analysis psychotherapy approach (Längle, 2003). Self-reflection was found to be a key function of this, supporting Morin's (2005) extensive research into self-awareness and inner speech.

As themes began to emerge through the analysis I began to expect "The Healer" may become a subtheme. Instead, The Healer was found to exist within all features of inner dialogue.

Paradoxically, it appeared that even the more challenging inner dialogical qualities had value in healing life beyond rape. This is relatable to the work of Schwartz (1995; 2013) who conceptualized the existence of internal 'parts' of the self and found that even the 'bad' parts – such as the parts which encourage self-harm – can be understood to have developed in attempt to protect the individual from danger. This is illuminated for example by Ely (line, 61) who noticed that her Inner Critic also prevented her from drinking dangerously.

Similarly, nor was "The Meaning Maker" identified as its own stand-alone sub-theme. Each feature of inner dialogue contributed towards how participants created meaning. Each feature used its own tools and resources not only to discover what is personally meaningful, but to identify how these personal meanings sit within the wider sense of self, time, context, and reality for each participant. For each participant, inner dialogue serves the purpose of containing dreams and realities, being the master of self-punishment and self-creation, and facilitating torture and transcendence.

Control

The relationship between self-control and inner dialogue has been investigated within psychological fields for decades (Tullett & Inzlicht, 2010). The current study supports existing research which highlights *the role* inner dialogue plays in an individuals' capacity to regulate or control their behaviours (Vygotszky, 1962) with a correlation identified between 'thought control' and 'self-efficacy' (Banduara, 2000). Tullet (2010) notes, "our results suggest that the inner voice helps us to exert self-control by enhancing our ability to restrain our impulses." (p. 252), based on their task-completion study which demonstrated that when the inner voice is blocked, individuals were more likely to respond to their impulses rather than regulate their behaviour. This is consistent with the potential danger identified by the current study that 'ignoring' or 'drowning out' the inner dialogue may have on individuals' tendency to engage in potentially harmful, impulsive behaviours such as substance misuse, sex, and suicide (see subthemes: Suicide and Power).

However, evidenced by extensive overviews of self-talk literature (e.g. Hardy, 2006), there is limited research into the *lived experience of having control* over one's inner dialogue (Moser et al., 2017), leaving unanswered questions such as: What contributes to having control over one's inner dialogue? Is this innate or a skill that can be learned? Do traumas and/or pathologies influence one's capacity for inner dialogical control? The majority of such research is focused on athletic performance which indicate control can be actively enhanced (e.g. Dickens et al., 2018) or psychopathologies which indicate that pathological conditions reduce capacity for control (Alderson-Day et al., 2018).

The current study bridges the aforementioned gap in research, going beyond existing research by further illuminating *the role* inner dialogue has in self-control, and by providing novel insights into investigating *the experience* of having control over one's inner dialogue. Consistent throughout all transcripts and throughout all features of inner dialogue, control was gained by compassionately acknowledging the inner dialogue's presence and curiously exploring its qualities.

Building on the research of fMRI studies of Moser et al. (2017) who found that participants who were silently talking to themselves in third person were able to exert self-control with less effort than the control groups, the current study's findings highlight that participants' who were actively communicating with themselves within their inner dialogue felt more in control of their inner dialogue. Furthermore, the findings reveal that this enabled participants to develop and make-dominant *specific characteristics* of their inner dialogue. For example, active *critical* communication was found to make-dominant the critical features, whilst active *nurturing* communication was found to make-dominant the nurturing features.

As highlighted in the findings, this had real-world implications. Feeling in control of their inner dialogue was expressed to directly correlate with a sense of control over finding meaning in life, overcoming challenges in life, healing from their trauma, self-development, and self-esteem. Feeling out of control was directly correlated with a sense of helplessness, despair, and real-life actions to ignore or destroy it such as substance misuse and suicide. This supports the body of

existing research highlighting the relationship between substance misuse and suicide to quieten negative inner experiences (Najavits, 2017). Research directly investigating this is limited yet nevertheless it resonates with Vygotsky's (1987) original proposal that inner dialogue impacts emotions and behaviour. More extensive research correlates both substance misuse and suicide as trauma responses (e.g. Elliot et al., 2005; Fisher, 2000). This study subsequently recommends more extensive research into the relationship between inner dialogue and coping mechanisms to 'silence' or 'destroy' it, with therapeutic implications for interventions facilitating clients to have greater control over their inner dialogue.

Healing & Trauma

A primary contribution of this research is the insight gained into the relationship between inner dialogue and trauma, specifically but not exclusively sexual trauma. While historical inner dialogue research has been predominantly focused on pathological *symptoms*, recent extensive overviews continue to highlight that the impact-of and healing-from trauma remains a gap in research literature (Geurts, 2018).

There was a unanimous sense of conflict within the participant's inner dialogue between a nurturing voice and a critical voice. All eight participants directly expressed that the critical voice significantly worsened due to their experience of rape, supporting the findings from existing research into trauma and negative inner experiences (Brinthaupt, Hein & Kramer, 2009; Earley, 2010)

Both healing and re-traumatization was expressed by each participant to occur within their inner dialogues. Traumatic experiences included flashbacks, ruminating on damaging responses from others from their disclosure of rape, fear of others, and anxiety surrounding the future. 'Healing' and 'safer' experiences within their inner dialogue - and subsequently within their lived-existence - were identified as inner dialogue feeling more in control, more nurturing in words and tone, and when finding meaning.

Time Travel

Time is an illusion; a "labyrinth" (Peake, 2017). While time is a prominent theme in existential literature and was implicitly investigated through the interview questions pertaining to 'shifts' and 'changes', the findings highlighted that time is a significant experience within inner dialogue, and that experiences of sexual violence impact *how* time is experienced within inner dialogue. Reflecting on the emphasis and certain distinct features of 'time travel' which emerged, I consider it a limitation of this study not to have explicitly explored this in more depth and propose that future research into inner dialogical and experiential time travel would benefit the field of humanities. This would provide deeper understandings of how time travel is experienced, its healing and suffering qualities, and how therapeutic interventions may be tailored towards working with this phenomenon.

Inner dialogical time travel was experienced as both wilful and uncontrolled by the participants. For example, Octavia actively engaged in communication with her past selves and future potential selves which she expressed to have become a key feature of her inner dialogue and her healing process. In contrast, all participants referred to an uncontrolled time travel, akin to the psychological concept of 'flashbacks'.

Existing research into 're-experiencing' trauma is both supported and extended by the findings of the current study. Ehlers, Hackmann & Michael (2004) phenomenologically explored triggers and re-experiencing with emphasis on time perception through a model of theoretical analysis. They found that triggering stimuli which caused re-experiencing was usually similar to the stimuli at the traumatic event. This finding was supported by the current study, which found all participants were 'triggered' into a sense of unsafety, panic, or heightened existential awareness around stimuli (e.g. situations and individuals) similar to their rape. Unanimously, as discussed in the subtheme 'Wolves in Sheep's Clothing", towards men. The more similar the stimuli, the more intense the trigger of re-experiencing, for example: a man of the same height, age, ethnicity was

more triggering than a man of a different profile. The re-experiencing was identified as both a 'flashback' replication of the memory and feelings, or, only the embodied traumatic feelings.

Yet a novel insight gained by the current study was that triggers, flashbacks, re-experiencing, and physiological trauma responses did *not* require a specific stimulus to occur. As explicated in the Time Travel subtheme, these could happen seemingly at random 'any time anywhere' in both public and private situations, i.e., when alone or with others. The potential to time travel back to their images and feelings of being raped at any time in any situation was found to significantly contribute to the profound sense of unsafety, fear, and suffering in the participant's life beyond rape. Ely describes this as no longer being able to live in her own little world, no longer able to joyfully daydream but instead finding herself returning to the horrors of the past any time her inner dialogue was left to wonder unattended. For this study's participants, the inner dialogue was found to link 'any' topic to the rape, at any time, in any context. This strongly emphasises the value of further exploring interventions targeting gaining awareness and control over inner dialogue, as elaborated later in this discussion. Furthermore, as proposed by Ehlers, Hackmann & Michael (2004), trauma-informed interventions equipping clients with the capacity to distinguish between past and present are recommended.

Imagination

Multidisciplinary research suggests the complex overlap between 'imagined' realities and 'lived' realities in relation to human faculties such as inner dialogue (Morin, 2019), perception and emotion (Toleikyte, 2021). Recent research by Morin (2019) investigated the relationship between inner dialogue and 'Imagined Interactions' which refer to the inner dialogical replay of past conversations or imagined anticipatory future conversations. Morin's self-report-based research identified that inner speech includes both imagined interactions and additional features, and similarly imagined interactions include inner speech and additional features. Therefore, while there is active overlap in the concepts of inner speech and imagined interactions, they should not be 'equated'. This is supported by neuroscientific research that provides an awareness that individuals

can have the same physiological responses to both real and imagined stimuli, especially 'danger' and 'trauma' stimuli (Haen, 2020).

The current research project builds on such research, inviting an understanding of how these concepts may be integrated into therapeutic trauma work. For example, Octavia identified 'imagined interactions' within her inner dialogue, also addressed in the 'Time Traveller' theme. This feature of inner dialogue was identified as a fundamental resource for Octavia's healing. She shared the 'real life' actions of coming to terms with her rape and addressing her rapist by use of imagined interactions within her inner dialogue. Similarly, all eight participants expressed the detrimental impact of imagined interactions pertaining to dangerous or unpleasant situations, as previously discussed in relation to flashbacks and continually re-experiencing their rape. This research suggests that psychological interventions such as fairy-tale therapy, humour, and expressive arts which intentionally promote the use of imagination for positive healing from suffering may be well suited to working with the inner dialogues of trauma survivors (Lussier-Howard, 2018; Landoni, 2019).

Self-Identity

The inner dialogue was evidenced to play a central role in all participants' identity specifically in relation to their self-awareness, self-creation, sense of meaning and sense of purpose. All were expressed as an ongoing process, offering experiential support for existential conceptualizations of humans' ongoing search for meaning (Frankl, 1965) and freedom and responsibility to create ones' sense of self (Sartre, 1956; Längle & Wurm, 2018).

Participants described their inner dialogue as 'me' with findings suggesting that it is an internal manifestation of the complex and endless essence of the self. This expands on the afore-presented research by Puchalska-Wasyl (2007) (see: literature review) which highlights the multifaceted nature of inner dialogue and its role in self-creation.

The current study's findings uncovered a sense of uncertainty surrounding exactly how the inner dialogue exists in relation to self-creation and identity, which may be due to the challenge of investigating invisible phenomena (Hulbert et al., 2013) and the uniqueness of each individual's

experience. This feature of the findings will therefore be discussed in terms of paradoxes through an existential lens.

Building on how inner dialogue is described in Plato's work (Hulbert et al., 2013), this project found an unextractable connection between inner dialogue and their 'self', 'soul' and 'thinking' for all eight participants. The findings emulate the description of inner dialogue in Theaetetus, where Socrates states: *''thought...as the talk which the soul has with itself about any subjects which it considers ..., not with someone else, nor yet aloud, but in silence with oneself"* (Plato & Parmenides, 1939, p. 189).

Inner dialogue is paradoxically: 'the self' and 'in communication with the self'. Akin to philosophies (Sartre, 1956; Längle, 2003) and psychologies (Schwartz, 2013) which promote that all humans have within them multiple-potential-selves, the novel theoretical contribution of this research (see: Characteristics of Inner Dialogue) proposes a conceptualization of how this complex internal communication can be more tangibly grasped. Recommendations for how this understanding can enable individuals and professionals to build a deeper connection with the self and subsequently experience a more meaningful existence is discussed below.

Theoretical Contribution

One of the novel contributions of this study is the identified characteristics that capture different features of inner dialogue, which developed intuitively through the analysis. The eight features were: The Best Friend, The Dreamer, The Detective, The Enlightened, The Time Traveller, The Critic, The Chameleon, and The Professor.

As previously iterated, these eight characteristics do not propose to be a final nor absolute conceptualisation of the phenomenon, but rather developed organically in the context of this research through a creative yet empirically grounded analytical process rooted in existential philosophy and psychology. As I explored existing conceptualisations in response to my findings, I became aware that I am not the first to conceptualise features of inner dialogue as personified characters. For example, Earley and Weiss (Earley, 2010) labelled seven types of inner critic: the

perfectionist, the taskmaster, the inner controller, the guilt tripper, the destroyer, the underminer, and the molder.

However, an important differentiation is that while The Critic was identified as one feature in the current study, there were seven other features which the inner dialogue was found to manifest as. As demonstrated in existing literature, psychological fields have a tendency to focus on the damaging and critical elements of experiences (Brinthaupt, Hein & Kramer, 2009) with few models emphasizing the nurturing, healing elements (Längle, 2003). Yet this study reveals that the eight personified features found in each of the eight participants' experiences were not solely 'negative', 'damaging' or 'pathological' but rather more akin to the 'support, bond, and exploration' characteristics that Puchalska-Wasyl (2007) described. Each characteristic neither 'all good' nor 'all bad', but rather existing as a collaborating holism of potentials.

Psychological research has identified that accepting and communicating with the multiple elements of the self are primary obstacles for clients to overcome for change (Längle, 2003; Schwartz, 2013). This notion is supported by the current study which found distinct differences within levels of self-compassion and healing between participants who accepted multiple aspects of themselves and were actively communicating in their inner dialogues, in comparison to those who primarily identified with one or few aspects of self (namely: critical; blaming; fearful).

Furthermore, it feels significant to discuss the somewhat whimsical, playful titles of the characteristics which developed through the analysis. Reflecting on this process, while research into humour and trauma remains limited, the thematic development may be explained via the work of Landoni (2019). Her extensive research into the role that humour, and expressive arts play in transforming trauma iterates that there is a perspectival overlap between trauma and humour, with both requiring a situation and a perceiver. Through humour, a shift in perception can take place (Landoni, 2019). As discussed in the Final Reflections subsection, the value of reframing the often-pathologized and 'serious' phenomenon of inner dialogue as a playful, personified inner community may transform not just the theoretical understanding of inner dialogue but have practical

implications for how individuals perceive and relate to their inner dialogue. This novel conceptualisation offers the opportunity to shift from relating to inner dialogue as an ambiguous, uncontrolled concept towards relating to inner dialogue as a more tangible, controllable concept. As previously iterated, feeling more in control of and compassionate towards ones inner dialogue was found to provide participants with a more empowered and compassionate sense of self.

Part 2 – Life Beyond Rape

A significant finding of this research was the unanimous indication that rape is *not* merely an isolated physical experience, despite how it is most commonly defined and discussed in society and literature (see: literature review). Instead, the physical experience of being raped was revealed to be only one feature of what became a long-lasting traumatic experience, impacting the participants' lives for many years beyond the incident.

Part 2 of the findings 'Long Lived Experiences' was so-named to emphasize this finding, providing an overview of multiple components of the long-lasting impact of rape. The holistic and complex experience of rape and inner dialogue were revealed in more depth than existing literature has provided (e.g. Flo Arcas, 2019). Four main themes emerged corresponding to the existential dimensions: The Personal Dimension: "The Search For Meaning"; The Social Dimension: "Hell is Stigma"; The Spiritual Dimension: "Thus Spoke the Survivors"; The Physical Dimension: "The Myth of Sanctuary". This section will not separate the existential dimensions and will discuss the interwoven findings which shed new light onto the experience of inner dialogue in life beyond rape.

Sex & Sexuality

> *"Rape is to sex like a punch in the mouth is to a kiss".*
>
> *Benedict (1993, p. 14).*

As emphasised by the above quote, spoken to Benedict (1993) by a young victim during her thorough overview of rape myths and social attitudes, the findings from this study builds on

previous research which emphasises that *rape is not a sexual experience… it is an unsolicited act of violence* (Benedict, 1993, Wright, 2019). As previously highlighted, definitions of rape remain rooted in physical action and physical body parts: “penetration”, “penis”, “vagina” (Met.police.uk, 2021). It is understandable that as these actions and body parts are words related to sex and reproduction, with “consent” being the sole differentiator, rape subsequently remains all-too affiliated with sexual behaviour with social and inner dialogues. Limited by the scope of this paper to elaborate, this research highlights an important yet uncommon perspective on the nature of rape, sex, and trauma, briefly discussing the difference between ‘consensual rough sex’ and ‘rape’.

The ever-growing body of research into sex therapy clearly evidences that individuals experience ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sex, that consensual sex can be painful for numerous reasons, and that sex can be ‘rough’ and ‘painful’ in a pleasurable way (Barker, 2011). Considering this in relation to the findings of the current study, it is notable that not one out of the eight participants mentioned the *physical* pain of their physical rape experience within the entire collection of interviews, and only two participants spoke of violent rapes. This supports existing evidence demonstrating the potential ambiguity and misunderstandings surrounding what constitutes rape due to rape myths (Elmore et al., 2020) and that for example ‘its only rape if its violent’ (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Only one out of the eight participants expressed un-doubtingly ‘knowing’ (Helena, line 3) that they were being raped during the experience of rape and all eight participants expressed questioning their experience after their rape. This is *not* evidence to suggest that rape is *never* violent, nor that rape *does not* hurt, however, it challenges the myth that rape must be violent or painful to constitute rape and challenges the narrative that rape is purely physical.

Existential sex therapy research highlights the role of *sensory feeling* and *connection* in sex (Barker, 2011). This existential rape research highlights the role of *numbness* and *isolation* in rape. Sex can be physically painful, and rape can be physically painless. This thesis recommends a reframing of how rape is conceptualized: rape is not bad or painful sex, it is an act violation across the existential dimension (Benedict, 1993). This supports existing definitions which highlight the

role of ‘consent’ in differentiating between ‘sex’ and ‘rape’ yet emphasizes that the linguistic and conceptual association between rape and sex can be a damaging social narrative, detrimental to survivors’ ability to understand the reality of their experience and therefore heal from their experience. The pain of rape is evidenced not to be rooted in the physical experience. The pain endured from the experiences of rape can be as personal, social, spiritual, and emotional as it is physical and were found to be understood through bodily responses and the inner dialogue.

All eight participants disclosed self-doubt and self-blame about their responsibility for being raped which, as further illuminated below, was found to correspond directly with rape myths. Benedict’s (1993) research highlights an area of rape myths which stem from the belief that all men find women irresistible, and that women are to blame for being raped as they failed to not entice the man. The findings of this study suggest this decades-old social narrative remains rooted in social attitudes towards rape victims, leading to participants questioning themselves and how ‘if’ they had been more ‘responsible with their sexuality, ‘seen red flags’, or ‘dressed differently’ maybe it would not have happened (see subtheme: blame).

As this thesis discusses in detail, social attitudes towards rape and who is responsible for rape were found to cultivate social environments which felt unsafe to the participants, causing them to blame themselves and tarnish their capacity for healing. The current study provides lived-experience evidence of this, with participants expressing that their role in “putting themselves in the position to be raped” justified their understanding that they were to blame for being raped, for example, Silvia and Mariana discuss this in relation to going on a date with their perpetrator. Neither social dialogue nor enough rape literature advocates that no matter what “position” a person puts themselves in, this does not equate to consenting to sex, and ‘non-consensual’ sex is by its very definition rape.

Furthermore, the to-date research that highlights the heteronormative world which societies perpetually create (McIntosh, Nicholas & Huq, 2019) was supported by this study’s findings, and the isolating impact that this has on “sexual minority” groups (p. 133) has been

explored. Notably, while sex and sexuality were not explicitly questioned during the interview, in all transcripts was an emphasis on the lasting impact that rape had on the participants experience of sexual intimacy, the development of their sexuality, and their relationship with their gender.

Viola spoke at length about the lived experience of being raped by a man when you are both a virgin and not heterosexual, and the impact that this had on forming her sexual identity. The extensive reviews of rape literature undertaken over the course of this research demonstrates what an underdiscussed and under investigated lived experience and feature of sexual assault this is (Stiebert, 2019). All eight participants referenced their 'wish' that men did not have the capacity to rape and expressed a newfound discomfort in their sense of femaleness and femininity (See subthemes: Sex & Virginity; Power). This directly correlated with a newfound fear of men, expressed in all eight transcripts.

Rape had a varying impact on each participant's sex drive. For example, Mariana disclosed engaging in more sexual activities than previously which she felt was due to an exaggerated need to feel wanted and to mask a sense of insecurity (line 9). Mariana expressed that this behavioural response had put her at risk of, and resulted in, her being raped more than once. In contrast, Silvia disclosed a diminished desire to engage in sex (line 6) despite being in a long-term relationship and Helena disclosed the new experience of being emotionally triggered by sexual encounters.

Future research is recommended to further illuminate the distinction between sex and rape, the impact of losing one's virginity to a rapist, and the connection between rape and the formation of sexual identity.

Stigma & Psychosis

It is widely appreciated in literature that inner dialogue has primarily been investigated in pathological settings (Alderson-Day et al., 2018), which may contribute to the stigmatic understandings associated with the experience as evidenced by the current study. Phenomenological analysis conducted by Rosen et al. (2015) explored the relationship between self and inner dialogue in 20 participants with psychosis diagnosis, finding that the relationship between

self and inner voice is dynamic, and can be influenced and changed through engagement, conversation, and negotiation with their voices.

The analysis demonstrated that these dynamic capacities for engagement and negotiation with inner dialogue were prevalent for all eight participants regardless of any pathological diagnosis, aligned with Perrone-Bertolotti et al. (2014)'s overview which revealed agency in the development, control, relationship-with and experience-of inner speech.

The findings of this study refute the stigmatised notion that inner dialogue is a purely pathological experience, adding to the body of literature which promotes its beneficial role for nearly-all individuals in self-efficacy (Hardy, 2006) cognitive function (Day & Fernyhough, 2015) self-control (Moser et al., 2017) and meaning making (Richert, 2010). The current study promotes a movement towards advocating the value of active inner-communication, moving away from associations of inner-dialogue and pathologies. This view is further supported in personal existential analysis (Längle, 2003), self-compassion (Neff, 2019) and Internal Family Systems (Schwartz, 1986; 2013) approaches to psychological therapies, amongst others.

The presence and impact of stigma associated with being raped, as introduced in the literature review, was also evidenced by the findings of this research (Donovan, 2007). This was found to develop through implicit internalisation of rape myths and explicit internalisation from others' comments, such as Viola whose mother called her a "whore" (line 6) and Ely who's friend suggested she was cheating on her boyfriend for attention. Illuminated in the subsection 'Blame' and 'Sex and Sexuality' participants appeared to internalise narratives that the cause of rape may have been due to their own behaviour, and that being raped was something to be ashamed about.

Rape Myths

The findings in this study support existing historical and modern research into the prevalence and perpetuation of rape myths (Benedict, 1993; Rollero & Tartaglia, 2019). As emphasised throughout the findings, all eight participants explicitly identified the existence and

detrimental impact which rape myths had on their life beyond rape, despite no interview question mentioning rape myths.

Supporting the meta-analysis conducted by Suarez & Gadalla (2010), rape myths were found to emerge from their social network, legal services, and the police, specifically from the participant's nuclear family and closest friends. All participants described the experience of having their truth questioned by others as exceptionally damaging, with over half of participants explicitly stating that this was 'worse' than the rape itself.

Building on existing understandings, the participants in this study explicitly identified rape myths as causing them additional trauma (Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007; Deming et al., 2015) and identified that unsympathetic and judgemental reactions to their disclosure created a framework for the meanings they associated with their own experience, their inner dialogical understanding of the experience, and their sense of self.

It was unanimously expressed that rape myths significantly contributed to the participant's lack of willingness to disclose or report their experience (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). This was notably the case for both participants who had and had not previously reported a rape, with explicit mention that the handling of their experience, exposure to rape myths, and perceived judgement by authorities caused them to question whether they would advocate other survivors to report, despite having a sense that reporting is important.

Hermans (2002) described the dialogical self as a 'society of mind'. This metaphor appears apt not merely due to the influence of Others on individuals' inner dialogue but the colonialization of the participant's mind which appears to have occurred, the values of others infiltrating their existence via their inner dialogue. All eight participants found themselves tortured by a societal pressure to share and report whilst paradoxically being blamed and shamed when they attempted to do so.

Existential Shattering

A direct correlation was found between traumatic events and a changed inner dialogue. Greening (1990) and Hoffman et al., (2013) significantly contributed to trauma literature with the conceptualization of 'existential shattering'. Not only were the lived experiences shared by all participants in this study akin to the descriptions of existential shattering provided, but participants also explicitly used the word 'shattering' to describe their lived experience. The findings further support the differentiation between PTSD and existential shattering (Hoffman et al., 2013), indicating that one can experience either, both, or neither following traumatic experiences such as sexual assault. Over half of participants in this study shared formal diagnosis of PTSD as well as a sense of shattering, with others describing lived experiences which were akin to PTSD diagnosis criteria and/or existential shattering.

Building on this theory, this research found that the extent of one's existential shattering can drastically vary both between individuals and across time. A direct correlation was unveiled between participants experiencing a shattering of previously held truths about existence, safety, self, and their acceptance of the reality of their experience. For example, participants who expressed a lapse of time between the rape and their understanding and acceptance of being raped identified that the 'shattering' – also expressed as 'breakdown' – occurred not during the rape but during the realisation.

Much like the instantaneousness of a glass shattering upon contact with a hard surface, the sense of existential shattering was described as an instantaneous response to the personal-acceptance and realisation of a hard truth. The shadow side of The Enlightened.

Yet despite expressing a sense of shattering, all eight participants met me for an interview with a unanimous purpose which led them to participate: to explore their lived experiences, find meaning from their suffering, and contribute towards change for future survivors.

"I often find that now, kind of similar to you, I'm diving into advocacy work. And I really want to support survivors and I really want to focus on

educational programming or survivor support. I've really found that I'm not sure if my passion for that would be as alive as it is today if I hadn't gone through that experience. So I almost feel grateful for the journey that I've been on, and I often say to myself, "I'm not sure if I would be my entire self if I hadn't gone through this, hadn't survived."" (Hermia, line 7)

To discuss this finding, I draw together the modern existential concept of existential shattering and the ancient Japanese art of Kintsugi to explore the process of healing from sexual trauma. In line with the work of Scherb (2018), I propose that these metaphors can be interwoven to provide a foundation of building a life beyond a shattering experience. Kintsugi is the ancient Japanese art of restoring broken ceramics with lacquer mixed with powdered gold. This process not only repairs the damage, but the resulting entity is enhanced. When considering this concept in relation to existential shattering, a powerful metaphor of hope can be offered. While trauma may initially be experienced as shattering the perceptions of self and meaning into fragments, this can be conceptualised as creating a new foundation for individuals to re-create and restore their existence more meaningfully than ever before. With reference to the role of counselling psychology and the existential emphasis of living in a world of others (Kierkegaard, 1962), another fundamental aspect of Kintsugi is the necessity for multiple contributors to the task of restoration. Individuals who have experienced trauma may experience a newfound sense of isolation, yet it is crucial they draw upon Others to heal (Kierkegaard, 1962; Stolorow, 2011; Hoffman et al., 2013). All eight participants referred to psychological support as pivotal in their healing process.

These findings provide support for the continued development and provision of psychological support for trauma survivors, highlighting that therapeutic focus on rebuilding the client's sense of safety, values, and self is as-or-more important than specific focus on the sexual assault itself.

Fear & Trust

> *"Really the nature of it is that someone intentionally harmed you or that something happened to you that basically damaged you so much that it caused all these permanent changes to your brain, and the way you think, and the way you respond to things." (Viola, line 2)*

A direct correlation was found between being raped and what all eight participants described as an irreversible change in their worldview, specifically in relation to the world and people no longer being 'safe'.

This invites a debate: is it an existential fact that the world is an unsafe place, and the experience of rape provided a shocking lesson? Does the inner dialogue cultivate a narrative of unsafety which becomes un-boundaried and over-generalised? The current study may contribute to answering these questions which will be discussed pluralistically, drawing on different psychological approaches.

Considering this **ontologically,** the findings reveal that *knowledge* about existential danger without having experienced it does not equate to the *depth of knowing* about an existential danger having experienced it. To elaborate, the analysis revealed that participants were *aware* of the existence of existential dangers – such as rape – before being raped, yet only after being raped did the knowledge of this experience cause near-constant suffering and fear underlying their everyday lives. This supports findings from previous research, which discuss this in relation to 'victim' and 'nonvictim' awareness (Benedict, 1993).

This suggests that the nature of the 'knowing' transforms after trauma. The analysis proposes an explanation of this shift. Previously, existential danger such as rape was held in their awareness as a hypothetical reality which was not part of their own reality, evidenced by comments such as, "[before] I didn't ever want to think that something like that could happen to me." (Mariana, line 17). It appears that undergoing the experience of rape formed a bond between

potential 'hypothetical' realities and the participants 'lived' realities. Furthermore, the fear was heightened in each participant's new awareness that these given existential dangers could occur without any warning and from any person.

This may be unsurprising, considering that the depths of experience-based knowledge compared to hypothetical-based knowledge is at the root of lived-experience research (see Validity section).

Considering this **existentially,** the extensive literature review indicates that for decades thinkers and psychologists have noted the inescapability of suffering and potential danger existing in the world. As evidenced in The Enlightened subtheme, experiencing traumas such as rape appear to provide a shocking and embodied realisation of this existential facticity/given.

A notable subsequent discovery is how a worldview lens of inherent safety was drastically overshadowed and replaced by a lens of existential fear for all eight participants. As explored in the subthemes 'The Enlightened' and 'Thrown into Danger' the findings suggest that this lens became applied to "all" areas of life: from social interactions, to talking to themselves to. From walking down the street, to choosing what to wear and drink. Both a sense of danger and the memory of their rape became present across all dimensions of their existence.

In contrast to the existential insights abundant in this paper, **neuroscientific** approaches may deepen understandings of the phenomena discovered by this study's analysis. Inner dialogue was found to be a reflective, emotional, sensory, entity. This supports neuroscientific understandings which have identified the relationship between thought, feeling and action due to different brain regions communicating and suggest that "every thought you have is created by small currents of electricity in your brain" which communicate via 'neural networks' (Toleikyte, 2021, p. 32). While the scope of this paper does not permit a detailed neuroscientific investigation of the participant's lived experiences of inner dialogue, current research may be especially relevant to explain why all participants experienced uncharacteristic responses of fear to 'non-dangerous' everyday phenomena.

Toleikye (2021) explains that the amygdala is responsible for attaching meaning and action responses to emotions, and can be activated by both *real and imaginary dangers*. The response to dangers causes a temporary 'switch off' of the ventromedial pre-frontal cortex (vmPFC) subsequently making rational decisions physically impossible. This is supported by neuroscientific studies into how the brain responds to fear and can be 'rewired', as outlined by the extensive work of Pittman and Karle (2015).

Furthermore, the *continued* impacts of how participants reflected on their experience of rape and responded to everyday stimuli such as other people may be neuroscientifically explicated. Modern research highlights the role of trauma and 'neuroplasticty' or the ability for neural networks to change or grow (Kolassa & Elbert, 2007; Toleikyte, 2021). In short, the more a network is used, the stronger it grows and the less a network is used, the weaker the connection grows. Considering this in relation to the findings, participants who frequently actively thought negatively and fearfully about their experience of rape, or judgementally about themselves, can be understood to have been strengthening these neuro pathways. In contrast, participants who frequently actively focused their thoughts on self-compassion and healing were strengthening these neuro pathways. Clinical implications are outlined below in the section 'Amygdala Soothing.

Healing Through Meaning

All transcripts indicated that participants tormented themselves with a sense of urgency to recover. This urgency manifested in their inner dialogue and developed from internalized words and attitudes of others. Recovering or 'getting over it' (Ely, line 80) was identified to be a unique process of finding meaning in their suffering and rebuilding their life beyond rape, as further explicated in for example Findings Part 2 themes one and four. Both similarities and stark contrasts were revealed between how participants found meaning and healing following their experience of rape.

For example, Viola found it important and meaningful not to form a 'positive' narrative about any aspect of their experience, as this enabled her to validate her suffering and feel aligned with her worldview that the experience of rape is not acceptable and should not have happened.

"I have a lot of trauma from this, and I don't necessarily want to frame it as a positive thing... as if, "oh it's just another thing that contributed to who I am". Because it shouldn't have happened." (Viola, line 1)

Contrastingly, Hermia found it important and meaningful not to form a 'negative' narrative about her experience, as this enabled her to validate her suffering by cultivating acceptance and gratitude for who she is despite her experiences, akin to more Buddhist-influenced approaches of healing (Mason-John, 2017; Lama, 2011).

"So I almost feel grateful for the journey that I've been on, and I often say to myself, "I'm not sure if I would be my entire self if I hadn't gone through this, hadn't survived."" (Hermia, line 7)

Considering the participants beliefs and personal meanings in relaton to their trauma, the findings support existing literature highlighting that trauma causes a spiritual violation for many indiviuals (Park et al., 2017). Finding and creating personal meaning within ones narrative were identified to contribute to healing, and this process was identified as ultimately unique to each individual. This supports philosophical and psychological trauma theories (Frankl, 1987; Part et al., 2017; Mason-John, 2017). Yet ultimately, as continually reitterated in this paper, it suggests that there is no one way to heal from rape.

Despite their different lived experiences, timelapse since rape/s, and philosophical or spiritual positions, each participant described a sense of 'being on a healing journey' and no participant identified that they had either 'completed the healing journey' or that indeed there would ever be an end to the journey. Existential philosophies propose that this consideration does not have to be despairing. Philosophies of self, which propose that ones' sense of self continually transforms and transcends (May, 1953; 1983; Langle & Wurm, 2018) and that our "search" for ourselves and our meanings is a lifelong journey may be a source of hope and inspiration in relation to healing from trauma.

The search for oneself would always be a complex and creative experience abudent with possibilities, with or without trauma as part of previous chapters. As itterated in the subtheme "Thrown Into Danger" and further explored in the "Narrative" section of the discussion, it appears that we may not choose what life brings but we are empowered when we choose our inner dialogical attitude towards creating our future.

> *"Existing involves a continual emerging –- a transcending of one's past and present in terms of the future." (May, 1983, p. 143)*

Implications for Counselling Psychology & Existential Psychotherapy

This research raises several implications for psychotherapy and counselling psychology, having produced findings which may directly impact the fields both theoretically and practically. Novel implications for relevant existing approaches are hereby discussed in relation to the findings.

Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS)

The term rape trauma (RT) and rape trauma syndrome (RTS) were introduced to psychological literature in the 1970s by Burges and Holmstrom (1974) in their attempt to reframe social attitudes towards the experience of rape (Wright, 2019). Extensive research into social attitudes towards rape prior to this time provides detailed suggestions of how women were perceived as responsible and to blame for being raped or 'inviting' rape (Benke, 1982). The dissemination of the conceptualization of rape trauma syndrome promoted a movement towards understanding rape not as a sexual act but as an act of violence or torture, and subsequently began to cultivate an awareness of the long-term impact that rape can have on the individual, commonly likened to the PTSD men experience after living through combat (Benedict, 1993; Wright, 2019). To-date research into the history of rape trauma found that courts accept the more generalised symptoms of PTSD over the more specialised symptoms of RTS when considering cases of rape (Wright, 2019).

It is noticeable that throughout the extensive literature review conducted within the scope of this project, decades after rape trauma concepts were introduced, there remains a prevalence of rape being defined as a physical or sexual act rather than an act of violence or wilful torture of another human as advocated by Benedict (1993), and a lack of research enhancing the awareness of the long standing impact that rape can have on individuals and the subsequent long-term healing process (Kroll, 2003).

It is therefore a priority of the current study to reiterate an awareness of the importance of rape being understood not as a sexual encounter but as an act of unsolicited violence, as evidenced by the knowledge which emerged through the analysis. Subsequently, it is recommended that the process of healing from, recovering from, or living beyond the experience of rape should be viewed as a potentially complex and long-standing process of recovery from trauma.

While contemporary research has criticized the concept of rape trauma syndrome as assigning a label which may remove the individuals' agency and capacity to recover (Stefan, 1993), the concept has been included within this paper as a foundation for discussion surrounding the evolution and reframing of rape recovery within psychological literature. As highlighted by Hoffman et al., (2013), recovery from trauma is unique. Therefore, it is recommended that the appropriateness of traumatic events leading to diagnosable pathologies (such as PTSD of RTS) should be considered on an individual basis by a trained professional. It should not be assumed that all rape leads to permanent trauma nor guarantees specific symptoms nor requires a formal diagnosis. In turn, it should not be assumed that all rape survivors will benefit from the same interventions, and each should be supported on an individual basis.

The following sections will therefore introduce several approaches which may offer rape survivors psychological support based on their unique needs. The appropriateness of these approaches is supported by the understandings gained through the analysis within the current study in relation to working with inner dialogue and the potentially long-lasting impact of rape.

Personal Existential Analysis (PEA)

Personal existential analysis (PEA) is a psychotherapeutic framework developed by Längle in the 1980s as a part of an existential analytical method of pragmatically applying the meaning-focused techniques inspired by Frankl (1985) (Längle & Wurm, 2018). While existentially influenced, a strength of the approach is its capacity to be used collaboratively with other psychotherapeutic approaches. PEA provides a framework from which practitioners work with clients to "to find personal expression in, and have a personal effect on, his world." (Längle, 2003, p. 53). The emphasis Längle and PEA have on working with the inner dialogue makes this approach specifically attune with the findings of the current study.

The framework of PEA (Längle, 2003) involves the practitioner and client working through four methodological 'steps' which each have different anthropological implications. The first step involves the client *describing* their experience which begins a *relation* with the 'facts' of their situation which Längle proposes often become distorted by suffering. The second step involves phenomenological analysis of their experience, which begins *self-acceptance.* The third step involves exploring the client's *inner positioning* or values relating to their experience, which begins *self-distancing* from the suffering. The fourth step involves working with their *external performance; action* in the world, which begins *self-transcendence.* "Consequently, the person is called to free itself from the spell of being affected, in order to regain power over itself." (Längle, 2003, p. 48).

Another strength of PEA is its capacity for adaptable application based on the client's unique struggle. For example, research suggests (Längle, 2003) that clients who are suffering from fear, a common impact following the experience of rape as highlighted by the current study, may be prone to avoiding particularly painful or fearful parts of their story and may therefore need to spend longer in the 'description' phase of PEA. This works from the philosophy that without becoming consciously aware of their reality, the individual cannot encounter, live with, or heal from their suffering.

Narrative Therapies

Drawing on overviews of existing literature and case studies, practitioners such as Duvall and Béres (2006) explored the beneficial application of narrative therapy for survivors of sexual abuse. They highlight the therapeutic focuses of giving a voice to traumas which are challenging to comprehend, make sense of, and live meaningfully beyond. Providing a space for this voice was highlighted as a fundamental part of the therapeutic process, directly supported by the findings of this research.

The current study provides a deeper understanding into *how* the voice of trauma manifests within inner dialogue. All eight participants expressed that how their inner dialogue told their story in the present directly impacted their emotional state, behaviours, ability to process experiences, and self-perception. For example: narratives uncontrollably focusing on the experience of rape, blaming the participant for rape, and focused on fear of Others were revealed to continually re-traumatize and prevent healing.

While the findings suggest that external sources may *influence* the tone and narrative within the participant's inner dialogues, as evidenced by existing research inner dialogue was found to be self-generated and not *produced* by someone else (Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014).

This suggests that narrative therapies explicitly engaging with client's inner dialogue may increase clients' ability to re-write their story in a way that acknowledges their pain whilst exploring a preferred alternative representation. Furthermore, the findings illuminate *how* time travel exists within inner dialogue, with implications supporting narrative therapies focusing on the 'temporal landscape' when reconstructing trauma narratives (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2006).

Additionally, all features of inner dialogue were identified as resources to find meaning, with implications for the continued development of existential-narrative therapies (Richert, 2010). This integration may be especially valuable due to the embodied, lived experience and socially constructed meanings which were identified by this research as inherent to life beyond rape. This

supports recommendations by Day (2009) who proposes integrating existential and narrative therapies for interpersonal violence treatment.

Compassionate Mindfulness

As discussed in the Methodology section, mindfulness practice played a significant role in this projects' development, with leaders in modern research fields advocating the use of reflective (Wharne, 2019) and mindfulness techniques (Vos, 2020) to support the validation process. The efficacy of this technique is supported by this research specifically in relation to it enabling: a deeper emersion into the data, grounding, and self-care necessary for researching emotionally provocative topics, and enhancing the 'bracketing' capacity of phenomenological research.

Furthermore, the findings of this study continually demonstrate the correlation between active engagement with inner dialogue and improved personal, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Participants who disclosed engagement with mindfulness practices highlighted the direct influence mindfulness has on their ability to connect with and control their inner dialogue, subsequently supporting their healing. This suggests that offering mindfulness techniques to trauma survivors may enhance their inner resources for processing and living beyond their experience. More extensive research into active engagement with inner dialogue is needed to provide a deeper understanding of how this inner resource can increase self-compassion and self-awareness.

Furthermore, reduction in self-worth, self-esteem, and self-compassion were found to be directly caused by rape and perpetuated by rape-myths, with negative self-talk, shaming, and blaming traumatically experienced by all participants. This suggests that approaches focusing on mindful self-compassion (Neff, 2019) may be specifically beneficial for this population.

Internal Family Systems (IFS)

The findings have distinct relevance to the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model, supporting Schwarts' (1995; 2013) emphasis that existing with multiple parts of the self is innately human, not pathological. This strongly aligns with Sartrian (1956) existential offerings of the self which the

philosopher proposed to hold infinite possibilities. Sartre considered those who do not explore their multiplicity of Self live 'inauthentically' or in 'Bad Faith', yet equally expressed that the ability to do so fully was impossible. Existential theories frequently mention human tendency to create a 'concrete' self; a self that is stuck in one way-of-being; unreflective nor creatively embracing their possibilities. If applied to this research, participants found their ability to embrace 'carefree' 'adventurous' 'curious' selves were shattered by their experience of rape. Those who were able to reflect and embrace healing or empowered elements of themselves, such as through advocacy, appeared in active communication with their inner dialogue and experienced 'survivor' or 'victim' as only one of many aspects of themselves. Participants who struggled to see themselves beyond their trauma-labelled identities appeared to primarily experience their Inner Critic painfully and their Time Traveller focused on their assault.

While the concept of Inner Critic is perpetually seen as a negative feature of the self in many therapeutic approaches, and the findings of this research illuminate the profoundly damaging and debilitating influence it had on participants' sense of self, sense of control, behaviours such as drinking and suicidal contemplation, and ability to find meaning in life, the findings suggest that the existence of an inner critic may be inevitable. Rather than demonising this darker, 'shadow side' (Jung, 1991), IFS engages with the critical inner selves with compassion, enabling these parts to be heard and understood.

Furthermore, as introduced in the 'rape myths' discussion, Hermans' (2002) concept of inner dialogical self as a 'society of mind', combined with my suggestion that rape and rape myths invade and in essence 'colonialize' the characteristics of the mind, indicate that survivors of rape may benefit from interventions such as IFS that facilitate discussion between inner dialogical facets. The findings suggest that different inner dialogical features may feel more and less in control and may be unequally balanced in power. The systemic therapist may therefore act as a 'mediator' between the inner dialogical community.

It appears that training in IFS with a specific focus on the multifaceted features of inner experiences is recommendable for practitioners working with survivors of sexual trauma. I aspire to contribute towards developing a more succinct model of this based on the findings of this research.

Neuroscience 'Amygdala Soothing'

Building on the previous discussion exploring fear, trust, and a lack of safety from a neuroscientific perspective, the findings have distinct relevance when working clinically with this population. Toleikyte (2021) and Pittman & Karle (2015) propose that 'amygdala soothing' exercises can both reduce the inability to access rational thinking and increase a sense of safety. Inspired by the change-orientated books from the above authors, six 'amygdala soothing' exercises are outlined below:

Breathing exercises – Breathing deeply and mindfully causes the brain to activate its 'relaxation' response. Including soothing visualisations and inner narratives, such as being at a sunny beach, or by a calming river, has been found to enhance the state of relaxation brought on.

Movement – From yoga to jogging, all movement changes oxygenation levels in the bloodstream, creating a more balanced mood and increasing levels of brain plasticity.

Oxytocin – Nurturing ourselves or being with nurturing people triggers a release of the chemical oxytocin, supplying the brain with oxygen and glucose, and creating a sense of love, relaxation, and safety.

Gratitude Practice – There are many gratitude practice exercises, such as listing 5 things we are grateful for each morning and evening. Not only do gratitude practices change brain chemistry, but they also feed the amygdala with more objective information about positive aspects of life. The brain is well wired to pick up negative information, and benefits from active introduction of positive information.

Positive Affirmations – first developed by Hay (1984), affirmation practice have been found to naturally sooth the amygdala. They involve reciting specific and detailed loving and nurturing messages, spoke within one's inner dialogue or out loud.

Sleep – The brain and body remain fully functional while humans sleep, making sure that hormones are released, needed neurochemicals are produced, and memories are stored (Pittman & Karle, 2015, p. 149). Lack of sleep has been found to increase anxious responses to situations during waking hours, due to activation of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) which is responsible for the 'fight of flight' response (see: Pittman & Karle, 2015, p. 34).

Recommendations

For Psychologists and Psychotherapists

While individuals seek therapeutic support for a multitude of different reasons, extensive research suggests that the overall reason relates to human suffering (Dryden, 2007). The findings suggest that inner dialogue plays a central role in lived experiences of suffering, specifically suffering the outcome of rape. Research into inner dialogue and different traumas is recommended to further identify variations of inner dialogical experiences pertaining to trauma variations.

Furthermore, this study significantly revealed how inner dialogue influences meaning-making and healing processes. Further research into approach-specific therapies (such as those presented above) will provide practitioners with deeper understandings of how inner dialogue can be a resource for transformation and change. Furthermore, due to the complex, existential, embodied impact that rape has on survivors, an emphasis on working pluralistically (Cooper & Dryden, 2015) with abuse survivors is strongly recommended.

The findings continually emphasized the unique experience of inner dialogue, yet highlight specific similarities in features, development, function, and control over inner dialogue. Further research phenomenologically investigating these aspects of inner dialogue is recommended to continue deepening the understanding of this relatively un-understood yet widely experienced phenomenon (Hulbert et al., 2013).

The current study was limited by its small sample and specific focus on rape trauma. Future research expanding on both the findings and limitations of this study is recommended to focus in

more depth on how age, gender identities, spirituality, sexualities, intimacy, and relationships influence how inner dialogue is experienced.

For the Education System

Educators are in a prime position to guide discussions about stigmatised phenomena such as identity, relationships, sexual assault, and inner dialogue. Evidenced both through the participants interviews and my personal experience as a psychotherapist working with young adults, education settings do not provide safe, adequate, nor informed spaces for discussion. This is perpetuated by stigmatising and misinformed depictions in film and media, creating - as the findings suggest - a lack of reality-based awareness of these phenomena amongst young people and adults alike.

Therefore, a primary recommendation from this study is for educational settings to cultivate a safe and informed space where common lived experiences such as inner dialogue, sex, and abuse can be explored safely by young people, preventing these becoming 'taboo' and subsequently 'silenced' topics.

Specific action such as regular visits from advocates and advocacy groups to give lived-experience rather than generic-textbook teaching from tutors who may not relate to the phenomenon was recommended by three participants. I support this recommendation.

Consent is at the heart of legal definitions and lived experiences of sexual assault. It is strongly recommended that educators are more explicit in how consent is taught. Furthermore, based on the findings of this study and lived experiences disclosed by participants, it appears that educators need to cultivate a more open and honest dialogue about virginity, stop emphasising it as a 'sacred moment', and provide more realistic ideas of what sex is like. The importance of this is further implicated by research into sexual violence (Foubert et al., 2019) which highlights that widely available depictions of women as sex objects, such as porn, influences attitudes towards what is expected and acceptable.

For the Criminal Justice System

As explored within the findings, within the eight transcripts from eight women in eight locations around the globe, it became apparent that failings lie both at systemic and personal levels within current judiciary systems.

As this study did not explicitly address the judiciary system, the findings are limited yet raise questions about the handling of sexual assault survivors within legal systems. Clearly expressed within all transcripts was a need for improved training for all staff about how to appropriately speak to survivors of rape. Language was found to be internalised and contribute to the development of inner dialogical wordings and tone. A reframing of the language used to survivors which indicate a sense of mistrust - "making the allegation", "you claim" - judgement, or blame is strongly recommended.

This builds on research into framing strategies such as French (2003) who's lived-experience research promoted the prevalence and damaging impact of victim blaming language used by social networks and law enforcement. This is further illuminated by the lived-experience research of Brooks-Hay et al., (2019) who found that regardless of trial outcomes, achieving a sense of justice was overshadowed by the cumulative impact of the assault and the criminal justice process itself. Further research into the handling of sexual assault by criminal justice systems is strongly recommended, which may begin to prevent what Campbell et al. (2001) have called the "second rape"; victim blaming.

For Society & Humanity

As proposed by existential literature, suffering is an inevitable part of existence (Frankl, 1985). Yet my research demonstrates that humans' responses to others' suffering deeply impacts whether they heal or hurt more deeply. I suggest that humanity should be more prepared to accept that "trauma and distress can happen to any of us, that it probably already has" (Wharne, 2019, p. 204), and that we have a responsibility as humans to prevent increased suffering being perpetuated due to lack of compassion and neglectful language.

Implications from this research, existing studies, and autobiographical memoirs (Miller, 2020) clearly highlight the damaging impacts of judgements, rape myths, blame, sexualised language, victim-questioning, the social-religious value attached to 'virginity', porn, and glorification or rape and abuse have on both social attitudes and everyday-life beyond rape. I suggest an actively increased awareness and critical thinking around how our words and attitudes impact ourselves and those around us.

I aspire to propagate this message by continuing to speak at conferences, facilitating support groups, and provoking public discourse around stigmatised and painful experiences. Furthermore, I intend to further contribute psychological and non-academic literature pertaining to the multifaceted findings of this research.

For Survivors of Rape

Infinite gratitude goes to the eight participants who shared their time and truths to contribute towards this research project. It feels pertinent to share several emergent findings which may support survivors of rape.

Firstly, **you are not alone.** The findings of previous research and this research project alike indicate the extensive number of people from all ages, backgrounds, genders, and sexualities who are subjected to the experience of rape and/or sexual assault. While research suggests a sense of isolation, shame, and solitude are commonly experienced as a direct result of being assaulted, this research strongly indicated that you are not alone.

Furthermore, **the shame & blame is not yours.** This study supports findings which propose that shame and stigma are rooted in social perceptions *not* in fact (Stiebert, 2019). These social perceptions – 'rape myths' - can be internalised – known as 'self-stigma' – causing survivors to absorb and believe incorrect, painful, judgemental views of an experience. Holding onto this shame and stigma can create exceptional pain within and prevent healing and self-compassion. No one is responsible for rape other than the rapist themselves.

With this in mind, the findings continually propose the value and necessity of **sharing your experience** when you are ready.

It is also important to remember that for any number of reasons, not everyone will react in a helpful, healing way. This can be remedied in several ways. Firstly, even being aware of this may combat the shock of a negative response in a moment. Secondly, we can make an active choice (Frankl, 1985) *not* to absorb and carry negative or harmful responses with us beyond the conversation. Thirdly, while we cannot control *how others will respond*, we can try to understand and control *how we respond to ourselves.* **Cultivate a relationship with your inner dialogue** to reclaim the control over your thoughts, ruminative experience, and healing journey.

Finally, **find what works for you.** While the findings offer an overview of shared experiences, they also continually identify the uniqueness of all lived experiences of finding meaning and healing. There is a difference between learning from others and comparing ourselves to others. **Your healing is your own unique experience.**

Dissemination

Dissemination is a fundamentally important component of any research project yet research highlights that the findings of qualitative research which is crucial for informing interventions and policy-making is under-disseminated (Towes et al., 2016). Sommer (2006) promotes the importance of 'dual dissemination'; writing for colleagues and the public, suggesting that researchers should not leave it to journalists to disseminate their findings to the general public.

As this research developed, I continually engaged in reflective and peer review discussions and, much like the findings of this project suggest, I noticed that the encouraging words of my peers have been internalized into my inner dialogue. My thoughts have become a permanent hub of ideas and aspirations to share the insights gained in this research. Furthermore, heeding the advice of Sommer (2006), I feel compelled to disseminate using language and platforms which may be accessible to practitioners and the public alike.

I initially intend to transform the findings into two books: one focused on the characteristics of inner dialogue, the other focused on providing practical support and reducing stigma for survivors of abuse.

I have been invited to speak at several conferences and organisations, such as the International Meaning Conferences, The Society of Existential Analysis, The Society of Psychotherapy, and The Weekend University. I will also disseminate and build on the findings of this research in my clinical work and have recently been invited to create and lead a nation-wide therapeutic project supporting women and children in refuge from abuse.

Considering philosophical dissemination, the depths of understanding gained by this research project has highlighted the value of exploring lived experiences through an existential-philosophical lens. Learning from my own experiences, and those of my colleagues, I understand the challenges faced when engaging in complex literature and primary texts. Furthermore, few have access to these philosophies unless enrolled on expensive and intellectually challenging education courses. I have therefore founded Existential Offerings (see: www.existentialofferings.com), a multi-media project which aspires to provide accessible resources for personal reflection and meaning making. In January 2022, I will also be hosting The Global Existential Summit, a free summit which I have developed alongside my doctorate. This summit invites people from all backgrounds to have an opportunity to learn about existential philosophies and to explore how these ideas can be applied to finding healing, meaning, humour, and happiness in their own lives.

Conclusion

Through the generous sharing of participants stories, the extensive literature review, and the rigorous analysis of the data, this research has provided significant contributions towards deeper understandings of what inner dialogue is, specifically how it is experienced by rape survivors. As suggested by Hulbert et al. (2013) inner dialogue was discovered not to be a monolithic experience; not the same for every person nor on every occasion. Each lived experience was found to be unique to each participant.

Inner dialogue is a multifaceted innate phenomenon, not a pathological symptom of mental unwellness. The experience of rape is not an isolated physical violation, it has the potential to violate all areas of a person's lived experience, shattering previously held values and causing long-term impact for the victim and the people in their lives. Society's perceptions of stigmas, stereotypes, and rape-myths are internalised into inner dialogues and directly impede healing from rape.

Who experiences inner dialogue continues to be a challenging question to answer due to its subjective and invisible nature. All eight participants in this study identified an inner dialogue that they were willing and able to investigate.

What inner dialogue is was revealed to be a multi-faceted and deeply complex phenomenon, uniquely experienced by each participant and at each moment in time.

Where inner dialogue develops from was found to be a complex process of external and internal influences, developing from explicit and implicit words, attitudes, and emotions from the self and others.

When traumatic events such as sexual assault and victim blaming occur, inner dialogue was found to change dramatically, becoming critical and damaging.

Why inner dialogue exists is perhaps the most poignant discovery. Inner dialogue is the source of individual philosophy; the epicentre of life's "eternal questions" (Jacob, 2019). Succinct with existential meaning philosophers, each participant appeared on a personal quest to find

meaning from their suffering. The inner dialogue in all eight cases was expressed as playing a central role in the discovery and creation of meaning-making and healing from suffering. Humans may never discover one ultimate answer to life, but this research suggests that inner dialogue plays a fundamental role for those attempting to do so.

How inner dialogue enables meaning-making appears to be related to the psychological distance it enables between the self and mental experiences (Morin, 2005) alternatively described as self-reflection or self-awareness. Active engagement with the many parts of the inner dialogical self-facilitated self-discovery and self-companionship. Whatever the past, present, and future holds, within our inner dialogue we are never alone.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Creative Formulation of Heuristics Devices

Mindful Reflexivity

Mindful Reflexivity is the term I have used to describe the heuristic device applied in this research to develop and enhance the researcher's awareness of bias, assumptions, and expectations.

This was developed in response to the 'epoché' and 'reduction' techniques outlined by van Deurzen in her paper on SEA (2014). As explicated in the main body of the thesis, due to theoretical and empirical critique of her application of Husserl's reductions (e.g. Garland, 2019; Zahavi, 2019), and due to the distinctly constructivist perspective of Husserl's work which does not align with the critical realist position of this research, this 'epoché' and 'reduction' technique was rejected from the framework offered by SEA within this research project.

It was therefore necessary within the context of this project to develop a technique of ascertaining the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the findings which was both aligned with the epistemological position of this study, and more empirically supported than Husserlian concepts. To develop this technique, I attempted to interweave contemporary and modern understandings.

This section offers a necessary emphasis of the subtle differences between features of reflexivity, meditation, and phenomenological intuition.

<u>Reflexivity</u>

The researcher's perspective is the central tool used to conduct any qualitative analysis (Wharne, 2019). To ascertain the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the findings, it is crucial that the researcher develops and transparently presents how their bias, assumptions, and perspectives were reflected upon throughout the analysis and how this contributed towards the

meanings found within the analysis. This is commonly referred to within academic literature as the 'reflexivity' process.

While many definitions have been provided by practitioners, a description by Bruner (1982: 150) is provided here, chosen as it closely encapsulates my personal experience of reflexivity:

> *"The researcher 'appears not as an individual creative scholar, a knowing subject who discovers, but more as a material body through whom a narrative structure unfolds".*

Moustakas (1990) first conceptualized 'heuristic research' and describes the process as an 'internal search through which meaning is discovered':

> *"I may be entranced by visions, images and dreams that connect me to my question. I may come into touch with new regions of myself, and discover revealing connections with others... If I am investigating delight, then delight hovers nearby and follows me around… Delight becomes a lingering presence… It opens me to the world in a joyous way and takes me into a richness, playfulness and childlikeness that move me freely and effortlessly. I am ready to see, feel, touch, or hear whatever opens me to a fuller knowledge and understanding of the experience of delight." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11.)*

Mindfulness & Meditation

The practice of meditation – especially mindfulness meditation – has risen in popularity over recent years within Western societies (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015), to the extent to which it has become something of a buzzword.

Firstly, it feels significant to honor the Eastern, Buddhist traditions from which it was gifted to the West, the philosophies of which are strongly influential in my academic work, therapeutic practice, and everyday life. With this in mind, I include a definition of meditation from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who describes:

"The whole purpose of meditation is to eradicate the deluded afflictions of our mind and eventually eradicate them from their very roots" (Lama, 2011, p. 21)

Secondly, *mindfulness* meditation in particular was selected for this heuristic due to the accessibility of contemporary empirical research supporting its beneficial application in research and providing applicable examples and techniques (Lutz et al., 2008; Vos, 2018).

No single definition of mindfulness nor meditation has been agreed upon by scholars (Lutz et al., 2008; Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015). Davidson & Kaszniak (2015) point out that *mindfulness* developed from several Buddhist traditions and is a term translated from the Pali word *sati* with meanings including: attention, awareness, retention, and discernment and involve the practice of "learning to observe the functioning of his or her own mind in a calm and unattached manner".

In the context of contemporary research, mindfulness practice is described by Shapiro and Carlson (2009):

"Mindfulness meditation involves intention, attention, and attitude: Intention refers to the personal vision for why meditation is practiced, which may be dynamic and evolving as practice continues. Attention in mindfulness meditation "…is discerning and nonreactive, sustained and concentrated, so that we can see clearly what is arising in the present moment…" (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009, p. 10). Attitude refers to qualities of openness, acceptance, curiosity, and affection in the attention that is brought to present experience." (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015)

Phenomenological Intuition

Vos (2018) highlights how practitioners are able to use their phenomenological intuition to return to the primary flow of experiencing and guide them towards emerging themes within data. The phenomenological intuition can be understood as:

"the individual's embodied, full-sensory receptivity towards their true self and an unconscious understanding of what is meaningful and valuable, and what is not. Metaphorically, this is like the compass that directs individuals in the mountains of their lives." (Vos, 2018, p. 117 & 120).

The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions

The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions is the term I have used to describe the heuristic device applied in this research to develop and enhance the researcher's capacity to understand and apply the existential dimensions of existence (Binswanger, 1963).

In *'Being in the World'* Binswanger (1963) conceptualized that existence can be understood as experienced on three dimensions: the personal, social and physical. Building on Binswanger's concept, van Deurzen added a fourth dimension: the spiritual. This has become known in modern existential fields as The Four Worlds Model (van Duerzen, 2010; 2014).

When preparing to apply this heuristic device, I noticed through extensive discussion with colleagues in the field that a number of different formulations are offered, yet without one overall understanding. A thorough literature review supported this, and revealed to me that various elements of the four worlds are discussed and elaborated on in different articles and books.

I therefore created a 'Blueprint' of the four existential dimensions by compiling the various elements of the combinative work of my predecessors. The term 'Blueprint' refers to "something serving as a model or providing guidance" (Merriam-Webster, 2021), and while this blueprint does not presume nor attempt to provide a *complete* overview, it was developed with the intention of providing a *more detailed* overview than is currently available, from which to understand the conceptualization of the existential dimensions (e.g. Binswanger, 1963; van Durzen, 1997; Cooper, 2016; Christophy, 2017; Garland, 2019). It must be reiterated that the separation of dimensions is purely a task of organization, with each dimension understood to be innately interlinked.

The Blueprint of Existential Dimensions

Personal Dimension | Eigenwelt

Tensions and Polarities: Identity & Freedom - Integrity & Disintegration - Self-acceptance - Authenticity & In-authenticity - Perfection & Imperfection - Confidence & Confusion

Preoccupation: Strength & Weakness - Memory - Authenticity & Inauthenticity - Freedom & Responsibilities

Interaction: Inner Self; Thinking

Outlet: Creation of inner sense of individuality

Point of reference: Selfhood
Point of contact: Sense of Self

Sense of Meaning: Sense of self-worth

World of: 'Me' – Identity - Character

Spiritual Dimension | Uberwelt

Tensions and Polarities: Good & Evil - Purpose & Futility - Transcendence & Mundanity - Meaning & Meaninglessness - Truth & Untruth - Right & Wrong

Preoccupation: Values & Beliefs - Meaning - Intuitions - Worldview/Ideas

Interaction: Intuition

Outlet: Connection to wider network; Sense of greater belonging

Point of reference: Existence of truth in the world
Point of Contact: Embodied Consciousness; Our Whole Being

Sense of Meaning: Sense of Purpose

World of: Faith - Philosophical Outlook - Systems of belief

Social Dimension | Mitwelt

Tensions and Polarities: Love & Hate - Belonging & Isolation - Introversion & Extroversion - Trust & Distrust - Competition & Cooperation - Conformity & Individualisation - Dominance & Submission - Acceptance & Rejection

Preoccupation: Emotions & Feelings - Acknowledgement - Relations

Interaction: Contact with others

Outlet: Communication

Point of reference: Existence of Others
Point of Contact: Social Self

Sense of Meaning: Shared values and connections with Others; acknowledgement, love

World of: Interpersonal Relationships - Culture - Race - Class- Family

Physical Dimension | Umwelt

Tensions and Polarities: Life & Death - Pleasure & Pain - Dominance & Acceptance - Expansion & Contraction - Birth & Death - Limitations & Possibilities - Harmony & Chaos

Preoccupation: Thrownness - Embodiment - Environment - Things – Survival

Interaction: Senses; Sensations

Outlet: Action

Point of reference: Material World
Point of Contact: Body

Sense of Meaning: Physical actions make a concrete difference

World of: Nature - Body - Health - Physical Needs - Material Possessions - Activities

The Timeline of The Lifeworlds

Philosophers have suggested that the limited time we have on earth; our mortality, is part of what brings life meaning (Heidegger, 1927; Merleau-Ponty, 1981). Furthermore, philosophy and science highlights the complex and “labyrinth” like nature of time (Peak, 2017). As humans gain their understanding of the meaning of events across time, both temporality and experience is considered to be complex and in 'flux' (van Deurzen, 2010).

When preparing to apply this heuristic device, I drew on practical resources such as van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker’s Dialectic of Time (2005) and theoretical resources such as the aforementioned existential-philosophical literature.

This also required an intuitive knowledge and reflective awareness of how I experience time; of how to phenomenologically observe time and temporality; and a fluent capacity to connect with the subtleties of language indicative of time and movement within time.

For example: I was very aware that I experience distinct movements within time in relation to my traumatic experiences, and that the 'past' can become overwhelmingly present in any moment especially when triggered by provocative experiences and memories. This is understood through my inner dialogue which can often give the impression of a lapse or extended length of time which does not match time measurable on a clock.

The Emotional Compass

Philosophers such as Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1939, 1943) wrote extensively about human emotions, and attempted to understand them by applying phenomenological methods. For example, Heidegger suggests that emotions are like the weather and Sartre saw them as a magical way in which humans create different relationships to the world. The Emotional Compass Model developed by van Deurzen (2010; 2014) was built on such ideas about human emotion.

To prepare for the application of the Emotional Compass, I drew on my existential training and theoretical understandings of how humans experience emotions. I drew on my awareness that

the process of SEA requires the researcher to go beyond other abstract methods of phenomenological investigation and to prepare themselves to be “moved” by the participant's experience of the world (van Deurzen, 2014). I was very aware that my shared life experience may evoke specific emotional biases within this process, and noticed that this was especially relevant in relation to emotional attunement both within the stage of hermeneutic interviewing and within the layer of analysis pertaining to The Compass of Emotions.

I prepared myself to approach this level of an analysis with a heightened engagement through Mindful Reflexivity. This enabled me to identify what my biases may be towards experiences, providing a clearer lens and openness to my interpretation of my participant's description of their emotional reality. I made sure to be aware and open to both explicit and implicit indications of emotions. I remained open throughout the process to capture the meanings of nuanced use of language and to attempt to clarify when appropriate within the interview process, with a suspension of my own biases. This awareness enabled me to identify and record which emotions were mine, my participants, or shared. For this I drew on practical resources such as The Emotional Compass (van Deurzen, 1997; 2014) and theoretical resources such as the aforementioned existential-philosophical literature.

Appendix B - Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How do you experience your inner dialogue?
   + How would you describe your inner dialogue?

2. How has your inner dialogue enabled you to understand your life experiences, such as your experience of rape?

3. Do you feel your experience of rape has shifted the way you experience your inner dialogue?

4. How has your experience of rape affected the way you experience your self, as understood through your inner dialogue? (eg. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, socially)

5. Have you noticed if your experience of rape has altered the emotional tones of your inner dialogue, and what are the emotional tones of your inner dialogue?

6. Has your experience of rape altered the beliefs & values which you hold of the world and others, as you understand them through your inner dialogue?

7. Do you notice similar qualities between your inner dialogue and the way you experience yourself in the world? (e.g. distracted inner dialogue/distracted attention to tasks; repetitive inner dialogue/ repetitiveness in lifestyle)

8. Do you feel that your inner dialogue contributes towards the way you develop as a person, since your experience of rape?

Prompts for closed questions where necessary:
"Please describe what this means to you?"
"Would you like to explore that in more detail?"
"Could you please share a little more about that?"

Appendix C - Characteristics of Inner Dialogues

Due to the limited scope of the thesis, further support for Part 1 of the Findings are presented below, bringing the characteristics of inner dialogue to life and giving the participants a voice through extensive inclusion of verbatim taken from the interview transcripts. It feels significant to note that verbatim supporting each characteristic was found in all eight transcripts, subsequently supporting the notion that within each participant exists a multifaceted inner dialogical experience.

The Best Friend

To begin this subtheme we consider the given of solitude which has surfaced through the analysis of transcripts such as Helena's and Silvia's. The first message which each chose to share about their inner dialogue suggests that they experience an invaluable role of the inner Best Friend which serves as a reminder that whatever situations they were thrown into, they always had themselves. It appears that when they felt connected to themselves, they were never truly alone.

"Okay so I think my inner dialogue in my head... my whole experience is that I basically am telling myself: I'm not alone, I'm not alone in the sense of this particular person I'm not alone. Which has been really supportive to myself to tell myself that I'm not alone and I know that as for fact." (Silvia, line 1)

"And I love my alone time and being alone, and I think part of that is because I have such an active inner dialogue so I never really feel that I am alone!" (Helena, line 1)

Their inner dialogue is there for the eight participants in times of need; a driving force of encouragement and optimism. It speaks with a forceful confidence, driving them away from despair and towards a sense of empowerment.

"'Cause like, it's when I desperately need - if I'm in a bad situation and I desperately need something, that's when my inner dialogue will come up and say, "YOU are strong, and YOU are resilient" - so it's a survival I think. I think it might be a survival technique." (Octavia, line 6)

"I have random things about it popping into my head and then having to mentally talk myself down for a long time afterwards." (Adriana, line 1)

When challenging thoughts and memories become a mountain, Adriana's Best Friend stands by her on the cliff of heartache, talking herself down from the heights of her pain until she reaches a more stable place of being. It appears that there is an essence of patience and calm within The Best Friend for all the participants. Being patient with themselves in their inner dialogue was revealed to be an important feature especially at the times that the participants expressed an urgency to understand and move through challenging situations. This urgency appeared to create a sense of pressure and expectation of themselves, from which the patient Best Friend helped them to restore peace. It seems that The Best Friend welcomed an honest inner discussion, acknowledging the distress of their situation and working gently to move them beyond their pain.

"Yeah, sometimes I think I need to tell myself like, "you can do it" and sometimes I need to be like, "yeah, this really sucks". And like, "how do you get past it? What are you going to do to get past it?"" (Mariana, line 16)

"I'm definitely trying to train myself to be gentle with that. To understand, "right now you don't know, and that's okay. There's reasons that you don't have the answers.

You're still pretty young."" (Viola, line 5)

As we looked more deeply into this during the interviews, we discovered that this relationship takes two to tango. Participants, such Mariana and Viola, expressed actively training

themselves to communicate within their inner dialogues. All eight participants expressed a dual sense of feeling broken, yet simultaneously feeling that they are in battle. The closeness of Octaviaʾs Best Friend inner dialogue demonstrates the beautiful side of bias, Knowing her truths with a capital K, and fighting for her when the world feels against her.

"So I think deep down within myself the inner dialogue knows, and fights for myself." (Octavia, line 2)

The analysis process unveiled the adaptive nature of The Best Friend, responding in each new moment based on what the participants needed. Hermia's Best Friend stood by her as she came to terms with the fact that she had been raped again, supporting her need to hide and providing her with a shield to do so. Adapting alongside Hermia over time, The Best Friend enabled an open dialogue with her experience of healing.

"My inner dialogue really helped me to accept it, while allowing me to really show this new part of me to the world.

So, some days it would be a dialogue saying, "I don't feel comfortable in my own skin today, but I don't want to let on to anyone else that I'm feeling that way. So, how can I portray myself in a light that shines brighter than I can personally feel right now myself."

And then, as time went on, and I began to not only accept but really grow alongside my healing. And I wanted to befriend my healing. Then it became a lot more positive." (Hermia, line 1)

There is a sense that having one's experiences validated and understood is of paramount importance when healing from trauma. The Best Friend does not encourage the participants to run away from their challenges, but rather be-with themselves in a moment of I-Thou; of honest connection based on authentic togetherness.

“But my inner dialogue, the self-compassion, having that nurturing motherly voice in my head saying that it's okay to feel how I feel; that it's valid" (Octavia, line 2)

For Ely, The Best Friend dialogue sometimes echoes the words of others, illuminating the capacity for us to be-with others regardless of their proximity in time and distance. Her Best Friend sabotages stereotypes and offers her a rational view on an otherwise emotional situation.

“And then I've got the rational bit of my head - the same things that everyone tells you - like "oh no its not your fault"” (Ely, line 9)

The Dreamer

Octavia’s Dreamer has found a creative way to heal herself through her imagination, by actively dreaming the outcomes of situations which she feels that she needs to find peace from. This research highlights that for the participants their dreamed experiences can be as valuable as their lived ‘realities’ in their potential for emotional healing.

“And, so I've noticed my brain - cause I also have childhood trauma - but I've noticed my brain just has this reaction where it'll dream the perfect scenario so that I can heal.” (Octavia, line 2)

The analysis reveals that when attention is honed towards the Dreamer, the participants were actively able to encourage its development. Adriana gained specific skills from professionals such as the use of affirmations and reminders which enable her Dreamer to become more dominant and act as an anchor when emotional tides are especially high.

“Doing affirmations and reminders, I've worked on that a lot in therapy. So I hope that's not like, messes up the study if I've been in too much therapy, but that's something that's really helped me. CBT - cognitive behaviourally therapy -

of trying to recognise my thoughts and more logically address them rather than letting them wash over myself." (Adriana, line 1)

The active power of affirmations and meditations was also revealed when analyzing Hermia and Helena's transcripts. It seems that the Dreamer's access to affirmations are especially valuable at times of self-criticism, self-doubt, and stuckness. The Dreamer enables a transcendence from these low moments, soaring instead into a position of powerful confidence. This not only gave strength to Hermia in these moments, but to those around her.

"So it almost feels like my ability to encourage others and liven them up transcends to the way that I think. And I feel like those affirmations are always able to come back to me in those moments of self-criticism or doubt." (Hermia, line 9)

Helena describes the sensation of being 'in her head', caught in her inner dialogues during darker moments of thought. The Dreamer appears to be a source of freedom, carving a space away from this chaos through distraction tasks, creative ventures, and meditations.

"I know what sort of things help me get a little more out of my head. So, I'll try meditation sometimes. I work best with distractions and I have a lot of creative hobbies." (Helena, line 12)

"I mean I know I'll have a lot of thoughts now. But I've been having them anyways recently. And I'll have dreams, and thoughts will come up. So I kind of feel like that's what it'll be like now too. It wasn't as scary as I thought." (Mariana, line 25)

The strength and influence that each feature of inner dialogue has appeared to be a fluid entity for the eight participants in this study. Mariana expresses the subtle connection between 'thoughts' and 'dreams'. Following her trauma Ely reflects on how this feature of her inner dialogue

has become less dominant. While before her rape Ely enjoyably found herself daydreaming of lighter topics, she now carries a weight that she experiences as bringing her inner dialogue to a deeper depth against her will.

"A lot more deep inner dialogue. Like I said not just thinking about your dinner - rather than just day dreaming - it's a lot deeper more of the time. Rather than just like thoughts about clouds or something." (Ely, line 14)

The Dreamer appears to transcend time and be a source of reminiscence and rumination for all eight participants. For Viola her Dreamer can have the tendency to wish for different past experiences. When Viola's Dreamer is dominant, she finds it bringing a sense of remorse for what could have been different; what she could have done to prevent her rape.

"A lot of "I wish I had seen these red flags"." (Viola, line 1)

"So, I think that obviously I think that I was not - I'm now in a healing process, but prior to that I dwelled on the night so much and like I said I kind of blamed myself a lot. And I think that shifted my trust in men. And, helped me to understand red flags better." (Silvia, line 3)

Red Flags and rumination were also a dominant feature of Silvia's Dreamer for years after her rape. Throughout our interview, Silvia spoke of a dream-like stuckness within which she spent much of her life, "dwelling" on the events of the evening and continually sitting in a sensation of self-doubt and blame. As Silvia started to heal, she noticed that this ruminative Dreamer became less present in her inner dialogue, and as this shifted so did her self-compassion.

The Detective

The analysis of transcripts such as Silvia's uncovered an understanding that The Detective within has the ability to rummage through memories, challenge existing emotional resonance that she had attached to her experiences and providing new perspectives for herself and for those around her. Looking more deeply at the impact of this feature of her inner dialogue Silvia felt that she had become stronger through the reflective process of the 2 years following her rape.

"And because I've had two and a half years to reflect on what happened to me, I think that it has made me... stronger. And it's made me not blame myself and understand from a different perspective about what someone else is going through that's similar to my story." (Silvia, line 3)

Emerging from Helena's transcript is an awareness of how The Detective can work in real time, bringing immediate awareness and vivid dialogues to draw her attention to the truth of a situation happening to in the present moment. Continually unveiled throughout the analysis of each participant, this immediate recognition of situations, such as being raped or sexually assaulted, is less common than one might imagine. That is to say, seven out of the eight participants referred to the fact that it took them time to understand the truth of their experience; to understand that what had happened was rape.

"So I think what's most vivid for me... and I've never thought of this as inner dialogue before... even while I was being assaulted, I remember thinking in my head, "I am being sexually assaulted right now". That sentence went through my head." (Helena, line 3)

It appears that for all participants The Detective provides and internalizes new information, enabling them at times to actively question the critical and judgmental inner dialogues associated with certain experiences. This is evidenced such as in Viola's case, who noticed that as her inner dialogue began to label situations with a more informed understanding of their true nature, she

became more equipped to cope with the reality of her situation; more able to put down the undeserved responsibility for the rape which occurred. Without the weight of regret, she began to move towards a place of comfort and self-compassion.

"And the dialogue was always kind of had that resentful, regretful element. And as I've got more information it's kind of forced me to be more comfortable, and call things for what they were." (Viola, line 3)

This experience of actively questioning and acquiring new information was also identified to be related to identity development for each of the eight participants. For example, in Ely's inner dialogue The Detective has the important role of piecing together the puzzle of her identity from the different potentials within her. As Ely looked more deeply within herself during the interview, she saw that she could identify the way she wants to be, and The Detective helped her to work out how this manifests authentically in her as a person. When "The Critic" formed as an "overthinking" doubter, Ely was able to use her Detective to identify this inner dialogue for what it was.

"No yeah I kind of identify with them all... and there's definitely like I don't like the over thinking one that one really pissses me off!

But thinking, like I want-

(very long pause)

I guess there's things in my head like there's qualities - characteristics - that I would like to be, and in my head I can think like that. But I don't know if I actually am like that. Sort of like about being an overall or general nice kind person. And in my head I am, but then I'm thinking... "am I actually that though."

But that's probably my over thinking head. It's all like a spiral of things!"

(Ely, line 51)

As we worked together during the interview unravelling the tapestry of Mariana's past, it was revealed that The Detective inner dialogue had identified patterns in some of her life experiences. As she explored these patterns, she discovered that these were correlated with her inner dialogue and that this particular aspect of her inner dialogue has been evolving since a young age.

> *"I think it made me realise a lot of the patterns of the negative voice I have... they come from like a very young age. And it's like I have this - I don't know, in some way it's kind of like trying to put someone else before myself, at any cost, sometimes.*
>
> *So I think realising where that came from, but also why... why I sometimes find myself repeating certain situations that I don't want to be in. I think it all kind of stems from there. And my perception of the rape was just that I didn't want to put what was good for me before what was good for the rapist. And it was easier for me to just kind of... not listen to that voice. Just to say, "it's fine... just go with it"." (Mariana, line 5)*

As she became attune with how this inner dialogue was encouraging her to act, Mariana gained a deeper understanding for why and how some of the experiences in her past may have occurred.

In some situations, The Detective appeared to help the participants to better understand their identity not only in relation to their sense of self but also in relation to their experience with others. For example, as Hermia reflected on the investigative feature of her inner dialogue, she noticed that it has enabled her not only to deepen her understanding of how to care for herself, but how she can care for those around her. She learned the value of communication and highlights why it is necessary to cultivate an authentic sense of self-love.

"And I think that I've realised the more I'm able to do that with myself, the more I'm able to translate that into the way that I care and the way that I communicate with others. And so I think that like, if you can't love yourself first then how can you love others." (Hermia, line 10)

As further explored below in Part 2 of the findings in the subtheme 'A Labelled Life', all eight participants referred to different labels associated with their experiences. The meaning of these labels was revealed to be understood through deliberation within each participant's inner dialogue. Octavia was able to investigate how she may like to bring the labelled parts of her identity into her future in a way that feels authentic to her.

"I'm also trying to figure out where I can put myself within that, without being labelled as just soley 'that', but also just creating social change around the dialogue about it." (Octavia, line 9)

Octavia also draws attention to the collaborative potential for the investigator's abilities to work with a team. She acknowledges that her therapist has been a valuable influence on exploring her own identity. In a world of labels which are weighted with stigma and preconditioned meaning, The Detective appears to be empowered to consider the personalized meaning of words, and each participant was responsible to question and chose whether the label was taken on board or not. This research highlights how the participants were influenced by exposing themselves to supportive resources, such as therapy, and actively implementing them in daily life.

"I struggled with labelling myself - the word: survivor; abuse and trauma; even the word rape, or sexual assault. I struggle with having that attached to me. So, I'm still working through that. And it helped talking to my therapist, because she told me "instead of wearing that hat 'survivor' which seems pretty permanent, you can change it into a verb, "that you survived" so it's something you went through; it's not your identity." (Octavia, line 4)

The analysis revealed that the experience of rape transformed the intentionality of The Detective within the inner dialogue of each participant. This is exemplified in Adriana's excerpt: while the inner dialogue was previously attuned to seeking opportunity, it became focused on protection and guided by fear.

> *"I used to be a lot more adventurous as a person. And I used to take a lot of risks, and my inner dialogue sort of reflected that although I didn't pay a lot of attention to it. I was always looking for opportunities in any kind of thing, I was very open to new things. And now I tend to be very closed off. My immediate reactions to anything are reactions of fear or hesitation." (Adriana, line 4)*

The Enlightened

One of the values Viola found most valuable in her inner dialogue was reaching the relieving understanding that her response to rape was not abnormal but was instead a perfectly rational response to her lived experience.

> *"My inner dialogue had kind of allowed me to see that I wasn't crazy."*
>
> *(Viola, line 3)*

Octavia suggests that she has an ability to intentionally focus her attention on her inner dialogue and expressed that this is as an important focus of her healing process. As Octavia reflected on this feature of her inner dialogue during the interview, she expressed feeling that this heightened awareness is a source of self-compassion and that it facilitates self-care.

> *"I've been doing a lot of focus on the inner dialogue. Because the inner dialogue I think is how you take care of yourself.*
>
> *It is one of the sources of self-compassion.*
>
> *And I think just really being aware of negativity or positivity… and focusing on the*

positive and the strength that I'm building. So I definitely think that inner dialogue is playing a big part." (Octavia, line 11)

The heightened awareness of The Enlightened inner dialogue was also a source of healing for Mariana. She became more in tune with her feelings and by acknowledging these as they came to her, Mariana noticed they were able to guide her to a place of calm. As we shone a spotlight onto the patterns in her life, Mariana shared the powerful awareness that she has discovered which distinguishes her self from her patterns: just because a pattern isn't good, doesn't mean that she as an individual isn't good.

"There was the way- there was the pattern, and then there was me. And I didn't have to - even if I felt like that pattern was not good, that didn't mean that I was not good for going in that pattern.

Yeah... I think that when I became aware, then I am kind of able to now more realise when I'm feeling a certain way why I am feeling that way, and what can I tell myself to calm myself down and make myself feel better." (Mariana, line 8)

The Enlightened feature of inner dialogue demonstrated by all eight transcripts suggests a profound interweave between emotions and the self for each participant. As we explored together during the interview how Helena navigates between darker and lighter areas of her inner dialogue, we became aware of the effortful manner in which she does so.

"When I have a clear head I am really happy and carefree. But I try - If I have like darker thoughts in my head, I really try not to let them effect my mood or whatever I'm doing in the moment." (Helena, line 11)

"I try to, because I've become more self aware and emotionally in tune with myself, I know what sort of things hope me get a little more out of my head." (Helena, line 12)

The Enlightened inner dialogue enables a deeper level of connection to others for all eight participants, with a unanimously expressed sense of heightened compassion that the participants felt for other people especially other rape survivors. Hermia reveals that this increased awareness of her own feelings enables her to experience the emotional worlds of others at a deeper level. This feature of her inner dialogue evolved through her own painful experiences; her emotional attunenment growing stronger through her suffering.

"I think it's allowed me to develop more empathy and compassion for others who struggle with mental health or with other disorders like anxiety and depression and things. Because I think this experience has really opened my eyes to what those experiences feel like. Also really what it means to feel alone in the moment, but also how much support really does give you hope." (Hermia, line 5)

Yet this heightened sense of awareness is bitter-sweet. Prior to her rape, Ely remembers a more "carefree; oblivious" sense of self. The Enlightened inner dialogue developed into one of the most dominant dialogues following her experience of rape. Whilst enabling her to become more attentive to the outside world, she was dragged from her "own little world" against her will into a new reality of danger and sensory overloads.

"Yeah aware, that's the right word. It's made me aware of everything. Like, I'm a very oblivious person. Like, normally - If people like - I just wouldn't notice anything going on, I'm in my own little world. Whereas since it happened I've been a lot more like switched on about things. And yeah noticing like, "what's that man doing over there" Little things like that, that I just wouldn't have noticed before. I guess now gets my attention. (Ely, line 45)

Silvia's transcript revealed that single life experiences can lead to moments of refreshed clarity within her inner dialogue. In the below excerpt she refers to her recent experience of reporting her rape to the police. These moments of enlightened understanding not only provide a new perspective on her past lived experiences, they also provide a release from emotional cages she has found herself in.

> *"And I think even since yesterday my inner dialogue has changed in reference to understanding that night, because, I know I wasn't - I know I've been blaming myself for so long about something that I never needed to." (Silvia, line 3)*

How the participants master their Enlightened inner dialogue remains something of a mystery. Adriana indicated its complexity, and the powerlessness that can be experienced when a lack of control is felt.

> *"Which is why I try really hard to sort of focus on my thoughts and what they are. But sometimes you can't. You can't stop your brain going. You know?" (Adriana, line 11)*

The Time Traveller

I have chosen to start this section with an excerpt from Hermia's transcript. Here, Hermia has demonstrated the relationship between The Time Traveller and healing. She describes the usefulness of her time-related inner dialogue in a multitude of ways. It provides her with a pathway for evolution from pain, a pause button for moments of rest, and an awareness of its non-linear nature. In the hustle and bustle of her temporality, it appears that self-care can often be found by taking the slow lane.

"I think that my inner dialogue has been tremendous in the way that I've developed and evolved after my experiences.

I feel like really the power of self-care that I was able to give myself when I knew that I had to step back from some involvement - when I knew that rest, and healing was what I needed most. It's through my inner dialogue that I could speak with myself and really encourage myself to really be with myself. And to take time to really feel my emotions and sit with them and sit with my pain and really be inside it. And I think that that really allowed me to grow and to heal...

...not that healing has a timeline, because I think that we know healing is non-linear. But it really helped me to learn things about myself and establish healthier ways of loving myself and like… coping. And I think that over time by doing that I really have seen the importance of treating myself with so much more kindness and just being gentle and being more compassionate with myself."

(Hermia, line 10)

As the analysis explored The Time Traveller it brought forth an awareness of the participant's power over how they exist within time. Like Hermia, Helena has learned the value of understanding what time she needs in each moment, and how by acknowledging this she frees herself from the high-pressure expectation to have all the answers all the time.

"And so I do think that since my own rape that... I've just learned to allow myself time. And not need myself to have answers right away, as to how I'm feeling or what I want to do or who I want to tell.

So, I think that it has definitely impacted my inner dialogue.

But, I have a bigger vocabulary now for my own thoughts and needs."

(Helena, line 14)

All eight of the participants made reference to using their inner dialogue to connect with their past selves during the interviews. As will be further explored below using excerpts of verbatim, the participants in this study had different relationships with their past selves and at times used their inner dialogues to be-with and communicate with this part of themselves. For some participants their younger self was lost and they used their inner dialogue in a quest to reconnect with their childhood innocence. For other participants they became trapped in teenage-like inner dialogue which directly correlated with their emotional response to the world following their experience of rape.

The analysis reveals that Octavia actively takes time to connect with her past self, and draws on their passion and wisdom as a means of guiding her through the present moment and caring for herself.

> *"The rape happened 2 years ago for me, and the abusive relationship was 3 years ago, and I look back and I don't even recognise that girl. In a good way - so, I'm into meditation and I'll think back and think "who was my younger self?" and talk to her. I do have that inner dialogue and with my older self, like how she's proud of me and how she'll get through that. That's part of my inner dialogue and I think it forced me to take care of myself, and look deep within."*
>
> *(Octavia, line 6)*

Yet in harmony with the duality of existence, it became clear that the notion of The Time Traveller providing a connection with their younger selves is a double edged sword for all of the participants. The events and traumas that they were thrown into appeared to have at different times since their experience of rape pushed each participant back to an inner dialogical age that they had experienced before and were not pleased to have to re-experience. Most commonly referenced within the transcripts was the teenage age which all eight participants referred to as

being a challenging time due to life circumstances, identity-searching, and the influence of hormones.

Adriana speaks of her struggle with this. Her experience of rape threw her back into the dramatic, emotionally barbaric inner dialogue associated with her challenging teenagehood. She found herself caught in an internal web of tension, consciously aware of her need for a rational inner dialogue to enable her to process her experience of rape whilst unable to access this matured state. Adriana affiliates this with PTSD, which appears to be experienced as a pathological wormhole preventing The Time Traveller to continue towards the future she desires.

> *"Yeah. And I think it's one of those things that I've really been working on. Like… at the beginning my inner dialogue was drastically impacted.*
>
> *Like most people I think when you're a teenager I think you have a pretty dramatic inner dialogue about "so and so's not talking to me today, it's devastating" and whatever.*
>
> *And I'd really grown out of that by the time this happened… and I feel like it just - I felt in a lot of ways like a child and a teenager again.*
>
> *For a long time I couldn't be logical, and I couldn't be rational about anything. And it really kind of just made me like, hate myself in a lot of ways. Because I'd really prided myself on that: that I was mature. And I didn't feel mature anymore because my feelings were ruling everything. The PTSD was controlling my whole life." (Adriana, line 3)*

It appears that in the realm of temporality, nothing is fixed and that the inner dialogue is an active source of communication across time. This study draws attention to the knowledge that the events in the participant's lives are not isolated in time, nor left in the past after they finish. Instead, they continue to exist within each of their memories. This is one of the facets of traumatic

longevity. Ely has cultivated the ability to use her inner dialogue to “work through” these memories in the present moment, rather than relating to them within the framework of her past as concrete facts. She also experiences time in distinct phases.

> *“Rather than just having events, it like, helps me like work through it I guess. In my head.” (Ely, line 9)*

> *"-after it happened, it got quite instantly into the darker and depressing... probably for the year after it happened it was very much like that. And then it's sort of slowly evening itself out." (Ely,*

The malleable characteristics of lived events also emerged through the analysis. In other words, the memory of events were able to be changed through the inner dialogue as participants reflected upon the past. Just as Elyʾs Time Traveller enabled her to come to terms with events of the past, Octaviaʾs allows her to reflect on past events and begin to identify them for what they truly are.

> *“I would say my inner dialogue...I've been working on it a lot so right now it's pretty good, it's nurturing, I'm very self-compassionate. But, it wasn't always like that. If I'm going back to when it did happen or when I did tell the police, erm, I questioned myself a lot. I remember when it did happen I don't think I processed exactly what happened until two days after, and it wasn't until I was on the plane flying back home that I just balled [cried deeply] and I kept having an inner dialogue saying "was that rape, was that rape, was that rape?"” (Octavia, line 1)*

Exploring the evolution of control over inner dialogue, the analysis reveals that synchronicity with The Time Traveller took a while to develop for each participant, with all eight participants referring to this being a ‘process’. Mariana reflected on how her connection with her inner dialogue developed over a process spanning around 2 years following her experience of rape.

She correlates this with her experience of rape which led her to feel out of control and disconnected with her inner dialogue. Attention is drawn to the influence of others on the development of inner dialogue, the sense of out of control within inner dialogue reflecting the dynamics of the social world.

"Um, how long? I think maybe it was 2 years probably after my rape experience that I actually started being in tune. And then it's kind of just been like a process. After I think I realised, I think it took my like a year or two to actually be like, "I'm in charge. I'm in change here". Probably about two.... two years."

(Mariana, line 22)

"Yeah I mean I think everyone has their own journey.

For me I think it was like growing out of being like a teenager. And feeling like very young, and feeling like everyone has control over me.

To like getting my own apartment and being independent and being like, "wait, no. Life just doesn't happen to me. I'm in charge here."" *(Mariana, line 24)*

As the emotional implications of this feature of inner dialogue were explored in the analysis, an understand that that rape can be a profoundly challenging experience to exist within the participant's inner world was gained. The Time Traveller within the inner dialogue appears to be able to transport the participants to painful places. This haunting element is described by a number of participants, who experiences "flashbacks" of their traumas. At any moment, in any time, The Time Traveller has the ability to seize them away from their present and throw them back into the past. This deep understanding is a powerful indication of the long-drawn-out impact of rape. Through the transportive power of memories and inner dialogues, the participants are not raped once but experience their rape again and again and again and again throughout their future.

Continuing to look at external influences on the development of inner dialogues, The Time Traveller emerged to suggest how influential time and context can be for each participant. As she reflected on the emotional journey that she has travelled following her experiences of rape, Viola reveals how deeply interwoven inner dialogue is with her emotional world.

"But definitely more often than not it's very like 'up and down' between like regret and anger, and wishing for what I'd like to never have been." (Viola, line 1)

This aspect of her inner dialogue was freaquently associated with a sense of helplessness by Viola as she fantasised of a story with her chapters free from rape. Adriana has noticed that over time her Time Traveller has shifted from vivid tactile flashbacks to intrusive thoughts about her experience of rape and the equally painful situation around it.

"It used to be a lot of flashbacks. I use to have lots of vivid tactile flashbacks for a really long time. And now it's not that so much, but now it's more intrusive thoughts." (Adriana, line 1)

Silvia's experience draws attention to the complexity of how time can be experienced in each moment within the inner dialogue. The Time Traveller demonstrates how her inner dialogue can seemingly speed up "going a million miles an hour" in certain situations, for example, in a moment of panic or doubt. Silvia also reveals how lived time can continue whilst the content of inner dialogue stays seemingly stationary. It appears that coming to terms with the reality of her situation may correlate with the pace that she experiences her inner dialogue. As Silvia is able to find peace within her predicament, she notices through her Time Traveller that her dialogue is able to slow down and enable her to continue with her day.

"Well Saturday's a perfect example to answer this question. The day after I reported, my inner dialogue was going a million miles an hour. Just: "you

should've just shut up, you shouldn't have said anything, you've just changed your whole life and you're gonna regret this."

And then I wouldn't get out of bed, until 1 o clock in the afternoon. I just laid in my bed, and I stared at the ceiling for hours and hours and hours and I just doubted myself all day long; doubt doubt doubt doubt. And then as the day went on, I was like, "okay what I did was great, what I did was good, I did the right thing I did the right thing". And then I could get stuff done." (Silvia, line 14)

The Critic

The Critic told Adriana that she deserved to be raped and began to convince her that this was a long-term reality that she would have to continually bare beyond her first experience of rape.

"I think it's changed over time. I think at first it was very negative self-talk. Very much that I deserved it, that I was the kind of person that those things just happen to, and that it was the sort of thing that I was always just going to have to deal with." (Adriana, line 2)

The analysis highlights not only the presence of an Inner Critic, but the understanding that The Inner Critic is not always present for the participants. It can "comes back" in certain situations. Drawing attention to the temporality of the Inner Critic, the analysis uncovered an understanding of the all-consuming potential that this dialogue can have. It seems that when The Critic takes over, a sense of stuckness is experienced. As Silvia stated: "there was no way I could get out of my head" *(Silvia, line 14)*.

"But yeah I've definitely experienced those days when my inner dialogue has been completely negative and feeling that wholeheartedly. Like, I had to take some mental health days from work, and those were the really bad days when I

was like, in my own head. And there was no way I could get out of my head. Until I could give myself a break." (Silvia, line 14)

This sense of stuckness; of being "in my head" was similarly experienced by Helena, who nods to an exaggerated gaze upon herself; a heightened sense of self-consciousness, which she attributes to her experience of rape.

"I find that I get a lot more in my head and self-conscious than I did before. And I can only attribute that to what I went through." (Helena, line 4)

The potential all-consuming quality of The Critic emerged from all eight transcripts during the analysis. Another example of this is given by Viola, who identified her desire to hide this experience from others. As we investigated this in greater depth during the interview, she revealed that her drive to feel empowered in front of others acted as a mask for The Critic to prevent others from seeing the pain she was experiencing within.

"So, I've always kind of had that self-critical dialogue, and really wanting to be empowered and not show people that they hurt me or they wronged me, even if it was eating me up inside." (Viola, line 4)

Octavia refers to her dedication towards self-exploration. As she "looks within" herself both in her healing journey and during our interview, she noticed that The Critic's dialogue exists as a force of questioning, doubt, and shame. Octavia also shared how The Critic may develop for her through the words and reactions of others.

"And as I look within myself, I think that question does come up still - "what's wrong with me?" - so that's still an inner critic that still goes on. As of lately, having come out, it's the self doubt and the shame like, "how is this perceived?" and when a friend - how they react - I really look into it." (Octavia, line 6)

This internalization of others' words as part of The Critic's development was explicitly stated in all eight transcripts, and is further explored in Part 2 of the Findings, such as in the 'Blame', the 'Myths and Stigma' and the 'A Labelled Life' subthemes. As others respond to situations, it appears that their words can directly be absorbed into the participant's inner dialogue. This experience was further illuminated in Viola's interview.

"There was a lot of shame and guilt and a lot of harsh critical stuff against myself. And that was strongly influenced by other adults in my life who responded really poorly to it, and kind of failed me in that way." (Viola, line 4)

When exploring the relationship between The Critic's dialogue and practical life actions, all eight participants expressed that they have a tendency to isolate from those around them. The analysis reveals that this can be due to a number of different reasons, such as a feeling of unworthiness to be in the presence of others or experiencing a need to hide. Hermia shares how she experiences moments where The Critic is so dominant that she finds it necessary to isolate herself from others.

"I think a lot of my inner dialogue - on a day or in a moment when I find myself being harder on myself or more critical of myself, I want to kind of shut that away from others." (Hermia, line 9)

A number of participants also demonstrate the very real danger of The Critical inner dialogue such as substance misuse. Six out of the eight participants shared their tendency to use alcohol and or drugs to subside their critical inner dialogue which they expressed to have become a familiar force following their experience of rape. The analysis revealed a sense of trying to fight against The Critic, but frequently finding that The Critic overpowers their inner dialogue, and at these times alcohol and or drug use was found to be the best way to silence it.

"I try to get the positive side to become what I'm more aware of and what I listen to. But it's hard. The negative one influences me a lot: feelings like I'm guilty, like I did something wrong. And then usually I just kind of like... drink. If a negative voice gets too strong. And then it can also lead to other things."

(Mariana, line 3)

"And that was my coping mechanism. And then when the rape happened, I even more used it as a coping mechanism... but... it was a bit ironic because it kind of happened because I was so drunk but then I still continued drinking so much." (Ely, line 61)

The dangerous practical implications of The Critic are also further explored in the Findings Part 2 subtheme "Suicide". Ely noticed an overall shift towards The Critic constantly highlighting her "flaws" such as her drinking habits.

"Like... though, I don't think it was bad to start off with but it's been so critical in my head since it happened, I've sort of... seen my flaws. And paid attention to my flaws a lot more now than I did before. And so now thinking what I can do to sort of... minimalize those flaws a bit." (Ely, line 60)

"And now coming out of it, I sort of have that little voice in the back of my head like, "be weary of your drink" or, "if you feel like you're getting too much then make sure you stop" which was never a worry I had before.

Like, if I got black out drunk, I got black out drunk - what was the worse that was going to happen?

Whereas now, like, every bad scenario that could happen if I get drunk comes into my head." (Ely, Line 61)

Yet the silver lining of The Critic was acknowledged by two participants. Ely draws attention to how by noticing The Critic voice when it comes slowly enabled her to become more self-aware, and furthermore, be empowered to actively chose which dialogue she listens to. She has used it as a resource to actively change the ‘‘flaws" which The Critic pointed out, such as in relation to her consumption of alcohol.

‘‘I think it's - this is where sometimes my conflicting voices come slightly in handy like, I think - all the critical ones in my head - I try and listen more to the rational voice." (Ely, line 93)

Octavia also shares an understanding of the positive quality The Critic can have. As we co-observed her inner dialogue more deeply, Octavia was able to see that it acted as a force for her survival.

"There's still that inner critic inside that comes back, but since that incident it forced me to survive." (Octavia, line 4)

The Chameleon

The transformation as described by Hermia gave her a sense of control and indicates the freedom that she innately has to change their inner dialogue.

‘‘Yeah that it's allowed me to, overtime it's really allowed me to look back at my experiences through a lens of compassion and self-forgiveness. And that's really transformed from, the beginning, when I was feeling nothing but guilt and shame, and feeling like it was my fault and like I had something to do with it.

And I really attribute that transformation to my inner dialogue allowing me to be more self-compassionate and really being able to almost remind me that it wasn't my fault, and give me back my sense of control that I really lost when I was going through it." (Hermia, line 3)

The analysis draws attention to the fact that situations have the tendency to entice out different aspects of the participant's selves. For example, Octavia acknowledges the responsibility which she is aware of having to effortfully try to give more energy to certain aspects over others. The excerpt below is taken from a discussion about the 'survivor' element of her identity which she has recently shared publicly.

"So it's a mixed bag. But for the most part, it is nurturing. I'm trying to make that stronger. And I'm trying to balance how being authentic with myself and not betraying myself for the sake of how I'm perceived in the world - because now it's public - and so I've been trying to balance that." (Octavia, line 6)

One of most common qualities of The Chameleon which surfaced during the analysis of all transcripts is the understanding that the potential for changes are ever-present within. This can be actively encouraged, as well as happening organically. The nature of change was experienced differently by each participant. Some participants experienced distinct phased changes, whilst others were more inconsistent and jumbled. The multivariate nature of The Chameleon also appears to be present in relation to the emotional tones of the participant's inner dialogues. Their unique experiences of this are illuminated in the following excerpts .

'The one thing I can say is that it's so true that emotions coexist with each other because I have had a mixture of my emotions in my inner dialogue changing between: being overjoyed, and being depressed; being anxious, and being relieved; and being happy and doubting myself a lot. Doubting my power and doubting my control over the situation.

So what I can say about that is that I'm having a coexistence of emotions. And that's from the very beginning. That's from the night that it happened. And those have transformed since this past week." (Silvia, line 10)

To illuminate the Chameleon's development as understood through the analysis, Silvia points clearly to her experience of rape influencing this. Only years later, following an event during which she actively opened a new chapter of healing by reporting her rapist, has Silvia felt The Chameleon's changeable emotional tones start to settle. Since her rape years prior to the time of interview, Silvia has had only one week feeling more at peace within her inner dialogue.

Viola experiences this transformative quality of her inner dialogue as a fluctuation, and during our exploration we noticed that the 'negative ''inner dialogues are more dominant.

"It's very - it fluctuates a lot I notice. Typically more often than not it leans towards, I guess what would be considered more negative." (Viola, line 1)

For Helena, this multivariate quality is sometimes experienced as a "jumble", and she notices that this impacts her way of being-in-the-world as a distraction, preventing her from concentrating on her present moment.

"I do think that when my mind is really foggy and cloudy with a lot of things jumbled around then I do have a harder time concentrating." (Helena, line 11)

It appears that this experience of having a mixture of emotional tones within the inner dialogue also developed as such in the aftermath of the rape for Ely. Unlike Silvia's continual transformation, Viola's fluctuation, and Helena's jumble, Ely's Chameleon made bold, clear shifts following her trauma, shifting from carefree shades of joy to darker shades of anger and sadness. Ely explicitly suggests that these phases of inner dialogue following a traumatic experience are likely unique to each person.

"I definitely think that they're definitely probably all different for everyone, because I think that everyone copes differently. But I think that most people would probably at one point or another have like the same phases at some point.

Like there's definitely like, at one point: numbness.

Like, I'd say that's what I had first of all like disbelief and numb and just sort of like 'nothing' like don't even know what to think. Like it's such a big thing and...

Well, it didn't feel like a big thing to me. But then like, the word rape is such a big thing. Like I even struggled for a while to say: rape. Like, it seems so massively big.

Erm. But yeah anger phase, upset phase.
And then finally – well the final one I'm trying to get - is the acceptance bit. I think that's the best way to get closure." (Ely, line 77)

This transitional nature was also expressed by Mariana, who described a duality which through the analysis was revealed to relate to self-care and self-neglect.

"But also very, in a way very doubtful of myself too. Doubtful of my ability to take care of myself. To watch over myself. To choose the right guy. It made me feel kind of unstable like, "maybe I need someone to take care of me, because I can't take care of myself if these things keep happening".

"But, I don't know, like I said in question 1... it's always like this inner dialogue: this and that this and that. And sometimes I'm like, "you can't take care of yourself, you're a mess" and sometimes it's like, "no, you're doing it.

Sometimes it's overwhelming but you're doing it. Just one day at a time."

(Mariana, line 17)

It appears that The Chameleon does not necessarily need a specific situation to begin its transformation, which can throw the participants into a state of instability and self-doubt. Sometimes the transformation was expressed to be triggered by a specific situation, for example a situation that held a similarity to the event. Other times for all participants, this transformation could happen seemingly spontaneously and randomly, interrupting the peace and stability of their day. The power and responsibility over being able to change and encourage the transformation of inner dialogue appears to be a wholly personal experience for the participants, yet the analysis showed that this can be influenced by external resources too. When investigating this with Adriana, she shared that personal therapy has played an important role in purposeful restructuring of her inner dialogue.

"Over time though, I think again with therapy - I probably wouldn't have gotten here without it - I've worked really hard to restructure those thoughts and those conversations with myself about [my experiences of rape]" (Adriana, line 22)

The Professor

The paradox of becoming stronger through suffering is acknowledged below by Silvia.

"It's really helped to speak to someone who knows what they're talking about, who's been through it! And I think that all the women that you talk to, or men, I think eventually will become sooner because of what they went through. And it sucks that that's how we've become stronger, but I really believe that."

(Silvia, line 23)

Further illuminating this paradox, the analysis reveals that trauma can be a starting point to learning. An excerpt from Hermia's dialogue is shown below to demonstrate how her innate curiosity manifested as questions within her inner dialogue and grew into an active process of self-discovery. Beyond this, Hermia's Professor within her inner dialogue uses her past experiences as learning resources in a process which she uses to carefully understand and shape her future.

> *"And now that I look back I see how trauma shaped the way that I really thought about things, or how trauma really shaped my relationships with some people. It really does fascinate me. And I often find myself wondering if I can find answers for questions that were once unknown about why I reacted the way that I did; why I was feeling; why I was relating to certain people in some ways.*
>
> *I think those questions in my inner dialogue keep me wondering and keep me wanting to dive deeper into my own story, but also learning about trauma responses as a whole." (Hermia, line 7)*

Adriana experienced a similar sense of self-discovery following her experiences of rape. As we explore how her inner dialogue may have been influenced by trauma, we can see how it can provide clearer understandings of certain elements of identity. The Professor within inner dialogue appears to have taught all eight of the participants about their values and personal boundaries. In Adriana's case, she feels that her experiences of rape contributed to this lesson occurring.

> *"And I also feel like in a lot of ways, I know who I am more certainly in certain things. Like, I know more who I am with where my values are and where my morals are, and what I'm willing to do for other people." (Adriana, line 4)*

As we explored the features of inner dialogue in more depth during the interview, Ely recognized that being busy was a key function of her wellbeing before she was raped. The Professor guided her to remember this about herself and prompts her to immerse herself in activities to

prevent the painful alternative – a tumultuous influx of questions and opinions which she experiences akin to madness.

> *"Yeah I've always been quite a busy person. But then I know like, since when I started feeling depressed, I've learned that I get depressed when I stop doing things - like if just - if I've got a day at home by myself - that's when all my thoughts go CRAZY.*
>
> *If I'm not doing something then that's when every opinion on every single thing that's going on in my life, starts coming in my inner dialogue at once." (Ely, line 55)*

It appears that the inner Professor was able to use the participant's challenges as a foundation for growth. In spite of the trauma which they experienced against their will, the participants' analysis revealed a profound capacity for their inner dialogues to turn terrible times into learning opportunities. It emerges that the participants all embraced the responsibility to actively engage in this experience. Octavia and Mariana demonstrate that that they found value in willfully choosing to learn from their trauma. Exploring this more deeply during the interviews, we came to understand that this is a delicate process of acknowledging a traumatic event for what it was and not invalidating the experience but rather choosing to grow and learn from it.

> *"I see my inner dialogue as: it's made me stronger so that I can help others. It's helped me, I've used it as a lesson... even though it was injustice and an act of violence, I try to see the positives of it and how I can grow." (Octavia, line 2)*

> *"I don't know if I could definitely say that that's from the - ... but I think it is. I think it's from that. Something I guess I could say that's what I "got out of it".*

To like be aware of what I'm feeling when I'm feeling. And not just later on, when I regret what I did." (Mariana, line 9)

It appears that there is no singular clear correlation between the traumatic historical event and the learning potential from it. There is evidence of a varied increased understanding in their social, emotional, spiritual and physical realms gained by each of the participants through their inner dialogue. These lessons are not only applicable to understanding their past but can be invariably useful in the present moment.

As we further explore the phenomenon of learning from trauma we stumble across the agonizing paradox of this experience. The analysis begins to unravel the grey area of framing a traumatic experience as something 'positive' when it becomes a learning opportunity. Implicitly or explicitly referred to in all eight of the transcripts was a sense that by gaining any learning from it, this learning inextricably binds part of the self to the event; as if this event was therefore in some way justifiable. This is a challenge that was very present with Viola at the time of our interview.

"And, I don't know it's hard to kind of try and change the dialogue sometimes. To make it healthier. To make it as though this was more of like a learning experience for you know I can grow from this. I have a lot of trauma from this, and I don't necessarily want to frame it as a positive thing... as if, "oh it's just another thing that contributed to who I am". Because it shouldn't have happened." (Viola, line 1)

As revealed during the analysis, it appeared that inner dialogue works behind the scenes whether the participants were actively aware of it or not. As Helena became more aware of the role of The Professor she realizes that she has been taught the valuable lesson of being kinder to herself. It appears that becoming more informed about the roles her inner dialogues have may have enabled a greater understanding for how she can support herself through challenging times.

"And so, I don't think... I can barely remember what my inner dialogue was like before this happened, because I didn't think I thought about it.

But now I've done so much time working on myself and my thoughts and my own healing process. That I think I've learned to be kinder to myself." (Helena, line 14)

However, attention is equally valuably drawn to the realisation that no matter how active their inner dialogue was and no matter how willing the participants were to learn, some things in life may never be understood. All participants referred to being unable to understand certain things, specifically thing that they felt they could not truly connect with on a personal level. With that in mind, certain things in life - such as hurting other people - may better be left unknown.

"Yes I think that... even though I don't want to believe it... I do have this feeling that the world is a very dangerous place and people are very complicated. And people hurt other people... in terrible ways, in ways that sometimes I can't understand.

Like, I think that besides from getting angry, I can't really hurt someone. But there are so many people that do." (Mariana, 15)

Appendix D – Participant Information Sheet

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Title of Study:

An Existential-Phenomenological Exploration Of How Inner Dialogue Is Experienced By Rape Survivors

Researcher: Natalie Fraser NF270@live.mdx.ac.uk

Supervisors: Dr. Simon Cassar & Dr. Claire Arnold-Baker –
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Date: October 2019

Participant Information Sheet

My name is Natalie Fraser and I am currently studying a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology & Psychotherapy by Professional Studies with the New School of Psychotherapy & Counselling, in partnership with Middlesex University. As part of my qualification, I am required to create an original piece of research that will contribute to my field.

What is the purpose of the research?

I am conducting a research project exploring how inner dialogue is experienced by rape survivors. I am looking to recruit individuals who have experienced rape and can relate to the experience of inner dialogue, and are willing to discuss these experiences in a research interview. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how inner dialogue is experienced by rape victims in their life following the event.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited as a potential participant because you meet the following criteria:

- You are between the ages of 20 and 30
- You have been through the experience of rape in the last 5 years.
- You have had at least 12 sessions of therapy since your experience of rape, and are not currently in therapy.
- Speak English fluently.
- Can legally provide consent to engage in the study.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation in this research is on a voluntary basis.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you would like to take part in this research project, following communication via phone or email to clarify your interest in participating and check that you meet the inclusion criteria, an interview will be arranged at a suitable time and place for you. A consent form will be provided on the day of the interview, and you will be asked to sign it before taking part in the interview, once the contents of the form and project have been fully appraised to you. This will enable you to understand fully what you are consenting to.

This interview should last for approximately 60 – 90 minutes and will be audio recorded with a digital voice recorder so that it can be transcribed by me for the analysis process. In this interview I will ask you questions about how you experience your inner dialogue, how it affects your life including how this may have been influenced by your experience of rape. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to and you will be able to pause or stop the interview without judgement or having to

give an explanation why. The audio recordings will only be accessible to me (the researcher) and these will be deleted as soon as the interview has been transcribed. The interview will be transcribed and coded, and your identity will be concealed by a pseudonym, meaning that none of your personal details will be on this document.

Consent

You are free to withdraw your consent without consequences up until the data analysis when your data can no longer be identifiable as yours. You do not need to provide an explanation for withdrawing your consent.

What will happen to the data?

Audio recordings of your interview will be transcribed by myself the researcher. I will use these to explore if there are any patterns between your experience and those of the other participants, to allow me to establish important aspects of your experiences. I will anonymise the interviews so you cannot be identified from these. I will store these on my secured personal laptop computer and password protect all documentation relating to you. Your personal details will be securely stored separately and will be delete once the interviews have been transcribed. No one other than myself will have access to your information. All recordings will be deleted upon transcription and anonymised data will be kept for 10 years. The findings of the research may be published in psychology and psychotherapy journals and/or may be presented at conferences/workshops. Non-identifiable verbatim from the transcripts may be selected as part of these publications.

What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?

As we explore how you experience your inner dialogue, with some questions relating to your experience of rape, the discussion may evoke emotionally challenging feelings for you. If at any point you wish to pause or stop the interview you will be able to do so without question, and the interview will continue only if you wish to do so. At the end of the interview you will have the opportunity to discuss your experience of the research with me (the researcher) and will be provided with details of supporting communities and organisations if you need further support. You will be given the contact details of the supervising institute should you wish to raise any issues or concerns about your experience participating in the project following your interview.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

Taking part in this research may be beneficial to you for a number of reasons. Important studies into the experience of rape have demonstrated that the process of discussing one's experience is a fundamental part of the healing process (Flo, 2018). While you will participate in a research interview not a therapy session, the process of this type of interview will be therapeutic by its very nature (Van Deurzen, 2014) and will be conducted by an existential-phenomenological psychotherapist in training

As well as the personal benefits, your participation in this study will enable this research project to provide important new insights into how inner dialogue is experienced by rape survivors, contributing to the currently small understandings of this exceptionally important and widely experienced phenomena. It will also offer insight into the personal impact of rape which until recently has been relatively underexplored in the field of psychology despite how too-common the experience is for people across the world. The theoretical understandings gained by this research project will enable help healthcare professionals have a greater understanding of how to support the healing process of rape and work with inner dialogue, and how they may apply this within therapeutic settings.

As a survivor of rape, this research project will give you and other survivors a voice within a society which continually stigmatises and misunderstands this impactful experience. As the contributions of this research project are published and disseminated, sharing these important experiences will raise attention and acknowledgement within public and professional fields.

Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC Ethics Committee.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am funding and organising this research project as part of my Doctoral studies.
If you wish to take part in this study or if you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, then please contact me at NF270@live.mdx.ac.uk where I will be available to answer any further questions you may have. You are welcome to request a telephone call via this email address if you would prefer to communicate by phone.

Appendix E – Informed Consent Form

New School of Psychotherapy & Counselling
Existential Academy
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London
NW6 1DR

The Department of Health and Social Sciences
Middlesex University
London NW4 4BT

Written Informed Consent Form

Title of study:	An Existential-Phenomenological Exploration Of How Inner Dialogue Is Experienced By Rape Survivors
Academic year:	19/20 & 20/21
Researcher's name:	Natalie Fraser NF270@live.mdx.ac.uk
Supervisor's names:	Dr Simon Cassar & Dr Claire Arnold-Baker Contactable via NSPC. Email: admin@nspc.org.uk Telephone: 020 3515 0223
Supervising institutes:	New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling – London, NW6 1DR

□ I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and confirm that I have consented to be a participant.
□ I can confirm that I am able to legally provide my consent to engage in this study.
□ I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.
□ I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, that all reasonable measures will be taken to ensure my data will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from participating in the project, up until the data analysis stage starts 1 week after the interview takes place, without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
□ The benefits and risks of participating in the research has been explained to me to my satisfaction and that my participation will involve giving an in-depth interview.
□ I understand that I can ask for my research data to be withdrawn from the project until data analysis begins. I also understand that my personal details will be stored in a secure place, separate from my interview data and that my personal details will be deleted once interview has been transcribed.
□ I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication in psychology and psychotherapy journals, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

_____ _____

Print Name Sign Name

Date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Science and Technology Ethics committee of Middlesex University/New School of Psychotherapy & Counselling, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

Appendix F – Debrief Form

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61-63 Fortune Green Road
London
NW6 1DR

The Department of Health and Social Sciences
Middlesex University
London NW4 4BT

Participant Debrief Form

This form has been provided as a written debrief following your participation in this research project, in the form of a face to face semi-structured interview with the researcher. As well as this written debrief you will be given a verbal debrief by the researcher, in person directly after the research interview. This debriefing time offers you the opportunity to discuss your experience of the interview, and invites you to share any feelings or challenging emotions that may have arisen for you during the process.

Thank you so much for taking part in this research project, your participation is greatly appreciated!

Study title: An Existential-Phenomenological Exploration Of How Inner Dialogue Is Experienced By Rape Survivors

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Academic Year: 19/20- 20/21

Study details:

This study will explore how individuals that have been through rape experience their inner dialogue. The verbal accounts collected in the interview process of the study will be transcribed by the researcher and compared to the accounts of other participants. The reason for this is to uncover any important themes or patterns between accounts which may shed light onto the experiences. The understandings gained will provide an important contribution to professionals who support individuals overcoming the experience of rape, and increase the understanding of the role inner dialogue plays on people's experience of the world.

What happens now?

Audio recordings of your interview will be transcribed by myself and I will use these to explore if there are any patterns between your experience and those of the other participants, to allow me to establish important aspects of your experiences. I will anonymise the interviews so that you cannot be identified from these. I will store these on my secured personal laptop computer and password protect all documentation relating to you. The recordings will be deleted after transcription. Your personal details will be securely stored separately from the recordings and will be deleted after 10 years in accordance with GDPR regulations. You will have the right to withdraw any information up until the data has been analysed - up to one week after the interview takes place. Anonymised transcriptions may be used as part of the final write up and may be part of published work.

The findings of the research may be published in psychology and psychotherapy journals and may be presented at conferences/workshops. Non-identifiable verbatim from the transcripts may be selected as part of these publications. If you would like a summary of the final research project then you are welcome to request an electronic version by contacting me by email (provided above).

If anything personally challenging has arisen for you during this research process, please don't hesitate to seek support from the contact details of networks and agencies that have been provided for you. If you would like to contact the supervising institutes directly to express any concerns that you may have about your experience of participating in this research, their contact details can be found at the bottom of the page.

Thank you so much for your contribution to this research project, your participation will provide important new insights into how inner dialogue is experienced by rape survivors. It will also offer insight into the personal impact of rape which until recently has been relatively underexplored in the field of psychology despite how too-common the experience is for people across the world. Your contribution will help professionals gain understandings of these experiences, enabling them to better support the healing process of rape and work therapeutically with inner dialogue.