

detoxify her sense of shame, stigma, and defilement. Another, more fortunate rape survivor describes how a friend comforted her: "I said, 'I'm fourteen years old and I'm not a virgin any more.' He said, 'This doesn't have anything to do with being a virgin. Some day you'll fall in love and you'll make love and *that* will be losing your virginity. Not the act of what happened' (he didn't say *rape*). 'That doesn't have anything to do with it.'"⁶⁹

Beyond the issues of shame and doubt, traumatized people struggle to arrive at a fair and reasonable assessment of their conduct, finding a balance between unrealistic guilt and denial of all moral responsibility. In coming to terms with issues of guilt, the survivor needs the help of others who are willing to recognize that a traumatic event has occurred, to suspend their preconceived judgments, and simply to bear witness to her tale. When others can listen without ascribing blame, the survivor can accept her own failure to live up to ideal standards at the moment of extremity. Ultimately, she can come to a realistic judgment of her conduct and a fair attribution of responsibility.

In their study of combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, Herbert Hendin and Ann Haas found that resolving guilt required a detailed understanding of each man's particular reasons for self-blame rather than simply a blanket absolution. A young officer, for example, who survived after a jeep in which he was riding ran over a mine and exploded, killing several men, blamed himself for surviving while others died. He felt that he should have been driving the jeep. On the face of it, this self-criticism was completely unfounded. Careful exploration of the circumstances leading up to the disaster revealed, however, that this officer had been in the habit of avoiding responsibility and had not done everything he could to protect his men. When ordered by an inexperienced commander to embark upon the trip in the jeep, he had not objected, even though he knew that the order was unwise. Thus, by an act of omission, he had placed himself and his men in jeopardy. In this metaphorical sense, he blamed himself for not being "in the driver's seat."⁷⁰

Similar issues surface in the treatment of rape survivors, who often castigate themselves bitterly, either for placing themselves at risk or for resisting ineffectively. These are precisely the arguments that rapists invoke to blame the victim or justify the rape. The survivor cannot come to a fair assessment of her own conduct until she clearly understands that no action on her part in any way absolves the rapist of responsibility for his crime.

In reality, most people sometimes take unnecessary risks. Women often take risks naively, in ignorance of danger, or rebelliously, in defiance of danger. Most women do not in fact recognize the degree of male hostility toward them, preferring to view the relations of the sexes as more benign than they are in fact. Similarly, women like to believe that they have greater freedom and higher status than they do in reality. A woman is especially vulnerable to rape when acting as though she were free—that is, when she is not observing conventional restrictions on dress, physical mobility, and social initiative. Women who act as though they were free are often described as "loose," meaning not only "unbound" but also sexually provocative.

Once in a situation of danger, most women have little experience in mobilizing an effective defense. Traditional socialization virtually ensures that women will be poorly prepared for danger, surprised by attack, and ill equipped to protect themselves.⁷¹ Reviewing the rape scenario after the fact, many women report ignoring their own initial perceptions of danger, thereby losing the opportunity for escape.⁷² Fear of conflict or social embarrassment may prevent victims from taking action in time. Later, survivors who have disregarded their own "inner voice" may be furiously critical of their own "stupidity" or "naiveté." Transforming this harsh self-blame into a realistic judgment may in fact enhance recovery. Among the few positive outcomes reported by rape survivors is the determination to become more self-reliant, to show greater respect for their own perceptions and feelings, and to be better prepared for handling conflict and danger.⁷³

The survivor's shame and guilt may be exacerbated by the harsh judgment of others, but it is not fully assuaged by simple pronouncements absolving her from responsibility, because simple pronouncements, even favorable ones, represent a refusal to engage with the survivor in the lacerating moral complexities of the extreme situation. From those who bear witness, the survivor seeks not absolution but fairness, compassion, and the willingness to share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity.

Finally, the survivor needs help from others to mourn her losses. All of the classic writings ultimately recognize the necessity of mourning and reconstruction in the resolution of traumatic life events. Failure to complete the normal process of grieving perpetuates the traumatic reaction. Lifton observes that "unresolved or incomplete mourning results in stasis and entrapment in the traumatic process."⁷⁴ Chaim Shatan, observing combat veterans, speaks of their "impacted grief."⁷⁵ In ordinary bereave-