

**Shrink Rap Radio #403**  
**15<sup>th</sup> May, 2014**

**“Insights on Rape, Courage and Authenticity”**

**Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD**  
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

**Introduction:**

My guest today is Dr. Nina Burrowes, who is not only a forensic psychologist specialising in rape and sexual abuse but also an author who is using cartooning to deal with psychologically difficult topics. For more information about Dr. Burrowes go to our show notes at [www.shrinkrapradio.com](http://www.shrinkrapradio.com)

Now here’s the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Nina Burrowes, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Nina Burrowes:** Thank you very much.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, it’s great to have you here, especially since when you reached out to me, expressing interest in possibly being interviewed and you let me know that you’re a listener. Listeners always get priority. (laughs).

**Nina Burrowes:** I’ve been listening to Shrink Rap Radio for years now, so yeah, this is doubly exciting for me.

**Dr. Dave:** That’s good, that’s good. It’s not every day that I get to interview a cartooning psychologist.

**Nina Burrowes:** I think I might be the only one, so I hope you enjoy today.

**Dr. Dave:** By the way are you in the London area, or where are you based?

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, I’m central London so I can literally hear Big Ben from my bedroom, so that’s how central I am.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, that’s wonderful. I’ve had a chance to visit London two or three times and always really enjoy it.

**Nina Burrowes:** Oh, I’m deeply in love with this city. It’s a fantastic place to live.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, that’s wonderful. Well, I mentioned your cartooning but before we get into the cartooning aspect of your career, I’d like to spend some time talking with you about your work in forensic psychology.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yep.

Shrink Rap Radio #403  
*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

**Dr. Dave:** Well, first of all, perhaps you can define for our audience just what is meant by the term ‘forensic psychology.’

**Nina Burrowes:** So, forensic psychology is looking at psychology around criminal behavior and certainly like in terms of my experience with it, a lot of the work in terms of if you’re employed as a forensic psychologist is mostly working with people who have been caught for their offence and have been convicted and they’re spending time serving whatever sentence and your job is to work with them, so that they don’t re-offend when they are back in the community. So, when I meet people and say I work in forensic psychology they normally think I help the police catch criminals but I can assure you that my job doesn’t involve any running, or chasing, or any kind of crime biting in that respect.

**Dr. Dave:** O.K. so how did a nice, sweet, young lady such as yourself first become interested in the field of forensic psychology?

**Nina Burrowes:** Your making huge assumptions about me there, Dave (both laugh). I’m fascinated with people definitely and I really, really enjoyed doing my degree in psychology and at the end of it, they had a competition for a bursary for a PhD and it was suggested to me that I might like to apply for it and I had to choose at the time between being supervised by someone who was an expert in forensic psychology, so therefore that’s what my PhD would be in and the other alternative was to do something on primates. So I had this mad two weeks where I was trying to decide which way I wanted my future to go but in all honesty it was quite easy to choose the forensic psychology because I’ve always been interested in people and I’ve always been interested in the kind of clinical aspects of psychology, the practice of psychology and this felt like a really great way to be a researcher but also still very much have a foot in that practitioner space.

**Dr. Dave:** O.K. that’s interesting. Within that specialization it appears that you further specialized in rape and sexual abuse. How did that come about?

**Nina Burrowes:** That was my first job. I was writing up my PhD and my PhD was on criminal behavior and rehabilitation but it was kind of generic. It wasn’t about a specific offence type but then I landed myself a job at the headquarters of the Prison Service and that job was with the sex offender team, so that’s when I started looking at that particular offence type and I found the work really fascinating. So challenging, as a psychologist, to understand that aspect of human behavior. It’s very, very challenging and therefore I just found it really interesting. Having worked with offenders with the prison service, I made a conscious choice to broaden my horizons and so I began volunteering with charities that support survivors of abuse, so that I could make sure that I could see the issue from both perspectives.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, that’s interesting. And being attached to the Prison Service – that sounds depressing. Has it been depressing for you?

**Nina Burrowes:** No, I loved that job. People often asked me if I felt unsafe – all these things. I always felt exceptionally safe and I met some fascinating people, really interesting people. Obviously I spent a lot of time with both staff and with people who are serving their sentence and yeah, I always felt safe and I didn’t find it a

depressing space but of course, I got to go home at the end of the day.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, that's an important difference and is it strictly a women's prison that you're involved with?

**Nina Burrowes:** No. At the time I was working for the headquarters of the Prison Service so they send me all around the prison estate, so I would get to go to lots of places and because the vast majority of the prison population are male and certainly the sex offenders are very much so – predominantly male – I was sent to the specific prisons that were housing sex offenders.

**Dr. Dave:** Aha. On your website you have a link to a report that you've written for prosecutors regarding myths about rape and you list ten such myths in the report – maybe I should have warned you ahead of time – I don't know if you've got that report anywhere nearby but I was hoping maybe you could take us through those ten myths.

**Nina Burrowes:** I'm not going to remember all ten of them for sure but certainly in terms of rape myths, I think the thing about rape and sexual abuse is that it's a topic that people find intimidating and scary and the obvious thing to do when something's like that is to not think about it, or to think that it's got nothing to do with you or to dismiss it. So it's an area that's rich in myths and stereotypes and I think for me the biggest and probably most dangerous myth is the one we have about the actual sex offenders. That they're these monsters that hang around in dark alleyways at night, or hang around in children's playgrounds and so when we hear about an offence and it doesn't involve a dark alleyway and it's not a stranger and it isn't some dangerous criminal attacking a member of the public, people get really confused when they hear a story that is described as a rape case but actually the two people knew each other and they liked each other and they were having a good evening but now one of them is accusing the other of rape. A lot of our myths come from our confusion that it doesn't fit what we're expecting to hear. So many of the myths are things like, a real victim of rape will try to fight or flee, that they will report the offence to the police immediately, that if they were drinking, or in any way wearing provocative clothing, then it wasn't rape. These kinds of things that we try and force the information that we hear to fit our stereotype of what we think rape is but unfortunately that stereotype is very inaccurate.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes and I'm just now searching for your report, so I can ask you about the other myths. I'm trying to remember what they were.

**Nina Burrowes:** The really interesting thing about that report, the thing that I found fascinating was that we know that these myths we have about victims are very prevalent and there's a lot of research about them and they're a problem in court because the prosecutor is trying to communicate to a jury and the jury probably have lots of these myths and stereotypes going round in their head. One of the main points I was trying to make in my report is that we need to start telling more accurate stories about the offender to help people understand that actually if you're an offender who wants to get away with their offence, or an offender who actually isn't able to recognize that that's what they're doing, then the kind of offence you're most likely to commit is what we call acquaintance rape which is when the two people – the

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

defendant and complainant – know each other.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I think here that's often called date rape because it often happens in that context. I've found the list of myths and that in fact speaks to the first one, is the myth that rape occurs between strangers in dark alleys and you say the majority of rapes – 66 per cent of them – are committed by persons known to the victim and the victims are often raped in their homes.

**Nina Burrowes:** Absolutely and if you're a perpetrator of that offence, having ready access to a victim is obviously a lot easier than going out there and attacking a stranger. You just have to look at your own behavior – if some stranger approaches you in a public space and starts a conversation, especially if that's a bar or something like that, you can be on alert – your defenses can be up but if it's a friend of a friend, someone you know, then immediately you feel relaxed and you feel safe and that's often how victims feel before the offence.

**Dr. Dave:** Aha, aha. And a lot of people have the idea of this next one that you've listed here, that women provoke rape by the way that they dress or act.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, yeah. I think because we're trying to understand what happened, we're putting all of this attention and focus on what the defendant did and didn't do but if you were to compare that to other crimes, say someone stole my car, you wouldn't be looking at my behavior before that offence took place. It would be quite a straightforward thing to understand. You blame the offender for the offence, not the victim but when it comes to rape because I think we find it so confusing, we focus so much on the victim – what they did and didn't do – and we don't even have that conversation about the defendant and what they did and didn't do.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Also another myth that you debunk is that rape is a crime of passion. If it's not a crime of passion, what is it?

**Nina Burrowes:** I think lots of people, because they're trying to understand sexual violence and if it's not something that they have an academic or professional knowledge of, they use some framework that they do have a knowledge of. And for many people, the most obvious framework to use, or schema, is normal dating relationships and normal sex. I think that's why people use that lens to try and understand sexual violence but the motivations of the offender, when they're committing a sex offence, has got nothing to do with intimacy and love or connection – especially in the case of rape. In the case of rape, the victim is either actively trying to fight off the offender, although in most cases they're not, in most cases they're frozen. So when they're frozen, they're completely non-responsive, not at all responsive and consent in intimacy is actively given. So, if someone is saying, “well she didn't say ‘no,’” She didn't say ‘no’ isn't consent and I think the other thing that's really important, to help people understand is the reason that victim is frozen is because they're terrified and we are absolutely hard wired to detect fear in one another. I would need to know if you're afraid because the thing that you're frightened of might be a threat to me. So when someone's committing an offence, they're detecting that fear on some level but they're carrying on with what they're doing. And it could well be that the fear is exactly what they're looking for, or it's just that the fear isn't enough to make them stop. But the scenario that I've just

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

described there, that's so far removed from normal healthy intimacy. It has no nothing to do with connection and everything to do with violence and control.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yes. So you spoke to the next one, which is if she didn't scream, fight or get injured it wasn't rape but as you say, it's very likely that the person will go into a frozen response. Do you advise women to resist if they find themselves in that situation? Do you advise them to try to fight?

**Nina Burrowes:** I think the thing to know with a frozen response is it isn't a choice. This is your automatic system taking over your fight or flight response. Because we're frightened of rape and sexual abuse, we'd like to think that if we were attacked we'd talk ourselves out of it, or we'd run away, or we'd fight and that would be successful. That's a clever thing for us to do, it makes us feel safe but it's not true, we're actually very likely to freeze and that freeze then goes into a relaxed flop. That's our instinctive brain looking after us. As a human being we don't have natural predators but the natural predators that we have, we can't outrun them and we can't outfight them. So that the freeze response as a human being is a smart response that our instinctive brains have learnt over generations and that is actually what's most likely to happen.

**Dr. Dave:** I'm thinking though, of women who have taken self defense classes maybe. You know there are groups out there that advocate that women really stand up for themselves and maybe even do so physically but I guess if they do that, depending upon who the rapist is etcetera, they might be risking their life.

**Nina Burrowes:** Absolutely. You don't know how far it's going to go and I think also with those classes, you have to be very careful to not add to the victim blaming narrative. I think those classes work if you can train your instinctive brain so that your instinct is to fight but that would take an awful lot of training. I mean rape and sexual abuse is something that happens to people who are trained in the military, so that they've had a high degree of armed combat training and yet they still freeze too.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, wow. That's an interesting point.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, you're trying to override something that's very powerful and as you said earlier, you don't know if that rape is going to turn into something else and at the time that's certainly... this is a survival thing. You don't know that you're going to survive.

**Dr. Dave:** It's always been difficult for women to report rape because they are concerned that they are going to be accused of either having provoked it somehow, or that they're doing it because they want revenge on the person for some reason but you've studied that statistically.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, absolutely. That's a very common myth that many people report rape and it's not really rape. Again, that's because our expectations have been confounded and we're trying to make sense of why someone would do that but the realities of reporting a rape, this is not an easy process for anyone to go through. It can be exceptionally difficult, the offenders can be very manipulative afterwards and try to convince the victim that what happened wasn't rape and wasn't an offence. If

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

you remember that most perpetrators are known to their victim and I think also people who've experienced abuse they also live in the same society as us. They were thinking that they were going to fight, they were thinking that they were going to be able to run away, they were never expecting to be attacked by someone they trusted. So they have all these internal doubts in their own minds too, so all of this can come together to make it very difficult for them to report the offence. This is before you even think about if that perpetrator is a known person, maybe a family member, what is the impact on the family and so on and so forth. So, very, very difficult for people to report the offence. The estimates you read a lot in the research, is that only one in ten offences get reported and that figure would probably be lower for male victims.

**Dr. Dave:** And some other statistics that you report here, is you say data from two thousand, six hundred and forty three (2,643) cases suggest that the level of false reporting is somewhere between eight percent and two-tenths of a percent.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yes, it's one of those things that really depends on how you count the numbers. Sometimes people look at whether the case was dropped. Well the case can be dropped for so very many reasons other than a known to be false allegation. Many women can retract what they've said but they can do that out of fear of the perpetrator rather than the fact that it was a false report in the first place. So it's a particularly difficult statistic to pin down but when you ask the public what percentage of reports of rape do you think are false, they give you figures like forty percent, something like this. So, they think a significant minority are false accusations. The reality is very low, very low indeed.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Another myth that you cite here is that male rape is an offence that takes place between gay men.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, I think that's how people understand again that information when they receive it but again it's not true. It's hard to get statistics for this whole space because of course most offences aren't reported but of what we know, it's very much a heterosexual offence, this is heterosexual men raping heterosexual men. It isn't exclusive to the gay community at all.

**Dr. Dave:** Right. And another one here is that prostitutes can't be raped.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yep, if someone is working as a sex worker they still are making a choice about what it is they're selling and what it is they're agreeing to and the minute what happens goes against that choice then that is rape. Rape is about consent.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah and one you don't even mention here but that sort of fits with what you're saying now, is even within a marital context it can be rape, right?

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, absolutely. It's crazy, it's only relatively recently that the law was changed here in England but up until the early nineties, I think it was but yeah, absolutely you can rape within a marriage.

**Dr. Dave:** O.K., and the final one which I think you've covered, is if the victim didn't complain immediately, then it wasn't rape but you cite a statistic here that the vast majority estimated at ninety percent of victims never report the rape to the police.

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

**Nina Burrowes:** Yes, so those that do are the exceptional few and it can take many of them a very long time to do that. The people who tend to report straight away are people who experience, if you like, the stereotypical rape, which is actually the minority of rapes, so stranger rapes do tend to be reported more swiftly because it fits within people's stereotypes. As you can see the whole space is so very, very rich in psychology and I've really enjoyed looking at it from the perspective of the offender, the victim and also for this report, the prosecutor and more importantly for this report, the public. As a psychologist, it's an amazing space to try and get your head around.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Do you find that these myths perhaps unconsciously have an impact on judges and juries and prosecutors? Because they're people too.

**Nina Burrowes:** Oh, yeah, rape myths are alive and well unfortunately in every courtroom. The myth really comes from a lack of understanding and knowledge and because we don't talk about sexual abuse in society – it's in the press all the time but we don't have a conversation about it but those myths will just continue to be there until people have more informed understanding of the realities of sexual abuse.

**Dr. Dave:** What sort of evidence is there that jury decision making is affected by these kinds of myths?

**Nina Burrowes:** So, in my report I look at the studies that have been done looking at the impact of rape myths on decision making. It's very difficult to do research with actual juries, so most of those studies are done with members of the public and a typical study would give them some information about a case, some sort of scenario and then they would ask them either what verdict would they give, or they would ask them to rate how believable they felt the defendant or the complainant was. And most studies show that the myths definitely do have an impact on decisions that people make. And when you're in the situation where just a few members of the jury can swing a decision, even if it's just a minority of jurors, that can end up having a huge impact on the whole space. It was doing that project – up until that point all the work that I'd done in the sexual violence space had been written for my fellow psychologists, or government policy makers, or practitioners – and it was creating this report, that made me start to think I really need to start producing some content for the public. Which is what prompted the cartooning and prompted the recent book and so writing that report is definitely been a huge catalyst for me and it is definitely driven by a desire to help people to understand this area better.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now in your report you talk about the need to develop alternative narratives in relation to rape but I'm not sure what you're getting at there and developing alternative narratives for whom?

**Nina Burrowes:** So that the point I'm making there is that when we talk about these rape myths and we talk about rape, we're invariably talking about the victim and we simply don't have that conversation about the defendant, the offender, unless we're talking about the monster in the alley way. So we need to start having conversations about the realities of the sex offender. I think this is why when somebody who's a celebrity who is loved and admired is then accused of committing a sex offence there could be a huge uproar because that individual doesn't fit our stereotype in any way,

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

shape or form. For me that's an indicator that we need to start helping people understand and this is a very difficult thing to do, to help them understand that sex offenders look like normal, every day individuals. They do not look like the monster image that you have in your head. Which is a very difficult message for people to hear.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, we've had some high profile cases in this country where I believe athletes, sports figures – famous ones – have been accused of rape.

**Nina Burrowes:** Hm, hmm. Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** And you mention something you call 'hindsight bias.' What are you getting at there?

**Nina Burrowes:** The hindsight bias is what's happening when a juror is listening to the evidence and they are judging, normally the victim's behavior, but they're judging them with the benefit of hindsight. So they're not remembering that at the time that individual didn't know that they were about to get raped, or they didn't know during the offence whether they were going to survive the whole thing. So with the benefit of hindsight they are blaming them for what happened but they're failing to recognize that actually there are probably tens of thousands of women, who on the very same evening, made very, very similar choices to go out, to dress nicely, to drink alcohol and those other women didn't get raped. The reason why this woman did was because she happened to be with a rapist. But instead of recognizing that, with hindsight the juror can be blaming them for every choice that they made.

**Dr. Dave:** You also have a section on the rape offenders themselves and you raise some interesting questions, one of which is 'how do you differentiate a rapist from a non-rapist?' What's the answer to that question?

**Nina Burrowes:** In terms of looking at them, you don't. Do you mean in terms of the law, or?

**Dr. Dave:** I wasn't sure, I just pulled that out of your report. I saw you had a heading called 'Differentiating' so maybe that you can't tell by looking really was the point, that that's one of the myths.

**Nina Burrowes:** Oh, absolutely. The idea that you could spot somebody in a line up – absolutely not. As part of my job I used to tour the prison estate quite a lot and go into lots of prisons and you wouldn't have to be told, you would know when you were on the wing which housed majority sex offenders because it would be on that wing that you would see every section of a society represented, in terms of age, ethnicity and class and educational backgrounds. The other wings tended to be predominantly young men and I can assure, pick any man off the street and sadly, that's what sex offenders look like, they look like everybody.

**Dr. Dave:** Are there any generalizations we can make, in terms of the psychology of rapists, of why they offend?

**Nina Burrowes:** In the report I introduce, if you like, four types of offender. I use Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

stereotypes and the reality of course is any one offender could be a blend of the four.

**Dr. Dave:** Sure.

**Nina Burrowes:** And I think, certainly we tend to think of the violent, sadistic, offender and yes, that type of offender does exist. There's also the offender who uses their offending as a coping mechanism, so for whatever reason, they have developed this way of coping, that perhaps they require sex to cope but they feel unable to get sex, so they take non-consensual sex. Or they may have specifically developed a way of coping that is non-consensual sex; they actually need to rape in order to cope. So there's that kind of perpetrator. There's also the perpetrator who's offending is motivated by their attitudes toward women. They have an attitude that they're just entitled to sex from women whenever they wish and that when a woman says 'no' she really means 'yes' and all the rest of it. So their offending would be driven by their attitudes to women. The fourth group, which is a group that I think I encounter a lot in the kind of acquaintance rape kind of scenarios, is the offender who is offending but their level of self-denial is so high they're actually able to kid themselves that they're not offending. I think it's important to recognize that sex offenders like to think of themselves in a positive light, just like everybody else. We all like to excuse and dismiss ourselves of our wrongs and they're the same as we are in that respect. And to admit to yourself that you've committed a sex offence is actually a very difficult thing to do. It could potentially be a massive threat to your self concept. So offenders are highly motivated to deny or dismiss their own behavior. So this type of offender is talking themselves both into the offence and out of the offence but they're managing to do it with such levels of denial that when they're finally accused of rape, they're absolutely shocked but this is the amount of work that they've been doing to delude themselves.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, maybe that leads into something else that you write about which is the offender responses after the offence. So is that sort of the denial I guess kind of gets into that. You know we have this image of sex offenders, that sex offenders can't change, that it's so deep in their personality. Is that true of rapists in general, what's the prospect for therapy, or other kinds of rehabilitation?

**Nina Burrowes:** Well, actually in terms of rehabilitating an offender, the statistics on how successfully can you rehabilitate a sex offender are good. Your offender who is a career criminal in terms of theft, or something like that, it's quite hard to rehabilitate that person. They're quite likely to reoffend. The reoffending rates for short-term offenders is massively high. For sex offenders, it's actually quite low, so for the minority who are caught and convicted when they are released back into the community, the re-offending rates, or re-conviction rates are low. So the rehabilitation efforts... and I also think just the process of being caught and convicted and of serving of what is probably a long sentence, so yes, whilst there might be a myth there for the ones that are caught, the data tells us that actually rehabilitation can happen.

**Dr. Dave:** Uh, huh. Now do you appear as an expert witness in court?

**Nina Burrowes:** No, I don't. Over here with our system we don't currently have people with my kind of knowledge as expert witnesses. So you'd have somebody as Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

an expert talking about the specific individuals in the case but you wouldn't have someone come in and talking about rape myths in general, or sexual offending in general.

**Nina Burrowes:** O.K. So, what are the challenges that you face as a forensic psychologist because there are listeners out there who are students and who are maybe at a choice point kind of like you were not so long ago – you know, which direction do I want to go within psychology – what are the challenges of being a forensic psychology.

**Nina Burrowes:** Actually I think my cartooning was born out of one of the main challenges, which is how do you spend an awful lot of your time thinking about rape and sexual abuse and stay healthy? And there's lots of things you can do. I have supervision and all of things but I actually started cartooning as a way of self care. I think it's not realistic to think that this doesn't affect you. In fact, I think the minute my work doesn't affect me is probably the minute I should stop doing it. So it's a case of recognizing that there will be an impact to doing this and what are you doing to mitigate, or deal with, or cope with that impact. So my first piece of advice obviously would be to start cartooning immediately.

**Dr. Dave:** (Laughs) We're going to get into the cartooning in just a moment. What about the flip side, what are the rewards in the work that you do?

**Nina Burrowes:** For me, what I do is so deeply challenging as a psychologist, I wonder would there be a better space for me to learn my craft. Because the psychology is so rich and difficult and interesting – not just to understand what's happening but also in terms of communicating to other people about it – I think it's given me the kind of challenge that has then sort of fed into all of my other work. So definitely, I don't think... you certainly won't be bored, no way.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now art is part of what you do. Do you do therapy with offenders, or not?

**Nina Burrowes:** No, I'm purely a researcher, I trained as a counselor but I made that choice simply because I thought I would be a better researcher if I went through that training. Because I'm a qualitative researcher primarily, so most of my work is in depth interviews, so, yeah, that's why I did it but I don't see clients.

**Dr. Dave:** O.K. So you've been chomping at the bit here to talk about the cartooning and that's definitely one of the really interesting things about you and what you're doing. So let's talk now about your morphing into the cartooning psychologist.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yes, 'morphing' is a good way to describe it. (both laugh)

**Dr. Dave:** So in part, you say, it had to do with self care?

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, learning to draw was the self care, definitely. When I started drawing, I had no intention of turning that drawing into anything other than a way to relax. I always had drawn badly – I think I'm quite a visual learner – and when I was doing my counseling training and as part of that you would have to do a certain

number of hours with clients in terms of practice and when I had to write up my notes from the sessions, my notes were always cartoons. They were very badly drawn, matchstick men but there was something about communicating my experience in cartoons that made sense to me. It's just that I lacked the skills to draw it well. I think in some ways it's always been there but I've always had this idea that 'but I can't draw!'

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah and on your website you show some examples of a drawing that you did before you really applied yourself to studying drawing. It wasn't a matchstick person and I think it was a self portrait. It was really good, I thought.

**Nina Burrowes:** When I sat down to do that, I was surprised how well that came out. I really like how well I can draw now but I think maybe I always had an eye but not the skill, or maybe it was just the confidence but what I really loved about my process of learning to draw, it's like, of course, you just need to sit down and practice and learn. Like, anybody can draw, you need to choose to become that person, you need to choose to learn the skill. In the same way no one can learn to play the piano just like that, you have to learn your scales and you have to go through the process. Drawing is just the same.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now at first blush it might seem that cartooning would be far afield from your forensic work but actually you've used your newly acquired skills to illustrate two books that you've written – one titled *The Little Book of Authenticity* and the other is titled *The Courage to Be Me*. So tell us about these books and what your cartooning ability adds to those books.

**Nina Burrowes:** So, *The Courage to Be Me*, what I've done with that book, is I've taken a research report and the research report was a project I did where I was interviewing women who had been raped or sexually abused and I was interviewing them about their experiences of group therapy. And having done that research and been moved by the courage of these women during the interviews and really massively inspired by them, it felt like such a shame to take all of that beautiful data and just leave it in a research report. I think a research report does many things. It's a great way to communicate to your fellow academics and to practitioners but it always felt to me such a shame that the individuals who could most benefit from our knowledge, can't access that material – the people who are living this life. So having done that study and watched these women... and there was one participant in particular who'd really struggled during the interview but struggled in a very determined way, like there was no way that she wanted to stop, she wanted to carry on but it was hard for her to carry on. At the end of the interview, I reflected back to her that that looked like it was quite hard for you to share that story with me. Can I ask you why you chose to come in today and talk to me and she told me that if one person could benefit from the research I was doing, then what she'd been through would be worth it. And that really stayed with me and I heard that a lot and I thought about the research report and I thought about what I'd heard in the stories and I thought, 'you know, I think we can do better than that.' So I made the choice to turn the research report into a graphic novel and that graphic novel is now free on the Internet. My hope with that is that many other people who have experienced rape or sexual abuse who are out there and they're on the Internet and they're looking for resources, I really hope they find this book because the book tells that story of having this

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

experience and finding the courage to rebuild your life afterwards.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow! I didn't realize that it was available for free on the Internet. So is that from your site?

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, it's on my website. I was really determined that the people who needed it the most would be able to access it. Some people can't afford to buy a book, some people are still living in abusive relationships, so they would be very afraid to have a book about abuse in the home. Some people are too young to buy a book like this and some people – and I think this is probably a lot of people – they're simply just not ready to walk into a book shop and buy a book about sexual abuse. So the whole book is on my website and I'm getting some amazing feedback from the people who have found it and it's obviously been for them the right resource at the right time.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, that's got to be very gratifying to you.

**Nina Burrowes:** It is. It makes me all the more determined to get it out there so that more people can find that because as far as I'm concerned this is actually the largest group of people who've experienced sexual abuse. We know that they don't report the offence to the police, I think they're also not accessing support services, they've perhaps not told anybody about their experience, so this is a big, big group of people that are living with this in isolation. And we know all about the psychology of why they're living with it in isolation, it's because we don't talk about it in society. It's because they're probably living with shame and guilt, fear that they're beyond help and also a sense that what that this happened maybe, ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, why bring that up now? So there're many, many reasons why people may be reluctant to come forward for help and those are the very reasons that the book addresses.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now I'll be giving the URL for your website at the end of the interview so you don't have to worry about doing that now I'm wondering though have you thought about also making the books available through say Amazon.com to reach an even wider audience?

**Nina Burrowes:** Yes, so when I originally started this project of creating this book I was just intending to put it for free on my website but then lots of people asked me 'Oh but are you going to print it, could we have the paperback?' And I was like 'Oh, I don't know, I've only just learned how to draw. I don't if I can create an illustrated book and print it an everything.' But the requests became greater and greater, so now it is available on Amazon and as an eBook, so you can get your hands on a paperback version of it. And the wonderful thing about self-publishing these days is that it's available internationally straight away, so yeah, it is there. And I've been getting lots of individual counselors but also organizations get in contact with me because they see this as a fantastic resource to give to people who are maybe on a waiting list, so some support whilst they're waiting for therapy. Or they're not a specialist organization for sexual abuse, so maybe they are a drug or alcohol rehabilitation organization, the kind of place where actually there are lots of people disclosing a history of sexual abuse but they don't feel like they have the in-house expertise to deal with that. So that they're using the book as a resource to help people take the

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

next step, which is to get the specialist support that they need.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, that's such a great idea to have professionals making it available to clients in various settings. I must say from the pieces I was able to see on your website and I didn't realize that I could look at a whole book but the cartooning is very charming and engaging and I think it helps to – and I don't know if this is the right word – to detoxify the experience somewhat by putting it in a lighter kind of context.

**Nina Burrowes:** Yes, cartooning is such a human medium. It's very compassionate and it's very gentle. I like that the reader kind of sees what they're able to see. You can read a graphic novel six times and on the sixth time you will see something you haven't noticed on the other five occasions. And I think there's something very gentle about it and the feedback I'm getting from people is that... getting feedback from people who are often triggered, so this means if they read anything about rape or sexual abuse it actually triggers within them like a trauma response because they found it all so very overwhelming. The feedback I'm getting is that people aren't getting triggered by this book because it's handling exactly the same material... I have a whole chapter on trauma and guilt and shame, that the book really does cover the material but it does it in such a gentle and compassionate way that people are able to emotionally connect with it and engage with it and of course understand it. It's been a real challenge. I think some people think cartooning is dumbing down and it really isn't. To me it's distilling. It's been a massive challenge to distill that information into... normally if I write something, it's thousands and thousands and thousands of words long. This is only a few hundred words long. You really have to get to the main point and make it clearly and then move in. So I'm really enjoying the intellectual challenge as well.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, one thing that comes to mind now is the graphic novel *Maus*, which I think deals with the Holocaust. Are you familiar with that?

**Nina Burrowes:** I think Chris Ware is the illustrator, the author of that book. I haven't read that one but I'm a big fan of his work.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

(Transcriber's note: The author of *Maus* was Art Spiegelman. Chris Ware created Quimby the Mouse)

**Nina Burrowes:** And I think cartoons are a really, really great way of tackling anything that's difficult. Either difficult intellectually, or difficult emotionally and with rape and sexual abuse you've got both of them there. And what's just an observation for me is as a researcher, research reports are great and they perform a very important function but you don't capture a large audience with a research report. I don't tend to read them time and time again but my cartoons, I'll read them tens and tens of times because it's fun and it's quick and you see something different every time. So as a medium it really is a great way to genuinely communicate.

**Dr. Dave:** Did you go out and study other graphic novels for inspiration?

**Nina Burrowes:** No, I didn't. I worked with a team of illustrators, so the book is six chapters long. I've illustrated two of them and then we have another four illustrators and they're massively talented. One of my favorite things about the book is that every chapter feels different because you have a different person drawing it. So I let them bring their own style to their chapters and because I'm a beginner, my chapters have this style which is 'Hi, I'm a beginner.' So my chapters are different but they're certainly good enough to get the point across.

**Dr. Dave:** Now what's the difference between the two books? You've got one on authenticity and the other's on courage. Are they targeted to different, either topic areas or a different audience?

**Nina Burrowes:** The way my work works for me is I divide my work into two. One half is the forensic psychology so all of that content – which is *The Courage to Be Me* – all of that content now I'm very much aiming at the public. So *The Courage to Be Me* is my first of piece of material for the public – trying to help people to understand sexual abuse. So that's one half of my output if you like. The other half is what I do to... initially it's what I started to do to unwind and relax, to allow myself to think about psychology but not, specifically not, about rape and sexual abuse. And what I'm doing with that other half is I am trying to do the most interesting thing I can think of doing as a psychologist, which is to really look at that question 'what does it mean to be a human being?' And that's a very long term project for me. The little book on authenticity is the first of many, many books which is me going through a slow process of illustrating what I find to be the most fascinating psychology I can think of.

**Dr. Dave:** Ah, that's really exciting. I was going to ask you where you see yourself going in the future but I think you've just spoken to that. Well as we wind down, is there anything more that you'd like our listeners to know?

**Nina Burrowes:** I think one of the things I'm really enjoying about my work is I'm completely independent and there's something that I'm really valuing about that in terms of being a psychologist. Today's actually been a real treat for me 'cause I very, very rarely speak to a fellow psychologist. I'm going out of my way to talk to members of the public or people of different professions. And I think there's something interesting about what happens in our profession when somebody gives themselves that freedom. And I think in terms of innovation and creativity, I've been really enjoying what happens when I give myself permission to take my profession and my work and my career in any direction I choose. And I'm just finding the whole process so rich and rewarding, that I hope that it's of interest to my fellow psychologists. I also think there's something about the person who's working out on the margins of any profession, that they're able to see things that other people can't see because they're not out on the margins. And also I'm in a position where I can choose to try things that it would be very difficult to perhaps do if you had a boss. I'm just imagining the scenario where you say to your boss 'Yeah, that research report – I'm going to turn it into a graphic novel.' But as someone who works for themselves I can make that choice and so I'm very much enjoying that. I have quite a few people who are psychologists following me on my website and I think they're enjoying seeing what she's doing next. I hope it feeds into their work too.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, keep me posted on what you're doing next. I'm struck by the titles Shrink Rap Radio #403 *Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

of your books – they're also really about you. You know, the book on authenticity and a book titled *The Courage to Be Me* and that's sort of what you're putting into action because I would imagine that you'd have a voice in your head much as the voice that I had in my head when I started to do this podcast, was sort of 'well, what are other psychologists going to think about this, you know. Maybe they'll be really critical.'

**Nina Burrowes:** Yeah, of course. On my website there's a link to a talk I do which is on courage and vulnerability and if you watch that talk, you'll see that those voices are very much alive and well in my head. But that's O.K. that's just all part of being human. I think that's a big part of my message is that I think being human isn't something you try to avoid, fix or control. It's something to understand and certainly with my work, everything that I'm working on at the moment, has a central theme and I feel that what I'm doing at the moment is exploring the psychology of one person who's in a room on their own. And that's my big project for now. I think it will take me at least another four or five years to produce all the content that I'd like to do, just around that, just one person on their own. So things like authenticity and courage and choice and self-compassion and all of these things. Very excited about what will be the next project, which is the psychology that happens when someone else walks in that room. So it's going to be a long ride but it's going to be a lot of fun too.

**Dr. Dave:** That's wonderful. Dr. Nina Burrowes thanks for being a Shrink Rap Radio listener and thanks for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Nina Burrowes:** It's been my pleasure. Thank you ever so much Dave.

#### **WRAP UP:**

It's great to have had the opportunity of interviewing another one of my listeners who's also a professional psychologist. It's also particularly gratifying to me to discover such accomplished fellow professionals in our listening audience. I'm impressed by the intelligence and empathy that Dr. Burrowes brings to her work with both the victims of sexual abuse and the abusers themselves. Before I go any further let me share Dr. Burrowes website with you. I'm sure many of you will be eager to take a look at her illustrated books on courage and authenticity, which we discussed. So here's one: it's [www.ninaburrowes.com](http://www.ninaburrowes.com)

You'll find links to her blog there, as well as a video of a presentation she gave on courage and authenticity and although it wasn't a Ted.com video it has that same kind of production values. I wasn't able to find a link to her research site from that page however. It may be there but I couldn't find it. If you're interested in seeing the report she wrote on rape and sexual abuse that I was referring to in our interview, you'll find that on her research site at: [www.nb-research.co.uk](http://www.nb-research.co.uk)

I'm particularly impressed by her use of drawing as a tool for relaxation and personal development. I think the way it has evolved as a way to illustrate compelling stories about the inner journey is particularly compelling. I think she's on an exciting voyage of discovery that will open many doors, not only for her readers but also for her.

And any of you out there who a) may be victims of past sexual abuse, or rape I

Shrink Rap Radio #403

*Insights on Rape, Trauma and Vulnerability* with Dr. Nina Burrowes PhD

certainly think that you would want to check out these books that she's written. But also those therapists out there in our audience, I think you're going to want to have one or more copies in your library not only to read yourself but to give out to clients – loan out, let them buy them from you, whatever.

So if you decide to buy paper or Kindle versions of her books, as always you can order them using the [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) widget in our right hand sidebar.

Thanks again to Dr. Nina Burrowes, the Cartooning Psychologist, for sharing her unique career with us.