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Love and Trauma

Photography, weaving, sculpture, plaster casting, and etching

I researched the extent of love and whether it can overpower trauma. I was fascinated by trauma and love as they have the power to ruin each other, making an awfully fascinating juxtaposition. I wanted to use materials I've never used or had little experience with to make the most of my time here at Oxbow. For weaving the tapestry, I embarked on a lengthy journey as there were many steps that proceeded weaving, which took around 25 hours just to complete. Similarly, film photography requires a precise setup of chemicals for the film to develop successfully. And etching requires attention to detail and patience when inking and printing.

The cast of my chest is a moment in time captured similarly to photography, and I was compelled to use materials that capture a single moment in time as trauma and love tend to drastically change us, sometimes instantaneously. The photographs are my raw experience with reporting my own sexual assault and how it impacted the way I viewed myself. I am pulled towards tedious, complex, and lengthy art forms, as that is what art means to me. And I would gladly give it all my time, unlike other subjects. Behind the scenes, getting the art form right involves math, chemistry, and physics, which are all other passions of mine. I feel like trauma, and love is, if not more complex than any form of art or science, and I tried to best represent them by using as many components as I could.

What if I Kept Asking?



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Writer's Note: Love and trauma relate to each other more than one would think. They have the power to ruin each other and strengthen the other's bond. I thought I was naive for believing in love but I was wrong as love is a powerful force. Not only can love heal trauma but it can also create it. This paper will delve into the extents of love and trauma and how they are connected.

Love can manifest powerfully in humans, but I want to explore its extent. Many undergo some degree of trauma in their life, and I'm committed to understanding why trauma has such a significant impact on us and, even more so, if love can overpower it. I believe love and trauma are a juxtaposition as they have the power to ruin each other. Whether the trauma we endured was emotional, mental, physical, or sexual, research shows the impact can show up in a host of issues. However, only recently has love entered the scientific realm. In the past, understanding love was the responsibility of "the creative writer to depict for us the necessary conditions for loving," according to Sigmund Freud. Love was not a priority for scientists as they considered it fictional instead of factual. Senator William Proxmire discredited researchers studying love in the 1970s and "derided the work as a waste of taxpayer dollars."¹

Do we control trauma, or does trauma control us?

Choice is a funny word to describe what memories we hold onto— the good, the bad, and the evil. We don't get to choose which memories stick and which don't. We hold onto grudges even though they serve us no good. Bad memories stick more than the good ones. Trauma is a factor in having the past linger even when we wish it didn't.² Trauma often subconsciously changes the

¹ Cherry, Kendra. "Is Love Biological or Is It a Cultural Phenomenon?" *Verywell Mind*, 2020, www.verywellmind.com/what-is-love-2795343.

² Haines, Steve, and Sophie Standing. *Trauma Is Really Strange*. Singing Dragon, an Imprint of Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016.

way we act and see things, altering our reality.³ No matter what traumatic event a person endures, whether it be sexual assault or war, it is natural for the experience to affect our lives.

I was sexually assaulted, yet I find myself still having to prove it, even to myself. I want my story to be uncommon. I want to be the televised story, and when the reporter starts speaking, the audience gasps because they can't relate. The kind of story that makes everyone listening to it sigh in relief that they are safe, far from the danger. The reality is that sexual assault is far too common to televise every story out there. There are too many with my story, and an abundance of injustice surrounding it has become a culture. I want to share my experience to break the stigma and shame I've enlisted within myself. The following poem takes a glimpse into my experience of being assaulted and the psychological impact it had on me. It's my turn to break the silence.

“911, what's your emergency?”

I come from not talking about our bodies
 Pepper spray in my hand at night
 Oversized hoodie covering my sight
 Because what if it happens to me
 I used to wonder who I'd be if it didn't happen to me
 I used to miss the person I might've been
 I lay on my bed
 My clean new bed that he hasn't touched

³ Haines, Steve, and Sophie Standing. *Trauma Is Really Strange*. Singing Dragon, an Imprint of Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016.

I lock my room at night

Then check it twice

I justified turning into an animal

I have been preyed upon like an animal, so maybe I should try responding like one

I exchanged my humanity for a rabid dog

I barked at anyone who tried to steal my treat

My well-deserved treat

Unfortunately, my treat is in the hands of my owner

Police reports and hours of sitting in waiting rooms

The dropped investigations left me crying back to my dog house

If only I could jump to the treat

The giant leap I would have to take

In the midst of the danger

I leaped with hunger

Perhaps forgiveness can be confused with permission

I find myself misusing my forgiveness

I said no

I started to question my truth

Was I asking for it

Did I ask him twice?

Vixxen Benzeev is his name

He lives five minutes away from my house

Vixxen currently walks as a free man in my neighborhood.

We cannot change the past, but it can be repaired. *She Said* by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey shed light on the years of silenced women and their bravery when they broke it. The majority of the women who Harvey Weinstein assaulted signed a contract saying they wouldn't disclose any information regarding their experience working with Harvey Weinstein. Not only were most women legally obligated to stay silent, but even if they wanted to speak up, they wouldn't be given the support they needed as "Harassers were often accepted, or even cheered, as mischievous bad boys." There is a risk in speaking up because the industry "tackles you when you've got the ball."⁴ These women had a lot to risk: not being believed, blamed for, and sued, but winning could earn them what they've been deprived of — justice. There will always be a point where people will have to speak up, especially in the face of adversity.

How powerful is love?

The American Psychological Association defines love as "a complex emotion." Love is a selfless act we can create and share with others, whether platonic or romantic.⁵ Love is putting another person before yourself and choosing them even at their worsts, making love a conscious choice. Unlike trauma, which is an involuntary behavior, love is a choice.⁶ To me love has been contagious, once I am given it, it spread to those around me like a domino affect. When I think of love my mother sticks out to me as a prime example for me in my life. I've struggled with anxiety and depression heavily as an adolescent and my mother has stayed committed to me

⁴ Kantor, Jodi, and Megan Twohey. *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement*. Penguin, 2020.

⁵ Gillette, Hope. "Here's Why Love Is a Choice and a Decision." *Psych Central*, 8 July 2022, psychcentral.com/relationships/love-is-a-choice-more-than-a-feeling.

⁶ Ibid.

through it all. She put up with my violent tantrums, silence treatments, and crying spells. I never understood how or why she loved me at times when I hated her. Of course there were points where we failed to keep each other up and ended in yelling fights, slammed doors, and crying. But her non stop commitment to my well being and happiness fills me with gratitude and a desire to give back to others unconditionally.

Love comes with risks.

Love is an adversity within itself. Many see love as the reason for human existence, but sometimes, being “lovesick” can feel like an illness. Romantic love can bring about many adverse psychological effects. The risks of love include jealousy, grief, sadness, and confrontation.⁷

But is love a superpower? Well, yes. According to scientists who studied whether psychic abilities can be tied to genetics, the power of love can manifest into psychic abilities. In the study, the participants were swatched for their DNA and then closely examined to see if the DNA of regular folks and ones with psychic abilities had any distinctions in the genomes.⁸ Studies showed that “people who claim psychic experiences tend to score higher on empathy scales than controls [and] increased sensory processing sensitivity levels.”⁹ Empathy is the basis for social connections to thrive. Feeling as though humans are connected to others is essential for

⁷ Gillette, Hope. “Here’s Why Love Is a Choice and a Decision.” *Psych Central*, 8 July 2022, psychcentral.com/relationships/love-is-a-choice-more-than-a-feeling.

⁸ Wahbeh, Helané, et al. “Genetics of Psychic Ability - A Pilot Case-Control Exome Sequencing Study.” *Explore (New York, N.Y.)*, vol. 18, no. 3, May 2022, pp. 264-71. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2021.02.014>

⁹ Ibid.

optimal well-being. It is the basis of human relationships and helps us feel valued, loved, and cared for. Empathy is synonymous with love, as without empathy, love can't function.¹⁰

In the particular case of after-death communication, people with limited psychic gifts in knowing what other's thoughts are, predicting the future, or receiving messages from dead people) Nonetheless, they may sense the presence of departed loved ones with a powerful bond. Research shows that 46% of the widows had sensed some kind of after-death communication from their departed mate. The more strongly the surviving partner bonded with their mate, the more likely they were to sense that partner's presence afterward.¹¹

Trauma is a catalyst for growth.

Trauma changes the frequency that flight or fight responses activate in our brains, activating even when no threat exists in that present moment. In *Trauma is Really Strange* by Steve Haines, it highlights how trauma works in human bodies and how to overcome it. Humans are wired to survive and withstand even the most aversive events. Dr. David Berceci said, "We would not be here as a human species unless we had evolved in ways of recovering from trauma; we are genetically encoded to know that we will experience trauma in life." Nine out of ten people will grow and learn from their trauma. To heal trauma, "we do not need to understand, and we do not need to remember; it happens subconsciously." Shaking is mislabeled as trauma when it's the body neutralizing itself from tensions in the body.¹² I have been shaken before but love has helped me steady myself.

¹⁰ "What Is Empathy and Why Is It Good for Us? - Wellbeing People." *Wellbeingpeople.com*, 20 Nov. 2023, wellbeingpeople.com/family-wellbeing/what-is-empathy-and-why-is-it-good-for-us/2023/.

¹¹ Wahbeh, Helané, et al. "Genetics of Psychic Ability - A Pilot Case-Control Exome Sequencing Study." *Explore (New York, N.Y.)*, vol. 18, no. 3, May 2022, pp. 264-71. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2021.02.014>

¹² Haines, Steve, and Sophie Standing. *Trauma Is Really Strange*. Singing Dragon, an Imprint of Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016.

Ok and?

If we lived with no problems we would be incompetent and lack a purpose in life. Even though love and trauma are complex and messy, it's also beautiful to see how we heal and grow as humans from it. Love and trauma can ruin each other, but the choice is ours to which wins. After researching it's become clear that we have far more control in our lives than we may think and can decide the trajectory of our own happiness.

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