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Undergraduate

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# Undergraduate Research Journal

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\*Karen Merritt Writing Award  
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# Expressive Writing and Male Rape Victims

Patty Aleamoutua, Savannah Silverman

May 20, 2014

## Introduction

Rape. This word can strike horror into people. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, every two minutes someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted (as cited on RAINN.org). Studies have shown that women have profound side effects following this traumatic event; however, little is known about male victims. Although the number of reported sexual assaults is not as high for males as it is for female rape victims; men are prone to the same post trauma symptoms. There is an appalling lack of information regarding male rape victims today; the study conducted is designed to correct this oversight. Expressive writing provides benefits for post-traumatic stress disorder caused by rape, but these studies neglect men. Research shows that expressive writing as a form of therapy should work the same for men as with women. In fact, the reviewed literature makes it reasonable for the public to assume men have the same responses towards posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as women. In turn, the idea that expressive writing therapy is beneficial for men needs to be tested. The plan is to use expressive writing to find favorable treatment for male rape victims and eliminate the gap in the literature. Filling in the gaps in this area of study will allow for the discrepancies between male and female rape victims to be lessened. In addition, if results are significant then it may be possible to reduce some of the stigma male rape victim's face in today's society. There is an ample amount of opportunity to research this topic that can in turn remedy the gap in the litera-

ture. This research could help springboard future research by opening up new possibilities. The study will be similar to those on female rape victims regarding the benefits of expressive writing; therefore, the same type of therapy for male rape victims can easily be implemented. If these results coincide with the hypothesis about expressive writing benefitting male rape victims, then other researchers can take this study and build upon it. This research will also allow for a more effective remedy of PTSD symptoms in male rape victims. This grant proposal starts with a look at the previous literary research. The lack of research on male rape victims accentuates the importance of this study. The project plan provides a means to correct this inconsistency in the lack of regard for male rape victims. The limitations for the study as well as a detailed budget and timeline are included to illustrate the time and effort needed to make the study happen.

## Literature Review

### Studies about female rape victims

The research that is available covers a variety of different variables including abusive partnerships, traumatic events, and rape. The ample amount of research available on female victims provides expressive writing. A study by Pennebaker and Beall had female participants in four different conditions. Each condition called for a different form of writing for the participants. These conditions were: trauma emotions, facts about the trauma, a combined emotion

and fact condition, and a control group. The researchers also took into consideration the participants' physical and mood state that they were in while writing. The results of the study showed that providing an outlet, like expressive writing, for women who experienced a traumatic event greatly decreases long-term inhibition and health risks (Pennebaker & Beall, 1996, pp. 274-281). In another study by Koopman et al., found similar results. Koopman and colleagues used female participants that had experienced traumatic events either partake in expressive writing task about stressful events or neutral writing about their daily schedule. Findings showed that women who took part in expressive writing showed decreased symptoms of depression compared to women who took part in the neutral writing condition (Koopman et al., 2005, pp. 211-221). A study similar to Koopman's, by Holmes and colleagues also demonstrated the benefits of expressive writing for female victims of traumatic events. The study showed that through positive expressive writing and the use of positive words there was a decrease in symptoms of emotional and psychological pain (Holmes et al., 2007, pp. 1192-1205). Although expressive writing appears to be beneficial to women who have experienced traumatic events like rape, sexual assault, or abuse; other methods of therapy also show a decrease in symptomatology. A study conducted by Resick and Schnicke examined the effects of cognitive-processing therapy (CPT) on victims of sexual assault in relation to PTSD. CPT teaches victims about their symptoms, becoming aware of thoughts and feelings, learning skills to change thoughts, and understanding changes in beliefs. The study showed that the CPT group, which used expressive writing, demonstrated an improved quality of life and proved to have a decrease in PTSD symptoms (Resick & Schnicke, 1992, pp. 748-756). To build upon effectiveness of CPT another study conducted by

Nishith, Resick and Griffin compared prolonged exposure and cognitive-processing therapy in female rape victims with PTSD. The therapy helped victims by changing avoidance-related coping skills to help them deal with PTSD. The study concluded that cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure were effective (Nishith, Resick & Griffin, 1992, pp. 880-886). A study conducted by Resick, Nishith, Weaver, Astin, and Feuer also showed benefits of cognitive processing theory and prolonged exposure. Again, the study showed that cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure were effective in reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Resick, Nishith, Weaver, Astin & Feuer, 2002, pp. 867-879). Coinciding with Resick and other studies, Foa, Rothbaum, Riggs, and Murdock, conducted a study of four different conditions for female rape victims: stress inoculation training, prolonged exposure, supportive counseling, and a waitlist condition. Stress inoculation therapy is a cognitive behavioral treatment for PTSD with the goal of helping victims deal with the fear and anxiety related to trauma. Prolonged exposure is a cognitive behavioral therapy based on facing reminders and triggers of their trauma instead of avoiding it. The supportive counseling group received basic therapy and counseling to help them cope with their PTSD symptoms. The waitlist condition was a group that remained on waitlist for the duration of the study and received treatment afterwards. The study suggests that stress inoculation training and prolonged exposure demonstrated improvement of PTSD symptoms. Stress inoculation training was shown to be more useful for short-term while prolonged exposure was more useful for long-term (Foa, Rothbaum, Riggs, & Murdock, 1991, pp. 715-723).

## Studies about male rape victims

There is little in the literature regarding male victims of rape. This is due to several factors including myths that surround male victims, underreporting of victimization, and the lack of empirical studies about the topic. In the article, "Male Victims of Rape and Sexual Abuse", Cowell and King discuss the myths that surround male rape as well as the prevalence of rape and the problems that affect men after the trauma. These myths about sexual assault on men include the belief that the presence of an erection or ejaculation implies consent—a statement that is untrue, as men can achieve an erection while experiencing fear or extreme anxiety—or that a man cannot be forced to have sex unwillingly or that men raped by other men must be homosexual. Research has shown that both males and females underreport being victims of sexual assault. With this being the case, studies that allow the victims to remain anonymous are important in discovering more information (Cowell & King, 2010, pp. 380-391).

According to Isely and Gehrenbeck-Shim (1997), existing studies on male rape have come from clinical studies with small sample sizes. In their study, of the 336 agencies that responded to their survey, approximately half reported servicing male sexual assault victims. 3,635 male victims were reported between 1972 and 1991 and this survey provided a breakdown of demographics, rape characteristics, and victim response. This data lists characteristics and responses that are similar to that of female victims. This study also provides a catalyst for studies wanting to examine male rape victims as it shows easily understandable data.

## PTSD, Rape Trauma Connections; Men and Women Symptomatology Similarities

While there is little information about male rape victims there is plenty regarding men with PTSD as well as information regarding females with PTSD. By looking at the similarities and differences in men and women in regards to PTSD connections can be made in regards to symptomology of rape trauma. This information can then be applied to better treat male rape victims. In the paper, "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Following Male Rape", Paul Rogers states that the relationship between female rape and PTSD is clearly documented and says that it "seems reasonable to expect a similar response in males". This also leads us to believe that the treatments that are beneficial to women—in this case, expressive writing—can also be of use for treating male rape victims (Rogers, 1997, pp. 5-10). Another paper, "Cognitive Therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Development and Evaluation", by Ehlers, Clark, Hackmann, McManus, and Fennell discusses goals for post-traumatic therapy. The goals that Ehlers et al. put forth are to change negative appraisals of the event, elaborate on the memory, and get rid of dysfunctional behaviors. These goals help those with PTSD by identifying that these events occurred in the past and do not reign supreme over the victims' lives. This allows for the victim to develop new coping mechanisms to deal with these traumatic events by changing their responsive behavior to the event. The study concluded that by implementing these goals victims were able to reduce the symptoms of PTSD (Ehlers et al., 2005, pp. 413-431). This literature review covered both the topics of female and male rape victims and took a look at the connections that can be made between PTSD and rape trauma. As is shown, there is a great discrepancy between the amount of information about males and

female who have been sexually assaulted. The best way to compare this information is to use the similarities between PTSD and rape trauma to guide this research.

## Project Plan

### Introduction

The goal of this study is to conduct an experiment to determine whether the same benefits from expressive writing found in female rape victims can be found in regards to male rape victims. The opportunity to be included in an anthology is offered as an incentive to all participants. In addition, they will receive a copy of the book. This anthology will take the expressive writing narratives and assemble them to spread awareness of male rape. This study uses parts of the methods employed in other studies—found in the literature review as well as mentioned below—and puts them together in a comprehensive way. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, this study will be conducted on a national scale. What follows is a detailed summary of the planned methods, the limitations found in the study, the budget, and the timeline.

### Participants

This study will be measure how and if expressive writing alleviates symptoms of PTSD in male rape victims. Participants will be adult males over the age of 18 because previous research surrounding the topic includes adult female rape victims over the age of 18. Since this study attempts to mirror the female studies it is desirable to keep participants similar to the previous research. Participants' traumatic events are to have occurred no more recently than 3 months prior to the study. The 3-month mark is implemented because it follows the conventions of the previous studies on this topic. Participants will be recruited through crisis centers throughout

the USA. Participants are offered the incentive to participate by having their stories anonymously published in an anthology. This anthology will be a collection of the participants' expressive writing tasks with the goal of spreading awareness of male rape and opening the doors to the public so that the subject may no longer be considered taboo.

### Methods

The methods of this study are inspired by previous research done in this topic with respects to female rape victims. A mixed-methods approach will be used; it will include a quantitative survey, an expressive writing or control prompt, and a follow-up open answer question. Different crisis centers throughout the United States will be contacted and sent packages with the study materials. This method of recruiting participants is taken from a similar study done by Isely and Gehrenbeck-Shim.

### Phase 1: Recruiting Participants and Distributing Materials/Surveys

Specific crisis centers will be selected because they will allow for having as many participants as possible; these crisis centers will be those that accommodate male rape victims. All of these centers will be found through the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network that lists all centers in a given state. Centers from every state will be asked to participate because a large and diverse sample is desired. This will help to better generalize the findings to the United States population. Upon deciding what centers will work best in each state calls will be made to ask for their participation. It is possible some centers will not respond; if this is the case then the next largest crisis center in the area will be chosen. Packages containing the materials will be sent to these chosen centers. Materials will in-

clude: the PTSD Checklist for Civilians (PCL-C), see appendix A, a demographics survey, see appendix B, prompts for each writing group, follow-up open answers questions, instructions to the study, a number assigned for each individual to provide anonymity, and an informed consent form. Upon receiving the materials the crisis centers will then distribute the envelopes to male rape victims who have agreed to take part in the study. By working with the crisis centers a larger population of male rape victims can be reached. When the participants receive the envelope they will be prompted to complete the expressive writing throughout the course of one month. The participants will be asked to write once a week for one month consisting of 15-20 minutes for each session. The reason for extending the expressive writing tasks to one month, instead of the four consecutive days paradigm proposed by Pennebaker, is because writing consecutively for four days allows little room for improvement. By having the participants writing once a week for a month participants should have new material to write about for each session. There will be two groups, a control group and an expressive writing group. The control group will receive prompts about mundane topics like their daily lives. They will be asked to keep their narratives strictly factual and neutral to make sure they do not bring up traumatic events. In order to see if expressive writing affects PTSD symptoms the control group's writing should not stray into traumatic events. The expressive group will be asked to write about a traumatic event in their life that has occurred. This will allow for examining if expressive writing about a traumatic event will affect symptoms of PTSD. After the participants complete their expressive writing tasks they will complete a follow-up question that is open ended. This will only apply to the participants in the expressive writing group. This question will focus on how the participants felt before, dur-

ing, and after the expressive writing task. Having them address their mood will allow for qualitative measurement of how the participants felt about the experiment and whether or not it was beneficial for them.

## **Phase 2: Collection and Analysis of Materials/Follow-up**

After completing the survey and expressive writing task participants will place their materials in the self-addressed envelope and mail them in to the study analysts. A response rate of around 50 percent is expected. After a majority of the surveys are returned they will be sorted through individually, and analyzed. In addition, the PCL-C will be graded in order to omit participants that do not meet the qualifications for PTSD. The reason for excluding participants that do not meet the qualifications for PTSD is because it is desirable to adhere to previous studies on female rape victims in order to provide a reliable and valid study. After deciding what participants will be included in the continuation of the study a follow-up PCL-C will be sent to the clinics of the participants three months after the initial study. The participants will be sent pre-addressed envelopes to send back when they have completed the survey. The reason for the follow-up is to see if the participants have decreased symptoms of PTSD after the study. Another follow-up utilizing the same procedure will be conducted six months after the initial study. If participants' symptoms of PTSD decrease then the hypothesis of expressive writing benefiting male rape victims will be true.

## **Phase 3: Final Stage**

The surveys, including those from the follow-ups, will be analyzed to see if male rape victims received any benefits from expressive writing. The PCL-Cs from the participants who continued with the study



throughout its entirety will be examined to see if there was an improvement in their symptoms of PTSD. Using the same scale, the PCL-C, throughout the entire study allows for consistency in measuring the symptoms of PTSD. The data collected from the PCL-C can be compared with the research found regarding female rape victims. The scores on the PCL-C along with their open-ended question will be compared task to see if there is an improvement in symptoms. Although the literary research found used the CAPS scale a comparison with the data found using the PCL-C can still be made regarding the alleviation of symptoms. The CAPS requires an interview done by a research assistant with every participant. Since this research will be conducted throughout the U.S. it would be difficult to conduct one-on-one interviews with all the participants. Comparing male and female rape victim data side by side allows for examination of the similarities and differences. Previous research has shown that female rape victims have benefitted from expressive writing techniques and similar results should be found in male victims. There is widespread help available for female rape victims and a lot of research on expressive writing on traumatic events has stemmed from female rape victim participants. This study will tie together the similarities between female and male rape victims and bring forth new research, help, and awareness for males.

## **Limitations**

When conducting a study on such a large scale there are compromises that must be made. The main limitation of the study is being unable to physically administer the surveys and writing exercise. The study depends on the participants being honest and following the steps on their own. With a large scale study it is to be expected that some participants will not be completely honest with their answers or that there will be issues of miscomprehension. Another limitation is the length of the study. Although this is a limitation, a large enough sample size can make up for the attrition. Despite having a variety of limitations none of these are of potential risk to the study. Even with these limitations it can provide a springboard for future researchers to build upon the study.

## **Detailed Budget**

What follows is a detailed listing of the proposed budget. Large portions of the costs go into publishing the anthology. The costs cover the price to publish a book with printing not being included by using on-demand printing for physical copies; most copies will be sold as e-books. The remainder of the costs resides in printing and shipping. Materials including the surveys, the writing prompts, and the instructions will need to be printed and shipped. Shipping costs will cover everything necessary to distribute this survey to the various crisis centers across the nation.

<u>Anthology Costs Total</u>	<u>\$8100</u>
Editing	\$6000
Cover	\$300
Formatting	\$300
Acquiring an ISBN	\$125
Pre-publishing Review	\$575
Marketing and PR	\$800
<u>Incentive Costs Total</u>	<u>\$25000</u>
Print Costs Total	\$900
Shipping Costs Total	\$5600
Envelopes	\$200
Boxes	\$800
Stamps	\$4600
<u>Grand Total</u>	<u>\$39600</u>

## Timeline

Below is a chart that represents the planned timeline for the study. Material will be sent out at the beginning of the study and are expected to be returned within a month. Upon receiving the materials, compilation and analysis will commence along with

Month 1	Month 2	Month 5	Month 8
2 Send out Materials	Receive Materials	Send out first follow-up.	Send out second follow-up.
	Back and Begin Analyzing Data.		

the organization of the anthology. Three months after receiving the initial material a follow-up survey will be sent out. Three months after the first follow-up a second follow-up will be sent out. Materials will be expected to be returned within a week of each follow-up. After receiving all follow-up material a detailed analysis will occur.

## Conclusion

This study is of crucial importance in regards to male rape victims and the potential alleviation of PTSD symptoms. There is a minimal amount of research on expressive writing on male rape victims; this study seeks to correct this oversight and provide a catalyst for future research as

well. The anthology will provide a channel for the participants to share their stories with the general population and demystify the cultural stigma that males cannot be victims of sexual assault.

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## Appendix

### Demographic Survey

#### A

Age:

Ethnicity: Caucasian Hispanic or Latino Asian Pacific Islander African American  
Native American or American Indian Other

Current Relationship Status:

Single Married Divorced Widowed Separated

Sexual Orientation:

Heterosexual Homosexual Other

What state do you reside in?

## B

### PTSD Checklist-Civilian Form (PCL-C)

Instructions to patient: "Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have in response to stressful life experiences. Please read each one carefully, and then fill in the circle of the response to indicate how much you have been bothered by that problem IN THE PAST MONTH." Please fill in ONE option only for each question."

Response	Not at all (1)	A little bit (2)	Moderately (3)	Quite a bit (4)	Extremely (5)
1.	Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience from the past?				
2.	Repeated, disturbing dreams of a stressful experience from the past?				
3.	Suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful experience were happening again (as if you were reliving it)?				
4.	Feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?				
5.	Having physical reactions (e.g., heart pounding, trouble breathing, or sweating) when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?				
6.	Avoid thinking about or talking about a stressful experience from the past or avoid having feelings related to it?				
7.	Avoid activities or situations because they remind you of a stressful experience from the past?				
8.	Trouble remembering important parts of a stressful experience from the past?				
9.	Loss of interest in things that you used to enjoy?				
10.	Feeling distant or cut off from other people?				
11.	Feeling emotionally numb or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?				
12.	Feeling as if your future will somehow be cut short?				
13.	Trouble falling or staying asleep?				
14.	Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts?				
15.	Having difficulty concentrating?				
16.	Being "super alert" or watchful on guard?				
17.	Feeling jumpy or easily startled?				
•	The total score is the sum of all 17 items.				
•	A score of >50 suggests the presence of a significant level of symptom severity which should be further evaluated with a formal assessment.				Total Score



## **Patiola Aleamoutua**

Patiola Aleamoutua is a senior at the University of California, Merced where she will be graduating with a Bachelors in Psychology and a minor in Cognitive Science. She transferred to UC Merced from the local junior college, and is the first of her family to attend an institution of higher education. She grew up in the foster care system and lived throughout Southern California before finding a permanent home in Merced when she was 8 years old. She intends to go to graduate school for social work so she can help out a large population of foster kids. She enjoys being outside and surrounding herself with friends and family. She has worked hard to get where she is in life and will continue to pursue her thirst for knowledge.



## **Savannah Silverman**

Savannah Silverman is a Psychology major who will be graduating in May 2014. She transferred to UC Merced from Columbia College in Sonora, California in 2012. Her first Psychology class at this community college is what inspired and motivated her to pursue a career in this field. She took a variety of Psychology classes before transferring here. Upon arriving at UC Merced, she found enjoyment in the subject of Cognitive Science and decided to take that as a minor. She has been taking a mixture of Cognitive Science classes and Psychology class during her time here.