

From Victim to Survivor: The Lived Experience of Negotiating Freedom From Being Held Against One's Will

*"In these matters the only certainty is that nothing is certain" –
Pliny the Elder, Roman Scholar (23 AD – 79 AD)*

Abstract

The research explores the lived experience of Anne, then aged 31, when she went to Japan in 2008 to visit her brother who was working there. Anne shares her experience of waking up alone and groggy in unfamiliar surroundings after having had her drink spiked in a bar. Anne reveals how her captor makes himself known to her and the chain of events that follow and eventually lead to her freedom.

Phenomenological enquiry through the form of a relational interview was held at Anne's house. The interview reveals emerging themes of

- *"Maybe I've made a bit much of this"*
- *"I have to get out of here"*
- *"I don't know what's going to happen"*
- *"I'm just gonna try and talk you down"*

These themes have been selected to help describe Anne's lived experience of negotiating freedom. She describes how she negotiates with her captor in order to secure her freedom. Interestingly, neither Anne nor her captor can speak the other's language and so cannot understand each other through the spoken word. The research highlights the various strategies Anne used and the other forms of communication and contact that come into play. At the time of her experience, Anne had just qualified as a clinical psychologist. She partly attributes negotiating her freedom to the skills she had learned during her training and from her experience of working with highly disturbed people.

Introduction

As a trainee psychotherapist in Transactional Analysis, I am required to undertake phenomenological research as part of my studies. I have chosen this particular subject area because it is one that is of much interest to me. I was already familiar to a certain extent with Anne's story. We are close friends and as such, the subject matter had been discussed informally on a number of occasions. This was more so shortly after the event and in the subsequent months.

As four years had since passed, I wanted to explore Anne's experience on a more in-depth level. I wanted to acknowledge her experience and also offer her space to talk about what had happened and what it meant for her. Aside from my training, I have a natural interest and curiosity in people and their experiences. I really wanted to gain more of an insight into Anne's experience, the different processes she went through and the strategy she adopted in securing her freedom. The choice of subject is a celebration of, in my view, Anne's achievements in a potentially life threatening situation.

Review of the literature proved somewhat difficult at first, namely because I wasn't sure of how to describe what had happened to Anne. Also, there didn't seem to be any studies

which focused upon the phenomenology of this particular experience. Anne had described her experience to me as “being held against her will”. As such, I have honoured her definition of her experience by including this in the title of the paper. Anne seemed to want to steer clear of using the terms “kidnap” or “hostage”. However, literature on kidnapping and being held hostage was reviewed in order to gain more information and to see if there were any similarities in respect of circumstances and negotiations.

Gonzales (2010) wrote a dissertation entitled “The Phenomenology of Kidnapping Survivors’ Experience”. Whilst there similar flavours in some of the themes, such as building relationships with captors et cetera, her research focused solely upon kidnappings for ransom and political reasons. It did not feature much about negotiations and the process that kidnapped people go through. Also, many of the people who Gonzalez (2010) had interviewed had been held captive for a number of months, some for a number of years. Anne’s experience was different in the respect that it was on a shorter term and therefore some of the themes Gonzalez picked out, such as abandonment by one’s family did not apply in this instance.

However, this piece of work gave me information about the work of Ernst Kahlar Alix (1978), who identified fifteen types of kidnapping:

- White slavery
- Hostage situation
- Child stealing
- Domestic relations kidnapping
- Kidnapping for rape or other sexual assault
- Kidnapping for murder or other non-sexual assault
- Kidnapping for robbery
- Romantic kidnapping
- Ransom skyjacking
- Ransom kidnapping hoax
- Plot or abortive ransom kidnapping
- Ransom threat for extortion
- Developmental ransom kidnapping
- Classic ransom kidnapping
- Miscellaneous kidnapping

The motivations of Anne’s captor will remain largely unknown because she managed to escape before the situation escalated into something else. Anne described how her captor was “trying it on” in a sexual way which could infer kidnapping for rape or other sexual assault. The worst case scenario was that this was kidnap for murder. Kidnapping does not always have to include monetary compensation or ransom. However, it was helpful for me to gain some clarity on the situation by reading around this area.

On a more general level, I decided to review literature around the subject of criminal victimisation and what happens for the victim during a complex life event. Wertz (1985, pp 195 -204) wrote:

“Victimisation is.....an empty possibility with which we are not concerned in normal, routine daily life prior to its emergence. Being victimised is the dawning of a new configuration of meaning.....he is delivered to a strange, unfamiliar, shocking, hardly believable new realm outside usual norms of lived experience.....Victimization does not make sense.....and is shot through with uncertainty.....The structure of ‘criminal’ victimisation has three constituents.....1) the self’s agency is lost and one stands helplessly vulnerable, isolated

and immobilized, 2) all helpful community is receded out of reach, and 3) a detrimental other has entered the subject's preferred situation in the mode of destruction..... There is an upsurge of protest, rage, and perhaps a readiness for retaliation, counterviolation, or revenge..... The person attempts to get back on top of the situation, negate victimisation in its own turn, and re-establish the preferred order..... The subject does not simply return to the pre-victimisation order, but continues to live through victimisation..... Surpassing these meanings may take time..... In this process the person takes responsibility for victimisation. This process involves three interrelated aspects: active ("sense making") efforts, the world's assertion of predictable safeness, and the other's active helpfulness. Through this process victimisation appears.....overcomable"

I felt that this quote especially rang true with my findings, particularly in respect of the theme of uncertainty and shall be discussed later in the paper.

The work of Ronnie Janoff-Bulman (1992) was also researched because her work relating to the psychology of trauma. This is an interesting subject area which looks at people's "basic assumptions" from birth and how victimisation (the trauma) can impact upon these assumptions. (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) proposed that the three fundamental human assumptions are:

- The world is benevolent
- The world is meaningful
- The self is worthy

"Our fundamental assumptions are the bedrock of our conceptual system; they are the assumptions that we are least aware of and least likely to challenge" (Janoff – Bulman, 1992 p.5).

When trauma occurs, personal vulnerability can be brought into question and can potentially shatter a person's core beliefs about themselves and the world. How quickly a person can rebuild their assumptions is impactful upon how long it can take to recover from a traumatic experience. Of course, there are instances when some people never fully recover too. Coping strategies, which will be discussed later in the paper, also play an important part in rebuilding a person's shattered assumptions.

Literature featuring information about crisis intervention and hostage negotiation was also reviewed for the purpose of this paper. (Vecchi et al, 2005) wrote a paper entitled "Crisis (hostage) negotiation: current strategies and issues in high-risk conflict resolution". This paper reviews the various components of crisis negotiation. It also incorporates the Behavioural Change Stairway Model which was constructed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Crisis Negotiation Unit (CNU) that "provides a systematic, multistep process directed toward peaceful, nonlethal resolution of critical incidents" (Vecchi et al, 2005; Aggression and Violent Behaviour 10 (2005). p533). The previous work of Hatcher et al (1998) was also cited in the paper, "the goal or mission of crisis/hostage negotiation is to utilize verbal strategies to buy time and intervene so that the emotions of the perpetrator can decrease and rationality can increase".

The theory of Stockholm Syndrome was also reviewed, as it is well known that this can occur in some kidnapping situations. Stockholm Syndrome is said to occur when a hostage emotionally bonds with their captor.

Carver (date tbc) wrote four situations or conditions are present that serve as a foundation for the development of Stockholm Syndrome. These conditions can be found in hostage, severe abuse and abusive relationships:

- The presence of perceived threat to one's physical or psychological survival and the belief that the abuser would carry out the threat
- The presence of a perceived small kindness from abuser to victim
- Isolation from perspectives other than those of the abuser
- The perceived inability to escape the situation

Some of the behaviours associated with Stockholm Syndrome are:

- Positive feelings by the victim toward the abuser/captor
- Negative feelings by the victim toward family and friends who are trying to rescue them
- Support of the abuser's reasons and behaviours
- Positive feelings by the abuser toward the victim
- Supportive behaviours by the victim, at times helping the abuser
- Inability to engage in behaviours that may assist in their release or detachment

The overall aim of this paper is to research Anne's lived experience of negotiating freedom from being held against her will.

Methodology

The research was conducted by way of qualitative research in the form of phenomenological enquiry. A relational – centred phenomenological approach (Finlay and Evans, 2009) was used with the co – researcher, Anne, to describe her lived experience of negotiating freedom. I chose this method of research because it not only allows for the lived experience of the co-researcher to be told, but also values the relationship between researcher and co-researcher.

Phenomenology “is about saying no to the meaning system bequeathed to us. It is about setting meaning system aside. Far from inviting us to explore our everyday meanings as they stand, it calls for us to put them in abeyance and open ourselves to the phenomena in their stark immediacy to see what emerges for us” (Crotty, 1998, p.82)

Phenomenology allows for exploration which is really important when dealing with a real life experience. It offers room for creativity and fluidity, being co-creative on a relational level between researcher and co-researcher. There is also space for researcher to be reflexive, which I found particularly useful with this piece of work. After all, this is the description of a human experience, thus requiring a human approach to honour and respect the co-researcher's experience.

“The path of phenomenology does not follow the ways of objective science, because the human experience cannot follow calculations in absolute terms” (Gonzalez, 2010 p.11) In light of this viewpoint, phenomenology was deemed to be a more appropriate method of investigation in this particular instance, than say quantitative research.

“The meaning of the word phenomenon is twofold because of the essential correlation between appearing and that which appears, and yet is predominantly used for the appearing

itself, the subjective phenomenon if one is allowed to use this misleading expression in a rough psychological sense” (Husserl, 1999, p.69). As such, this research is concerned with the subjective rather than the objective.

I conducted an unstructured interview which lasted 55 minutes. I felt unstructured was the best way for this piece of work as I wanted to see what arose naturally, rather than having a script. I was conscious I wanted to “talk with” my co-researcher rather than “interview her”. The unstructured interview gave Anne the opportunity to share her lived experience of negotiating freedom when she was held against her will in 2008.

I started the interview by running through the ethics with Anne (which shall be discussed later). The interview started by Anne telling me a little about the events before she was held against her will. She then went on to describe her experience. I tried to use open questions wherever possible, using empathy when needed and sometimes gently challenging Anne when I felt she was “underplaying” her experience and the part she played in securing her freedom.

I transcribed the interview myself. I listened to the interview several times as well as reading the transcription over and over again. I wanted to become immersed in Anne’s story so that I could pick out four themes in order to best describe her lived experience. Rather than use subheadings such as “survival” or “communication”, the theme headings use Anne’s own words and which allows for a richer description. The findings largely contain chunks of Anne’s dialogue. This was her experience after all, and I wanted to make sure that I was able to honour that. It also helps the reader to get a flavour of how the experience was for Anne.

Ethics

The co-researcher in this paper is 35 year old British woman who is a close friend of mine. Following our discussions about ethics at the beginning of the interview, I have taken the steps to protect her anonymity. As such, all of the names of the people in the transcript and throughout the paper have been changed. I have not changed Anne’s occupation because this featured quite heavily throughout the interview. I believe the reader needs to have knowledge of this in order to have an insight into Anne’s lived experience.

I also acknowledge and respect Anne’s wishes for this paper not to be published on or offline, thus offering additional protection for her. Throughout the research process, data was stored carefully and confidentially and the recorded interview shall be erased upon completion of this piece of work.

I obtained overall consent from Anne regarding this piece of work at the beginning and prior to conducting the interview. I advised and assured her about issues surrounding confidentiality. Taking into account our close friendship and the nature of the subject, I wanted to handle matters sensitively and respectfully, keeping Anne informed as well as I could. I was mindful that I wanted to honour her experience. As a result, I have involved Anne throughout the research process. I have given Anne a copy of the transcript to read through and advised her of the themes I have picked out. I also advised Anne that she could read and comment upon the finished piece of research.

Anne was aware that she was a volunteer in this research and that she could withdraw from it at any time. We discussed about Anne having good support systems in place should the interview and its content impact on her afterwards. I also offered her a free session with a psychotherapist after the interview if she needed it.

Findings

I have chosen to focus upon four particularly strong themes that I felt emerged out of the interview with Anne. Themes themselves are entitled by using Anne's own words. *"Maybe I've made a bit much of this"* looks at how Anne feels her experience could have been worse and how she thinks maybe she's made a big deal out of it. *"I have to get out of here"* looks at the survival aspect as a prominent theme of Anne's experience, her certainty in an uncertain situation. *"I don't know what is going to happen"* illustrates just how shot through with uncertainty this situation was. There were a lot of unknowns during Anne's experience. Even several years after, there are many things that remain uncertain and which can only be hypothesised about. *"I'm just gonna try and talk you down"* looks at strategy Anne adopted in order to get her captor to set her free. This theme largely looks at the methods of communication and contact that Anne used.

"Maybe I've made a bit much of this"

Anne's experience was a situation riddled with uncertainty, where anything could have happened. When I asked Anne about how she felt about recalling what had happened to her, I was surprised when she said she felt like she'd *"made a bit much of this"* and that she felt like *"making a bit of a big deal of it"*. I wondered whether she was "playing down" the circumstances in order to help her cope?

Anne told me how she felt other people had described what happened to her in a way that *"just makes it sound so serious"*. Her belief is that anyone would have done the same in that situation and that there is some embarrassment surrounding this:

"I dunno, it feels a little bit, isn't it funny that people do think it's serious really....I suppose. I always feel a little bit embarrassed about it. Y'know just in terms of what happened but like erm I think anyone would have done the same"

During the interview, I felt at times that I was quite firm with Anne in respect of saying I felt the part she played in getting herself away from that man deserved some recognition and seriousness. She agreed to a point. However, I felt that maybe she was reluctant to take too much credit. It seemed her reality of the situation was that *"it could've been worse"*. I told Anne that I was glad it hadn't been worse. Anne agreed. She then went on to describe how it could have been worse for her:

"If I had been raped then I think my reaction would be completely different. Because for me... that's like my biggest fear. So if that had happened then I think we might not even be sat here talking about this. Because that, that would just be a completely different ball game to me. But for me it's like...well I got roughed up a little bit and it wasn't very nice. But in my own core belief system, then it wasn't so bad"

Again, I wondered whether this was her way of coping? I somehow felt that if it had been worse, then maybe Anne would have given herself the permission to acknowledge it was a big deal?

Anne gave me an insight into her process, the things she worries about and the things she copes with:

“I think that’s completely my way of being. That I don’t worry about big things. It’ll be like stupid things that I will get stressed about. It wouldn’t be something big, erm, yeah I worry about the kind of like silly things really. And silly things will kind of bug me...usually related to work. There might be big things going on or happening, you know, you just kind of cope”

It almost seemed that for Anne, it is ok for her to place an importance on work related stuff but not issues of a bigger nature. It seems that Anne feels she has to “*just kind of cope*” with what happened to her.

Anne attributed negotiating successfully with her captor to the fact she had recently qualified as a clinical psychologist. During her training, she had been exposed to some highly disturbed patients. She described was able to apply what she knew professionally to the situation:

“I think it’s that thing of you don’t know how you’re going to react and I suppose it’s like, it’s a stupid analogy to make and I don’t mean it to be a stupid analogy or overegging myself but.....I suppose like soldiers when they’re trained to react in a certain way. Maybe that’s if you’ve been trained to deal with humans and to de-escalate situations, then maybe that does come into play”

I felt this must have had a significant impact on the chain of events. Anne had just finished a placement of a year of working with adolescent males on a forensic ward and had quite often had to use methods of de-escalation to “*talk them down*”. It seemed that on one level, Anne did not really see the part she played in saving herself as being anything out of the ordinary. I felt like this also played into the theme of “*maybe I’ve made a bit much of this*”, because perhaps the part she felt she played in securing her freedom was part of the job and what she had been trained to do.

“I have to get out of here”

The theme of survival was consistent throughout the interview. Nothing was more critical than “*I have to get of here*”. Anne mentioned several times throughout the interview that this is what she remembered thinking at the time. That was her ultimate goal and main motivating factor which helped to save her from harm. Was it this will and determination that helped her through as well as her professional experience?

Anne also recalled how thinking became quite clear. She wasn’t sure whether it was because she was still drunk or whether the after effects of a drug were keeping her arousal levels down or:

“ maybe it’s that thing of when you’re in danger, then actually your...your thinking actually becomes quite clear and you kind of go into survival mode”

Anne described how she tried several strategies in order to get her captor to set her free. She recalled how her captor was “*trying various things on*” in an attempt to violate her sexually. She tried to hold him off but then recalls getting angry with him. Anne tells how she

grabbed him by the throat in a bid to get him to stop. However, he grabbed her throat and began to squeeze hard. I couldn't begin to imagine how scary that must have been:

"for some reason that popped into my head of actually, yeah you just need to stop this physical stuff with him now because erm he might panic and kill you"

and a sense of relief when Anne decided to use a different strategy:

"I suppose there's lots of goals in your actions in that moment. And your ultimate goal is you want to get the fuck out of there and then the other goal is, yeah can I appeal to this person's better nature and convince them that they shouldn't hurt me. And how do I do that? So you try being forceful, like don't fuck with me or I'll hurt you. Erm...then it's like ok, well let me try and be really nice to you. And hopefully you'll think actually, you know, why would I want to hurt this person?"

Anne also talked about "fight, flight, freeze or faint":

"it's not pleasant and you don't know what's going to happen erm and you're just like right need to get out of here now. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know if it's so much control or just trying to save yourself from harm. Because you don't want to be harmed and you're.....you're in danger. Erm and you don't know what harm is going to come of you . So you're like I need to remove myself from this. Erm and I suppose, yeah, you try different strategies. So they talk about fight, flight, freeze or faint. Erm and I suppose at first it was a bit.....feeling a bit frozen. It's oh fuck what's going on here? Erm and then you try the flight, so try to get out. Erm then try to fight him. And then comes like ok, I need to try a different tactic really"

It seems like the negotiation process was about trying different tactics in an uncertain situation, in the hope that something would work. Anne also attributed the fact that she managed to negotiate with her captor because in her experience she has found that she is "quite good at reasoning with people". Anne was able to play to her strengths to help herself and that is what helped her to survive.

"I don't know what's going to happen"

Anne recalled how when she first came round in the basement room everything was a little hazy and she experienced confusion. It wasn't clear whether she was dreaming or whether this was reality. Once Anne realised it wasn't not a dream, she had the awful realisation that she may not see her partner, Rob, or her family ever again. That was her instant thought, even before she was able to get the measure of the situation. At this stage and throughout her ordeal until she finally escapes, there is constant a theme of uncertainty and the fear that naturally occurs as a result:

"Oh my god I'm never gonna see my brother again, or my family and I'd never see Rob again and then it was like fucking hell I'd do anything to be....you know....back with my brother just having a drink or oh my god what am I gonna do if I don't see Rob again?"

Anne's experience was uncertain on many levels, especially because at first she does not know who is there with her or why she is there. And because of the unknowns Anne feared the worst in that moment:

"I thought this isn't good because I don't know who is coming back. And what's gonna happen? Erm and you just immediately think of rape and torture. That's what you think."

When her captor made himself known to her, Anne's fear was that he may not be on his own. There may be others and what would that mean for her?:

"I need to get out of here because I don't know if it's just him on his own. And is he keeping me here because his mates are coming round or something?"

A lot of Anne's experience is hypothetical because we just don't know anything about her captor or much about his intentions:

Is he a rapist?

"I suppose it feels as though maybe he was opportunistic because, you, well you don't know do you? He might, he might have been a sadistic rapist but on that occasion there was something that stopped him, you know."

Does he have any weapons?

"I was thinking at the time....if he's got a knife, I'm a bit, you know, fucked here really."

What is going to happen?

"It's not pleasant and you don't know what's going to happen erm and you're just like right....need to get out of here now. I don't know what's going to happen."

What are his intentions?

"I know exactly what could have happened. Erm and I think it was more so when it first happened. Then it was like scary cos it's like fucking hell actually that could have been really bad. For, I don't know, for maybe if you'd planned it, you know trying to think of what his intentions were or sometimes it's like maybe you were just lucky erm....maybe his intentions were bad but for some reason he didn't want to hurt you anymore."

How long will this go on for?

“You don’t know how long ithow long it would have gone on for you know. I suppose I was alsoI was trying to charm him a bit in some way. You know, trying to get round that person, cause you know that really physically you can’t....you might try, but physically that’s quite...that’s dangerous in itself.”

Is he going to kill her?

“There was one point that I was getting a bit fucked off with him punching my arms and trying it on. And I, I grabbed his throat to push him away and actually as I grabbed his throat he grabbed mine and it was kind of, you know, the more I was squeezing, the more he was squeezing. And I could kind of see he was panicking a little bit and I thought....actually this is how you mistakenly get killed, you know, because the person starts panicking and you’re erm putting pressure on them. Erm and they panic and they strangle you.”

Is it possible to negotiate with him?

“Negotiation is something between two people. So, you don’t know what the other person is going to bring to that.”

Will her survival strategy work?

“You try being forceful, like don’t fuck with me or I’ll hurt you and then it’s like ok, well let me try and be really nice to you. And hopefully you’ll think actually, you know, why would I want to hurt this person/ She’s so nice. Erm, but....you don’t know, so you try it.”

It seems that to a lot was left to a change of tactic on Anne’s part.....with the outcome always uncertain until she managed to get out of the room.

The theme of uncertainty is also present for Anne as she described how her experience would impact on a future, similar experience

“Just as I would not think because that’s happened to me that I would be ok in the future. Because you don’t just don’t know what circumstances would be in play.”

It seems there is a lot of uncertainty in Anne’s lived experience and many unanswered questions.

“I’m just gonna try and talk you down”

When Anne realised that by fighting her captor she was potentially putting herself in danger of being killed, she tried a different strategy of negotiation. This involved Anne being very calm and reaching out to her captor by physical touch:

“I’d just finished my placement of a year working with adolescent males erm on a forensic ward and a lot of that had been about thinking about how you de-escalate these boys when they are in states of arousal and stuff you’d have to talk them down and erm....I dunno for some reason it was just in the back of my mind that when they were erm freaked out and stuff...erm it was just to keep very calm and talk very gently to them erm and you know actually all they needed which you obviously weren’t allowed to do was just like kind of like a bit of contact with someone, or a bit of touch. So erm right before I bang your head against the door frame, I’m just gonna try and talk you down....even though he was just.....kept talking to me in Japanese. Didn’t understand English. Erm so I kind of like, you know, took his face in my hands and was stroking his face. And actually I wasn’t saying anything nice to him....but talking very gently. But I was saying d’you know what erm if you kill me or if you do anything then the police are gonna find me, you know, my brother, he’ll come round and he’ll send people out looking for me. Emma will do. So, you know, you’re gonna get caught. But just kept my voice very, erm, level. Erm and all the while like stroking his face and stuff.”

The theme is “I’m just gonna try and talk you down” which was impossible through the spoken word in this situation. Neither Anne nor her captor spoke the same language. Although Anne did “talk” to her captor, he did not understand what she was saying. It seems the communication that was in play here was more about Anne reaching out to her captor, making contact through touch and by being calm with him – this is what he responded to.

Anne described how she was “appealing to his better nature” by being nice to her captor in the hope that he would think “why would I want to hurt this person?” She also talked about “psychologically stroking” in the same way as she did her patients at work. Anne told me how she was “calm and reasonable” with him and that she was “trying to charm him in some way” and he responded to that:

“I do think it was a set of circumstances coming together erm, and at that moment between me and that man.....then the way I interacted with him, it worked and he responded.”

Anne’s training and professional experience seemed to also play a part here also:

“If you’ve been trained to deal with humans and to de-escalate situations then maybe it does come into play.”

Discussion

I think Anne’s lived experience is a fine example of human strength and courage in a very uncertain situation. For her to be able to de-escalate her captor, training and qualifications aside, was inspirational. As a result, I have a friend who is still alive and this is by her own doing in respect of her strategic thinking and instinct for survival.

After I had carried out the interview and for a number of subsequent days after, the theme of *“maybe I’ve made a bit much of this”* seemed the most prominent out of the four for me. I think this is because it was the theme I was least expecting. During the interview, Anne alluded to the fact that she thought *“it could have been worse”* and talked of rape. I remember thinking that on one level perhaps she was discounting her experience and the part she played in it. But why would she? I had a hunch that this could be her way of coping with her experience. I wondered that if Anne viewed the situation as being “big” or “serious” now, then there was an underlying fear of potentially being viewed as a victim or as being vulnerable four years on after the event?

Part of the literature review focused on the work of Ronnie Janoff – Bulman. According to Janoff - Bulman (1992), everyone has basic assumptions about themselves and the world:

- The world is benevolent
- The world is meaningful
- The self is worthy

In instances of trauma, there can be a massive impact upon these assumptions. Sometimes they can be shot to pieces or “shattered” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). To recover from a traumatic incident, a person has to rebuild and restore their assumptions and various coping mechanisms can help them to do that.

Janoff – Bulman (1992 p.120) talked about the coping mechanism of *“it could have been worse”*. According to Janoff – Bulman (1992), if a person redefines the event then it minimises the threat to the assumptive world. The person maximises the possibility of maintaining his or her prior theories of reality. So when Anne talked of *“maybe I’m making a big deal of this”*, maybe she wasn’t evaluating the experience as one of harsh victimisation, and therefore the threat to her assumptive world is minimised and re-establishing belief in her own personal invulnerability.

Janoff – Bulman (1992: p121) also talked about people creating hypothetical worse worlds in order to minimise their perception of being a victim:

“The victim compares his or her misfortune to what could have happened. In other words, the comparison is with a worse scenario that is conjured up in one’s mind; compared to what could have happened, the victim feels somewhat reassured”

Maybe this is what was happening when Anne spoke about *“it could have been worse”* in relation to rape? It is not for me to say definitively, *“this is how it is for Anne”*, merely me witnessing this as a possibility. Initially, this theme impacted upon me the most. I remembered being firm with Anne during the interview when I felt she was playing the experience down. I think this was because I have adopted similar strategies in the past, which I believe were to help me cope with traumatic situations. I could identify with this process. However, I felt as though maybe she was discounting her experience on some level and the part she played in securing her freedom:

Natalie: *“I think you play it down”*

“I think this deserves some recognition”

“I think it does deserve some seriousness”

There seems to be a fine balance in having an opinion about a situation and respecting the other person's viewpoint. This was evident for me during the interview and also now, whilst writing the paper. I was conscious to honour Anne's lived experience and not put words into her mouth, but gently challenge where I thought appropriate. I think there was a fear from my Child ego-state that if I pushed things too far or didn't write the paper sensitively, then this would have a negative impact on our friendship.

I think that Anne's occupation of clinical psychologist impacted in a big way, not only the part that it played in her lived experience, but the impact that it had on the research itself. Anne partly attributed securing her freedom to the fact that she had learned the skills required to help her in this situation. I got the impression that talking her captor round and de-escalating the situation was almost part of the job – she had been trained to do this. It was almost like she expected this of herself due to the training she had received and the experience she had with dealing with disturbed people. I wondered whether because of her qualifications Anne felt like she had to "Be Strong" in describing her experience?

I also wondered whether the fact that this research formed part of my psychotherapy course impacted upon the research. Did Anne feel like she could not be vulnerable because of her professional capacity? I sensed that maybe on one level she felt some shame when she said, *"I always feel a little bit embarrassed about it."* In some ways, I felt that perhaps Anne's strength and shame neither let her be the victim or the survivor. I think this also impacted on my role of researcher as I was careful not "over-dramatise" Anne's experience. Whilst I considered this to be a terrifying experience and felt scare during the interview and feel ok acknowledging that, Anne's scare appeared to be less than my own.

I think Anne's occupation really impacted on the research. As Anne is a qualified individual in the field of psychology, my Child was scared of "getting it wrong". Anne also spoke quite matter-of-factly during the interview and was quite guarded. As a result, I think I projected an almost a critical parent figure on to Anne and was fearful to be told "that's not how it is for me". I soothed myself by allowing myself authorial control in this piece of research – this is merely my interpretation of Anne's lived experience and there are no right or wrong answers.

Often in kidnapping situations we hear of hostages developing Stockholm Syndrome with their captors (see introduction). I didn't get the impression this happened to Anne. Whilst there were flavours of Stockholm Syndrome, I felt that Anne forged a relationship with her captor as part of her survival strategy, not because she had developed a positive regard for him. During the interview, I found that Anne spoke in a rather neutrally about her captor, referring to him as "that man". I wondered whether Anne had stepped into symbiosis with her captor in order to save herself? Her captor clearly seemed to be operating from his Child ego state. I believe Anne used her Parent and Adult ego states to nurture and calm her captor's Child in a bid to bring him back to an Adult position. Resolution of conflict usually occurs from an Adult to Adult position. Again, was this all part of her job and training?

Anne was able to build a relationship with her captor through touch and reaching out to him, but not through the spoken word as they did not speak the same language. I think this is a very good example of communication not just being about the spoken word. Non-verbal communication is equally as important, and in this circumstance was possibly the defining factor that possibly saved Anne. I think I wanted to offer recognition of Anne's achievements to her, but felt this met some resistance during this interview. I accepted that whilst it was not my place to force my thoughts and opinions upon Anne, they also formed a valid part of the interview and research process.

Vecchi et al (2005) talked of a "behavioural change stairway" in respect of crisis negotiations. Over time, there has to be active listening, followed by empathy, rapport and

influence. They believed this led to behavioural change. I think what Anne did during her ordeal follows this. She tried to fight against her captor.....and when that didn't work I think she actively responded to this – almost like “actively listening”, although that was impossible as she couldn't understand what he was saying! I think she did develop a certain amount of empathy for her captor, just like she would with her patients. She built rapport with her captor and this ultimately influenced him as he changed his mind about holding her captive and let her go. I think the fact she was able to go through this process – especially under stress, was something to be really proud of. Although her fate was unknown, Anne potentially saved her own life. I felt that Anne saw it differently - this was just something she did and she didn't want to “*over-egg herself*”.

The theme of uncertainty weaved through Anne's lived experience. Things seemed to be uncertain on almost every level. Who is her captor? What is he going to do her? Why did he do this? Is he going to kill her? Does he have any weapons? Has he done this before or was this an opportunistic one off? Is he going to rape her? Why did he let her go? I felt there were many unanswered questions. I found the levels of uncertainty in Anne's experience really scary. For me, the information given in the interview highlighted this was a situation that at times was highly unpredictable. I wondered how Anne had managed to cope with this.

In his phenomenological study about criminal victimisation, Wertz (1985) described victimisation as not making sense and “is shot through with uncertainty”. If there are so many unknowns, how can Anne ever make any sense of what happened to her? And if she can't make sense of it, what then? This isn't something we covered in the interview. In hindsight I wish we had – just to get Anne's thoughts on it. Wertz (1985) wrote that victims go through various stages to assume pre-victimisation order which involves living through the victimisation and taking responsibility for it before order can be restored. Maybe Anne had already gone through these stages during the four years since her experience and that her victimisation had been “overcomable” (Wertz, 1985).

Anne's sense of survival seemed to be constant through her lived experience. Throughout the interview, Anne repeatedly said how she “*had to get of there*”. I think she showed resilience and determination - “*He had his aim. And I had my aim*”. She described what she did as being “*goal related*”. In some respects it seemed that Anne's survival was her only certainty in this uncertain situation. And at the time, that wasn't guaranteed. Anne had to try different strategies to ensure her own safety and protect her from harm. It seems she played to her strengths to make sure she saved herself.

I found doing this piece of research really interesting - not only the findings themselves but also reading around the subject to gain more information and more insight into the subject area. This was also unlike any other research I had previously done because it allowed my own reflexivity. I think there are certain limitations to this type of study as it focuses only upon one person's lived experience. Therefore, this research cannot be used to say “this is how it is for all people who have had this lived experience”. However, that is not what this piece of work is about – it is about one person's real experience and its aim is to give a snapshot of how it was and is for the co-researcher. I think this opens up the opportunity for further study in this area though, as there doesn't seem to be much research that focuses upon this type of experience. I think it would be interesting to complete further research with several participants in order to compare and contrast experiences and themes.

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