INTO THE FIRE: USING THERAPEUTIC ENACTMENT TO ADDRESS
EARLY TRAUMATIC MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

by

PAM HIRAKATA
B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1991

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
September 2002
©Pam Hirakata, 2002
ABSTRACT

While traditional forms of therapy focus heavily on a survivor’s ability to tell his or her story, the very nature of traumatic memory can present a challenge since survivors of trauma often struggle to find the verbal language to describe the terrifying events that have occurred. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse can be left in a state of re-experiencing the past as they face the overwhelming task of trying to find words for something that is often wordless. Researchers have identified the need for a “bridge” between the non-verbal and the verbal however, studies in this area are lacking. The purpose of this research is to examine the lived experience of using therapeutic enactment as a supplementary tool to address the fragmented and wordless memories of childhood sexual abuse. Through an ethnographic research design, four women have participated in this study. These women share with us their stories and take us on a journey through their experience of using therapeutic enactment to address memories of their abuse. From these stories, four dominant themes emerged. These themes - re-connection, voice, empowerment, and corrective re-experiencing - appear in varying degrees and indicate an overall positive and reparative experience.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ii

**TABLE OF CONTENTS** iii

**LIST OF FIGURES** vi

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** vii

**THE SILENT CHILD** viii

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION** 1

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

- Introduction 5
- Traumatic Memory 5
- Vivid Re-experiencing 5
- Sensory Fragmentation 7
- State-Dependent Triggers 9
- Non-Verbal 10
- Therapeutic Enactment 13
- Action 14
- Social Community 16
- Enactment 18

Summary of Literature Review 20

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

- Introduction 22
- Ethnographic Research 22
- Pros and Cons of Ethnographic Research 24
- Researcher’s Perspective 26
- Representation of the Research Text 27
- Autoethnography 28
- A Biographical Approach 28
- Participants 28
CHAPTER FOUR: THE JOURNEY BEGINS....

Introduction 32
Diane 32
Andrea 48
Beth 60
Sandra 75

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

Introduction 87
Re-connection - Self, Others, and the World 87
Connecting With Others 88
Re-connecting to Self 89
Back Into the World 91
Voice - Breaking Down the Walls of Silence 93
Being Seen 94
Being Loved 95
Being Heard 96
Empowerment - Strength from Within 97
The Freedom to Trust 98
The Permission to Feel 98
The Safety to Confront 100
Corrective Re-experiencing - The Creation of New Memories 102
An Internal Resource 102
A Completed Response 104
A Reparative Experience 105
Summary 107
### CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Research Findings</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-connection</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective Re-experiencing</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Challenges and Concerns</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-traumatization</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Traumatic Material</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the Study</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Therapist</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Director</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Survivor</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EPILOGUE** 128  
**REFERENCES** 130  
**APPENDIX A** 140  
**APPENDIX B** 141  
**APPENDIX C** 143
| Figure 1 | ix  |
| Figure 2 | 57  |
| Figure 3 | 62  |
| Figure 4 | 70  |
| Figure 5 | 72  |
| Figure 6 | 88  |
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my amazing circle of support, love, and strength: David Bain, Tim Black, Julie Griffith, Rick Hancock, Patrice Keats, Isabel McClure, Shona McKinnon-Wood, Olivia Scalzo, Dr. Marv Westwood, and Dr. Patricia Wilensky. Individually, your unique and special gifts have continued to guide and light my way. Together, your strength and power to heal are endless.

To my parents, Helen and Larry and my husband, Hide. Your silent love and support have given me the space and courage to follow my dreams. Your faith in me has helped me achieve them.

To my friend and sister, Cindy whose playful Spirit reminds me of the brightness in life and the innocence of the heart. You teach me a lot through your strength.

To Monica Edl - my belay in more ways than one! Your friendship will always be treasured.

To Dr. Marla Arvay for providing me with the borders to safely explore this world. Your warm and gentle guidance has carved a path for me - a path that has taken me one step further in my journey. Thank you.

Further special acknowledgements to Dr. Marv Westwood for your trust, your strength, and your belief that my heart will find the way;

To Dr. Patricia Wilensky for being an anchor in the storm. Your words of wisdom and warm and loving embrace will not be forgotten;

And to Rick Hancock for never leaving my side and for travelling the journey with me. Your endless support and unfaltering patience have showed me that the journey towards reparation need not be travelled alone. I will be forever grateful.

Finally, a special and very important acknowledgement to “Diane”, “Sandra”, and “Andrea”. Your stories have touched my life - your Spirits have captured my Soul. Thank you!
The first time I saw her, I didn't know what to do. She looked so scared and fragile and helpless. There she was curled in the corner of a cold, dark room with no one around to protect her and keep her warm. I want to help her but I don't know how. She jumps when I try to go near her and doesn't answer when I call to her. I don't think she can hear me. It's like she shut herself out from the rest of the world. She's alone and no one can reach her.

Sometimes I can see that she is crying, but I can't hear her - she cries silently because she knows that her tears don't make a difference. No one can help. No one can understand.

As I watch her, I feel helpless. How can I reach out to someone who is hurting so much? It's so much easier to just close my eyes and walk away. To try and reach her means I would have to enter her world, feel her pain, and listen to stories that I don't want to hear. How can she possibly exist? How can this be real?

Slowly I walk towards her. She shivers with fear for she fears anyone who comes too close. Sometimes she'll strike out in anger hoping that maybe I'll go away. Secretly however, she hopes that I won't. Secretly she just hopes that one day someone will notice and care enough to reach out and help. She won't make that easy though. She's been hurt before and can't bare the thought of being hurt again. Her anger protects her. At the same time however, it isolates her and pushes people away.

With gentle care and persistence I reach out and touch her shoulder. She cries even more as if my touch has enabled her to release some of the pain. But this time as she cries, I can hear her. At first her cries are faint - almost non-existent - but gradually they become louder as if coming from within a very deep and dark place. Slowly she begins to realize that her cries can be heard. In her own way, she is reaching out to me. Trusting me with her tears - trusting me with her pain.

Slowly she begins to speak, and little by little, the story behind her pain is revealed. Sometimes she'll stand up and start to walk with me. Sometimes she'll collapse and curl back up into the silent Child I had found her as. I feel discouraged and frustrated and even angry at her for collapsing, but I've come this far and I can't close my eyes to her now. . . .
This story marks the beginning of a journey - a journey that will take you into the silent and frozen world of childhood trauma and further into the heart and soul of a tiny Child that lies within. You are invited to share with her the struggles and fears that make up her world and move with her through the darkness as she discovers of her strengths, her courage, and ultimately her voice. As you read this, I hope that you will embark on this journey with her and receive from it, the gift of knowing that the spirit of a Child never dies. In fact, that tiny spark of a trembling Child can shine and sparkle brilliantly - if given the love and space to grow and be heard. By listening to her story, you contribute to the growth of her spirit and for this, she thanks you.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Etched in the mind of every person who survived childhood sexual abuse are haunting memories that take them back in time and lock them in the moments of terror. These memories are fragmented and filled with disturbing images and sensations and cause the mind and body to re-live the abuse and ultimately, to re-live the horror. For many, these memories are terrifying. They consist of overwhelming images that appear in the form of flashbacks, dreams, and nightmares and contain vivid “snapshots” of the abuse that continuously re-play and remain trapped somewhere within the mind and body. They consist of intense feelings and sensations. They are the abusive touches that continue to be felt and the breathing and whispering voices that continue to be heard. In many ways, these memories replicate the abusive events themselves for they can surface unexpectedly and leave an individual feeling helpless, powerless, and without control. They continue to hold an individual hostage long after the abuse has ended.

For survivors of trauma, such as childhood sexual abuse, these vivid and intrusive memories can momentarily pull them into a darkened world where sights, sounds, and sensations are heightened. Confused and disoriented, individuals can feel trapped as frozen segments of the abuse begin to emerge - encapsulated in free-floating “bubbles” - and move about ominously as the memories begin to take on a life of their own. A sense of anticipation and terror is felt. Each memory passes by holding fragmented pieces of the trauma: the coldness of the floor, the weight of the body, and the sound of the abuser’s footsteps coming near. Each piece of the trauma is disconnected from the other. Each piece appears lost in both time and place. Sometimes these trauma “bubbles” burst unexpectedly, with one burst triggering the burst of others and creating a situation where the individual is suddenly thrown back into the trauma and overwhelmed with all of the feelings and sensations that went with it. Feelings and sensations that were originally experienced are re-experienced -- the frantic need to be invisible; the horror of being found; the touch, the sounds, the pain... the fear. The experience of remembering takes the adult survivor back to the terrified child being abused and
the trauma is once again repeated.

As with other traumatic events, repairing from the wounds of childhood sexual abuse, often involves telling one’s story. As each part of the trauma is named and spoken about, isolated parts of the experience begin to connect and slowly become integrated into a part of one’s own personal history. Valuable pieces of the past are reclaimed and treasured parts of oneself are rediscovered. Talking about the trauma provides survivors with an opportunity for their experiences to be validated, witnessed, and shared. It gives them a sense of strength, connection, and meaning. While telling one’s story can be an important part of the reparation process, it can however, be a challenge, for within this world filled with overwhelming feelings, images, and sensations, there are no words. Verbal language does not exist leaving the survivor lost and alone in a frightening world of “speechless terror” (van der Kolk, 1987).

With traditional therapy relying heavily on the power of speech, finding words to describe the horrifying images and sensations that make up a traumatic memory can be difficult. Slowly, survivors struggle to make sense of the abuse and may begin to attach some words to their pain. However, “as the narrative closes in on the most unbearable moments . . . [the survivor] . . . finds it more and more difficult to use words” (Herman, 1992, p. 177) and the struggle to tell one’s story continues. Traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse are to a large extent kept alive by the secrecy and silence that surround it. In order to break this silence and reclaim power and control, the disturbing images and sensations that repeat in one’s mind must somehow be given a voice and be heard. Given the wordless nature of traumatic memories however, how is it possible to speak the unspeakable?

Researchers (Keats, 2000; Morley, 2000) have examined the use of therapeutic enactment as an action-based intervention used in the reparation of trauma. A branch of group psychotherapy that uses drama or enactments to recreate and ultimately, resolve key life events, therapeutic enactments have been widely used to address a variety of traumatic experiences from both childhood and adulthood. According to Herman (1992), traumatic experiences can be defined as events that “. . . overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning. [They] . . . generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death” (Herman, 1992, p. 33).
Traumatic events are traumatic. They strongly impact the mind and body and leave a lasting imprint on both the Spirit and Soul. For therapists working with trauma survivors, there are many unique challenges. Depending on the type of trauma experienced, the number of times the trauma occurred, and the relationship with the perpetrator or perpetrators involved, these challenges can present themselves in many different forms. Also, depending on the age at which the trauma or traumas occurred, inner strengths and resources may vary, depending on how much, or how little, the core Self had developed during the time of the trauma. Trust and safety may also be lacking and for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the formation of a strong therapeutic alliance may be difficult as these issues of trust and safety become intertwined with feelings of fear, shame, abandonment, and betrayal. Interventions with survivors of childhood sexual abuse need to consider the complexity of issues involved (Courtois, 1997; Daniluk & Haverkamp, 1993; Williams, 1994; Winder, 1996). Additional guidelines must be implemented.

While research (e.g., Brooks, 1998; Keats, 2000; Morley, 2000) on therapeutic enactments has concentrated mainly on the experience and use of this intervention with a single traumatic incident experienced in adulthood by an unknown perpetrator, no research has been done on the use of this intervention to work through multiple traumas experienced in childhood by a known perpetrator. How do therapeutic enactments access the fragmented and wordless nature of early traumatic memories? And how do they address the specific needs of survivors who experienced multiple traumas in childhood by a known perpetrator?

At this point, it is important to note that the intent of this study is in no way meant to indicate that therapeutic enactments should be used to replace traditional therapy. The support, guidance, and movement that occur in individual sessions are in my experience, essential to working through many of the lasting effects of childhood sexual abuse. The benefits of this individual work are invaluable. However, when used in conjunction with individual therapy and with the support of a primary therapist, therapeutic enactments may be used to complement traditional therapy and help move a person further along the reparation process.

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth exploration of the use of therapeutic enactment as a supplementary tool in accessing and repairing early traumatic memories of
childhood sexual abuse. Previous studies (Keats, 2000; Morley, 2000) have shown that therapeutic enactments can positively influence the repair process of trauma. This research however, hopes to contribute to these studies by further examining 1) how therapeutic enactments address the fragmented and wordless nature of early traumatic memories for individuals who experienced childhood sexual abuse and 2) how therapeutic enactments meet the specific needs and considerations for survivors who experienced multiple traumas in childhood by a known perpetrator.

What is the lived experience of using therapeutic enactments to address early traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse? To examine this question, an ethnographic research design using an autoethnographic method was used to provide a deeper understanding of the complex, and often wordless, experiences of traumatic memory and therapeutic enactment. Ethnography is the study of the lives and experiences of people living within a particular culture. Through an ethnographic research design, an in-depth exploration into the cultures of childhood sexual abuse and therapeutic enactment groups will be obtained. Implications of this study hope to provide an opportunity to understand the complex nature of traumatic memory and offer therapeutic enactments as a supplementary intervention to address the early traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study combines three areas of current research - traumatic memory, childhood sexual abuse, and therapeutic enactment. The purpose of this section is to review current literature found in these areas and highlight some relevant studies that are essential to understanding this research.

**Traumatic Memory**

 Appropriately referred to by Charcot as “parasites of the mind” (cited in van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996), traumatic memories can be described as the disturbingly intrusive feelings, images, and sensations that are related to a traumatic event and repeatedly experienced in both the body and mind. Studies have identified critical differences between memories of non-traumatic events and memories of traumatic events and describe several unique characteristics of traumatic memory.

**Vivid Re-experiencing.** Unlike ordinary memories that generally fade or change with time, traumatic memories maintain a high degree of vividness and clarity and remain unusually detailed and persistent over time (Allen, 1995; Herman, 1992; Putnam, 1997). A study by McFarlane and Papay (1992) found that firefighters who responded to a natural disaster in Australia reported re-experiencing the same intrusive memories 8 years after the trauma occurred. Visual images, scents, and sounds remained highly persistent and vividly detailed. Similar results were found in individual eyewitnesses to a traumatic crime (Freinkel & Koopman, 1994; North & Smith, 1997; Yuille & Cutshall, 1986), in the re-experiences of war veterans (Briere, 1996; Morgan III & Hill, 1999; Southwick & Morgan III, 1997; van der Kolk, Blitz, Burr, & Hartmann, 1984), in the aftermath of a natural disaster (Cardena & Spiegel, 1993; Koopman & Classen, 1994; Sharan & Chaudhary, 1996; Xiangdong & Lan, 2000), and in adult survivors who experienced sexual abuse in childhood (Briere, 1992; Courtois, 1999; Elmone & Lingg, 1996; Waites, 1997). According to Chu (1998) and van der Kolk (1996c), traumatic memories are not just remembered, but rather felt, re-experienced, and re-lived.

A study by Lee, Vaillant, Torrey, and Elder (1995) further found that the severity of
trauma influences the degree to which these memories remain vividly persistent and re-experienced. Their study of 107 war veterans found that veterans who were exposed to severe combat during the war, experienced “recurrent and intrusive recollections of combat” and “recurrent distressing dreams of combat” 40 years later. Veterans who were less involved in the trauma of war however, altered their original accounts, diluted events, and reported memories of the war as becoming less vivid over the years.

For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the vivid and re-experiencing quality to traumatic memory can keep the survivor trapped in the trauma and continue to give power and control to the perpetrator long after the abuse has ended (Courtois, 1999; Herman, 1992; Waites, 1997). According to Courtois (1999), childhood sexual abuse can be defined as a sexual act imposed on a child by a person or persons who are in a powerful and dominant position and implicitly or directly coerce the child into sexual compliance. It can involve intra-familial or extra-familial relationships and can vary in frequency, duration, and severity (Courtois, 1999; Gil, 1988; Herman, 1992).

A study by Dorado (1999) examined the memory processes of survivors who experienced sexual abuse by a family member and found that “…visual images were very vivid and detailed and the experience…[of remembering]…was extremely intense. The memories were intrusive re-experiences of the trauma, often with accompanying visceral sensations and bodily reactions, which propelled survivors into an alternate state of consciousness.…” (Dorado, 1999, p. 102-103). For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the vivid and re-experiencing quality of traumatic memory has a disturbingly powerful, emotional impact.

Another study by Hartmann, Zborowski, Rosen, and Grace (2001) examined the dream images in 305 individuals and compared the dream images of those who experienced physical and/or sexual abuse to those who experienced no abuse. In total, 451 dream images were collected. The results of this study show that individuals who had a history of sexual and/or physical abuse reported experiencing a significantly greater degree of fear, terror, helplessness, and vulnerability in their dreams than those who had no history of abuse. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the overwhelming feelings associated with the abusive acts were found
to be vividly re-experienced both consciously and unconsciously. A felt sense of re-living continuously occurs.

**Sensory Fragmentation.** While ordinary memories are generally recalled as a sequence of events with a beginning, middle, and end, memories of a traumatic event are initially recalled as sensory fragments that “... appear to be retained in spots, rather than clear complete wholes” (Terr, 1999, p. 70). A study by van der Kolk and Fisler (1995) examined the fragmented, sensory, and dissociative nature of traumatic memories by comparing traumatic memories to highly significant, yet non-traumatic memories (e.g., graduations, weddings, etc.). They found that with highly significant but non-traumatic memories, subjects were able to state the sequence of events in a clear and linear manner. They did not report any sensory re-experiencing of the events or experience any fragmented flashbacks, dreams, or images. With traumatic memories however, all subjects, regardless of the age at which the trauma occurred, initially experienced their memories as fragmented pieces of information that were recalled in a variety of sensory modalities. Initial experiences of the memories were: visual: 63%, affective: 51%, tactile: 49%, olfactory: 26%, and auditory: 23%. None of these sensory modalities initially occurred together.

In the case of childhood sexual abuse, the degree of fragmentation is also influenced by the age at which the trauma occurred. According to Pynoos, Steinberg, and Goenjian (1996), the younger the child at the time of the trauma, the more memory is confined to a single image, sound, or smell that is linked to the action that is most representative of the immediate threat or danger. Particularly with negative emotions, the authors report that developmental factors interfere with a child’s ability to reconstruct an experience and make sense of the concurrently experienced feelings and sensations. For a child experiencing sexual trauma, concurrent feelings of fear, sadness, excitement, and anger require the child to isolate each emotion and assign them to different portions of the experience (Pynoos et al., 1996). For example, the authors state that fear may be assigned to a look in the perpetrator’s eyes, anger to a distinct laugh heard in the distance, and sadness to the feeling of the cold floor against his or her back. As each emotion separates and becomes assigned to a specific piece of the experience, the trauma becomes further and further fragmented. A series of isolated sensory events is therefore
In some cases, the fragmentation of traumatic memory takes on an extreme form, where parts, or all of the traumatic experience, is completely dissociated from conscious awareness. Traumatic dissociation, or the partial or complete inability to recall traumatic events, appears more frequently in situations of childhood sexual abuse, the witnessing of domestic violence as a child, and in combat exposure (Elliott & Briere, 1995).

In general, children in particular have a greater innate capacity to dissociate (Chu; 1998; van der Kolk, van der Hart, & Burbridge; 1995). However, the type of trauma experienced and the relationship with the perpetrator, or perpetrators, involved influence the degree to which traumatic dissociation occurs. A study by Feldman-Summers and Pope (1994) found that there is a greater tendency for partial or complete dissociation of an event if the trauma involves sexual rather than physical abuse and if the perpetrator is a trusted caregiver rather than a complete stranger. Williams (1994) experienced similar findings where in documented cases of childhood sexual abuse by a close relative, 48% had no recollection of the abuse during interviews conducted 17 years later.

According to Courtois (1999), Freyd (1996), and Whitfield (1995), the very nature of childhood sexual abuse by a trusted caregiver can leave a child doubting and dissociating from the experience. Childhood sexual abuse by a trusted caregiver leaves no lasting physical evidence or noticeable scars and is neither explained nor acknowledged by the perpetrator (Freyd, 1996). It goes against a child’s belief in the goodness and safety of his or her family and presents conflicting images of a loving, yet hurtful, caregiver (Dorado, 1999; Whitfield, 1995). Physically, sexually, and emotionally, a child is developmentally unable to understand and integrate the experience (Courtois, 1999). It can appear dream-like and unreal and can force a child to emotionally flee from a situation in which he or she has absolutely no control (Waites, 1997). Also, the more a child is dependent on the perpetrator and the more power the perpetrator has in a trusted, intimate relationship, the greater the betrayal and the greater the tendency to dissociate (Freyd, 1996). “To know . . . [about the abuse] . . . is to put oneself in danger” (Freyd, 1996, p. 165) and for a child, dissociation can be one of the fundamental forms of survival.
State-dependent Triggers. With non-traumatic experiences, memories are independently evoked by the person. When asked, or when desired, individuals can recall events from their past and control when, and with whom, to share them with. With memories of traumatic events however, specific cues can independently trigger memories and leave survivors feeling controlled by their past. These cues, referred to as state-dependent triggers, can be both external and internal.

For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, external cues can appear in a variety of forms. McNew and Abell (1995) compared traumatic memories of Vietnam veterans and adults who experienced sexual trauma in childhood and identified several external triggers that evoke intense feelings of fear or anxiety. For adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, triggers included: places (eg. beds, small spaces, and the house where the abuse occurred), events (eg. holidays, sexual acts, and specific times of the day), and interpersonal situations (eg. crowds, angry individuals, and people in authority). The study found that when compared to Vietnam veterans, survivors of childhood sexual abuse experienced a significantly greater number of sensory stimuli that included taste (eg. salty tastes), smells (eg. tobacco, cologne, alcohol), sounds (eg. loud voices, chanting), sights (eg. beer bottles, scissors), and touch (eg. touches from behind or near the neck).

Much research has also been done on internal triggers. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, traumatic recall can be evoked when “... high states of arousal seem to selectively promote retrieval of traumatic memories, sensory information, or behaviors associated with prior traumatic experiences” (van der Kolk, 1996c, p. 291-292). Studies have identified incidences of traumatic remembering during times of increased heart rate, blood pressure, and skin conductance (Fairbank & Keane, 1982; Pitman, Orr, Forgue, de Jong, & Claiborn, 1987). This can be especially frightening and confusing when physical activity, such as exercise, stimulate these physiological reactions and act as triggers to traumatic remembering (Waites, 1997). Medications that arouse the autonomic nervous system and replicate internal states experienced during the trauma have also been found to evoke traumatic memories (Southwick, Krystal, Morgan, Johnson, Nagy, Nicolaou, Henninger, & Charney, 1993). Traumatic remembering can be further triggered by moods and dissociative states experienced
during the trauma and also by body positions that are reminiscent of the abuse (Waites, 1997).

Whether external or internal, many cues become associated with the trauma and can elicit similar responses to those experienced during the original event (Perry, 1999; Rothschild, 2000; Waites, 1997). While some survivors are aware of their triggers and are able to gain a greater sense of control over their memories, others find that their triggers operate at an unconscious level and leave them feeling confused and disoriented by their sudden reactions to a seemingly harmless event (Perry, 1999; Roth & Friedman, 1998; Waites, 1997).

**Non-verbal.** Traumatic memories also lack language (Herman, 1992; Roth & Friedman, 1998; van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995). Despite their clear and vivid nature, many traumatized individuals have a great deal of difficulty describing precisely what happened and finding words to communicate their experience (Putnam, 1997; van der Kolk et al., 1996). A study by van der Kolk, Burbridge, and Suzuki (1997) found that 80% of the participants who experienced trauma in adulthood and 100% of the participants who experienced trauma in childhood had no verbal narrative of their experience and could not initially tell a story about what happened. The capacity to tell one’s story emerged over time.

Brain scans have also found that during trauma, and during subsequent re-experiencing of the trauma, individuals experience heightened activity in the right hemisphere - the area of the brain that is most involved with emotional arousal (Rauch, van der Kolk, Fisler, Alpert, Orr, Savage, Fischman, Jenike, & Pitman, in press). However, the left hemisphere, the area responsible for translating personal experiences to verbal, communicable language was completely inactive. Individuals may therefore feel, see, or hear sensory elements of their trauma but may be physiologically prevented from translating these experience into words (Bjertrup, 1995; van der Kolk, 1996a).

In the case of childhood sexual abuse, this lack of verbal language is further complicated by the developmental age of the child, the possibility of multiple traumas by a trusted caregiver, and the degree of shame, secrecy, and silence that surround it (Dorado, 1999; Herman, 1992; Rothschild, 2000). According to Waites (1997), people who experience shared traumas, such as natural disasters, or a single trauma in adulthood, such as a motor vehicle accident, often have a community in which they can talk about what happened, share narratives, and assimilate
it faster into their own personal histories. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse however, this is often not the case. Many children were threatened harm and told not to tell. Although these threats were told in childhood, they often remain vividly real in adulthood (Chu, 1998).

Acts of childhood sexual abuse are also silenced, not only in childhood by the perpetrator, but also in adulthood by society (McFarlane et al., 1996). According to Harber and Pennebaker (1992), people are often resistant to hearing about traumatic events for they can challenge a person's own sense of self-worth, confront a personal belief about his or her ability to help, and threaten his or her overall assumptions about the world. When the horrors involve sexual acts committed against a young child, the need for society to "close their eyes" can be devastatingly painful. It can continue to reinforce a survivor's belief in the need to keep silent.

The very nature of traumatic memory greatly differs from the nature of non-traumatic memory. In order to provide appropriate and effective care for trauma survivors, it is important to understand the critical differences that have been stated above. Researchers (Lipschitz, Rasmusson, & Southwick, 1998; Perry, 1999; van der Kolk, 1994) have expanded this knowledge by further studying the processing that occurs in the brain during trauma and offer a comprehensive and rich description of the neurotransmitters and neurochemicals involved. While an in-depth description of the physiological nature of traumatic memory is beyond the scope of this paper, a simplified and general understanding of how the brain stores and processes traumatic and non-traumatic information is provided (see Appendix A).

All information obtained from both traumatic and non-traumatic events enter into our brain through our senses and passes through the thalamus where it is evaluated and directed to one of two routes: If the information received is interpreted as non-threatening or safe, sensory data is directed to the hippocampus and neocortex where information is interpreted, assigned a time and place, and given language (Bjertrup, 1995; van der Kolk, 1994). Events which are non-traumatizing can therefore be integrated into our personal history and spoken about in the form of a story or narrative (Rothschild, 2000). Think back, for example, to the time when you first learned how to ride a bike. If the event was perceived as relatively safe and non-traumatic, you are probably able to tell a "story" about how you learned to ride a bike and include details such as where you were, the time of day or year it was, and whom you were with. Your
experience can be captured in the form of a story with a beginning, middle, and end. It can be spoken about in the past tense for it has become a part of your own personal history. It has been integrated into a part of who you are.

If however, the information obtained is perceived as threatening or dangerous, the thalamus responds immediately by directing the information along a quicker route. Information is passed to the limbic system where the amygdala captures and stores intense feelings such as panic and fear, and then to the hypothalamus, which activates the sympathetic nervous system and prepares the body for a fight or flight response (van der Kolk, van der Hart, & Burbridge, 1995). Increased respiration and heart rate is experienced and blood moves away from the skin towards the muscles (Bjertrup, 1995). The body is prepared for action. In situations of childhood sexual abuse however, the body’s natural attempts to take action may be unsuccessful. Physical fight and flight may not be possible and a child may be forced to surrender to a situation that is out of his or her control. In order to promote survival, this system automatically activates the body’s natural defence for emotional “flight” or dissociation (Allen, 1995; Hall & Powell, 2000; Putnam, 1997; Rothschild, 2000; Spiegel, 1997).

Both systems are essential to survival - one allows for the encoding and integration of information and memories and the other for the physiological response to danger. These systems however, operate independently. In fact, during times of trauma and subsequent re-experiencing of the trauma, researchers (Bjertrup, 1995; Perry, 1999; Putnam, 1997) state that the hippocampus and neocortex centres of the brain are completely de-activated. Studies by Schiffer, Teicher, and Papanicolaou (1995) and van der Kolk (1996c) found that when people are exposed to stimuli reminiscent of their trauma, brain scans display a significantly increased level of activity in areas of the brain associated with emotional states and autonomic arousal. Survivors therefore experience the same feelings of panic, fear, and terror that were associated with the original trauma and the physiological need for fight or flight. Simultaneously, the brain scans show a significantly decreased level of activity in the hippocampus and in the areas of the brain associated with verbal language. Survivors are left trapped in a state of re-experiencing the trauma. Verbal language and a context of time and place are simply unavailable (Herman, 1992; Perry, 1999; van der Kolk, 1994).
Researchers state that the verbalization of traumatic experiences is the essence of trauma treatment where “the goal is to put those affective, somatic, and perceptual experiences into words...” (Putnam, 1997, p. 286). Effective treatment needs to encourage verbalization. It needs to explore the impact of the trauma, the personal meanings attached to it, and the prominent feelings and coping strategies involved (Harvey, 1999; Marshall, Yehuda, & Bone, 2000). Researchers have found that significant psychological and physical health benefits are associated with confronting and verbalizing the trauma, and that there is a significant reduction in the intrusive symptoms associated with traumatic memory (Harber et al., 1992; Marshal et al., 2000; Perry, 1999). According to van der Kolk, van der Hart, and Burbridge (1995), traumatic memories need to be exposed, modified, and transformed.

For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, working through memories of the trauma can be an overwhelming experience as the survivor struggles between wanting to acknowledge and know more and wanting to deny and know nothing at all (Dorado, 1999). Moving too slowly into the memories can lead to stagnation and frustration; however, moving too quickly can lead to re-victimization and re-traumatization (Courtois, 1997; Daniluk et al., 1993; Herman, 1992; Waites, 1997). According to Herman (1992), this process of moving through memories of the abuse requires constant vigilance on the part of the therapist for “as the survivor summons her memories, the need to preserve safety must be balanced constantly against the need to face the past” (Herman, 1992, p. 176).

While researchers agree that creating an integrated, verbal narrative is a critical part of the reparation process, little research has been done on specific tools that can be used to help survivors achieve this goal. For survivors of trauma, this leap from the sensory, fragmented non-verbal memory to the cohesive, integrated verbal narrative can be difficult and overwhelming. Interventions need to include tools that utilize both the mind and the body and work towards accessing the sensorimotor levels of the brain where traumatic material is stored. A “bridge” between the non-verbal and the verbal needs to be explored (Harber et al., 1992; Rothschild, 2000; Waites, 1997).

**Therapeutic Enactment**

Developed through the collaborative work and research of Dr. Marv Westwood and Dr.
Patricia Wilensky, therapeutic enactments offer a multi-modal approach to trauma repair that utilizes the whole Self - mind, body, and Soul. With its antecedent roots in J. L. Moreno's (1921) psychodrama, therapeutic enactments can be described as an action-based intervention that uses drama, or enactments, to recreate and work through key life events in the safety of a group environment. Therapeutic enactments provide an extension to traditional talking and thinking, by placing an emphasis on experiencing and doing (Westwood & Wilensky, in progress).

In many ways, a therapeutic enactment resembles an ancient traditional healing ritual, in which a group of people assembles and gathers together in a circle to openly acknowledge and repair the emotional, physical, and/or spiritual suffering of an individual group member. As each member takes his or her place in the circle, a unique energy and strength begin to develop and a special "healing community" is formed. Basically, there are three groups of people involved in a therapeutic enactment - the "lead" or person doing the enactment, the "directors" or therapists trained in guiding the lead, and the "witnesses" or group members who act as a container to the experience. The directors begin by addressing the group and acknowledging the process that is about to take place. A physical and sacred space is created and a ceremonial atmosphere unfolds. The director and lead enter the center of the circle - a movement symbolizing a shift from being witnesses in the group to being the director and lead of the enactment (Westwood et al., in progress). A "ceremonial walk" takes place and the lead begins to tell the story. . . .

The purpose of this section is to explore the role of therapeutic enactments in the trauma repair process and to examine current research relevant to the field. For the ease of this discussion, I have divided therapeutic enactments into three basic components - action, social community, and enactment - and although each component is discussed individually, it is important to note that each does not occur in isolation. Instead, all components are inter-related. Together, they combine and work as a whole in addressing the emotional, cognitive, and spiritual aspects of the Self that are most commonly impacted by trauma.

Action. Unlike traditional forms of therapy that begin by working with an individual at a cognitive and emotional level - commonly referred to as "top-down" processing (Schore,
therapeutic enactments directly utilize the body in physical movement and action and begin by processing information within the body at a sensorimotor level. As the lead verbally reconstructs his or her story, the body actively becomes involved in the story-telling process. He or she physically moves through the events and allows the body to utilize its own natural healing mechanisms to directly access the same sensorimotor level of the body and brain where traumatic material is stored. This form of processing - commonly referred to as "bottom-up" processing (Schore, 1994) - engages both the mind and body in the therapeutic process. The body itself becomes the fundamental tool in processing traumatic material.

A study by Ogden and Minton (2000) examined the impact of using the body in physical movement and action to work with an individual who experienced sexual abuse between the ages of four and ten by a family member. Through the direction and support of a therapist, the individual actively engaged both her mind and body in mindfully tracking and moving through any impulses and body sensations she experienced. Over a period of four sessions, the individual worked towards completing specific fight and flight responses that were thwarted during the time of the original trauma. Results indicate that the individual experienced a significant decrease in posttraumatic stress symptoms, such as trauma-related nightmares, panic attacks, and intrusive sensations, and identified feeling a significant increase in personal safety and control.

Kipper (1998) and van der Kolk (1996b) further state that the action and movement involved in psychodramatic interventions are particularly valuable in processing information that may have been dissociated during the time of the trauma. According to Kipper (1998), action-based interventions release information trapped at this dissociated level by "... physiologically evoking experiences on the level at which they have been stored" (Kipper, 1998, p. 115). Although dissociated information may not be an integrated part of a trauma survivor's conscious awareness, it can however maintain a strong hold on a person's present day life and emerge in the form of nightmares, unconscious re-enactments of the traumatic event, and in the intrusive thoughts, feelings, and images associated with traumatic memory (Herman, 1992; Putnam, 1997; Rothschild, 2000; Waites, 1997). Through the action and movement involved in therapeutic enactment, dissociated information can become integrated...
into the lead’s conscious awareness as physical sensations are felt, somatic experiences are experienced, and information that has been held within the body is released. For the lead, a sense of completion surrounding the enacted event can therefore be obtained (Brooks, 1998; Keats, 2000; Morley, 2000).

For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, physical movement and action can be particularly valuable in helping survivors experience a stronger sense of his or her body and develop conscious links between feelings, images, and behaviors (Phillips, 2000; Rothschild, 2000; Stromsted, 2001; van der Kolk & Ogden, 2002; Waites, 1997). In therapeutic enactment, the lead is sequentially guided through the physical movements associated with the trauma while the body’s experience of these movements are continuously reflected upon. The director facilitates this process by verbally commenting on the events as they occur and by having the lead momentarily pause to notice what he or she is experiencing. By assimilating sensorimotor and somatic experiences at this physiological level, survivors of childhood sexual abuse can reclaim a sense of wholeness as they begin to re-experience their bodies and develop a more complete understanding of who they are (Ogden et al., 2000; van der Kolk et al., 2002).

Though action and movement, the body becomes an active participant in processing traumatic material. Physical action and movement help reduce anxiety (Brooks, 1998), provide individuals with an opportunity to experience new roles and behaviors (van der Kolk, 2002; Westwood et al., in progress), and help survivors gain a physical sense of strength and power as they literally confront and “move through” their experience (Naar, Dorein-Michael, & Santhouse, 1998; van der Kolk et al., 2002). In therapeutic enactment, the body acts as a guide. Its wisdom and power in transforming trauma are fully acknowledged.

Social Community. According to Herman (1992) and Waites (1997), trauma does not occur in isolation. Even if restricted to a single individual, traumatic events occur in a social context and often involve the destruction of basic trust and safety and the loss of personal attachment and connection (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 1987). Trauma repair therefore needs to take place within a social community where it can be taken back to the society in which it occurred and a re-connection with both the Self and others can begin to develop (Herman, 1992).
For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, a re-connection with a social community is especially important as a deep sense of aloneness and isolation is often experienced when disconnection, both internally and externally, has become a fundamental form of survival (Courtois, 1999; Freyd, 1996; Herman, 1992). In therapeutic enactment, the social community acts as a mirror for society (Westwood et al., in progress). Its interactive roles foster a unique community of social support, acceptance, and validation as each member of the circle interacts and actively contributes to the lead's reparative experience.

In therapeutic enactment, social cohesion and connection are further developed through a unique experience that often occurs during the lead's process of selecting individuals to participate in the various roles needed for his or her enactment (Westwood et al., in process). While Moreno (1959) used the term "tele" to refer to a two-way flow of emotional understanding, therapeutic enactment takes this experience one step further. As the lead intuitively selects individuals to represent a particular person in the enactment, an unconscious connection, or "parallel experience," often occurs. The lead, for example, may unknowingly ask the role of a violent perpetrator to be taken by a group member who is struggling with a belief that he or she cannot be trusted. The mere trust the lead has placed in this group member will therefore play an important role in this group member's own process. The lead may also unknowingly ask the role of a double to be represented by a group member who has experienced a remarkably similar situation to the one that is about to be enacted. This group member is therefore able to offer special insight into the experience and also receive a valuable opportunity to re-experience the situation from a new and different perspective. In therapeutic enactment, the lead is not the only person impacted by the events that take place within the center of the circle. The parallel experiences that occur help strengthen individual connections and provide a reparative energy that radiates throughout the room.

According to Herman (1992), the cohesive support and solidarity of a social community "... provide the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience..." (Herman, 1992, p. 214). In therapeutic enactment, the power of the social community and the deep connections that develop create a strong container for the lead to safely confront and move through a trauma. Together, the community unites and joins in its
strength to support, validate, and affirm the lead's reparative experience (Westwood et al., in progress).

**Enactment.** In therapeutic enactment, the goal is to bring the lead's inner reality to life so that key life events can be slowed down, critically explored, and reintegrated (Westwood et al., in progress). Through the process of enactment, essential components of the lead's inner world are highlighted as spatial arrangements are duplicated, special props are included, and distinct sights, sounds, and sensations are imitated (Brooks, 1998). For the lead, a felt sense of re-living occurs (Westwood et al., in process). Past experiences and future events are brought to life in the present where they are carefully reconstructed within the center of a circle.

According to Herman (1992) and Putnam (1997), the process of re-creation and enactment are valuable facilitators of self-reflection, validation, and transformation.

Through the process of re-enacting a critical life event, inner thoughts, feelings, and conflicts can be externalized and viewed from different positions of wisdom and strength (Brooks, 1998; Hudgins, 1998; Kipper, 1998). Knowledge and skills that may have been unavailable at the time of the original incident can therefore be accessed as current resources are both identified and strengthened. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, this is especially valuable for with its focus on the here-and-now, enactments provide survivors with an opportunity to confront their childhood past from the stronger and more powerful position of an adult (Courtois, 1999; Herman, 1992; Rothschild, 2000).

A case study by Hudgins (1998) found that by being able to consciously re-construct a traumatic event, a woman survivor of childhood sexual abuse was able to safely express dissociated thoughts and feelings and transform sensorimotor representations of the event into a meaningful and personal narrative. Naar, Dorein-Michael, and Santhouse (1998) also found that in a study of six women who experienced various degrees of sexual trauma in childhood, there was an identified reduction in the fear these women had of their perpetrators and a felt sense of inner strength as they safely moved through the enactment of their trauma.

Kipper (1998) and van der Kolk (1996b) also state that enactments can help provide survivors of childhood sexual abuse with an opportunity for a "corrective re-experiencing" to occur. As the individual moves through an enactment, negative feelings, images, and
sensations are challenged as the positive and reparative experience of the enactment re-scripts and re-defines the trauma (Burmeister, 2000; Kipper, 1998; van der Kolk et al., 2002). Interventions that allow the body to systematically re-experience and mindfully track a trauma, further provide survivors with a chance to safely complete the autonomic fight or flight responses that were left interrupted at the time of the original incident (Ogden et al., 2000). Studies (Hudgins & Kipper, 1998; Ogden et al., 2000; Stromsted, 2001) indicate that survivors who were able to mindfully move through an incomplete fight or flight response, reported experiencing a decrease in intrusive thoughts, feelings, and images and identified a feeling of “wholeness” as energy that was previously needed to maintain repressed and dissociated material was regained.

For survivors of trauma, the enactment of an internal image or scene can be particularly valuable in providing an alternate medium to communicate and express the inexpressible (Terr, 1999; van der Kolk, 1997; Waites, 1997). With traumatic memories in particular, enactments can act as a bridge from the non-verbal to the verbal and help survivors pull together the fragmented pieces of memory so that they can be located in time and place, distinguished from current reality, and appropriately integrated as part of the past (Courtois, 1999; Herman, 1997; van der Kolk et al, 1995). According to van der Kolk (1996b), trauma survivors are “prone to action, and deficient in words...[and]...can often express their internal states more articulately in physical movements or in pictures than in words” (van der Kolk, 1996b, p. 195). The enactments involved in psychodramatic interventions provide the necessary “language” to effectively communicate and transform an experience (van der Kolk, 1996b).

Through the enactment, the lead’s full experience of an event is captured in a specific scene where feelings are felt, actions are witnessed, and unspeakable acts that have been silenced can finally be voiced. Key life events are safely re-constructed in the here-and-now and through this process, a positive and reparative experience is obtained (Brooks, 1998; Keats, 2000; Morley, 2000; Westwood et al., in process).

By combining the theories of action, social community, and enactment, therapeutic enactments help facilitate the reparation of trauma. A study by Keats (2000) found that therapeutic enactment used to work through the trauma of a sexual assault contributed to a
reduction in anxiety, an increased feeling of safety, and a stronger and more complete sense of Self. Results of the study also indicated positive changes in interpersonal relationships, body posture, and communication. Brooks (1998) documented the change processes that occurred in eight individuals as they moved through a key life event in a therapeutic enactment. Individuals reported experiencing a greater level of closeness to others, a stronger sense of self-awareness, and an overall change in their thought and belief systems. Morley (2000) further examined the experiences of two individuals who used therapeutic enactment to address the past trauma of a physical and/or sexual assault. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher found that the individuals experienced positive and reparative changes that they both attributed to the therapeutic enactment intervention.

Research (Keats, 2000; Morley, 2000) indicates that therapeutic enactments play a critical and reparative role in working through a single-incident trauma experienced in adulthood by an unknown perpetrator. However, can the results of these studies generalize to other types of trauma, in particular, multiple traumas experienced in childhood by a known perpetrator? According to Courtois (1999), Herman (1992), Terr (1994), and Waites (1997), there are significant differences in the trauma repair process for single versus multiple-incident traumas, adult versus childhood traumas, and traumas committed by an unknown versus known perpetrator. Given that in Canada, one in every three females and one in every six males experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18 (National Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1999), research on therapeutic enactments need to explore the use of this intervention with other types of trauma - in particular, the trauma of childhood sexual abuse.

Summary of Literature Review

Repairing from the wounds of childhood sexual abuse can be a complex experience. For both the therapist and the survivor, it can involve a backwards and forwards motion that teeters delicately between hopelessness and despair and hopefulness and resolution. This experience can be further complicated by intrusive memories of the trauma that continue to interfere with a survivor’s ability to live fully in the present. Researchers (Perry, 1999; van der Kolk et al, 1995; van der Kolk, 1996a) identify significant differences between memories of traumatic events and non-traumatic events and state that interventions need to work with both the mind and body to access the sensorimotor level of the brain where traumatic memories are
stored. Keats (2000) and Morley (2000) found that individuals who used therapeutic enactment to work through a single traumatic incident experienced in adulthood by an unknown perpetrator reported a positive and reparative experience. Studies however, have yet to explore the effectiveness of this intervention with survivors of multiple traumas committed in childhood by a known caretaker.

The rationale for this research is to 1) explore the use of therapeutic enactment with traumas involving multiple-incidences experienced in childhood by a known perpetrator since research has yet to explore the impact and effectiveness of therapeutic enactment with this population, 2) examine how therapeutic enactments address the specific needs and considerations of survivors who experienced such traumas because it is ethically and morally essential to incorporate specific guidelines to help ensure the emotional safety of the survivor, and 3) contribute to the field of counselling psychology by providing therapists with a deeper understanding of therapeutic enactment and the traumatic memories that act as vivid reminders of childhood sexual abuse.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore the use of therapeutic enactments as a tool in addressing early traumatic memories of sexual abuse experienced in childhood. It aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of a journey through an enactment and to capture the inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences that may occur. As with the nature of traumatic memories, therapeutic enactments are experiences that can be difficult to explain in words. Quite often following an intense enactment, the group will sit in a moment of silence as if to both honour what has happened and to absorb the shared event that had just taken place. It is an event that must be experienced for it to be fully understood. What is the lived experience of using therapeutic enactment to address early traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse?

To examine this lived experience, an ethnographic methodology will be used. Through this methodology, a unique opportunity to enter the worlds of traumatic memory, therapeutic enactment, and childhood sexual abuse will be provided.

This section will outline the methodology that has been chosen. I will provide a description of ethnography, highlight some of its advantages and disadvantages, and present some arguments as to why an ethnographic approach appears to be the most appropriate form of inquiry for this study. I will also describe how data will be represented as voices within this text. A definition of autoethnography will be introduced and information regarding the participants and the process of collecting, analysing, and validating the data will be provided.

Ethnographic Research

Traditionally used in sociology and anthropology, ethnography began in the early 1800's as a way for travellers, missionaries, and merchants to gather information about the customs and lifestyles of individuals living within isolated cultures (Tedlock, 2000). Questionnaires were distributed to travellers and designed to help gather and document information so that scholars and theorists could receive an accurate and detailed picture of what life in these societies was like. In the late 1800's however, theorists began to recognize that these questionnaires were unreliable. The questionnaires failed to capture the full experience of a culture and only
provided information that fit the theory it was designed to explore. In 1903, Alfred Cort Haddon announced the need for scholars and theorists to become directly involved in their own fieldwork and work with the people of the culture to obtain a deeper understanding of what life in that culture is like (Tedlock, 2000). By participating in their own fieldwork, scholars became "participant-observers" and were able to enter the cultures they were studying by learning to "... see, think, feel, and sometimes even behave as an insider..." (Tedlock, 2000, p. 457). A detailed and more accurate understanding of a culture was therefore provided.

Relying strongly on stories or narrative accounts that reflect an understanding of a culture, ethnographic research provides a vivid and privileged reconstruction of an experience (Atkinson, 1992; Denzin, 1997). It takes the researcher, and the reader, into the lives and inner experiences of people living within a particular culture and provides first-hand knowledge of what life in this culture is like (Denzin, 1989; Goodall, 2000; Hammersley, 1998; van Maanen, 1988).

According to the Oxford Dictionary (1993), culture is defined as a particular group or civilization that possesses its own customs, experiences, and achievements. It includes a range of activities, ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge - all of which is shared, translated, and reinforced by its group members. Based on this definition, both childhood sexual abuse and therapeutic enactment groups are cultures. They involve shared beliefs, knowledge, activities, and experiences that are commonly shared among its members.

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse live within a shared culture where each "member" experiences similar thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Thoughts such as "It was all my fault" or "I deserve bad things" are commonly believed by survivors of childhood sexual abuse while feelings such as fear, anger, shame, and betrayal are frequently felt (Courtois, 1999; Gil, 1988; Herman, 1992; Matsakis, 1994). Drug and alcohol abuse, self-harming behaviours, and sexual promiscuity are some of the common activities that exist within this culture and flashbacks, dissociation, and intrusive memories are some of the shared experiences (Courtois, 1999; Herman, 1992; Rothschild, 2000; Waites, 1997). Although each individual has his or her own unique story and the process towards reparation may differ, the emotional, physical, and spiritual impact of childhood sexual abuse often leads to a shared set of beliefs, behaviours, and
experiences. These common factors combine to make up the "culture" of childhood sexual abuse.

Therapeutic enactment groups are also a culture. This culture has its own unique experiences, beliefs, language, and customs. It involves the shared ritual of creating a sacred space, the language of "director", "lead", and "double", and a sequence of events that begins with a "ceremonial walk" and ends with a period of debriefing. For individuals participating in a therapeutic enactment group, there is often a sense of belonging and a unique connection and understanding that is shared within the room (Westwood et al., in progress). It is a culture that shares activities, experiences, and knowledge.

This research focuses on the cultures of childhood sexual abuse and therapeutic enactment groups. Individuals who live within these cultures have been asked to participate in this study and through an ethnographic methodology, both I, as the researcher, and you, as the reader, will embark on a journey into their world.

Pro and Cons of Ethnographic Research

There are several arguments that state the value of conducting ethnographic research. First, ethnographic research is naturalistic (Hammersley, 1998). It attempts to provide first-hand experience of a culture within its natural setting and is not controlled by research conditions. As a researcher, I have been able to enter into the natural setting of a therapeutic enactment by either directly participating in and observing the enactment or by directly viewing videotapes of the therapeutic enactment experience. A wide range of artifacts that included personal journals, dreams, and art pieces was also collected for this study. This multitude of data provides a naturalistic approach to research and according to Denzin (1997) and Goodall (2000), enables readers to become both emotionally and intellectually involved in the experience.

Ethnographic research involves a process that is discovery-based and does not rely on formulated hypotheses and assumptions that can act as "blinders" to the full experience (Hammersley, 1998). The emphasis of ethnographic research is not on proving or disproving a particular belief, but instead on providing an experience of a culture through the use of vivid and descriptive passages (Atkinson, 1990). Researchers remove any biases that may exist and
remain open to the experience by maintaining a sense of curiosity and wonder that is analogous to travelling on a mysterious journey - a journey in which the final destiny or outcome is unknown (Denzin, 1997). Through this descriptive and discovery-based method, a unique opportunity is provided. Maximum learning can occur and a more accurate picture of an experience can be obtained (Atkinson, 1990).

Critics of ethnographic research however, argue that the use of a small sample makes a study less valuable since results cannot be freely generalized to other settings and populations. While other types of research, such as surveys and questionnaires, can offer wider and more generalised information, the value of having an in-depth, personal reconstruction of an experience must be weighed against the fact that not all aspects of this experience are universal (Hammersley, 1998). Both forms of research offer equally valuable and important knowledge. The purpose of this study however, is to gain an in-depth understanding of childhood sexual abuse and therapeutic enactments through personal and intimate accounts of each participant’s lived experience. An ethnographic methodology has therefore been chosen to bring readers closer to this human experience.

Another criticism of ethnography is the degree of subjectivity involved and how accurately this research will reflect the “true” culture and experience of traumatic memories, childhood sexual abuse, and therapeutic enactments. Proponents of this criticism compare this methodology to quantitative research where the traditional terms of reliability and validity apply (Hammersley, 1998). It is important to note however, that the basic underlying theories of qualitative and quantitative research are different and that in qualitative studies, “truth” is not characterised by a single reality but instead, by multiple realities that are subjectively defined (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 1999; Silverman, 2000). Based on this subjective definition of reality, data collected by each researcher is expected to differ since it is filtered through each researcher’s own personal experiences, meaning, and knowledge (Abma, 1999; Silverman, 2000). What I bring to this research may therefore be completely different from what you bring to this research, even if we were simultaneously experiencing the same events at the exact same time. Hammersley (1998) also states that each reader of ethnographic research is influenced by his or her own personal background and will offer different interpretations of
this study. You as the reader will therefore bring to this research your own subjective knowledge and interpret it from your own personal experience. Differences are expected to exist and the meaning assigned to this research will be unique to each individual. Different perspectives and experiences however, do not reduce validity nor do they indicate that one representation is more valid than another (Atkinson, 1990; Martella et al., 1999; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998).

**Researcher’s Perspective**

To obtain an in-depth understanding of traumatic memory, therapeutic enactment, and childhood sexual abuse, an ethnographic methodology appears most appropriate for the following reasons:

First, according to Atkinson (1992) and Ellis and Bochner (1992), ethnographic research resembles a "collage" - a collection of data obtained from a variety of sources that is woven together in a way that allows the reader to vicariously enter an experience and leave with a greater sense of what it was like. Since both therapeutic enactment and traumatic memory are to a large extent, experiences that are difficult to express with words, an ethnographic methodology is most appropriate. Through ethnography, data sources, such as art work, photographs, dreams, stories, and journal entries each offer a unique perspective. A window into the inner world of traumatic memory, therapeutic enactment, and childhood sexual abuse is therefore provided.

Secondly, according to Ellis and Bochner (1992) and Goodall (2000), ethnographic research gives voice to unspoken cultures and communicates experiences that are shrouded in secrecy. The very act of childhood sexual abuse occurs behind a wall of secrecy and silence - a wall that is often kept in place by the society in which the abuse occurs. An ethnographic methodology is therefore most appropriate in helping break this silence.

Finally, ethnographic research also stimulates self-reflection and acts as a mirror to our own personal lives (Abma, 1999; Atkinson, 1990). Through ethnographic research, we not only enter the stories and narratives of the individuals presented, but also travel with them on a parallel journey. As each story is read and as each photograph and drawing is seen, you as the reader, will be confronted with your own personal story and be provided with a window into
your own inner experiences. A process of self-reflection and self-discovery is about to begin. My hope is that the pages that follow will take us both further towards a deeper understanding, not only of others who share these experiences, but also of ourselves and who we are. Through an ethnographic methodology, we, both you and I, can become aware of the most private and vulnerable parts of ourselves and it is when this awareness occurs, that the greatest changes can begin.

 Representation of the Research Text

According to Josselson (1995) and Rambo-Ranai (1992), it is difficult to truly capture a lived experience through a single voice or perspective for it fails to embrace the complex and intricate nature of what has occurred. A greater and deeper understanding can be obtained if “. . . a kaleidoscope of contrasting or complementary perspectives is provided. . . .” (Atkinson, 1992, p. 24).

This research consists of an orchestra of voices - voices that reflect the lives and experiences of individuals who exist within the culture of childhood sexual abuse and have used therapeutic enactment to work through early memories of their trauma. Artifacts, such as personal dreams, drawings, and journal entries have been included. These artifacts speak for themselves and actively contribute to the lived experiences of the participants. Transcribed material from the interviews and from the videotapes of the enactments are also represented as voices within this text. Various fonts have been used to express voice tones, such as loudness, softness, and/or ~ silences ~ and also to represent dominant feelings or expressions, such as ANGER, sadness, strength, shame, and fear. This visual representation of the voices within this study provide readers with a more complete sense of each participant’s experience. A deeper understanding of their inner world is therefore obtained.

In addition to the voices of the participants, three other voices will be directly woven into this study. Witnesses who were present during the enactment will be included within the text as a way of providing another window into the lived experience of the participants. To distinguish the voice of the witness from that of the participant, the voice of the witness will appear in comic sans font.

Also included within this text is the voice of knowledgeable researchers in the field of
counselling psychology. This voice will highlight portions of the participants’ stories and provide informative explanations of what has occurred. This voice of the researcher or theorist will appear bracketed in [Arial font].

Finally, the third voice that appears in this text is my voice of the researcher-observer. With this voice, I provide a personal reflection of my inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences as the stories and narratives of each participant begins to unfold. This voice represents the parallel journey that I travel on and offers another perspective of the participants’ experiences. My voice of the researcher-observer appears in italics.

Through this orchestra of voices that intertwines and weaves together, a narrative of our inner experiences is created. Each voice offers a unique and different perspective. Together, they combine and form a more complete sense of the experience of using therapeutic enactments to address memories of childhood sexual abuse.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be defined as the study of the culture of the Self (Denzin, 1997). It examines the life and experiences of the Self and explores how the Self is constituted through culture. Although autoethnography can be written autobiographically about one’s own personal experiences, this study is written biographically and focuses on the culture of participants, or Selves, who have experienced sexual trauma in childhood and have used therapeutic enactment to address memories of their trauma. This study therefore uses an ethnographic research design employing an autoethnographic method.

Using a Biographical Approach in Ethnography

Participants. Three participants agreed to take part in this study. The participants, all female, range from 31 to 53 years of age. Each experienced multiple incidences of sexual abuse in childhood by a known perpetrator and used therapeutic enactment to address memories of their abuse. My own story of abuse has also been included within this text. A total of four stories will therefore make up this research. Including myself, all of the participants completed their enactment at least 6 months prior to participating in this study and therefore were able to offer a reflective view of their experiences. Informed consent (see Appendix B) from each participant was obtained.
Data Collection. In order to provide a complete and in-depth understanding of this experience, data was collected from a variety of sources. First, individual interviews were conducted with each participant regarding her lived experience of using therapeutic enactment to address early traumatic memories of the abuse. A letter (see Appendix C) was sent to each individual providing an outline of the interview structure and the questions that would be asked. Each interview lasted approximately 2-3 hours and was aimed at providing the conscious thoughts, feelings, and experiences of each participant as she prepared for and worked through the enactment. Second, artifacts, such as drawings, dreams, and journal entries, were also collected. These artifacts provide images and symbols that reflect each participant’s inner world and offer a different, and perhaps deeper, “window” into her lived experience. Third, when appropriate, and with the permission of the participant, brief interviews were conducted with witnesses of the enactment. Data obtained from these witnesses offer another perspective of the experience. Fourth, data was also collected through the direct observation of the videotaped enactment. With permission from the participants, the videotape of their enactments were both viewed and transcribed by the researcher. Finally, a personal research journal was used to document my own experiences throughout this research. Recorded were my observations, thoughts, and reactions to the experiences of each participant. This information offers another dimension, that of an “outside” researcher, and further contributes to the richness of the study.

Data Analysis. Data obtained from both the audio-taped interviews and the videotaped enactments were transcribed. According to Lapadat and Lindsay (1999), the process of transcription is never complete or objective for transcription is limited to each researcher’s own unique selection of what he or she views as significant and relevant. The precise meaning behind each expression, gesture, and interaction is never fully captured for “each new retelling . . . [of a story] . . . is different than the original event in that the meanings and contexts change” (Lapadat et al., 1999, p. 76). It must therefore be noted that the transcribed material in this research includes my own subjective reflection of what I feel has transpired during the taped enactments and interviews.

From a holistic-content approach (Lieblich, 1998), dominant themes that emerged from
the transcribed material and artifacts have been highlighted and analysed according to current theories and literature on trauma treatment and childhood sexual abuse. These themes were identified by their frequency of occurrence, their content, mood, and tone, and their apparent significance to each participant. Unfinished or omitted components were also acknowledged as well as those issues that appeared unusual or contradictory.

Each participant, for example, identified the reparative value of the social community involved in therapeutic enactment and commented on how members of the therapeutic enactment group provided them with a strong sense of support and safety. This theme was compared across narratives and analysed according to any similar, or significantly different, comments expressed by the participants. A global or holistic impression of this theme was then obtained by highlighting specific examples from each story and providing a brief summary of the experience.

Criteria of Rigor. Given the nature of ethnographic research and the belief that there are multiple "truths" which are subjectively defined, inter-judge reliability is not to be expected (Lieblich, 1998). This research however, has been evaluated according to three criteria: coherence (Does this research make sense?), resonance (Are readers able to emotionally relate to this research?), and verisimilitude (Does this research appear to reflect the personal contextual "truth" of the participants' experiences?).

To meet these criteria, this study was piloted with an individual who used therapeutic enactment to work through the experience of a sexual assault. The data collected and the analysis provided were also read by each participant who validated and affirmed that each of the above criteria was met. Two individuals who directly observed and participated in the enactments and two other individuals independent of this study also validated the coherence, resonance, and verisimilitude of the data. The readers stated that the stories accurately reflected the personal contextual "truth" of each participant and enabled them to emotionally connect with the experience.

Significance of Research. What is the lived experience of using therapeutic enactment to address early traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse? This study examines the use of therapeutic enactment in the trauma repair process for individuals who
experienced multiple sexual trauma in childhood by a known perpetrator. It hopes to contribute to the field of counselling psychology by presenting therapeutic enactment as a supplementary tool that can bridge the gap between the non-verbal and the verbal and work with survivors to reclaim power over the terrifying memories that haunt them.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE JOURNEY BEGINS...

History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again. — Maya Angelou

This section provides the stories and experiences of the four individuals who have participated in this study. To help bring these stories to life and provide an in-depth view of their experience, these stories are written in the first person and are woven together from multiple sources which include the participants’ personal interviews, the videotapes of their enactment, interviews from witnesses at their enactment, and their journal entries, dreams, and artwork. Also included within these stories, are my own personal thoughts, observations, and feelings in relation to each story as well as relevant data cited by current researchers in the field. Through this collection of data obtained from a variety of sources, a deeper exploration into each experience is provided.

Four women share with us their lived experience of using therapeutic enactments to address traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse. Through their stories, we are invited into their world to share with them their darkest secrets, to feel with them their greatest pains, and to travel with them on a part of their own personal journey through life. As you read each story, you will find that each woman’s story is unique - each woman’s journey, courageous.

“Diane”

I’m 42 years old and keep myself very busy with my full-time work as a therapist. Apart from seeing clients, I’m also quite active in the community where I participate in a variety of groups and organize various workshops and conferences.

In my personal life, I try to find as much balance as I can. For the past two years, I have been going to the gym at least once a week and I’m finding that this has been giving me an enormous amount of personal power and strength! At home, I fill my life with things that bring me peace and simplicity - scented candles, personal artwork, and photographs of people who are close to my heart. The person who is perhaps the closest to my heart, is my son “Justin”, who is eight years old and absolutely an amazing human being! As a single mother, I try to be
as much a part of his life as I can. We share a lot of special moments together - reading stories, doing crafts, and spending days playing in the park. Justin makes up a big part of who I am.

The Abuse. My father started abusing me when I was around four or five and ~ silence ~ it continued on into my teens. I was always aware of the subtle forms of abuse that occurred — and those memories have always been very vivid and concrete. When I was probably about ~ sigh ~ twenty-five, the rest of the memories began to emerge. The abuse escalated as I moved through my childhood and into my teens and at one point, when I was a bit older - and more able to put up a fight - my father held a gun to my head so he could rape me. The memories I have of the abuse, and the flashbacks that go along with them, are horrible. Sometimes, even I have a hard time believing the reality of it all.

One of the things that I struggled with was the fact that I always looked okay. When I worked at the sexual assault crisis center and read books on the impact of sexual abuse, I learned about all the awful things that could happen - prostitution, drug abuse, living on the streets, depression, and suicide. And although I went through a period of depression and all that, I was successful in life. I went to university, I had good grades, I achieved my doctorate degree — I always looked okay. I was competent in the world! All of this only added to my own doubts about how this could have happened to me. It made me question my own sanity!

Family-of-Origin. There are five children in my family - a brother who is about two years older, another brother two years younger, a sister six years younger, and then another brother who is seven years younger. I'm the oldest girl - second in the family.

My father was a raging alcoholic and my younger brother and I spent most of our childhood taking care of our mother and protecting her from him. We saw my mother as a victim and would often step in if our father got verbally abusive and threatening. Although he never physically hit anyone, he made it VERY clear that he would, and could, if he were pushed far enough. His temper was explosive and unpredictable, but for some reason, I was never the target of his rage. Somehow, I held a special role in the family — I had power and immunity when it came to his temper.

My mother used me as a sounding board and put me right in the middle of things. She would talk about my father and complain about his violent behaviour — "You have no idea
what your father did last night. . . .!” Even at a really young age, I was the only one who could get him to calm down and realize what he had done. I would be the one to say to him when he was hung over, “How can you do those things to mom? You should be ashamed!” — and he took it from me!

_A group of people sit in a circle and listen as Diane shares the story of what life was like growing up in her childhood family. She walks with the male director in the center of the circle and together, they engage in a dialogue._

**Male Director:** “So how much of a kid did you get to be?”

_Diane stops walking and there is a moment of silence before she softly utters a single word. Diane: “Zip.”_

More silence. Diane folds her arms over her chest as if her arms could protect the very core of herself that had been hurt so badly. She continues to walk slowly around the circle. For a brief moment, I feel Diane’s loss - the loss of her childhood and the loss of that playful Spirit that never had a chance to grow. I realize that the pain she holds is very deep and suddenly, I begin to feel very sad.

I haven’t spoken to my parents in — a couple of years now — or two or three years maybe. I don’t have a lot of contact with anyone in my family. They all live elsewhere in Canada or in the U.S. When I was about twenty-five ~ silence ~ I confronted my father by writing him a letter. It was at that point when I told all my other family members that I was abused by dad and that I didn’t want to have anything to do with him. My mom’s first response was that she didn’t know about the abuse, and ~ silence ~ at the same time, it didn’t surprise her either. My father showed my mother the letter I wrote, told her to read it — “Well!! Do you think I’m a child molester?!” ~ silence ~ My mother said, “No” ~ silence ~ Right away, she sided with him.

My brothers and sister couldn’t understand why I wasn’t talking to my mother anymore, but she was a part of it! In some ways, she was a perpetrator as well! At the time, she was going along with the idea that everything was okay and that I should just forgive and forget — “He’s not drinking anymore, so what’s your problem?!” — I haven’t spoken to either of them in the past two years. I just got to the point where ~ sigh ~ until
they’re ready to hear about what happened, I don’t have anything more to say. I just don’t want to pretend and play those games anymore.

Past and/or Current Counselling. When I lived in Saskatchewan, I was seeing a counsellor for about two years and then when I moved, I started with someone else for about eight months. Now, I’m seeing “Michael” ~ silence ~ I’ve been seeing him for a long time, but it’s gone up and down through the years depending on what things have been going on in my life. When things were going really well, and when I had my son, Justin, I saw him — maybe every other week. But there have been times when more memories have come up and at that point, I’d be seeing him twice a week.

Michael has become very important to me. He’s my secure base - my anchor. He’s been an incredible source of strength and support and has played a big role in helping me become “real”. Michael has just been an incredible part of this whole process, and for me, it was really important that he somehow be present at my enactments. I needed him to be there - if not physically, then spiritually or symbolically. I knew that somehow his presence - even if it were just a symbol of his presence - would help me feel safe.

Therapeutic Enactment. I did two enactments all together - the first one in May 1998 and the second in November of the same year. The first time I heard about therapeutic enactments, I was immediately drawn to the idea of doing one. I just knew that it would be something really powerful. For me, there was something about being able to act it out rather than just talk about it ~ silence ~ I had been talking about the abuse for a long time and although it was really helpful, it seemed like there was something about being able to embody the experience — to act it out — that was really compelling. I got on the phone right away, spoke to the female director, and just jumped right in!

My first enactment wasn’t of — the abuse itself — it was — it was of me confronting my father. It was a particular incident that occurred when I was in my mid-twenties. My father picked me up to drive me back home for dinner and as usual, he was completely drunk. I cowered in the back seat of the car worrying about getting into an accident and wondering why I was allowing him put my life at risk again!

In a dialogue with the male director, Diane continues to talk about her father and
describe to the group the events that took place that day. The group listens intently.

When we got home — I told him ~ silence ~ I told him that I didn’t like what he was doing — I was sick and tired of him driving drunk and threatening my life! Usually he takes things like that from me, but for the first time in my life, he just ~ silence ~ verbally LASHED out at me! In that single moment, I lost the protection and immunity that kept me safe from the verbal terror the rest of my family was subjected to. My last thin layer of protection was gone - he had abused me sexually, emotionally, and now verbally. I just couldn’t let him violate and abuse me anymore.

I pause for a moment to notice the circle of people that surround and tightly embrace Diane and her story. There are about twenty-five people all together - each person playing an important role in creating a circle that will support and contain Diane’s experience. Within the group, there are people who will be chosen to stand in for various “parts” of her story. Her father, her mother... or perhaps another part of herself that needs to be present. As I look at the faces that make up this circle, I wonder how this process will unfold.

Diane looks around the room and appears to intuitively select a female group member to stand in as her “double”. For Diane, this double symbolizes the part of herself that is strong - the part of herself that will be able to stay present when her father’s rage is suddenly directed at her. Diane and her double walk within the center of the circle - each step allowing them to become more and more familiar with one another. Each step creating an invisible bond that will support Diane through her experience.

[When using therapeutic enactments with survivors of childhood sexual abuse, a “double” is often used to support the lead in working through a particularly difficult portion of the enactment (P. Wilensky, personal communication, November, 2001.) The double represents an extension of the lead. He or she provides the qualities or characteristics, such as anger, voice, strength, and courage, that already exist within the lead, but have been previously difficult or unsafe to access.]

Diane is aware that it will be hard for her to remain present and strong in that critical moment when she comes face to face with her father’s violent rage. It frightens her to think about it. She remembers how the event completely shattered her and took away that one piece of immunity she had left - that one piece that had kept her safe. Diane speaks to her double and
identifies her to the group.

Diane: “You’re the part of me that is going to hear what he’s going to say. You’re the part of me that can hear it because you’re strong.”

With her double by her side, Diane comes in contact with her own inner strength. Together with her double, she will confront her father, stand up to him, and give voice to a part of herself that had been silenced. Diane and her double move within the center of the circle. Together, they move as one.

********

Diane must now choose someone to play the role of her father. Suddenly, her body becomes still and for a brief moment, she is completely silent. The thought of bringing her father into the room terrifies her.

Diane looks around the room and appears hesitant. All her life, Diane has been the protector of others and has sacrificed her own needs by being the continuous target of her father’s sexual abuse, the caregiver to her mother, and often holding her family together at the expense of her own happiness. For Diane, it will be difficult to ask someone in the room to play such a violent and horrible man. The male director is aware of this. He stops for a moment and turns to Diane.

Male Director: “And I don’t want you to protect anyone. They’re here because of you and you can choose whoever you want. This is for you. You choose whoever you think will be best in this role.”

Diane pauses for a moment, looks around the room, and turns to “Jason”. Her voice seems soft and unsure. Diane: “Will you be my dad? Will you be okay with that?”

The male director turns to Jason. Male Director: “I think she’s asking you a question. Will you be okay with that?”

Jason: “I will be okay with that — I’m happy to do it for you.”

The male director turns his attention back to Diane. Male Director: “Do you think you have to protect him? ~ silence ~ Let’s go right up to him.” Together they move closer to Jason.

Diane: “I feel like I want to protect him because the role he’s taking on is one of a pretty evil man.”
Male Director: “Let’s look at him ~ silence ~ Can you do this?”

Jason: “I can do this.” His voice seems confident and assured.

Male Director: “Do you believe him?”

Diane: “Yes.” Diane smiles and nods. She seems relieved. As I watch this process unfold, I feel touched by the support and love that is exchanged between the two. Jason is more than happy to take on such a role . . . in fact, he seems honoured.

[In therapeutic enactment, the strengthening of both internal and external resources are an important part of the reparation process. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, these resources are particularly essential in helping create the safety and containment that is needed and must be directly incorporated into the lead’s enactment (M. Westwood, personal communication, November, 2001). In therapeutic enactment, these resources can be accessed on a variety of levels. Resources can be real and take the form of an actual person who has been an important source of strength and support, or they can be symbolic and represent an element in the lead’s life that was lacking in reality.]

Male Director: “Tell the group why we need six people. This is VERY important in your enactment.”

Diane: ~ silence ~ “My father still terrorizes me and in order to face him, I decided I need six people between me and him so that if he really gets into his role — it’s a buffer. I need a wall between me and him to face him.”

As Diane speaks, somehow her voice appears stronger. Somehow, it is as if this experience of symbolically constructing a shield has enabled her to accentuate it and make it real. With purpose and determination, she moves around the room and selects six people to stand in as her shield. One by one, she moves each person into position and intuitively organizes who needs to be where and exactly how he or she needs to be. She lines them up in a row in front of her and has them kneel on the floor facing the door where her “father” will enter. Together, the six people form a solid barrier between her and what is about to occur.

The male director stops for a moment and tells Diane to move to the front of the room so she can view the shield that she has just created. As Diane looks into the eyes of the six people who make up her creation, her voice softens. Diane: “She’s so not alone. ~ silence ~ When
this happened, I was so alone."

*Tears begin to flow down my face as I watch this process unfold and begin to realize that for the first time, Diane is able to experience some sense of protection.*

******

The female director instructs everyone to move into place. A group member whom Diane had selected to represent her mother moves to the side of the room to stand beside Diane's "father." Diane’s double and the group member she has chosen to represent Michael, her therapist, move to either side of her - supporting her and providing her with strength. The human shield is ready. The female director takes her place near Diane and gives her a gentle embrace from behind.

The male director addresses the group. Male Director: “Some of the things that you’re going to see are harsh and horrible things. And what Diane wants to know is that all of you are able to hear these things and won’t disbelieve them.”

For a long time, Diane herself has struggled to believe her own story. She has worked hard to validate herself and to trust the truth that she seems to already know. To have anyone doubt or disbelieve her experience would be devastating. The directors ensure that this will not occur.

Female Director: “Let’s go right around. If you feel able to give Diane your solemn promise that you will hang in there, please do so. And if you can’t, there are absolutely no hard feelings here. It’s okay to simply sit out and hold the space by the door.”

One by one, each person in the group turns to Diane and acknowledges his or her complete and total support.

Female Group Member: “I’m here.”
Female Group Member: “I’m here for you.”
Male Group Member: “I am too.”
Female Director: “I’m here for you — as always.”

Diane appears touched by the tremendous support that fills the room. Her double reaches out and squeezes her hand as if to acknowledge the fact that they are in this together. As I look into the eyes of the people who make up her circle, a deep sense of warmth fills my
heart. The group truly acts as a container. I know that they will not let her down.

The tone is set and the enactment is ready to proceed. Diane is in the “laundry room” at her parents’ home and is angry at her father for once again risking her life and driving drunk. She has had enough of his selfish behavior - his explosive temper, his non-stop drinking, and above all, the continuous sexual abuse that she has had to endure for years. He can no longer violate her emotional and physical safety anymore.

Diane’s father enters the circle. Everyone in the room freezes with fear as Diane’s father picks up a book and throws it across the room. Jason is playing his role well.

Father: “God damn it!! I can’t believe this! What is your problem?!”

Diane’s father moves towards her. The human shield rises to their knees ready to protect her from the violent rage that has filled the room. Her father takes another step closer. Diane reacts — her head turns away as she falls slightly back onto Michael’s shoulder. She is pale and her body appears frozen. Diane’s body is telling us the unspoken story - the story of how her father continues to fill her with terror and fear. Despite the fact that she appears strong and calm, her body is telling us that emotionally, she is no longer there.

I do a really good job of dissociating - sometimes my vision becomes distorted, I can’t hear, and I become quite paralyzed. I can also dissociate in a way where I talk really well and look okay — but have absolutely no feelings or emotions at all. I did a lot of that during my enactment. It really felt like I was just going through the motions.

In retrospect, I wish I had — I wish I had been able to say, “Stop! I’m not here and I need to be!” — but I couldn’t. There can be so many things that trigger me. I lose track of what’s happening — and I get flooded with feeling unsafe. Everything just happened so fast and I didn’t know how to get myself back or to tell the directors what I needed. I needed them to take control — for someone to take control — to stop everything for a moment and allow me to re-focus and become present again.

As a child, I used to have this fantasy — the fantasy that someone would just figure it all out — that someone would just know about everything that was happening and be there even if I couldn’t say the words myself. During my enactment, I needed someone to do that — to understand and hear me without having to be asked. Everything just happened so fast and
Sometimes I feel angry at myself for not being able to stay present. I had the ideal environment to work through this — an incredibly caring and supportive group — but I just couldn’t be there emotionally. Emotionally, I was completely gone.

[Dissociation is one of the added challenges of using therapeutic enactments to address traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse. Although dissociation can occur in varying degrees, Westwood (M. Westwood, personal communication, November, 2001) states that the degree of dissociation is often far greater in those who have experienced multiple traumas - particularly multiple traumas that occurred in childhood by a known perpetrator.

The signs or symptoms of dissociation can be unique to each individual. Observable indications of dissociation can include: blank stares, sudden affective changes, an inability to track and maintain conversation, memory impairment, and a complete loss of time and space (Chu, 1998; Hall et al., 2000, Putnam, 1997; Waites, 1997). When using therapeutic enactments with survivors of childhood sexual abuse, it is important to recognize the signs of dissociation that are specific to the lead doing the enactment. According to Westwood (M. Westwood, personal communication, February, 2002), although dissociation plays a valuable role in helping survivors stay safe, it can also be disruptive and interfere with the therapeutic process. Directors must therefore be responsible for supporting the lead in strengthening alternate ways of coping and develop a solid understanding of what the lead specifically needs to stay present.]

Sometimes I wonder if I could really be present if I ever did another enactment - maybe if the enactment was done in a smaller group or if the directors had gone slower. It scares me to be present — it would just make me so vulnerable.

Up to a certain point, hearing a person’s voice is helpful. I was in dialogue with the directors a lot and I remember thinking that their voices were soothing, but ultimately for me, words aren’t able to keep me present. Eventually, the words fade away and stop making sense. Words get distorted - sometimes I don’t know what they mean, sometimes I can’t hear them, and sometimes they just have absolutely no impact.

I think for me, stopping and waiting, and allowing me to reconnect through physical touch is helpful. The touch needs to involve movement though - like having someone rub my hands or having me move my hand against a textured material. If someone physically held me, it wouldn’t be enough. Eventually, I would lose contact and the felt sense of it all would just
disappear.

*******

Father: "God damn it! I can't believe this! What is your problem?!

Diane continues to look away as her father's rage escalates. Her hand moves over her mouth and her eyes appear locked. She is frozen with fear. The directors move around the room and attempt to engage Diane in some dialogue. Her voice is soft, flat, and barely audible.

Aside from the directors, everyone in the room is silent and still. In fact, the entire scene appears to have stopped. The female director places her arm around Diane and speaks to her in soft and caring voice. Together, Diane and the female director engage in a dialogue - a dialogue that is intimately shared between the two. In this moment, I realize just how important the female director is to Diane. She is someone whom Diane has grown to trust. She is someone who gives her the freedom to be real.

I think the female director is the first woman that I've ever really trusted. She has always been there for me and gives me the permission to own my feelings and to be emotional. When I was growing up, I was never allowed to express my feelings — and I was especially never allowed to be upset! My mother could never be emotionally present herself - she was just too wrapped up with my father. For me, there's something about the female director's willingness to be emotional and to be totally present. She accepts me in my emotions and let's me know that it's okay.

Through their interaction, something appears to shift. In a soft, yet somehow powerful voice, Diane begins to speak. She looks at her father.

Diane: "No. Come back. I have something I need to say to you." Diane's father looks at her - his eyes still filled with rage. Once again, Diane becomes silent.

The male director moves to her side. Male Director: "What I have to say to you is....."

Diane: "What I have to say to you is that I'm tired of being in terror of you." Her voice is soft and flat.

Male Director: "I'm terrified of you because....."

Diane: "I'm terrified of you because you hurt me."

The male director continues to try and support Diane in breaking the silence that has kept her paralyzed for so long. Male Director: "You hurt me in ways....."
Diane: “You hurt me so badly.” Her voice becomes slightly louder. “And YOU know what you did to me ~ silence ~ you did unspeakable things to me!”

Male Director: “And I’m furious with you. . . .”

Diane: “I’m furious with you.” ~ silence ~

Male Director: “Louder.”

Diane: “I’m furious with you ~ silence ~ I’m furious with you! And I don’t care if you stand there looking angry at me! I’m angrier!”

Male Director: “And I’m not going to be silenced anymore. . . .”

Diane: “And I’m not going to be silenced any longer — I’m going to tell you what you did to me. What you did was molest me at three, and at four, and at five and it only got worse after that until you were raping me when I was twelve years old!”

She’s broken the silence! Those very words appear to have released some of the pain and anger that had been locked inside of her for so long. She has spoken the words and in doing so, she has reclaimed a part of her voice that had been lost.

Diane continues to confront her father about the horrific acts of violence and abuse that he had committed - how he had held a gun to her head, continuously abused her, and sacrificed her to his friends. I wonder to myself how such evil can exist. How can a father commit such horrible acts to his daughter and still believe he deserves the right to be a part of her life?

I think back and remember the first time I had met Diane. I remember being impressed by her calmness - her gentle Spirit, her sparkling energy, and her ability to bring peace and serenity to the room. She has a unique gentleness to her, and at the same time, holds an amazingly powerful strength. I watch Diane and think about the journey that she has traveled and feel an enormous need to reach out and embrace her. I admire her warmth. I admire her strength.

Diane: “You tried to make me crazy! You tried to make me forget.” Her voice begins to tremble. “I want to be able to feel . . . . and to know and to experience what
happened to me!"

Diane’s mother moves forward and begins to speak. **Diane’s mother:** “Now Diane, you’re just mad. I know you don’t mean it. You don’t really mean it.”

Diane turns to her mother - her voice shaking with anger. **Diane:** “It was real and you assisted! And I hate you for it! I hate that you would stay with him and sacrifice me!”

*******

**Male Director:** “What are you aware of right now?”

**Diane:** “My throat hurts.” *She laughs. She had been doing a lot of yelling.*

*The male director smiles.* **Male Director:** “What did you just do?”

**Diane:** “I stood up to them and I’m not afraid of them anymore.”

**Male Director:** “That’s right! Say that to them.”

*She looks at her parents and speaks to them in a calm, yet powerful voice.* **Diane:** “I’m not afraid of you anymore. You’re a coward. You may be my birth father, but I have no feelings for you. I want nothing to do with you. I order you to get out of my life.”

Diane’s parents begin to slowly retreat from the room. *The director stops them.* **Male Director:** “Before they go, let’s freeze them. What do you see in their faces?”

**Diane looks into the eyes of the two people who were suppose to love and protect her. She replies.** **Diane:** “They look pathetic.” *She smiles.*

*The male director laughs.* **Male director:** “What’s the smile for?”

**Diane:** “Well, it’s because I don’t have to. . . . I don’t have to hold onto it so hard. I don’t have to convince them. **I don’t have to convince ME. I know.**”

**Diane places her hands over her heart and smiles. She knows the truth. She knows that she can trust the truth that lies within her own heart.**

*******

**Journal Entry.** May 1998 (after my first enactment). I went over to my son’s father’s house
and my son's grandmother was there. She followed me around with this little grin on her face and a
twinkle in her eye. She took me aside and gave me a kiss. She kisses me and I say, “What's that
for?” “For everything,” she says, “- because you know, don’t you?” I tell her, “I do now.” We both
start to cry. She says that like me, she has been through a lot in her life and that she has lived a very
long time. She tells me that I have courage - I tell her, “You do too. And we both raised good
children.”

I think back and realize that her and I have never had a moment of intimacy like that. What
we shared was an incredibly intimate and intense meeting of love between the both of us. It was just
extraordinary! If I hadn't done my enactment... I truly believe that somehow, by going through
my enactment, I was able to meet her in that special place and not run away. I wasn't afraid of the
closeness. I have become more open - more able to let people in. If I hadn't been through my
enactment, this would not have happened. It was really, really lovely!

I think one of the greatest things that I received from my enactment was an incredible
feeling of being loved and embraced - a feeling that I still experience even now as I think about
it. I was so afraid that people would look at me with disgust ~ silence ~ but they didn’t.
Instead, they held me with their gaze and looked at me with love!

A few weeks after my enactment, I crashed — I crashed and went through a period of
feeling an incredible amount of self-hatred and shame. When I was growing up, I was always
told NEVER to tell — “People won’t believe you! You’re a horrible person for saying
those things!” All of those messages just came flooding back and I absolutely hated myself
for what I had done.

One of the most amazing things about the enactment was the group. I knew that all I
had to do was call someone — and without a doubt, they would be there for me whole-
heartedly. I also learned from the group that good men do exist. For me, that was a real
powerful shift — to know that there are good men in the world and that I don’t have to give
anything to them in order for them to care about me. The experience created a community for
me - a community that built up really quickly and transcends all time.

*******
Journal Entry. 1998. In my next enactment, I need to grieve with someone in public - to cry - and to not be alone in the pain.

There were definitely things that I gained from my first enactment, but for me, it didn’t quite feel finished. I felt that I still needed to tell my story — have it be heard — and to make public that part of me that I had hid for so long. Even though I had told Michael my story ~ silence ~ and even though he listened and heard it very well — it was always still private. Like the abuse itself, my story was still happening behind closed doors. It felt like it was still a secret! My second enactment was about — it was about — being — public, I guess.

I created a ritual. I had objects representing the past and death laid out on the floor in the middle of the circle and I wore black as a symbol of mourning. The female director gave me a memorial candle — we lit it together and I placed it on the floor next to a very special candle in a lotus shaped holder. This candle represented my spirit — my life. It symbolized the very essence of myself that I had to protect through all of the abuse.

I also had a scarf. It was a beautifully coloured scarf that I laid out and placed on the floor near the candles. For me, this represented energy, creativity — and sparkle. It symbolized my desire to live life to the fullest. The male director and I walked around as I told my story — all the horrible things that my father had done — and for the first time, my inner and spirit Selves became public. I put on a white shirt as a symbol of rebirth and purity and as I continued to tell my story, I picked up my spirit candle, moved around the circle, and lit the candles of each person in the room. This was a magical moment for me. I looked each person in their eyes, said their name, and connected with them in a way that I had never done before. For the first time, I was not only able to see the people around me, but I was also able to truly allow them to see me. It was a wonderful moment of re-connection.

When everyone’s candle was lit, we all went down to the lake to place our candles around a fire. For me, leaving that room represented leaving the abuse and that part of my life behind me and walking down to the fire with everyone around symbolized a “moving on” and a re-entry back into the world.

In a lot of ways, the role of wife and mother were imposed on me as a child and for me,
this enactment was a symbol of reclaiming who I really am. Through this enactment, I had the
opportunity to reclaim that part of me that was lost - that inner spark that I needed to hold onto
so desperately - that inner spark that my father was unable to extinguish.

Dream. November 1998 (the Sunday after my enactment). I'm back in my hometown in the
parking lot of a building which was across from the hospital where I was born. It's the same hospital
where I had the only medical procedure I've ever had - getting my tonsils out - and the same hospital
where I was on the psych ward for a few days. I had won a contest and was being given a wedding
dress! There were a few dresses laid out on a table and most of them were old fashion and flowery. A
woman comes out and looks at them. One dress is velvet and ox-blood red - the color of dried blood.

Suddenly, I'm in a room in front of a mirror and I'm wearing the wedding dress. I have a
hairpiece on and I look like my mother!! I take the hairpiece off. A woman appears and tries to put
it back on. She says that she likes it and looks very pleased. But I am not pleased! I say "No! This
isn't me!" I take off the dress and I take off the hairpiece and I walk away.

I think in a lot of ways, my first enactment gave me the permission to do my second one.
I became more relaxed, more open around people, and was really able to receive love — and
experience it in a way that I had never experienced it before. My second enactment was just a
deepening of all that — not only giving and receiving love to others, but also the beginning of
giving and receiving love to myself! I've often struggled with wanting to leave and end my life.
One week after my enactment, I had an amazingly significant dream....

Dream. November 1998 (one week after my second enactment). I'm in a large house with my
husband and two or three kids - and a woman, who is a mid-wife, comes to visit. I show her around
the house and tell her that I'm planning to move. We go upstairs and there's this very large room
with gleaming hard wood floors. There's not much furniture in this room, but I tell the woman that
this is a great room for children to play. I tell her about the garden - it is small, but this part of the
house makes up for it.

We move through the house and go into two other rooms that are off to the side. I open the
door and move into a smaller room - it has a bed on the floor and I think to myself, "This would be a
great birthing room!" I tell the woman that I have never seen this room before and that I didn't know
In that moment, with absolute clarity, I decide to stay in the house - there is just so much more for me to discover and explore. I love this house and I won't leave it! I decide to stay!

*****

"Andrea"

In two weeks, I’ll be turning 31 and I think to celebrate my birthday, my husband “Brent” and I will go out for dinner and then spend a quiet evening for just the two of us. We’ve been married for eight years now and I can honestly say, that I wouldn’t have been able to get through any of this without him. He knows me so well — he’s my support system and my very best friend.

My relationship with Brent goes quite far back. We met and started going out in high school and we grew up knowing every part of each other’s lives. It’s interesting because when I think about it now, I realize that we’re not the same people that we were then and it’s nice to see how much we’ve grown and changed together as a couple. We don’t have any children right now but one day, we would like to. Brent’s in the process of finishing his degree at the university — he’ll be done in a couple of years — and it’s just not a good time for us financially. Also, I just came back from spending three weeks in Europe with a girlfriend of mine! We had the best time staying in hostels and visiting all the different countries! The trip was well worth it, but it did put a bit of a dent in our budget. Hopefully, we’ll be able to start a family in a few years but for now, we have “Spud” — he’s our bulldog and we love him dearly!

Aside from being a mom to Spud and keeping myself busy taking care of him, I also work full-time at ICBC. I’ve been working there for quite some time and it’s an okay job but I think I’m ready for a change. I don’t really know what I want to do — maybe take some courses — and go back to school. I’m not too sure. I’m not worried though — I know that everything will fall into place eventually.

The Abuse. I don’t have any early memories of the abuse, but I think it started when I was around five or six and continued on until I was fifteen. My cousin “Lisa” was the abuser — we’re both the same age — and she would molest me and make me do male things in the sex
acts. She used to stay over a lot and when we were at my family’s cottage, my parents would often have my younger sister sleep on one couch and then have Lisa and I share another. I remember every night when Lisa stayed over, I would move through this little ritual of going over to my younger sister, tucking her in, and telling her that everything was going to be okay. As far as I know, my sister was never abused by Lisa — but I think on some level, she knew what was happening. She was in the same room as us and I guess, that ritual was my way of protecting her and keeping her safe. She’s my little sister and — and I wasn’t about to let anything bad happen to her.

Lisa would have a sock stuffed with things and — and she would have me use it as a penis to abuse her. The abuse would ~ silence ~ it would go on for quite some time and I remember my mom and dad would just be in the next room drinking. When I was eleven, the abuse got worse. Lisa began bringing boyfriends into the scene and one night — when I was fifteen — things got really bad. I was seriously attacked by one of the guys in the backseat of a car and I couldn’t — I couldn’t break free. I don’t know exactly how I got out of the car, but somehow I did and I managed to get home. That was the last time, I ever spoke to Lisa. I stopped returning her phone calls and never had any contact with her again ~ silence ~ that night, it had just gone way too far.

Family-of-Origin. My parents were never aware of what was happening — or even if they were, they didn’t do anything about it. That night when I came home after the final incident in the car, I was crying hysterically and my mom just patted me on the back, told me to have a shower, and never mentioned anything about it again. My mom and my dad are both alcoholics — they’re quite abusive themselves and they have always been really wrapped up in their own world. One time, I remember seeing my mom behave quite sexually with one of my dad’s friends while my dad was in the same room passed out on the couch ~ silence ~ I guess that’s basically what my world looked like when I was growing up. I don’t think I was ever really close to either of them.

My sister is five years younger and my relationship with her is a little bit better, but she still lives in Ontario with my parents. Actually, when I think about it, all of my relatives are quite messed up and I don’t share a closeness with any of them. I don’t even think of them as my family. All of my relatives live in Eastern Canada and I find that I really need those few
thousand miles of distance between me and them. Here, I have Brent and Spud — they’re my “good family” — and the rest of them can just stay out there in their misery!

Past and/or Current Counselling. Altogether, I’ve probably been in counselling for about three years and during that time, I’ve pretty much done the full gamut of things! I started off with a cognitive psychologist, then did some EMDR, and now I’m doing some somatic work with another psychologist. I don’t believe that there’s any single technique that works on its own but for me, all of these things have played an important role in helping me heal and move through my experience.

At the time of my enactment, I was seeing “Robert”. We worked together for a little over a year and in a lot of ways, he reminds me of my “Papa” — round, jolly and sometimes, even a little grumpy. I really love that about him though — he’s just so totally truthful! For me, it was really important to have Robert at my enactment. I went through so much with him and I just needed for him to witness and experience everything that we had talked about. It’s so different to have someone see your story and watch it unfold right in front of your eyes. For some reason, it was just really important to have him see everything that I had gone through.

Therapeutic Enactment. I heard a lot about therapeutic enactments from Brent - he had been involved in doing them through the university and would often talk to me about his experiences. He was just so positive about them and thought that it might be healing for me to do one. Brent and I talked about it a lot and in January 2000, I did my first enactment. It was about family-of-origin stuff and even though it had absolutely nothing to do with Lisa or the abuse, it helped prepare me by making me familiar with the enactment process and by giving me a chance to see how things would be done.

A year later, I did my second enactment — the one about the abuse — and that was completely initiated by me. It was my choice and I knew that I was ready. I also knew that I didn’t want Brent to be there — not because I didn’t want him to know about it or because he wasn’t supportive of me — but because I really felt that it was something I needed to do on my own. This enactment was for me — it was about me facing and confronting my past — and by doing that on my own, I felt empowered.

For about six months, I spent a lot of time mentally preparing for the enactment by
going through different scenes in my head and trying to get a sense of what I wanted to enact. There were a lot of different incidences that I thought about, but one scene in particular kept coming back to me — one incident that happened when I was about eight years old and at the cottage with Lisa and my family. In my mind, I knew exactly how I wanted it done — I had everything ready — and then all of a sudden, I got totally overwhelmed — “I can’t do it. I just can’t do it in a big group with a bunch of people that I don’t know!” The abuse is such a dark part of my life and I didn’t know if I could handle bringing it up in front of a large group of unknown people. On the one hand, I questioned whether my enactment was worthy enough — maybe I would be wasting everyone’s time and people would think that I was making a big deal out of nothing — and on the other hand, I was afraid of what people would think of me once they saw all the things that had happened. I really struggled a lot, but when I talked to the female director, she came up with this brilliant idea of having me do it privately in a smaller group. That just felt right — it was perfect!

When an individual begins the process of breaking the silence of childhood sexual abuse, issues of fear and shame can become predominant and directors must adapt the therapeutic enactment process in order to maintain a level of safety that is comfortable for the lead. In order to enhance safety and containment, modifications to the group and the group size must therefore be considered.

Typically, a therapeutic enactment occurs in a larger group of approximately 25-30 people where a series of enactments is done over a period of a few consecutive days. In situations however, where the enactment involves incidences of early sexual trauma, the lead is often given the option of doing his or her enactment in a smaller, more intimate group of approximately 10-12 people (P. Wilensky, personal communication, November, 2001). Also, to further enhance a feeling of safety, the lead is given the choice to invite certain individuals, who act as personal resources, to be present during the enactment (M. Westwood, personal communication, November, 2001). By doing this, the lead can have the support of individuals who provide him or her with a sense of strength and comfort, to be a part of the enactment circle and act as an anchor during times of heightened fear or anxiety. Through this modification of the group and the group size, a closer community of support, safety, cohesion, and containment is achieved (M. Westwood, personal communication, February, 2002).

*******
In a small room at the university, Andrea and I meet. I had called her a few weeks earlier to arrange for us to talk about her enactment and with a sense of eagerness and enthusiasm, she more than willingly agreed. I hear her footsteps as they race up the stairs to the office and I notice my heart beating as I go to the door to greet her. For Andrea and I, this will be our second meeting. We had met once before - socially - and I feel touched beyond words by her willingness to take the time to share with me her story. I open the door. She greets me with a warm smile and a gentle wave of her hand. I am happy to see her.

Together, we move into the office and arrange ourselves in the chairs by the window. The room itself is filled with books - studies and research done by students at the university - and I feel somewhat at odds by the sterile and impersonal environment around us. Tonight, Andrea brings to me, her story - a story that is very personal, very sacred, and very real. It is a story that is filled with strong emotions and as we sit together in the coldness of a fluorescent-lit room, I feel the desire to close ourselves off from the outside world and find comfort in the warmth and safety of a strong, protective shield.

We spend a few minutes “catching up”. We talk briefly about her recent trip to Europe, her husband and his studies, our birthdays, her dog, and her future dreams for a family. And then, with a deep breath, and a sigh, we begin.

I was crying hysterically even before I walked into the middle of the circle and I really leaned on a couple of people who I especially needed to be there. One of them was the female director, who I already had a strong and trusting relationship with, and the other was Katherine, a friend of mine, who is just one of the most comforting people that I know. I trust them both completely. The female director is someone I have a lot of respect for. I admire her and she gives me a lot of hope just by being the kind of person that she is. And Katherine — she’s just got the best hugs! I know I can always count on the both of them to be there. I couldn’t have gone through any of this without them.

Right from the very beginning, Katherine and the female director stood by my side — one on either side of me — and they stayed with me like that throughout my entire enactment. The three of us moved together in the middle of the circle and I remember the female director beginning the process by talking to me and asking me to tell the group about my family. At that
point, my whole body was shaking uncontrollably and I just didn’t have the words to tell the group why I was here. I couldn’t tell them about my parents, my sister, or about Lisa — and all I could do was cry. I didn’t have the words ~ silence ~ for some reason, I just didn’t have the words at all.

*******

Dream. (Re-occurring) Black. Panic stricken. Something’s attacking me! Nothing’s coming out from my voice. I have to wake up, but I can’t! I can’t!

*******

As Andrea continues to tell me the story of her enactment and the struggles and fears she experienced, I find myself being drawn into the fabric of her world as I begin to picture her slowly walking into the center of the circle. In my mind’s eye, I imagine the scene - an intimate group of about twelve familiar faces surrounding Andrea and forming a tightly knit container to support and hold her in her experience. I imagine Andrea as she speaks. Her breathing is rapid and shallow and her words are broken as they hide behind the fearful shivers of her body and drown beneath the rapid flow of her tears. At a very early age, her voice had been taken away from her - taken away by her parents who failed to hear her silent cries for help and taken away by her cousin whose own abusive behaviours hide the frightening truth of a secret abusive past. As Andrea continues to move through her enactment, she begins the process of searching for a voice that she once had. Her enactment takes her on a journey to find it.

With the support of Katherine and the female director, Andrea recreates the scene and takes the group back on a journey through her childhood. Between her broken words and trembling tears, she tells the group about the cottage where she and her family had spent many of their summers. For most, thoughts of a family cottage conjure up memories of refreshingly cool swims in the lake, the smell of fresh pine and wildflowers from a nearby field, and the sound of laughter as a family enjoys the togetherness of a warm summer night. For Andrea however, the memories are very different.

I’m eight years old and it’s night time — and we’re getting ready to go to bed. The three of us are in one room — Lisa, my sister, and I and — and I have this strange feeling in my body — dread, I think— because I know what’s going to happen next. In the next room, I hear
voices. It’s my mom and my dad and they’ve been drinking. My mom’s talking to someone — one of my dad’s friends — and she’s flirting with him. My dad must have passed out — he’s probably lying down somewhere — he has no idea of what’s about to happen.

Lisa is getting into her pyjamas. In the room that we share, there are two couches — one for my sister and the other for Lisa and I — and I see Lisa climb onto the couch and crawl beneath the covers. She lies there quietly and waits.

_In my mind’s eye, I imagine Andrea moving around the room selecting people to represent the various roles needed for her enactment - her “sister”, her “cousin”, and her “parents” - and then, one by one, each member of her childhood family is brought to life. As each person takes his or her place in the circle, members of the group pull together some chairs to symbolize the two couches where the three children will sleep. Within minutes, the scene from her childhood past is recreated._

My sister needs my help — she’s only three — and I need to get her changed and ready for bed. I sense that Lisa is waiting — it’s a horrible feeling and it just creeps throughout my entire body. It’s a feeling of knowing what’s going to happen next and I hate it! I turn to my sister — I help her up onto the couch, tuck her in, and kiss her good-night. I tell her that everything is going to be okay.

_“Everything’s going to be okay” — in my mind, I hear Andrea whisper those words as if to reassure both her sister and herself that it is safe and that nothing bad will happen. Despite those words however, the sound of fear resonates in her voice. At the age of eight, Andrea has already taken on the role of an adult - shielding her sister from the horrible things that she has to endure and protecting her from the pain and chaos that is happening in the world around them. Like a mother sacrificing her own needs for the sake of a child’s, Andrea makes sure that her sister is tucked away safely beneath the blanket before slowly moving to the other couch where Lisa is waiting. In the darkness, I picture Andrea walking hesitantly towards Lisa. On the one hand, she finds comfort in knowing that her sister is safe and protected. On the other, she finds herself filled with an overwhelming feeling of dread. One step at a time, she moves closer to her abuser._
Dream. 2000 (a few months before my enactment). My family is trying to pull me back and I don’t want to go! I jump through a door before it gets shut and then — “No! I don’t want to go back! I don’t want to go back!” I turn around and someone is chasing me — coming after me. I’m trying to tell Brent that I need help. I need help — but I can’t and the words can’t get out! ******

When I planned my enactment, I was originally going to focus on the abusive things that happened when I was little — the things that happened with Lisa. I never thought about having my parents there at all, but for some reason I did — and as soon as I saw my mom and dad standing there watching everything happen, I got really, really angry! I realized that my mom and dad were never really there for me! They were always caught up in their own world and because of that, they couldn’t see what was happening. They chose to turn a blind eye to it all and when I stood there in that room and saw them watching everything that I was going through, it made me mad. In that moment, I realized just how much they really let me down!

[Through the process of physically moving through the enactment, the lead is provided with an opportunity to directly witness and experience the family dynamics that were operating at the time of the original trauma and become aware of dissociated thoughts and/or feelings that may have been emotionally unsafe to experience at time. For a child faced with the trauma of sexual abuse, the full extent of the betrayal and abandonment by those trusted care givers who failed to protect and prevent the abuse from happening may not be fully acknowledged in order to preserve some sense of safety and trust in his or her loved ones (Courtois, 1999; Freyd, 1996; Gil, 1988; Waites, 1997). For a child, the losses that accompany this awareness can be devastating.

In therapeutic enactment however, the lead is able to re-experience his or her childhood family from the position of an adult (Brooks, 1998; Westwood et al., in progress). He or she can bring to consciousness the significant losses that had been experienced and acknowledge the impact these losses have had. According to Herman (1992), the mourning of what was or what could have been, is an important part of a survivor’s journey towards reparation.]

In the process of moving through her enactment - and in the process of moving closer to Lisa - Andrea enters into a deeper terror and crosses over into a rage that she has never before
experienced. Through this process, she is confronted with the terror of knowing that her parents were never really there for her and in a pivotal moment, realizes how very alone she truly was.

Every muscle in my body was tensing up and shaking. Lisa was lying on the couch — telling me that it was time — and my mom and dad were just standing there watching. I could feel myself being pulled back into my role as a child. I couldn’t speak — I could hardly even stand. At that point, the female director just took control and stopped everything. She turned to me and made me look right into her eyes. I knew that I wasn’t alone — we made eye contact and that snapped me back to the present. After that, I was able to speak! I turned to my family and yelled at them — the whole lot of them — my sister, my cousin, and my mom and dad. One by one, I told them what I thought. I got angry and told them how much they let me down.

For a brief moment, I picture Andrea as that eight year old child who had been left alone to care for herself in a world filled with emotional chaos. She had been forced to survive in an environment created by the very people who were suppose to love and protect her - the very people who were suppose to keep her safe. I think about Andrea as that young child and feel a surge of my own anger build towards her parents. How could they not have known what was happening to their daughter in the very next room? Did they not see the look of fear and dread in her eyes when they sent her off to bed at night? Or did they even take the time to care?

As I sit across from Andrea in that small room at the university, I think about who she is today and the strong and vibrant person that she has become. I become aware of her energetic Spirit. It is a Spirit that overflows with warmth, love, and kindness and is brought forth in the sense of wonder and excitement in her eyes. I stop again to think about her childhood family. They have truly missed out on getting to know a wonderful human being.

*****

On the night of my enactment, I had brought a few things from home — photographs and socks like the ones Lisa used to represent a penis — and at the end of my enactment, I put all that stuff together and wrapped it into a big, black cloth. When Brent came to pick me up
that night, we took the cloth — and everything that was in it — and drove to one of my favorite spots by the ocean. Together, Brent and I walked down to the beach and I took the cloth with all the things from my past and threw it into the sea. I let it all go — I set myself free!

If there were three words that could describe who I was before my enactment, they would have been “unaware”, “co-dependent”, and “very forgiving”. Now, the three words that describe me are “truthful”, “more aware”, and — “comfortable”. Since that night, a lot of things have changed and sometimes it’s hard for me to think about who I was back then. I used to be the type of person who rarely had the desire to take any chances — to do anything different — but since my enactment, I’ve become a lot more risk-taking and carefree!

The week after my enactment, I actually packed up ten boxes worth of stuff and got rid of it all. It’s like I finally realized that there’s no point in keeping the things that I don’t need. Eight months after my enactment, I also lost twenty-five pounds, got my motorcycle license, and I took a chance at applying for a new position at work — and I got it! I’ve been doing a lot of wild stuff lately — I even took a boxing class! The other day, Spud and I went for a walk in the park and for the first time, I stopped to play on the swings! I’ve never done anything like
that before. I’m beginning to feel that it’s okay for me to take up more space in the world — I feel that it’s okay to really be me!

A few weeks after my enactment, Brent and I celebrated our wedding anniversary and as a gift to him, I made a collage of all the special moments we had spent together. I’ve never done anything like that before and I think the enactment allowed me to be creative in thanking him for all the support he’s given me over the years.

With a sense of gentle pride and excitement, Andrea shows me a large sheet of paper that she had brought with her to our meeting. She places it on a table and shows me the collage that she had made in dedication to the love that her and Brent share. Carefully arranged on the sheet of paper are photographs of their life together - photos of their highschool dance, their special dates, and their wedding. It’s a collage that captures the past fifteen years of their lives. It captures the special journey that they have traveled on together.

Each thing that I do helps move me further along in my process — and I think my enactment helped me let go of a lot of the losses I experienced and freed me up to becoming more spontaneous. Sometimes I feel that I’ve wasted the past thirty years of my life — so much had been taken away and it’s sad to think about what could have been — but at the end of my enactment, one of the group members came up to me and quoted a saying from Lord Tennyson — “Though much was lost, much was gained” — and that is really true! It touches my heart even as I think about it now.

I really have changed a lot since my enactment — but there are still a few things that I’d like to work on. I still have a lot of recurring dreams about Lisa and her mom and the house that they used to live in — those haven’t gone away and every once in awhile, I’ll have some really bad nightmares about them. I’d also like be more spontaneous with Brent. When we’re together sexually, I can experience what we’re doing in my head — but not in my body. I know that’s a common experience for a person who has been abused, but one day, I’d like for that to change.

**Dream.** *(2 weeks after my enactment)*. *A very vivid dream! I am a witness to a wedding.*

There’s a cop on the top of the stairs and he is about to marry an older woman who is strapped to a dolly. I’m standing in front of this couple - like a minister or something - and we’re in a room with a
All of a sudden, I become the bride and I’m wearing this headpiece that isn’t very steady. I go into another room - a bedroom, I think - and pull the headpiece off. I don’t like it! All of a sudden, I become the witness again and I see the bride coming into the room, but the groom is gone! The bride and I go and look for him — and we find him in the basement of a building. We walk towards the room where the groom is and a man pushes past us trying to warn the groom that we are coming. We keep walking and push him out of our way.

In the bathroom, there is a huge party. It’s a long room with a row of stalls and everyone leaves — except the groom and a woman stay behind. The bride stands at the entrance of the bathroom and sees that the groom and the other woman had been having sex. They’re having sex, but I am the one feeling his penis inside of me. The groom loses his erection - he’s been caught. The groom and the woman don’t want to leave each other and they both start to cry. I start hitting the groom with a tennis racket — I’m hitting him and punching him on his side. The woman and the groom are still together. They don’t want to leave. They just don’t want to leave.

As I look back at the array of photos that have been placed in front of me, I experience a deep sense of admiration for the love and courage that the two of them share. For me, Andrea’s story gives me hope. It speaks to me about the power of love and reminds me that there can be strength found in the support and commitment when it is shared between two people who travel on a journey together. As I listen to the joy in Andrea’s voice when she speaks about the magical moments that she and Brent have shared, I know that together, they will journey even further.

Before we end our meeting, I stop to ask Andrea one final question. She began her enactment in search of a voice that she once had and I am curious to know if she has been able to find it. She smiles and responds immediately - “Yes!” With a sparkle in her eye and the new found strength in her voice, Andrea tells me that she has reclaimed far more than she had ever thought possible. Not only has she rediscovered a voice that she had lost so many years ago, but through the process of moving through and confronting her past, she has discovered a new sense of freedom for her future.

Together, Andrea and I leave behind that small room at the university and walk down circular staircase and with windows that face out onto the ocean.
the stairs into the crisp autumn air. We say our good-byes and as I watch her walk down the street to her car, my eyes catch a brief and final glimpse of that eight year old child. A child once filled with fear and dread, now walks with a spring in her step - free of fear, free of worry, and free from the past.

********

“Beth”

For me, there’s something really special about being outside - hiking, camping, kayaking, climbing - even when I’m by myself, it’s probably the only time I’m able to feel completely safe and free. For me, there’s something about being outdoors - out in the middle of nowhere that gives me a sense of balance and an inner strength and safety that I just can’t seem to find anywhere else. When I’m outside, there’s just so much open space — so much peace. The outdoors has become my sanctuary. There is always a place to run or hide. No one could ever corner or trap me out there.

Sometimes, I think people see me as someone who is really strong and healthy — someone who can go to university, have a lot of friends, and solidly be there for everyone else — but I do a good job of pretending and hiding what really goes on. I’m 32 years old and have been married to “Scott” for seven years and even though we have been together for a long time, he knows very little about my past. I don’t talk a lot about the abuse with anyone — it’s just easier to keep it as my own “personal terror” — but I think Scott supports me without knowing it by giving me the space that I need and by letting me lead my own life. When I think about the pain and sadness that exist inside of me, all I see is a darkness — a dark, swirling mass of broken pictures and images that I can’t seem to make go away. Some of the pictures have moved together to create a scene — and somehow that makes them less overwhelming — but the others are just broken bits of memory that I can’t explain. Those bits are always the most frightening.

Six years ago, I started working full-time as a counsellor at a community agency with
women who have experienced abuse — and before that, with children and teens who were abused. I don’t really know how I ended up working in this area, but I like it a lot. I’ve met a lot of really courageous people who have been through so much and it always reminds of how strong the human Spirit can be. In my own life, I’ve been lucky enough to have a lot of people who have made a difference just by being there — silence — and I hope I can be there and do the same for someone else. If I can turn the things that have happened to me into something good — and touch the life of someone else — then maybe all of this will have been worth it.

The Abuse. I don’t remember exactly when the abuse began — silence — but I think it started when I was about four or five. I was three when my younger brother was born and within the first year of his life, he became quite sick and was in the hospital a lot. I don’t really know what was wrong with him, but it was all pretty scary. My mom spent a lot of time crying and my parents would often be away at the hospital visiting my brother. At that point, the abuse was already happening.

During the abuse, I was threatened a lot and — silence — and told that if I ever said anything to anyone, people that I cared about would get hurt and die. When my little brother got sick, I knew right away that it was all my fault. At that time, my whole family was falling apart — there was a lot of arguing, a lot of worry, and an awful lot of tears — deep down, I knew that it was all because of me. I hated watching my family in so much pain. I remember lying asleep in my room at night and hearing my mom cry in the next room. I would often go into her room and try to comfort her, but the damage was already done. My brother was very, very sick and I knew that I was responsible.

There were a few people involved in the abuse, but the main ones were my older brother and two neighbours who lived down the street. The neighbours were the ones who started the abuse — silence — they were older and somewhere in their twenties. They use to talk to my mom and dad about the college they were at and spent a lot of time with my family, especially during the summer. They babysat both my older brother and I — and they played basketball and hockey with us. My mom and dad liked them a lot — silence — but the abuse by them was a lot
Figure 3

My brother “Chris” is seven years older. The neighbours often told him to close the door and leave me alone with them and ~ silence ~ and I remember seeing the look in his eyes when he closed the door behind him. I don’t know exactly when Chris got directly involved in the abuse ~ silence ~ but sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to have a “real” big brother. I did have a big brother for a little while. Up until the abuse started, Chris and I did everything together. He was my role model — my best friend. I don’t know what I did to make him hate me so much.

Family-of-Origin. There are three of us in my family — Chris is seven years older and “Bryan” is three years younger. Bryan is the one who was often sick as a child and took up a lot of my mom’s time and energy, but even when he got better ~ silence ~ my mom was still very protective of him. He was my mom’s favorite and I would always be in trouble for not being nice to him or for not taking caring of him the way a big sister should. I don’t think there was ever really a time that I liked him that much.

My older brother is married now and has three children of his own. We’ve never talked about what happened — actually, I’ve never told anyone in my family and probably never will.
My family means a lot to me and I think it would only make them feel really guilty and angry. Right now, my parents are at a stage in their lives where they can sit back and feel proud of all of accomplishments their children have achieved and realize that they have succeeded in raising us. It would just destroy them if they knew what had happened. They would blame themselves. They would question why they didn’t see what was going on and feel guilty for not keeping me safe. My dad and I have always been really close and I think he would feel especially torn if he knew that his son was involved in abusing his daughter ~ silence ~ I can’t see anything positive happening by telling anyone. It would only make things worse and hurt a lot of people in the process.

I still see my family quite often and sometimes that can be a bit hard, but the neighbours who lived down the street have since moved away. I think they moved when I was around eleven or twelve. I don’t know where they are now, but each time I hear about a child who has been kidnapped or abused, I can’t help but wonder if they’re still out there hurting someone else. Maybe that’s why I work with the women and children that I do ~ silence ~ maybe on some level, I feel responsible for letting those neighbours go free — and maybe I feel the need to undo any pain and suffering my silence may have caused someone else.

Past and/or Current Counselling. I started seeing Mark about three years ago and he’s taught me a lot about trust. I think through the process of trusting him, I am learning to trust others — and more importantly, learning to find an inner trust in myself. I guess one of the things that happens when a person is abused is that they lose faith in their own ability to know who is safe and they question their own judgement. It’s taken me a long time, but I really do trust Mark more than I have ever trusted anyone else and I’m beginning to realize that it’s safe to tell him all of the thoughts and feelings that go through my mind. It scares me to be that dependent on someone. I’m so used to doing everything on my own — taking care of myself and not letting anyone get beyond the huge walls that I have built — but somehow, Mark has been able to work his way into my world. For the very first time, I’m realizing that I don’t have to do this on my own.
During my enactment, it was really important to have Mark there. At that time, he was the only person who knew what had happened and the only person who would have stood up for me if anything had gone wrong. Even though my enactment was done in a small group — and I personally selected everyone who was there — I was still really afraid of how people would react. For me, therapeutic enactments are about bringing the shadow into the light — and when something so dark, and so evil, is brought into a room full of warmth and love — magical things can happen and the shadow can begin to transform. I think for most people, abuse brings a lot of shame and darkness and fear ~ silence ~ and even though I believe that there is a lot of power in bringing such darkness into a room for others to see, it can still be really frightening. By having Mark there, I knew that there would be at least one solid ray of light shining onto the darkness. He gives me an important element of safety and continuity just by being there ~ silence ~ as long as he’s there, I know that everything will be okay.

**Therapeutic Enactment.** My first experience of being involved in a therapeutic enactment was at a weekend workshop in November 1998. I don’t remember how or why I ended up there, but I do believe that things happen for a reason ~ silence ~ and for whatever reason, I was meant to be there. On the first night, the female director told all of us to pay special attention to our dreams — “There may be strong messages in our dreams this weekend and it is important for us to listen to them.” I don’t think anything could have prepared me for what was about to happen, but looking back now, I realize this journey for me really started with a dream. . . .

**Dream.** November 1998 (my first night at Loon Lake). I open my eyes in a slight daze and see an older woman standing beside my bed. I am very aware that I am lying on the bottom bunk in a cabin at Loon Lake and that my cabin mate “Allison” is asleep in a nearby bed. I try to get up and see who the woman is, but I can’t move. I am paralyzed and lost in time. The woman moves closer. Her eyes are deep and dark and I am caught in her trance-like stare. Her tangled blond hair surrounds her face - a face that is pale and eerie, yet in a strange way, oddly familiar. I want to tell her something — something very important — but before my voice can be heard, her cold thin hands
cover my mouth and wrap around my throat. I struggle and can't breathe. I try to push her away and reach up to press my hands against her shoulders, but the weight and strength of her body defeat me. Her face moves closer to mine. Again, I try to speak — I have to let her know — but her hands quickly tighten around my throat. I struggle. Desperately, my hands move toward her face and I feel the coldness of her body as my fingers scrape against her revealing the ugly, raw flesh beneath her skin. I wake up frozen in fear... 

The next day, I witnessed an enactment that sent me spiraling into a really deep and dark place. My whole body reacted — I was shaking and crying — and I just couldn't stop. The enactment I saw wasn’t even about childhood abuse — someone had been stabbed and the enactment centered around this person’s experience of working through his trauma. When I watched his enactment, pictures and voices started flashing through my head and the whole room started to spin. I felt like I was in a tunnel or — or in a slow-motion movie that was somehow playing too fast.

For the next few months, I started having horrible nightmares. I was crying a lot and sometimes, I would suddenly start to shake and turn cold. Broken voices and pictures kept going through my head — shadow people — being attacked — hurt — and angry, whispering voices that tell me to listen and be still. I thought I was going crazy.

In June 2000, I did my own enactment and the plan was to “sculpt” my experience and piece together some of the broken pictures and images that were going through my head. For me, it has always been really hard to talk about the abuse — something that frightening and that horrible often doesn’t have words — and it just felt right to be able to sculpt it and make it real. Right from the very beginning, the directors gave me complete control and ownership over my entire process. I was able to decide when and how it would be done, and most importantly, individually select who I wanted to be there. I think for me, the building of that circle was one of the most reparative parts of my experience.

The circle was ready. Including Beth, there were eleven people in the room - each individually selected to be a part of the enactment and each bringing with them a unique gift...
that would help support and carry Beth through the experience. For Beth, this circle was a very important part of the enactment. It held within it, the strengths and resources that were unavailable when the abusive acts were happening and each person who made up this circle, served as a symbol to some of the very things that were so desperately needed.

Acceptance. Beth looked softly into the eyes of the group member who brought with her this gift and talked about the complete and total acceptance this group member has for her. As a child, Beth had been told to “BEHAVE and be good!” Beth’s silent screams for help were dismissed as selfish and jealous behaviour and the cries and struggles during the abuse were punished. For Beth, this group member brings a complete acceptance - the good and the bad. It is a gift that was greatly treasured.

Life, energy, and spirit. Beth continued to make her way around the circle. Love.
Connection. Beth paused for a moment before continuing. Knowledge. Beth stopped beside the group member who brought with her this gift and spoke to her in a voice filled with sadness. Beth: “You bring to the circle a knowledge and understanding that no one else in this room has and because of that you know my thoughts and my feelings and my fears. You remind me that I am not going crazy.”

The group member smiled at Beth and together with their eyes, they communicated an unspoken understanding that was shared only between the two. In this group member’s own life, she too had experienced the same terror and fear and on this night, she has brought with her a knowing that is deeper than words. It is a knowing that reached Beth’s heart.

Dream. March 2000 (3 months before my enactment). The boys are throwing stones at the cat - laughing at it and poking it with sticks. They don’t stop. Now it’s injured. It’s not moving - I think it’s dead.

I pick the cat up and carry it to the middle of a room and place it carefully on a blanket that’s lying on the floor. There are six or seven people in the room and they come to see what has happened. They say they want to help.

Together, we join hands and form a circle around the cat. It’s a healing circle and we must
now close our eyes and wait. A woman in the group gets impatient. She says it's taking too long.

"There's no use trying to save it! It's already dead!" She storms out of the room. I am angry at her.

The rest of us continue. With our Spirits joined, we gently squeeze each other's hands until a surge of energy moves throughout the circle. Together, we have created a "heartbeat". It moves within each person - connecting us together - and gathers strength and energy as it goes. We open our eyes.

The cat takes a breath - it has come back to life.

******

As Beth continued to move around the circle naming each person and identifying the valuable role that he or she played, a powerful connection began to develop and the container began to strengthen. Through this process, each person came to realize the importance of his or her presence. Each person came to know how important it was that he or she was there. Beth admired the creation of the circle and felt touched by the love and compassion that had filled the room. Each person held a special place in Beth's heart. They have come together to create a circle that would support and carry Beth through the experience.

Protection. Balance. Safety. Beth continued around the circle and stopped in front of "Dan" to identify the rare and precious gift that he had brought. Trust. Beth looked at Dan as the very word itself has taken Beth into a deep and sacred place within the heart. Trust. Beth spoke to him between the tears. Beth: "You bring to the room a special kind of trust ~ silence ~ and the role that you'll play is a role that can't be played by anyone else." Beth's voice began to tremble as the sadness turned to fear. Beth: "I'm afraid that I'm going to hate you — I don't want to hate you — but you're going to play the role of someone horrible — and I don't want to end up hating you too."

A sense of panic entered Beth's voice. Beth's breathing became rapid and shallow and Beth's eyes became distant. The male director stepped in to momentarily pause the process and helped re-orient Beth back to the safety of the room. He reminded Beth of the "butterfly taps" that he had spoken about earlier and calmly led Beth through the experience. With his arms crossed over his chest, he alternately tapped each hand on his shoulders and calmly and gently, began to count. Male Director: "One, two, three. One, two, three." His voice sent
a soothing energy throughout the circle.

Beth crossed her arms over her chest and followed. Beth: “One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three.” With each count, Beth’s voice grew calmer. Beth: “One, two, three.”

[Adopted from Shapiro’s (1995) Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), the “butterfly taps” are frequently used in therapeutic enactments during times of heightened stress or anxiety and act as a grounding or centering tool that reconnects the lead back to the present (P. Wilensky, personal communication, November, 2001). Through the use of the butterfly taps, the lead is provided with an emotional and physical “pause”. He or she is able to experience the presence of his or her body and reconnect with the secure sense of safety in the room.]

As Beth began to emotionally reconnect with the people in the room, a calm and soothing energy returned to the circle. The male director smiled at Beth and revisited her fears. Male Director: “Beth, you may hate the role that Dan is going to play, but you won’t hate him. He’ll still be Dan and he’ll carry with him the special trust that you have given him.”

Beth heard the male director’s words and looked to Dan for reassurance. Dan smiled at Beth and nodded. The softness in his eyes told Beth that everything was going to be okay.

Dan: I saw Beth in the hallway before the enactment started and she came over to me and gave me a big hug. That hug was really important because it told me that everything was going to be okay. I knew that the role I was playing was really significant — and I knew she was putting a lot of trust in me — but I also trust Beth and for me, that hug reaffirmed our connection. When we met in the hallway and gave each other that hug, it was like we were saying to each other, “We’re in this together! We can do this and we’re going to be okay!”

The final member of the group was Beth and the circle was now complete.

*****

Beth: “I’m sitting on the floor playing with something and — and I’m little.”

Beth and the male director recreated the scene - the scene of Beth as a five year old child playing quietly in the basement of her family home. Through the direction and guidance of the male director, Dan moved to the other side of the room and prepared to re-enter the circle as the perpetrator. Beth moved onto the floor. Beth: “I hear his footsteps.”
Beth gave the signal and from around the corner, Dan slowly entered the room wearing a black shirt and mask to represent the shadowy figure that had terrorized Beth’s Being. As the Shadow, Dan moved closer to Beth - his footsteps were slow and heavy and he watched Beth and moved closer like a predator moving in on its prey. Beth looked up from the floor and stared into the cold, dark eyes of the abuser. In that instant, the childhood terror returned. . . .

********

Dream. April 2000 (2 months before my enactment). He’s getting closer! I’m in my childhood elementary school and it’s dark — there’s no one around. I run down the hall towards a bit of light shining through a door at the end of the corridor. I can hear him behind me. Run — faster — hurry! My legs are taking too long.

I reach the door and slowly, I push it open. It’s a room with several long tables all lined up in a row — a science lab. On a table at the front of the room, there are jars filled with coloured potions — red, blue, yellow, and green — they’re bubbling and I think they’re about to boil over.

I hear his footsteps again. He knows where I am. Get out! I race out of the room and run down a flight of stairs. Quickly! I can hear him behind me. I turn the corner and go down another flight of stairs. He’s getting closer — another corner and then . . . the stairwell comes to an end. There’s no where to go — I’m trapped! Help! Please somebody help!

********

The male director instructed the shadowy figure to stop and used his voice to reconnect with Beth and reminded the group of the safety and protection that was in the room. This time, Beth was the one in control. Male Director: “Beth, when you’re ready, I want you to tell the Shadow when it’s okay to move closer and step by step, you’re going to guide him through the process. You’re the one in control this time. You’re going to tell him when to stop and start moving.”

[Through a process of “successive approximation”, the lead is guided through a series of small successive steps and progressively moves through a particularly critical scene one step at a time (M. Westwood, personal communication, February, 2002). “In situations of early childhood trauma, directors must take special care to progressively move in to confront . . .]
the perpetrator — moving back and forth — and being careful in both the timing and intervals" (M. Westwood, personal communication, February, 2002). By doing this, directors are able to continuously assess and monitor the lead’s readiness. They can slow events down, regulate the intensity of a scene, and incorporate resources and grounding techniques whenever necessary.

Successive approximation also gives the lead the opportunity to directly control his or her past. He or she is able to stop, start, and/or pause the process and experience a felt sense of empowerment as he or she learns to regulate and monitor the therapeutic process. Through successive approximation, both the lead and the director work together to maintain a maximum sense of safety and containment.

******

that I didn't do anything until Beth told me to — and I knew that with absolute certainty! In the background, I could hear people telling me to do certain things, but I didn't. I wasn't about to do anything unless Beth said the word. She knew what she needed and I trusted her completely. In my mind, Beth was the director and I was the one following her lead.

As if moving through the scene frame by frame, Beth gave the signal for the events to proceed forward, and when necessary, gave the signal for it to stop. Step by step, the Shadow moved closer to Beth. He knelt on the floor. He grabbed Beth's wrists. He pulled Beth down to the floor and . . .

Witness: It was hard watching Beth lie on the floor struggling with her perpetrator and there were times when I felt really uncomfortable. It brought up my own history of molestation — and sometimes it was hard to know when her experience ended and mine began. When she was down on the floor struggling with the Shadow, I was aware of how everyone was sitting around looking over her. She had already been overpowered as a child and here in her enactment, we were re-enacting that power imbalance — that made me lie on the floor with her. I guess I was compelled by my own history of abuse and my own fear of being alone on the floor. By being on the floor with her, I was able to comfort her and hold her with my eyes.

. . . . Beth struggled to the floor. He laid on top of Beth — pinned Beth down. His hands tightly grasped Beth's wrists. . . .

Stop!!!

Suddenly, tears began to flow down Beth's face.

I want so much to tell you how I struggled to the floor — how I fought back and yelled at my abusers — but that didn't happen ~ silence ~ I didn't fight back. I didn't even scream ~ silence ~ I feel scared. I'm scared and I don't know why.

As if lost in a moment of the childhood past, Beth's voice began to fade and a stillness took over Beth's Being. For Beth, this process of re-telling was hard, particularly as she remembered the threats that had been made not to tell — "Bad things will happen. People will get hurt and die." Beth had lived with the fear for so long and here Beth was saying the very things that had been sworn never to tell. Beth's eyes screamed out the silent words of the
Witness: She was lying on the floor struggling with her perpetrator — and I could see that she was becoming more and more agitated and dissociative. The directors were talking to her — trying to keep her connected — but she wasn't responding. She didn't seem to connect at all to what they were saying.

At one point, she told us that she had to get out — and then she just got up and walked out the door! The female director followed her. I was scared. I've never seen Beth that removed from herself and I was worried that we had pushed her too far. I really didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew that I wasn't about to let them leave without me. I followed them out. I thought she needed the containment of more than one person — silence — and maybe there was also a part of me that needed to find some sense of safety within myself. I'm protective of Beth and I wasn't about to let anything go wrong.

A part of Beth wanted so desperately to tell the story - to have it be heard - and be free from the chains of the past. Another part however, continued to live in the fear. That part of
Beth hid and shivered in the darkness and knew only too well, the dangers of breaking the secret.

The people in my circle were so patient and supportive — and I would never want my telling to hurt any of them. It scares me sometimes. Each person in that room has given me so much. At one point in my enactment, things got really overwhelming — and I left the room to go outside for a walk. I wasn’t expecting anyone to come with me, but the female director and another group member followed me out. That was when we found the lavender bushes. It was completely by accident — but somehow, the touch and scent of the lavender made me feel safe and calm and it helped re-connect me back to the present. I took some back to the room and gave some to each person in the circle. I was so sure that everyone had given up on me — that they would be angry and wanting to go home — but they weren’t. They stuck by me and supported me no matter what.

**Dan:** When Beth left the room, I think she crossed an important threshold. She knew what she needed and to me, it just affirmed my belief that she was in control of her enactment. When she left the room, I took off my mask and used the moment to regain my strength. Personally, the role was tough for me. When I think about the abuse and all the things that happened — I feel very sad. Even as I talk about it now, there’s a strong sadness that comes up. When I was in the role of the perpetrator, I had to force myself not to waver — to not feel the sadness — because if I did, I wouldn’t have been able to be fully there for her in the way that she needed me. I had to contain my emotions — and that was hard because they were, and still are, really strong.

**Mark:** At times, I was afraid for Beth’s safety. I wasn’t sure if the directors knew the full extent of Beth’s trauma — and I was curious how multiple traumatic events could be put together into a single scene. I hadn’t been to a therapeutic enactment before. It was a very vivid and real experience and I was overwhelmed by the intensity of emotions displayed by Beth and her supporters. It was hard to watch. Because of the close therapeutic relationship developed between Beth and myself, it was like watching someone in my family getting hurt — and it took me a few hours to come back to earth after it was over. For me, it was the witnessing of a tragedy. Everyone in the room was affected by it and I could see it in their faces and in their tears.
I think I went into the enactment with a lot of misgivings — and if it were up to me, it wouldn't have happened — but I trusted Beth. She was courageous and just kept moving forward.

******

It was really important when I got up from the floor and walked out of the room because I was able to do something that I wasn’t able to do as a child — and by doing that, I took back some of the power. When I came back into the room, I don’t really remember what happened — but I think at that point, my enactment was already over. I had moved as far as I could by letting people into my world and by sharing my story in a way that didn’t need a lot of words. Even though I wasn’t able to tell the group everything that happened, I did show them a small piece of what I went through — and that for me, was really important. I don’t think there will ever really be words to describe how scared and alone I felt ~ silence ~ but the people in the room were able to act as witnesses to my experience and emotionally feel what I was feeling. The enactment let them listen to me with their hearts and because of that, I really felt that they heard my story.

Sometimes when I think about my enactment, I feel angry at myself for not being emotionally strong enough to yell at my perpetrator or fight back — but I realize now that in my own way, I am fighting back by sharing a part of my story. I’ve begun writing about my experiences in a way that I don’t think I could have before and I really believe that my individual counselling with Mark and the support and strength I gained from my enactment has helped me do that. I also think that I fight back by working with the women and children that I do. There’s strength in being able to help support someone who has been through some of the same things that I’ve gone through and in my own small ways, I’m making a difference. The connections I made during my enactment have given me a “safety net” and that makes me feel safe in taking those few extra steps forward to confront the darkness.

The people who made up the circle have been an incredible source of strength and support for Beth. Not only did the people in the room provide Beth with the love and safety of a strong therapeutic circle, but they also continued to provide Beth with an endless flow of warmth and protection. Each person in that circle held a special place in Beth’s heart — they
have touched Beth’s life. Despite the pain and darkness, Beth’s soft and gentle Spirit remained unbroken.

I know that I still have a long way to go on whatever journey it is that I’m on — and I’m learning that there isn’t one magical “cure” that can make all of the pain and sadness go away — but my enactment gave me something very special. My enactment opened me up to the outside world and connected me to a group of people who know the real me and will be there if ever I need them. The people in my circle showed me a love that truly came from their hearts and no matter where I am or what I do, I know that I will always have that circle of people to support and care about me in a way that I have never before experienced. I don’t think I can ever really be alone again — and that for me, is one of the greatest gifts I could have ever received!

*******

“Sandra”

I got my degree in Counselling Psychology about six years ago and since then, I’ve been teaching at various courses and doing advanced training in energy work and meditation. The energy work that I do has become really important to me. It’s enhanced my life - both personally and professionally - and helps fill in some of the gaps that traditional counselling leaves behind. I’ve discovered that there’s just a whole other world outside the field of traditional counselling that hasn’t received as much recognition as it deserves and I’m really excited about all the new things that I’m learning! For the past few months, I’ve been busy setting up a private practice where I hope to add this spiritual element to counselling and combine the work that I do in moving and balancing energy patterns. Energy work has really become a passion for me — it’s my “calling” and I really believe that it’s what I’m meant to do.

I’m 53 years old and in the past year, there have been a lot of changes in my life. A few months ago, I moved apartments and ended a long-term relationship with a woman that I had met while I was working on my degree at the university. We were both in the same program together and the ending of that relationship was pretty significant. I was also in a car accident.
It wasn’t that serious — but it doesn’t take a lot to stir up past trauma! Trauma really is held in the body and lately, I’ve been quite active in finding alternate ways of working with my body to heal the injuries I got from the accident. All of this keeps me very busy!

**The Abuse.** The abuse started when I was an infant, probably about two months old or so and my main abuser ~ *sigh* ~ was my mother. She — was definitely split — or what we would call multiple personality and that was most likely the result of the ritualistic abuse that she experienced by my grandfather. The parts of my mother that abused me often used words of endearment and love and tenderness while the sexual acts were happening and ~ *silence* ~ and these words were always spoken in a very evil sort of way.

At the age of five, my mom and dad divorced and that’s when the abuse intensified. My brothers and I went to live with my mother at her parents’ home ~ *silence* ~ and at that point, my grandfather and my mother’s boyfriend got involved. The three of them would often abuse me together. When I was little, I remember having what I call “pressure dreams” - or dreams where I would be conscious, yet at the same time, still asleep - and I would be tied up, taken away, and abused. This incredible darkness would just come over me and my entire body would be filled with tremendous pressure. I used to have recurring nightmares that my Soul was being ripped apart and hurled through the universe — I was afraid that the demons were trying to get me.

I’m not sure how or why the abuse ended, but I think I was ten or eleven when it all stopped. I remember being about that age when my grandfather and my mother’s boyfriend snuck into my room when I was asleep and held me down so my mother could molest me. It’s a bit unclear, but I think the abuse stopped sometime after that.

**Family-of-Origin.** In my family-of-origin, there were three children. My older brother died when I was eight years old - he was three years older than me - and I have another brother who is five years younger. I’m the middle child and the only girl.

When I was growing up, it was mainly just my brothers, my mom, and her parents. After the divorce, my father wasn’t too involved in our lives and I’m not sure if he was even aware of what was going on. My grandmother also lived in the home. She had a strong presence, but I don’t remember where she was when the abuse was happening. When I
envision Nana now, I see her sitting in her chair, smoking her cigarettes, and looking out the window. I think that was her way of dealing with it ~ silence ~ she just couldn't allow herself to see it and needed to turn away from it all.

I never really wanted to have much to do with my mom and I've often struggled with that because there were the parts of her that were — lovely — fun-loving and harmless. People would have never, NEVER believed me if I had told them what was happening. I realize that I never really had a mom growing up — I was the parent to her and she was the one dependent on me. I was always made to put her needs first ~ silence ~ I took care of her and made sure that she was okay.

About ten years ago, my mom got lung cancer and — and when it got worse, I went back to Winnipeg to help her die. I never confronted any of my perpetrators about the abuse, but in the process of helping mom die, I asked her if there was anything she needed to tell me. At that time, I really believed that if I had talked to her about the abuse, she would not have remembered. She was dealing with her own death and was terrified by it. I just never brought it up — it wouldn’t have helped either of us heal by doing that.

My mom and her boyfriend were together for about twenty years, but he was married and had a family so he only saw us on the weekends. The last time I talked to him was about ten years ago to tell him that mom was dying. It’s funny because at that time, I found out that he was dying of cancer as well. The two of them were really connected in a strange sort of way.

Past and/or Current Counselling. Altogether, I've been involved in the traditional form of counselling for probably about a year. I'm more of a believer in non-traditional forms of healing — like energy work and other types of holistic approaches — and I've been doing that for about twenty years now. It's hard for me to distinguish "counselling" from the personal growth work that I do. There's a lot of overlap and I don't think they can really be separated.

Therapeutic Enactment. I've done two enactments - my first centered around the death of my brother and that was done in 1995. It had absolutely nothing to do with the abuse, but in a lot of ways, it helped prepare me by establishing the trust and safety I needed to move forward with my second one. That one was about the abuse and it was done in June 2000.

Both of my enactments were completely unplanned for. I really had no intention of
doing either of them, but as I watched other people do theirs, things just started to come up. I approached the male director and he just got everything going. It was that spontaneous! I really have a lot of faith in groups. I’ve been involved in a lot of them through my work as a teacher and counsellor and because of that, I’ve learned to trust the group and the group process. In traditional forms of counselling, I’ve found that I can often get hooked onto one person — one person who becomes my savior and guides me through my journey. In therapeutic enactments, the energy somehow gets spread out and I feel that I get to own my experience.

I’m also a very physical person and it helps if I can create the things that go on in my inner world and represent them physically in my external world. When I do this, I can often step back, see what I’ve created, and reflect on what’s going on. Somehow, this process of being able to witness my inner reality - and have it witnessed by others - allows me to gather information about myself and gain a better understanding of what I need to do. It’s about being able to safely move into the depths of my inner experience. It’s about having it seen — and making it real.

In the center of a circle made up of about thirty people, Sandra prepares the group for what is about to occur. I watch her as she moves. For the first time, she is about to bring to life a part of her inner world that has haunted her for so long and yet, as she prepares to confront one of her darkest shadows, I become aware of an incredible strength that exists within her Being. Sandra moves within the center of the circle and selects people from the group to represent the various roles needed for her enactment. I watch her as she walks. Her movements are strong and determined. I listen as she speaks. Her voice is assertive and in control. As Sandra prepares the group for what is about to unfold, I realize that she truly is the director of her own journey - the director of her own enactment.

[According to Wilensky (P. Wilensky, personal communication, November, 2001), when using therapeutic enactments with survivors of extreme trauma, it is very important to provide the lead with as much personal control as possible and to closely follow the lead’s inner “script” as the traumatic events are reconstructed. By doing this, directors are able to provide an increased sense of containment and reduce the risk of triggering additional material.]
In other types of enactments, where the trauma content is not as high, directors may offer more therapeutic instruction and guide the lead in a direction that may not have been previously planned for (P. Wilensky, personal communication, November, 2001). In situations of childhood sexual abuse however, the need for safety and containment is greater.

Researchers (Chu, 1998; Courtois, 1999; Freyd, 1996; Waites, 1997) state that for individuals who experienced early sexual trauma, there is an increased likelihood that further traumatic material may exist and that these memories may be dissociated from conscious awareness. Given the state-dependent nature of traumatic memory, directors of therapeutic enactment must therefore provide additional containment for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and closely follow his or her original plan of action.

Even though my enactment was completely spontaneous, somehow I knew exactly what I needed to do. I had an image from a dream — and I knew I needed to recreate that and bring it into the room. I knew all the specific details - how the room needed to be arranged, how my abusers would enter the room, and where they would stand when they start to molest me. In a lot of ways, I directed my own enactment. I became empowered and was given the space, and the permission, to be in control of my own process. By recreating the precise image that appeared in my dream, I was able to safely put myself back into the experience and let my own inner wisdom guide my journey.

*With the male director by her side, Sandra describes the dream that she had the previous week and talks about the terror she experiences as an overwhelming darkness envelops her and fills her entire Being. This darkness has entered her dreams before. It has followed her through the years and fills her mind and body with an overwhelming fear that invades her sleep and terrorizes her Soul. This time however, the darkness is different. This time, it brings with it the very people who hurt and betrayed her.*

*Sandra:* “I would get to a place where I suddenly become conscious. I’m still asleep, but I’m aware that a darkness is coming over me — and I can’t stop it from taking over. For the first time, this darkness comes and I see figures in it ~ silence ~ it is my mother and two men — they hold me down.”

*The male director becomes aware of a dramatic shift in Sandra’s voice. He notices the rigidness of her movements, the faltering of her voice, and the overall change in her Being. He*
stops to redirect her back to the here-and-now. Male Director: “When you talk about your dream, what do you notice in your body right now?”

Sandra pauses for a moment before responding. Sandra: “I’m finding it hard to breathe.” She stops walking. “I feel like I have something on my head — on top of my head — pushing me down.”

I watch as the director reconnects Sandra back to her body. Through their dialogue, she becomes aware of her breath, her movements, her feelings, and her sensations. Through this connection with the director’s voice and a re-orientation to her present Self, Sandra returns from being the frightened child who is abused to the strong adult who can no longer be harmed. I listen as she reclaims the strength in her voice and watch as her shoulders begin to unfold and her chin slowly pulls away from her chest. Once again, her body stands tall and strong.

[Through the act of telling one’s story, survivors of childhood sexual abuse may unknowingly return to their childhood experiences and fall into “pockets of time” that have no connection to their current reality (Courtois, 1999; Herman, 1992; Napier, 1993; Waites, 1997). According to Napier (1993), these pockets of time can pull an adult survivor into the past and fill his or her awareness with the feelings and sensations that were experienced as a child. This process can lead to a vivid re-living of the abuse and can ultimately result in retraumatization.

In therapeutic enactment, the director brings the lead’s awareness to the body by having the lead notice what he or she is experiencing in that moment. For survivors of childhood trauma, this directed awareness towards the body serves three specific functions.

First, an awareness of one’s breathing, regardless of its quality, enables an individual to become re-oriented in the here-and-now. Researchers (Courtois, 1999; Gil, 1988; Napier, 1993; Zettl et al., 2002) state that a noticing of one’s breath, even if only for a brief moment, can act as a “grounding” tool by helping survivors return their attention to their body and anchor themselves back to the present.

Second, by connecting to the body’s present experiences, survivors of childhood trauma are able to become aware of the strengths and resources they have as adults and utilize these resources as they work to confront their past (Courtois, 1999; Herman, 1992; Rothschild, 2000; Waites, 1997). In therapeutic enactment, directors may pause at a moment
when the lead is experiencing a surge of power over the perpetrator or at a time when he or she is feeling a strong sense of peace and safety (Keats, 2000; Morley, 2000). An awareness of one's body helps anchor these experiences at a sensorimotor level and aids in establishing a "corrective re-experiencing" of the trauma (Kipper, 1998; Zettl et al., 2002).

Third, by simply noticing the body and becoming aware of the feelings and sensations it experiences, the body automatically becomes engaged at a cellular and sensorimotor level (Levine, 1997; Rothschild, 2000; Zettl et al., 2002). Dissociated parts of the Self are gradually re-integrated and traumatic material is able to shift and transform within the body.]

* * * * * * *

The group is ready. The three people Sandra has chosen to represent her perpetrators move to the side of the room as she works to recreate the details of her dream. Members of the group transform a sofa into a "bed". A white bed sheet and pillow are provided and a small "table" is placed nearby. The curtains are drawn and the lights are dimmed. Within minutes, Sandra's childhood room is recreated.

The male director reminds Sandra that she is in complete control and turns to her for direction as to what needs to happen next. **Male director:** "Tell us what's going to happen and what we're going to do. Let's slow things down and take it step by step."

Sandra informs the group that her double will move through the scene first. She physically positions her double into the bed for it is nighttime and "Sandra", as a ten year old child, lies curled asleep beneath the sheet. Next, Sandra directs her "mother", her "mother's boyfriend", and her "grandfather" into the room. **Sandra:** "Come in slowly and quietly." They tiptoe towards the bed and move silently through the darkness.

**Sandra:** "Now my mother stands here." Sandra's mother moves to the side of the bed. Her grandfather and mother's boyfriend move to the end of the bed and lean towards the sleeping child. **Sandra:** "Grab her thighs." The three shadowy figures reach down, grab her legs, and hold her down.

**Now, Sandra directs her attention to her double. Sandra:** "And now you scream." Her double begins to struggle as she experiences an overwhelming feeling of helplessness. She screams. **Double:** "NOOOOOO! Don't hurt me! Leave me alone!!"

**Sandra stands near the bed and watches as the very people who are to suppose love and
protect her begin to abuse her body and torture her Soul. Sandra begins to shake. The directors move in to support her as she falls backwards and lets out a chilling scream . . . .

I stop for a moment and allow my mind to escape the terror that is happening before me. My mind escapes to a world of rainbows - a world of colourful creatures and magical places. It is a world where children can dance in raindrops, run with unicorns, and explore a mystical castle made up of clouds. It is a world where abuse can not enter. It is a world of peace . . . calm.

My mind returns to the events that are happening in front of me and I feel my thoughts, and my heart, begin to race. I wonder how abuse begins, when it will end, and why it all exists in the first place. I think about the world that we live in today and wonder if there will ever be a time when abuse is no longer a part of our lives. I think about the children - children who may never know the true meaning of safety, never know the true meaning of trust, and never experience the true feeling of love. A deep sense of sadness enters my heart.

Questions begin to flood my mind. Do abusers ever feel a moment of remorse? Do they ever truly realize what they have done or fully comprehend the wounds they have left behind? Do they ever really understand the pain and terror that exists when a tiny child lies trapped beneath a human body and feels a frozen terror that will live in the Soul forever? My mind returns to Sandra. I listen as she screams and watch as she cries uncontrollably in the director's arms. I realize that she has never experienced the safety and comfort of having a mother - the safety and comfort of lying in bed and falling asleep at night knowing that she is free from harm. Sandra continues to scream as she watches her double struggle beneath her perpetrators. My mind is pulled back to what is happening in the room.

Sandra: “Let go of me!! I didn’t do anything! Get off of me! Heeeelp!”

Suddenly, Sandra’s screaming comes to an abrupt end. The room becomes completely silent . . . .

After watching my double struggle and witnessing my abusers try to molest her, something in my body told me that I needed to experience that same vulnerability. It wasn’t really a conscious awareness — it was more of a felt sense that my body just knew what it needed to do. It’s taken me a long time, but I trust my body’s experiences and I listen closely to
its wisdom. I really believe that it holds the knowledge and that the answers that I seek must come from within.

During my enactment, I was encouraged to connect with myself - connect with my body - and by doing that, the power that my abusers had taken away, was able to return to where it belongs. Somehow, my body knew that it was safe to re-enter the scene — I trusted that — and the directors guided me through the process.

*******

The directors move to reconnect with Sandra as the strength in her body and Soul return. They look to Sandra for direction as to what needs to happen next and help prepare her as she moves in to take the place of her double. Sandra positions herself in the bed and when ready, gives the cue for the scene to re-play. Her abusers re-enter the room and again, tiptoe quietly towards the bed. They grab her legs. Sandra struggles and screams. Sandra: “Nooooooooo!!”

[For individuals who were sexually violated as children, one of the many losses they often experience, is the loss of a connection with themselves and their body (Courtois, 1999; Gil, 1988; Rothschild, 2000; Waites, 1997). In therapeutic enactment, the director helps connect the lead back to the body by providing him or her with a delicate balance of “contained freedom”. The lead is therefore free to explore and follow the body’s own natural wisdom within the safe and solid parameters of a supportive environment.]

Suddenly, a powerful surge of strength and energy take over as Sandra forcefully pushes away her perpetrators and shoves them to the floor. She rises to stand on the bed, draping the white bed sheet over her shoulders and demands that her abusers leave her alone. She confronts them in a voice filled with power. Sandra: “Don’t ever touch me again!! And if you do, I will kill you because that’s what you did to me!
You took my Soul!”

I watch as Sandra’s perpetrators slowly appear to shrink as they begin to lose the hold that they have had over her for all these years. From a new position of strength, Sandra takes back the power that they have held on to for so long. Sandra: “I believed I was bad.
I believed I deserved it, but it's not my evil! It's yours!"

As she stands on top of the bed with the white sheet draped over her shoulders, I am reminded of a beautiful Spirit who has risen above the terror to release her Soul from the chains of her past. She will no longer be haunted by the people who were unable to truly love and protect her for she is finally free and they will never again have the power to harm her.

One of the strongest memories I have of my enactment is standing on the bed with the white sheet around me. The male director said I looked like an avenging angel — and that's who I truly am! Through the abuse, my energy had become trapped and caged in a Soul that had been tortured — but somehow I was able to set it free. It was as if standing on that bed represented myself as an angel in flight — it gave me the wings that I needed. It gave me the wings to release my Spirit and soar!

With another surge of strength and energy, Sandra jumps down from the bed and grabs her abusers by their arms. Sandra: "None of you ever had the capacity to love! You didn't have any love in you and you tried to take my love away — but you didn't! You couldn't destroy me!"

With strength, determination, and sheer power and force, Sandra takes her abusers out of the room and slams the door behind them.

******

At first, when I watched my double lie helpless in that bed, I felt disempowered. The directors held me back and there was just so much rage in my body that I had nowhere to put it. I wanted so much to rescue that child — to stop them from hurting her — but in that moment, that child I was watching, wasn’t me.

All my life, I have been the caretaker — the protector of everyone else — and if in that moment, I had been able to jump in to save that little girl, I would have been jumping in to save a child — ANY child — but not necessarily me. By acting as a witness to my double’s experience of being abused, I was able to reach a place of complete rage and anger towards my perpetrators. Then, by lying in that bed and directly re-experiencing that complete vulnerability, something was able to shift. For the first time, I was able to really stand up to my
abusers and protect myself. For the first time, I was able to truly stand up for ME!

*With her abusers out of the room, Sandra returns to the center of the circle for there is one final piece left of her enactment. She looks around the room as she prepares to face the one Being who could have truly saved her - the one Being that she felt really let her down.*

**Sandra:** “Okay, where’s God?!”

*Two members of the group move into place and stand in front of Sandra to symbolize God. They look softly into her eyes and gently place their hands on her shoulder. Sandra begins to cry.*  **Sandra:** “Why didn’t you do anything? You were my only hope to tell me that I wasn’t evil and I wasn’t bad.”

*I listen as Sandra’s voice softens and transforms to that of a young child who had been left all alone. Through her tears, she turns to God and asks a simple, yet very important question.*  **Sandra:** “Why did you abandon me!”

*“God” gazes lovingly into Sandra’s eyes and reaches out to her heart and Soul.*  **God:** “We love you and we’re very sorry. We’re very sorry.”  **God continues to tell her that her Soul is good, that she isn’t evil, and that she wasn’t bad.**  **God:** “You are precious. You were precious when those people did very bad things to you.”  **God pauses.** “Those are the things that happened to you, but they are not you.”

**Sandra’s eyes glance towards the floor as she experiences the guilt of lying helpless in her bed and not being able to do more to protect herself. Her sadness turns to shame.  **Sandra:** “I couldn’t get up.”

*With love and understanding, God smiles, leans forward, and looks directly into her eyes.  **God:** “You did what you had to do.”

*For a short moment, Sandra’s eyes brighten as she begins to forgive herself and release some of the shame that she has held on to for so long. A “lightness” begins to embrace her, but as her thoughts return to the terrors of her childhood and the things she did to survive, that lightness starts to fade. Unable to face God, Sandra looks away. She stares down at her hands.*

*All her life, Sandra has been made to carry the shame of her past - the shame of being abused, the shame of being helpless, and the shame of doing what she did to survive. For*
Sandra, her hands hold the unspoken story. They carry within them the deep secrets that have never been told.

As if hearing her unspoken words and understanding her silent shame, God gently takes Sandra's hands and holds them out in front of her. **God:** “Look at your hands.”

**Sandra** glances at them and then averts her eyes and turns away. **Sandra:** “They did bad things.”

God pauses for a moment, rubs her hands gently, and speaks in a voice filled with love. **God:** “Sandra, they had to do bad things to survive. They're beautiful hands because they're attached to a very beautiful heart.”

I watch as Sandra stands before God with tears flowing down her face as she releases some of the shame that she has held on to for so long. As a child, she had been made to hold on to this shame - but it not hers. It never was and should have never been given to her at all. I watch as the tears flow down her face. A darkness lifts from her shoulders and reveals for the first time, the softness of her eyes, the innocence of her heart, and the sense of childhood wonder in her Soul. Her childhood Spirit is finally free.

And then, as if a magical sign from above, a small ray of light shines through the window, reaching Sandra, and embracing her with a gentle halo of love. As I watch her stand in the warmth of the sun, I think back to that pivotal moment when she stood on the bed with a white sheet draped over her shoulders and realize that she truly is an angel - an avenging angel who has fought her way back from a difficult journey to rediscover her Self and reclaim parts of her past. Her abusers have tried desperately to destroy her Spirit, but they have failed. Despite the pain and the sadness, Sandra's Spirit did not weakened. Instead, it has strengthened and grown and today, it soars even higher than ever.

"To see your drama clearly is to be liberated from it."

(p. 100, Keyes, cited in Goldman, 2001)

******
CHAPTER FIVE
RESULTS

That which haunts us will always find a way out.
The wound will not heal unless given witness.
The shadow that follows us is the way in. ~ Rumi

From a holistic-content approach (Lieblich, 1998), four dominant themes emerged and appear in varying degrees in the stories and narratives of all four women who participated in this study. These themes - re-connection, voice, empowerment, and corrective re-experiencing - will be discussed individually and include excerpts from each story to demonstrate how the themes were experienced.

What is the lived experience of using therapeutic enactments to address early traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse?

Before we begin however, I feel the need to express one final comment. Although there are similarities and shared themes among the stories and narratives of the four women who participated in this study - and the purpose of this chapter is to highlight these themes - I feel that it is important to remember the woman behind each story and honour the unique and individual voice that she has. As a way of respecting their differences and acknowledging the voice that they have struggled so hard to find, excerpts from each woman’s story will appear in a different font. By doing this, I hope to create a balance - a balance of “one-ness” and “togetherness” -- a sense of individuality within this shared and united experience.

Re-connection - Self, Others, and the World

For a child confronted with the trauma of sexual abuse, disconnection both with oneself and to others is a necessary and adaptive way of coping with the overwhelming, and often terrifying, events that are happening. Particularly in situations that involve on-going or multiple incidences of abuse, a child quickly learns to disconnect from his or her body and withdraw from relationships that might lead to the “danger” of emotional intimacy. Over time, a child learns to disconnect from the world (Herman, 1992; Putnam, 1997; Waites, 1997).

According to Herman (1992), re-connection is a critical part of the trauma repair
process. It involves reconnecting with a sense of unity and wholeness and recognizing that safety can be found in the world. All four women who participated in this study experienced a shift in their relationship with others, themselves, and the world and identified the social community component of therapeutic enactment as being particularly instrumental in facilitating this experience.

Connecting with others. For Beth, the process of creating a circle of people to be with her at her enactment helped her build a strong network of support and safety. A drawing done after her enactment helps depict the importance of the connections she made:

![Figure 6](image)

**Beth:** The building of the circle was one of the most reparative parts of my enactment because for the first time, I was able to share a piece of myself and let others into my world. Each person in that room brought something special to the circle. They helped me through some of my darkest moments and gave me a chance to experience some of the strengths and resources I didn’t have as a child. Together, they form a protective circle around me and the child parts of my Self. The gifts that each person brought to the room that night will stay with me forever.
Diane expressed a similar feeling of connection to a unique community that developed as a result of her enactment:

**Diane:** The experience created a community for me — silence — and it’s a community that knows the real me and will be there if ever I need them. The connections I made from my enactment are really strong and powerful. I know that all I have to do is call someone — and without a doubt, they would be there for me whole-heartedly. It’s a community that built up really quickly. It’s a community that transcends all time.

Andrea’s connection appeared in the relationship she shared with two group members who were particularly instrumental in supporting her through her enactment:

**Andrea:** During my enactment, I really leaned a couple of people who I especially needed to be there. One of them was the female director, who I already had a strong and trusting relationship with and the other was Katherine, a friend of mine who is just one of the most comforting people that I know. I trust them both completely. The female director is someone I have a lot of respect for. I admire her and she gives me a lot of hope just by being the kind of person that she is. And Katherine — she’s just got the best hugs! From the very beginning, they were both right by my side — one on either side of me — and they stayed with me like that throughout the entire enactment. I’m just so grateful to the both of them for being there.

... while Sandra experienced a powerful connection to the members of her group who acted as her perpetrators:

**Sandra:** I feel a strong connection to all three of the people who represented my perpetrators, but it’s interesting because the person I chose to be my most feared perpetrator, is the person that I feel the strongest connection to. For me, there was just an instant connection. That group member really brought an important element of safety to the room and I needed that — particularly from a male. I really believe that he just has the biggest heart!

**Re-connecting to Self.** Through the process of moving through her enactment, Andrea
was able to re-connect with the Child parts of her Self that needed to be disowned or dissociated when the abuse was happening:

**Andrea:** After my enactment, I felt like I wanted to draw, to paint, and to learn to play an instrument. I wanted to do all sorts of fun and exciting things! The day after my enactment I actually went out, brought some coloured pencil crayons, and drew a picture. I think if I had drawn the picture before my enactment, there wouldn't have been any colour in it. My enactment has definitely helped me become more spontaneous and free. The other day, Spud and I went for a walk and for the first time, I stopped to play on the swings! I've never done anything like that before. Since my enactment, I've been discovering a lot of new things about myself — and it's been a really fun and exciting process!

Her enactment also enabled her to experience a “reparative disconnection” from a part of her past that needed to be left behind:

**Andrea:** On the night of my enactment, I had brought a few things from home — photographs and socks like the ones Lisa used to represent a penis — and at the end of my enactment, I put all that stuff together and wrapped it in a big, black cloth. When Brent came to pick me up that night, we took that cloth — and everything that was in it — and threw it into the ocean. I let it all go — I set myself free!

Sandra’s re-connection to her Self occurred as she struggled with her abusers and was able to act as her own protector:

**Sandra:** All my life, I have been the caretaker — the protector of everyone else — but by lying in that bed and directly re-experiencing that complete vulnerability, something inside of me was able to shift. For the first time, I was able to really stand up to my abusers and protect that part of my Self that had been so helpless. For the first time, I was able to truly stand up and protect ME!

..... while Beth experienced a connection to a part of her Self that she had been wanting to deny:
Beth: There's still a big part of me that doesn't want any of this to be real — and I think I spend a lot of time trying to deny what happened. My enactment made me face a darkened part of my Self and by doing that, I've become a lot more connected to who I really am.

Diane's re-connection to a deeper part of her Self is captured in a dream she had a week after her enactment. In her story, she talked about the struggles she experienced in wanting to leave and end her life and her dream communicated a desire to stay and discover the hidden and treasured parts of her Self:

We move into a smaller room - it has a bed on the floor and I think to myself, “This would be a great birthing room!” I tell the woman that I have never seen this room before and that I didn’t know this room existed. It is a discovery!

.... it captures her renewed energy for life.

In that moment, with absolute clarity, I decide to stay in the house - there is just so much more for me to discover and explore. I love this house and I won’t leave it! I decide to stay!

Back into the world. All four women experienced a connection to the outside world that they never before had. Andrea’s connection became evident in the lessons and classes she took and in her new found freedom to take risks:

Andrea: Eight months after my enactment, I lost twenty-five pounds, got my motorcycle license, and took a chance at applying for a new position at work — and I got it! I’m beginning to realize that it’s okay for me to take up more space in the world — I finally feel that it’s okay to really be me!

Through their enactments, both Beth and Diane discovered a new sense of safety in the world that they had never before known:

Beth: My enactment helped me realize that the world can be a safe place — and even though it was just with a small group of people — I’m hoping that feeling of safety will grow. I think my sense of safety began through my work with Mark — he was the first person I trusted and felt safe with all of this — and the enactment just took it one step further by helping me find safety in others. With time, I’m hoping it will expand even further.
Diane: I realized that safe men do exist. For me, that was a real powerful shift — to know that there are good men in the world and that I don’t have to give anything to them in order for them to care about me.

Sandra’s connection to the world was experienced in a comment made by one of the witnesses after her enactment:

Sandra: After the enactment ended, we all sat around in the circle to debrief the experience and one man took the position of just — apologizing — for what happened. For a few minutes, he just took it all on his shoulders and spoke from a position of all men. That really touched me. It was really helpful.

All four women identified a notable shift in their relationship with themselves, with others, and with the outside world. These shifts appeared as a re-connection to something they had previously lost, as a new connection to something they had never before experienced, and as in the case with Andrea, a disconnection from something that needed to be forgotten. The ritual Diane created in her second enactment highlights the complexity of connections that can occur as she began the process of re-connecting with her Self:

Diane: In a lot of ways, the role of wife and mother were imposed on me as a child and for me, this enactment was a symbol of reclaiming who I really am. Though this enactment, I had the opportunity to reclaim that part of me that was lost — that inner spark that I needed to hold onto so desperately — that inner spark that my father was unable to extinguish. It was the beginning of giving and receiving love to myself!

.... with others....

Diane: I picked up my spirit candle, moved around the circle, and lit the candles of each person in the room. This was a magical moment for me. I looked each person in their eyes, said their name, and connected with them in a way that I had never done before. For the first time, I was not only able to see the people around me, but I was also able to truly allow them to see me. It was a wonderful moment of re-connection.

.... and with the world.
Diane: When everyone’s candle was lit, we all went down to the lake to place our candles around a fire. For me, leaving that room represented leaving the abuse and that part of my life behind — and walking down to the fire with everyone around symbolized a “moving on” and a re-entry back into the world.

**Voice - Breaking Down the Walls of Silence**

One of the most damaging effects of childhood sexual abuse is the shame and guilt that is placed upon an innocent child who had been left helpless at the hands of his or her abuser (Courtois, 1999; Freyd, 1996; Gil, 1988; Waites, 1997). This shame and guilt is often carried with the child into adulthood where it remains deeply rooted in the belief that “It was all my fault.” Over time, an overwhelming wall of silence begins to build - trapping the survivor and leaving him or her isolated and alone in the frightening world of childhood trauma. For many survivors, this wall of silence is continuously strengthened by the challenges involved in verbalizing traumatic memories and in the silencing that occurs from their perpetrators, families, and society.

For Andrea, the shame and silencing appeared not only in the “secrets” she shared with Lisa, but also in the way her mother dismissed and ignored her cries after she came home from that final incident in the car. The impact of the silencing strongly appeared in her dreams:

My family is trying to pull me back and I don’t want to go! I jump through a door before it gets shut and then — “No! I don’t want to go back! I don’t want to go back!” I turn around and someone is chasing me — coming after me. I’m trying to tell Brent that I need help. I need help — but I can’t and the words can’t get out!

For Beth, the threats were overt - spoken to her when the abusive acts were happening and further instilled through the fear that there would be harm in telling:

Beth: They told me that I was making them do it — that I wanted it to happen ~ silence~ they said people would get hurt if I ever told.

The shame Sandra carried is illustrated in her body as she stood face to face in the center of the circle with one of her abusers:

*With her “mother” by her side, Sandra’s body appears to shrink and become smaller. Her movements are slower and her shoulders hunch forward as her fingers*
move in and around her mouth. Her body is remembering the experience. In the presence of her mother, she once again returns to that small and silent child.

... while for Diane, the shame and silencing was evident in her mother’s refusal to believe that the abuse ever occurred:

Diane: When I was about twenty-five ~ silence ~ I confronted my father by writing him a letter. It was at that point when I told all my other family members that I was abused by dad and that I didn’t want to have anything to do with him. My mom’s first response was that she didn’t know about the abuse, and ~ silence ~ at the same time, it didn’t surprise her either. My father showed my mother the letter I wrote, told her to read it — “Well!! Do you think I’m a child molester?!” ~ silence ~ My mother said, “No” ~ silence ~ Right away, she sided with him.

Although all of the women experienced a sense of fear and shame as they prepared to bring their stories into the center of the circle, they were all drawn to the enactment and social community components of therapeutic enactment as a way of releasing the shame and breaking their silence. Three factors - being seen, being loved, and being heard - were identified as being especially valuable in fostering a reparative experience.

Being seen. All four women found that a critical part of their enactment involved bringing themselves out into the world and having the group bear witness to their story:

Diane: I felt that I still needed to tell my story — and to make public that part of me that I had hid for so long. Even though I had told my therapist my story ~ silence ~ and even though he listened and heard it very well — it was always still private. Like the abuse itself, my story was still happening behind closed doors. It felt like it was still a secret! The enactment was — it was about making it public.

Andrea: For me, it was really important to have my therapist, Robert at my enactment. I went through so much with him and I just needed for him to witness and experience everything that we had talked about. It’s so different to have someone see your story and watch it unfold right in front of your eyes and
for some reason, it was just really important to have him see everything that I had gone through. It made me feel closer to him because I knew that he really understood what happened.

**Beth:** Even though, there's a big part of me that would rather keep all of this hidden and buried away somewhere ~ silence ~ I guess there's another part of me that needs to share it and have somebody know. I've always had a hard time talking about what happened — and the male director told me that I could use the enactment to sculpt my experience. That made sense to me — it just felt right.

**Sandra:** Somehow, the process of being able to witness my own inner reality — and have it witnessed by others — allows me to gather information about myself and gain a better understanding of what I need to do. It's about being able to safely move to the depths of my inner experience. It's about having it seen — and making it real.

**Being loved.** The women further identified how the warmth and support of the social community helped them release some of the guilt and shame they carried:

**Diane:** When I was growing up, I was always told NEVER to tell ~ "People won't believe you! You're a horrible person for saying those things!" I think I confronted the shame by risking that exposure and discovering that people didn’t think I was horrible. For me, the enactment gave me an incredible feeling of being loved and embraced — it’s a feeling that I still experience even now as I think about it.

**Andrea:** It's kind of weird, but I always felt like my trauma wasn't worthy enough of an enactment. I thought I would just be wasting everyone’s time or that people would think that I was making a big deal out of nothing. The comments the witnesses made after my enactment were really special. One person — the person who played the role of my abuser — actually came up to me and told me that she felt honoured to play that part. It was such a horrible role but she still commented on how happy she was to be there for me. Even as I think about it now, I feel really touched by her words.

**Sandra:** At the end of the enactment, we all sat around to debrief the experience and it was really meaningful to hear what the people in the group had to say. We were all
a part of the same experience and I felt that everyone respected and honoured what I went through. No one saw me as a "victim". I think they saw me as someone who is really strong.

**Beth:** For me, there's comfort in knowing that there's a group of people who love and care about me even though they know about what happened. I was so ready for everyone in that circle to hate me — but they didn't. Instead, they just sat with me in the silence and embraced me even more!

**Being heard.** All of the women found that they were able to give voice to their experience by bringing their stories into the center of the circle where a voice that was once silenced could finally be heard:

**Beth:** Even though I wasn't able to tell the group everything that happened, I was able to show them a small piece of what I went through — and that for me, was really important. I don't think there will ever really be words to explain how scared and alone I felt ~ silence ~ but the people in the room were able to act as witnesses to my experience and emotionally feel what I was feeling. The enactment let them listen to me with their hearts — and because of that, I really felt that they heard my story.

Andrea and Diane further found that through the process of having their stories embraced and heard, they were able to discover a voice that had been silenced. For Andrea, this discovery occurred in a specific and pivotal moment:

Every muscle in my body was tensing up and shaking. Lisa was lying on the couch — telling me that it was time — and my mom and dad were just standing there watching. I could feel myself being pulled back into my role as a child. I couldn't speak — I could hardly even stand.

At that point, the female director just took control and stopped everything. She turned to me and made me look right into her eyes. I knew that I wasn't alone — we made eye contact and that snapped me back to the present. After that, I was able to speak! I yelled at them — the whole lot of them. One by one, I told them what I thought — I told them how much they let me down.

... while for Diane, it was experienced as a gradual strengthening that could be heard in the words and tone she used to confront her father:
Diane: “You hurt me so badly – you did unspeakable things to me.”

Male Director: “And I’m furious with you. . . .”

Diane: “I’m furious with you.”

Male Director: “Louder.”

Diane: “I’m furious with you! ~silence ~ And I don’t care if you stand there looking angry at me! I’m angrier! And I’m not going to be silenced any longer!”

By confronting the past and bringing their stories to life, all four women found themselves breaking down the walls of silence and releasing some of the guilt and shame they carried. Sandra described how her enactment gave voice to her experience and helped her realize on a bodily level that the shame she had been carrying, wasn’t hers:

Sandra: On one level, I knew that the abuse wasn’t my fault — but I knew that in my head, not in my body. When I got up from lying there in that bed, I was able to rise up out of the shame and experience in my body that the shame wasn’t mine. I gave it back to the people it belonged to — “It’s not my evil. It’s yours!” My abusers left the room shamed — not me. It wasn’t mine anymore ~ silence ~ and that was one of the most valuable gifts my enactment gave me.

Empowerment - Strength From Within

One of the many losses experienced by a child confronted with the trauma of sexual abuse is the loss of ownership over his or her thoughts and feelings and a loss of power and control over the environment (Courtois, 1999; Gil, 1988; Herman, 1992; Waites, 1997). According to Courtois (1999), Rothschild (2000), and Waites (1997) an important part of reparation needs to involve instilling a sense of strength and power in survivors that help them re-connect with their own inner knowledge and experiences. Reparation must involve teaching survivors to trust and believe in themselves.

In varying degrees, all four women discovered a felt sense of empowerment as they moved through their enactment to confront the darkness of their past. Three factors - the freedom to find and trust their own inner strength and wisdom, the permission to express and
feel their own feelings, and the safety to face and confront their abusers were identified as being particularly valuable in facilitating this experience.

The freedom to trust. For Andrea and Beth, an important part of their enactment involved embodying a sense of empowerment as they were able to take control of their enactment and trust their own inner strength and wisdom to lead the way:

**Beth:** Right from the very beginning, the directors gave me complete control and ownership over my entire process. I was able to decide when and how it would be done and most importantly, individually select who I wanted to be there. Somehow, I knew exactly what I needed — and I was able to trust myself to put together something that for me, was really important.

**Andrea:** I needed to have that feeling of control over what was going to happen, otherwise I would have just backed out and not done it. The fact that I could pick it myself — the people, the enactment — that made a huge difference!

Diane and Sandra found strength and power as they were able to act as directors to their own enactment:

**Diane:** I created a ritual. I had objects representing the past and death laid out on the floor in the middle of the circle and I wore black as a symbol of mourning. The female director gave me a memorial candle — we lit it together and I placed it on the floor next to a very special candle in a lotus shaped holder. I also had a scarf. It was a beautifully coloured scarf that I laid out and placed on the floor near the candles. For me, this scarf represented energy, creativity — and sparkle. It symbolized my desire to live life to the fullest.

**Sandra:** Even though my enactment was completely spontaneous, somehow I knew exactly what I needed to do. In a lot of ways, I directed my own enactment. I became empowered and was given the space, and the permission, to be in control of my own process. By recreating the precise image that was in my head, I was able to safely put myself back into the experience and let my own inner wisdom guide my journey.

The permission to feel. For Sandra and Diane, their enactments gave them the freedom
to safely access feelings and emotions that had been deeply buried and disowned:

**Diane:** The female director gave me the permission to own my feelings and to be emotional. When I was growing up, I was never allowed to express my feelings—and I was especially never allowed to be upset! “Don’t let anyone see that you’re upset!” My mother could never be emotionally present herself—she was just too wrapped up with my father. For me, there’s something about the female director’s willingness to be emotional and to be totally present. She accepts me in my emotions and let’s me know that it’s okay.

**Sandra:** As I moved through my enactment, I was able to get in touch with that righteous rage—that correct rage that I had never been given the permission to experience. I was afraid of that rage because I thought that if I let it go, I would hurt someone—but I didn’t. Instead, that rage inside of me transformed. As I released it, I made room for a new energy to emerge—I made the space for my own power and strength to break through.

_Suddenly, a powerful surge of strength and energy take over as Sandra forcefully pushes away her perpetrators and shoves them to the floor. She rises to stand on the bed, draping the white bed sheet over her shoulders and demands that her abusers leave her alone. She confronts them in a voice filled with power._ Sandra: “**Don’t ever touch me again!! And if you do, I will kill you!**

In that moment, I was able to take on the role of protector—the protector of myself—and I was never, EVER going to let them hurt me again.

For both Beth and Andrea, the permission to feel appeared as they witnessed other members of the group express some of the feelings that they themselves were unable to feel:

**Andrea:** Everyone in the room was very silent when they watched my enactment and there were a few people who shed a lot of tears. I don’t know why, but I appreciated that. It’s like they were able to feel for me and it touches me a lot to know that.

Beth reflected on the words of Dan, the group member who acted in the role of her perpetrator and Mark, her therapist as they described the impact of her enactment on the people
in the room:

**Dan:** When I think about Beth and all of the things that happened — I feel very sad.
Even as I talk about it now, there's a strong sadness that comes up. When I was in the role of the perpetrator, I had to force myself not to waver. I had to contain my emotions — and that was hard, because they were, and still are, really strong.

**Mark:** It was a very vivid and real experience and I was overwhelmed by the intensity of emotions displayed by Beth and her supporters. It was hard to watch. Because of the close therapeutic relationship developed between Beth and myself, it was like watching someone in my family getting hurt — and it took me a few hours to come back to earth after it was over. For me, it was the witnessing of a tragedy. Everyone in the room was affected by it and I could see it in their faces and in their tears.

**Beth:** When I think about the things that happened when I was little, I don’t feel anything at all — not anger, not sadness — and it touches me to know that people in the room were affected by what they saw. When I see other people expressing strong emotions about the things that happened to me, it somehow allows me to acknowledge and feel those feelings too.

The safety to confront. Perhaps one of the most powerful feelings of empowerment came as Andrea, Diane, and Sandra stood in front of their abusers and discovered an inner strength in themselves that they never knew they had:

**Diane:** I stood up to my father — I yelled at him and told him and everyone in the room all the horrible things that he had done — “And I’m going to tell you what you did to me. What you did was molest me at three, and at four, and at five and it only got worse after that until you were raping when I was twelve years old!”

After that, the female director told me that my voice sounded different — that I sounded like a woman for the first time after yelling at him. By confronting my father and standing up to him, I found my own strength. He couldn’t hurt me and I wasn’t intimidated by him anymore.

**Andrea:** I confronted my entire family — for the first time, I stood up to them
and yelled at them — the whole lot of them — my sister, my cousin, and my mom and dad. One by one, I told them what I thought. I said things to them that I was never able to say before. I got angry — really angry — I told them how much they really let me down.

Sandra described a felt sense of physical power and strength as she confronted her abusers and physically led them out of the room:

**Sandra:** When I was being abused as a child, that feeling of being powerless got trapped in my body — but as I moved through my enactment, I was able to release it and replace it with an embodied sense of power and strength. I guess I needed to experience it directly in my body. I needed to directly feel what it was like to be strong.

*With another surge of strength and energy, Sandra jumps down from the bed and grabs her abusers by their arms.*  **None of you ever had the capacity to love! You didn't have any love in you and you tried to take my love away — but you didn't! You couldn't destroy me!**  *With strength, determination, and sheer power and force, Sandra physically takes her abusers out of the room and slams the door behind them.*

Although Beth’s enactment did not involve a direct confrontation with her perpetrator, she was able to experience a feeling of empowerment as she moved into the center of the circle to confront her past:

**Beth:** Even though I wasn’t able to stand up and get angry at the people who hurt me — I was able to stand up to face and confront my past — and that for me, is a first step. When I was little, I was always told NEVER to tell — bad things would happen ~ silence ~ but through my enactment, I did tell! In my own way, I confronted them — and in doing that, I became a little bit stronger in the process.

For these women, the action and enactment components of therapeutic enactment were particularly instrumental in fostering a felt sense of empowerment as they moved through the darkness of their past to discover within themselves, their own inner strength, feelings, and wisdom. As an illustration of the depth of empowerment that is experienced, Diane shared with us, her dream:

**Diane:** 2001 (1 year after my enactment). I’m in this house — and my
father as this large man, is walking towards me with a gun. He hands it to me and challenges me to shoot him. "The only way you're going to stop me is to shoot me right in my heart." He moves towards me — taunting me with his words. I take the gun, aim — and shoot! At first, I miss — but then I shoot again — and I see the bullet go right through his chest. "You'll be known as the woman who shot me," he says. I aim the gun and shoot him again. I shoot him three more times in his heart.

**Corrective Re-experiencing - The Creation of New Memories**

According to Kipper (1998) and van der Kolk (1996b), action-based interventions that allow individuals to physically re-experience a critical life event provide a "corrective re-experiencing" that helps survivors process and integrate traumatic material. Although it is impossible to erase the past, or change the horrible things that have happened, this new and positive experience can create a "competing memory" that challenges the strength and power of a traumatic memory (van der Kolk, 2002). Briere (2002), Kipper (1998), and van der Kolk (2002), state that competing memories and corrective re-experiences need to be an integral part of the trauma repair process.

Through their enactments, all four women experienced a corrective re-experiencing of their past and developed within them, a strong competing memory that challenged and in some cases, overpowered, the vivid and overwhelming memory of their trauma. For these women, three aspects of their enactments were identified as being particularly valuable. These aspects were experienced in varying degrees and include the development of powerful, internal resources, the completion of thwarted traumatic responses, and the embodied creation of new and reparative experiences. All three components of therapeutic enactment were identified as working together to facilitate this important and corrective occurrence.

**An internal resource.** All four of the women developed a powerful, internal resource that provided them with a unique and personal reference for safety, protection, and strength. For Diane, this resource appeared in the form of a human shield that protected her from her father's angry rage:

**Male Director:** "Tell the group why we need six people. This is VERY important in you enactment."
Diane: ~ silence ~ “My father still terrorizes me and in order to face him, I decided I need six people between me and him so that if he really gets into his role — it’s a buffer. I need a wall between me and him to face him.”

As Diane speaks, somehow her voice appears stronger. Somehow, it is as if this experience of symbolically constructing a shield has enabled her to accentuate it and make it real. With purpose and determination, she moves around the room and selects six people to stand in as her shield. One by one, she moves each person into position and intuitively organizes who needs to be where and exactly how he or she needs to be.

As Diane steps back to view the shield that she has just created, her voice softens. Diane: “She’s so not alone.” For the first time, she is able to experience some sense of protection.

... while Sandra’s resource is captured in the form of an avenging angel — powerful, strong, and free:

Sandra: For me, the strongest memory of my enactment is me as that avenging angel — standing on the bed with a white sheet draped over my shoulders. That’s who I am! My enactment helped release a part of me that had been stifled for so long and it’s an experience that’s etched in both my mind and body. It’s become a part of me — it has given me the wings that I needed to soar!

For both Beth and Andrea, internal resources for safety and protection were created through actual objects used in their enactments:

Andrea: In the room where I had my enactment, there was a small fountain — and when things started to get to be too much — the female director took me over to it so I could feel and hear the sound of the water. For me, the ocean has always been a soothing resource for me — it’s a symbol of safety — and the fountain just strengthened that and made my safe resource even stronger!

Beth: At one point, things just got too overwhelming — and I left the room to go outside for a walk. The female director and another group member came with me and that’s when we found the lavender bushes! It was completely by accident - but it
was perfect. We brought some back to the room and since then, lavender has become a symbol of the love and safety I experienced that night. It reminds me that I’m not alone — it helps me feel safe.

A completed response. For both Beth and Sandra, their enactments provided them with an opportunity to safely re-experience a physical struggle with their perpetrator and slowly move through the traumatic responses that were interrupted at the time of the original trauma:

Sandra: Just for a moment, I needed to re-experience myself struggling — to experience that fight — and that was enough to put me in a place of pure rage so that I could get up and push my abusers away. For me, it was a moment of transformation. I was no longer that powerless child left at the mercy of my abusers — and instead, I was able to become my own protector. Somehow, by being able to re-experience that struggle, I released something in my body and found the strength that I needed to be free.

Beth and the group member who represented her perpetrator described how the struggle, and an unexpected break to get away, provided Beth with a reparative sense of completion:

Dan: I was holding her wrists — struggling with her — when I accidentally lost my grip and she slipped away. It was completely by accident, but I clearly remember the look on her face — it was a look of confusion, shock, surprise — but a pleasant surprise that she had broken free! At first she seemed confused and unsure about what to do with it — but there was a shift in her eyes — and in that moment, I knew that something important changed.

Beth: When I was lying on the floor struggling with my perpetrator, my body was able to experience just how small and powerless I really was — and then, when my hand broke away, it was as if I was able to release something that had been trapped in my body for so long. It was only for a short moment — but in that instant, I experienced a really powerful feeling of freedom and strength. It’s a feeling that I can still experience even as I think about it now.

Diane described how a completed response was captured in a dream that she had a few days after her enactment:

Diane: In a lot of ways, the role of wife and mother were imposed on
me as a child and for me, my second enactment was a symbol of reclaiming who I really am. The Sunday after my enactment, I had a very important dream:

Suddenly, I’m in a room in front of a mirror and I’m wearing the wedding dress. I have a hairpiece on and I look like my mother!! I take the hairpiece off. A woman appears and tries to put it back on. She says that she likes it and looks very pleased. But I am not pleased! I say “No! This isn’t me!” I take off the dress and I take off the hairpiece and I walk away.

.... while Andrea’s experience of completion took place as she threw symbols of her past into the sea:

Andrea: After my enactment, a lot of things changed. It was like a death — a death and a rebirth at the same time. When I went to the ocean, I had a moment to think about what I was doing before I tossed all of those things into the sea. I really thought about it. Can I really do this? I needed to get rid of my past — and my family just didn’t mean anything to me anymore. It was a huge moment of transformation and I really feel good about throwing all of that stuff into the ocean. I was able to put that part of my past away and by doing that, I can look forward into my future.

A reparative experience. Through their enactments, the women identified specific corrective experiences that were valuable factors in helping them move further along in their reparative journey. For Andrea, this occurred as she was able to have her “parents” stand in the room and witness the pain she was going through:

Andrea: When I planned my enactment, I was originally going to focus on the abusive things that happened when I was little — the things that happened with Lisa. I never thought about having my parents there at all, but for some reason I did — and as soon as I saw my mom and dad standing there watching everything happen, I got really, really angry! I realized that my mom and dad were never really there for me! When I stood there in that room and saw them watching everything that I was going through, it made me mad. In that moment, I realized just how much they really let me down!
... while for Sandra, it enabled her to bring forth the one Being whom she truly needed to speak to:

*Through her tears, Sandra turns to God and asks a simple, yet very important question.* Sandra: “Why did you abandon me?”

*God* gazes lovingly in Sandra’s eyes and reaches out to her heart and Soul. God: “We love you and we’re very sorry. We’re very sorry.” God continues to tell her that her Soul is good, that she isn’t evil, and that she wasn’t bad. God: “You are precious. You were precious when those people did very bad things to you.” God pauses. “Those are the things that happened to you, but they are not you.”

Touched by those words, Sandra’s eyes suddenly fill with tears as she releases some of the shame that she has held onto for so long. As the tears flow gently down her face, a darkness suddenly lifts from her shoulders and reveals for the first time, the softness of her eyes, the innocence of her heart, and a sense of childhood wonder in her Soul. Her childhood Spirit is finally free.

Perhaps one of the most powerful corrective experiences occurred as each of the women was able to move through their trauma in the presence of safe and loving witnesses who supported and affirmed their stories. Both Beth and Diane described how this corrective experience acted as a competing memory to their trauma:

**Diane:** When I was growing up, I was always told NEVER to tell — “People won’t believe you! You’re a horrible person for saying those things!” A few weeks after my enactment, all of those messages just came flooding back but one of the most amazing things about my enactment was the group. I was so afraid that people would look at me with disgust ~ silence ~ but they didn’t. Through my enactment, I was really able to receive love — and experience it in a way that I had never experienced it before.

**Beth:** I think I learned at a very early age that love always comes with a price. It’s hard for me to accept — or even understand — how people can possibly love and care so openly and honestly. It confuses me. The people in my circle showed me a love that truly came from their hearts and no matter where I am or what I do, I know
that I will always have that circle of people to support and care about me in a way
that I had never before experienced. I don't think I can ever really be alone again —
and that for me, is one of the greatest gifts I could have ever received!

Summary

Through the stories and narratives of the four women who participated in this study,
four dominant themes emerged. These themes - re-connection, voice, empowerment, and
corrective re-experiencing - were identified by all four women and highlight the key
experiences of using therapeutic enactment to address early traumatic memories of childhood
sexual abuse. Overall, the women found their enactments to be a positive and reparative
experience; however, unlike research done on single traumatic incidences experienced in
adulthood by an unknown perpetrator, they did not find that their enactment provided them with
a complete sense of closure over their trauma.

Three of the four women did more than one enactment and although their first
enactment may have been unrelated to the issue of childhood sexual abuse, the women felt that
it was a valuable and much needed experience in helping them prepare for their second
enactment. All of the women maintain individual counselling support and expressed the
importance of having their therapist at their enactment to provide them with a continued sense
support and safety. Each of the women identified the possibility of doing another therapeutic
enactment. They stated that they plan to trust their own inner knowledge to decide when, and
if, this will occur.

The results of this study indicate that one of the primary differences in using therapeutic
enactment with survivors of multiple traumatic incidences experienced in childhood by a known
perpetrator is the need for a more gradual and titrated enactment process. For survivors of
childhood sexual abuse, the therapeutic enactment experience needs to progressively move back
and forth between addressing the traumatic material and strengthening the lead’s sense of
safety. The results of this study highlight the added importance of directly incorporating
positive resources, such as strength, support, safety, and protection into the therapeutic
enactment process. For survivors of early sexual trauma, therapeutic enactment needs to focus
not only on helping the lead move through the trauma, but also in building and developing the
basic foundation of autonomy, safety, and trust. Finally, the results of this research support the
idea that repairing from the wounds of childhood sexual abuse truly is a journey. It is a journey that can neither be hurried nor slowed down and is made up of each survivor’s own unique set of carefully placed “stepping stones”. Although therapeutic enactment did not bring these women to the end of their reparative journey, each of them found that their enactment was an important and valuable step forward in their overall reparative process.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this section is to discuss the results of this research and examine how the four themes that emerged from this study relate to the current theories on trauma treatment and childhood sexual abuse. This section will discuss the significance of the research findings and explore the specific challenges and concerns involved in using therapeutic enactments with individuals who experienced early sexual trauma. Through this discussion, I will highlight how this study contributes to the field of counselling psychology by identifying 1) how therapeutic enactments act as a bridge between the non-verbal nature of traumatic memory and the verbal narrative involved in reparation and 2) how therapeutic enactments meet the specific needs of survivors who experienced multiple traumatic incidences in childhood by a known perpetrator. Finally, this section will discuss the limitations to this study, its specific implications, and possible considerations for future research.

Significance of the Research Findings

Through the stories and narratives of the four women who participated in this study, four dominant themes emerged. These themes - re-connection, voice, empowerment, and corrective re-experiencing - will be discussed individually and linked to the current theories on trauma and childhood sexual abuse.

Re-connection. According to researchers (Chu, 1998; Courtois, 1999; Herman, 1992; Waites, 1997), one of the core experiences of early sexual trauma is the disconnection that commonly occurs from one's Self, others, and the world. As the abuse takes place, a child begins to lose some of the basic trust and safety that is necessary in the development of close and interpersonal relationships. He or she learns to fear emotional intimacy and eventually withdraws into his or her own silent world of terror (Courtois, 1999). Herman (1992) states that "recovery can only take place in the context of relationships... [for as survivors begin the process of re-connecting with themselves, others, and society, they recreate]. . . the
psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capabilities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy” (Herman, 1992, p. 133). According to Herman (1992), these six capabilities are the core issues faced by survivors of childhood sexual abuse and need to be addressed, strengthened, and re-formed through the process of re-connection.

The results of this study support the critical role of re-connection and further show that the re-connection that occurs in therapeutic enactment results in a positive increase in all six of the above capabilities cited by Herman (1992). In varying degrees, trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy were all positively strengthened through the therapeutic enactment experience. The results of this research contribute to the field of counselling psychology by demonstrating how the three components of therapeutic enactment - action, social community, and enactment - work to meet these specific needs through a re-connection to Self, others, and the world.

First, the physical action and movement involved in therapeutic enactment was identified in this research as being particularly instrumental in helping the lead re-connect with her Self and her body. This study therefore supports the research by Ogden and Minton (2000) and Stromsted (2001) which identifies the importance of using action-based and body-focused interventions to help survivors of early sexual trauma develop a stronger and more integrated sense of Self.

Second, one of the most prominent aspects of therapeutic enactment is the social community that develops as a result of a shared experience that occurs within the center of the enactment circle. Individuals are able to emotionally and physically engage in the therapeutic process, create a shared story of the trauma, and become an integral part of the lead’s experience. According to Herman (1992) and Waites (1997), individuals who experience shared traumas, such as natural disasters and war, commonly develop a community of people who join together to support one another through a difficult experience. The united community that results from a shared event provides a stronger reparative environment than those situations where a single individual is left to experience the trauma on his or her own (Waites, 1997). The results of this research support the reparative benefit of having a social community that helps
bring survivors back into the world by re-connecting them to a group of people who are able to fully share in their experience. Through this process, survivors of childhood sexual abuse develop a stronger capacity for trust and intimacy.

Finally, the enactment component allows the lead to develop a sense of competency and initiative as he or she safely reconstructs an event so that members of the enactment circle are able to bear witness to his or her story. According to Coutois (1999) and Freyd (1996), the very nature of childhood sexual abuse prevents survivors from having safe and supportive witnesses who can validate and affirm their experience. Many survivors are therefore left questioning their own reality and disconnect from themselves as they begin to lose trust in their own inner knowledge and wisdom (Gil, 1988; Herman, 1992; Freyd, 1996; Waites, 1997). The results of this study support the reparative value of having people support, validate, and affirm the lead’s experience.

The results of this research further contribute to the field of counselling psychology by identifying the value of having survivors act as witnesses to their own story. In therapeutic enactment, this process enables survivors of early sexual trauma to re-connect with parts of themselves that they never knew they had. For example, as the lead watches his or her double display anger or strength, he or she is able to re-connect with a disowned part of the Self that needed to be suppressed. The results of this study further indicate that the witnessing of one’s own story allows survivors of childhood sexual abuse to validate and affirm their own experience. While others can publicly act as witnesses to an event that is presented in front of them, the survivor is the only one who can truly validate his or her own story. The results of this study contribute to the field of counselling psychology by identifying how therapeutic enactment meets the specific need for survivors of childhood sexual abuse to be a witness to their own experience. Through this process, survivors are able to come in contact with an embodied knowing that re-connects them to a knowledge that lies within.

**Voice.** Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for survivors of early sexual trauma is the difficulty that can be experienced in trying to find the verbal language to describe the abusive events that occurred. Researchers (Freyd, 1996; Rothschild, 2000; van der Kolk, 1996c; Waites, 1997) state that this lack of verbal language can be attributed to 1) the very nature of
traumatic memory and how memories of a traumatic event are stored and processed at a sensorimotor level in the body, 2) the lack of developmental language in the child at the time of the abuse, 3) the lack of sufficient words to communicate the full extent of the pain and fear that was experienced, and 4) the degree of shame and silencing that occurs from perpetrators, family members, and society. The results of this study support the challenges that can be involved in verbalizing the events of a trauma and further contribute to the field of counselling psychology by offering therapeutic enactment as a bridge between the non-verbal and the verbal.

In the traditional sense, therapeutic enactment supports survivors of childhood sexual abuse in verbalizing their experience by offering a safe and supportive container for them to tell their story. However, the results of this study also demonstrate how therapeutic enactments can give “voice” to an experience without the use of verbal language. Rothschild (2000) states that although emotions may be interpreted and named by the mind, they are integrally an experience of the body. In situations where attaching verbal language to an experience is met by more than one of the barriers listed above, feelings and emotions can often only be “spoken” through the movements and gestures of the body (Rothschild, 2000; Stromsted, 2001).

The results of this study indicate that through therapeutic enactment, the body is provided with an opportunity to speak for itself. Physical gestures, body posture, eye movement, skin tone, and rate of breathing all communicate those aspects of the abuse that verbal language simply cannot describe. Without words, the lead is able to give voice to some of the deepest parts of his or her experience. A downward glance of the eyes can communicate a deep sense of shame and a fixed stare or sudden stillness can express the paralyzing feeling of terror. According to Herman (1992), Freyd (1996), and Rothschild (2000), shame is one of the core feelings that is experienced by survivors of childhood sexual abuse; however, “... it does not seem to be expressed and released in the same way as other feelings. Sadness and grief are released through crying, anger through yelling and stomping about... [and]... fear through screaming and shaking” (Rothschild, 2000, p. 62). The results of this study demonstrate that inexpressible feelings, such as guilt, shame, terror, and pain can be both expressed and released through the therapeutic enactment process. In this regard, therapeutic enactments offer survivors of childhood sexual abuse a bridge between the non-verbal and the verbal by helping
them give voice to those aspects of the trauma that can not be spoken aloud.

**Empowerment.** According to Herman (1992), one of the key principles of reparation is to empower trauma survivors so that they are able to become the author and arbiter of their own reparative process. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, this is particularly important since the very nature of the trauma involves a disempowerment of a child’s basic rights to his or her safety, body, and Self (Courtois, 1999; Freyd, 1996; Gil, 1988; Waites, 1997). While most interventions provide survivors with a sense of empowerment at a cognitive and emotional level, researchers (Ogden et al., 2000; Rothschild, 2000; Stromsted, 2001; Waites, 1997) state that empowerment also needs to be experienced at a physical level within the body. Rothschild (2000) and Stromsted (2001) argue that in order to facilitate this experience, the body must be actively involved in the process of reparation.

The results of this study support the importance of fully engaging both the mind and body in the therapeutic process. The results indicate that therapeutic enactment facilitates reparation by directly involving the lead in physical action and movement and allowing the body to fully experience the feelings and sensations associated with significant moments of transformation. For example, as the lead physically moves to confront the perpetrator, his or her body is able to experience the specific gestures, body posture, and muscle movements that are linked to positive feelings of power and strength. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse can therefore experience a felt sense of empowerment as they learn to recognize their own inner ability to take control of their past.

**Corrective Re-experiencing.** Although the trauma of childhood sexual abuse can never be fully erased or completely forgotten, researchers (Briere, 2002; Kipper, 1998; Ogden et al., 2000; Rothschild, 2000) state that it is important for interventions to help survivors create new and competing memories of their past. Research by Levine (1997), Rothschild (2000), and Stromsted (2001) indicate that reparation occurs as survivors mindfully track the physical movements associated with the autonomic fight and flight responses that had been left interrupted at the time of the original trauma. Thwarted responses remain trapped in the body at a sensorimotor level and therefore need to be released through the body in the same manner (Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 1996c; Zettl et al., 2002). Through this process, the body is able
to experience a corrective re-experiencing of the past by creating a new experience of completion within the body (Levine, 1997; Ogden et al., 2000; Stromsted, 2001).

The results of this study support the reparative value of being able to mindfully move through an experience as a way of completing any unsuccessful fight or flight responses that resulted from the abuse. Briere (2002), Kipper (1998), and van der Kolk (1996c) also state that by allowing survivors to safely re-experience aspects of their trauma in the presence of caring and loving witnesses, powerful memories begin to develop and compete with the strength and power of traumatic memories. The results of this study support the reparative need to create new and positive memories and suggest that therapeutic enactments help survivors move through their trauma by developing a corrective re-experience of their past.

Summary

Overall, the results of this research support the current theories on trauma treatment and childhood sexual abuse and particularly highlight the importance of fully engaging both the mind and body in the therapeutic process. As stated by Rothschild (2000), van der Kolk (1996c), and Waites (1997), trauma is truly held within the body. The results of this research stress the importance that reparation take place not only at a cognitive and emotional level, but also at a physical level by actively involving the body in the reparative process.

The results of this research also identify how therapeutic enactment meets the specific needs of survivors who experienced multiple traumatic incidences in childhood by a known perpetrator. This study demonstrates how the components of action, social community, and enactment work together to address the six factors identified by Herman (1992) as being the core issues faced by survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Finally, the results of this research contribute to the field of counselling psychology by highlighting the reparative value of having survivors of early sexual trauma act as witnesses to their own experience and by offering therapeutic enactment as a bridge between the non-verbal and the verbal.

Specific Concerns and Challenges

According to Westwood (M. Westwood, personal communication, February, 2002) and Wilensky (P. Wilensky, personal communication, November, 2001), there are specific differences in working with survivors of a single incident trauma experienced in adulthood by an unknown perpetrator versus survivors of multiple traumas experienced in childhood by a
known perpetrator. Through interviews with Dr. Marv Westwood and Dr. Patricia Wilensky, three specific concerns emerged - the potential danger of re-traumatization, the greater tendency towards dissociation, and the possible triggering of new traumatic material.

The following consists of a dialogue between Dr. Marv Westwood and Dr. Patricia Wilensky - co-creators of therapeutic enactment - and the four women who participated in this study. This dialogue is based on the individual interviews of each person and has been woven together to create a shared story of their combined experience. Through this discussion, an opportunity is provided for the women to discuss the effectiveness of specific techniques and to offer suggestions as to what they felt, in their experience, may have been helpful. The discussion begins with Dr. Patricia Wilensky:

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky**: Working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse can be especially difficult because it involves developing basic trust and safety and building up internal resources that may not have had the opportunity to develop in childhood. In my mind, the possibility of re-traumatization is greater. What would you say was your experience of re-traumatization during your enactment process?

**Andrea**: I wouldn't say that I was re-traumatized. It was a hard experience — but it meant a lot having you and Katherine by my side the whole time. When things happened in my childhood, I was alone — but here in my enactment, I wasn't and it made a huge difference knowing that you were both physically and emotionally supporting me.

**Sandra**: Re-traumatization — that's a difficult one for me because I do believe that even though I wasn't re-traumatized by my enactment, it could have also gone the other way. I guess for me, it made a difference knowing that you were “holding me” - not physically, but emotionally. I have the sense that you and a few other people in the room, had gone to the depths of your own pain — and dealt with it — and that helped me feel safe in going to the depths of mine.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky**: Yes, it's really important that directors do their own work so that they can hold and contain what the lead is going through.

**Sandra**: I also think that I have a lot of inner strength — and in many ways, I was
able to hold things together on my own. I think you both sensed that because you wouldn't have let me go through with my enactment if you didn't feel that I could.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** That's true. When we do an enactment of this nature, both the male director and I like to sit down with the lead to make sure we're all comfortable with what's going to happen. The screening process is so important.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** The assessment phase is a lot more thorough when we do enactments with survivors of childhood sexual abuse. There's a lot more planning involved and we work more closely with the lead to continuously assess his or her readiness — and we do that both before and during the enactment.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** With survivors of childhood sexual abuse, we tend to move VERY, VERY slowly. If the lead wants to stop, we stop. We're completely guided by the lead and if the lead falters, we never push through.

**Beth:** In my enactment, it was really helpful to be able to stop and start the process and to break it down into small "do-able" steps. I don't know if I was re-traumatized — I think I emotionally go missing first — but I know that it was definitely helpful to be able to slow things down and move at my own pace. It gave me control.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** That's right. The successive approximation we used in your enactment is something that really stands out for me. It allowed you to have direct control over your perpetrator.

**Beth:** It also helped doing my enactment in a small group — with people that I really wanted and needed to be there. For me, that created a strong container and made me feel safe.

**Andrea:** That made a big difference for me too. I'm glad I had the choice to do it in a smaller group. I think for me, it would have been re-traumatizing if I had done it in a larger group with a bunch of people that I didn't know. I just wouldn't have done it.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** Yes, I remember that was one of your concerns when you were originally planning to do yours, Andrea. Safety and autonomy are absolute musts when it comes to using therapeutic enactments with early childhood trauma. We've been offering smaller enactment groups and we find them really helpful.
Andrea: I think another thing that helped minimize re-traumatization was the fact that I already had a trusting relationship with you. For me, I needed the safety and comfort of a woman to work through this with me — and I trust you completely! You gave me a lot of hope that I could get through it and I knew you weren’t about let anything go wrong.

Sandra: It was the same for me — having a strong and trusting relationship with at least one of the directors is critical.

Dr. Patricia Wilensky: Absolutely! That’s very important. What about some things that we hadn’t done, but you feel might have been helpful?

Sandra: Well, I think that it would have been helpful if there had been more of a follow up after my enactment. I know there’s usually a big group follow up a few months later — but I think I could have used something a little more immediate. Even though we debriefed the experience right after my enactment, it would have helped to have talked about what happened — maybe a week or two later — once things had a chance to settle down. When there’s a really intense enactment, I think that’s important — not only for the lead, but for the witness as well.

Diane: For me, the few days following my first enactment were hard. I experienced this huge internal backlash that was pretty intense and I was feeling suicidal and just really wanting to harm myself. It was all about my own self-hatred — and the shame that built up after having told people things that I wasn’t suppose to tell. When I was growing up, there were a lot of things said to me about not telling — and what people would think of me if I did — and after my enactment, all of those messages just came flooding back. I knew that all I had to do was call someone from the group — but a big part of my struggle was that I didn’t feel I fit in or belonged. I knew I needed to reach out to people — but at that point, I don’t think I could have.

Beth: I think the feelings that come up after the enactment are almost more frightening and confusing than the feelings that surface during the enactment. There’s that weird sense of shame and aloneness that wells up — and that can be really scary. The few days after my enactment, I felt like I was in this huge void and it’s
hard going from a feeling of complete love and safety to a feeling of complete emptiness. I think that’s when the crash happens.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** Normally when we do an enactment that involves childhood sexual abuse, we tend to provide more of a follow up. We always make sure the lead never leaves the enactment on their own and group members often keep in close contact with the lead — but maybe we also need to be more aware of the fall out that can happen in the few weeks following the event. It might be useful to have some sort of small group meeting to maintain the support and containment that developed during the enactment.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** Sandra and Beth, in your enactments, both of you directly struggled with your perpetrators. Some people might question the safety of this and wonder if it would have been more effective for you to have watched your double struggle rather than go through it yourselves. Would you say that your experience of physically struggling with your perpetrator was re-traumatizing?

**Sandra:** In my enactment, I did watch my double move through the scene first — and that definitely helped connect me to a feeling of deep rage — but I needed to directly re-experience what happened in my body — and in my Soul — to be able to get to a place of power. For me, the struggle wasn’t re-traumatizing. Instead, it was a critical moment of reparation.

**Beth:** Re-experiencing the physical struggle can be re-traumatizing and that’s why successive approximation and resource building are so important. I don’t think it would have been enough to just watch my double struggle on the floor — because then it would be the same as watching someone else being abused. By going through the physical struggle myself, I was able to experience just enough resistance to realize in my body just how small and powerless I really was. I realized that I couldn’t have done anything more to try and get away and I don’t think that could have realized that if I hadn’t gone through the experience myself.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** Another challenge for me is that there is a greater tendency to dissociate — particularly if the abuse began at an earlier age. This can interrupt and interfere with the trauma repair process. As directors, there are specific things that we do to minimize dissociation but I’d like to know what you think might have been helpful.
Diane: Well, at some points, I needed for someone to take control — to stop everything for a moment and allow me to re-focus and become present again. I think for me, stopping and waiting, and allowing me to reconnect through physical touch is helpful.

Beth: There were times when I felt like my mind was just spinning and it would have been helpful if you had stopped every once in awhile to maybe even check in to see how I was doing. Also, when I was lying on the floor, it was hard having you stand over me — it made me feel even smaller and more helpless. At that point, it would have been easier if you were kneeling on the floor beside me.

Dr. Marv Westwood: Yes, that’s important. We don’t want to replicate that power imbalance and I think it’s also important to have at least one person stay with the lead when he or she is on the floor. That way the lead isn’t alone like they were in childhood.

Beth: That’s true because the female director was on the floor with me the entire time. That definitely made a difference.

Dr. Patricia Wilensky: What about you, Andrea? I remember in your enactment there were specific things that seemed to be helpful.

Andrea: I felt myself dissociating a few times, but I think you were aware of this because you stopped everything and either made me look into your eyes or took me over to the small fountain in the room. That helped connect me to the sound and touch of the water. It was really helpful because it made me focus on something safe and soothing. It helped bring me back to the present.

Dr. Marv Westwood: We do a lot more grounding and resource building when we’re working with survivors of early sexual trauma. We don’t want to deny the lead from dissociating — it helped ensure survival — but what we want to do is work with it by incorporating positive resources directly into the enactment. One way we do this is by having a single object or person in the room that might represent strength or safety — and we continue to bring the lead back to that resource whenever necessary.

Beth: I think for me that was done by making me connect with a safe person in the room and having me look into their eyes. I remember a few times, I looked at Mark — and that helped connect me to a feeling of safety. It reminded me of where I was.
Also, there was a point in my enactment when one of the witnesses laid down on the floor with me. I looked into her eyes. I think that helped keep me connected — and it definitely made me feel less alone.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** That was a really important part of your enactment — having someone lie on the floor and remain at eye level with you.

**Diane:** I think everyone has a different way of dissociating and their needs at the time are different. For me, eye contact is good, but physical touch is especially helpful — and for me, the touch needs to involve movement — like having someone rub my hands or having me move my hands against a textured material. If someone physically held me, it wouldn’t be enough. Eventually, I would lose contact — and the felt sense of it all would just disappear.

**Sandra:** That’s true because for me physical contact would have been an immediate trigger.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** That’s a very good point, Diane. We need to know what works for each person and particularly with early childhood trauma, we can never second guess what the lead is experiencing.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** Sandra, in your enactment, a resource developed spontaneously and when that resource developed, you seemed to be really present. What was that experience like for you?

**Sandra:** That image of me as an avenging angel — it was an incredible experience! I was able to directly feel that strength and freedom and it helped having the director ask me what I was experiencing in my body at that moment. I don’t remember if I had been dissociating before that, but as soon as I became that avenging angel, I remember I was completely present.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** Yes, we keep the lead in the present by focusing on what the lead is feeling right now — in this moment — not then. I think that’s critical for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. It takes them out of the role of the child who was helpless and connects them back to their current strengths and resources of an adult.

**Sandra:** In that moment, I also think it was helpful to connect me to my body —
because that’s where trauma is held. In a moment of strength or power, it’s important to ask what my body is experiencing — or where in my body I feel that strength. By doing that, I think it helps create that new body memory.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** That’s important to know. Those resourcing moments need to be anchored in the body — because you’re right, that creates the new memory.

**Andrea:** I think it also helps using all of my senses — the touch and sound of the water — the smell of the lavender. My memory of those resources are really strong and all of it really helped bring me back to the present.

**Diane:** For me, the moving involved in therapeutic enactment is also helpful. When I’m moving, it’s harder for me not to be in contact with my body — so that in itself helps me stay grounded.

**Beth:** I think it’s important to really acknowledge those moments when the lead is able to do something differently. When I left the room and came back — or when my hand slipped away from Dan’s grip — I think those were important moments. I was able to do something that I wasn’t able to do as a child and during those moments, I remember being completely present. If those moments had been anchored more directly in my body — just by asking me what it was like to leave the room or feel my hand slip away — it may have strengthened those feeling even more.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** So in that way, the movement and action involved in therapeutic enactment acts as a grounding tool and also helps create new body memories — and we need to be more aware of those moments to help the lead really anchor them into their body. That’s important because that’s where reparation needs to take place. Another challenge for me is that because therapeutic enactments are action-based, there is the possible danger of triggering new traumatic material — especially given the fact that traumatic memories are state-dependent.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** Yes - we don’t want to construct new memories.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** Beth, what happened in your enactment when memories started to resurface?

**Beth:** Different pictures came into my head — but I think because we stuck so closely to the original image, I didn’t have a chance to feel flooded or overwhelmed by them. That was helpful because at the time, I don’t think I was ready to deal with
anything else.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** Yes, that’s the one thing we’re really careful of. We stay really close to the concrete memory or image that the lead brings to the circle — and we don’t veer off in another direction like we might in other enactments. We pay particular attention to the physical details of that memory — and we do that even more so for survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** I think that’s another area where successive approximation helps because it really works to contain the memory by slowing things down.

**Sandra:** New memories are just so crazy-making. When they were surfacing for me in my enactment, the enactment and movement actually helped. I think because it took me right back to the scene of my childhood and by physically moving through the experience, I was able to feel in my body that the memories were right. I didn’t question them. As somebody was grabbing my wrists, I knew in my body that it wasn’t a new feeling — or I’m ten — when I was back in that scene, I knew it was real. It was like an unfolding and I just went with it and trusted that my body knew the truth. For me, every little bit just confirmed and affirmed what I already knew.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** That’s true. One of the advantages is that therapeutic enactment can make the memory clearer — and this can be beneficial because it validates your experience. That was also important in your enactment, Diane. As you moved through your enactment, you were able to know in your heart that your experiences were real. It’s an embodied knowing that comes from the body at a cellular level.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** Many traditional forms of therapy work with an individual at a cognitive level, but trauma repair needs to encompass the mind, body, and Soul — and that is especially true in situations of early childhood sexual abuse since the very nature of the trauma violates all three of those areas.

**Diane:** One of the reasons I was drawn to do a therapeutic enactment was because I was attracted to the idea of being able to act it out and embody the experience.

**Sandra:** I was also drawn to it for the same reason. I really believe that trauma is held deep within the body and by moving through my enactment, I was able to let my
body speak for itself. My body knows the truth. It knows what happened and it also knows exactly what needs to repair. When I was moving through my enactment, all of the movements were familiar — and it was at that point, when I was able to affirm my own experience.

**Dr. Marv Westwood:** Yes, I think therapeutic enactments honour the body’s natural wisdom and works to release the trauma that is held in the nervous system.

**Dr. Patricia Wilensky:** I agree. Therapeutic enactment allows the body to speak for itself. When working with survivors of early sexual trauma, it is important to contain the memory so that the lead doesn’t become flooded — but at the same time, give the lead enough room to trust what their body is telling them. It’s a delicate balance that needs to be carefully worked with.

**Summary**

Dr. Marv Westwood and Dr. Patricia Wilensky identified three specific challenges involved in using therapeutic enactment with survivors of childhood sexual trauma. These challenges and concerns were identified as 1) the potential danger of re-traumatization, 2) the greater tendency towards dissociation, and 3) the possible risk of triggering new traumatic material. Through this discussion, each of the women who participated in this research was able to provide personal insight into each of these concerns.

**Re-traumatization.** Although none of the women named re-traumatization as an issue, they did acknowledge the potential risk that could be involved and identified specific aspects of their enactments that helped minimize this possibility. The presence of a safe and trusted person, whether it be one of the directors or one of the witnesses in the group, was perhaps the most valuable buffer against re-traumatization. Personal autonomy and specific grounding techniques were two other factors that the women considered helpful. Two of the women whose enactments involved re-experiencing a physical struggle with their perpetrators did not find the experience re-traumatizing and instead, commented on the how the experience contributed to their reparation. All of the women also expressed the need for some type of supportive follow-up during the first few weeks following the enactment. A formalized group debriefing session was identified as a possible antidote to the potential “crash” that can occur after a highly charged or intense enactment.
**Dissociation.** Varying degrees of dissociation was experienced by all four of the women who participated in this study. Again, a resourcing person or object was named as being a valuable factor in minimizing this occurrence as well as the physical action and movement that is innately involved in therapeutic enactment. Successive approximation was also identified; however, in some situations, an even slower pace or a complete or total pause in the enactment may have been necessary. In situations such as these, the lead’s ability to voice his or her concerns may be restricted and the directors need to be acutely aware of the subtle dissociative tendencies that may occur. The women in this study also identified the value of eye contact and physical touch in minimizing dissociation and the importance of anchoring those resourcing or grounding moments into the body. By asking what they were experiencing in their body at that particular resourcing moment, the women found that it strengthened that moment and created a strong competing memory to their trauma.

**New traumatic material.** Two of the women identified the emergence of new traumatic memories that re-surfaced during the process of their enactment. Neither considered this to be a negative or overwhelming occurrence and credited the role of the directors in containing the enactment and closely following the details of the original memory. It was also stated by one of the women that the re-surfacing of memories during her enactment was a positive experience. In this situation, the enactment and action components helped validate and affirm what her body had already known.

**Limitations**

One of the most significant limitations of this study lies in the very nature of qualitative research where each story and narrative has become my own subjective representation of the women’s experience for a “true” lived experience can never fully be obtained. While a quantitative study could have perhaps offered a more objective understanding, I had purposefully chosen a subjective research design as a way of providing readers with a more thorough understanding of the complex events that occur. Working through the memories of a traumatic event can be a complicated experience and the reparative journey for survivors of childhood sexual abuse is never straightforward. The struggles, the fears, the triumphs, and the tears are in my opinion, best reflected and perhaps, best understood, in a study that allows the
reader to truly enter into the depths of each survivor’s experience. To help ensure the “accuracy” of my subjective representation, the women themselves, two witnesses who were present at the enactments, and two other readers independent from this study, participated in reading each of the stories. Each reader validated and affirmed the coherence, resonance, and verisimilitude of each narrative.

Another limitation lies in the fact that each person who participates in an interview only shares what he or she feels is significant at the time and what he or she can recall at the time of the interview. By gathering data from multiple sources such as artwork, journal entries, dreams, and videotapes of the enactment, I hoped to obtain a more complete picture of the experience. It is however, important to acknowledge the fact that other significant themes or pertinent information may be missing.

The third limitation of this study lies in the sample size of four individuals and in the lack of diversity given that all of the participants are women born and raised in Canada. It needs to therefore be taken into consideration that the results of this study are specific to these individuals and until further studies are conducted, can not be generalized to populations outside of this sample.

**Implications of the Study**

Implications of this study appear in three distinct areas - implications for the therapist, for the directors, and for the survivor.

**The therapist.** For the therapist, the stories and narratives of Beth, Andrea, Sandra, and Diane provide an in-depth understanding of the very vivid and fragmented nature of traumatic memory. It provides therapists with a direct “window” into the experience of traumatic memory and offers specific resourcing and grounding techniques that can be used. This study also highlights the essential need for trust and autonomy in the therapeutic relationship. It emphasizes the importance of progressing at a safe and steady pace and trusting the survivor to lead the way. By entering into the lives of Sandra, Andrea, Beth, and Diane, therapists are able to develop a greater awareness of what the journey through traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse may be like. Through this awareness, therapists are in a better position to journey with their clients and provide the safe, compassionate, and caring support that is needed.
The director. For the directors, this study provides valuable information about the process a survivor of childhood sexual abuse may go through as he or she moves through a therapeutic enactment. It helps directors become aware of the issues survivors are faced with, the cautions they may need to take, and the overall potential value of using therapeutic enactment as a bridge between the non-verbal nature of traumatic memory and the verbal narrative involved in reparation. Directors are also provided with information about how therapeutic enactments can be used to create powerful competing memories and offered suggestions as to how these memories can be firmly anchored into the lead’s experience. For directors, this study also brings forth the differences of using therapeutic enactment with survivors of multiple traumatic incidences in childhood by a known perpetrator. The study highlights the action, social community, and enactment components of therapeutic enactment and provides directors with a greater understanding of how these components work together to create a positive and reparative experience.

The survivor. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, this study offers an opportunity for them to listen to the stories and narratives of four other survivors who share their experience of living with traumatic memories of the abuse. While I realize that each survivor’s story is unique, I believe that there can be comfort found in discovering that some of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences are shared. Through the stories and narratives of these four women, survivors of childhood sexual abuse can begin to realize that they are not alone.

Perhaps for me, there is another implication to this study and that lies in my own belief that one day the world can be free of abuse. My dream is that someday, children will be able to feel completely safe in their homes and that their playful and innocent Spirits can roam free. By reading this study, you have already played a valuable role in helping me reach this dream for as you open your eyes to the silent and terrifying world of childhood sexual abuse, you confront it and join us in breaking the silence. Step by step — story by story — we defeat the darkness. One day our dream will be achieved.

Future Research

The process of repairing from the traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse can be a complex experience and future research needs to involve “dissecting” the multi-faceted
intervention of therapeutic enactment to gain a greater understanding of how the lead experiences the many therapeutic aspects that are involved. For example, the interactive roles of the double, the perpetrator, the director, and the witnesses can be researched to understand 1) the impact of these roles on the lead and 2) the impact of these roles on the individuals who play them. The specific process involved in the creation of competing memories can also be examined as well as the utilization of the body in anchoring and resourcing those critical moments of strength and power. Finally, studies further need to expand the size and diversity of the sample and perhaps explore possible gender and/or cultural differences that may be involved.
EPILOGUE

As I think back to the past 127 pages, I feel a deep sense of relief, and sadness, that this chapter in my life is coming to an end. For me, the relief was expected - completing a research project that was a full two and a half years in the making and now, achieving one of my greatest life dreams. The sadness however, is less expected. Through the stories of Andrea, Diane, Sandra, and Beth, my eyes have been opened to a world of darkness and fear - a world of betrayal - and it saddens me to know that such a world exists. However, through their stories, I have also seen the strength, the courage, and the hope that abuse can be defeated. To Andrea, Diane, Sandra, and Beth, I thank you for letting me be a part of your world and for helping me see the incredible strength of the human Spirit. As a dedication to their incredible Spirits and to all of those people who have helped support them, I share with you a story -

Once upon a time, in a far away land, there lived a tiny Child whose Spirit was filled with magic for it sparkled and soared and touched the lives of all of those around. The Child's Spirit radiated brilliantly. It filled the Child and left her without a care in the world and free to dance in the meadow and play with the stars. Her life was happy and bright.

Now in this land, there also lived a dragon - a dragon that envied the Child's magical Spirit and set out on a mission to destroy it. The dragon followed the Child, watched her, and waited for the perfect moment to cast the darkest Shadow on the Child's radiant light. The first time the dragon attacked, the Child's Spirit did not darken so it continued its attacks until eventually, her once sparkling Spirit began to fade. The brilliant light within her was gone and in its place a Shadow remained. The Child spent many days living in darkness. She feared the dragon's return and cried silently to herself in a way so no one could hear. She no longer danced in the meadow or played with the stars. Her life wasn't happy or free.

One day, a group of people heard the Child's silent cries and gathered around her in a caring circle of love. The people of the circle saw her pain and somehow knew exactly what to do. They reached out to her with their hearts, held her with their eyes, and embraced her dearly with their love. At first the Child was frightened - for a dragon can appear in many forms - but something in her heart told her that she was safe and that the people in the circle could be trusted. The people took the Child on a journey and guided her down a path to a small stream at the end of a forest. On their walk, the Child spoke. She told the people about the dragon and how it had watched her and followed her and
taken away her shining light. The people of the circle listened - some of them even cried - and then they took her to the edge of the stream where they told her to look deep into the water.

Curious about their request, the Child leaned over and peered into the stream where a small pool of water remained calm. In the water, she saw her reflection. At first, she was frightenened - horrified by the darkness of the Shadow within her - but as she looked a little deeper, and a little longer, something magical caught her eye. In her reflection, she saw the bright and sparkling light of her magical Spirit. The radiant glow of her Spirit had returned!

The Child looked at the people confused by what she was seeing — “But the dragon took my Spirit away. It was taken away and replaced by a Shadow.” The people looked at her and smiled. “The dragon did not capture your Spirit. It had only been hiding in the darkness, but as soon as you looked directly into the depths of the Shadow’s eye, the darkness faded away. Your magical Spirit has never left you. It’s been within you - a part of you - all this time."

The Child peered once again into the water. Tears of joy streamed down her face as she rejoiced in the re-discovery of her radiant glow. The people of the circle shared in her joy — “The dragon tried to destroy the brightness of your Spirit but instead, its attempts to destroy it made it shine even brighter.” The Child looked into the eyes of the people around her. Through their love, warmth, and magical ability to hear the silent cries of a tiny Child, her Spirit now radiates all the way to the ends of the Earth and touches the tip of the sky!

As I prepare to bring this page to a close, I think back to the stories of Diane, Andrea, Sandra, and Beth and all the people whose lives have been affected by the trauma of sexual abuse. I think about our dream - yours and mine - to one day have a world free of abuse and find hope in the strength and courage of each survivor. Today, as we look up into the darkness of the midnight sky, we are reminded of their incredible Spirit as we catch a glimpse of the tiny Child’s radiant light. . . . and, if we look close enough, we may even see her playing freely among the stars!
REFERENCES


Goodall, H. L., Jr. (2000). Writing the new ethnography. Walnut Creek, MD: AltaMira Press.


Lapadat, J. C. & Lindsay, A. C. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretative positionings. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5* (1), 64-86.


Sage.


Routledge.


APPENDIX A

THE NATURE OF MEMORY

sound       touch
sight     taste    smell

THALAMUS

— danger? —

Traumatic Memory

Yes!

AMYGDALA
(center of emotions ie. fear, panic)

CEREBELLUM
(initiates fight, flight, or freeze)

Non-traumatic Memory

No

HIPPOCAMPUS
(Assigns time and place)

NEOCORTEX
(interprets and assigns verbal language)

* fragmented
* vividly re-experienced
* state-dependent
* non-verbal
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and/or provide any information. You also have the right to withdraw from this study at anytime.

The researcher, and the research supervisor, will be available to answer any questions concerning this study. If however, you have any concerns regarding your rights or treatment as a participant, you may contact the Director of the University of British Columbia’s Office of Research Services at 604 822-8598.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you for your own records.

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood this form.

Participant’s Name:

Signature:

Date:

Witness’ Name:

Signature:

Date:
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of this research is to examine the lived experience of using therapeutic enactments to address early traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse. I recognize that your enactment was, and most likely still is, a very personal and private event and that certain aspects of your experience may not wish to be shared. I recognize the sensitivity of this research topic and will completely respect and understand any decisions you may have to stop, pause, and/or end our interview.

The following is an outline of the how our interview will be structured and the questions that will mostly likely be asked. This will provide you with an opportunity to review the questions before our meeting and to help you obtain a better “feel” of what the interview will be like. A copy of the Informed Consent form has also been included.

The Interview Structure

The interview will be approximately 2-3 hours. With your permission, it will be audio-taped and personal artifacts, such as art pieces and/or journal entries will be photographed and included in the final thesis. Also with your permission, segments of your videotaped enactment will be both viewed and transcribed. All information obtained from this study will remain strictly confidential. Your name and any identifying characteristics will not be included with any of your artifacts.

The Interview

Background Information -

* General questions to obtain some demographic information (age, gender, employment, family structure, current relationships).
* Briefly outline your experience of the abuse (age the abuse began and ended, your past and current relationship with the perpetrator(s), disclosure, etc.).
* General information about your own therapeutic process (previous and/or current counselling, types of interventions, length of time in counselling, etc.)
* What led you to do your enactment and how did you prepare for it?
* When and where did it take place? (small group or large weekend group?)