

Abstract

Rape is an important topic of enquiry in South Africa due to the high incidences of rape and the underreporting of the crime to legal authorities. This research is exploratory in nature and is concerned with how the four women interviewed employ specific narratives to aid or inhibit their ability to speak about their experience of being raped, and the ways in which rape survivors position themselves within their own stories and societal discourses of rape. A detailed analysis was done of the research available on hegemonic masculine power, societal discourses and myths about rape, silencing and personal and public narratives. Through this analysis rape is placed within a framework of patriarchy and control. Four female rape survivors living in Johannesburg were found using targeted sampling, and were interviewed using a recording device and unstructured, one-on-one interviews. These interviews were transcribed and coded, and then analysed using Thematic Narrative Analysis. Great care was taken throughout the research process to ensure that it is ethical and that no harm was done to any of the interviewees or anyone else. It was found that each of the interviewees came to represent three distinct narratives, namely the stranger rape narrative, the date/acquaintance rape narrative and the child rape narrative. These narratives appear to sometimes be in tension and conflict with one another, creating confusion in the positionality and believability of the rape survivor. It was also found that narratives are often employed as ways of defining the experience of rape and challenging rape myths and public narratives of rape. The women interviewed for the purposes of this paper drew attention to various themes within their narratives, such as tensions between their own experience of rape and societal discourses of rape, empowerment, safe spaces to talk about trauma, education, consent and control. Further research could be conducted to explore this topic in greater detail and expand upon the knowledge gathered in this report.