**Male Peer Support and Male-to-Female Dating Abuse
Committed by Socially Displaced Male Youth:
An Exploratory Study**

by

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**A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Sociology and Anthropology
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Abstract

Youth violence has recently received increased attention in Canada (Tyyskä 2001; Sinclair and Boe 1998; Dell and Boe 1997); however, one area that continues to be neglected is male-to-female youth dating abuse. Canadian exploratory research documents the existence of this form of abuse (Poitras and Lavoie 1995; Jaffe et al. 1992); still, this issue has yet to be explored beyond rates of incidence and prevalence. There is a need to understand the dynamics of male-to-female youth dating abuse. Recent research suggests that an important explanatory factor is male peer support (Hearn 1998; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

While research has demonstrated "the marriage license as a hitting license" (Straus et al. 1981), it has not addressed the reality of many males: abuse against female intimates often begins before marriage. Adolescent dating relationships may be a learning ground for the abuse of women.

Problematizing male-to-female youth dating abuse within the wider social context of male power and dominance, this study integrates feminist theoretical insights with a modified version of male peer support theory. The research addresses three limitations of current male peer support research: 1) the theoretical and empirical reliance on university and married respondents (Schwartz and Nogrady 1996); 2) the dependence on quantitative methodologies (Elloit et al. 1992); and, 3) the inability to theorize male peer support dynamics beyond adult male university students (Sanday 1990). In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 36 male young offenders within an Ontario secure custody facility were conducted to explore the following two research questions:

1. *Do socially displaced male youth receive similar types of male peer support for male-to-female dating abuse as university/college males?*
2. *How do male peer support processes operate among socially displaced male youth?*

The male peer group provided support for the use of male-to-female dating abuse in several ways and was an important element in the construction of masculinity. Findings are compared to the larger body of male peer support research as well as with studies focusing on youth. Future research directions and avenues for proactive education are presented.

Dedicated to Heather Johnette, Hunter Faris, and Alexandra Nicole.

May our future generations experience the freedoms of equality.

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First, thank-you to the youth who participated in this study. Without the sharing of your experiences with me, this study would not have been possible. I only hope that one day a study of this nature will not be necessary.

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To my family and friends, thank-you for your strength, belief in me, and support not only during the completion of the Ph.D., but during the time that has brought me to where I am today. Most importantly, thank-you for reminding me to live, love, and most of all laugh -- at least once a day.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

The sexual, physical, and psychological abuse of women has been a topic of concern for many scholars dating back to some of the female founders of the social sciences such as Mary Wollstonecraft writing in the 18th century and Harriet Martineau in the 19th century¹ (McDonald 1994). This diverse area came into renewed focus via feminist scholars' debates in the early 1970s. A number of recent Canadian and American studies document the incidence² and prevalence³ of such abuse (O'Sullivan 1998; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; White and Koss 1991; Brinkerhoff and Lupri 1988; Koss et al. 1987; Smith 1987, 1986; Straus and Gelles 1986; Kanin 1967). This body of work shows that women are *most* at risk of male physical, sexual, and psychological assaults committed by their intimate partners⁴, family members⁵, friends, dating partners, and acquaintances. Within the Canadian context, research has focused primarily on woman abuse in marital/cohabiting relationships (Statistics Canada 2000, 1999, 1993; Lupri 1990; Kennedy and Dutton 1989), during and after the process of divorce/separation (DeKeseredy and MacLeod 1997; Ellis and Stuckless 1993; Johnson

¹ See McDonald (1994), "*The Women Founders of the Social Sciences*" for a thorough review of early female founders of social thought.

² The term *incidence* refers to the percentage of women who state they have been abused and the percentage of men who state they were abusive within a specified time period (typically the previous 12 months).

³ The term *prevalence* refers to the percentage of women who state they have been abused and the percentage of men who state they were abusive over a longer period of time (questions typically take the form of "have you ever...").

⁴ The term *intimate partners* includes (ex)husbands, (ex)lovers, (ex)boyfriends, and fathers of their children.

⁵ The term *family members* includes (step)fathers, (step)brothers, and (step)uncles.

and Sacco 1995), and in university/college dating relationships (DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a, 1993b; Elliot et al. 1992; Finkelmann 1992; Barnes et al. 1991; DeKeseredy 1988).

While research has demonstrated “the marriage license as a license to hit” (Straus et al. 1981) and exposed the “unwelcoming” climate women often experience at university/college, little attention has been allotted to woman abuse *before* adulthood. In fact, adolescent dating relationships may very well be a learning ground for the use of male-to-female abuse among older couples⁶. Indeed, Canadian and American exploratory research documents the existence of male-to-female youth dating abuse⁷ (Silverman 2001; Coker et al. 2000; Totten 2000; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1994; Sudermann and Jaffe 1993; Jaffe et al. 1992; Mercer 1988).

A growing body of literature suggests that male peer support is a key explanatory factor of male-to-female abuse in adult dating relationships (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993b; Lupri 1990; Sanday 1990; Kanin 1967). Male peer support refers to “the attachment to male peers and the resources that these men provide which encourage and legitimate woman abuse” (DeKeseredy 1990:130). Significant findings from this body of research suggest that some patriarchal male peer groups provide support for male-to-female abuse. This research indicates that male peer groups often offer a climate where male-to-female abuse is modeled, practiced, and reinforced.

⁶ Analyzing data gathered in the CNS, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1994) found that approximately one third of college men who admitted using physical force to obtain sexual relations with a female were continuing a pattern that began prior to college entry. As well, research has demonstrated that adherence to rape myths among high school and elementary male and female students is prevalent (Boxley et al. 1995; Cassidy 1995).

⁷ *Male-to-female dating abuse* is defined as any sexual, physical, or psychological assault on a female by a male dating partner resulting in a loss of dignity, control, and/or safety for the female partner (modified definition from DeKeseredy and MacLeod 1997 and Health Canada 1995). This definition reflects the understanding that various forms of male-to-female abuse cause harm and are equally important.

Past research also contends that men may already be socially “trained” to abuse women prior to their adult years (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997, 1994; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; Kanin 1985, 1967), illustrating the need to focus on younger males.

Peer groups are an important part of youth culture; they are drawn on for support and they can provide a forum in which youths can demonstrate their individual identities. Similarly, they play an integral role in the social reproduction of patriarchal gender relations (Messerschmidt 2000; Canaan 1996; Connell 1996; Jackson 1990; Sherrod 1987). As such, they may be an important context for acquiring, reinforcing, or transmitting patriarchal gender-role attitudes among youth (Chatterjee and McCarrey 1989; Ziegler et al. 1984).

This study represents the first Canadian, and quite possibly the first North American qualitative study focusing exclusively on male peer support of male-to-female youth dating abuse. Problematizing male-to-female dating abuse within the wider social context of male power and dominance, the current study integrates socialist feminist and masculinities theoretical insights with a modified version of male peer support theory. This qualitative study features in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 36 male young offenders in an Ontario secure custody facility. The interviews were conducted to explore the dynamics of male peer support of male-to-female dating abuse among socially displaced male youth. The term socially displaced refers to male young offenders who are taken as sharing a similar, less-privileged class position or experience at the time of the research as they are temporarily detached from society (outside world); that is, they are placed within custody, excluded from the economic world. Youth present a unique challenge in terms of class definition (Wright 1979), and organizing the current youth in terms of social class (i.e. working- or middle-class) would have been difficult if not impossible as they often have sporadic, non-typical employment and

transient home lives. Therefore, in this work, social class is controlled for as all respondents are taken as sharing a common location; they are socially displaced. Similar to male peer support research with university/college males, this study offers insight into peer group dynamics within a certain group of male youths considered to be disadvantaged and less-privileged.

The study addresses three limitations of current male peer support research. First, this type of research is characterized by an empirical reliance on adult university and married respondents (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; Kanin 1985, 1967; Bowker 1983). Although the findings show that patterns of pro-abuse dynamics exist before college/university age, to date there have been limited research energies focused on younger males. Current trends in the male-to-female youth dating abuse literature include the effects of male dating abuse on specific health risks of female victims (Silverman 2001; Wingood 2001); the relationship between witnessing family violence and perpetrating dating abuse (Jackson 1997a; Simons et al. 1998; O’Keefe 1997; Roscoe and Callahan 1985); female perception of male-to-female dating abuse (Jonson-Reid and Bivens 1999; Jezl et al. 1996); and the relationship between alcohol use and male-to-female dating abuse (Bergman 1992). Although few, if any, qualitative studies have *explicitly* explored male peer support as an explanatory dynamic of male-to-female youth dating abuse, some studies report secondary findings that indicate the importance of this dynamic.

In one of the first longitudinal studies on adolescents and sexual aggression, Ageton (1983) found that “peer attitudes and behaviour strongly influence sexually aggressive behaviour” (121). More recently, a Canadian study on students in Grades 7, 9, and 11, reported a similar finding: males who had aggressive male friends were more accepting of psychological and sexual dating violence (Price et al. 1999). Other

investigations involving male youth have shown preliminary support for the need to investigate further the role of the male peer group in the encouragement and/or justification of male-to-female youth dating abuse (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000; Jackson 1997a). The current research addresses this limitation (empirical reliance on adult men) by focusing on male youth.

Second, there has been a dependence upon quantitative methodologies within the existing body of male peer support research⁸ (Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993b; DeKeseredy 1988; Kanin 1967), resulting in a lack of rich ethnographic discussion. Much of the research completed thus far attempts to quantify the relationship between male peer support and male-to-female abuse via its reliance on quantitative approaches. However, little research has explored how male peer support dynamics operate. A qualitative approach allows for exploration of subtle communications (such as sexist jokes) that are often missed in quantitative studies (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998c). In light of this, the study employs a qualitative methodology to facilitate a deeper understanding of male peer support dynamics among socially displaced male youth. This design allows for exploration of more subtle forms of male peer support as well as more covert forms of male-to-female dating abuse such as the sexual objectification of women. We know very little about male peer support dynamics among male youth. Hence, a qualitative method allows for an exploratory approach that can inform additional research by illustrating some of the ways in which male peer support for male-to-female dating abuse is provided among male youth.

Third, male peer support research can currently be cited for its lack of ability to

⁸ There are some exceptions to this trend however. For example, studies by Smith (1990) and Bowker (1983) are based upon interviews with women. These studies, however, are based on the females' perspectives on males' interaction with male peers.

theorize beyond the middle-class adult male experience⁹. Specifically, there has been insufficient research on male peer support of male-to-female dating abuse by less-privileged male youth (as well as those who are not Caucasian). Thus far, our understanding of male peer support dynamics is limited to large-scale surveys with university/college respondents, offering little insight into male peer dynamics among less-privileged males¹⁰. In a review of male peer support research, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998c) argue that the majority of research has conceptualized male peer support as a universal risk factor (all men experience this support regardless of economic, social, or political status) without empirical data to rely upon. While research among college/university samples has been successful in illustrating the pervasive nature of male-to-female dating abuse, there is reason to suggest further study among less-privileged populations of male youth.

Messerschmidt's (2000) life history analysis of nine working-class adolescent males indicates that the male peer group was an important site for the development of aggressive masculine identities (some of which identified females as legitimate targets for male abuse). As well, his work begins to demonstrate the role that male peer groups can play in the encouragement and legitimation of male-to-female dating abuse. Within the Canadian context, Totten (2000) similarly focused on marginalized male youth¹¹ and

⁹ Scholars such as DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2002) are slowly addressing the lack of work on male peer support among disenfranchised males.

¹⁰ There have been, however, a few American qualitative studies that have found the male peer group to be an important component among less-privileged adult men (for example, Anderson 1999; Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995).

¹¹ Totten defines *marginal male youth* as the following: These youth have poor relations with their families, have been abused by caregivers and have witnessed abuse in their homes. These youth receive little or no financial support from their families. Many live away from home in young offender facilities, group homes, rooming houses/apartments, and shelters. Those who live at home spend little

offers preliminary insight into male peer support. However, his study focuses on youth who were deemed to be abusive via a quantitative questionnaire. The current research utilizes a group of socially displaced male youth to gain a more intimate understanding of male peer support processes among less-privileged male youth.

This study represents a first step in the building of a body of research that examines male peer support dynamics among a particular group of less-privileged Canadian male youth, exploring how these dynamics are linked to their use of male-to-female abuse in dating relationships. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, it sets the stage for further inquiries of male peer support dynamics among male youth, expanding our understanding of the role that all-male peer groups can play in the legitimation and perpetuation of male-to-female dating abuse.

Locating the Researcher

A common debate in feminist research has been whether social research can or should be “value-free” (Miller 1997; Renzetti 1997; Gouldner 1970). As people living in a social world we bring our own lived experience into our research. The work we choose to do is undoubtedly linked to this experience. As Renzetti (1997) suggests, *we* choose the problem of study and this is a value-based choice.

One of feminism's most important contributions is placing gender at the forefront of social research and theory¹². In so doing, it has demonstrated that “...our everyday social lives are not only gendered, they are also characterized by widespread gender

time there; thus parental control is minimal. Almost all have come from lower income neighborhoods and have dropped out or are failing school. Their parents receive social assistance, unemployment insurance, disability pensions, or work in low-paying service sector jobs (Totten 1996:10).

¹² See Messerschmidt (1993) for a review of feminist contributions to a social scientific understanding of gender.

inequality... Moreover, this inequality intersects with other inequalities” (such as social class, heterosexism, ageism) (Renzetti 1997:133). In light of this, it is important to share my experience of how I arrived at the current topic (Reinharz 1992; Cook and Fonow 1984; Oakley 1981).

Many authors suggest that research projects have their genesis in past experience or life history of the researcher; research ideas are usually agreed upon in meaningful ways that are reflective of who we are. As Lofland and Lofland suggest, “it is often said among sociologists that, as sociologists, we ‘make problematic’ in our research matters that are problematic in our lives” (1995:13). The initial stage of a project begins with “starting where you are” (Kirby and McKenna 1989). This is a process whereby the researcher informs the readers of the perspective they are approaching the study from and “provides the necessary meaningful linkages between the personal and emotional on the one hand, and the stringent intellectual operations to come on the other” (Kirby and McKenna 1989:15).

While the current qualitative study provides an opportunity to gain a detailed understanding of the respondent’s perspective through in-depth personal interviews, this is achieved with the understanding that behind every research project is “a personal biography of the gendered researcher, who speaks from a particular class, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:3). It is important to provide the details of the researcher’s personal approach and biography so as to inform readers of her/his approach to the project. This openness adds validity and truthfulness to the work as the reader is informed about the perspective of the researcher and how this might influence the data reported. The social and cultural background of the interviewer has an effect or influence on the research process from beginning to end (Flick 1998). My decision to conduct this study was guided by several related aspects. A brief

reflection and personal biography illustrate my perspective as well as providing a succinct history of the origins of the current study.

Violence against women is a widespread concern in our culture. Whether it be on campus, in the workplace, in our community, or in our homes, many women and men feel the consequences of woman abuse. My interest in violence against women research stems back to the beginning of my university experience. As an undergraduate student, I conducted a study on the criminal justice system's re-victimization of young women aged 12-15 who were sexually assaulted¹³ (Sinclair 1994). This examination was achieved through court observation and interviews with crown attorneys, defence lawyers, and judges. The project led me to experience, "in action," many of the rape myths¹⁴ (for example, no means yes, some females are to blame for an assault) surrounding sexual assault portrayed not only by the male accused, but also by other key players in the criminal justice system, such as defence lawyers, judges, and crown-attorneys¹⁵. This research led me to question how we, as a society, learn such misconceptions and encourage them to be upheld.

¹³ *Revictimization* refers to what has been described as the victimizing experience many women suggest they endure when they pursue their case through the legal system. One of the fathers in a case I analyzed states: "*The justice system has let victims down to the point where they feel it's not worth going to the police. If I had to do it all over again, we would not have gotten involved*" (Kitchener-Waterloo Record 1994).

¹⁴ *Rape myths* are prejudicial, stereotypical, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists (Burt 1980:217) that provide and/or support the perception that male violence against women is acceptable.

¹⁵ An example of such an experience involves the trial of a 13-year-old female and a 31-year-old male accused who was a deacon at her church. The defence attorney questions: "*Did you do anything to give him [the accused] the idea that you liked him?*" and "*I suggest you had a crush on him*" (Sinclair 1994), attempting to shift the blame from the accused to the young girl. These questions are irrelevant as the female is not of consenting age, therefore it is the responsibility of the male as her elder and as an authority figure in her life, to not pursue any form of sexual interaction.

My Master of Arts thesis (Sinclair 1996) examined public opinion of the mandatory arrest policy in domestic violence cases. One of the most noteworthy and frustrating findings was the general belief that a certain level of male violence between husbands and wives was acceptable. This led me to question how we learn to associate masculinity with violence against women.

As I read the extant literature on violence against women and the sociology of masculinity, an emphasis on married and college males became apparent. The assumption that male-to-female intimate violence began once males reached university age and older was called into question by many of the studies. Through my own personal experience, my research, and from spending time with youth, I also began to question the validity of this assertion. It became clear that to adequately assess male-to-female dating abuse, we must look at the dynamics of youth dating relationships.

Youth dating relationships are often viewed as experiences of heightened awareness and exploration. Unfortunately, it is quite common to “explain” the use of male-to-female violence in these relationships with a “boys will be boys” (Pollack 2000) rationale, leaving young women at risk for continued male abuse. It is important to begin to listen to the young men to determine *why* and *where* they are developing these pro-abuse beliefs.

As a white, heterosexual female raised in a rural lower middle-class family, I am dedicated to equality regardless of gender, class, and/or race. I am also committed to the eradication of violence against women and to the elimination of traditional barriers enforced on both women and men within a capitalist patriarchal society. My understanding of gender as something that is actively achieved under various constraints (for example, class, race/ethnicity) facilitates my understanding of the importance of socialization in the shaping of masculinities and femininities. This approach allows me

to be sensitive to the detrimental effect of male violence on both females *and* males, although in differing capacities and to differing degrees. Masculine identity is restricted within capitalist patriarchal societies and exposing constraints like traditional gender roles and hegemonic masculinity, helps us in our understanding of male-to-female abuse. As an active volunteer with male young offenders and street youth for the past ten years, I have witnessed the consequences of these constraints. Many of the male youth I have met demonstrate the realities of being a less-privileged male youth living in a capitalist patriarchal society. My study begins to explore these constraints and demonstrates how they may influence male-to-female dating abuse.

My empirical work has emerged from my lived experiences: my experience as a female, my interactions with males, my past academic explorations, through my contact with male young offenders, exposure to the literature, and my feminist approach to research. The combination of these elements shapes my interaction with others and influences my approach to social life. It is for all these reasons that the research was undertaken, with the primary goal of attaining a better understanding of the interrelations between male-to-female abuse, masculinities, and socially displaced youth.

Organization of the Dissertation

This section summarizes the structure of the dissertation. Chapter 2 describes my theoretical framework. The study draws upon socialist feminist theory and sociological work on masculinities, and components of a modified version of male peer support theory. First, various feminist theories addressing male-to-female abuse will be presented. Second, the sociology of masculinities literature will be briefly reviewed, demonstrating its importance in the study of male-to-female youth dating abuse. Dominant theories of male peer support are reviewed, illustrating the relevance or applicability of male peer support theory to male-to-female youth dating abuse. And last,

the research questions are presented.

In Chapter 3, after briefly reviewing the male-to-female youth dating abuse literature, the methodological design (qualitative interviews) of the study is presented. A discussion of the merits of qualitative research is followed by a detailed description of the interview process. Demographics are provided to familiarize the reader with the respondents, followed by an introduction to the findings.

The results are presented in three sections. In the first section of Chapter 4, attachment to male peers will be reviewed. The second section of Chapter 4 introduces readers to some of the characteristics of their intimate relationships. This chapter provides background information that contextualizes the following two chapters.

Qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in the identification of three main concepts - masculinity, sexuality, and violence. The findings related to these concepts have been organized as follows. The first key concept, masculinity, is referred to throughout the discussions of sexuality and violence. Due to the prevalence of the theme of masculinity in both the sexuality and violence chapters, there is not one chapter dedicated to this concept, but rather comments related to this theme are presented throughout. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the discussion surrounding sexuality while Chapter 6 pertains to violence.

A summary of the findings is presented in Chapter 7, illustrating the links between them and demonstrating the overall relevance they offer to the area of male peer support of male-to-female youth dating abuse. In the final chapter, future research directions, theoretical suggestions, and some steps toward ending male-to-female youth dating abuse are presented.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon socialist feminist theory, the sociology of masculinities (e.g., Connell 1995, 1987; Messerschmidt 1994, 1993, 1986) literature, and components of a modified version of male peer support theory (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; DeKeseredy 1988; Bowker 1983; Kanin 1985, 1967). Four primary objectives are achieved in this chapter. First, an overview of feminist theoretical perspectives on male violence against females is presented. Second, the sociology of masculinities work will be reviewed, demonstrating how this work can inform our understanding of male-to-female dating abuse. Section three briefly reviews the three major male peer support theories that inform the study. In section four, the theoretical framework for the current study is introduced, illustrating the culmination of the three main theoretical approaches (socialist feminism, masculinities, and male peer support).

Section One: Feminist Theoretical Perspectives on Male-to-Female Abuse

Bringing woman abuse to the public realm and establishing it as a concern for political, theoretical, and empirical agendas was one of feminism's most significant contributions to the social sciences. Theories of male violence against females initially focused on dominant psychological and biological perspectives, such as the psychological make-up of rapists was different from "normal" men, rape was a disease (biological), and that the capacity to rape reflected an individual's lack of "outlets" to satisfy his sexual "needs."¹⁶ These individualistic approaches problematized male-to-female violence as a rare crime committed by "sex-crazed maniacs," typically against strangers, allowing many to distance themselves from the widespread nature of male violence against females, while characterizing it as a personal and individual act rather than as a socially

¹⁶ See Scully (1990) and Messerschmidt (1993) for a more in-depth discussion on past theoretical directions.

constructed act. Theories informed by this approach typically sought to find the causes of male abuse “*inside* abusers” (DeKeseredy and MacLeod 1997:31; original emphasis)¹⁷.

Feminist theories, on the other hand, argue that women often stand a *greater* risk of being abused by intimates¹⁸ than by strangers, and that male-to-female violence is a crime of male dominance and power leading to the framing of male-to-female violence within the context of patriarchal social structures (i.e. legal, education, employment systems) (Segal 1990; Saunders 1988). Violent men are not “rare maniacs” as once thought, but rather are similar in many ways to “normal” men in our society. These developments contributed to the conceptualization of woman abuse within the wider social context of male power and dominance (Dobash and Dobash 1979).

Many definitions of feminism exist; however, one that is amenable to this discussion defines feminism as “a set of theories about women’s oppression *and* a set of strategies for change” (Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988:502; original emphasis). Although there are several feminist theories on woman abuse, most contend that men abuse women to maintain their dominance within their intimate relationships (DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993b; Smith 1990; Saunders 1988; Dobash and Dobash 1979). In addition, numerous feminist theorists agree that the power differences between men and women within a patriarchal society perpetuate masculine dominance, and therefore male-to-female abuse (see Websdale and Chesney-Lind 1998; Hanmer 1996; Scully 1990).

Although there are several variants of feminist thought, three inform much of the male-to-female abuse literature: Radical Feminist theory, Marxist Feminism, and Socialist Feminist theory. These theories share some similarities but a key difference lies

¹⁷ See DeKeseredy and MacLeod (1997) for a succinct review of such individualistic theories of woman abuse.

¹⁸ The term *intimates* includes male friends, family, and (ex)partners. The focus of this research is male-female intimate coupling only.

in the conceptualization of which set of social relations (for example, gender, class, race/ethnicity) is most important to our understanding of woman abuse¹⁹. The radical feminist school of thought prioritizes gender as the most important set of social relations and views others (for example, class, race/ethnicity) as secondary (Beirne and Messerschmidt 1991). Within this framework, men abuse women because they feel a desire to and believe they have a right to control them. As Elias notes, “[w]omen who are criminally victimized do not just *happen* to be women. They are victimized *because* they are women...” (1993:124, as cited in DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1996; original emphasis).

Alternatively, Marxist feminism views economic relations as the key determinant of other social relations (for example, gender relations). Class divisions establish or structure male and female positions within society, sustaining male dominance over females, hence creating an environment conducive to the male abuse of females. A commonly cited Marxist feminist analysis of rape has been provided by Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1983) who contend that capitalist²⁰ societies have the highest rates of rape due to the unequal relations between men and women, “...the exploitative modes of production that have culminated in the formation of class societies have either produced or intensified sexual inequality and violence” (178-179).

The third perspective, socialist feminism, is often described as a combination of the aforementioned theories. Both capitalism and patriarchy are key variables, however, neither is prioritized. “To understand class...we must recognize how it is structured by gender; conversely, to understand gender requires an examination of how it is structured by class” (Beirne and Messerschmidt 1991:520). Furthermore, gender, class, and

¹⁹ See DeKeseredy and MacLeod (1997) for a detailed review of these theories.

²⁰ From DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991:4), “[c]apitalism refers to a political economic system that is based on the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class which owns and controls the means of production (e.g. factories, companies, financial corporations, etc.”.

race/ethnicity are conceptualized as being socially constructed according to power relations (Danner 1996). Within the current study, male-to-female abuse as an extension of male power, privilege, and control over women is explored.

The concept of patriarchy²¹ is important to any discussion of male power and dominance over females. Several early radical feminist theories on violence against women have focused on patriarchy as the sole explanatory of violence against women (MacKinnon 1983; Brownmiller 1975; Griffen 1971). The focus on patriarchy by past feminist theorists has been successful in illustrating the various ways that male dominance presents itself through social institutions (for example, the family, legal system). However, sole reliance on patriarchy as an explanation of male-to-female abuse has often left the image of patriarchy as being something unchangeable whereby women have no power to resist the dominance of men (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). This ignores the areas in which women have been powerful and influential regardless of male dominance. Exclusive emphasis on patriarchy also suggests that *all* men benefit equally, presenting the male gender as a unified group sharing equal power and dominance.

The assumption that all men are the same in a capitalist patriarchal society denies the fact that all men do not have equal access to power, nor are all men provided equal opportunity (Messerschmidt 1993). Simply put, although men benefit from this position of dominance over women within a patriarchal society, not *all* men benefit equally, nor are all men accorded equal positions of power. There are also economic relations within our society that variously shape one's access to power and resources.

Socialist feminists argue that it is important not to place gender relations secondary to production relations (Messerschmidt 1986; Hartmann 1981; Eisenstein

²¹ *Patriarchy* has various definitions; however, I draw upon Eisenstein's (1980:16) definition: "a sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege."

1979). Rather, contemporary western societies should be conceptualized “as a composite of two equally important and discrete systems, patriarchy and capitalism, in which neither prevailed over the other” (Messerschmidt 1993:54). This “double vision” (Kelly 1979) acknowledges that our experiences are shaped by both class and gender relations.

Within patriarchal capitalism, individuals are affected structurally by their class and gender position in interaction. Social behaviour is socially regulated. Individuals are enmeshed in class and gender structures that organize the way people think about their circumstances and devise solutions to act upon them. Gender and class shape one’s possibilities...Males in all social classes are powerful since men have power over women. Their powerful position allows some men to engage in crimes specifically as men to maintain their dominant position. Primarily directed at women and children, crimes such as rape and wife-beating are forms of domination and control of the powerless (Messerschmidt 1986:41-45).

It is suggested that the interaction of both patriarchal and capitalist social relations give rise to two primary groups: the powerful, predominantly consisting of men and members of the capitalist class²², and the relatively powerless, consisting of women and members of the working-class²³. Socialist feminists contend that in western, post-industrialized societies, male-to-female abuse is rooted within social relations (gender and class) of inequality between men and women.

Patriarchal social order revolves around the doctrine of male privilege. Within our current form of patriarchy in Canada, men are accorded dominance and power over women in various realms including domestic, economic, and sexual. However, within

²² According to Clement (1990), the capitalists are defined as those who employ on a regular basis three or more people or who command the means of production concerning the number of persons employed, the products made, their amount, methods of production, budget or distribution, with binding decision-making authority either themselves or as voting members of a group.

²³ The working-class, as defined by Clement (1990), has an absence of command over the means of production, labour power of others, or their own means of realizing labour.

Canadian society, it is evident that power is not equally distributed, not only between men and women but also *among* men. Some groups of men have more authority, hence more power than other men (Forcese 1997; Connell 1987). Patriarchal capitalist society maintains a hierarchy among men which privileges a specific form of masculinity providing those who embrace such a form with more power.

Although woman abuse occurs across all sectors of society, research has indicated that women living under conditions of economic strain are more at risk to experience intimate violence (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2002; DeKeseredy et al. 1999; Holzman and Piper 1998). Recent Canadian work by DeKeseredy et al. (1999), shows that the displacement of working-class men and women results in an inability to provide for their families. For men in particular, this economic strain may cause stress for the individual as he is not able to live up to his "masculine role" as breadwinner. This can contribute to the creation of an environment of increased risk of intimate violence for economically disadvantaged women. The differing levels of power in terms of gender and class relations and the struggle to establish oneself in this hierarchy offers much to our understanding of male-to-female abuse.

Section Two: The Incorporation of Masculinities Literature to Our Understanding of Male-to-Female Abuse

Theories discussing masculinity and femininity have historically relied on the biological differences between men and women (Harway et al. 1999; Katz and Marsh 1985). The dichotomous ideology created through primary reliance on biology does not allow for the study of differences that exist between men (as the focus of this study). Gender norms are social facts shaped by agents of socialization (Connell 1995:23); therefore, the role that social relations and interactions play in the development of masculinity and femininity must be acknowledged. The sociology of masculinities attempts to understand the construction of masculinity in everyday life, acknowledging

the importance of economic and institutional structures and the significance of different *masculinities* (Connell 1995; Morgan 1992).

The theoretical starting point of the sociology of masculinities is that gender is not fixed but is ever-changing. Gender is constructed in interaction and continues to be reconstructed in social practice, as a result, "...[t]hese relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on" (Connell 1995:37). The sociology of masculinities recognizes that men are positioned differently in society and that they share the construction of masculinity particular to their position in society (Messerschmidt 1993). Therefore, masculinity is a way of "doing gender" in a culturally specific way. To illustrate, Totten (2000) contends that marginal male youth with limited opportunities attempt to declare their masculinity through the degradation of homosexuality, including physical violence including "gay bashing."

The sociology of masculinities literature builds upon the assumption that gender is not a given but rather, socially constructed. It is said that we live in "rape-prone"²⁴ cultures (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Sanday 1990; Segal 1990), implying that larger patriarchal structures in society affect the socialization patterns of both men and women. We also live in a capitalist society which simultaneously affects socialization patterns. These theoretical insights can be incorporated to advance our understanding of male-to-female youth dating abuse.

Approaching gender in a manner reflective of West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is conceptualized as "situated accomplishment ...the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions, attitudes, and activities appropriate to one's

²⁴ A rape-prone society is one that "...accepts sexual violence and the fear of violence *as the norm*. It is a society that, knowingly or not, perpetuates models of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality that foster aggression, violence, and fear" (Buchwald et al. 1993:v, original emphasis).

sex category” (127). Thus, masculinity²⁵ as a form of gender, is best understood as a way of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) in a culturally specific way. In different social settings men’s actions are constructed in relation to how they might be interpreted by others, introducing the concept of *various forms of masculinities*. In this sense, masculinities are never static but are dynamic, continually being constructed and reconstructed. “To be a man is to participate in social life as a man...Men are not born; they are made. And men make themselves, actively constructing their masculinities within a social and historical context” (Kimmel and Messner 1992:8). Men are concerned with presenting an image of themselves as men within their social networks and the notion of what it means to be a “man” changes in different contexts. However, not all forms of masculinity receive equal acknowledgment, support, or privilege.

“Hegemonic masculinity²⁶” (Connell 1995) denotes the dominant form of masculinity within a *given historical setting*²⁷. Hegemonic masculinity “embodies a culturally accepted strategy,” (Connell 1995:77) therefore, telling us much about the dynamics of our current social order. In North America, current patterns of hegemonic masculinity commonly include the subordination of women, the marginalization of gay men via the focus on normative heterosexuality, and the connection of masculinity to aggression, competitiveness, and violence (Connell 1993; Messerschmidt 1993; Coleman

²⁵ The focus in this study is on masculinity only, hence the omission and lack of reference to femininity.

²⁶ Connell (1987:184) describes hegemonic masculinity as “a form of masculinity that is embedded in religious doctrine and practices, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies, and so forth.”

²⁷ The emphasis on “in a given historical setting” introduces the fluid (changing) nature of masculinity: hegemonic masculinity is not fixed and is always contestable. For example, hegemonic masculinity today rejects homosexuality whereas in certain historical periods homosexual activity was the highest form of love (i.e., Spartan society).

1990; Segal 1990; Liddle 1989)²⁸. Further, hegemonic masculinity encourages the *sexual domination* of women by men, supports the *sexual objectification* of women, and supports men's uncontrollable *heterosexuality* resulting in a “‘naturally’ coercive ‘male’ sexuality” (Messerschmidt 1993:75). Homosexuality and anything feminine are defined as unmasculine and therefore deemed powerless and often despised. If men can prove themselves to be *heterosexual* they will have succeeded in presenting themselves as men. In other words, *heterosexuality* is deemed normative and becomes a fundamental indication of one's “maleness.”

Hegemonic ideals and practices are learned through various agents of socialization; different social institutions (for example, the family, education system²⁹) provide guidelines as to how to act and, in turn, we internalize various gender roles. Emphasizing the internalization of the gender role encourages change as it defies a biological and constant nature of gender; thereby introducing the idea that different people conceptualize gender in different ways, as there are various forms of masculinities and femininities. Gender role norms are social facts shaped by agents of socialization (Connell 1995:23); therefore, the role that social relations and interactions play in the

²⁸ Many authors suggest that there is a hierarchy in the social structure of sexuality (Messerschmidt 1993; Connell 1987). As sexuality is a product of human agency, certain sexual practices have been restricted, resulting in a hierarchy of “sexual value.” Within this hierarchy, marital reproductive heterosexuals are prioritized, while other “subordinate” sexualities are relegated to lower positions (i.e., women, gay men, lesbians). Through this hierarchy, heterosexuality, as the dominant form of sexuality, becomes a fundamental indication of maleness while other sexualities are deemed inferior (i.e., homosexuality).

²⁹ For example, work by Connell (1996) indicates that the education system is a primary agent of socialization in the practices of hegemonic masculinity. Recent work in the area of sport has also illustrated that boys are taught many of the practices of hegemonic masculinity through their association with all male sports teams. For more discussion on how hegemonic masculinity ideals are learned through various sports groups see Messner and Sabo (1990) and Fine (1987).

development of masculinities (as the focus of this study) must be acknowledged. In this sense, masculinities are never static but are ever changing, continually being constructed and reconstructed.

“Doing masculinity” is a response to the social situations that men interact with which are affected by patriarchal and capitalist structures. Men experience their everyday world from a specific position in society, and they construct their ideals of hegemonic masculinity in accordance to their position. Hence, “[m]asculinity must be viewed as structured action - what men do under specific constraints depending upon one’s class, race and sexual preference” (Messerschmidt 1993:81).

There has been increased focus on the male peer group as a key agent in the socialization of the dominant form of hegemonic masculinity that emphasizes male dominance and female passivity (Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; Sanday 1990). In fact, this body of research suggests that the male peer group can play an important role in the creation of an environment that is conducive to the male victimization of females. A review of male peer support theories illustrates this relationship.

Section Three: Male Peer Support Theories³⁰

There are three major male peer support theories that inform the current study: 1) Kanin’s Reference Group Theory (1967); 2) Bowker’s Standards of Gratification Theory (1983); and, 3) DeKeseredy and Schwartz’s Modified Male Peer Support Theory (1993). Each one is briefly reviewed below.

1) Kanin’s Reference Group Theory (1967)

One of the first sociologists to study the effect of male reference groups on sexual aggression among college students was Eugene Kanin (Kanin 1985, 1967). Kanin

³⁰ For an extensive review of the major male peer support theories, see Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997).

contends that by the time men get to college they have already been trained in high school to view women as sexual objects and to use them to satisfy their sexual desires.

The orientation to sexually exploit was acquired at a previous period - high school or perhaps earlier - and the choice of sympathetic membership groups at college largely represents a *selective* attempt to *sustain* and receive *support* for the earlier acquired values (Kanin 1967:501, original emphasis).

As a result, many college men may simply choose groups with similar sexist beliefs and attitudes. For example, those who join fraternities that support the sexual exploitation of women may already believe in their “right” to exploit females.

Kanin suggests that heterosexual activity has a “masculine validating function” (1967:497) as prestige and maturity were associated with sexual behavior. There are some “hypererotic” groups, such as fraternities and athletic clubs that stress high levels of sexual activity and some may assume that the other members are obtaining these goals. Therefore, when members of the group are not able to achieve these unrealistic goals, some men may experience frustration caused by their reference-group anchored sex drive. This feeling of inadequacy is caused in part from belief in the normative heterosexuality that asserts that “real men” achieve a high level of sexual satisfaction. Dissatisfaction with their sexual endeavors can lead to male-to-female violence in an attempt to achieve the group’s “realistic” sexual conquest levels.

Of key importance to Kanin’s (1985, 1967) theory is the assertion that sexually aggressive behaviour was not recently acquired at college/university age, but rather was a product of prior learning and socialization during younger ages. He further suggests that aggressive males gravitate to groups whose values are compatible with their own. New groups were also formed which “serve to embellish old values, provide new vocabularies of motive, modify old norms, and provide new norms” (Kanin 1967:501). However, Kanin’s theoretical assertions are hypothetical rather than based on empirical data as his studies were limited to university/college males; Kanin did not explore these peer group

dynamics among younger males.

2) *Bowker's Standards of Gratification Theory (1983)*

In Bowker's (1983) standards of gratification theory, a different form of frustration is related to male-to-female abuse. He asserts that there are standards of gratification dictating that men should dominate their wives and children, which are learned through childhood experience (for example, their fathers' domination in the family). When these standards are challenged, a man may experience stress to which he might react in rage. The reaction of rage is designed to re-establish his control, thereby allowing him to obtain his "standards of gratification" as he has defined them. These standards of gratification can facilitate the use of male violence against females and Bowker suggests that various male peer groups can encourage the obtainment of standards of gratification through dominance. He refers to this as a patriarchal subculture of violence and contends that the more a man is integrated with other men who believe in male dominance, the more likely he will be to abuse his wife. The male peer group is conceptualized as a key agent in the socialization of men and members of this subculture of violence play a dual role: 1) they can provide support for the standards of gratification dictating male dominance over females; and, 2) they can provide justification for the use of violence in order to maintain that position of male dominance.

This can be related to female abuse in dating when the dominance of the male partner is threatened or if his sexual desires or expectations are not being satisfied. In such a situation he may react with violence to regain the dominance he feels is his "right." If his male peer group supports the use of violence, the likelihood of him using violence to achieve this dominance is increased as well.

While this theory has proven to be very influential, it is not without limitations. First, the theory is somewhat speculative and is based on research conducted with wives of men who are abusive; Bowker did not include abusive husbands in his methodology.

In light of this, Bowker's research illustrates that "the frequency and severity of wife beating is positively associated with wives' reports of their husbands' contacts with their male friends" (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997:38). Second, Bowker presents male peer support as a constant rather than a variable. The theory contends that *all* men are affected equally within a patriarchal capitalist society; it is incorrect to assume that these dynamics will be the same across class, ethnic/race lines (Schwartz 1988). The current study addresses these limitations by exploring the perspectives of socially displaced male youth to better understand the dynamics of such a subculture of violence.

3) *DeKeseredy and Schwartz's Modified Male Peer Support Model (1993)*

DeKeseredy's (1988) male peer support model attempts to explain how social interactions with certain male peers are associated with various forms of female victimization in male-female dating relationships. The definition of *male peer support* is twofold: first, it refers to the actual attachment to male peers, and second, it refers to the resources (for example, verbal, emotional support) these male peers provide that encourage and perpetuate the use of male violence in intimate relationships (DeKeseredy 1990).

Male peer support theory stems from social support theory. Its theoretical roots lead to Durkheim's (1951) work on group integration and social bonds. Durkheim proposed that people who are better integrated in society would have more of a conformist attitude as they have more at stake, hence, more to lose. Social integration therefore has a strong influence on the individual's behaviour. Another theory that informs male peer support theory is Mead's (1934) perspective, which states that the mind and self are developed in terms of interaction with other people. The relevance of both these aspects is realized in the male peer group as social integration and the group experience have definite consequences at both the individual and the societal level.

Male peer support theory argues that in rape-prone societies, some male peer

groups provide support for the use of male-to-female violence, thus generating, or perhaps reinforcing, pro-abuse ideologies in some males. Contrary to popular myths concerning the romantic and erotic nature of male-to-female dating relationships, many men find these interactions marked by varying levels of conflict and some men experience considerable stress when their partners reject or fail to live up to their ideals (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Kanin 1985, 1967). Some of these men turn to male peers for guidance when they encounter this relationship stress. Peer groups often provide members with resources such as social companionship, guidance, financial assistance, and emotional support. Simultaneously, male alliances directly and indirectly supply men with a repertoire of norms and behaviours that shape their interactions with women. Often hidden in these interactions are values and techniques that mold or dictate what is appropriate conduct in dealing with the opposite sex. This supports the social learning perspective that suggests that deviant behaviour (such as the victimization of women) is learned in the same way that conforming behaviour is learned (Sutherland and Cressey 1960). Male-to-female abuse is partially learned through social interaction with others who support the use of such violence.

Unlike the previous two theories, DeKeseredy (1988) obtained some empirical evidence for his claims (following the creation of the theory) and developed the Male Peer Support model which was later modified by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993) to include broader societal forces and other factors; for example, membership in social groups and heavy alcohol use. The modified male peer support model³¹ takes as its focus the relationship stress that occurs when sexual problems arise or when the authority that patriarchal society led the male to believe he should embody is challenged (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). It is suggested that the male peer group can provide justifications for

³¹ Although components of the male peer support model have been empirically supported, the model in its entirety has not yet been tested.

and legitimize the use of aggression when relationship problems arise (for example, non-willing sexual participants).

The modified male peer support model adds four new factors to its framework to account for more of the variables related to woman abuse by men. The inclusions were attempts to make the theoretical model better reflect the larger societal influences of aggressive behaviour among college/university males. The four factors included ideologies of familial and courtship patriarchy, alcohol consumption, membership in formal social groups, and the absence of deterrence. A brief overview of the model is presented.

The first addition, the ideology of familial patriarchy, reflects the recognition that “behaviours are micro social expressions of broader societal forces” (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997:47). We live in a patriarchal society and this undoubtedly has implications for the dynamics of intimate relationships between males and females. There are two components of patriarchy: a *structural* component which denotes a hierarchical organization that associates males with higher levels of power and prestige than women, and an *ideology* that provides the rationale for the hierarchy (Smith 1990; Messerschmidt 1986). Many find it useful to make a distinction between social patriarchy and familial patriarchy. *Social* patriarchy refers to male dominance at a societal level, whereas *familial* patriarchy refers to male power and dominance within domestic or intimate settings (Ursel 1986; Eisenstein 1980).

Woman abuse research demonstrates that men who adhere to an ideology of familial patriarchy are more likely to abuse their wives than those who do not (Sinclair 1996; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; Smith 1990). However, research also shows that there is a class basis to the likelihood of acceptance of such attitudes and beliefs; low-income males are more likely to espouse such an ideology, and are hence more likely to physically assault their wives than are middle-class men (DeKeseredy et al. 1999; Lupri

1990; Smith 1990, 1989, 1986; Kennedy and Dutton 1989; Stets and Straus 1989; Schwartz 1988; Straus et al. 1981; Schulman 1979). Research among college/university students has similarly demonstrated that attitudes supportive of familial patriarchy are linked to dating abuse (DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993b; Fallingstad et al. 1988; Stets and Pirog-Good 1987). At present we are unsure if a similar connection between familial patriarchal ideology and woman abuse exists among male youth. However, research indicates that a similar relationship might exist. As Mercer (1988:16) states:

Adolescence is clearly not a period when young people reject the traditional gender roles for which they have been groomed. It is characteristically a time when they act them out - sometimes to their worst extremes. The alarming revelations about this process testify to the grave personal implications that male power has for females long before they become adults.

Other researchers have also noted adolescence as a period of conformity to gender-specific roles (Prothrow-Stith 1991). The second component of this first addition, a system of male dominance over women, is courtship patriarchy which simply acknowledges that ideals among dating couples are enacted differently than among married/co-habiting couples.

The second addition, alcohol consumption, plays a dual role. Drinking large quantities of alcohol is often associated with male peer support groups like fraternities and many men use alcohol as a social aid in finding intoxicated women who will be easy targets for sexual relations (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). Inebriated females are often viewed as “suitable targets” for sexual coercion as they are less able to fend-off potential attackers. Statistics indicate that women who are sexually assaulted are apt to go out drinking more frequently and also have higher alcohol intake levels than other women (Schwartz et al. 2001). In this sense, alcohol is used as a tool to assist their pursuit of sexual conquest; it is used to provide suitable targets to assault while also making the

victim less able to object³².

Membership in formal groups is the third addition to the model. This factor refers to the fact that men often receive support from their peers and other groups to which they belong. Although many things are learned in these groups, men may learn such things as a narrow conception of masculinity, the importance of group secrecy, and how to sexually objectify women. In this way, formal groups may provide justifications and legitimations for their mistreatment of women.

Last, there is the absence of punishment. It is suggested that rape is a high reward, low risk crime as many sexual assaults go unreported on campuses. Those cases that are reported often have a low probability of resulting in conviction. Within the university/college environment (the focus of much of the male peer support research) sexual assault often goes unpunished, or the punishments are rarely criminal or severe, offering further support for their use of sexual violence.

The modified male peer support model (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993) suggests that various factors, such as those described above, combine to create an environment where male-to-female abuse is acceptable and justified within certain male peer groups³³. The model takes as its focus the societal influences that are present on a college/university campus and has furthered our understanding of how college/university-aged male peer groups support and legitimize the use of male-to-female dating abuse within the campus environment.

Similar to other studies in this area, DeKeseredy (1988) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (1993) work has concentrated on samples of university/college students. Due

³² For a more comprehensive discussion of the relationship between alcohol consumption and the viewing of women as suitable targets for sexual assault, see Schwartz et al. (2001). The article discusses the applicability of the routine activities approach to sexual assault on the college campus.

³³ Discussion of the justification process will be expanded upon in the next section.

to this focus, little insight into the processes of male peer support prior to post-secondary entry is provided. Other recent Canadian work (Alvi et al. 2000) focuses on male peer support and adult woman abuse in public housing. Although DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1994) were able to establish that violence against females in the context of high school intimate relationships in Canada exists and that it persists into university/college dating, they did not have access to empirical data on male peer groups among high school males. Second, their research has focused on the middle-class male experience as the samples used are representative of those who are *privileged* to attain a higher level of education. As Wilson's (1996) work on the inner-city demonstrates, that is a privilege not often granted to working-class members of society.

Section Four: Theoretical Framework

A culmination of the theories presented in the previous three sections provides a base for this study of male peer support and male-to-female youth dating abuse. Dating abuse research has demonstrated that many youth relationships are characterized by male-to-female abuse (Coker et al. 2000; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1994; Jaffe et al. 1992; Mercer 1988). Current trends in this literature include the effects of dating violence on specific health risks of female victims (Silverman 2001; Wingood 2001); the relationship between witnessing family violence and perpetrating dating violence (Simons et al. 1998; Jackson 1997a; O'Keefe 1997; Roscoe and Callahan 1985); female perception of male-to-female dating violence (Jonson-Reid and Bivens 1999; Jezl et al. 1996); and, the relationship between alcohol use and male-to-female dating violence (Bergman 1992). To the best of my knowledge, however, very few qualitative studies with youth have explicitly explored male peer support as an explanatory dynamic. Nonetheless some studies have supported the need to explore this dynamic in more depth.

In one of the early studies on adolescents and sexual aggression, Ageton (1983) found that sexually assaultive male adolescents receive strong support from their male

peers for their behaviour. Employing a longitudinal methodology, Ageton (1983:99) found that 40% or more of the offenders in each year stated that their friends knew of the assault and that less than 20% of the friends in any year expressed any disapproval while one-quarter or less did not react in one way or another. This led her to conclude that “peer attitudes and behaviour strongly influence sexually aggressive behaviour” (1983:121). This assertion has been echoed by youth respondents who suggest that the influence of one’s peers played an important role in the emergence of dating violence (Jackson 1997a; Robitaille and Lavoie 1992). A Canadian study on students in Grades 7, 9, and 11, reports similar findings; males who had aggressive friends were more accepting of psychological and sexual dating violence (Price et al. 1999). Other investigations with aggressive male youth have shown support for the need to investigate further the role of male peers in the encouragement and/or justification of male-to-female youth dating abuse (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000; Jackson 1997a). However, the majority of these studies have focused on high school samples (excluding Messerschmidt (2000) and Totten (2000)), again, offering little insight on the experience of less-privileged youth.

This study represents the first Canadian, and quite possibly the first North American, qualitative study focusing explicitly on male peer support among socially displaced male youth. Informed by a perspective that acknowledges that masculinity is partially socially constructed, this study explores the dynamics of male peer support as a key explanatory factor in male-to-female youth dating abuse among a group of less-privileged males.

To reiterate, male peer support refers to refers to the actual attachment to male peers, and second, it refers to the resources these male peers provide that encourage and legitimize the abuse of women (DeKeseredy 1990). Review of recent work in the area of masculinities has suggested the introduction of a slight reconceptualization of the

attachment component of male peers support theory to reflect the assumption that most men are concerned with presenting an image of themselves as “masculine” for other men (e.g. Messerschmidt 2000, 1993 Connell 1996, 1995); this is often referred to as “accountability” (West and Zimmerman 1987). Our behaviour is held accountable to those we interact with as we are concerned with being identified socially as “male” or “female” (Messerschmidt 2000).

The concept of masculinity derives meaning only within a specified culture (Connell 1993). Male youth experience their daily lives from a specific position in society and construct their ideals of hegemonic masculinity accordingly. The peer group is an important component of youth culture; hence, peers play an integral role in the expression and confirmation of one’s masculinity. Studies have shown that the peer group is important to the construction of various masculinities among adolescent males (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000; Connell 1996). One’s peer group is often a critical element in the life of youth, providing a medium for feedback concerning how they gauge their own behaviour (Tyyskä 2001; Johnson 1996). Peer groups are drawn upon for support and they provide a forum for youth to demonstrate their identities. Although there are several positive influences of group membership, there are also negative aspects of such associations.

A peer group may play a role in encouraging and rationalizing the use of male violence against female dating partners by reinforcing attitudes that condone the use of such violence (Eme and Kavanaugh 1995; DeKeseredy 1988; Bowker 1983; Kanin 1967). In some male peer groups, the goal of high levels of sexual conquest is shared, and heterosexuality determines the “success” of a young man’s masculinity (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Newburn and Stanko 1994; Sanday 1990). By abstaining from sexual activity, or the “appropriate level” of sexual activity (as defined by the group), the males are severely threatening their masculinity as the group has defined it. Among the

socialization factors that foster gang-rape, many authors discuss a strong focus on male-only group activities with themes of competition and cooperation among members and misogynist cultural practices, such as songs and jokes glorifying sexual violence³⁴ (O'Sullivan 1998; Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989; Ehrhart and Sandler 1985). These components serve to keep women outside the group, therefore defining them as subordinate and emphasize both the sexual and violent elements of masculinity as defined by the group. If a male youth can demonstrate his adherence to the dominant form of masculinity adhered to or promoted by the group, he will have succeeded in presenting himself as a man as the group has defined.

Male-to-female abuse can also maintain and reinforce an alliance among the group strengthening the "masculine power" of the group members, feeding their sense of masculine superiority and dominance (Messerschmidt 1993; Sanday 1990). Through their use of violence against their female dating partner, they are accomplishing a form of masculinity defined as aggressive, dominating, and as "above" women, while simultaneously strengthening their image of masculine power within their male peer group. Therefore the concept of "attachment to other abusive males" must be conceptualized in terms that acknowledge the concern of male youth to demonstrate to other males their adherence to the dominant form of masculinity promoted by the peer group.

The second component of male peer support concerns the resources male peers can provide that encourage male-to-female abuse. Male peer support theory focuses on

³⁴ The fraternity song lyrics "Who can take a chain saw, shove it up your hole, mix it all together, make taco casserole?" and the rugby song lyrics, "Who can take a baby, spread its tiny thighs, fuck it up the ass til the blood squirts out its eyes?" (both sung to the tune of "The Candy Man") clearly illustrate the misogynist views of some male groups. The fraternity lyrics were located in the UCLA Phi Psi fraternity songbook (as cited in O'Sullivan 1998:108).

the relationship stress that occurs when problems arise in intimate relationships or when the authority that patriarchal society led the male to believe he should embody is challenged (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). A male experiencing this type of stress may turn to his male peers for advice. At times, this can result in advice that is supportive of the use of varying degrees of violence against the female dating partner (Schwartz and Nogrady 1996); for example, male peers may tell a male to use some form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence to “put the dating partner in her place.”

A male peer group that embraces its role of dominance and power over women, however, must also embrace alternative solutions to “save face” should a member fall short of the groups’ agreed upon expectations; for example, although not supportive of the continual use of violence to engage in certain activities, the group may support the use of violence in some situations. In order to justify violent behaviour, the group legitimizes the use of violence by suggesting that women should submit to male dominance and if they do not, they should be made to, whereby identifying some women (for example, dating partners who do not submit) as appropriate targets of violence. This process of legitimization allows the violent man to present himself as a “normal” man (Ellis and DeKeseredy 1996), while simultaneously receiving the support of his male peers. Male alliances help to shape how men interact with women, and, can at times, provide justification for the use of violence when relationship problems (for example, non-willing participants) develop (Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; Sanday 1990; Scully 1990; Kanin 1985, 1967). However, the ways in which the justifications of male-to-female violence are expressed and which ways are most likely to lead to male-to-female violence continues to be an area of discussion.

There is current debate regarding whether the support of male-to-female violence must be direct or indirect. Kanin (1967) argues that support for the use of male-to-female violence does not need to be expressed verbally. Rather he indicates that the groups most

likely “...stress the value of the erotic goal so the male will become physically aggressive at the point when it is apparent that the usual seductive approaches are not going to be productive” (as cited in Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997:497). More recent Canadian work however, has suggested that *explicit verbal* support for the use of violence by male peers is one of the most important predictors of whether a male is abusive in his own dating relationship (see Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; DeKeseredy 1988). The differing dynamics of direct and indirect peer support of male-to-female dating violence require further exploration.

Male peer support theory examines how social interaction with male peers and the resources they provide are associated with various forms of male-to-female victimization in dating relationships. It is argued that various factors work together to create an atmosphere where male-to-female violence is acceptable and justified within the male peer group. Similar to much research on violence against women, male peer support research has primarily concentrated on samples of university/college students (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; Sanday 1990; DeKeseredy 1988), naturally generating a focus on male groups on campus such as fraternities and sports teams (Crosset et al. 1996; Connell 1990; Messner and Sabo 1990; Smith 1983). However, findings indicate that it is likely that abusive ideologies exist in some men prior to college age (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1994; Sabo and Panepinto 1990; Sanday 1990; Kanin 1967). In other words, by the time many men get to college they may have already been trained in high school to treat women as sexual objects to be used to satisfy their needs (Kanin 1967).

Research by Price et al. (1999) and Jackson (1997a, 1997b) reports that males with physically and/or sexually abusive male friends were more accepting of psychological violence and males with sexually abusive friends were more accepting of

sexual violence³⁵. Messerschmidt (2000) and Totten (2000) also provide preliminary support for the influence of male peer support groups on the use of male-to-female dating abuse among marginalized youth. Several authors in the area of masculinities and sport similarly illustrate the existence of pro-abuse ideologies among younger males (Messner 1992, 1990; Sabo and Panepinto 1990; Fine 1987)³⁶. Through interaction with pro-abuse peer groups (sport related and otherwise), males are simultaneously learning that to be “female” is to be sexualized and socially lower than males, and to be “male” is to be aggressive and above females, supporting the sexual objectification of women and male superiority.

There is reason to suggest that male youth are concerned with how their male peers perceive them in respect to masculine status (Messerschmidt 2000; Johnson 1996; Cotterel 1992³⁷). Young men have developed various ideals concerning what it means to be male, as well as ways through which to confirm their masculine identity. There is also concern for how males can present themselves in terms of being sexually attractive to the opposite sex. Research has demonstrated that a large portion of anxiety experienced through adolescence concerns sexual attractiveness anxiety; “...fragile identities and egos are evolving, and both young women and men are looking for acceptance from their peers and from the opposite sex” (Johnson 1996:111). Messerschmidt (1993) has argued that men have access to different resources through which to “do” masculinity. Access to

³⁵ Interestingly, having physically abusive friends was not associated with greater acceptance of male physical abuse.

³⁶ Often the worst insult for a male player (regardless of age) is to be compared to a girl and punishment for losing a game is frequently misogynist in nature (Sabo and Panepinto 1990).

³⁷ Cotterel (1992) examined how peer attachment strengthens during adolescence in specific areas of functioning. A relationship between peer attachment and self-image was found among male youth.

these resources is limited/shaped by one's class, race, ethnicity, and sexual preference. Men "do" masculinity in ways that are reflective of the resources they have available to them. Differing access to resources within a capitalist patriarchal society helps to maintain a hierarchy of masculinity wherein certain masculinities (i.e., ethnic minorities, homosexuals) are subordinated or marginalized (Goodey 1997). The resources of less-privileged male youth will be different than more-privileged male youth.

A general increase in interest in aggression in Canada, particularly focusing on violent male-to-male youth crime (Hagan 1998; Sinclair and Boe 1998; Tanner 1996; O'Bireck 1996), has revealed themes of honour, pride, and protection of masculine identity (Baron and Hartnagel 1998; Hagan and McCarthy 1992; McLean 1998; Toch 1998; MacLeod 1995). Recent literature on male youth violence illustrates that conditions created by economic deprivation can lead to the creation of an aggressive environment, particularly if those individuals are socially isolated (Messerschmidt 2000; Baron and Hartnagel 1998; Hagedorn 1998; Bernard 1990). Within this environment there is a constant threat of violence, often centered on the boy's ability to display his physical toughness and fighting ability to preserve his pride and honour - his masculinity. To illustrate:

Gaining admission to a male peer group in a subculture of macho youths requires fighting your way in. A place in the pecking order is pugilistically promoted. You have to have "heart". Although victory is sought, it is more important to demonstrate courage and toughness through the willingness to fight (Mosher and Tompkins 1988:72).

In a study of inner-city male youth, MacLeod (1995) similarly found that the

Hallway Hangers can inhabit a subculture whose values receive a good deal of validation from the dominant culture: based on a valuation of machismo taken to the extreme, being tough, cool and defiant all derive from an overstated pride in masculinity. Lacking in nearly every category that defines success in America, the Hallway Hangers latch onto and inflate the one quality they still have: their masculinity (141).

Much of the research on male youth violence has neglected male-to-female violence, instead, focusing on the relationship between gang youth, male-to-male violence, and the earning of respect (i.e., Baron and Hartnagel 1998³⁸; MacLeod 1995³⁹). As suggested by Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995), this focus often does not acknowledge that, among less-privileged youth, “the street becomes a battleground and a theater dominated by young minority men doing gender” (158). There are some studies, however, that do examine the social construction of gender (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000).

Drawing on the life-histories of nine adolescent males⁴⁰, Messerschmidt (2000) problematizes gender and explores the use of violence as a resource for “doing masculinity” by working-class male youth. Sexual violence was embraced by several boys as a masculine resource that helped the youth feel like a “real man” (39).

³⁸ In their examination of street youth and crime, Baron and Hartnagel (1998) included robbery, aggravated assault, common assault and group fights as indicators of violent crime. Violence against women was not included.

³⁹ Although acknowledging that male violence is often directed at female dating partners, MacLeod (1995) limits his discussion to approximately one page. In the appendix he offers this insight:

Another element of the Hallway hangers’ subculture with which I had difficulty, however, was the blatant sexism. Involved tales of sexual conquest were relatively rare; Hallway Hangers generally didn’t discuss the intricacies of their sexual lives. Still, it was quite obvious that they saw the woman’s role in their relationships as purely instrumental. Women were stripped of all identity except for that bound up with their sexuality, and even that was severely restricted; the Hallway Hangers always spoke about their experience, never about their partners’ experiences. Women were reduced to the level of commodities, and the discussions in doorway #13 sometimes consisted of consumers exchanging information...Because of the discomfort these conversations caused me, I avoided or ignored them whenever possible. This was a serious mistake. An analysis of the gender relations of the Hallway Hangers would have been a valuable addition to the study... (MacLeod 1995:280).

⁴⁰ Messerschmidt (2000) drew upon three different groupings of working-class male adolescents: 1) sexual offenders; 2) assaultive boys; and, 3) nonviolent boys.

Similarities are also found in the research on masculinities, youth, and violence by Pollack (2000) and Totten (2000). The current study is similar in its exploration of how some male peer groups can promote masculine ideals that encourage and legitimate male-to-female abuse against dating partners. Similar links concerning masculine status may be found with male-to-female youth dating abuse. This form of abuse may be perpetuated and legitimized among some male peer groups as an alternative way to demonstrate masculinity: they are males *because* of their ability to dominate females.

Section Five: Research Questions

Key tenets from socialist feminism, masculinities, and male peer support theories inform the theoretical perspective of the current study. Conceptualizing gender as “situated accomplishment” (West and Zimmerman 1987), allowing for the understanding that there are several forms of masculinity, and acknowledging that the hegemonic form of masculinity within our current form of patriarchal capitalist society emphasizes male dominance and female passivity, the study is premised on the assertion that men do masculinity differently based on their access to masculine-validating resources and, at times, the male peer group can encourage male-to-female dating abuse as one such resource.

Previous research has established a relationship between male peer support and male-to-female dating abuse among adult males (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1994, 1993; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993b; DeKeseredy 1988; Alder 1985; Ageton 1983). This research illustrates that male peer groups can provide support for and encourage pro-abuse ideologies. The majority of male peer support research has been conducted with university/college respondents (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; Sanday 1990; DeKeseredy 1988), typically employing quantitative methodologies such as self-report and victimization questionnaires. This has generated three primary research gaps that are addressed in this

study: 1) although research has suggested that pro-abuse ideologies often begin before university/college (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1994; Sabo and Panepinto 1990; Fine 1987; Kanin 1967), we know little about how male peer support operates among male youth; 2) we know how male peer support operates among university/college men, but we know virtually nothing about male peer support processes among less-privileged males; and, 3) we are in need of rich, qualitative studies to explore the subtleties of male peer support dynamics. At the current time, these gaps have yet to be problematized within North American male peer support research. This study explores how the peer group, as an agent of socialization, provides a forum for the learning and reinforcement of male dominance over females (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1994; Messerschmidt 1994; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989; DeKeseredy 1988; Alder 1985; Kanin 1985, 1967; Ageton 1983) and how this is related to male-to-female dating abuse by socially displaced male youth. Based on the review of literature, two key research questions emerge:

1. *Do socially displaced male youth receive similar types of male peer support for male-to-female dating abuse as university/college males?*
2. *How do male peer support processes operate among socially displaced male youth?*

Chapter 3 provides a review of past methodological approaches with male-to-female youth dating abuse research, introduces the design of the study, and presents an introduction to the respondents.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The following chapter explores various methodological issues. First, the most common methods used to study male-to-female youth dating abuse are reviewed. Next, an overview of qualitative research is provided, introducing the chosen method for this study, followed by a detailed discussion of the interview process. In section four, the demographics of the respondents are presented to familiarize the reader with the cases that were studied. Section five describes my data analysis procedure and introduces the structure of subsequent chapters.

Section One: Review of Common Methods Used to Study Male-to-Female Youth Dating Abuse

Acknowledging that male-to-female dating abuse does not begin in adulthood, some small-scale surveys with high school students were conducted in North America (see Table 3.1). Estimated prevalence rates of male-to-female violence are wide ranging: sexual abuse 2.6-77%; physical abuse 11-18%; verbal abuse 17-45%; experienced a violent dating relationship 9-12%; and, experienced any form of abuse 29%. The broad range of reported levels can be partially explained through methodological differences or limitations. First, the definitions of the various forms of abuse differ from study to study. For example, Bergman (1992) asked about physical injury, being forced to engage in sexual behaviours, and verbal threats or abuse, whereas Mercer (1988) employed a questionnaire asking respondents to report all forms of abuse experienced.

Table 3.1: North American Research on Male-to-Female Youth Dating Abuse

Researcher(s)	Survey Location	Sample Description	Method	Female Prevalence Of Abuse Rates
Ageton (1983)	Probability sample of households, U.S. (1976)	1,494 adolescents (13 - 19 yrs)	Interviews Longitudinal	Sexual Abuse: 2.6% to 15% (a)
Henton et al. (1983)	5 Oregon high schools, U.S.	293 female 351 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	12% reported they were involved in a violent dating relationship (b)
Roscoe and Callahan (1985)	1 Midwestern high school, U.S.	108 female 96 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	10% had experienced physical violence in a dating relationship
O'Keefe et al. (1986)	1 California school district (c) U.S.	135 female 121 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	11% experienced violence including threats 8% experienced actual violence (d)
Mercer (1988)	4 Toronto, Canada high schools	217 female 87 male students	Self-administered questionnaire (e)	Physical Abuse: 11% ; Verbal Abuse: 17% ; Sexual Abuse: 20% (f)
Bergman (1992)	3 Midwestern high schools, U.S.	337 female 294 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	Sexual Abuse: 16% ; Physical Abuse: 16% ; the proportion rose to 25% reporting sexual or physical violence or both
Jaffe et al. (1992)	4 London, Canada high schools	358 female 379 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	Verbal Abuse: 24%
Davis et al. (1993)	American	Female and male students	Self-administered questionnaire	Been in a situation where a sexual contact was obtained through the use of force: 26% (g)
DeKeseredy and Kelly (1993a)	Canadian Universities/ Colleges	1,835 female 1,307 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	45% of women reported having been victims of some form of sexual coercion before graduating from high school
Sudermann and Jaffe (1993) (h)	2 London, Canada high schools	790 female 757 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	Verbal Abuse: 45% ; Physical Abuse: 14% ; Sexual Abuse: 14%
Gagné et al. (1994)	5 Quebec City private school classes, Canada	Grade 10 students	Self-administered questionnaire	Sexual Abuse: 33% (i)
Poitras and Lavoie (1995)	Public high school Quebec City, Canada	336 female 308 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	Sexual Abuse: 54%

Avery-Leaf et al. (1997)	Long Island New York, US	87 female 106 male students	Self-administered questionnaire	Physical victimization: 38%
Jonson-Reid and Bivens (1999)	California high schools	85 foster youth who were seniors or juniors	Self-administered questionnaire	Victim of Dating Violence: 37%
Coker et al. (2000)	South Carolina Grades 9 - 11	2,836 females 2,758 males	Self-administered questionnaire	Victim of Severe Dating Violence: 5.5% (Physically beat up by dating partner)
Jackson et al. (2000)	5 Auckland, New Zealand high schools	200 female 173 male (16-20yrs) (j)	Self-administered questionnaire	Emotionally Abusive Behaviour 82%; Unwanted Sexual Activity 77%; Physical Abuse 18%
Price et al. (2000)	New Brunswick, Canada, Grades: 7, 9, 11	812 females 886 males	Self-administered questionnaire	Psychological and/or Physical Abuse 22%; Sexual Abuse 19%; Any type of Abuse 29%
Silverman (2001)	Massachusetts, U.S. 9 th - 12 th grade females	1,977 females (1997) 2,186 females (1999)	Self-administered questionnaire	The following are incidence rates by a dating partner: Physically abused: 10% 1997, 9% 1999 Sexually assaulted: 4% 1997 and 1999 Both sexually and physically assaulted: 6% in 1997, 5% in 1999
Wingood (2001)	Black adolescent females	522 black female high school students	Self-administered questionnaire	18% reported dating violence (which was defined as ever having a physically abusive boyfriend)

- (a) The range reflects the longitudinal nature of the study. Different rates were found according to the age and the year studied.
- (b) The term *experience* is not fully defined by the authors therefore it is not possible to discern whether the respondent was an offender, victim or both.
- (c) Originally seven districts were to be sampled, however, six districts did not participate as "the topic was too personal, potentially controversial, or basically useless because remediation would be impossible" (page 465:1986)
- (d) Authors did not provide a sex break down for the victims.
- (e) A vignette strategy was used in this study.
- (f) Respondents were asked to report all forms of abuse received therefore the frequencies of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse are not necessarily mutually exclusive.
- (g) Interpretation of this finding is limited as the authors do not report on the different types of sexual experiences or strategies engaged in.
- (h) There is no way to determine the number of these respondents who were victims or offenders because they were not asked to provide such information. Rather, they were only asked to disclose having 'experienced' abuse.
- (i) Interpretation of the findings is limited as no distinctions between types of sexual contact were made.
- (j) Participants were drawn from 5 co-educational high schools selected for their commitment to violence prevention programs.

Relatedly, some studies did not provide clear definitions detailing what activities constituted each form of abuse; for example, Gagné et al. (1994) and Davis et al. (1993). Third, several studies are limited by a restriction that researchers could only ask questions about having experienced abuse⁴⁰; for example, Jaffe et al. (1992); Suderman and Jaffe (1993); Roscoe and Callahan (1985); and, Henton et al. (1983). While the findings from these studies are important, rates on what percent actually *experienced and/or perpetrated* dating violence are not available. Furthermore, one cannot differentiate whether the aggressor was using violence as a form of self-defence; for example, Coker et al. (2000). And last, some of the studies asked about combined forms of abuse (for example, Price et al. (2000) and Mercer (1988) making it difficult to provide exact rates of abuse. Although the lack of consensus along definitional lines makes comparison across studies difficult (Lewis and Fremouw 2001), it is clear that many youth dating relationships are characterized by male-to-female abuse.

One of the most common methods used in male youth and violence against women research is the self-administered questionnaire (see Table 3.1). The most commonly used questions in such questionnaires are primarily closed-ended (yes/no format), originating from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus and Gelles 1986), and

⁴⁰ School board officials placed these restrictions on the researchers. Restrictions such as these and the general lack of co-operation researchers are met with when attempting to study male-to-female dating violence in high school populations indicate potential reasons as to why this area continues to be under-studied. Restraints such as these have caused researchers to alter their methodologies, resulting in somewhat problematic findings.

The Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) (Koss et al. 1987)⁴¹. The limitations of the CTS have been widely debated elsewhere (see DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998b); however, a brief overview will illustrate the need to go beyond the use of the CTS and conduct qualitative research on male-to-female youth dating abuse.

A key limitation that often emerges when evaluating the CTS is that the context of violence is not measured⁴² (DeKeseredy 1995; Smith 1994; Bograd 1990). Much of the research using the CTS does not explore the context, motive, and meaning of the conflict tactic utilized. Therefore, studies using *only* the CTS merely provide incidence and prevalence rates. Some researchers have addressed this concern through the use of open-ended questions allowing respondents to express additional concerns and/or comments.

⁴¹ The CTS (Straus and Gelles 1986), asks male and female members of couples to describe the types of tactics they used when encountering conflict situations within their relationship. The tactics are categorized from minor (i.e. swearing at your partner) to major (i.e. using a gun or knife on your partner). The CTS categorizes items on a continuum from least to most severe, with the tactics least likely to be seen as socially undesirable presented first (Kennedy and Dutton 1989). The CTS has since been revised, the CTS2 (Straus et al. 1995), to address three of the main limitations: 1) the inclusion of more psychical and psychological abuse items, 2) the inclusion of seven types of sexual assault, and 3) injury or physical outcome measures to assess the degree of physical injury. The most publicized use of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) was in a *Ms. Magazine* Campus Project on Sexual Assault in 1985 (the SES has since been revised), in which thousands of female students across the United States completed a questionnaire on their experience with sexual victimization, focusing on coercion, threats of bodily harm, and taking advantage of women who, for various reasons, are unable to defend themselves (i.e. due to intoxication). The survey has since been used with males in respect to perpetration of sexual violence and has recently been revised.

⁴² As previously stated, the CTS has recently been revised (CTS2) to address some of the concerns, however, the research discussed in this study was based on information gained using the CTS.

DeKeseredy and Kelly (1993a) provide the following three questions⁴³ pertaining to motive, meanings, and context regarding the use of violence items:

On (the following) items, what percentage of these times overall do you estimate that in doing these actions you were primarily motivated by acting in self-defense, that is protecting yourself from immediate physical harm?

On (the following) items, what percentage of these times overall do you estimate that in doing these actions you were trying to fight back in a situation where you were not the first to use these or similar tactics?

On (the following) items, what percentage of these times overall do you estimate that you used these actions on your dating partners before they actually attacked you or threatened to attack you?

Findings from the above research highlight the importance of motive, meanings, and context. The results indicated that as the frequency of female victimization increased, so did the use of self-defense violence. Although women reported that they were violent in dating relationships, the majority of women did not initiate an attack (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998a).

The concern regarding the lack of exploration of context, meaning, and motive, relates to the potential use of the data pertaining to female use of violence against their male partners. The most common misrepresentation of CTS data is the use of the data to support the argument that relationship violence is “sexually symmetrical” (Dobash et al. 1992), suggesting that men and women are equal aggressors in intimate relationships. The evidence of women’s use of violence in relationships gained through the CTS has often been used to promote this argument (e.g. Fekete1994). However, using data in such

⁴³ These are modified versions of questions developed by Saunders (1986).

a way has not gone without challenge (for example, Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

Without probing the circumstances surrounding female use of violence in relationships, it is not possible to determine the reason for their use of violence such as self-defense or retaliation (see DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998a and 1998b for more discussion).

The second criticism of the CTS can also be addressed through the use of open-ended, qualitative questions, and/or interviews (e.g. Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1998a; Smith 1994). The CTS (Straus and Gelles 1986) asks males and females to describe the tactics they have used to resolve problems within their intimate relationships. However, many physically, emotionally, and verbally abusive acts that males inflict on females are excluded (for example, burning, suffocating). As well, more covert forms of violence such as control (for example, male control over female actions/behaviours) are difficult to detect through questionnaires such as those that use the CTS because the preamble does not include control-instigated violence. This results in the exclusion of those acts of violence stemming from non-conflict situations, and, as DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998b:3) suggest:

It may miss attacks that 'come out of the blue' with no external reason or dispute to mediate. These attacks, whether physical or verbal violence, may be as or more highly injurious as those that stem from conflicts or disputes. The CTS, although it may accurately count numbers of blows struck, overlooks the broader social psychological and social forces (e.g. patriarchy) that motivate men to abuse their female partners.

As well, some tactics may not appear to suggest violence but if the behaviour is being used in such a way as to induce fear in the woman, female compliance, or male control over the woman, then the action should be recognized as a form of violence. It is

difficult to conceive all such instances and place them on a questionnaire. Within a qualitative study, the respondent is given free range to express him/herself and, in such an environment, often talks of various forms of control that would not typically be included on a questionnaire. As the name suggests, the CTS is interested in *conflict tactics*; that is, tactics that are used in times of conflict. However, situations of conflict are not always the reason for the use of male-to-female dating abuse. Situations of conflict infer that both partners are a part of the incident leading to violence (McGregor 1990) whereas male violence is often used as a means to punish a female partner (Jackson 1999). Hence, there is a need to contextualize the use of male-to-female dating abuse.

A third limitation of the CTS (Straus and Gelles 1986) is its inability to measure sexual violence⁴⁴. This limitation has been overcome by some authors through the inclusion of questions from the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) (Koss et al. 1987) (i.e. Totten 2000; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a, 1993b). A primary advantage of the SES (Koss et al. 1987) is its reference to coercive sexual experiences without labeling them as “rape.” This is important as many men, as well as women, have a narrow definition of what constitutes “rape” or “sexual assault” (Sanday 1990; Scully 1990), potentially leading to the exclusion of many sexual behaviours *legally* defined as sexual offences.

A final methodological criticism of the body of research on male-to-female youth dating abuse concerns the samples used in the research; the majority of studies on this

⁴⁴ The CTS2 has incorporated a supplementary Sexual Coercion scale, however the research referred to in this discussion was conducted prior to the modifications of the CTS.

topic have drawn upon samples of high school students (see Table 3.1). An exception is Jonson-Reid and Bivens' (1999) work on California youth in foster care. However, the respondents were still drawn from a sample of high school classes. Ageton (1983) provides a more representative sample by using a national sample of adolescents. As Table 3.1 illustrates, however, the remaining research focused solely on high school student samples. While this research provides valuable information pertaining to the prevalence of male-to-female abuse in dating relationships among high school students, it does not provide any information on youth who are not represented in such a sample; for example, those youth who are not currently attending school. As will be discussed later in this chapter, almost half of the respondents in my study were not actively participating in school. Within the dating violence literature in general, the perspectives of economically marginalized males are significantly omitted⁴⁵ (Jackson 1999; O'Keefe 1997). The current study provides insight into another group of male youth who are often missed in typical sampling procedures. The demographics provided later in this chapter, suggest that the respondents in my study can be described as representing male youth who are at risk in terms of low educational attainment, low economic prospects, and who are socially displaced from many of the societal benefits including economic stability, education, and social capital; benefits that a group of high school students might be exposed to.

⁴⁵ Dating violence research among adult males has typically focused on college/university respondents and dating violence research among male youth has concentrated on high school respondents.

Currently there is interest in determining whether male peer support is a constant or a variable. In other words, whether all men experience the dynamics of male peer support equally regardless of their social status (economically, socially). Although it may be appealing to suggest that male peer support is a “universal risk factor,” male peer support research has not problematized class differences (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998c:92)⁴⁶. Rather, the majority of male peer support research has concentrated on students at middle-class college campuses, thereby informing us of the dynamics among middle-class adult males. Research has demonstrated that some working-class men also adhere to patriarchal ideology that emphasizes male dominance over women (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2002; Lupri 1990; Smith 1990; Kennedy and Dutton 1989; Stets and Strauss 1989). As well, it has demonstrated a “patriarchal subculture of wife beaters” in which some lower-class men participate in the socialization of peers regarding the ideology of male dominance (Bowker 1983; Smith 1990). However, there has been limited empirical research on the dynamics of pro-abuse ideologies among less-privileged adult men (Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995) or male adolescents (Messerschmidt 2000; Totten 2000). We know relatively little about the dynamics of male-to-female youth dating abuse among under-privileged youth; this study addresses this lack via its focus on male young offenders.

There have been a limited number of studies on male-to-female youth dating abuse. Those that have been completed show a focus on incidence and prevalence rates.

⁴⁶ There is, however, new Canadian research on woman abuse in public housing that

The brief review presented illustrates some methodological trends: the use of the self-administered questionnaire comprised of CTS (Straus and Gelles 1986) and SES (Koss et al. 1987) questions, an overall lack of contextualization of the use of male-to-female dating abuse, and a focus on high school students. I share the concern of Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) who state that an exclusionary approach (using primarily the CTS (Straus and Gelles 1986) and SES (Koss et al. 1987) scales) creates “methodological parochialism” as it ignores other effective means of obtaining rich data. This concern can be expanded to include the over-use of the self-administered questionnaire in male-to-female dating abuse research.

This concern characterizes the state of affairs with male-to-female youth dating abuse - we are in need of qualitative studies on male peer support and male-to-female dating abuse among youth. There is a need to examine male peer support in relation to male-to-female dating abuse among younger males. Although quantitative methods provide valuable information on male peer support and its relation to the victimization of females, there is an absence of in-depth data on the dynamics of this key explanatory factor.

Studies that explore how peer support is offered to males and how this support can encourage and/or legitimate male violence against women are necessary. An examination of the social exchanges between the male respondents and their male peer groups will provide an opportunity to explore these dynamics. For example, using an

addresses this limitation (see DeKeseredy et al. in press and Alvi et al. 2000).

ethnographic approach to her research on male peer group dynamics in British pubs, Whitehead (1976) related the exchange of sexist jokes to the victimization of women. Similarly, through extensive interviews with male fraternity members, Sanday (1990) found that sexist discourse was a key factor related to the abuse of women. Qualitative interviews on male peer support dynamics will shed new light on situations and practices that the respondents engage in that encourage male “dominance bonding” (Farr 1988) at the exclusion and expense of females. DeKeseredy and Schwartz’s (1998c:90) assessment of the need for qualitative methods in studies on college/university dating abuse is equally valid in terms of male-to-female youth dating abuse:

Male students are exposed to a variety of discourses and behaviours; to accurately discern and translate how they foster woman abuse in secondary school dating, researchers should attempt to “merge into” all-male cultures (Ellen 1984).

As well, in-depth interviews with respondents on sensitive issues (such as male-to-female dating abuse) are invaluable as they allow the researcher to gain a more intimate understanding of the perspective of the respondent and allow some of the direction to be provided by the respondent. It is for these reasons that a qualitative approach to my study was employed, thus filling the methodological gaps in male-to-female youth dating abuse and male peer support research.

Section Two: Qualitative Research

As briefly described in the previous section, there are certain advantages to using qualitative methods. The following section illustrates some of them.

Having its origins in the work of the Chicago school⁴⁷, qualitative research is a multi-disciplinary tradition that is suitable to the study of many different elements of social life (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:1). Although qualitative methods have often fought for a place of esteem alongside quantitative methods (Creswell 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Guba and Lincoln 1994; Levine 1993), sociology has typically been more welcoming, although American sociology continues to be dominated by quantitative work. It is important to note that while both traditions have their merits, the choice of method often reflects the questions that are pertinent to a particular study.

The differences between qualitative and quantitative research have been debated for several years and in varying contexts⁴⁸. These discussions often focus on the merits of each tradition, generally with neither side acknowledging the other. Qualitative research is generally distinguished from quantitative research in the following manner: qualitative research focuses on descriptions and explanations of behaviours and is not typically concerned with numerically measuring constructs, while quantitative research focuses on numerically measurable relationships. Qualitative research emphasizes "process and meaning that are not rigorously examined, or measured, if measured at all, in terms of

⁴⁷ The Chicago school is a term that was coined in the mid-twentieth century in reference to a group of sociology and criminology scholars at the University of Chicago. A predominant theme of the Chicago School is "that human behaviour is developed and changed by the social and physical environment of the person rather than simply by genetic structure" (Williams and McShane 1994:50). As such, the broader community was deemed to be a large influence on human behaviour.

⁴⁸ See Neuman and Wiegand (2000) for a more detailed discussion on such debates.

quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency" (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:3). Conversely, quantitative research seeks to quantify or reflect with numbers the relationships between variables of human behaviour. The focus is on measurement, the testing of hypotheses, and the statistical analysis of a large quantity of data. Quantitative research prides itself on large, representational samples, whereas qualitative research emphasizes the subjective components of the phenomena under study, resulting in a smaller number of cases. Hence, generalizability of the research can be more limited.

Qualitative research is founded on the belief that there are regularities that underlie and link phenomena together (Huberman and Miles 1994:429). As the name suggests, qualitative research is concerned with the "what, how, when and where of a thing - its essence and ambience" (Berg 1995:3). As a result, qualitative studies draw and expand on the meaning of concepts and definitional components. Qualitative methods are often used when the researcher seeks to understand how a particular group makes sense of its position in society, how it interprets relationships, and how it experiences its daily lives. Hence, research projects grounded within the qualitative tradition are typically known for their use of personal examples to illustrate relationships that sometimes go undetected in statistical analyses.

Through emphasizing detailed descriptions of social relations, an attempt is made to understand how participants experience and explain their own worlds. As such:

[Q]ualitative research...is carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of human and cultural social contexts, and is commonly guided by the ethic to remain loyal or true to the phenomena under study... (Altheide and Johnson 1994: 488).

The primary objective of qualitative research is to gain a deep and complex “understanding, *verstehen*, of a social situation, which takes into account the perspectives of those being observed” (Whyte 1984:335). Its emphasis is on describing existing patterns that help us to understand relationships (Mishler 1990) by allowing the perspectives of respondents to be incorporated. There are many methods amenable to a qualitative approach including ethnographies, field work, and interviewing⁴⁹. Further discussion of the qualitative interview, the chosen method in this study, will be provided.

1) *Qualitative Interviews*

To do justice to the complexity and richness of the human side of the story requires a level of understanding and distinction that questionnaire surveys are incapable of providing (MacLeod 1995:10).

The area of male-to-female youth dating abuse is characterized by a strong reliance on quantitative methodologies (Silverman 2001; Price et al. 2000; Poitras and Lavoie 1995; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; Sudermann and Jaffe 1993; Jaffe et al. 1992). The use of these methodologies has been instrumental in advancing our understanding of the pervasive and widespread nature of male-to-female youth dating abuse and in establishing male peer support as a key correlate of male-to-female dating violence among adult men (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; DeKeseredy 1988; Kanin 1987, 1967). However, it is now necessary to develop a more in-depth understanding of this correlate. To achieve a more intimate understanding of the dynamics of male peer

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of the various qualitative methodologies, see Babbie (1998, Chapter 11) and Lofland and Lofland (1995).

support, personal interviews were my method of choice.

Personal interviews enable researchers to clarify questions respondents might have, probe for more specific responses, and provide respondents with the opportunity to disclose additional information (Baker 1999; Hippensteele et al. 1993; Singleton et al. 1993). Open-ended interviews work to reduce the threat of sensitive questions allowing respondents to qualify their responses, and:

may reduce the power imbalance inherent in the interview situation (the relationship between researcher and researched parallels the hierarchical nature of traditional male-to-female relationships) because open questions encourage interaction and collaboration between interviewer and respondent. The less threatening the question and the more equal the power relationship, the greater the probability of rapport and, in turn, of eliciting an honest answer to a sensitive question on violence (Smith 1994:115).

Approaching the interview as an interactive process whereby the interviewer and participant shape the research, it is of utmost importance to integrate the participant's experience, as it is shared. It is also vital to use this information to guide the interview and to introduce relevant themes to explore (Babbie 1998:290). In qualitative research, the gathering of data is part of the information gathering process as one has to remain open to new directions that are presented in the interview because every respondent has a unique perspective. Therefore, this method calls for the interviewer to be well versed in the research topic and to understand the research objective so as to avoid going off subject. This method compliments the exploratory component of the study, allowing for the interview to become a lived experience, continually being constructed and reconstructed.

The focus of my study is the reality as the youth themselves understand it; my research grounded in their experiences. This approach recognizes the importance of including the voices of the experts in male violence - the aggressors themselves. It supports the need to comprehend and to reflect on the reality of the respondents as they have come to understand it - *their* reality. As Scully proposes, “[w]e understand that women and men live in separate phenomenological, if not physical, worlds, which means there are important gender differences in our social construction of reality” (1990:2). It is important to understand the social construction of a violent male youth through *his* eyes. Some of the richest work on male violence against women (Messerschmidt 2000; Sanday 1990; Scully 1990), as well as the body of male peer support research (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; DeKeseredy 1989; Whitehead 1976), has originated from studies focusing on male participants. When we exclude males from our research focus, we are attempting to understand why men abuse women from a female’s perspective. The following statement by Hotaling and Sugarman (1986:120) suggests their support for the inclusion of men in violence against women research:

While research on men’s violence toward women raises a number of complicated issues, it is sometimes forgotten that men’s violence is men’s behaviour. As such, it is not surprising that the more fruitful efforts to explain this behaviour have focused on male characteristics. What is surprising however, is the enormous effort to explain male behaviour by examining characteristics of women. It is hoped that future research will show more about the factors that promote violent male behaviour and that stronger theory will be developed to explain it.

Violent and non-violent men can tell us a great deal about the roots of male-to-female dating abuse. By including their perspectives in our frameworks, we will be

closer to understanding why some men engage in violence against women, what they achieve from doing so, and how some male peer groups support and encourage the use of male-to-female abuse. However, approaching my research from the male's perspective raises various gender-related issues.

Some important yet problematic aspects of this study stem from issues surrounding the concept of *gender*. One of the most significant concerns the gender of the interviewer and the gender of those who will be interviewed: an adult female interviewing male youth. Various authors have discussed the importance of gender in interviewing situations, most typically in studies of feminist and postmodern orientation (Fontana and Frey 1994; Gluck and Patai 1991; Stanfield 1985).

In the area of violence against women, an important strength of the interviewing process is its ability to evoke disclosure of abuse experienced by women at the hands of men. A current debate among qualitative researchers concerns the matching of interviewer to respondent in terms of sex, class, and race (see for example, Currie and MacLean 1997). Past research supports the use of a female interviewer in research exploring sexual interpretations of male respondents (Johnson et al. 1991; Kaplan et al. 1991; Scully 1990; Delamater 1974). One potential explanation for this relates to traditional gender roles. The traditional male gender role discourages emotional intimacy among men, whereas the traditional female gender script encourages a listener, comforter, and caring role. Using both a male and female interviewer, Scully (1990) repeatedly found that the convicted male rapists were more comfortable discussing topics of sexual

relations with a female interviewer. Similarly, in a study assessing comfort in talking about sexual issues, adolescent male respondents indicated preference for a female interviewer (Kaplan et al. 1991).

Some of the most insightful work on male peer support and patriarchal subcultures has been undertaken by female researchers (Canaan 1998, 1996; Stanko 1995; Segal 1990; Whitehead 1976). As was found in the current study (this will be discussed further in subsequent chapters), demonstrating commitment to the dominant form of masculinity promoted by the group was important to the respondents; this could partially explain the success in using a female interviewer. A female interviewer may be privy to a more revealing interview as she is not seen as a person the male must “be better than” in terms of masculinity - tough, non-emotional, and macho. A male interviewer may be regarded as a challenge or as someone to whom the respondent needs to prove he is a “man” to. However, this finding does not preclude the importance of creating rapport with the respondents during the interviews.

Rapport involves creating an environment wherein respondents feel comfortable and are encouraged to “talk back” (Blumer 1969:22), to discuss their own understanding of the world. The advantages of face-to-face interviews are many, including the ability to elicit a greater depth of response from an interviewee and allowing a respondent to provide her/his personal input. It is an interactive encounter between the interviewer and the respondent. As such, the interviewer must constantly be aware of how her/his reactions effect or influence the sharing of information. In this study, I was careful to be

non-judgmental in verbal and non-verbal reactions, creating an environment that encouraged respondents to share information regardless of my agreement. In other words, it was important to hear their opinions and perspectives without passing judgement. This is also essential in light of the lack of anonymity that characterizes face-to-face interviewing; there is no mask of anonymity as is offered in self-administered questionnaires. The ability to probe and solicit more information to facilitate a holistic understanding of the respondent's point of view and the ability to listen and to hear without passing judgement are imperative. It is the interviewer's responsibility to create an atmosphere wherein respondents are encouraged to express their own opinions and understanding of their lives.

One of the key determinants of a "successful" interview rests in the ability of the interviewer to encourage the respondent to talk with her/him. There are, unfortunately, no steadfast rules on how to achieve this. Every respondent is different in terms of what helps him⁵⁰ to feel comfortable talking about his experiences. However, there are some overall aspects that assisted in achieving a level of comfort.

When doing sensitive research, it is important to learn the perspectives of respondents and to design the project with those insights in mind (Sieber 1993). Over the past ten years, I have been actively involved in volunteer work with male young

⁵⁰ It should be noted that because all respondents were male in the current study, "he" will be used exclusively. The same overall "rules" apply for both male and female respondents in terms of establishing rapport; however, different ways of achieving rapport may arise depending on interviewer-respondent pairing.

offenders in both secure and open-custody facilities. This experience allowed me to observe their interaction in various settings: amongst themselves, with correctional officers/youth workers, family members, and girlfriends. I have met new young offenders on many occasions and have learned different techniques to “ease” our initial interaction. For example, I begin by asking the respondents questions (background, school, family life) and then give them the opportunity to ask the same of me, thus giving some of the power back to the individual, making the interaction more equal (Kirby and McKenna 1989). The same approach was followed in the interviews. After introducing myself and the study, the respondent was given the opportunity to ask me questions.

My interaction with male young offenders provided me with the chance to listen to their “lingo” and to note their appearances and mannerisms. This information helped me interact with them on “their” level and to be seen as someone they could trust and feel at ease with. As an open, genuinely interested, and honest person, I created a positive relationship in which the participant felt comfortable speaking openly with me, which is of utmost importance in a qualitative interview. Evidence of this positive rapport was demonstrated through the respondents’ sharing of intimate details of their lives with me; for example, details of prior abuse, future aspirations, and/or reflections on their lifestyles.

Several tactics were used to help to create a positive rapport between us. First, although often taken for granted, great care was taken in presenting myself in the manner of clothing that mirrored this group to some degree. Presentation of oneself is a

substantial issue in interviewing as the initial meeting has an influence on the respondents and on the overall success or failure of the interviewing encounter (Fontana and Frey 1994; Fontana 1977). Clothing similar to that of the respondents was chosen, typically consisting of jeans, t-shirt, sneakers with hair tied back. Prior to the official start of the interview, I typically engaged in some general conversation with the respondents. To help establish a connection between us, I also picked up on cues as to what interested each respondent and engaged in chatting with the respondent on non-study related issues (Douglas 1985; Berg and Glassner 1979). Before and throughout the interviews, we often discussed fishing, sports, and car racing. These were topics that came up regularly that helped to create a link between us.

Due to the nature of qualitative interviewing and its focus on understanding, the interviewer needs to establish trust with the respondents (Cicourel 1974). As the interviews were not taped, I wrote a great deal throughout the interview. Telling the respondents that I was going to be writing down everything they said, that I was not judging them while I wrote, and that I was not writing anything “bad” about the respondents, seemed to ease any potential anxiety. As well, suggesting that many of the respondents wondered about what I was writing appeared to normalize the action - I write a lot in *all* the interviews. Telling the respondents that they were free to read my notes after the interview to ensure I had written down what they had said accurately seemed to satisfy any remaining concerns⁵¹.

⁵¹ The option seemed to resolve any anxiety, however, when asked if they would like to

Section Three: The Interview Process

1) Logistics

Respondents were male young offenders⁵² at an Ontario Secure Custody Detention Centre⁵³. The interview phase lasted for two and a half months (March 02/00 - May 12/00). During that period, 64 male youth were processed through the unit. Thirty-six were interviewed for this study, resulting in a 56% coverage rate. All male young offenders were eligible to participate in the research with two exceptions. One individual was excluded as he was over 21 years of age⁵⁴ and one individual was excluded as he was part of a high-profile case. The first thirty-six youth willing to participate in the study were interviewed. Those offenders who were scheduled to leave the institution were given first opportunity to participate in the research.

do so, all respondents declined.

⁵² Under the 1984 Young Offenders Act, male young offenders in Canada include those male youth who at the time of offence commission are aged 12-17 (up to their 18th birthday) and have been charged with an offence under the Criminal Code of Canada. In the current research, male young offenders include those males who are 16 - 19 years of age.

⁵³ The secure young offender unit has a 27-bed capacity (although numbers in residence often exceed that) for youths charged with an offence under the *Canadian Criminal Code*. It houses youth awaiting bail, trial, transfer, or a review hearing. It also serves as a facility where open-custody young offenders are transferred to in the event of inappropriate behaviour. The average stay of residents is one month, with those residents receiving a long-term sentence (one month to three years) being transferred to a secure custody setting.

⁵⁴ According to Canadian Criminal law, the age at the time of the offence determines whether one will be charged as a young offender or as an adult. This individual was excluded from the current study as he would not be representative of those aged 16-19.

Although the first name of the respondent was known at the time of the interview (to enhance rapport), the name of the respondent was not recorded. Rather, each interview session was assigned an identification number ranging from 1-36. All interviews were conducted in English⁵⁵ by myself. Interviews were held at the secure-custody facility in one of three locations: the school room (5 interviews), the library (4 interviews), and the interview room (27 interviews)⁵⁶.

Interviews were scheduled around the programming that is offered in the unit⁵⁷. Typically, one interview was completed in the morning after breakfast and a second was completed after lunch and before recreation time. Two days a week were set aside for the interviews (2 interviews a day, 4 interviews per week). Although this schedule increased the length of time required for data collection, it proved to be most beneficial as it allowed a distancing from the material and sustained my energy level. As is characteristic of qualitative research, the interviewing sessions proved to be exhausting

⁵⁵ Providing the interviews only in English caused no problems as all of the respondents spoke English.

⁵⁶ The school room was the largest of the rooms and offered complete privacy as it was a separate room and the door could be shut. The library was not as large but presented more potential for interruption as it was located between the offices of the unit's psychologist and social worker. Although the doors to both offices were closed, there were the occasional people (staff, youth, visitors) walking through the area which caused a momentary interruption in the interview. Last, the interview room was a smaller room but proved to be ideal as it was closed off from the rest of the unit.

⁵⁷ It was important not to interrupt the daily routine within the institution, for both the respondents as well as for the staff. The interviews were scheduled around recreation time (a daily one-hour period of outdoor recreation) so the respondents did not miss this activity.

both emotionally and intellectually. The separation of interview sessions eased this tension considerably. In addition, the time span between the sessions allowed for ample time to make detailed transcriptions of each interview, ensuring a high level of accuracy.

As is often the case in studying social situations, a researcher finds her/himself dependent upon an organization. When working within an institution, problems typically arise that the researcher can not control. Two events precipitated minor problems in this area: (1) space within the institution was limited and on two occasions the interview location had to be changed in the midst of an interview⁵⁸; and, (2) interviews had to be delayed for one week in mid-April due to increased tension within the unit. However, these delays were minimal and caused little disruption in the interviewing process.

As pre-testing one's instrument is an important component of any research project (Chadwick et al. 1984), a multi-stage pre-test of the interview schedule was conducted. Prior to entering the field, several people reviewed the schedule and provided comments on the wording, clarity, and focus of the interview questions. The following people provided input at this stage: 1) Young Offender Psychologist at a Secure Custody facility (male, worked in this capacity with young offenders for thirteen years); 2) Dr. DeKeseredy (male, thesis advisor familiar with the theoretical focus of the research; 3) Dr. Alvi (male, committee member familiar with the theoretical focus of the research); 4) Ph.D. candidate (female, familiar with young offenders and interviewing on sensitive

⁵⁸ In these two situations, extra time and care were allotted to rapport to ensure consistency in the interviews.

topics); 5) non-academic adult (male, provided insight into question interpretation); and, 6) a Youth Social Worker (female, ten years of experience).

Input from those immersed in the area of youth allowed for modifications in terms of language, while also suggesting some redirection of certain questions. Diversity among those who completed the pre-test reading of the interview schedule was deliberate so as to provide a variety of perspectives. Following this process, five interviews were held with young offenders to test the interview schedule. Results from the pre-test were extremely consistent, resulting in their inclusion in the study. Pre-testing of the interview with outside readers and with the five pre-test respondents worked to rid it of potential problems.

Consistency of method and delivery is essential in all social scientific research regardless of its qualitative or quantitative nature. Reflecting this concern, each interview followed the same process, which is briefly outlined below.

Upon arriving at the institution, I met with the psychologist who was overseeing the project. He would introduce me to a potential respondent with the following speech:

I'd like you to meet Bobbi-Lynn Sinclair. She is working with me here and she is completing her doctorate. Part of her schooling means that she has to do lots of research, and write a big paper. She is interested in learning more about young offenders, but she is only interested in guy young offenders not girls. So she would like to talk to you for a while - she will probably end up talking to all the guys in here if she can. So she would like to talk to you for a while, is that OK with you?

At this point, the respondent stated his agreement and the psychologist would leave the room (all respondents agreed to participate in the research). In one case, an interviewee

terminated the interview mid-way through; all other respondents completed the interview.

Assurances of and respect of confidentiality are of enhanced importance when conducting sensitive research. Respondents were assured verbally and in writing that what we discussed would remain in confidence (limited through constraints as outlined in the *Informed Consent Form* - see Appendix A⁵⁹), anonymity would be guaranteed (refer to limitations outlined in the *Informed Consent Form* in Appendix A), abstaining from any question(s) was permissible, and that the interview could be ended at any time by either the participant or the interviewer. As this research had the potential of raising emotions, respondents were informed of their access to an on-site registered clinical psychologist. These guidelines were clearly outlined on the *Informed Consent Form*. To help to establish respondent understanding of the restrictions of the informed consent process in this research, extra precautions were taken. After reading the informed consent form, each respondent explained in his own words what the form indicated and his understanding of the confidentiality restrictions. This worked to establish personal confidence in the respondents full and complete understanding of the process. A list of local contact numbers was also provided on the informed consent form should respondents want to contact an outside service.

As explained in the informed consent form, the on-site clinical psychologist was contacted when issues arose in the interview which he could provide services for⁶⁰; this

⁵⁹ The nature of these constraints is discussed further in a latter paragraph.

⁶⁰ It was explained that the on-site clinical psychologist would have access to the

arose three times in the interview phase. These incidents concerned threats to cause harm to individuals on the outside, as well as potential depression; the psychologist addressed all issues.

A note of explanation is required regarding the on-site clinical psychologist in respect to ethical implications and potential limitations of the findings. The psychologist who oversaw this research in the institution is a member of the Ph.D. committee as well as the resident psychologist for the young offenders. This situation was problematized as a necessary compromise as the well-being of the respondents (e.g. having full access to a clinical psychologist, as well as having permission to seek his intervention should issues arise) was placed above the possible limitations to what they shared with me as a result of the psychologist potentially having access to the information. It was discovered that the young offenders on the unit typically engaged in an open relationship with the psychologist and did not appear to be concerned with his access to the interview material. In fact, many suggested that the psychologist knew of the things they were sharing with me. The respondents were reminded throughout the interview that the psychologist could have access to the information so they were well aware of his role in the project. Having examined the relationship between the psychologist and the respondents during my time on the unit, I am confident that the findings were not compromised by his participation in the study.

interview data should a problem arise (in which he could provide services to the respondents) and that his files are confidential in that no one else (up to and including the superintendent of the institution) would have access to the information.

Ethics are an important component of a research project, especially those in which offenders are utilized as a sample (Maxfield and Babbie 2001; Hagan 2000; Neuman and Wiegand 2000)⁶¹. It was fully explained that I could not offer benefits or special privileges for participating, nor would there be negative consequences should one *not* participate in the study. To deter identification of those who did not want to participate in the interview, I had planned to spend time with each respondent. However, this need did not arise. Following the signing of the consent forms, the interview began.

2) *Interview Format*

The interviews followed a semi-structured format⁶² allowing for interactive, spontaneously developed questions, probing, and supplementary questions to lessen the probability of omitted factors. The interview schedule (provided in Appendix B) was divided into the following sections:

1. Background/Family life
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Dating Relationship
5. Peer Relationship
6. Male Peer Male-to-Female Dating Abuse
7. Respondent Use of Male-to-Female Dating Abuse
8. Beliefs and Attitudes (respondent and male peers)

Upon completion of the interview, the respondent was asked if he wanted to add

⁶¹ See the aforementioned authors for a more in-depth discussion of the importance of ethical guidelines when using offenders as respondents in a research project.

⁶² Due to the interactive nature of a semi-structured personal interview, this schedule changed and followed the flow of the conversation between the respondent and myself.

anything further, or if he had any questions he would like to ask. Occasionally questions regarding why I was doing the research arose as well as some personal questions regarding my age. Each respondent was thanked for sharing his time and his experiences with me. Following each interview, an information package⁶³ was placed in each of their personal belongings (via the assistance of a Correctional Officer) so the information would leave the institution with the respondents⁶⁴.

Section Four: Respondent Demographics

The sample is a purposive one, yet somewhat representative or typical of the population in question - socially displaced male youth. Again, this term is defined as male young offenders who are taken as sharing a similar position of being socially displaced at the time of the research as they are temporarily detached from society (outside world), excluded from the economic world, and placed within custody. This term acknowledges the conceptualization of "class location" as a fluid concept, one that changes during one's life span⁶⁵.

⁶³ See Appendix C for a list of the materials provided in the information package.

⁶⁴ This option was pursued to limit the effect that the distribution of this information could potentially have on the rest of the interviews.

⁶⁵ Most studies that incorporate class location do so by using either gradational or relational conceptions of class. Gradational conceptions differentiate between classes according to whether they possess the characteristics that constitute the criterion of divisions (Ossowski 1963:146 as cited in Wright 1979:5). One of the most common gradational conception of class is income level resulting in a class structure that mirrors the shape of income distribution. In contrast, relational conceptions define classes in terms of their relations of dependence to other classes. Both conceptions do not typically acknowledge the fluidity of class location over time.

The introduction of the term *socially displaced* reflects concern in using an approach to understand class that “pigeon-holes” people into certain classes by, for example, answering questions related to employment history. Youth present a unique challenge in terms of class. Organizing the youth in this study in terms of “class location” would be difficult if not impossible as they often have sporadic, non-typical employment, transient home lives (moving from group home to foster care etc.), and are not active in the class scheme according to many class analysts' definitional criteria (see Wright 1979). The introduction of the term socially displaced allows one to take the group “as is,” so to speak - as a group temporarily excluded from the economic world and acknowledges the fluidity of class location during one's life span.

1) *Sex and Age*

The respondents were awaiting sentencing for various offences; however, specifics of the offences were not noted as the breakdown of offences would not accurately reflect the crimes committed due to the exaggerated use of plea bargaining within the young offender justice system⁶⁶. Typically, youth are charged with several crimes, and the Crown will advise the offender to plead guilty to the lesser charges, asking for maximum sentencing, as the system would be too costly to proceed with every charge. This results in a misrepresentation of charges⁶⁷. The ages of the respondents

⁶⁶ This discussion reflects personal correspondence with the young offender psychologist at the institution that provided the respondents for the current research, November 2001.

⁶⁷ However, to provide an overall breakdown, according to Whitehall (1992), most male young offenders in the current institution have been charged/convicted with theft over

ranged from 16 - 19 years of age, with an average age of 17.

2) *Living Conditions*

Prior to incarceration, the accommodation history of the respondents could be described as transient⁶⁸. The respondents most commonly had lived/were living with their biological mother, while fewer had lived/were living with their biological father (33% versus 10%). Over half of the respondents did not associate with their biological fathers, did not know them, or they had passed away. Respondents exhibited transient living accommodation histories with the majority having lived in three or more settings thus far (for example, foster home(s), group home(s), switching from mother to father as primary care giver). Similarly, there was a prevalent history of living in group home(s) and various foster home(s). Although only six respondents stated that they typically lived on the streets or in shelters, many had experienced street life for short periods of time. Those respondents who had been exposed to street life described their life as one of a struggle to survive in an environment of drugs, alcohol, and crime similar to the youth interviewed by Hagan and McCarthy (1992).

3) *Familial Abuse*

For those respondents who did live/had lived with their biological mother and/or

and under, possession of stolen goods, and break and enters. (See Appendix D for a list of the breakdown of demographics).

⁶⁸ In this section, the categories do not necessarily add to 36 as most respondents provided more than one type of accommodation.

father, their experiences were, in some cases, characterized by familial abuse⁶⁹. This finding is similar to other research demonstrating that young offenders are generally characterized as having abusive pasts through their exposure to inter-parental⁷⁰ abuse (Forth and Tobin 1995). Although no questions were asked pertaining to abuse the respondents experienced or witnessed within their home environment, these experiences became evident throughout the interviews in various ways. For example, just under one-third (10) of the respondents volunteered that they had experienced or witnessed some extreme violence within their home environment^{71 72}. Many times, their statements about the abuse included the abuser (male in all but one instance) being an alcoholic or a

⁶⁹ Due to constraints on interview time and the current focus on male peer support, questions pertaining to familial abuse were not included in the interview schedule. This is an area that is in need of future research.

⁷⁰ The use of the term inter-parental includes those who are the natural parents as well as those not married and who act, even temporarily, as the father figure through his relationship with the mother.

⁷¹ Seven respondents spoke of violence he had experienced himself at the hands of his mother (1), his mothers boyfriend (2), his father (3), and/or his step-father (1). In the cases where the boyfriend was being abusive to the respondent he was also being abusive to the respondents' mother. Eight respondents spoke of violence they had witnessed in the home: mother abused by father (3), mother abused by step-father (1), mother abused by boyfriend (3), mother's boyfriend abusing respondents' sister (1). In the words of the respondents, the forms of abuse were varied including hitting, beating with a belt, line writing, burning, yelling/screaming, neglect, intimidation, rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

⁷² In the National Survey on Violence Against Women (Statistics Canada 1993), 30% of Canadian women reported at least one incident of physical or sexual violence at the hands of a marital partner; children witnessed the violence in almost 40% of the cases (Manion and Wilson 1995).

“drinker.” The respondents appeared to make one of two connections between alcohol and abuse. In some cases alcohol made the man more abusive, while in others it sedated/calmed his abusive behaviour. In many cases, the abuse was noted as one of the key reasons in the respondents’ decision to leave home.

4) *Employment*

Many of the respondents did not associate with their biological fathers and those who did, could provide little information on their employment. This can be contrasted to their association with their biological mother’s. Almost all respondents continued to have some form of contact with their mothers. This is similar to other work on less-privileged males (Anderson 1999; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995). This could be a reflection of the somewhat current trend wherein parenting falls on the mother’s shoulders (Tyyskä 2001; Pollack 2000). Many of the respondents stated that their father and mother were no longer together, saying that their father “left.” In terms of their mother's employment, those of whom were employed were typically in low-paying, low-skilled positions (e.g. waitresses, secretaries, and telemarketing).

As many of the respondents were not currently living with their parents, it was important to become familiar with the respondents’ personal employment. There was a split in terms of the respondent employment before coming to the closed-custody facility: 18 were working and 18 were not working. Only two respondents had never been employed nor did they mention any illegal income. One received money from his mother whenever he needed it and one received an allowance from the group home in which he

lived.

In terms of legal means of earning an income, the most common employment was that of labourer (including roofing, landscaping, maintenance, mill work, moving company, construction) (16 respondents)⁷³. Illegal means of earning an income were quite common. Twenty-two respondents indicated some form of crime as a means of income⁷⁴. The most common forms of criminal activity were drug selling, break and enters, car theft (with the delivery of vehicle to "chop-shop" resulting in income) (12 respondents mentioned each of these activities)⁷⁵. Thirty respondents shared their future career aspirations: approximately one-third aspired to be a mechanic; a labourer (6); and four respondents wanted to work in computers⁷⁶.

⁷³ This percentage (44%) is considerably higher than found in Decker and Van Winkle's (1996) study on male youth gang members - only 17% reported legal means of employment.

⁷⁴ Numbers do not add to total as many respondents stated various forms of crime.

⁷⁵ Eleven respondents mentioned *only* illegal money making employment, while several others suggested both illegal and legal means of employment. Twelve (33%) respondents discussed their selling of drugs, with marijuana as the most common (6); mushrooms and acid (2) and heroin, rock, hash, crack, coke (1 per drug). Typically the respondents considered themselves to be small quantity dealers, commenting in two cases that coke was where the money was, but that they did not want to get pinched for that. Several of the respondents selling drugs spoke of the dilemma of the availability of the drug market and the profitability of drug selling in terms of money. Often times the money available through selling drugs brought with it some form of power, authority and/or respect for the respondents. The selling of stolen property was also common - eight respondents discussed the selling of T.V.'s, V.C.R.'s, bikes, knives. Robbery was also mentioned by three respondents, and one respondent noted armed robbery as a means of making money.

⁷⁶ Other career aspirations were: electrician (1); Security/cop (2); Trucker (1); "Repo

5) *Education*

Fifteen (42%) respondents were going to school prior to incarceration, while 21 (58%) were not⁷⁷. One respondent had graduated from high school and was enrolled in night school. In terms of the highest grade level of school completed, the grades range from Grade 7 (1) to high school diploma (2). Thirty-one percent of the respondents had completed Grade eight.

Of those who *were not* going to school before their incarceration, many spoke of their discontent with the teachers they came into contact with at school. Similar to Cohen's (1955) findings with less-privileged boys, many of the respondents described their teachers as controlling (telling them what to do), argumentative, interfering and confrontational (on both the teacher and the respondents part). These experiences can be contrasted, to some degree, with the comments of those who *were* going to school before their incarceration. This group typically said that they liked most of the teachers and got along with them.

6) *Prior Incarceration*

Man" (1); Forest Fire fighter (1); Artist (1); Military (1); Accountant (1), go to University for Criminology (1); any "hands on" job (1).

⁷⁷ This finding is similar to work with marginalized male youth gang members in Decker and Van Winkle (1996:121) who found 40% were attending school.

As respondents were drawn from young offenders, it was not surprising that some of them had previous contact with the criminal justice system. Six respondents had lived in an open custody facility and two had previously lived in jail.

7) *Substance Use*

Substance use was quite prevalent. The majority of respondents discussed their active substance use throughout the interviews: 81% (29) were drug users and 45% (16) indicated they were users of alcohol⁷⁸. The most common drug used was marijuana (“weed,” “pot,” “dope”); 83% (24/29) of the respondents who used drugs discussed their use of this drug. Coke, crack, mushrooms, acid, hash, and ecstasy were also mentioned by the respondents but typically only by three or four separate respondents per drug. In respect to “harder” drugs including heroine, speed, rock and crystal methane were mentioned sporadically. The respondents initiated the discussion of substance use. Typically, the discussion of drug use involved male friends, partying or “chilling.” Words such as “potheads” and “druggies” were often used in reference to their male friends.

Substance use is fairly common among youth aged 16 - 19 (The Youth at Risk Project 2001; The Health of Canada’s Children: A CICH Profile, 3rd Edition 2000; Ontario Student Drug Use Survey 1999); however, there were indications of a substance abuse problem among some of the respondents. For example, there were times when the use of substances gave rise to relationship problems with their girlfriends, caused

⁷⁸ Three respondents did not mention drugs in the interview and 1 respondent stated he did not drink or use drugs.

interference with school and/or led to increased risk of violence levels (increased fear of one's male friends due to their use, increased perpetration of violence against male friends and girlfriends by the youth⁷⁹). Also, there was the use of substances as a relaxation inducer and as an escape from life (i.e. boredom, coping mechanism for past abuse). Alcohol/drug use has been noted as a key correlate of inflicting dating violence among male youth (O'Keefe 1997; Ageton 1983). Substance use has been theorized to play several roles such as 1) it lowers inhibitions regarding the use of abuse (e.g. Sanday 1990), 2) it may act as a means to remove responsibility for the use of violence (e.g. Scully 1990), and 3) as a tool to "work a yes out" (e.g. Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

8) *Gang Affiliation*

Only one respondent admitted that he belonged to a gang. Five other respondents suggested they spent most of their time with "my boys," however, in most of those cases, they were quick to point out that they were not in a gang. The "trueness" of their non-gang claims will not be debated. It is important to note that the respondents did not self-identify as gang members.

⁷⁹ Decker and Van Winkle (1996) similarly report a connection between an increase in violence and alcohol use. Jackson et al.'s (2000:28, 30) study on youth found that 50% of the females unwanted sexual activity had occurred at parties, and 27% of females reported alcohol was the reason for unwanted sexual activity.

Respondent demographics are summarized in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Summary of Demographics

Respondents	36 male young offenders
Age of Respondents	16-19 years of age, average age 17
Familial Living History	33% lived with/had lived with their biological mother 10% with biological father
Living Conditions	One Setting - 19% Two Settings - 25% Three or More Settings - 56%
Nature of Accommodation	Group/Foster Home(s) - 20% Male Friends - 6% On the Street - 6% On their Own - 4% With Girlfriend and her Family - 3%
Familial Abuse	28% initiated discussion of exposure to and/or witnessing of family abuse
Working Prior to Incarceration	Yes - 50% No - 50%
Employment Positions	Legal Employment: roofing, landscaping, construction Illegal Employment: drug selling, break and enters, car theft
Education Background	Attending School - 15 (42%) 31% had completed grade eight
Prior Incarceration	17%
Substance Use	Drug use: 81% Alcohol use: 45%
Gang Affiliation	1 Respondent

The choice of respondents often introduces limitations to a study (Baker 1999; Singleton et al. 1993; Babbie 1985); the respondents in this study are no exception. The choice of male young offenders requires some explanation. Many researchers in the area

of youth, and specifically youth and male-to-female dating abuse, have met with considerable obstacles when attempting to gain access to research populations. In the initial stages of this research, access to high school students was explored. This process proved to be time consuming and unsuccessful. It is difficult to gain access to high school students for a study of this nature for various reasons: 1) high school boards are often hesitant to allow researchers' access to their students. This concern is intensified when the nature of a study concerns male-to-female dating violence; 2) parental permission to interview youth under the age of 18 must be obtained, introducing potential bias in respect to those who participate in the study; and, 3) parents, school board officials and the respondents themselves are concerned with the potential backlash (e.g. being labeled as an unsafe school for females) that can accompany participating in a study of violence against women, again leading to conceivable bias in the research.

Upon exploring these obstacles and attempting to overcome them, and as an active volunteer with young offenders for several years, I reflected on what I had gained from this experience. Many of the young offenders whom I had met commented on their relationships with their girlfriends as well as their male peers. My interaction with them began to reveal that this was an ideal group of youth to explore the research questions with. Although I had worked in secure facilities before, my work at the time was concentrated within the open-custody system, therefore avoiding potential interviewer bias as I was not familiar to the youth in the secure facilities. This is a group of male youth who happen to be a captive audience as they are in custody. However, the status of

being in custody relates little to this project. To explain, this is a study on male-to-female dating abuse and male peer relationships. The interview questions pertain only to their dating relationships and peer interactions prior to coming into custody. Although not without limitations, these respondents offer an avenue to overcome two of the key limitations of male peer support research: its lack of ability to theorize about pro-abuse peer relations of *young males* among a *socially displaced* group of male youth. This research also opens the door to further exploratory male peer support research on alternative populations such as high school students and other youth groups.

Section Five: Qualitative Data Analysis and Introduction to the Findings

Qualitative data analysis is often viewed as being unsystematic (Neuman and Wiegand 2000). Although there are no standardized rules guiding qualitative data analysis, reflecting the wide array of possible approaches and personalized nature of qualitative research, there are steps that seek to make qualitative data analysis more explicit and, in a sense, generalizable. Due to the personalized nature of qualitative research, it is important for researchers in this tradition to provide their readership with an outline of how their data were analyzed. It is to this task that I now turn.

Reliance on computer assisted software (e.g. NUD*IST, Ethnograph) in qualitative data analysis is an emerging trend (Senese 1997; Weitzman and Miles 1995; Brent 1984). However, at present, there is little empirical evidence suggesting that studies employing such computer programs are superior to those that do not employ such programs (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Furthermore, the programs are generally “young”

and are still evolving. The data in the current study was analyzed using word-processing capabilities that facilitated an enhanced filing system and the coding was preformed without the use of a computer program. This choice reflects my need to interact as much as possible with the data on a personal level as well as requiring the flexibility and accessibility of the data achieved via this method. Computer assisted programs allow for mechanical manipulation of data but are somewhat limited in terms of synthesis of data and in the recognition of patterns which in part is based on creativity:

[creativity] comes out of numerous cycles through a little bit of data, massive amount of thinking about that data, and slippery things like intuition and serendipity. An electronic ally doesn't have much of a role to play...[Moreover]...ethnography emphasizes the interrelated detailing a small number of cases rather than the common properties across a large number. For that, you need a little bit of data and a lot of right brain (Agar 1991:193).

For these reasons, a well-developed system of organized filing, memoing, and analysis was embraced using a computer-based word processing program to a limited degree. This approach generated an immensely intimate understanding of and closeness to the data that facilitated the development of many intricate patterns and themes during the analysis of interview material.

The heart of the analytical process of qualitative data lies within the coding of the data. Coding is the process whereby a researcher organizes her/his data into categories and searches for emerging themes or concepts within the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990:57) suggest that coding is a process "...representing the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data."

Data analysis reflected the three sequential stages of data coding identified by Strauss (1987). The first stage, termed open coding, embodied the first reading of the data wherein I located themes and assigned codes to them. "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles and Huberman 1994:56). The objective of this first stage is "to identify, and formulate, and analyze all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest" (Emerson et al. 1995:143). The codes emerged from two primary sources: from previous literature on the area of study and as they emerged from the respondents own expression. The latter type of codes are known as "in vivo" codes (Flick 1998). Data analysis in this study was approached with the theoretical concepts demonstrated from previous male peer support research in mind, but also with the freedom to observe additional theoretical components as they emerged from the data. In other words, there was openness to incorporate the experience of the respondents as they expressed it. Similarly, there was flexibility to respond to the interview data which was accomplished through the application of a mixture of both inductive⁸⁰ and deductive⁸¹ approaches. It is similar to a continual process of asking and answering questions, which then suggest new questions to ask of the data. Several hundred codes were the end product of the open coding stage of

⁸⁰ Within an *inductive* approach, one begins with "detailed observations of the world and move toward more abstract generalizations and ideas" (Neuman and Wiegand 2000:45).

⁸¹ Within the *deductive* approach, one begins with "an abstract, logical relationship among concepts, then move toward concrete empirical evidence" (Neuman and Wiegand 2000:45).

analysis.

In the second stage, axial coding took place. This is the process of organizing the themes into groups that represent key concepts and conceptualizing about the various linkages between them.

Axial coding is the process of relating subcategories to a category. It is a complex process of inductive and deductive thinking involving several steps. These are accomplished, as with open coding, by making comparisons and asking questions. However, in axial coding the use of these procedures is more focused, and geared toward discovering and relating categories in terms of the paradigm model (Strauss and Corbin 1990:114).

The categories identified by axial coding are enriched by their fit or representation among as many passages as possible. The theoretical strength of a category increases as the number of passages providing support for the theme increases. As Glaser (1978) suggests, “good theory has categories that fit (or have come to fit) the data; is relevant to the core of what is going on; can be used to explain, predict, and interpret what is going on; and is modifiable” (as cited in Huberman and Miles 1994:433). In the current research three core categories emerged: 1) masculinity, 2) sexuality, and, 3) violence.

Last, selective coding is completed once the major themes of the data have been identified. “Researchers look selectively for cases that illustrate themes and make comparisons and contrasts” (Neuman and Wiegand 2000:397). It is in this stage that the core categories are elaborated and the integration of various categories is completed.

At the core of qualitative data analysis is the practice of analytic memo writing (Emerson et al. 1995:155-156). As the researcher assigns codes to the data, s/he makes detailed notes on the meaning and definition of the code. The memos represent the first

stage of analysis and often guide the core of the analysis that follows. Within the memos, the researcher discusses the theoretical implications of the code, relevant themes that might be related, and any other pertinent information that comes to mind. While this process is quite labour-intensive, the task proved to be invaluable.

The next three chapters present the findings of my research. The definition of male peer support is twofold. The first component, attachment to male peers, is the focus of Chapter 4. The data presented provide insight into the relationships that the respondents have with their male friends and with their girlfriends. The information presented contextualizes the discussions that follow in Chapters 5 and 6 that focus on the resources (the second component) that the all-male peer group provided for the respondents that, at times, supported the use of male-to-female dating abuse.

Central to male peer support theory (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; DeKeseredy 1988) is the concept that male-female intimate relationships are, at times, characterized by relationship stress. A peer group is drawn on for support in various ways - emotional, financial, and psychological. As well, when a male experiences stress in an intimate relationship, he often turns to his peer group for support. Although this support can be positive, suggesting non-violent ways to resolve the conflict for example, this support can also be negative, placing female dating partners at risk for various forms of male violence (DeKeseredy and McLeod 1997). Several negative resources emerged through the interviews with the male respondents. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the resources provided and the consequences these resources had on their relationships with females.

The following definition of resource was adhered to when analyzing the data:

Any event perpetrated or witnessed, including verbal, visual, and implied, by the male peers or the respondent that reflected a pro-abuse ideology or male dominance over females. Abuse was broadly defined and included: physical, sexual, emotional, threatening, manipulation, and control.

Analysis of the interview material led to the emergence of three key concepts in terms of resources that could be supportive of male-to-female violence in dating relationships: 1) masculinity - what it means to be “male”; 2) sexuality; and, 3) violence.

The first theme is an overriding one that is evident throughout the entire discussion of the findings. During the interviews, the respondents spoke both directly and indirectly about what being “male” meant to them. In many cases, their ideals were expressed in terms of the differences between males and females. It is difficult to separate the discussion of masculinity from the other two themes, sexuality and violence, as key components of their identities as men are intertwined in their discussions of them. Similar to Messerschmidt’s (2000) findings, sexual relations and the use of violence were often employed as masculinizing practices - as a way of “doing masculinity” (Messerschmidt 1993). Therefore, the masculinity theme is referred to throughout the discussions of sexuality and violence. Chapter 5 provides illustrations of how the peer group was a resource in terms of the respondents’ views on sexuality and Chapter 6 provides a discussion of violence as a resource.

The words of the respondents are used extensively through the following three chapters. Where their quotes are unclear, I have added words in parentheses to clarify their statements. My questions and probing are denoted by the initials R.L.. In order to

give a broad picture of the respondents, variety in respondent quotation was adhered to avoiding reliance on a few cases. All but three respondents are cited in this dissertation.

Two respondents had not been involved in dating relationships while the third respondent ended the interview prior to questioning on dating relationships had progressed. That being said, however, it is important to remind readers that this group is not a homogenous one. Although there were differences among the respondents, the following discussions focus on patterns that were noted.

Chapter Four

Relationship Dynamics with Male Peers and Girlfriends

Grounded partially within a feminist orientation, male peer support theory (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; DeKeseredy 1988) frames male-to-female intimate violence within the wider social context of patriarchal social structures. Male peer support is composed of two separate yet intertwined components: 1) attachment to male peers and 2) the resources these male peers can provide that encourage and legitimize male-to-female partner abuse (DeKeseredy 1990).

Several questions were incorporated in the interview schedule to explore the attachment the youth had with their male peers (component 1). The first section of this chapter examines the respondent perspectives on their relationships with their male peers providing insight into the role the male peers played in the lives of the respondents. This component is essential to the second component, resources (which will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6), as it helps to illustrate how influential or important the male peer group is to the respondents (for example, loyalty, peer perception). This discussion introduces us to the respondents as well as to the dynamics of their male peer groups.

The second section of this chapter examines the relationships the youth have with their girlfriends to familiarize the reader with the dynamics of their intimate relationships. The level of attachment to their girlfriends and to their male peers and their expectations from both these relationships help to contextualize the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Section One: Attachment to Male Peers

One area that is often neglected in male peer support research is an exploration of the complex relationship dynamics between the male and his peer group. A current limitation of male peer support research is the inconsistent use of and lack of clarification in the definition of the concept “male peer group.” Male peer support research has typically been quantitative, most often large-scale surveys, asking broader questions regarding “one’s peers.” For example, the questions on male peer support that were included in the Canadian National Survey (DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993) focus exclusively on current male peers. However, there is limited attempt to define who the male respondents classify within this category. As DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998c) indicate, almost all of the male peer support research conducted thus far has concentrated on the influence of university/college men on other university/college men. This does not acknowledge the reality that many of these men will have associations with non-student peers; this has been referred to as a “wider circle of friends” (Giordano 1995). The qualitative nature of this study allows for exploration of this wider network of friends by asking the respondents themselves about their peers.

It is important to have an informed understanding of who “one’s peers” are. For example, are we referring only to same-aged peers or friends they have known for a long time, are we referring to fellow classmates, or are we also including males from other groups? As Messerschmidt (1993) states, masculinity is demonstrated in different ways in different situations; how a male acts may change in relation to which group of peers he is

with. This addresses a critical question still unanswered in male peer support research: "What are the differences in homosocial groups that develop and operate outside university/college environments?" (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998c:88). By asking questions pertaining to the characteristics of their male peers, a more complete picture of who "one's peers" include will be obtained, as well as providing some preliminary insight into the aforementioned question.

Attachment to male peers refers to the attachments abusive men have to other abusive men (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997); the males are friends and hence share some loyalties to each other. To explore the level of commitment to their male peers, the following aspects were examined: sex of friends, age of friends, length of friendships, commitment to remain friends, and activities with friends⁸².

Rather than assuming the sex of the peers, a general question was posed: "*Who do you usually hang out with?*" Most of the youth suggested that they hang out with male friends (17)⁸³, closely followed by both females and males (15). Two other categories were sparsely represented: girls only (2), and one's girlfriend (2). Although almost half (41%) of the sample suggested that they hang out with both males and females, it is important to note that the other half (47%) suggested that they hang out with males only. An all-male peer subculture was fairly prevalent among this group of male youth.

⁸² The abusive component of the male peers is explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

⁸³ This category includes six youth who suggested that they hung out with "boyz and gang girls" as the youth did not classify the girls as friends but merely as add-ons or appendages to their male friends - they were not considered to be friends as was the case

Some interesting dynamics arose in terms of *close* friendships. Over half (58%) of the respondents spoke solely of close male friends (21), while significantly fewer suggested both males and females (19%), girlfriend as closest friend (14%), and three respondents did not have any close friends (8%). In the majority of cases, females were excluded in terms of holding the status of close friend. Again, this introduces a strong theme of all-male peer alliances among this group of youth.

The following themes were prevalent when talking about their close male friends: we grew up together, we are like a family, and he is like a brother. The excerpts below are typical of their comments:

"Known for awhile, they are all brothers. I've known the oldest one since we were 12, and got to know his brother. They are like my family." (Respondent 1)

"Only five of us that really interacted together, there were other people too. Like a family, the five of us, help me out anytime, any place. They were bigger guys, we sold the drugs for them...He is like a younger brother, think of him as a younger brother...go to his house and know his dad. Go see him [younger friend] if I felt bad. He's not like a younger guy, in behaviour, he's like an adult. He is one of my only friends, could go and stay with him whenever I wanted." (Respondent 5)

"Close [with male friends], just sticking together. You screw with one of us you screw with us all." (Respondent 19)

The themes of loyalty and family-like bonds suggest a high level of commitment to their close male friends. The majority of respondents took their male relationships seriously and were willing to go to great lengths to defend their male friends. The description of close male friends as being family-like is similar to what many have found among gang

in the mixed group.

members⁸⁴ (Anderson 1999; Curry and Decker 1998; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Hagedorn 1988). In addition, the theme of sticking up for the boyz⁸⁵ that is evident in this study is again reminiscent of gang research; in fact, respondents in Decker and Van Winkle's (1996) research indicate that the family-like bond is demonstrated through the willingness to look out for and protect fellow members. Being able and willing to physically defend the other members is a measure of one's masculinity (Alexander 2000; Anderson 1999; Sanchez-Jankowski 1991).

In looking at characteristics of the male-male friendships, the theme of male friends leading to various problem situations was evident. There was an association between male friends and trouble, fighting and just "bad luck" as one respondent stated.

The following excerpts illustrate this theme:

"I used to hang around my [male] friends. Now I am a housebug. I got sick of getting in trouble every time I go out. Used to get into trouble with my friends - beating up kids, stole a car, guy pulled a knife on me so I did the same." (Respondent 16)

⁸⁴ Although the gang literature is drawn upon throughout this dissertation, it is important to note that almost all respondents claimed that they did not belong to gangs; the honesty of this status claim will not be debated. As the study is focused on the reality as the respondents view it, their understanding of their non-gang affiliation will stand. Due in part to the lack of definitional consensus regarding the composition of a gang (see Gordon 1998) and to the nature of the current study, it is not important whether the group was a gang or not, but rather the focus lies in what the group provides for the respondents in terms of violence against women. That being said, however, gang research tells us a great deal about peer group dynamics among marginalized youth similar to the strength that is found in research on fraternities pertaining to peer group dynamics among middle-class males. The gang literature that is drawn upon focuses on marginalized male youth and in light of the lack of research on male peer groups of youth, adds to the current study.

⁸⁵ The use of the term boyz reflects respondent emphasis.

"I don't like to hang out with that many people anymore...I notice that every time I chose one of my friends I end up in jail and they are out. When I go alone I never do nothing. I'm not in jail. I'm fine." (Respondent 34)

While only one respondent stated his closest friend was a female, some of the youth said that they had both female and male close friends. Among those youth who had close female friends there was a tendency for them to offer justifications for *why* they had female friends; they felt that they needed to clarify the reasons for having close female friends rather than close male friends. The notion of male friends as leading to trouble as discussed above was countered by female friends being "better influences" on the youth. The reasons the respondents gave for having close female friends were often related to getting into less trouble with them as compared to their male friends. The following excerpts shed light on the nature of such justifications:

"They [females] don't get me into trouble." (Respondent 2)

"I don't like hanging out with guys because they pick fights for no reason, even if they are friends. I hang out with two or three guys but everyone is girls." (Respondent 25)

Ages of their friends ranged from 14 - 30s. In general, their female friends were younger (14-16 years old), while male friends were older with 20-30 years of age being common. The age differences raise several issues that tell us about the peer groups of the respondents. Recalling the average age of respondents is 17, the male friends were considerably older than the respondents, with the respondent often being the youngest in his peer group. One explanation for the age difference between the respondents and their male friends could reflect criminal associations. For example, many of the respondents

sold drugs and spoke of their drug dealers as their "friends." In terms of being the youngest in the group, this could suggest that the older males are preying on the younger males to commit the crimes as they are still punishable by the YOA, hence incurring less severe sentences than adults. An alternative explanation is drawn from the gang research that has shown that older gang members recruit younger males into the gang in order to reproduce it (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Hagedorn 1988). However, these comments are purely speculative. The ages of female friends/girlfriends are rather young in comparison to the male peers and the respondent. The respondents are typically hanging out with older male peers and younger female friends/girlfriends.

To provide some perspective on the depth of their relationships with those they classified as their male "peers" or "friends," questions were asked pertaining to how they became friends. The most common themes were that they had grown up together, had lived in the same neighbourhood, and/or that they known them for a long time. As well, there was a theme of being introduced through other friends. It appears that a network is emerging; they have a group of friends they have known for a long time who are often from the same background and they introduce others to this group. Therefore, they are apt to have the same beliefs and attitudes; it is like a small pool with like-minded people being added. The emphasis on group loyalty, shared history, and collective solidarity is similar to what gang studies have found (Alexander 2000; Decker and Van Winkle 1996). For example, in her work on Asian gang members, Alexander (2000:143) found that "[F]riendship was often posited on the assertion of homogeneity - of history and

experience, of growing up together and sharing altogether more prosaic interests."

A second related question was asked of respondents: *"What makes you think of your male friends as friends?"* Again, a theme of knowing the males for a long period of time was common as they share a history with them.

"One is a friend because I have known him for 16 years, he'd do anything for me."
(Respondent 2)

"Grew up in same neighbourhood. [Been in] fights together, fish, camp, hunt."
(Respondent 13)

"Just respect them because they are my friends. They help me out, parents not able to help me out so if people were picking on me they would help me out. Mom's in a wheelchair, dad's sick, they'd take me to the beach, hang with me, give me money. I think back on all the things we did together - help each other out. Helped me when I was running from group homes." (Respondent 15)

Many of the respondents stressed the idea of friends "backing you up." There was a connection between this physical support and loyalty which was associated with the reason for their friendship:

"...cuz they get stabbed for me and I get stabbed for them." (Respondent 9)

"Loyalty. Stand up for you always. Respect you." (Respondent 12)

"Like the same things. I just trust them. They always have your back..." (Respondent 20)

A second reason for their relationships was because they went to the same school, implying that friendships are location based as they typically are among younger people. This may suggest that their exposure to different people is limited. They went to the same school and were also generally raised in the same neighbourhood; this implies that they

may not be exposed to a "wider circle of friends" (Giordano 1995)⁸⁶ as could be the case with adult males. This introduces a different dynamic than in college/university male peer support research. While college/university males are in a similar situation (location based), the pool of people to choose from is more diverse. There is an increased opportunity to have friends with different backgrounds and/or different beliefs. This is the opposite of what many respondents expressed:

"Started off because we were native. But we do the same things, most same beliefs."
(Respondent 1)

"Because we get along and have the same beliefs, same backgrounds...being there for you. Never thought about what friendship is." (Respondent 7)

"Maybe because we think the same, respect among each other, never fight, good relationship." (Respondent 17)

It is interesting to note that throughout their answers to the above questions, there was a distinction made by respondents between levels of male friendships and this was associated with the intensity of attachment they had with them. A hierarchy appeared to exist wherein different males were categorized in different places - boyz, friends, and acquaintances. For example, there was recurring mention that some of their male friends were merely associates or clients rather than friends, almost like a business-type relationship. A definite degree of difference between the terms was suggested:

R.L.: What makes you think of them as "friends"?

Youth: *They are there for you when you need them. They call me here, write me*

⁸⁶ Similar to this close networking in a neighbourhood, work with youth gang members show a pattern of neighbourhood groups progressing into more formally organized gangs (Decker and Van Winkle 1996).

here - just those good friends who aren't acquaintances. (Respondent 6)

"There's friends and people you hang out with. Friends are friends, you hang out. People you hang out with are clients, not really hang out but talk to them and then go away."
(Respondent 18)

"I hang out with guys, but not too many, I call them acquaintances not friends."
(Respondent 21)

There was also a separation made between those who were considered to be "boyz" versus "friends" and respondents drew on each group for different resources. For example, the following respondents speak of the differences between their friends and their boyz in the gang. The gang boyz are basically in their lives for fighting and/or for protection.

R.L.: How would you define friends?

Youth: Care for them. Brothers. A whole family. Gang is like cousins. Why would they have a say in my relationship, my girlfriend, my life?

R.L.: Who would you say you listen to most?

Youth: Closest friends. The gang guys are mostly like monkeys - back you up-dumb. (Respondent 1)

R.L.: What makes them your friends?

Youth: They talk to me. Talk about all our feelings. I don't talk to my boyz but I talk to those guys. My boyz say what's up? They aren't there to know how I feel, not there to know about my girlfriend, how I feel.

R.L.: What are your boyz for?

Youth: Chill out. They aren't close to me. They have other friends, go out, cuz trust neighbourhood boyz - that's all they are there for. (Respondent 22)

"Friends" were commonly thought of as people one would talk to about their life issues, whereas their "boyz" were for "chilling" and they did not talk to them about serious issues. In his seminal work on gangs, Thrasher (1927:322) introduces the concept of subgroups within a larger group, in his research the gang - "[T]he two- and three-boy

relationship is often much more important to the individual boy than his relationship to the gang. In such cases, a boy would doubtless forgo the gang before he would give up his special pal or pair of buddies." Similar organization appears to be occurring among the peer groups with a few peers being classified as close friends and the rest occupying a lower-level in the peer hierarchy. This dynamic will be revisited in latter chapters as it helps us to understand the variance in attitudes and beliefs of the larger peer group and how the respondent makes sense of his peers' behaviours.

One last question was asked to inform our understanding of the attachment the respondents had with their male friends: "*Do you see yourself being friends with your male friends for a long time?*" Over half (64%) suggested that they would be friends "forever" or for a long time. These respondents spoke of how they had been friends since they were kids, were close to their male friends, and that they could talk to each other:

Youth: Yeah have to.

R.L.: You have to?

Youth: What are you going to do? Whatever they go through I go through.

Although, if someone offered me \$10 million I'd say "fuck you and go." Been through a lot of shit. Same lives. Been through times together. All went through jail together. They never left one of us alone. (Respondent 12)

Youth: Close friend? Yeah. Because he's the one I knew since childhood. Yeah, he's moved a lot and always see each other and talk.

R.L.: What about the boyz?

Youth: I'm not there. I'm always telling them "you're not going to be my boyz forever. Just make the best of it." When I get out I want to leave. There will be new boyz. (Respondent 22)

"A couple yeah, not all. A select few. Not all are going down hill. Some are doing OK. A couple just can't not be friends with them, known too long. Just because they do crime doesn't mean I will do crime. I got my own fucking brain, but I just don't like to be

around that." (Respondent 34)

A second area that is integral in our understanding of male peer relationships is that of activities - what types of activities are they engaging in with their male peer group? This insight helps to paint a picture of how they spend their time together. This is important in light of research that shows that some environments are more conducive to male bonding and violence against women (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Sanday 1990; Hey 1986).

First, a general, non-gender specific question was posed to the males: "*what do you usually do with your friends?*" The most commonly mentioned activity done with friends was a combination of partying, drinking and using drugs with eleven respondents mentioning these activities⁸⁷. Overall, there were very few activities mentioned, basically they suggested that they "hung out" doing nothing in particular, with themes of boredom prevalent. When examining activities engaged in with sex-specific friends, some similar as well as different patterns emerge.

To determine whether there were differences between the activities the males engaged in with male versus female friends, respondents were asked about activities they did with their female and male friends specifically. Similar to the findings regarding peers in general, there was a predominant discussion of drinking, using drugs, and/or partying with female friends (13). This was also the theme among the activities engaged in with

⁸⁷ The other two common activities mentioned were watching movies (3) and surfing on the internet and/or playing video games (3).

their male peers with the majority citing at least one of the following as the primary activity they participate in with their male friends: smoking drugs (17), drinking/getting drunk (13) and/or partying (11). Regardless of whether they were hanging out with males or females, most respondents participated in a subculture that had a strong focus on drinking, using drugs, and partying. Research on marginalized youth echoes the same pattern of activity engagement (Miller 2001; Totten 2000).

In terms of differences between activities engaged in with male versus female friends, it was commonly suggested that crime was an activity they participated in solely with male friends, with sixteen mentioning it. The crimes stated were: stealing (6 - spanning from stealing a purse to stealing cars), break and enters (3), selling drugs (3) and robbing people (2). Two respondents said "crime" and did not elaborate.

A second related theme of difference focused on getting into "trouble" with male friends. As indicated, many respondents engaged in crime/trouble with their male friends. This theme was not evident among their female friends.

R.L.: What types of things do you do with your male friends?

Youth: Get into trouble.

R.L.: Do you get into more trouble with female or your male friends?

Youth: Me and my male friends are worse. (Respondent 2)

Youth: Looked for trouble. Ways to make money, steal a purse, a car.

R.L.: Did you do that kind of stuff with your female friends?

Youth: No, they're [female friends] not into that. (Respondent 8)

R.L.: Are your female friends into crime?

Youth: No, cuz their boyfriends won't let them. It's dangerous. You can get shot.

R.L.: It's OK for guys to do it?

Youth: I guess. (Respondent 19)

Also, ten respondents mentioned that fighting was as an activity they shared with their male friends which was not mentioned as an activity they engaged in with their female peers.

A third trend of difference in sexual activity was noted. For 20% (7) of respondents, there was a sexual theme that suggests a lack of distinction between female friends and girlfriends. They did not appear to think of girls in terms of friends, but rather in terms of sexual partners. For example, several mentioned sexual activity with their female friends:

R.L.: What about with your female friends?

Youth: They come around when we want them to.

R.L.: What type of stuff do you do when they come around?

Youth: Every average guy thing...just normal stuff...like sex and stuff.

(Respondent 9)

"Have sex with them, hook them up with my boyz, have one on my arm if I want one to do that..." (Respondent 12)

Youth: Smoke weed, hang out, have sex and crap like that.

R.L.: Are your female friends like girlfriends?

Youth: Yeah. (Respondent 23)

Other activities they participated in with their female friends included:

chilling/hanging out, going to the movies, going to the mall, and talking. Activities they participated in with their male friends specifically included playing sports, chilling or hanging out and going to the movies.

It is also important to understand the types of relationships respondents expected and experienced with their girlfriends. Aspects that characterized their relationships with

their girlfriends are presented below.

Section Two: Relationship with Girlfriends

Generally speaking, respondents were not new to the dating scene. All but one were currently involved in a relationship with a girl or had at least one previous girlfriend. The breakdown is as follows:

- 20 were in an intimate relationship at the time of the interview (including 1 fiancée)
- 15 did not have current girlfriends but had had girlfriends in the past
- 1 has never had a girlfriend

Most of their male friends were also in relationships with girls (20) while fewer female friends were in relationships with males (10). These respondents participated in a peer subculture that encouraged or promoted heterosexual dating relationships⁸⁸, with more male friends with girlfriends than female friends with boyfriends.

Twenty-seven (75%) of the respondents stated that they were either sexually active with their current girlfriend or had been sexually active with their past girlfriend(s).

In five cases, the males were currently or soon-to-be fathers with their girlfriends. Therefore, the relationships respondents were having with their girlfriends were typically sexually intimate in nature.

Among those who *were* in current relationships, the length of their relationships averaged approximately one year. Among those who *were not* in current relationships,

⁸⁸ The heterosexual emphasis reflects the fact that none of the male respondents suggested that he or his male peers were homosexual. One respondent suggested that his female friends were bi-sexual, however his was the only such case.

past relationships averaged six months or less. Those in current relationships appear to be more committed to their relationships as indicated by length of time in the relationship. However, length of time of relationship is not the only measure of commitment.

Speaking of commitment to the relationship with their girlfriends, comments provided ranged from being in "love with each other" to "just seeing what is out there" - a less serious, "having fun" type of relationship. In general, their relationships could be defined as low commitment or non-serious as they appeared to be taking it day-by-day without great focus on the future in terms of their relationships (Eshleman 1978). However, there were a few respondents who were more committed to the relationship foreseeing a future with the girlfriend and, typically, the child they had together. The child could be one reason for the higher level of commitment expressed by some respondents.

Respondents were asked a general question regarding their relationships with their girlfriend: *"How would you describe your relationship with your current/past girlfriend(s)?"* Generally speaking, respondents described their relationships with their girlfriends as "good." However, when probing further to find out what made their relationships "good," it was difficult for respondents to provide examples of what constituted these "good" aspects. Their relationships were not described as being serious; the reasoning that if they did not fight then it was a good relationship, and if they did fight, then the male would "move on" was common.

The following were the most common responses to the question *"What types of*

things did you and your girlfriend do when you hang out together?"

- Went to the movies with friends - 11
- Hang out with my guy friends/ "the boyz" - 10
- Drank/partied/used drugs/went to clubs - 9

As with the male peers, there was a focus on drinking, using drugs, and partying with their girlfriends. A peer group dating environment was predominant whereby the respondent and his girlfriend did not spend a great deal of time alone, but rather, in the company of his male peers with no mention of her friends being present.

For many respondents, having a girlfriend was an important part of their lives and was valued among many of their male peer groups. For many respondents, having a girlfriend was linked to status among their male peers:

R.L.: Was it important for the girls to have boyfriends?

Youth: Yeah - to be popular.

R.L.: Did it make their status better?

Youth: Not sure.

R.L.: Did it make the guys more popular if they had a girlfriend?

Youth: Yeah.

R.L.: How did that work?

Youth: If a guy didn't have a girlfriend we'd say "ha, I have a girlfriend and you don't, "made you bigger, tougher. (Respondent 8)

"My guy friends always jealous because I had one [girlfriend], try to fuck the whole thing up, because they didn't have one." (Respondent 34)

Youth: No, they always get dumped.

R.L.: Why is that?

Youth: Don't know. Never asked. I just laugh at them - usually just for other guys. (Respondent 36)

The link between having a girlfriend and status has similarly been found in previous research (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000).

Respondents were also questioned on the positive aspects of their relationship with their girlfriend. In answering the question "*Are there good things about having a girlfriend?*", the majority of respondents spoke of emotional support, affection, and companionship that a girlfriend provided⁸⁹:

Youth: Good for support if they are a good girlfriend, and you do the same for her.

R.L.: What kinds of support do you mean?

Youth: Say you're depressed, or got problems with your parents, they support you. She was always there when I was arguing on the phone with my mom. You know, mom-son stuff, and she'd support me. (Respondent 1)

"Got somebody to depend on if you're in trouble. Help her out too..." (Respondent 30)

"Someone to be there when you need them. Someone who's there when my mom's not there, someone to say 'oh, it's ok, 'like an actual girlfriend, someone who's worth going out with." (Respondent 32)

Having her support was often mentioned. However, there was an emphasis on *unconditional* support. She was to support him and be there for him at all times.

*"She was **always**⁹⁰ there to support me and guide me."* (Respondent 1)

*"That you're not alone. Have someone there **all the time**. Be there when I was down."* (Respondent 5)

*"**Always** someone there to talk to."* (Respondent 15)

*"Having someone there for you **at all times**. Having a body to cuddle up with, makes you feel wanted."* (Respondent 33)

⁸⁹ Most respondents mentioned more than one positive aspect of their relationship with their girlfriend, hence more than one response per respondent was included so the numbers are not valid to present.

⁹⁰ Throughout the respondents' passages, the words in **bold** indicate the emphasis of the author.

Respondents stated that they did not get this unconditional support from other relationships. Hence, they expected it from their girlfriend. This need or expectation suggests a patriarchal value whereby the female is to provide support for the male in a relationship. She is not to question his actions, rather, merely accept him and his actions. Hand-in-hand with this support feature in a relationship based upon patriarchal norms was an expectation that she did not cross the line of support by offering her own opinions on his life or "by sticking her nose in his business." Rather, it was a male oriented form of support to go along with whatever he wanted.

Similar to Anderson's (1999) findings, many respondents discussed how a girlfriend led to restrictions in their lives. This restrictive element had to deal with being "free"; being able to do as they wanted without their girlfriend interfering. The restriction was typically placed around their interaction with their male friends. The following excerpts illustrate how many respondents regarded their girlfriends in this respect:

Youth: Too close, I am only 17 and want liberty and freedom. I would give her the number if I went out, and she'd say "you're not leaving." Big argument, I don't need no second mom.

R.L.: What do you mean by liberty and freedom?

Youth: She should leave you alone - go do your own thing. Leave me to do my thing. Like sometimes I didn't like her always there, and sometimes I loved it. It's like a dog, when they come in front of you he wants to be cared for, but if he goes to another room, he's tired of it, it was just frustrating.
(Respondent 1)

"One word – suffocation. She was suffocating me. Phone calls every 15 minutes, bawling when I left...she was demanding that way." (Respondent 4)

Youth: She was annoying a lot. Being bitchy. Always talking about going to the store. She always had this bitchy attitude, yelled a lot.

R.L.: Did you yell too?

Youth: *No, I was always calm.*

R.L.: What did she yell about?

Youth: *Me smoking a lot or hanging with my guy friends or girl friends.*

R.L.: She didn't like you hanging with other girls?

Youth: *No, she was jealous.* (Respondent 16)

"Sometimes she would get on your nerves, tell you what to do, what not to do, tied down...like at parties, one night stands - stuff I wouldn't do if I had a girlfriend - availability." (Respondent 20)

Hand-in-hand with the unconditional support they expected from their girlfriend was also a theme of acceptance. The girlfriends were to provide unconditional acceptance for the males without trying to change them.

" Just like her. She's pretty, nice, doesn't judge a book by the way you look. She heard about me, that I was a dog, I'd cheat on her, that I'd end up in prison, but she didn't listen. She judged for herself." (Respondent 11)

"Don't know... if they like me and the way I am. There's one. If I go out with one and she says I want you to stop getting in crap, telling me what to do - hit the road. I want them to accept me. One girl tried to hook me up with this girl and she said have you ever been in [young offender facility]? I got mad." (Respondent 23)

"Understand you and her, talk about anything without fear. Likes you for who you are not money or what you do." (Respondent 28)

The role of a girlfriend to provide emotional support for the male can be contrasted to the role of their male friends. Respondents suggested a distinct difference between what they received from their male friends and what they received from their girlfriends in terms of support. Girlfriends were drawn upon for emotional support. They talked to their girlfriends about what they deemed to be more important "life things" whereas male friends were drawn upon for support in fighting, for fun, or for getting into

"trouble."

R.L.: Do you talk about deep things?

Youth: *With my guy friends no. With females, occasionally, like just about whatever happens in your life. Feel more obliged to talk to them because they talk to you about it and they want to know. More personal with the girls than the guys.*

R.L.: I wonder why that is?

Youth: *They are a little more sensitive. They care, guys don't.*

R.L.: How do you know they care?

Youth: *Can just tell by your interaction with them, by their responses when you talk about it with them. (Respondent 14)*

"Having a girlfriend is different than friends. Friends are there to fight and stuff - but I am not going to say I love you to them. Not going to tell all your problems to a guy or start crying on his shoulder." (Respondent 15)

Youth: *Companionship - someone to rely on. Boyz can only give you so much. You need a girl for other things. There are some things you talk about with your girl you don't talk about with your boyz.*

R.L.: Like what?

Youth: *My family, life, history, If I am depressed - boyz will be like "here, puff this." They don't care. My close 20 yr old guy, I can talk to - the other boyz just laugh. My girl, she'll listen. (Respondent 17)*

Male friends did not play the role of emotional supporter, but rather were to provide physical back-up and to have fun with. This indicates that many respondents upheld patriarchal values and norms in respect to their relationships with males and females; the female as the nurturer and the male strong/physical and to provide fun role. The males often spoke of the need to talk to their girlfriends and the ability to trust them with their personal issues. For example:

Youth: *Can tell her things I wouldn't tell others, I trust her.*

R.L.: What kinds of things do you talk to her about?

Youth: *Parents - like if I am ticked off I can tell her why. She won't go blab it around school...tell her stuff and keep it a secret. Tell her your troubles and know I can go and talk to her about it. You can talk to your parents,*

staff, teachers, but they don't understand. Adults don't understand.
(Respondent 3)

Youth: Can talk to her about things.

R.L.: What kinds of things?

*Youth: Feelings, what I want to do in life. She knows me more than my parents.
Know she is there if you need her.* (Respondent 6)

"Always someone there to talk to. Can talk to your girl about anything. If I asked her not to say anything to anyone she wouldn't. Always someone to do things with. If you are ever stuck someone there for you - care for you not like your friends, it feels good to have someone in your corner. I don't look at it as a relationship for sex, don't care about that shit, just someone there and shit." (Respondent 15)

In many cases, respondents depended upon their girlfriends for emotional support and this was often sought in an unconditional way.

Also suggesting a patriarchal nature of their relationships with their girlfriends, sexual relations was deemed to be an important part of having a girlfriend for many respondents. The following are typical of this response:

"Get laid by someone other than a female friend. Can say you are going out with her. Someone close. Keep me company at night." (Respondent 2)

Youth: Sex.

R.L.: Is that important?

Youth: Maybe not to girls but to me. (Respondent 9)

"Sex, don't know. It's the best thing I guess." (Respondent 11)

Along with this emphasis on the sexual benefits of having a girlfriend were issues of male sexual ownership over a girlfriend, and a commitment to be there for the male in a sexual respect. This suggests a very traditional, patriarchal expectation of the female's role in the relationship - knowing she will always be there for him sexually. This has also been

found in adult fraternity males (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). Accompanying this was a belief that she would be monogamous, placing certain restrictions placed on her interaction with other males as she is dating him.

"Fact that she stays with me. Won't cheat on me. Won't go around flirting with other guys. We're always together." (Respondent 10)

"Knowing someone is there to go to at night like after work or school and she won't be slutting around or with someone else." (Respondent 29)

As stated previously, five respondents were fathers or soon-to-be fathers. Their reasons for why they considered their partner to be their girlfriend were generally associated with fatherhood. There was a suggested "ownership" link between them; because of the baby she was his girlfriend.

Youth: Well we sleep in the same bed for one which makes a big difference.

R.L.: What are some other things?

Youth: She's giving me a kid

R.L.: How do you feel about that?

Youth: Fucking happy. She's having a girl. (Respondent 2)

"Don't know, I love her. Now she is pregnant with my child so that is what makes her my girlfriend." (Respondent 18)

"We have a kid together, I know it's my kid, I'm not going to say 'see ya,' now she's pregnant." (Respondent 29)

A "rescue me" theme was also evident. The girlfriends were often thought of as their escape or rescue from the "bad things" in their life which usually involved their male friends - crime, drugs, and getting into trouble.

"Don't know. At that point I cared about her, going out off and on for a long time. I really cared. She did things others didn't...she made me open, gave me hope. That's what made me closer to her. She wasn't there for money, didn't care. Just cared about me. She tried to change me...for the better." (Respondent 5)

"I share a lot of things on my mind with my girlfriend. My girlfriend is one of my best friends too. I tell her a lot - what's happening with me and shit. She helped me with a lot of things like stopping coke." (Respondent 18)

"I love her for one thing – she's different. It's different. I'm not all hyper or anything around her. She's trying to get me outta this shit." (Respondent 19)

Girlfriends were viewed as an out for some of these respondents, used as an excuse for not hanging out with the boyz and a means to keep them out of trouble.

"You can spoil them, if you have money - good to have. Beats hanging around with all your friends and getting into trouble cuz you're always with her." (Respondent 16)

"If you want to get away from your friends it's the best excuse - I'd say she wants me to be home early." (Respondent 21)

In addition, there was a link between the girlfriend and a "normal" life as well as a calming down of respondents, suggesting that when they were with their girlfriend they could be themselves.

R.L.: Why would you have a girlfriend?

Youth: *If I had one it would be to calm me down.* (Respondent 9)

"Just normal stuff 'cuz when I am with my girl it's time to be normal." (Respondent 17)

This calming effect of females was also noted in Joe and Chesney-Lind's (1995) study of gang youth in Hawaii wherein respondents suggested that they were either fighting or they were with their girls. This seems to suggest that different masks of masculinity were drawn upon by respondents depending on who they were with. When with their male peers, an air of masculine toughness, bravado, and machismo was embraced. While in the company of their girlfriends, this posturing could be dropped. The

focus on proving oneself when among male peers was not evident when with a girlfriend.

Research among marginalized males demonstrates that some men adapt to their perceived powerlessness by competing with other males in similar positions for personal power (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1995; Messerschmidt 1986). The environment or culture places them in competition with each other to establish and maintain their reputation and status (Polk 1998). Often these struggles are ways in which males can demonstrate their masculine status. "Members of the macho street culture have, and maintain, a strong sense of honour. As he must constantly prove his masculinity, an individual's reputation is always at stake" (Messerschmidt 1986:70). When with a girlfriend, the respondent could let his guard down as he was not competing with her as he was already better than her. This again highlights the stereotypical nature of the roles that males and females are expected to play in a dating relationship in the perspective of respondents; males are given the dominant status and females the subordinate. The males have the power and do not have to fight for it so they can let their guard down when with a girlfriend. This could reflect their belief that they did not have to prove themselves as men to their girlfriend as they already had a status as "above" in respect to females, but they have to continually fight for a higher place in the hierarchy of masculinity when among male peers. The expectations and experience of respondents suggest that many of them adhered to patriarchal roles for males and females in intimate relationships; the female was subordinate therefore the male did not have to prove his dominance, it was a given and was not to be contested as it might be, and often is, among the male peer group.

Section Three: Summary

Some of respondents spoke of having a mixed group of friends (both female and male friends); however, the status of being close friends was primarily reserved for males. There was an underlying assumption that having close female friends was something that the male needed to explain; it was as if he felt he was going against the masculine norm by having close female friends, hence the justifications. This is suggestive of a norm among respondents that accepted a male peer culture rather than a network of close female friends. The relationships with their close male friends were not casual, but rather, were based on a history of knowing each other for years. In general, their female friends were younger (14-16 years of age was common), while male friends were older with 20-30 years of age being common.

Overall, the group could be characterized as having strong affiliations with male peer groups and committed to these relationships, hence attached to them. They share some loyalties to them as friends and this is based, in part, on the length of time they have been friends and their commitment to remain friends. As male peer support theory suggests, attachment to male peers is important⁹¹; this connection appears to have been supported among these respondents.

In terms of their male peers, there was a network emerging where they have a group of friends they have known for a long time, from the same background, and they introduce others to the group. This suggests that their friendships are somewhat location

⁹¹ The concept of *abusive* male peers will be discussed in the following chapters.

based and exposure to different people is limited. Therefore, they are apt to have the same beliefs, attitudes, and experiences as many of their male peers. However, they also have newer relationships with some males. A hierarchy appeared to exist where different males were categorized in different places - boyz, friends, and acquaintances. There was also a separation made between those who were considered to be "boyz" versus "friends" and respondents drew on each group for different resources.

Most of the time with their male and female friends was spent engaging in drinking, using drugs, and partying. When looking at the male peer support and violence against women literature, there are findings that suggest these types of environments can be conducive to violence against women (Schwartz et al. 2001). As well, some of the gang research similarly points toward an association between drinking and increased sexual activity by males (Decker and Van Winkle 1996). When looking at the time spent with male peers alone, we also see a trend toward more criminal activities. Male friends were for getting into trouble, fighting, or supported fighting and having fun. There was a sexual theme surrounding female friends that suggests a lack of distinction between female friends and girlfriends. They did not appear to think of girls in terms of friends, but rather as sexual partners.

Respondents were not new to the dating scene. All but one male was currently involved in a relationship with a girl, or had had at least one girlfriend. The male peer subculture of most respondents encouraged heterosexual dating relationships with most of their male friends in dating relationships, while their female friends were less apt to be

dating. The majority (75%) of respondents were sexually active (or had been in former relationships) and five males were currently or soon-to-be fathers with their girlfriends. Typically, their intimate relationships were one year or less in duration and were generally characterized as low-level commitment. Those respondents who spoke of a foreseeable future with their girlfriend were typically those who had/were going to have a child with her. A peer group dating environment was predominant whereby the respondent and his girlfriend spent a great deal of time with his male peers, commonly engaging in "partying" activities.

When looking at the types of relationships respondents had with their girlfriends, three themes were evident. Central to these themes is the underlying commitment to patriarchal gender roles; the males wanted the female to play the emotional/nurturer role. There were suggestions that a girlfriend was to provide unconditional support and affection for the male and not to challenge or question him. Furthermore, she was to accept him without attempting to change him. A second theme pertained to sexual relations. Many respondents associated having a girlfriend with sexual access. There were also themes of male sexual ownership in their comments. It was not an equal relationship but rather there were overtones of male sexual control characterizing what they expected from a relationship with a girlfriend. Last, the theme of a girlfriend providing some form of rescue for respondents was present. This is an interesting and somewhat contradictory finding in relation to the first theme. As suggested, this could reflect the need to be better than the other males so keeping up the act of masculine

toughness with the male peers and competing for a higher place on the hierarchy of masculinity.

Taken together, the three themes provide insight into the way that many respondents conceptualized dating relationships to operate. Respondents had rigid expectations of the roles that males and females should play in a dating relationship and these expectations appeared to be based on patriarchal and stereotypical assumptions of female and male attributes. For example, it was suggested that a girlfriend was to support her boyfriend and not to challenge him. Focus was also placed on sexual access that a girlfriend was to provide.

To conclude, the male-male peer relationships experienced by many respondents were fairly serious, while the male-female relationships were characterized as less serious. The nature of their intimate relationships indicates a belief and adherence to patriarchal gender roles. The next two chapters discussing the resources that some of the male peer groups provided respondents similarly allude to such patriarchal beliefs and attitudes.

Chapter Five

Male Peer Support Resources: Sexuality

Male peer support theory argues that male peer groups can provide resources that encourage and/or legitimate male dominance over females (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993b; Lupri 1990; Sanday 1990). Support for the abuse of females can be provided through various mediums: language, behaviours, and “jokes” to name a few (Sanday 1990; Scully 1990). In analyzing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that one key resource provided by the male peer group was through an avenue coined “sexuality.” This term reflects the various ways in which support for the sexual abuse of women was offered. This category is expansive and includes any type of sexual attitudes and behaviours (verbally, visually, inferred) that could be viewed as creating an environment of male dominance that was conducive to the victimization of females.

Several objectives are achieved in this chapter. First, it will be demonstrated that interaction with their male peer group provided support for the creation and maintenance of a male dominated sexual subculture for many of the respondents. The sexual objectification of females, a narrow definition of male and female, and male peer pressure to be sexually successful, helped to establish and sustain a subculture wherein a male dominated form of sexual relations stressing a high level of sexual prowess with females was promoted. Second, this male dominated sexual subculture facilitated the conceptualization of sexual relations with females as a game of male dominance and power. Third, these factors contributed to an ideology wherein justifications and

legitimations for the use of male-to-female sexual abuse were fostered. Most common was the identification of certain groups of females as legitimate targets for male-to-female sexual abuse and mistreatment and the use of victim blaming to shift responsibility from the offending male to the female. Last, a continuum of abuse emerged whereby certain forms of male-to-female sexual abuse were deemed to be acceptable. While almost all of the respondents stated that they did not accept the use of sexual force, many were able to justify less physical forms of sexual coercion employed by either themselves or their male peers. The following chapter demonstrates how the male peer group provided support and encouragement for the use of various forms of male-to-female sexual abuse. Throughout this discussion, the findings are conceptualized in relevant literatures demonstrating similarities, differences, as well as highlighting some new insights.

Section One: The Creation and Maintenance of a Male Dominated Sexual Subculture: The Sexual Objectification of Females

The revised male peer support model proposed by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993) argues that various factors are related to predatory sexual behaviour and operate to make the victimization of females easier for some males. Although their research focuses primarily on factors among university/college males, similar factors were found among the youth in the current study.

Many studies of violence against women have found that the sexual objectification of females is a key explanatory factor in the sexual abuse of females (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Sanday 1990; Scully 1990). The sexual objectification

of females is best defined as a process whereby females are deemed to be sexual objects to be used by males. This process relegates females to a status lower than males and promotes the viewing of females only as sexual beings, ignoring other accomplishments and attributes they embody. By conceptualizing females merely as sexual objects, males who adhere to this ideology are more able to treat females in an abusive manner with minimized guilt over their behaviours and attitudes (Stock 1991). In other words, it is easier to harm someone who has been deemed worthy of mistreatment⁹². This is not to suggest that every male who adheres to this ideology is a sexual predator. However, as the following discussion illustrates, the sexual objectification of females helps to create an unequal environment for females. Females are seen as “things to be done to” (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997:123), which can often develop into an unsafe environment for females or expose them to a “continuum of unsafety” (Stanko 1990:85).

There is ongoing debate as to whether resources for the abuse of women are more influential if they are direct (verbal) or indirect (non-verbal), it is often difficult to differentiate between the two types of resources. Male peer support research argues that one resource male peers provide is a discourse that is derogatory and demeaning toward females (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). This seeks to create an environment of male bonding at the exclusion and, even more damaging, at the expense of females.

The following themes emerged and it is suggested that these dynamics help to

⁹² See Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997:124) for a brief discussion on historical examples of the process of conceptualizing other human beings as objects rather than as people.

create and maintain an environment that sexually objectifies females and is conducive to the sexual abuse of females: guy talk; a narrow conception of male and female; and, male peer pressure to be sexually active. Each factor will be discussed in turn.

1) *Guy Talk*

One of the most prevalent resources for the sexual objectification of females came in the form of “guy talk” which both the respondents and their male peer groups engaged in. In response to the question, “*what do you usually talk about with your male friends?*,” the majority of respondents suggested that they talked about their girlfriend with their male friends. It is interesting to note that most respondents associated this question with sexuality.

Many of the respondents said that they talked to their male peers about their sexual relations with their girlfriend, referring to this as “guy talk.” Guy talk was exclusionary to females as these conversations were reserved for males only.

“I wouldn’t talk in front of my female friends about who I was going to mack, work on, be nice to, try to pick up.” (Respondent 20)

“Talked about girls, their body, how they are bossy...Mostly talk about bad stuff about them, whose girlfriend is bigger [fatter], who has more money. Compare strippers body to our girlfriends...like if my girlfriend had that body...don’t take it the wrong way, **that’s what guys talk about**...basically, I don’t mind answering questions about sex, like what we do, what she likes, what she does.” (Respondent 31)⁹³

“Fucking - how they fuck a girl, **guy talk - every guy talks about that.**” (Respondent 34)

The content of the guy talk reveals a focus on the sexual aspects of females - who

⁹³ Respondent 31 was the only youth who talked about patronizing strip clubs (“*almost every night for about five hours or so*”), hence his reference to “strippers.”

they were trying to pick up, the females' body, "fucking." Females were discussed in terms of their physical appearance and their sexuality. As respondents 31 and 34 (cited above) state, talking about girlfriends in a sexual manner was "*guy talk*" and there was a common assumption that "*every guy talks about that*." The association between talking about sex and being a male was evident. In fact, it appeared to be an indication of being male in many cases. Talking about sex was a way in which to "do masculinity" (Messerschmidt 2000, 1993) as the respondents and their male peers had defined it - demonstrating one's commitment to masculinity via discussion of sexual relations with females. To be interested in and talk about sexual relations with females was an important element associated with being a male.

This association between heterosexual activity and masculinity confirms previous findings (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000). Messerschmidt's (2000) work with adolescent sexual offenders shows that one youth developed a "sexual consciousness in which he sexually objectifies and desired women" (Messerschmidt 2000:28) which was learned from interaction with other same-aged males at school. This particular youth's desire to be able to experience what the other males talked about was a central factor in his path to becoming a sexual offender. "I thought, well, I'm a guy, so this is something that every guy does, that I want to be a part of this. I want to be like the other guys. I want to know what it feels like, I want to know what goes on" (Messerschmidt 2000:28, Sam). The guy talk of his male peers worked to exclude him as he had not yet experienced sexual relations. As Sam could not develop sexual

relationships with females his own age, he sought younger females which led to the sexual abuse of females he babysat. The role of the male peer group in its promotion of the importance of heterosexuality to one's masculine status was similarly experienced by another sexual offender, John, who states, "to be male you have to be sexual with a female...because I heard the guys at school talking, you know. I heard the stuff about them having sex with these girls and how they thought it was cool, you know. That's all they talked about, and I wanted to be cool." (Messerschmidt 2000:38).

Guy talk should not merely be explained away with a "boys will be boys" rationale as Messerschmidt's (2000) work shows a relationship between this guy talk and the sexual abuse of females. In some cases, the exclusion of the males from participating in the guy talk coupled with their lack of ability to develop sexual relationships with females their own age, played a part in their preying on younger, non-willing females. The pressure to talk about their sexual exploits is not unique to male youth; Wilson's (1996) work with adult males similarly describes the male peer group as a site of pressure to reveal one's own sexual experiences. The importance of the peer group as a site for declaring one's heterosexual status was demonstrated among the respondents in my study as well.

Guy talk also encouraged the idea that males were entitled to sexual relations with females *because* they were male. The link between being male and heterosexual activity encouraged some respondents to reason that *because* males are supposed to have sex and I am a male, I am *entitled* to sex with females. The potential for this feeling of

entitlement to encourage the sexual abuse of females was also realized in Messerschmidt's (2000) work. "Like, well, I'm a guy. I'm supposed to have sex. I'm supposed to be like every other guy" (Messerschmidt 2000:31, Sam); "I felt entitled, 'cause I'm a guy" (Messerschmidt 2000:40, John). Similarly, in focus groups, Jackson (1997) found that young women similarly identified the sexual entitlement that seemed to accompany a male in an intimate relationship, "...they have this thing where what the guy says kind of goes and if they feel like it, yes, its their prerogative but I think that's where pressure comes in and a lot of society sees it as the guys right" (Jackson 1997b:6, Lisa).

Relatedly, one of the most common aspects of guy talk was a sharing of sexual stories:

R.L.: Do your male friends ask about you and your girlfriend?

Youth: Yeah – "*What happened?*" "*Did you eat her out? Did she suck your cock? Did you fuck her?*" I say, "*it's none of your fucking business.*"

R.L.: Do you ask them about their girlfriends?

Youth: Yeah – "*what did you do with your girlfriend? Sucking her tits and stuff?*" *They tell it all. I keep it to myself.* (Respondent 13)

"Girls, weed, one time it was really funny, this guy says 'just slammed her last night, I slammed her in the ass' ya'll talk about it...Ask me 'what kinds of positions does she do in bed?'" (Respondent 15)

"Yeah. Tell me about what they do to them. I guess there's a thing with guys, pass around sex stories." (Respondent 21)

Many of the respondents and their male peers engaged in similar conversations to those presented in the above excerpts. Discussions such as these contribute to the creation of an environment wherein sexual relations with females are valued and promoted while simultaneously reinforcing an image of successful sexual activity among its members. As

is similar to the previous excerpts, the content of their discussions focused on sexual acts and contributed to the conceptualization of females as sexual objects. The emotional or more intimate nature of their interactions with females is not a characteristic of guy talk. Rather, focus is placed on the sexual details.

The sharing of these details helps to teach the youth that to be male means to engage in sexual relations with females and to share the details with other males. Past research has referred to this aspect of guy talk as bragging about past sexual experiences or conquests (Wilson 1996).

Discussing one's past sexual exploits achieves many things for a male. First, it confirms his commitment to heterosexuality; second, it demonstrates his commitment to the ideology that females are to be viewed as sexual conquests; and third, the combination of these two previous aspects help to establish his position in the hierarchy of masculinities as above homosexuals and women. The importance of accomplishing these three objectives has been demonstrated in work with youth (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000) and with university/college men (Messner 1992; Sanday 1990). As well, guy talk helps to establish that the male is sexually active which can lead to the belief that the rest of the males in a peer group are sexually active; this can influence other members of the peer group. Jackson et al. (2000) found that many of the male high school students in their study reported that they engaged in unwanted sexual activity because they thought their friends were doing it (21%); only 10% of females stated a similar answer. Guy talk helps to establish the idea that everyone else is

engaging in sexual activity, therefore he should as well.

The sharing of sexual stories was commonly accompanied by the sharing of sexual resources or the passing around of females.

"Say your boy says, 'got this' then we say 'yeah, I already hit that.' All the boyz, we tell each other. Meet new girls at parties and they keep getting added to the list - phone numbers of how we can reach them." (Respondent 3)

Youth: I'd say I was with that [had sex with her], so they just know - say they like her, they ask me if I'd done her.

R.L.: What if you had?

Youth: Leave it. There's a respect between us. She's like property, not to disrespect the girls but that's what it's like. No one's going to take what you own, it's just respect. (Respondent 9)

Youth: Sex life, how the guy used her. Uses her for sex and then dumps her, only talks to her for sex. Most of my friends are players, don't really care about relationships. Just use girls for sex that's it.

R.L.: How are they being used?

Youth: Sexual wise, just being used as a toy.

R.L.: Toy?

Youth: Passed around between guys, use her for sex and then dump her...

R.L.: Why do you think the guys do that?

Youth: Don't know, make themselves look cool. They think it's cool. (Respondent 24)

In the excerpt by respondent 24 (cited above), it is clear that his male peers conceptualize females as sexual objects, "toys" to be used by males and this treatment is rewarded as the other males think it is "cool." Similarly, respondent 9 and his male peers conceptualize females they have had sex with as their "property." Once you have sex with a girl you own her; females are relegated to objects which one can dominate or have control over *because* of engaging in sexual relations with her. Furthermore, the use of the terminology, "I'd done her" and "I already hit that," again suggest that females are

deemed to be objects to “do things to” (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997:123). These terms denoting females as objects have also been found in earlier works (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000; Sanday 1990).

The theme of a female as a sexual object was also demonstrated through the rating of females on their body parts which some of the youth engaged in.

“If a girl walks by they’ll say ‘do you like her puppies [chest]?’ If they ask me I’ll say yeah yeah.” (Respondent 3)

Youth: Used to go to pornography sites [on the internet].

R.L.: Did you go to those sites with your male friends?

Youth: Yeah, pretty often, went to a lot of them.

R.L.: What was your reaction to those sites?

Youth: Look at them, talk about them – “this one’s [girl] crappy, good,” rate them. (Respondent 4)⁹⁴

The above excerpts illustrate how females are conceptualized as sexual objects. In the first excerpt, respondent 3 and his male peers evaluate females in terms of their body parts, in this case their chest. Similarly with respondent 4 (cited above), they engaged in the ranking of females based solely on their physical appearance.

2) *Narrow Definition of Being Male and Female*

⁹⁴ Respondent 4 introduces an interesting and relatively new avenue that aids in the sexual objectification of females. He and his male friends engaged in cyber sex which he defines as “*when you pretend you are having sex over the net.*” Sometimes he would engage in cyber sex with two or three male friends while other times he would be alone. He talks of how they also go to pornography sites and rate the women (see above excerpt). Activities such as these promote an environment where women are viewed merely as sexual objects and can also create unobtainable expectations in their own intimate relationships. Interestingly, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998c:88) speak of the emergence of “proabuse cyberspace male peer support groups” and the potential that the internet can serve as a forum for the sharing of violent pornographic material even though the men never meet face-to-face. This indeed is an area in need of future research.

The sexual objectification of females encourages the conceptualization of females merely as sexual objects to be used by men. This process is in a reciprocal relationship with a narrow definition of male and female. It is difficult to determine whether conceptualizing females as sexual objects leads to a narrow definition of male and female or whether a narrow definition of male and female facilitates the sexual objectification of females. As a result, the relationship between these two factors is suggested to be a reciprocal one.

In many of the interviews, conversations naturally progressed to the respondent discussing the differences between males and females. Typically this arose from their comments that “guys and girls are just different,” which in turn led to questions on *how* they were different. Their responses to this further probing were patriarchal and stereotypical in nature, painting a picture of a world of male privileges and benefits contrasted with a world of limited opportunities and few benefits for females. The respondents described male and female in a dichotomous nature, with the differences between them being clear and consistent. The following are examples from their conversations. It is important to note that the upcoming discussion relates only to answers to specific questions regarding the differences between males and females. As is evident in the previous section, and will be discussed throughout forthcoming chapters, several implicit references emerged regarding the differences between males and females. Those discussed below only pertain to what they said directly, not to what was implied during subsequent points of the interviews.

"Just the way they are respected - guys are more respected than girls in everything -in music - more guys, in sports watch guys more, guys more popular, girls are just generalized as people that cook at home and stuff. Guys are stronger, but a lot of girls are smart, but some are in school and stuff but most guys I know drop out and stuff." (Respondent 9)

"Hmm, how do I say this...most guys are more aggressive. Girls are passive. Personality types is a big difference. Most guys don't care about what others think. Girls worry about what others think. Can't do this because they might upset someone." (Respondent 17)

"Girls are more respectful of guys. [Girls are] kinder, more understanding [than guys]. They [females] care more, more understanding." (Respondent 24)

"Girls play with barbies, guys play with Gi-Joes. It's...guys are violent, girls some are and some aren't [violent]." (Respondent 29)

"Don't know. Guys a lot more bigger than girls... Don't know, guys think they can tell girls what to do. Sometimes good sometimes bad - people hit girls. Girl's told what to do and didn't do it. [Guys are] bigger than them [girls] and tell them what to do." (Respondent 30)

The respondents typically adhere to a narrow conception of gender roles characterized by distinct differences regarding what it is to be a male or a female. Females are defined in a stereotypical and patriarchal manner by the youth. The defining features such as emotionally supportive, are consistent with what the majority of the youth sought in a girlfriend (see Chapter 4). According to many of the respondents, being a male held many advantages; for example, physical strength, control over women, respect, and independence. Being female, on the other hand, did not hold such advantages; for example, dependent on others, generalized to stay at home and cook, physically smaller, and get hit. Respondents commonly defined male and female in opposition to one another. In fact, male attributes were often defined as anything that was not feminine, therefore placing males as above or "better than" females. As Connell

(1995) suggests, masculinity exists in opposition to femininity for these respondents; in a sense, masculinity can be seen as the social construction of difference. To be male means to be different and above females.

Parallels of this narrow definition of male and female can be drawn with some of the research on formal college/university male organizations and woman abuse. Fraternities and male sports teams tell us a great deal about the social construction of different masculinities and the promotion of narrow conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Koss and Cleveland III 1996; Koss and Gaines 1993; Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). Findings show that some members of these organizations are more apt to hold traditional gender role views that support male dominance and female passivity (Kalof and Cargill 1991; Muir 1991; Eskenazi 1990). Within many of these male organizations, hegemonic masculinity is defined as whatever is not feminine and heterosexuality is emphasized (Martin and Hummer 1989; Herek 1987). Findings from my research indicate that the socialization of this narrow definition of male and female begins prior to college/university age. As discussed above, some male youth adhere to these rigid and oppositional definitions of male and female calling into question the role of campus organizations in the generating of this narrow conception of masculinity. The findings add support to Kanin's (1967) claim that men are trained in the practices of sexually objectifying women at an earlier age, and simply join groups with like-minded ideologies; hence, fraternities or other formal groups on campus may play a reinforcing role. It appears that a narrow definition

of male and female is already being developed during the period of youth and perhaps even earlier.

Narrow and patriarchal definitions of male and female aid in the creation of an environment that encourages male dominance and control over females. Viewing females as unequal to men and adherence to an ideology that promotes male dominance and superiority can foster attitudes and behaviours that can be supportive of the victimization of females. Although discussing the fundamentals of the Aristotelian theory of law, the theme MacKinnon (1994) presents is relevant in this context; those who are deemed to be equal are treated equally, while those who are defined or perceived to be unequal are treated unequally. As respondent 30 (cited above) suggests, “...guys think they can tell girls what to do. Sometimes good sometimes bad - people hit girls.”

3) *Male Peer Pressure to be Sexually Active with Females*

A third factor related to the creation and maintenance of a male dominated sexual subculture came in the form of male peer pressure to be sexually active. As suggested previously, verbal banter back-and-forth with the male peer group in respect to their sexual experiences with girlfriends was quite common among the respondents and their male peers. These discussions helped to create an environment where sexual activity was promoted.

“They’ll say like ‘when was the last time you got into bed with her?’” (Respondent 2).

“Sometimes they brag, talk about it when first going out, make bets on who will screw their girlfriend first, like ‘oh I beat you’ we bet on sex, when they would get dumped.” (Respondent 14)

Similar to Totten's (2000) findings with marginalized male youth, sexual prowess was an important component of being a male as many of the groups had defined it in the current study. There is focus on quantity, "*when was the last time,*" suggesting that he should be having sexual relations frequently. For respondent 14 (cited above) the pressure to be sexually active is clear within this culture of betting on who would have sex first - to be sexually active is to be a winner so to speak⁹⁵.

There was an association of prestige with sexual activity and access confirming findings of past research with youth (e.g., Messerschmidt 2000, 1993; Pollack 2000; Ageton 1983). As the following respondents state, it was widely known that there was a negative connotation associated with a male if he was not sexually active. The male peer groups of the respondents seemed to support this negative association.

R.L.: Would it matter to you if you weren't having sex with your girlfriend?

Youth: No.

R.L.: Does sex mean much to you?

Youth: No, to a lot of guys it means lots. Some would say if you a virgin you're a loser, laugh at you.

R.L.: Why do you think they say that?

Youth: Makes themselves feel better, but not my friends, just people I know.

(Respondent 6)

R.L.: What would your guy friends say if you weren't having sex?

⁹⁵ Further elaboration on this theme of sexual relations as a game is presented at a latter point in this chapter.

Youth: Don't know. They'd laugh at me. They've all had sex. Some aren't if they don't have a girlfriend, others with girlfriend are all having sex, unless they are lying to me. (Respondent 11)

"They would probably bug me [if he was not having sex]. It doesn't really matter if you are or not, lots of younger guys aren't and it doesn't matter. They would just bug me, they don't mean it, they are your friends, they bug you about everything." (Respondent 20).

Respondent 6 (cited above) states that for many males, being a virgin indicates you are a "loser." Other males may perceive you as less of a male if you are not having sexual relations. In other words, it is seen as a challenge to your commitment to the masculine identity as the group has defined it. Similarly, it was expected that respondent 11 (cited above) would be having sexual relations and this was promoted within his male peer group. Although respondent 20 (cited above) appears to be able to down-play his peers teasing him, it is still apparent that if one is not sexually active it is a point that is open to ridicule.

This again supports the connection between being a male and sexual activity; to be male is to be sexually active with females. This connection finds support in other research on marginalized male youth. Some of the adolescents in Messerschmidt's (2000) work similarly spoke of a connection between respect and sexual activity with women. Respect from the other boys was achieved via being with a female. As well, respondents in Totten's (2000) study also associated respect and "being looked up to by other males" as inherently linked to heterosexual activity. This connection does not appear to be unique to the group of socially displaced male youth in the current study or to marginalized male youth however.

Male youth in Pollack's (2000) national study on high school students similarly report being bullied and teased by male peers if they were not sexually active with females. Jackson (1997b:6) also found a link between sexual conquest and masculine identity among adolescent males, "[c]onformity with a 'macho' definition of masculinity is strongly reinforced by the male peer group which can, and often does, exert considerable sexual pressure on a teenage male." As well, research with fraternity men suggests that successful demonstration of heterosexuality is a valued quality of potential and current members (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989).

The connection between heterosexuality and masculinity appears to be based within hegemonic patterns of masculinity rather than in a particular social class. Two examples from popular culture illustrate the pervasiveness of the emphasis on heterosexuality and masculinity. A new radio station Mo Joe Radio for Men in Toronto, Canada is directed to a male audience. The show casts men as being primarily concerned with sex, male bonding, and sports. Commercials contain sexual content, accompanied by contests that boast trips to "Hooters Restaurant with the guys." The station debuted a talk show entitled "Coyote Sex." It focused on situations where "you wake up and realize the girl you brought home is so ugly you would rather chew your own arm off to get away from her." Second, a television commercial for Export beer features a group of men drinking beer and talking about sex and the importance of hanging around with male friends. These examples demonstrate the association of popular culture between being male, engagement in heterosexual activity, and the defining of some females as sexual objects

to be used by men. It appears that the respondents' beliefs and values are a reflection of broader patriarchal social forces at work in society (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

The focus on heterosexual success reinforces the hierarchy of masculinities as well (Connell 1996). Talking about sexual relations with females also played a role in the development of subordinate masculinities. Males who did not participate in the sexual talk were defined as less male. Terms such as "wimp" and "faggot" have been shown to be associated with males who cannot, or choose not to, participate in the discussion of successful sexual conquests (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000; Connell 1996); there is an exclusion component that also operates as an attack on masculinity for some males that accompanied this sexual talk. If one could not participate in this medium (i.e. if they did not have sexual encounters to talk about), one could feel a threat to one's masculine status. In Messerschmidt's (2000) work, this exclusion was cited as one of the contributing factors to the sexual abuse of females by some of the identified adolescent male sexual offenders in his research. His research demonstrates how the experience of guy/sex talk can translate into feelings of exclusion and threats to masculine status that in some cases are resolved through the forcing of sexual relations on females.

Contributing to the relationship between masculinity and sexuality was the assumption that being interested in having a girlfriend solely for sexual relations was accepted, perhaps even expected. Many of the respondents suggested that their male peers would say that sex was the best thing about having a girlfriend.

"If serious, someone to talk to. If joking they'd say sex." (Respondent 5)

“Depends, if there are a bunch of us around they would say sex, but if it's just two of us they'd probably say trust, someone to talk to.” (Respondent 20)

“They would say sex for a joke but I don't know...” (Respondent 28)

“Sex, probably every guy would say that.” (Respondent 29)

Their thoughts on their male peers' relationships with girlfriends introduce another dynamic regarding the connection between sexual relations and being male. A distinction is eluded to between what male friends would say in a group of males versus one-on-one with another male. Reflecting the association that many of the respondents and their male peers adhered to between sexual relations and being masculine, there is an assumption that the males should say sex is the best thing about having a girlfriend. However, the respondents suggest that when their male friends are among close friends they are more apt to be serious and provide a different answer. Sexual activity is important to and is valued by many of the respondents and their male peer groups; they know that they are supposed to say sex is the best thing and they would do so in front of their peers, but personally they would say something else. They uphold the image of sexual relations being the most important goal, but yet the respondents seem to know that their male friends want more than a sexual relationship in many cases. The image of males as sexual beings is important and is upheld when among the group, but one-on-one they can leave the façade behind and be more serious.

Some authors in the area of masculinity refer to façades such as these as the mask of masculinity (for example, Pollack 2000), suggesting the many different faces of masculine identity that can exist within an individual. There are different aspects of

masculine identity that “please” different people; for example, many of the respondents suggested that they would act differently with males than with females (see Chapter 4’s discussion regarding the ability of a male being able to be himself around females and not males). There is almost an expectation for them to think that the most important thing about having a girlfriend is the sexual aspect. In order to appear as “male” as the group has defined it, sexual relations have to be an important aspect of his relationships with females. This focus on sexual relations can be conceptualized as an additional form of male peer pressure to be sexually active with females.

While the following excerpt is quite lengthy, it is included to exemplify the role that some male peer groups can have in terms of pressuring or encouraging a male to engage in some form of sexual activity, in this case, grabbing a girlfriend in a sexual nature while in public.

Youth: I just play around with her - grab her ass when everyone is there [at school]. Everybody does, just like it.

R.L.: Why?

Youth: It's funny, to get a reaction from her.

R.L.: What does she think about it?

Youth: Sometimes she likes it, sometimes she's cranky and will tell me to stop.

R.L.: What do your friends do when you do that?

Youth: They say "alright." Some of my friends are real perverts, they say "Alright! I hope you score this weekend!", I just laugh.

R.L.: You said that some of your friends are perverts?

Youth: If they see me doing something they'd say "alright." Sometimes I will grab her ass in front of cars.

R.L.: Why?

Youth: Because it is funny. If people don't like it, don't watch.

R.L.: Do your male friends like it when they see it?

Youth: Yeah - if not, why would they keep looking?

R.L.: Do the guys do the same with their girlfriends?

Youth: Not really, not like they wouldn't do that, I don't care what people think.

They wouldn't do things that others see, don't do it with their girlfriends. If they don't like it, turn away. Walk away.

R.L.: If your closer male friends told you not to do it, would you still do it?

Youth: Yeah, but they are all perverted so they wouldn't tell me not to do it.

R.L.: Why is so important for you to do it in public?

Youth: I don't know, it's just funny if people look, I don't know, sometimes I do it for a reaction.

R.L.: From who?

Youth: Some of my male friends.

R.L.: Can you give me an example of what you might do in front of your male friends?

Youth: Ok, say I am at her locker giving her a kiss, and I see a guy coming up behind. I might pinch her ass and he'll say "alright!" My friends do it too. I'll walk by and squeeze my hand and he'll squeeze her ass and we'll laugh.

R.L.: What happens when you do that to your girlfriend?

Youth: She gets angry because she doesn't want me to touch her in the hall.

R.L.: What do you say to her?

Youth: I don't care. (Respondent 3)

Respondent 3 (cited above) demonstrates the role his male peer group played in encouraging his sexual advances with his girlfriend. As suggested in his later statement, his girlfriend did not approve of his actions, yet he continued the behaviour. He acknowledges that he does these things, in part, for the reaction of his male peers. In fact, he places the entertainment and the accompanying approval of his male peers above the desire of his girlfriend. He does not care how his actions make her feel as they benefit him, his male peers, and his image as a male. Sexual harassment (for example, grabbing a girlfriend against her will) is one resource that helps to maintain the male gender hierarchy (Fineran and Bennett 1999; Segal 1990; O'Gorman and Sandler 1988). Acts such as these, perpetrated against females, can provide a resource through which to secure masculine gender identity among a male peer group, collectively reinforcing males as the

dominant sex. The male power and dominance over females achieved through these acts stems in part from the unpredictability of the acts escalating to more overt violence, what Stanko (1990) has referred to as the continuum of violence.

Another example of the importance of sexual relations with females and the role of the male peer group in reinforcing this aspect of masculinity is provided by respondent 25.

R.L.: So what goes on at the parties?

Youth: Everything - fights, drinking, sex upstairs in the rooms. Some just go out and fight in the driveways.

R.L.: There is sex at the parties?

Youth: Yeah.

R.L.: Between whom?

Youth: Everybody, some know each other, some not. Some are just drunk.

R.L.: Is that a main reason for the party?

Youth: Not really.

R.L.: Is it an important part?

Youth: Kinda. (Respondent 25)

Among his male peer group, sexual relations with females were actively encouraged through the throwing of parties which had sexual relations as one of the intended outcomes⁹⁶. The pressure for males to be sexually active that can be exerted by some male peer groups is evident in the above two excerpts.

4) *Summary*

⁹⁶ Although he was the only respondent who eluded to such parties, this idea has been noted among fraternity research as a means to finding "sexually available" women (Martin and Hummer 1998; Sanday 1990). This similarity suggests that perhaps fraternities merely replace existing unorganized or less formal male peer groups and continue to nurture such sexually oriented events.

The respondents and their male peers were learning that to be defined as masculine, they must choose females as the objects of their sexual interest (Stanko 1990). The sexual objectification of females was achieved through guy talk, a narrow definition of male and female, and male peer pressure to be sexually active; these components aided in the creation and maintenance of a male-dominated sexual subculture wherein male sexual prowess is encouraged, and male sexual dominance is fostered and promoted. Male peer groups are one avenue through which men learn about what to expect in relationships with females, and while there can be positive outcomes, there can also be damaging ones. In a male peer group that focuses on quantity and not quality of intimate relationships, peer influences regarding relationship roles can have negative consequences. The sexual objectification of females is one such impact. These factors help to create an environment that is conducive to the sexual victimization of females and encourages male dominance.

Section Two: Commitment to and Reinforcement of Male Sexual Control

The previous section demonstrated that many of the respondents and their male peer groups encouraged sexual relations, however, it is a specific form of sex that is encouraged - one that is male dominated. The importance of male sexual control is clearly illustrated through the words of respondent 2.

*Youth: She has more control [in relationship]. Stupid bitch. I don't have no say in our relationship, same with friends. But who has all control in bed? **She has no control in bed.** When I want to sleep, we sleep. I tell her "wait till night" then she shuts up. The first time I said that I waited till she was almost asleep and I stabbed the waterbed like inches away from her at like 2 a.m. So she always watches over her shoulder. She can't sleep and she*

freaks me out by always being awake and watching me so she gets me back.

R.L.: When you did that you were trying to freak her out?

Youth: *Yeah - tell her I am not joking, but I was.*

R.L.: So would you say you are in control at all?

Youth: *Girlfriend does everything they want them to do. **Some of the other guys lose control in bed, but I have control in bed.** Like my friend will say "when was the last time you got laid?" I'd say, "about five hours ago." This guy hadn't in over a week - he's got no control over his sex life. I tell them "you might as well take control 'cause you're getting fucked."*

R.L.: How would you get control?

Youth: *Just take it. (Respondent 2)*

The above respondent refers to the importance of male sexual control. While it is acceptable to lose control over the relationship in other respects, for him, the most important aspect is that he is sexually in control. The assumption that the male needs or perhaps even deserves the right to control females sexually is not questioned, but rather, adhered to and actively sought.

The factors discussed in the previous section facilitate the conceptualization of females as sexual conquests; females were objects to be sexually conquered by males, suggesting a male dominated sexual relationship. The importance of and commitment to male sexual control was expressed in several ways, however, one of the most dominant was through their conceptualization of sexual relations as a "game."

1) *The Game of Sexual Relations*

Several of the respondents talked about the game of sexual relations with females. As the following excerpts demonstrate, the ideology of sexual relations with females as a game was accepted by many of the respondents as well as their male peers.

Youth: *When they ask me if she [girlfriend] was good, I'll tell them. It's like a big*

joke. Everyone tries to be a player, see how many girls they play...can get - have sex with.

R.L.: Do you talk about that?

*Youth: More if girls are around. Bug them because they know and don't do anything about it. They know **it's just a big game to us**...yeah, it's not like intimate.* (Respondent 9)

*"They [male friends] ask me 'what kinds of positions does she do in bed?' I say 'none of your business,' just joke around, ask her if I am good in bed. Basically we are big kids, big joke, **like a game to us**."* (Respondent 15)

Inherent in this sexual game is an "us versus them" dichotomy that situates males against females. As the above two respondents demonstrate, the sexual game facilitates male bonding with the "us" referring to the respondent and his male peers. Drawing on the imagery of the game, males comprise one team while females are on the opposite team.

The imagery of sexual relations as a game was predominant in many of the respondent comments. For example, there was use of game or sport language:

*"...the guys would come up and say 'so did you **score** with her?' I say, 'oh yes.'"* (Respondent 3)

*"Like do we **score ranks**? We used to when we were younger, but not no more. We all know we get girls and shit, not as important anymore."* (Respondent 12)

The use of the terminology, "scoring," is consistent with findings from other research on masculinity and sexual coercion (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000; Jackson 1997b; Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). Also reflecting the game/sport imagery is the practice of placing monetary bets on who would be first to engage in sexual relations with his girlfriend. The following excerpts illustrate the nature of sexual competition between the respondents and their male peers.

*"It's like a contest. See who has the most numbers and stuff. I say '**I got more than you,**'*

then we bet on it. The most numbers this guy has is thousands. We all have a black book, alphabetize them...Phone numbers so you know how you can get them, numbers you can call and know she'd come to your house and have sex with you." (Respondent 9)

"Yeah - sometimes they brag. Talk about it at first when going out, make bets on who will screw their girlfriends first, like 'oh, I beat you'...We bet about sex, would they get dumped, etc.." (Respondent 14)

The ideology of females as things to be conquered is evident as they view sexual relations as a contest to see how many females each male can "get" (have sexual relations with). Part of many contests is the process of betting on who will win (i.e. sports). The females are objects that are used to facilitate "winning" this particular game. In order to "win," the male must have sexual relations with the most females. Females are literally pawns in this game, defined as objects to be taken and added to a list to become the winner of the male dominated game of sexual relations. The conceptualization of sexual relations as a game is not unique to this group of males. Pollack (2000) similarly found that sexual relations were often conceptualized as a race wherein virginity determines one's status among the male peer group.

The competitive component of seeing how many females a male can "get with" confirms findings among some of the working-class male adolescents in Messerschmidt (2000) and Canaan (1998), as well as among some marginalized males in Totten's (2000) research. This is not merely an activity limited to male youth however. Literature on fraternities and sexual coercion similarly argue that the practices engaged in by members (for example, a narrow macho conception of masculinity, the conceptualization of women as commodities) facilitate their view of sexual relations as a sport, game or contest

(Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). The current findings appear to lend support for Kanin's (1967) claim that many men are entrenched in pro-abuse ideology prior to university/college.

There was a great deal of discussion of "players" and "ho's" throughout the interviews, again partially reflecting the terminology of the sexual game/sport⁹⁷. Some respondents identified themselves as players while others did not, but rather, indicated their male friends were players. The definition of player was consistent across respondents and emphasized sexual prowess *with females*. The label of player was reserved for males who had several sexual experiences with different females; there was no mention of homosexual relations by any of the thirty-six respondents⁹⁸. The following are defining characteristics of a player:

"When girlfriends aren't there, they try to pick up women, trying to get laid all the time."
(Respondent 16)

"They're dirty, dress slick. Only thing on their minds is sex and girls." (Respondent 22)

⁹⁷ Again, there is consistency with this terminology and that found in similar studies. For example, Pollack (2000:60) describes how a girl who has sexual relations with several males is considered to be a "ho" whereas a male who engages in similar behaviour is considered to be a "player."

⁹⁸ This is not meant to suggest that there were no homosexual, or bisexual respondents in the group; however, no discussion of these sexualities arose in any of the interviews. Therefore no comments can be made in this respect. In fact, personal correspondence with the clinical psychologist revealed that there were two homosexuals among the males I interviewed. These examples again indicate the importance of presenting oneself as a heterosexual and the emphasis that is placed on the link between heterosexuality and maleness among the respondents. The inaccuracy of the image provided by some of the respondents reveals the vested interest in appearing to be heterosexual at all costs.

"A guy having more than one girlfriend." (Respondent 25)

However it is not merely a focus on sexual relations, but rather, a focus on a large number of sexual interactions with different women. Quite simply, it is not enough to be having sexual relations; a player had to be having sexual relations with several females.

"Player - see how many girls they can play, can get, have sex with...Stay with one for like a month and then I move to another one. I get tired of the same girl after a month and then just leave." (Respondent 9)

"They are players, sleeping with all these girls...Playing them having sex and then dumping them." (Respondent 11)

Again, we have the association between females as objects to be used sexually by males wherein the primary goal of their interaction with the females is of a sexual nature.

"One's a player, in it for sex, no commitment." (Respondent 10)

"Most of my friends are players, don't really care about relationships. Just use girls for sex that's it." (Respondent 24)

In this case, a player was a male who used whatever tactics available to him to help him achieve the end goal, sexual relations, with no concern for what the female would gain from the interaction. There were rules or tactics that were used in this game and these were encouraged or promoted through their conceptualization of females as sexual objects.

"...manipulate, con, lead them on, give them false promises you can take advantage of them. You play for different things, but I usually do it for sex, money, cars, older girls usually." (Respondent 12)⁹⁹

⁹⁹ As respondent 12 suggests, players also play females for things other than sexual relations (for example, money, cars), however the respondents in the current research spoke of players primarily in relation to sexual endeavours.

Youth: No, they [male friends] sleep with them for fun, not because they like the person, just use girls...

R.L.: How are they being used?

Youth: Sexual wise, just being used as a toy.

R.L.: Toy?

Youth: Passed around between guys - use her for sex then dump her...
(Respondent 24)

Youth: No, not serious [relationships he has with girlfriends]. The girls might think it is more serious. Me and the other guys are sweet-talkers.

R.L.: What do you tell them?

Youth: Anything, whatever they want to hear. If she thinks it's serious I say "yeah yeah it is for sure." I tell her so she stays. Buy them lots of stuff too cause we always have money.

R.L.: What do you get out of if it - giving them all that stuff?

Youth: The girls. (Respondent 25)

The respondents were "sweet-talkers" (respondent 25, cited above), who used whatever means necessary to ensure sexual relations - manipulation, conning, and telling them what they wanted to hear. In other words, the respondents and their male peers would "play" the females in order to "win" sexual relations with them. These tactics are similar to those discussed in work on fraternity men (Sanday 1990; Hummer and Martin 1989). Respondent 24 (cited above) expresses how the females are treated by players and that they are "dumped" once the male has achieved his goal (sexual relations). As well, he notes that the players engage in this game for "fun." The fun is connected to male bonding as these behaviours are restricted to male only members and they banter back and forth among the male group about who would be declared the winner.

R.L.: Why do you have a girlfriend?

Youth: Cause it's fun.

R.L.: What's fun?

Youth: Me going out with them all, that's all.

R.L.: What's funny about that?

Youth: Just funny watching me go with some girl then my friends see me with another, and a different one everyday. My friends don't say anything though.

R.L.: Why do you have a girlfriend?

Youth: Fun to have so many - my guy friends will put songs on like "I'm not a player I just fuck a lot" then we go, "you're the biggest player," "no you are" - so it brings a lot of fun. (Respondent 25)

R.L.: Do your guy friends cheat on their girlfriends?

Youth: Oh yeah - like crazy man, everyday, that's all they do. Girlfriends just keep coming back too.

R.L.: Do the girlfriends know?

Youth: Most of the time, just don't have the guts to leave.

R.L.: What do you think about the guys fooling around on their girlfriends?

Youth: Not my business. It's funny shit, downright funny, just the way they act. Whatever makes them laugh makes me laugh. (Respondent 36)

It is all for the fun of the game with little if any consideration for the female experience. A form of male bonding is also facilitated through this game as the other males "*don't say anything*" about their friends' actions. There is camaraderie linked to being a player and there is also status attributed to it by the male peer group. Parallels can be drawn from the work on male peer support among fraternity men (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989) that show how male bonding, group secrecy, and loyalty are achieved simultaneously through the abuse of females. At times, the group focus on women as sexual objects to be used to satisfy men's needs facilitates the use of females for the males benefit; for example, fraternity parties thrown with the intent of sexual relations. As well, females are used as "bait" to attract new pledges (Stomblor 1994; Martin and Hummer 1989). Hence, females are viewed as objects to be used as a form of entertainment or fun for the members.

Hand-in-hand with the theme of the sexual game as amusement, an association can be made between the reactions of some of the male peers in hearing stories of various sexual encounters and the typical sporting event response. Their reactions often read like that of a post-game celebration for a sports event.

Youth: I had this goal to sleep with as many virgins as I could for about two months. I started manipulating these girls and ended up sleeping with a lot of virgins.

R.L.: What did your guy friends think?

Youth: Lot of high fives, joints, beers after that – I'd leave and come back they'd say "Where were you?" "Take a guess", "oh, yeah!" more smokes and beers. (Respondent 32)

Youth: Yeah, I was pretty proud after the first time. I thought it was the right girl, but if not, get it over with. I told them and they took me out and celebrated. ...Not proud, just like happy it was over with, didn't feel like I thought it would feel - I thought I would feel totally different but I felt the same.

R.L.: How did the guys react?

Youth: "Yeah, good for you, alright, finally", like "let's go we, are going out tonight to celebrate." It was bigger to them then it was to me. (Respondent 33)

The reaction of the male friends is strikingly similar to what one would imagine happening after a sporting game with the males congratulating their team members – “high-fives, way to go.” For many of the respondents, sexual relations was a game and whoever had the highest stats was declared the winner and was, therefore, worthy of praise. This sports-like reaction was similar to what Pollack (2000:62) found in his national study of adolescent boys, “[I]f you tell your friends what you did, they give you a high five, like way to go!” and Messerschmidt’s (2000:128) work on working-class adolescent boys, “you da man.”

Based on the discussions and insight provided by the respondents, the following definition of player will be used throughout the duration of this study:

Player: a male youth who focuses on sexual relations with a girl, sexually objectifies females, has sexual relations with several females, focusing on quantity not quality of relationships, enlists various tactics to manipulate the females to sleep with him, and who discards the females after having sexual relations with them.

While the males in the sexual game/sport were described as the players, females were defined as the “ho’s.” In their discussions about ho’s, respondents focused solely on sexual relations. A ho is a girl who has had, or is believed to have had, several male sexual partners. The following quotations are representative of the definition of a ho as provided by the respondents:

“Some are crack head ho’s. Don’t deal with them. Barbie doll ho’s, messed up don’t have their priorities on the right things. Normal ho’s, dirty, no pride, no self-esteem.” (Respondent 12)

“A girl that sleeps around. Pretty much do anything for sex, will do anything for a guy - like a prostitute but not selling their bodies.” (Respondent 32)

“Sleep with three or four guys maybe in one night, every week, two or three times a week. They sleep with so many guys, it’s just nasty.” (Respondent 36)

For the remainder of this discussion, when ho is referred to, it is defined in the following manner:

Ho: a female who has had or is believed to have had several male sexual partners with the definitional component of “several” being left to the discretion of males who are passing their judgement on the females. As well, as will be shown throughout the chapter, ho’s were defined as sexual beings only and were afforded less, if any, respect/status from many of the respondents¹⁰⁰.

¹⁰⁰ This definition of ho’s is also promoted through popular culture. For example, in a

The sexual game eluded to by the respondents is not a “fair play” game. It is first and foremost a game of male sexual dominance and control over females. It is a male defined game where the males are the winners and the females are the losers. The advantage of being a male in this game is well understood by both the respondents and their male peers. The ideology of the game is predicated on a double-standard whereby men who have multiple sexual partners are defined as successful, while females engaging in similar behaviours are demeaned and devalued.

Some of the respondents take an active role in perpetuating this double standard or ho-player dichotomy. Many speak of the females who sleep with them as ho's and suggest that they do not respect them, in many cases *because* they have slept with the males. This is clearly based on a patriarchal stereotypical double-standard whereby male sexual activity is celebrated while female sexuality is discouraged. The words of respondent 9 sum up this double standard regarding ho's and players:

“A girl framed with that, she's a ho. A guy framed with that he's a player. I guess guys get off easy that way.” (Respondent 9)

Another theme of male sexual control emerged through our discussion of the question: *“Do you think you have a say over who your girlfriend hangs out with?”*

Notably all respondents took this question to mean what other *males* their girlfriends

song by Kid Rock the lyrics suggest a similar association: “Check'em off my list. Ho's get fucked they don't get kissed...Play ho's like a fucking football game. Fucked so many ho's I don't know where I'm at” (Kid Rock with Snoop Dog, song: WCSR, Cocky album, 2001, Warner Music Atlantic Recording Company).

could hang out with. Implicit in this association is that they would not be concerned in terms of the females their girlfriends hung out with, but rather, only other males. The issues of concern that surfaced in terms of other males focused upon the behaviour of the girl while with other males. For example, respondent 4 suggests that he does not care who his girlfriend hangs out with as long as “*it is not suspicious.*” By suspicious the respondent means that “*she is not hugging them or hanging off of them.*” This suggests a form of sexual ownership; because she is his girlfriend, she is not to be affectionate with other guys. Similarly, the following respondent suggests:

“As far as other guys I see no problem - flirt with them but don't take it to the extreme...don't sleep with them.” (Respondent 21)

A level of acceptable interaction with other males is implied and there are boundaries limiting this interaction. Another respondent suggested he did not care what other males his girlfriend hung out with, but then added that she only hangs out with his boyz. Therefore, it is acceptable.

“My girlfriend and I don't care [who either hangs out with]. She always talks/hangs out with certain girls, some guys, but I know my boyz...my boyz are scared, intimidated by me. I am just a bit bigger.” (Respondent 22)

His follow up comment pertaining to his boyz is insightful. He does not tell her who she can hang out with in terms of other males as long as they are *his* boyz. His boyz are intimidated by him so he does not have to worry that they may “*try something*” with her. This suggests that he is still in control of who she hangs around as she is not permitted to associate with males he does not know. This was similar to respondent 11.

Youth: There were a bunch of guys. She got drunk and slept at the house. She

doesn't know what she's doing sometimes when she is drunk - with a bunch of guys she just met - they could take advantage of her. I didn't know them.

R.L.: Would that have made a difference - you knowing them?

Youth: Yeah - if they were my friends I'd know they wouldn't do anything. I wouldn't have cared then. (Respondent 11)

It is also known by other males that if a girl has a boyfriend then she is "off limits." It is interesting to note that the girl does not get a say in this, and the response by the male if his girlfriend did cheat was typically to physically harm the other male.

Youth: I beat the shit out of him - broke both his knee caps.

R.L.: What happened when you saw her?

Youth: I kicked in the front door, grabbed her and threw her against the wall. I told her if she ever cheated again I would fucking kill her. I flipped, took a baseball bat and smashed everything.

R.L.: Did you hit her?

Youth: I couldn't hit her, ever, I love her. She said "Why don't you hit me?" I told her "You're not a guy, I won't hit you." (Respondent 2)

"I sent a few guys to his house to put a scare in him. He knew me and knew she was with me so they beat him up. I kinda hoped it would teach him a lesson not to screw around on other guys' girls." (Respondent 10).

The female did not have a say in who she was sexually active with, and the other male was punished because he should know the rules. Also the idea of sticking up for male friends' was expressed. Respondent 10 (cited above) was in custody therefore his male friends took care of his personal life, and in doing so, discovered she was cheating on him and they told him. This element of keeping tabs on girlfriends was eluded to by others respondents as well; for example, *"guys would tell me if she cheated on me while in jail."* (Respondent 6). There is some ownership of a sexual nature suggested as she cannot be with anyone else.

Respondent 12 is a player who has a girlfriend as well as ho's whom he has sexual relations with when convenient for him. This respondent clearly adheres to the belief that males should be in control sexually, and he suggests that he experiences this in his relationships.

Youth: I usually have a girl I always come home to - then have ho's to do stuff with - have sex with them, hook them up with my boyz, have one on my arm if I want one to do that. They're just ho's, but usually have one girlfriend I go home to.

R.L.: How do you treat them?

Youth: Well sometimes, if I'm sober, it's Ok, usually if I get what I want - sex, money, and stuff like that. I call them when it's convenient for me, hook them up with a friend, get them to bring me something, not big on the money thing, using them for that. (Respondent 12)

It is clear that his relationships with ho's are very one-sided; they seek to fulfill his benefit only. There is no talk or concern for what the females need, but rather, focus is on what he wants: sex, money, what is "convenient" for him. This respondent receives strong support for his beliefs and treatment of ho's from his male peer group who supposedly treat females worse than he does. He is fully entrenched in the player-ho world and has definite distinctions between females and males and how sexual relations between the two operate. For example:

"...us guys see it differently, we have a dick and shit. When you take a girl's virginity or screw her, you take something...I guess it makes you look better, feel better because you know how she liked it - you know how she's like - she can't come up and say shit because you know her." (Respondent 12)

Thus far, the discussion in this section has illustrated that the form of sexuality that is promoted among many of the respondents and their male peer groups is often one predicated on male control and is patriarchal in nature. The males are in control and they

decide the sexual components of their relationships with girlfriends and/or ho's.

However it is interesting to note that some respondents eluded to a form of female sexual control, albeit a limited one, in their discussions.

2) *Female Sexual Control*

Female sexual control was restricted and was defined in terms that continued to serve the males' purposes of sexual prowess. Simply, if the males are having sexual relations with their girlfriend then it does not matter who is in control. The sexual relationship is the focal point for many of the respondents, and however they attain this goal is deemed to be acceptable by the respondent and his male peers. The term "pussy-whipped" was commonly referred to by the males when discussing levels of control in their own and their male peers' relationships with girlfriends¹⁰¹. This term means that the girl has control over the guy because he will do whatever she wants so that he can have sexual relations with her. The girl is thought to be in control because she can withhold sexual encounters from the male. Therefore, he has to do what she says in order to achieve the goal of sexual relations with her. For example, respondent 6 expressed the following in his discussion of control in his relationship with his girlfriend:

Youth: She does the running, 24/7. If she wants to go somewhere, I'll even go if the guys and I want to do something else. They laugh at me, say I'm whipped but we know we all are.

R.L.: Whipped?

Youth: Wrapped around the person's finger - they laugh and I say I know they are too. I get it [sex] and you don't. (Respondent 6)

¹⁰¹ Totten (2000) reports similar use and definition of the term.

In this case, the respondent and his male friends are able to accept the lack of control they have with girlfriends because the end result is that they are having sexual relations with them. It appears to be acceptable to give up the control if they are getting sexual favours. Similarly, respondents 10 and 14 suggest that it is acceptable to lose that control and to be labeled as “pussy-whipped.”

“They might joke about it, got the whip. But they are just joking...” (Respondent 10)

“With the guys, they stay stuff when the girlfriends aren’t there, like ‘you’re pussy-whipped’, no I’m not. She shows up and you know he is.” (Respondent 14)

Being labeled “*pussy-whipped*” did not appear to be an insult to the respondents. On the contrary, it was often seen as a compliment from their perspective. Being assigned this label inherently confirms that he is having sexual relations. Therefore, it is a positive attribute in his and his male peers’ perspectives. Under these circumstances it is acceptable to give up some control to obtain the final end which is sexual encounters. As respondent 10 (cited above) suggests, it is a point that one is able to joke about without injury to his image within his male peer group. Male control and sexual prowess are both attributes that were encouraged and were evident in many of the respondents and their male peers’ definition of what it is to be a male. However, sexual control could be relinquished as long as the ultimate goal, sexual relations, was attained.

Although it could be suggested that the males have relinquished their sexual control in these instances, there is more to this dynamic than is visible at first glance. The males suggest that they give up the control to the females and do what the females ask them to do. However, the males are still in control. They know that by doing as the

female wishes, they will attain sexual relations with her. In the long-term picture, they continue to remain in control sexually. As well, as a group they have defined it to be acceptable to give up some control but they only do so with a higher focus on getting what they want from the females. It is similar to a façade - let the females think they are in control and we will obtain sex. It could be viewed as a form of manipulation; they give control to females sexually but they are still ultimately in control. Being called “pussy-whipped” is acceptable because they are getting sex (which is what they want) in the long run.

As discussed above, it was acceptable to give the girl some control without losing face in front of the other guys in some circumstances. However, there were limits to how much control one should give the girl. Take for example respondent 17 who discusses his male peers’ reaction to his waiting until his girlfriend was ready to have sexual relations with him.

Youth: I waited for four months for sex with my girlfriend.

R.L.: What did your guy friends say about that?

Youth: They hassled me, and I said she is worth it. I’m not going to pressure her to have sex or tell her I’m going to leave her. I told her whenever she was ready to tell me, that’s how it should be.

R.L.: What did the guys say?

Youth: They laughed at me. Called me a pansy, but my girl is before most of my boyz. (Respondent 17)

In this case, the male peers were not supportive of his lack of control as he was waiting for her to agree to have sexual relations with him. This resulted in him being laughed at and called a “pansy.” He had given her the control and because it did not result in sexual relations, he was seen as weaker than the rest of the males. He is labeled a pansy which is

a derogatory term in the perspective of his male friends.

When control was affiliated with the female, it was in the form of sexual access control - the ability to control men because of her sexuality. In many of the respondents' perspectives, females did not offer much more to a relationship; therefore, sexual access was for many, their only form of control. The following respondent shares his understanding of how the relationship between sexuality, power, and girlfriend/boyfriend dynamics operates.

Youth: Women have power. A lot of power. A lot of people don't realize they have power.

R.L.: What kinds of power?

Youth: Any kind she wanted. If she wants control she has it. All a girl has to do is take the guy by the balls and he'd do whatever she wants. Girls have a way of teasing guys to the point of, OK let's go.

R.L.: So they have sexual power?

Youth: Well yeah, they can use that for anything they want. Take Monica Lewinsky,¹⁰² some think she got nothing but she's a rich lady now. She got a rich settlement before and after court. She set him up.

R.L.: Do your girlfriends use that power?

Youth: Anytime they want to, they will get it. They tell guy friends do this later if you don't do this, OK you are cut off, so guys say like "alright I'll do it."
(Respondent 21)

Female power is tied to sexuality, and not as the female has defined it, but rather, how the males have defined it in terms of how they can benefit from the females sexuality. The focus on sexual access, or females as the sexual gatekeepers (Bateman 1991), relates once again to the sexual objectification of females as this is one of the few aspects deemed to be important by the males. Other accomplishments she has achieved or other facets she

¹⁰² Monica Lewinsky was implicated in the inquiry of alleged sexual acts perpetrated by former US President, Bill Clinton.

can add to the relationship are not valued, but rather only her ability to provide sexual access is acknowledged.

Many of the respondents and their male peer groups embraced and/or promoted male sexual control. Their commitment to this form of masculinity was most clearly evidenced in their conceptualization of sexual relations with females as a game. The males were dominant in the game, while females were used as pawns or objects. Although male sexual control was strongly promoted, female sexual control was eluded to by some of the respondents, and demonstrated that female power is bound up with sexuality.

Two questions emerge from the findings in the previous two sections. Evident in their discussions of players and ho's was a distinction between ho's and girlfriends. How does one female in one situation get framed as being a ho while another female in a different situation does not? And second, how do the respondents and their male peers deal with this dilemma without inflicting damage to their self-image as sexually successful males? Two of the key factors in answering these questions are the use of a justification process and the designation of certain females as legitimate targets for male-to-female violence.

Section Three: Justifications and Legitimate Targets

Much of the violence against women research suggests that abusive men typically use justifications to legitimate their use of male-to-female violence. More specifically, sexual violence literature indicates that there are common justifications that sexually

violent men invoke (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Sanday 1990; Scully 1990; Scully and Marolla 1984). The ideology of justifications builds upon the notion of a “vocabulary of motive” (Mills 1940:904) whereby:

Wrong-doers attempt to reinterpret their actions through the use of a linguistic device by which norm breaking conduct is socially interpreted. That is, anticipating the negative consequences of their behaviour, wrong-doers attempt to present the act in terms that are both culturally appropriate and acceptable (Scully and Marolla 1989:112).

This tactic denies the victims of the violence in a way that renders them legitimate targets for abuse. The internalization of these beliefs allows the perpetrator to present her/himself in a positive light rather than as deviant (Ellis and DeKeseredy 1996). As Scully and Marolla (1989:111) argue:

Convicted rapists have learned the attitudes and actions consistent with sexual aggression against women. Learning also includes the acquisition of culturally derived vocabularies of motive, which can be used to diminish responsibility and to negotiate a non-deviant identity.

In the current research, the use of justifications was evidenced in various forms. They were accepted by many of the respondents and their male peers and facilitated the use of some male-to-female sexual violence. Many of the respondents spoke about their own and their male peers’ behaviours as if there was nothing wrong with them. These behaviours were deemed to be acceptable within their own subculture.

One predominant avenue through which justifications were offered was the identification of certain females as deserving victims of male-to-female violence. For example, not all females are used as pawns in their sexual game. Specific females, like ho’s, street girls, are deemed to be legitimate targets, and this process helps to neutralize

the males treatment of them. Those respondents who had a girlfriend as well as having “girls on the side,” generally self-identified players, defined them in different ways. Often male peer support research inquires about “one’s girlfriend.” It is sometimes the females they are having sexual relations with, as opposed to the girlfriends, who are subjected to more abuse as they are more likely to be identified as legitimate targets.

There were levels of treatment associated with the various roles. Some females were categorized in a group where the males could justify their mistreatment of them. In other words, some females were deemed to be worthy or deserving of mistreatment. In many cases, assignment to the respective groups hinged upon sexual relations.

Youth: They [ho’s] aren’t like the other girls, not so snobby and stuff. Some girls get along good. Some are there for a couple of nights and gone. Some are friends you don’t sleep with but not going to tell them everything either. I think part of the respect comes from not sleeping with them.

R.L.: So there are like three groups: your boyz, girls you sleep with and girlfriends?

Youth: Yeah, just seeing her for a night, sleep with her and it’s done. You tell them straight up, that’s where some disrespect comes in. Tell them straight up what group they are in, but they take it just so they can tell people they were with us. (Respondent 9)

Youth: Some, some with girls, go for a few days, then dump them, get rid of her - they are players, but most have girlfriends, or at least someone to be with.

R.L.: What’s the difference between a girlfriend and someone to be with?

Youth: Playing them, having sex and then dumping them. (Respondent 11)

Along with the different groups of females came varying levels of respect. Some females are deemed worthy of respect whereas other females are deemed as legitimate targets who are typically used for sexual relations only. As respondent 32 (cited below) discusses, there were different rules when it came to his fiancée versus girlfriends he has

had in the past. To illustrate:

R.L.: Do you talk about sexual activities with your male friends?

Youth: *On the street girls? Oh yeah. Things I did with my actual girlfriends, fiancé like? They didn't need to know that. She actually means something to me, touches me in a different way. Those other girls are pretty much just for the sex. I'd never be like oh me and my fiancée, I bent her over backwards, they don't need to know that. That shit is between me and her and not the whole friggin world.*

R.L.: Did you respect her?

Youth: *Yeah. I didn't respect any of those girls [the street girls], but sure I told them I did, yeah like come on, most of those girls are not all there, dumb blondes¹⁰³ if you'd like to put it that way. I'd take them out to the movies, spend money on them, they thought I respected them.* (Respondent 32)

Respondent 32 (cited above) talked to his male friends about his sexual relations with the “street girls,” as he defines them, but there was more respect in terms of his fiancée. He suggests that “*she actually means something to me*” which for him translates into him having respect for her as well as respect for the privacy of their sexual relationship. He justifies his lack of respect for the street girls by suggesting that they were “*not all there, dumb blondes if you'd like to put it that way.*” Their lack of intelligence, in part because they are sexually active with him, allows him to conceptualize them as legitimate targets for the sole purpose of sexual relations. The street girls were not worthy of his respect whereas his fiancé was. The ideology of street girls being less worthy of respect or somehow inferior and therefore acceptable targets was also expressed by respondent 8:

Youth: *Not really good to have one [girlfriend] on the street. Don't make a lot of*

¹⁰³ The fact that I am blonde makes the statement all the more disturbing as it indicates his complete indifference.

money and they wanted it, found it complicated. Basically wanted a girlfriend on the street to get laid.

R.L.: Would your other male street friends agree?

Youth: *Yeah.*

R.L.: Did your girlfriend know that?

Youth: *No.*

R.L.: Was your girlfriend into relationships?

Youth: *Yeah.*

R.L.: Did you ever talk to her about that?

Youth: *No.*

R.L.: Was sex an important part of your being with her?

Youth: *Yes. (Respondent 8)*

There is also justification of deception as the street girlfriend he is speaking of was interested in a relationship whereas he was not. In this respect, he was playing the street girls and believes that they are legitimate targets for deception geared toward obtaining sexual relations from them. It is easier to victimize or manipulate them as they are deemed to be part of a group, street girls, which he and his male peers have dehumanized in a sense. Respondent 12 (cited below) clearly illustrates this process. In this case ho's are designated as legitimate targets while girlfriends are not:

R.L.: Do you respect ho's?

Youth: *No I don't. **They are like monsters to me, not people.** Some might get some, but it's not respect. It's like a business.*

R.L.: Do you respect your girlfriends?

Youth: *Yeah, could be if they deserve respect they get it.*

R.L.: How do they earn it?

Youth: *They are smart, don't sleep with you quick, head on her shoulders. If you don't respect them they are gonna leave you anyways. (Respondent 12)*

Respondent 12 is a self-identified player who has a male peer group that supports similar beliefs, and he makes a substantial distinction between girlfriends and ho's with the latter being undeserving of respect. He justifies his perspective and resulting

treatment (which is abusive spanning sexual, physical and emotional abuse) by conceptualizing ho's as monsters. Defining ho's as such allows him to treat them as he does without experiencing any negativity in terms of his self-image, both personally and among his male peers. Clearly, it is easier to disrespect and abuse someone you have defined as a non-person. We have seen this theme in much of the violence against women literature, but it is not typically expressed in such explicit terms. In his own words, they are non-people, therefore he and his male peers can abuse them as these females (ho's) deserve it.

The distinction between girlfriends and ho's in terms of being defined as legitimate targets introduces a different theme than has been found in some of the previous research. Past research among college respondents has found that the chances of a male being abusive with his female intimate partner increase as the level of seriousness/commitment increases (Sigelman et al. 1984; Henton et al. 1983; Cate et al. 1982). Conversely, O'Keefe (1997) found that the level of seriousness of a relationship was not correlated with the male perpetration of dating violence¹⁰⁴. My findings introduce a different perspective.

The females who appear to be most often the target of male abuse are ho's and street girls; those defined as legitimate targets and who are also defined as non-serious in

¹⁰⁴ However, findings from O'Keefe (1997:564-565) do suggest that seriousness of relationship was a significant predictor for females "suggesting that male dating violence may be less tied to their level of emotional commitment to their partner or that they evaluate their dating relationships less seriously than females."

terms of commitment level on the males' behalf. At first glance it appears that there is less violence being committed against girlfriends of more commitment. However, the respondents typically stated that even their relationships with their girlfriends were not serious. This could be a reflection of the time period (youth) in that they are not involved in serious relationships, and this difference may disappear as the respondents get older and enter into more serious relationships. Research with adult men seems to suggest that once some men enter into serious relationships, the likelihood of their use of violence against their female partner increases. As my research is only a snapshot during youth, it is not possible to speculate on this; more research exploring the depth of seriousness in relationships and its relation to the use of male violence is necessary.

As well, much of the research does not differentiate between types of violence. The use of sexual violence for example, may be more common in more serious relationships, whereas physical or verbal violence may happen regardless of seriousness of the relationship. For example, Lavoie and Vézina (1994) found that one-third of male and female high school students in a Quebec study thought that one had the right to expect or demand sexual relations after dating a person for a long time. As well, Jackson (1997b) found that among female adolescents, sex as an expected aspect of a relationship was embraced as a rationalization for saying yes to sexual activity. And last, Margolin et al. (1989) found that increased length of relationship led to decrease in females' right to say no. These findings reinforce the need to look further into the connection between relationship length/seriousness and type of abuse.

Victim blaming, as was previously eluded to, was also a common form of justification invoked by many of the respondents and their male peers. In many cases the female was blamed for the male's mistreatment as she was stupid, lacked self-respect or because she allowed the mistreatment. Females are portrayed as the gatekeepers in a sense; they are the ones who allow the mistreatment to happen therefore they are to blame.

R.L.: How does it [sleeping with the girls] make you think of the girls?

Youth: *As ho's. I think of them, the way they act; there are some I don't think of as ho's, as friends.*

R.L.: Why do they sleep with so many guys do you think?

Youth: *Don't know what goes on in their minds - **they are being stupid.***

R.L.: What's stupid?

Youth: ***Letting them let it happen to them.***

R.L.: Do you think they enjoy it?

Youth: ***Yeah - they wouldn't keep doing it if they didn't. If you don't enjoy something are you going to keep doing it?*** (Respondent 9)

*"Basically fuck'em, one night stands; they [male friends] were pretty mean to the girls, but not me. They would talk to them like 'dumb bitch,' and stuff and **the girls would listen to them.** I wouldn't listen to that shit....not hit them or anything, call them bitch. **The girls didn't really care. Maybe they were stupid or something,** I thought it was funny; they'd say 'ahh you don't mean that.'"* (Respondent 15)

The above excerpts provide examples of how some respondents justified their mistreatment of females by engaging in victim blaming. Respondent 9 (cited above) reverts to victim blaming to justify his actions by eluding to the fact that the females could do something about it, "*they are being stupid,*" and by suggesting that they must like it because they stay with the male. Similarly, respondent 15 (cited above) makes a similar statement: "*The girls would listen to them...The girls didn't really care; maybe they were stupid or something.*" The respondents can justify their own actions by

blaming the victim. It appears that this type of male treatment is acceptable toward females who are “stupid or dumb” as defined by the respondents and their male peer group. As well, the females are deemed as being unworthy of respect because they are dumb/stupid, in part, *because* they sleep with the males. These two qualities make them legitimate targets. Hence, the males are able to take advantage of and use the females while still maintaining their own self-image. Victim blaming allows for a shifting of responsibility whereby it is the female’s fault rather than the male’s. The females are to be blamed as they allow this to happen to them. The ho’s and street girls are in a group that has been deemed to be legitimate targets because they allow the treatment by the males; hence, it is not the responsibility of the males but of the females.

Ageton (1983) found similar forms of victim blaming in her work with adolescents wherein the occurrence of a sexual assault was seen as partly the responsibility of the female victim (for example, her behaviour and physical appearance) by many of the perpetrators. These findings were echoed among Quebec high school students almost ten years later. One in ten attributed some responsibility to the female victim as she could have turned her partner on (Lavoie and Vézina 1994). Totten (2000) also reported similar findings based on his study of marginalized male youth. As well, Scully’s (1990) work with adult rapists suggests similar forms of victim blaming. In all the above cases, placing blame on the females enabled the males to define their behaviour in a socially acceptable manner among both themselves and their male peers.

Tied into victim blaming was the ideal that it was the female’s responsibility to

“fight back” or “stand up for herself”:

*“There’s a difference between a bitch and a girl, and a lad. A big difference. A bitch – she’s a slut; they just want to sleep with her, take her money; a girlfriend...not because of sex or money, just because I care about her. I wouldn’t make a bitch my girlfriend. My girlfriend, she’s not like that so I could make her my girlfriend. Just about every guy I know would say there’s a difference between a lady and a bitch - **they don’t respect themselves, let us treat them like that, walk all over them, they should have more respect for themselves, if she has respect for herself.** That’s what I want, females who stand up for themselves and doesn’t let us walk all over them.”* (Respondent 17)

Youth: Oh yeah, like crazy man, everyday, all they [male friends] do, girlfriends keep coming back too.

R.L.: Do the girlfriends know?

*Youth: Most of the time. Just **don’t have the guts to leave.*** (Respondent 36)

The male’s behaviour is not challenged, but rather, the mistreatment is justified as the girl allows it to happen to her. The responsibility to stand up to the male falls upon the female rather than on the male.

Many respondents discussed the sexual prowess of the females as being a negative aspect, while simultaneously discussing how male sexual prowess is a positive one.

Multiple sexual partners makes a female into a ho (a negative attribute) and a male into a player (a positive attribute). None of the respondents suggested that they or their male peers’ actions were “stupid,” even though they were engaging in many sexual relations similar to the females they had deemed to be “stupid and/or dumb.” The respondents and their male peers did not acknowledge that female sexual prowess could be an acceptable attribute for females. Although this sexual double standard is not a new phenomena, their awareness and acceptance of it is noteworthy.

Male sexual control in the player-ho dichotomy is clearly evident; there remains a

strong adherence to the double sexual standard for males and females, with one consequence being the legitimization of certain groups of females as deserving of male mistreatment. Closely related, victim blaming was also commonly engaged in by the respondents and their male peers. Accompanying the designation of some women as legitimate targets for mistreatment was a justification process employed whereby various forms of sexual force were justified by the respondents and their male peers.

Section Four: Continuum of Sexual Force

To explore the use of sexual force, respondents were asked: *“Do you think that it is ever OK to use a little force to get your girlfriend to have sex with you?”* Only one respondent, a self-identified player, suggested that he did use force.

Youth: Yeah, usually when you're drunk and the night's almost over, or girl on her period and leave them and go to the next resort or last resort - always have a last resort.

R.L.: What do you mean last resort?

Youth: One of those dirty bitches, not for sex, for a favour. She does favours - sucks your dick or some shit like that. (Respondent 12)

Respondent 12 (cited above) was different from the other respondents as he admitted his use of sexual force with ho's. Although he was unique in this open-admission, his opinions, were not so distinctive.

Thirty-five of the respondents stated that they did not think that it was ever OK to use any type of force to have sexual relations with their girlfriend. However, upon further examination, it is apparent that this statement or belief is predicated on a narrow definition of sexual force wherein physical force was often the only type of force

acknowledged¹⁰⁵. This narrow definition facilitates the development of a continuum of sexual force ranging from physical to emotional force with the less physical forms of force being employed and supported by many of the respondents and their male peers. In other words, although they did not engage in physical sexual force, many respondents, as well as their male peers, were engaging in less physical forms of force in relation to sexual activity with their girlfriends; however, they did not acknowledge these behaviours as force.

When speaking of sexual force, it was common for a line to be drawn between being “a sex-crazed maniac” or “rapist” who uses physical force on females for sexual relations and others who use less physically forceful means for obtaining sexual encounters. If one used physical force with a girl in the context of sexual relations, he ran the risk of being labeled a rapist which generally was not beneficial to his image as a “male” among his male peer group; he would not be considered sexually successful if he had to use physical force. The respondents were able to justify the use of less physical forms of force while still maintaining their belief that they did not use force in terms of

¹⁰⁵ This narrow definition of sexual violence is similar to Scully’s (1990:115) work with convicted adult male rapists who had very narrow boundaries on what behaviours they would define as rape.

sexual relations with their girlfriends.

"I don't act like those kinds of people – sex-crazed idiots." (Respondent 4)

Youth: No, I might get pissed off but some of my friends have done that shit. One day my friend came back from selling crack all day. Some customer pissed him off, he went in the shower and a girl was there. He didn't even ask her or nothing just had sex with her. She was bleeding and shit, no consent or nothing - guess it hurt her and shit...Don't really think about it, what am I gonna say, it's not my business. In my head I don't think it's right. No, I know it's not right, but what can I do? What can I say? If two friends are fighting what can I do? What can I do? Nothing. But I laughed when he told me but she is still with him so obviously she kinda likes that shit – don't you think?

R.L.: Have you seen that type of stuff a lot?

Youth: Yeah, I've seen it a lot - if a virgin, conning really hard, and she gives in. I'm not no friend to no rapers or anything like that. (Respondent 12)

R.L.: What about using some force to get a girlfriend to have sex with them?

Youth: That's not nearly as uncommon as hitting. Forcing is socially unacceptable. Convincing is OK, but the line has to be drawn about forcing.

R.L.: The line?

Youth: When they say no they have to mean it.

R.L.: Do your guy friends say it is OK to use sexual force with their girlfriends?

Youth: No because that's crossing the line, wouldn't do it for fear of being outcast. Nobody wants anyone to think he raped his girlfriend. (Respondent 14)

Physical force was accompanied by the stigma of being labeled a rapist or sex-crazed maniac. Many of the respondents and their male peers embraced a narrow definition of sexual force; for example, respondent 12 (cited above) tells the story of a rape committed by his male peer, but ends his statement with *"I'm no friend to rapers."* It is important also to note how the respondents above can justify the rape because she continued to stay with the male peer (victim blaming as discussed in the last section).

The narrow definition of sexual abuse that was exhibited by many of the

respondents reaffirms previous research with abusive males. In Scully's (1990) work with adult convicted rapists, many minimized their sexually violent acts. This process has also been found among younger males. For example, Totten (2000) found that forty-five of the sixty marginalized youth who were abusive with their girlfriends used a narrow definition of abuse to justify their behaviour. As well, in her interviews with fraternity men, Sanday (1990) found that their conceptions of sexual abuse were narrow, facilitating the justification of many legally sexually abusive behaviours. The development of narrow definitions of sexual abuse and the use of this in justifying sexual abuse appears to be a process that is put in motion long before males reach adult status. The way in which other males perceived the respondents in the current study was important to them; it was not acceptable to be seen as a male who had to force his girlfriend to have sexual relations with him. This threatened their image as a sexually successful male. However, the respondents were often part of a peer group that was supportive of high levels of sexual prowess so the question arises: how does one achieve the status of being considered "sexually successful" when non-willing participants arise?

Part of the answer to this question lies in the forms of force like threats, conning, and manipulation, that were deemed to be acceptable among the respondents and their male peer groups. Again, the respondents did not acknowledge these forms as force but rather only recognized physical force as a form of sexual coercion. As the respondents cited above indicate, "conning" and/or "convincing" were strategies that were commonly engaged in.

The theme of “convincing” a girlfriend to have sexual relations was noted by many of the respondents. Some forms of coercion are accepted but physical force is not. The respondents and their male friends did not equate coercion with anything other than physical force:

“Still don’t think they [player friends] use force, convincing probably but not force, not holding them down or nothing, just ask over and over again.” (Respondent 24)

“Sometimes I con her, bug and bug, finally she says ‘fuck OK.’” (Respondent 34)

Another form of coercion that was acceptable by the respondents was the use of threats: *“If she didn’t want to have sex I’d say I’d get it somewhere else, but she knew I’d never do it.”* (Respondent 5)

“I am not going to stay with her if I am not getting anything [sex].” (Respondent 11)

Some of the respondents engaged in threats, such as ending the relationship or seeking sexual relations from other females. In the cases cited above, the threats were sufficient to “convince” the girlfriend to engage in sexual relations with the male. In a study on Quebec high school students, Gagné et al. (1994) similarly found that threatening to break up with a girlfriend if she refused sexual activity was a common form of manipulation. This threat appears to be working for the males. Lavoie and Vézina (1994) found that 85% of the high school students they sampled suggested that the fear of losing a partner can make one accept behaviours that one would not usually accept. Jackson (1997b) in Auckland, New Zealand, found the same from her female participants; threats to break up often led to unwanted sex.

Closely related to the use of threats was the use of various forms of manipulation. Respondent 32 employs a different strategy whereby he manipulates his girlfriend into

agreeing to have sexual relations with him:

R.L.: Sexually? Like if you want to sex and she doesn't?

Youth: Rarely happens but sometimes, usually I can just sit back and know it's going to come.

R.L.: What do to say to her to get her to sleep with you?

Youth: Don't know. It just happens. I don't say anything. I change the topic and it's in their heads "maybe he's mad" whatever, and then an hour later they want to - but if I just talk and then change subject, it's over and done with - 75% of the time it works, other 25% whatever, don't touch the subject again. (Respondent 32)

Another form of manipulation was achieved through the use of alcohol. Research on fraternities and violence against women has indicated a relationship between alcohol and abuse (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989; Ehrhart and Sandler 1985). In addition, some of the youth dating studies have shown the deliberate use of alcohol by the male perpetrator to obtain sexual relations (Gagné et al. 1994; Poitras and Lavoie 1994; Ageton 1983). Although not suggesting a causal relationship between alcohol and sexual violence (many males who drink large quantities of alcohol do not engage in sexual violence), it has been shown that alcohol can be used as a tool to use against women in order to achieve sexual relations (Schwartz et al. 2001; Martin and Hummer 1989). Similarly, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993) added the use of alcohol into the male peer support model. Recalling the discussion in Chapter 2, alcohol is often employed by some males to make females less resistant to sexual advances. The following respondents discuss their male peers' use of alcohol in obtaining to sexual relations:

"They [male friends] would get drunk and say give me sex." (Respondent 3)

"They [male friends] get the girls really drunk and then convince them to have sex with them." (Respondent 13)

R.L.: Have any of your male friends ever told you that they used a little force to convince their girlfriend to have sex with them?

Youth: *Yeah, if drunk and stuff. If a girl is saying "no," that's OK, I wouldn't do it. I don't think it's OK to force a girl to have sex. I can't speak for my friends...* (Respondent 15)

Although the respondents cited above do not share the same beliefs as their male peers in terms of using alcohol to engage in sexual relations, they implicitly provided support for their peers' use of manipulation as they did not challenge their use of alcohol. Although they did not agree with it, they did not think it was their business to discuss it with their male peers. As Gwartney-Gibbs et al. (1987) argue, perhaps individuals who have frequent and close association with peers who engage in aggressive or violent behaviour may be more tolerant of such behaviour.

Although many of the respondents and their male peers had different opinions on the acceptability of forcing sexual relations on females, many did not feel it was their responsibility to tell their peers what was wrong with their behaviour. A theme of not talking about the use of sexual force was common among the respondents.

Youth: *I guess sometimes they forced her to have sex, but I never saw it.*

R.L.: Did you ever talk to them about it?

Youth: *No, none of my business. **Didn't agree with friends. Didn't talk about it.** They never said I forced her to have sex, never told me. I would have said "You're a fucking idiot," been really mad. That they have to do that - they don't have to force girls to have sex with them. They can get it anytime. They have power and can do it yet they choose to do it, forcing someone. If they tried and couldn't they'd get all mad, "fuck you stupid bitch," then leave.* (Respondent 5)

"Yeah, some. A few try to get their girlfriends to sleep with them, so kept trying and then she did, they broke up. It's not right to force her to have sex and then break up. It's stupid. Just shouldn't force anyone to have sex; it's their own decision to or not to... We

don't talk about it." (Respondent 16)

R.L.: Have any of your male friends ever told you that they used a little force to convince their girlfriend to have sex with them?

Youth: Yeah, they [male peers] think I am too soft, too easy. The girls tell me what to do; I do more for them.

R.L.: What do the guys say?

Youth: They say I am too soft for them they say. I don't do that kinda stuff. I say, that's you, I'm me.

R.L.: Have you ever used a little force to convince your girlfriend to have sex?

Youth: No.

R.L.: Have your guy friends ever talked to you about that?

Youth: No.

R.L.: Do you think they do?

Youth: Sometimes. I don't listen to them. I listen to music. I don't like listening to it.

R.L.: How does it make you feel?

Youth: I just don't care.

R.L.: Do you think forcing girls to have sex happens a lot?

Youth: Yeah, in the whole world they do. I don't think it's right, but they do. If the girl says no guys should respect it. (Respondent 30)

While most respondents did not use sexual force in their own relationships, many had male peers who did, and there was a theme of not talking about their male peers' use of sexual force. Although the above respondents suggest that they disagree with the use of sexual force, they did not feel it was their responsibility to get involved and talk to their respective male peers. There is a respect for privacy in that they and their male peers can disagree on the use of force, but they all respect the others' opinions. Research on fraternities and the role of male peer groups on violence against women has found a similar construct at work, referred to as group secrecy (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). The commitment to the fraternity members overrides the commitment to others, no matter the level of injustice experienced by those defined as the "others." In

fact, this commitment is at times so intense that gang rape allegations against members have been thwarted¹⁰⁶. In my work, respondents felt an obligation to respect the privacy of their male peers in terms of their abuse of females.

Respondent 5 (cited above) also appears to justify his lack of involvement by the fact that he has never seen it nor have his peers told him about it; however, he does think they sometimes use force. This lack of “proof” allows him to justify his lack of involvement in the situation, and it allows him to present himself as a “normal” man while knowing that his friends use force which he says he is against. A different type of justification is suggested at a further point in the conversation. He states that he does not understand why they use force as *“they don’t have to force girls to have sex with them, they can get it [sex] anytime. They have power and can do it yet they choose to do it forcing someone.”* This statement implies that the respondent feels that if his peers could not get sex, then it might be OK to use force. However, because they do not have a problem finding females to have sex with, they should not have to resort to using force.

Some of the respondents spoke of how they and their male peers had different views when it came to the issue of intimate relationships with females. These differences typically arose among respondents who were not players, but had male peers who were players. They suggest that while they did not agree with the players in terms of their treatment of females, trying to deter their male peers’ use of violence was difficult, if they

¹⁰⁶ See Sanday (1990) Chapter 3 for a case profile that demonstrates the ability of fraternity members and indeed entire organizations to avoid persecution.

ventured into that activity at all. To illustrate:

R.L.: Did many of your guy friends have girlfriends?

Youth: Yeah, most.

R.L.: How long did their relationships last?

Youth: Not really relationships - have a steady girlfriend but had others on the side to sleep with.

R.L.: Did their girlfriends know about that?

Youth: They were clueless.

R.L.: How did that make you feel?

Youth: Really bad sometimes because some of the girlfriends they had were really dedicated and cared for them. But the guys didn't care like I do for my girlfriend. They didn't appreciate what they had.

R.L.: Did you ever tell the guys how you felt?

Youth: Yeah, sometimes; they would say not to worry about it. I'd say it's not right and shit and they'd say it's not you, not your responsibility.

R.L.: What did you think?

Youth: Yeah they were right; it's not my responsibility. I said what I thought. Not my place to tell the girlfriends. If they wanted their girlfriends to know they'd tell them. I didn't bring any business that didn't belong to me. That's how I would have got into trouble.

R.L.: What do you mean by trouble?

Youth: Fights with the guys - they were dangerous sometimes, especially when they were drunk. (Respondent 5)

R.L.: Do your male friends act the same if their girlfriends aren't there, or do they act differently?

Youth: Yeah. Most guys do; they try to pick up women, trying to get laid all the time, pick up girls.

R.L.: How about you?

Youth: I used to spend most of my time with her unless I didn't want her to come. (Respondent 16)

R.L.: Do your guy friends cheat on their girlfriends?

Youth: Oh yeah - like crazy man, everyday, all they do. Girlfriends just keep coming back too.

R.L.: Do the girlfriends know?

Youth: Most of the time, just don't have the guts to leave them.

R.L.: What do think about that?

Youth: About the girls? None of my business, feel bad for them. My girlfriend has cheated on me quite a few times, not sex, but pretty close; thank god they were my friends so they stopped her. She begged one of my friends, like

begged, but she was pretty drunk, but that's not an excuse- but I got over it. It was a while ago.

R.L.: What do you think about the guys fooling around on their girlfriends?

Youth: *Don't know. Not my business. It's funny shit, downright funny, just the way they act. Whatever makes them laugh makes me laugh.* (Respondent 36)

Respondent 5 (cited above) indicates that he felt bad for the girlfriends and knew that they were getting “played;” however, he did not force the issue with his male friends as this would lead to “trouble” for him. He states that it was not his responsibility to get involved in the business of his male peers' relationships. Respondent 36 (cited above) provides the same view. While he feels bad for the females, it is not any of his business. The respondents cited above all had a girlfriend and suggested that they felt differently about her than their male peers did about their girlfriends. The respondents suggested that they were “serious” and did not cheat on their girlfriend, while their male peers were the opposite. The depth of relationship with his girlfriend appeared to have an impact on whether the respondent was a player or not. Again, girlfriends were not as likely to be deemed as legitimate targets as were “girls on the side.”

Many of the respondents suggested that the difference between them and their male player friends was in terms of their commitment to their girlfriend. The respondents who were more serious with their girlfriend spent more time with her and suggest that they did not engage in the same behaviours:

“Then you have guys who want to rush them, ‘hey, I want to fuck you.’ I wouldn’t force someone to have sex. Shouldn’t go out with them if that’s the way... Yeah, I’ve seen them too, right in front of me ‘if you don’t fuck me I’m going to beat you.’ She usually says no and he doesn’t hit her, just a threat like ‘if you don’t screw me I’ll beat you’, ‘Don’t fuck me I’m gonna dump you.’” (Respondent 13)

“They [male player friends] basically fuck ‘em, one night stands. They were pretty mean to the girls, but not me. They would talk to them like ‘dumb bitch,’ and stuff, and the girls would listen to them. I wouldn’t listen to that shit.... not hit them or anything, call them bitch. The girls didn’t really care, maybe they were stupid or something, I thought it was funny. They’d say ‘ahh, you don’t mean that.’ We’d invite them over, to sleep over, my friends would slam these girls and kick them out at like 4 a.m.; that was really how it was...As soon as I got my girlfriend I didn’t really chill out with them anymore. Just me and my girlfriend.” (Respondent 15)

“My player friends they talk about girls they hit on the night before; they won’t shut up about it. They’re dirty, dress slick. Only thing on their minds is sex and girls...The players just talk and talk, hit on them the night before, had a girl at their house. They like to brag about girls they fucked, the numbers they have. It’s annoying garbage to listen to.” (Respondent 22)

Respondent 13 (cited above) has some male peers who threaten their girlfriends in terms of sexual relations, however, he and his closest friend do not. He suggests that he has been friends with his male peers all his life as they grew up in the same neighbourhood. His reaction to their use of threats suggests that he can justify verbal threats but not physical violence: *“I laugh at him sometimes, I say if you hit her you’re not going to like what happens.”* While he indicates that he and his closest friend do not engage in similar behaviour, his response, laughing, implies implicit support for the use of threats. It appears that he can have different views than his male peers, perhaps because of their long-term friendship. Respondent 15 (cited above) on the other hand, says that he is different than his male peers as he has a commitment with his girlfriend. He has been friends with his male peers for more than seven years and grew up in the same neighbourhood, and suggests that they can accept their difference of opinions in respect to relationships with females. While his male peers would agree that it is acceptable to

use alcohol to convince a girl to have sexual relations and he disagrees, they respect him for his choice and he theirs. While respondent 22 (cited above) states disapproval with his player friends' approach to relationships with females, he continues to associate with them; however, he does not talk to them about their actions.

There were different reasons for the respondents' personal disapproval of sexual force; however, they could generally accept their male peers use of force and not challenge them on it; an acceptance of different opinions emerged wherein each person was accountable to himself and did as he wanted and did not challenge others.

Respondent 16 offers a similar situation as he discusses his male peers as players, while he is committed to his girlfriend. He has known his male peers through school, and admits that they have different views but believes that, "*it did not cause any problems between us.*" Perhaps this was because they did not engage in conversations on the use of sexual force. As previous excerpts have illustrated, the use of sexual violence was not a common topic of discussion among the respondents and their male peers.

Players did not typically place a great deal of emphasis on relationships, but rather, were focused on the sexual aspect of their interaction with females. Players were more apt to say sexual relations were the most important aspect of their relationships and were more willing to share the details with the other males.

"*Sex, all they care about.*" (Respondent 13)

"*Always get laid.*" (Respondent 16)

"*Fuck'em, have to bring home girls every night.*" (Respondent 32)

The non-players were more apt to provide different reasons for having a girlfriend. Their reasons were not focused on sexual relations but rather were more relationship type elements; for example, trust, someone to talk to, care for you and you care for her. Some of the aspects that they felt were positive about having a girlfriend are presented below:

"Someone to always be there with you, spend time with you, trust. Keep each other company. You know there's someone who wants you." (Respondent 20)

"To speak to them about my issues, what's happening." (Respondent 23)

"Got someone to depend on if you're in trouble, help her out too." (Respondent 30)

These differences in characteristics of a male-female intimate relationship at times caused problems between the respondent (non-player) and his player friends. For example, respondent 17 discusses how conflicting opinions between himself and his male friends arise over his choice of a girlfriend:

"My boyz think it is weird that I am with a straight girl, not a bad girl. They give me shit, say 'get rid of her.' They are always saying stop. I don't understand. I just say 'fuck you,' because deep down I think that's what they want. They are jealous, all hard on the outside, won't show that they care, but I do, I don't care what they think, what anyone thinks, only myself." (Respondent 17)

Part of the difference in opinion stems from the fact that he did not pressure his girlfriend to have sex. He waited for four months until she was ready, while his male friends would have used force like threatening to break up with her, or nagging her.

The majority of respondents suggested that they did not agree with the use of sexual force; however, many had a limited or narrow definition of sexual violence wherein only physical forms were acknowledged. Many of the respondents and their

male peers engaged in the use of less physical forms of sexual coercion including manipulation, conning, and threats. The male peer group played a key role in providing justification for the use of less physical forms of sexual violence. In fact, many of the respondents who did not use sexual violence but who had friends who did, also provided support for the use of sexual violence. To explain, although many stated that they did not agree with their male peers' use of sexual violence, the majority felt it was not their place to talk to their peers about the use of violence. There appeared to be an acceptance of differing views on the use of violence with some respondents justifying their male peers' use of sexual violence.

In attempting to discern the differences between the use of sexual force, preliminary evidence supporting the level of commitment in a relationship was provided; the more serious the relationship, the less likely the use of violence was present. In fact, the females who were most likely to be abused were those the males defined as ho's and/or street girls with whom they had little in terms of relationships. This finding is contrary to other research that suggests that the more serious and involved a relationship, the more likely violence is to be used (Hanley and O'Neill 1997; Pederson and Thomas 1992; Arias et al. 1987). However, these studies were conducted with adult samples which may partially explain the differences. A few studies have explored the level of commitment and the relationship to violence in youth dating relationships and there have been mixed results. Bergman (1992) found that violence occurred in relatively long-term relationships while Roscoe and Callahan (1985) found short-term violent incidents. It

could be that serious relationships among youth are not common. Many were not looking for relationships. My findings indicate that violence was more acceptable in less serious relationships as ho's are defined as legitimate targets. However, my results are not expansive enough to substantiate such a claim; future research on levels of relationship commitment and the use of sexual force among youth is encouraged.

Section Five: Summary

The focus of this chapter has been on various factors that help create an environment where male sexual control is fostered, supported, and encouraged. For many respondents, their male peer group played a key role in demonstrating the importance of sexual relations with females to their masculine identity. To be a male is partially defined as being interested in, and actively engaging in, sexual relations with females. This aspect facilitated the development of a subculture wherein heterosexuality was normative and was an indication of manliness.

The respondents and their male peers typically embraced a narrow definition of male and female which was predicated on patriarchal differences (for example, male dominance and female passivity) between males and females. Male and female were defined in a dichotomous nature with male privileges and benefits contrasting with limited opportunities and benefits for females. There was little, if any, overlap between the two gender roles. Their narrow definitions aided in the creation of an environment that encouraged male dominance and control over females. Within this unequal environment, patriarchal attitudes and behaviours that can be supportive of the

victimization of females can be encouraged (Barrett and MacIntosh 1982; Pateman 1988; Dobash and Dobash 1979).

A third factor that was related to the creation and maintenance of a male dominated sexual subculture came in the form of male peer pressure to be sexually active. This pressure came in various forms including sexual talk. Their discussions with their male peers often focused on their own and their male peers' sexual experiences, while simultaneously encouraging high levels of sexual prowess. As well, some of the respondents spoke of how they would be ridiculed if they were not sexually active. To be sexually active with females was an important indication of their status as a male. In fact, some suggested that their male peers were *only* interested in sexual relations with their girlfriends. However, the respondents made an interesting distinction regarding this point.

Many suggested that their male peers would say that sexual relations were the most important aspect of having a girlfriend. However, when the respondent was one-on-one with a male peer, the friend would probably say something more serious. There was the assumption that in the company of a group of males it would be important to stress sexual relations, but on a more intimate level, they would say something different. The respondents and their male peers uphold the image of sexual relations being the most important goal, yet the respondents seem to know that their male peers want more than merely a sexual relationship in many cases.

While sexual prowess was an important aspect of masculinity, a particular form of

sexuality was encouraged or promoted - male dominated sexual relations with females.

The factors summarized above facilitated the conceptualization of females as sexual conquests. Females were objects to be sexually conquered by males, suggesting a male dominated sexual relationship. Through the sexual objectification of females, the narrow definition of males and females, and peer pressure to be sexually active, males are defined as “sexual takers” while females are defined as “sexual conquests.” Females are defined as objects that are to be used for the males’ benefit. For many of the respondents, these factors contributed to the viewing of sexual relations as a game of male sexual control and dominance. In this sexual game, females were defined as ho’s whereas males were defined as players, with player having positive consequences for the males’ image as man, while ho had a derogatory meaning for the females.

The males designated themselves as being in control of who their girlfriends hung out with and suggested that being a girlfriend signified monogamous sexual relations with the boyfriend, regardless of the male’s dual life as a player. When control was affiliated with the female, it was in the form of sexual control - the ability to control men because of their sexuality. Females were seen as sexual gatekeepers, their control was bound up with their sexuality.

While almost all of the respondents indicated that they did not believe that it was ever “OK” to use force on a girlfriend for sexual relations, many were able to provide justifications for the use of various forms of sexual coercion. Many of the respondents adhered to a narrow definition of sexual force wherein non-physical or less severe forms

of sexual coercion were acceptable. It was common for the respondents to distinguish between a “rapist” and other males who use less physical forms of sexual coercion. While more physical forms of sexual violence were not accepted by the respondents and their male peer groups, less severe forms of sexual force (i.e. conning, manipulating, threats) were accepted and justified. A process of justifications was employed by many of the respondents in order to make sense of the use of other forms of sexual coercion.

One of the most common justifications utilized was the designation of certain females as deserving of abuse. In other words, some females were deemed to be legitimate targets for sexual force or mistreatment. The male peer group played an important role in supporting this ideology of deserving victims as well. Not only were some females defined as legitimate targets for sexual coercion, they were also deemed to be less worthy of respect from males. Ho’s and street girls were two groups of females commonly identified as worthy targets for violence. Victim blaming was often used in conjunction with legitimate targets. Defining the females as dumb or stupid helps to legitimize the males’ mistreatment of them.

Male sexual control in the player-ho dichotomy is evident, and there remains a strong adherence to the double standard for males and females. The sexual objectification of females and male dominated form of sexuality promoted reflects or mirrors the hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt 1993, 1986; Connell 1995; 1987). This chapter provides empirical support for Kanin’s (1967) assertion that pro-abuse ideologies that help to create and maintain an environment that is conducive to male-to-

female dating abuse begin prior to adult age.

Chapter Six

Male Peer Support Resources: Violence

Similar to what we see in male peer support research on college/university men (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; DeKeseredy 1994; Sanday 1990), the male peer group was one of importance for my respondents; they had a stake in their male-male relationships as they had been friends for a long time, in some cases had grown up together, and the majority suggested that they would stay friends “forever.” As illustrated in Chapter 5, the male peer group offered various resources in terms of sexuality. Here, I describe the resources the youth received from their male peer groups in relation to various aspects of violence.

Within the youth crime literature, there are themes of male pride, honour, and respect related to the use of male-to-male violence (e.g., Anderson 1999; Baron and Hartnagel 1998; Hagan 1998; McLean 1998; Toch 1998; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; MacLeod 1995), but this has yet to be examined in the context of male-to-female abuse. The following section illustrates how similar themes are found via the abuse of females. The avenue to respect, pride and honour, as defined by many of the youth and their male peer groups via male control, dominance, and power over a girlfriend was demonstrated. This male-focused dominance was reinforced in many cases through their male peer groups.

Section One: Male-to-Female Violence: "I Don't Hit Girls."¹⁰⁷

Thirty-four¹⁰⁸ youth initiated discussions concerning their disagreement with violence against girls. Their comments on this issue generally arose in their answers to the following questions: *"Have you ever heard about fights between your male friends and their girlfriends?"* and/or *"Can you tell me about a fight you have had with your girlfriend?"* What is interesting is how these questions evolved into one about male-to-female physical violence and the respondents' views on this issue. They took this question about fighting with girlfriends and put an emphasis on physical violence, specifically "hitting," and their responses are indicative of how they and their male peers perceive violence against girls. The respondents did not speak about other forms of violence in this context, but rather, were conceptualizing violence against girls solely in a physical form.

Two themes arose in their discussions of "fights" with girlfriends (of both the respondents and their male peers) above and beyond a merely descriptive format of what the fight would entail; for example, yelling and swearing. Again, for almost all the

¹⁰⁷ The use of the term "girls" reflects the respondents' use of the term.

¹⁰⁸ One youth was supportive of the use of violence against girls as were his male peers while one youth did not make any reference to hitting girls, nor did he suggest it by him or his peers with their girlfriends. This respondent was a "street kid" and suggested that everyone in his group was very mellow. Neither he nor his friends were violent, which he attributed to their fairly consistent use of ecstasy (a drug he suggested mellows people out).

respondents, this question became one of *why* it was wrong to hit girls¹⁰⁹. The reasons they provide illustrate some of the key components of the relationship between violence and being “male” as these respondents and their male peers have defined it. Underlying the themes are patriarchal stereotypes of the differences between males and females and insight into how they and their male peers have come to conceptualize their own masculine identities. The themes are the physical difference between females and males and the “guy code.” Both themes are explored in turn.

1) *Physicality*

Sixteen respondents referred to the physical size and fighting ability differences between males and females as their main rationale for not hitting girls. In most cases, the physical difference was cast as a fact whereby “girls are smaller than guys” which often translated into a diminished ability of a female to defend herself. To illustrate:

“Most girls I know are smaller...It’s wrong, they are smaller, can’t defend themselves. When a girl gets hit she gets scared.” (Respondent 6)

“Cuz most of the guys I know are bigger than females, I don’t think it’s right to hit girls; a lot I know can’t defend themselves.” (Respondent 10)

“It’s just not right. Most of the time guys are bigger and stronger. Girls can’t defend themselves like guys can...” (Respondent 20)

The assertion that females could not fight back also existed:

“Cuz girls can’t fight back like guys fight back; some can but most can’t.” (Respondent

¹⁰⁹ This does not mean that they did not engage in violence against girls, but of interest at this point in the analysis is the image they sought to provide. As well, due to their narrow definition of violence against girls (as will be discussed later in this chapter), they in fact did not believe in violence against girls *as they had defined it*.

19)

"Because they [girls] don't fight back, not as strong." (Respondent 25)

"Cuz girls can't fight very well. Well I know a lot who can, but some can't." (Respondent 30)

At first glance the reasoning implied in the above excerpts appears to be valid - a persuasive argument can be made in support of males typically being physically stronger than females. However, underlying this theme is the patriarchal stereotype of males as physically strong and females as physically weak. Their statements suggest that the respondents associate the following three attributes with being male: 1) males are physically bigger than females; 2) males can defend themselves physically; and, 3) males will fight back when in an aggressive situation. These attributes are contextualized in opposition to how they have defined being female: females were generalized to be physically weak, more likely to be hurt, and unable to defend themselves. Masculinity is again defined through difference from femininity (Connell 1995, 1987; Messerschmidt 1993, 1986). These three components are commonly found in the male youth gang research as well (Alexander 2000; Anderson 1999; Decker and Van Winkle 1996), similarly validating one's individual status and his role within the gang. Other research on less-privileged male youth also confirms the importance of physical violence to masculine identity and to respect from others (Messerschmidt 2000; Totten 2000).

To be male is to have physical strength, fighting ability, and be willing to engage in physical violence. As the following excerpts demonstrate, the ability of males to

outpower females and acceptance of this belief were also important:

"Guys have more power than girls; most guys can overpower girls." (Respondent 15)

"I never came across a girl who can impact a punch like I can. There are some but I haven't met them. A lot of girls, if you hit them, they'd fall down, crack their heads open. Guys are big guys; girls aren't fighters. I'm not saying they are weak, but I don't hit girls. It's wrong. We know we can hurt them." (Respondent 22)

"Girls are not as strong as guys; you can use more power, hurt them really bad." (Respondent 24)

The reference to males being able to hurt females, or that if a male hit a female she would cry, sheds light on an additional aspect of masculine identity as the respondents had defined it. The emphasis on the perceived ability of a male to hurt a female seeks to allow the males to define themselves as male *because* they can cause harm to females. However, although it is accepted that they are more powerful than females, in the context of physical strength, this belief comes with the understanding that because of their physical dominance, males are not supposed to hit females. They must provide the image that they are against hitting females because they adhere to the ideology that males are aggressive and strong, hence, to engage in hitting a female would be detrimental to their image as men. In the words of respondent 22 (cited above), *"Guys are big guys; girls aren't fighters."* To present an image that embraces using physical violence against females would be to infer their weakness as a male. This did not mean that they did not hit or use other violence against females, as will be discussed in later sections, but merely that it was important to present the image that they did not support violence against females. As well, defining females as weak was important to their

masculine association with physical strength (again the emphasis is on difference) - to define females as being capable of physical strength would be invoking a challenge to their masculine identity as they had defined it¹¹⁰. Defining physical strength as a masculine trait has also been found among similar studies with male youth (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000).

While discussing their reasons for not hitting girls, further reinforcement of the importance of physical strength and fighting ability to masculine identity was demonstrated via their general acceptance of male-to-male physical violence.

"Because it's cheap bull shit - I am not sexist but if you see a guy hit a guy you laugh, if a girl gets hit by a boy she cries. It's stupid." (Respondent 4)

"Hitting guys is OK, the way I was raised. My dad told me never to hit a girl." (Respondent 5).

Youth: They [girls] are just smaller.

R.L.: What about [hitting] smaller guys?

Youth: That's OK. (Respondent 32)

Respondent 32 (cited above) raises an interesting problematic that was quite common among the respondents. He suggests that while it is acceptable for a male to hit other males even if they are "small," it was not right to hit girls *because* they were "smaller" than males. The acceptance of engaging in physical violence appears to be based upon sex (male or female) lines rather than physical size. An underlying theme of

¹¹⁰ This reasoning is reminiscent of the resistance of adult males to adult females joining traditionally male occupations (Lewis-Horne 2000; McMahon 1999; Cadwaladr 1993). For example, research on correctional and police officer resistance to female recruits has partially been theorized as stemming from the challenge that females being able to do traditionally masculine work brings to bear against the masculine identity of officers.

masculinity whereby physical hitting is defined as a male trait emerges. This theme is similar to research findings among less-privileged males (Anderson 1999; Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995). The following respondents illustrate this link between physical hitting and masculinity:

"I don't hit girls. Don't believe in that...not manly to hit girls." (Respondent 8)

"If she punched me in the face I would hit her back like she was a boy." (Respondent 18)

Youth: If the girl is manly enough to hit a guy first then she deserves a smack. Guys have a strength advantage over girlfriend so just not right.

R.L.: If she is "manly" enough?

Youth: Well if she is capable of hitting a guy then she deserves it...

R.L.: Is hitting more of a guy thing?

Youth: Yeah. Guys are just more aggressive than girls, more short tempered, less make-up to smudge, just joking. It's been around forever; you don't see too many girl fights. (Respondent 33)

Respondents 8 and 33 (cited above) refer to hitting girls as being unmanly and suggest that a female who is hitting a male is being "manly." Respondent 18 makes a similar reference to being or acting manly. The act of physical violence was defined primarily as a masculine trait, and females who participated in this activity with males were thought of as being masculine. This is similar to some of the gang research which suggests that even female gang members are perceived by some male members as being less physically able than the male members while those who are outwardly physically strong are perceived to be more masculine (Miller 2001; Campbell 1991). Respondents in my study were not opposed to violence in general, but rather specifically males hitting females. The association between physical violence and being a man was clearly

entrenched among most of the respondents and their male peer groups. The emphasis on physical strength as a component of masculinity was found in previous research among marginalized male youth (Messerschmidt 2000, 1993; Totten 2000; Hagedorn 1998); middle-class male youth (Pollack 2000); and, university men (Martin and Hummer 1989; Sanday 1990; Sabo 1980). The consistency of this finding suggests the possibility that the connection between physicality and masculinity is not class based but rather, is universal and manifested in different ways. For example, the work on university men indicates that physical strength in terms of athletic ability is promoted (Messner 1992; Kidd 1990; Sabo 1980) while the work on marginal male youth reports a focus on physical strength in terms of street violence (Hagedorn 1998; Decker and Van Winkle 1996). Physical strength as a masculine validating resource is engaged in differently depending on one's access to available resources.

Also reflecting the sex difference between the use of physical violence, a level of respect was associated with a male-to-male fighting that was absent when speaking of male-to-female violence:

R.L.: Did you like to fight with other guys when you were in school?

Youth: *Yeah, back then.*

R.L.: Why?

Youth: *Don't know, get respect.*

R.L.: Respect from who?

Youth: *Other students.*

R.L.: Was that the main way to get respect?

Youth: *Yeah.* (Respondent 19)

"It takes a fucking pussy to beat up a girl, takes a coward to do that. If a guy fights with another guy one-on-one it's respectable. You stood your ground; if you hit a girl you gotta watch yourself." (Respondent 20)

Male-to-male physical violence was an avenue to gaining respect by other males, whereas beating¹¹¹ up a girl was seen as a sign of weakness. The acceptance of male-male physical violence coupled with the rejection of males hitting girls often led to males being deemed legitimate targets of male violence. Several respondents spoke of the tactic of hitting "their boyz" rather than hitting their girlfriend. For example:

*Youth: No never. If I am about to hit one [a girl], I walk away and have a break, come back and hug her. I don't hit a girl, **I hit my boyz**. Never will, never have hit a girl. Maybe it's 'cuz I been there; it scares me. If I hear about a kid who gets abused it pisses me off because I been there. That's why I can't hit girls. **I hit one of my boyz instead.***

R.L.: So it's "OK" to hit guys but not girls?

Youth: It's not OK, but guys are always in fights. It's all over, everywhere you hear that stuff, not girls hitting other girls. (Respondent 23)

The hitting of males is acceptable via the commitment to not hit a female and their adherence to the relationship between masculinity and physical violence. It was acceptable, even respected, for a male to engage in physical violence with another male. The link between male-to-male violence and the ongoing negotiation of status is consistent with other findings among less-privileged male youth (Anderson 2000; Totten 2000; Short 1997).

Many respondents in the current study eluded to the relationship between masculinity and physical violence. For many, to be "male" was to be physically big,

¹¹¹ The respondents attributed very different meanings to "beating a girl" and "slapping a girl" which will be discussed in the next section. However, it is important to note at this point that beating a girl was linked to disrespect by other males and caused damage to ones masculine identity as the group has defined it.

willing to physically defend oneself, be stronger than females, and accept and engage in male-to-male physical violence, therefore gaining respect from male peers. These masculine traits, as the respondents and their male peers had defined them, were dictated by and reinforced through adherence to what the respondents referred to as the "guy code."

2) *The Guy Code*

As suggested in the previous discussion, males were defined in opposition to females - males were physically strong, able to defend themselves, and were willing to engage in physical violence with other males. These attributes encouraged the role of males as the protectors of females to emerge naturally. Females were weak, hence in need of male protection.

Many of the respondents eluded to this role of protector of females. One respondent spoke of it as a being a "*code among guys*:"

R.L.: Have you ever seen your male friends fight with their girlfriends?

Youth: *Yeah sometimes bad, yelling screaming, nothing serious, not hits or nothing. If I ever heard about a guy hitting a girl I'd beat him up. It's like a code among most guys, you know, not to hit a girl.*

R.L.: Where did you learn this code?

Youth: *I don't know, must be planted in your head at birth. Some guys just miss it. Some just learn the hard way.*

R.L.: The hard way?

Youth: *Other guys show them. I'd be the first to punch him.* (Respondent 32)

The "guy code" is predicated on the rejection (in ideology not necessarily in practice) of males hitting females and dictates that it is the responsibility of males to teach other men about the code. Teaching of the code is achieved through physically

hitting a male who has not yet adopted the code. According to many of the respondents, the guy code emphasized important aspects of masculine identity, was commonly known by all males and was widely accepted.

"Not allowed to fight, hit, intimidate your girlfriend. Somebody might find out and they'd beat you up. You don't; that's the way it is." (Respondent 14)

"This guy called his brother and he comes in and says he won't hit a girl. He knows not to. It's not cool, not good, all my friends know that. Not acceptable. You don't do it. Any guy ever hits a girl, I'd rip his head off, beat 'em good. I know like lots of guys, like hundreds; they would never hit a girl." (Respondent 15)

"None of the guys - if I did saw one, I'd hit them and push them outta a window - all the guys back me up on that - maybe like 20 guys on him." (Respondent 30)

Commitment to enforcing the guy code was often expressed in terms of "stepping in" if they saw a male hitting a female. Twenty respondents suggested that they and their male peers would somehow intervene (step in) if they witnessed such a scenario. The role of protecting females became an identifying feature of what it meant to be a male for many of the respondents. Part of the public display of masculinity was a commitment to being against males hitting females (in ideology not necessarily in practice) and coupled with that was the responsibility to step in should they see a male hitting a female¹¹².

Intervening often provided an avenue for male bonding among the male peer group. For example:

"Not my friends. We don't hit our girlfriends. I once saw this oriental guy punching out his girlfriend; he could have killed us but we stepped in on that." (Respondent 2)

¹¹² At this stage in the analysis it is not their use of violence against their girlfriends that is being examined, but rather the perception they present to others of being against hitting girls. Or in other words, their public commitment to protect girls.

"Yeah, at our school any guy who hits a girl, **we'd all get together and beat the shit out of him**. It's not right." (Respondent 3)

"Yeah - if we see a guy hit a girl, **we smash him in the head**." (Respondent 4)

"Yeah - he's not our friend; **we beat him up** - he was in the living room and he slapped her so **we all threw him out and shit kicked him**, because he slapped a girl." (Respondent 25)

The act of stepping in was typically fulfilled by more than one male; involvement in the violence was often a group activity as is demonstrated through the use of the term "we." Their discussions of the stepping in act implies that it was almost a male ritual to beat up males who hit females. As a group, they adhere to the same ideology of protecting females from men who are violent, and this ideal had become one component of how they defined being masculine. This was an accepted characteristic of being a male and he and his male peer group accomplished this element together. This activity was an avenue of male bonding whereby they could prove themselves in terms of masculinity, as the group had defined it, through their collective act of protecting girls which simultaneously reinforces their position of dominance over females.

Totten (2000) found a similar trend with his marginalized male youth. While they themselves were abusive, they also publicly engaged in the protection of other females from abusive men. Females were seen as weak and in need of male protection. Again, it may be that they engage in violence against females, as will be discussed later in this chapter, but this group declaration of being against hitting female's serves its own purpose. It allows the males to demonstrate that they are committed to that value of

masculinity as the group has defined it, hence providing them an avenue through which to "do" masculinity (Messerschmidt 1993). In part, they are male because of their role as protector of females.

A second component of stepping in was bravery; males were to step in regardless of potential or perceived threat to themselves and/or the group. As respondent 2 (cited above) suggests, he and his male friends stepped in even though "*the guy could have killed us.*" As well, respondent 25 (cited above) states "*Doesn't matter, even if we don't know him or he's bigger, we don't care.*" There is a belief that regardless of the potential for harm, it is the responsibility of the males to become involved to protect females from other males. This reflects a broader societal stereotype of females being in need of male protection (Segal 1990; Brownmiller 1975). Also, by suggesting that they stepped in even in the threat of extreme physical danger, it allows the respondents to present the persona that he is willing to defend females at increased risk to himself. This strengthens his public image of commitment to the masculine ideal of male strength and willingness to defend females. In other words, it enhances his image as a male. Being brave in the face of physical danger or when threatened with danger is an additional element of masculinity as they have defined it, and is achieved in this way.

Other unwritten rules governed the guy code as well. Several respondents indicated that there were boundaries to stepping in when the situation involved a male peer and his girlfriend. In these situations, boundaries were imposed by the type of fight that was occurring. Respondent 28 suggests that if it gets physical he would step in: "*No*

that's...I would stop it if it was physical; you don't do that to a girl. You don't hit her."

The line for stepping in, was, in many cases, based on the fight becoming physical. They did not step in if a male was yelling, intimidating, or threatening their girlfriends; those activities were in essence acceptable. The following excerpts illustrate this perspective:

"Most of my guy friends are pretty cool, get verbal but not physical; if they ever do it's not in front of me." (Respondent 31)

R.L.: Does it ever get physical between them [male peers and their girlfriends] when they fight?

Youth: *No, never physical abuse, not even verbal abuse, just yelling, swearing. If he had of hit her I would have hit him.* (Respondent 33)

Youth: *Yeah, I've broken up like literally fights. One friend, he had her on the bed choking her; I hit him.*

R.L.: What happens when you see that?

Youth: *Got in fights with some of my best friends because of them beating up their girlfriends. I don't like seeing them hit girls. Shouldn't hit girls. It's the way I was raised. My mom brought me up to not hit girls.*

R.L.: What do you say to the guys when you see them doing that?

Youth: *"Stop it," and then if they don't stop I push them, if still don't stop I hit them.*

R.L.: Do you ever talk about it with them?

Youth: *No - not any of my business to say nothing, just breaking it up.*

R.L.: And it's "OK" to break it up?

Youth: *Just break up the fight, not my place to get involved.*

R.L.: Do you talk to the guys about not hitting them?

Youth: *Tell them it's not right to hit girls or we will hit you - if we catch you we'll beat the crap out of you.*

R.L.: What about your closest male friend?

Youth: *He'll stand beside me if some guy is hitting a girl and will stop it - we know each other since I moved to Ottawa. We watch each other's backs.*

R.L.: How does he feel about hitting girls?

Youth: *He got mad at her once, pushed her really hard onto the couch and told her to shut up so they could talk.*

R.L.: How did that make you feel?

Youth: *She was in his face yelling and he pushed her away. Was OK - not like it was into a wall or anything.* (Respondent 11)

Although respondent 11 suggests that he breaks up fights with his male friends and their girlfriends, the description of the fights in terms of the level of violence used are important. The first incident where he got involved was when his male friend was choking his girlfriend. In his next comment he suggests that he gets involved when they are beating their girlfriends, as this is a more severe form of violence in his perspective. However, his last statements regarding his best friend suggest that he also respects the physical violence line. The fights where he did intervene involved beating or hitting of the girlfriends. The last comments made reference to pushing as the form of violence used, and he offers a minimization of that violence, "*not like it was into a wall or anything*," therefore he does not have to step in.

Another form of boundaries in relation to male peers, hitting girls, and stepping in, concerned the talking about hitting girls with their male peers.

R.L.: Do you ever talk about it with them?

Youth: *No - not any of my business to say nothing, just breaking it up.*

R.L.: And it's "OK" to break it up?

Youth: *Just break up the fight, not my place to get involved.* (Respondent 11)

Youth: *Don't like nobody hitting girls.*

R.L.: Would your male friends agree with you?

Youth: *I don't know. That's my opinion.*

R.L.: Do you ever talk about that?

Youth: *No.* (Respondent 30)

The above respondents would intervene when seeing a male friend get physical with his girlfriend; however, they do not feel that it is their place to "get involved" and talk to them about their use of violence. For many respondents, it was acceptable to get involved

and "hit" a male, but it was not acceptable to talk to them about their use of violence:

Youth: If we see a guy hit a girl we smash him in the head; most girls have a better chance of getting hurt.

R.L.: Do your male friends feel the same way?

Youth: No idea; we don't talk about it. (Respondent 4)

R.L.: Do your close male friends say the same about hitting girls as you?

Youth: Yeah.

R.L.: Ever talk about it?

Youth: Not no need to talk; we know why it's wrong. (Respondent 22)

R.L.: Have you ever seen a guy hit his girlfriend?

Youth: No, I would hit him.

R.L.: Ever talk about it with them?

Youth: No, you don't want to believe that people actually do that. Don't like talking about it. (Respondent 24)

The stepping in line reflects elements of difference between stopping the violence and talking about the violence. There was consensus that it was not their responsibility to talk to their male peers about their use of violence. The ideal that one was to mind his own business or respect the privacy lines of his male friends' personal lives concerning the violence they perpetrated on their girlfriends governed the guy code. It is not thought of as a group-bonding event when they witness a male friend using violence against his girlfriend, but rather, was deemed to be "*none of my business.*"

Youth: One friend doesn't like his own girlfriend, calls her ditchpig...He sees her [his girlfriend] coming and he yells out - big group of us having a smoke - yells out "ditchpig" to her. She tells him to stop it.

R.L.: What do you do?

Youth: Nothing. It's none of my business. If it was my girlfriend I would get involved, but not my girlfriend so I don't have to get involved. (Respondent 3)

R.L.: What about your guy friends and hitting?

Youth: One punched his girlfriend the head once. It was pretty stupid 'cuz he got

charged with it.

R.L.: Did you talk to him about it?

Youth: No... One other guy beat up his girlfriend and put her in the hospital.

R.L.: One of your friends?

Youth: Yeah, that's why I don't hang out with them anymore, they are all idiots.

R.L.: Did you talk to him about it?

Youth: No.

R.L.: Are many of your guy friends physical with their girlfriends?

Youth: Some, I see some of them hitting them.

R.L.: What do you do?

Youth: None of my business. I don't say anything, fake that I don't see it, turn my head around. I've seen it four or five times; one of my buddies smacked his girlfriend across the face for calling him a goof.

R.L.: What did you do?

Youth: Nothing. (Respondent 16)

In the first example provided by respondent 16 (cited above), the girl had to be hospitalized, suggesting a severe attack by the male friend. His solution in this case was to stop associating with the perpetrator.

While they said that they would step in if they saw a male hitting a female there were different rules when the male was one of their friends. It was understood that they were not to get involved in their male peers' business, and this was acceptable among their male peer group. There is a difference between getting involved with other people and respecting the privacy lines of one of his male friends, and this respect was reciprocal. The respondents often did not get involved in personal issues of violence by a male peer because they did not want their male friends to get involved with their issues with their girlfriends:

"Some [male friends] that beat their girlfriends and some that don't. It depends; I don't really care what they do; it's not my business if they beat them or not. I don't really care...If they beat their girlfriends it's none of my business. I don't ask them...If something happened between me and my girlfriend I wouldn't like my boyz coming and

telling me what to do." (Respondent 18)

R.L.: What do you usually/did you do when you see/saw them fight?

Youth: I go outside.

R.L.: Do you guys talk about it?

Youth: Nope, none of our business. (Respondent 19)

The distinction between one's peers and strangers confirms Totten's (2000) work with marginalized male youth.

In light of the discussions regarding their disapproval of violence against girls and stepping in when they see male-to-female violence, it would be logical to suggest that there would be few if any examples of violence against girls evidenced throughout their interviews. However, this was not the case. While almost all of the respondents stated that they disapproved of males hitting females, both their own and their male peers' relationships with girls were often characterized by other forms of male violence.

Section Two: Continuum of Male-to-Female Violence: "I Don't Hit Girls...But I..."

The majority of respondents suggested that they were against hitting girls; however, many were not opposed to other forms of violence against females in certain situations. This resulted in a continuum of male-to-female violence. The respondents appeared to categorize different forms of male violence in terms of degree of severity with each category signifying a different reaction from the respondents. There was continuity across many of the respondents regarding the conceptualization of this continuum of male-to-female violence. As will be demonstrated in the following discussion, the respondents adhered to a continuum of male-to-female violence that

guided both their own and their male peers' behaviours in many instances.

At the end of the continuum comprising the least severe acts of physical violence, as the respondents have defined it, is a form of violence commonly referred to as "slapping." For many of the respondents, there was a difference between "beating" a girl and "slapping" a girl. The term slapping was not coincidental, but rather, was purposeful in defining a less severe form of physical violence than a beating that the respondents could often justify in terms of their own use as well as their male peers' use of the violence.

"They [male peers] didn't beat them [girlfriends], just slap them to tell them to be quiet..." (Respondent 5)

"Nah, I don't hit girls. It's not right, unless they hit us like 10 times first, then it's our right, but I won't like beat her, just slap her and push her out of the way." (Respondent 16)

"I can see some girls need to be put in their place but not really, like I've seen them beating the shit out of them. Laying a beating on a girl is not right, but it all depends, maybe a slap but I can't see myself doing that." (Respondent 20)

"I never seen a girl get a real beating, just a smack or push to the floor." (Respondent 34)

Similar to the marginalized male youth in Totten (2000), in many cases it was acceptable to "just slap" a girl. However, if one beat a girl, then he would be labelled in a derogatory manner and looked down upon by his male peer group. This differentiation between being a "woman beater" and the occasional user of less severe violence reflects a more widely held social norm. Research indicates that in many cases, those who use severe physical violence are ostracized by others while a certain level of physical

violence against females is accepted among society in general (Sinclair 1996). As Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) argue, men who are violent with females are not acting out of the ordinary, but rather, take their cues from society. As well, the ability to justify less severe forms of violence against girls infers that there is a level of male-to-female violence that is acceptable as part of their relationships. The difference in degree of severity allows them to be physically violent with their own girlfriends while not being classified or labeled as a woman beater.

This also allowed them to be friends with males who slap their girlfriends without being friends with woman beaters. For example, even though respondent 15 suggests he has been physically violent with his girlfriend, "*she hit me hard so I pushed her on the bed, called her a cunt,*" and threatened her, "*I'll fucking kill you*" he suggests the following perspective: "*Guys who beat girls are pieces of shit.*" (Respondent 15). Similarly, one respondent showed strong discontentment with guys who use physical violence with girls: "*Fuck, I hate it when guys hit girls; that's just disrespect to the human race. It's not right, disrespectful. Even if they do deserve it, a guy shouldn't hit them*" (Respondent 13). However, he and his male friends often threatened their girlfriends, "*said we'd dump the girls, beat them up, but I have never seen a guy hit his girlfriend.*" As well, this respondent gave examples of how he demonstrated, in front of her, his capacity for extreme violence (i.e. fighting with her father and hitting a brick wall until his hands bled).

For many respondents, it was important to demonstrate that they were different

than those men who would be classified as "woman beaters." Adherence to stereotypical notions of a woman beater is evident in the following excerpts:

"If she hits you, like really hits you, not a slap. If she really hits you, knock her out. That's the only thing - I mean hit you not just a slap. I'd push her outta the way, or send her home, go away. If she punched me in the face I would hit her back like she was a boy. But I don't hit her if she didn't do the dishes or nothing. I know guys who if she didn't do what he wanted he'd hit her." (Respondent 18)

"If totally out of control nothing will calm them down, no use, yelling and screaming. Some guys do it when they just do a little thing, like burn a cake, and they give them a beat down. That's wrong; that makes me sick. I'd jump in then." (Respondent 36)

As illustrated in the above excerpts, many respondents do not agree with the use of violence in the stereotypical situations associated with a woman beater - they did not do the dishes, they burned a cake. Those reasons are not acceptable. Their contextualization of their use of violence suggests that they are better than most men and they pride themselves for that. Their behaviour is better than other males because they do not use extreme violence, which makes their own use of violence acceptable. To be able to put yourself above other men in the hierarchy of masculinities is important. Although they use violence against girls in some situations they are not considered to be as bad those who are classified as women beaters. This is important to their definition of being a man and how their violence against females fits into this identity and is justified.

The above scenarios show that the respondents adhere to a narrow definition of physical violence against females wherein only actions of severe physical violence are recognized. This definition allows them to engage in less severe (as the respondents have defined them) forms of abuse while still presenting themselves as not being abusive to

women. There are circumstances where the use of physical violence is acceptable and there are other situations where such a response is not warranted. These beliefs result in a continuum of physical violence that dictates certain forms of violence as acceptable.

One of the most predominant forms of violence that was accepted by the respondents and their male peers was the use of threats. The content of the threats were broad-ranging from the threat of potential physical harm to witnessing physical violence perpetrated by the respondents on other males. Several types of threats regarding physical violence emerged. These threats were rarely recognized as forms of violence against girls by the respondents; hence, the location of threats at the least severe end of the continuum.

First, there were several respondents who suggested they engaged in making verbal threats of physical violence against their girlfriends. Typical was the response that the respondent did not have to use violence but rather just had to threaten her:

"She was afraid I would hit her back." (Respondent 1)

"I just have to threaten to beat the shit out of her." (Respondent 2)

R.L.: Did you guys fight a lot when you were dating? (Past girlfriend)

Youth: *Lots. She threw a plate at me, she almost pushed me down the stairs after too. I told her not to touch me 'cuz "I will get so many people to beat the living shit out of you" - she was scared.* (Respondent 3)

"I said if you ever fucking slap me again I will snap your fucking neck." (Respondent 13)

While most of the respondents stated that they were not physically violent with their girlfriends, their acceptance of using threats of physical violence to accomplish some form of control over their girlfriend was common. For some of the respondents, the use of

threats provided an outlet, and resulted in them feeling better or more in control of the situation:

"No [I don't threaten her], sometimes, but they know I won't do it, makes me feel better. Like I say 'don't hit me again or I'll hit you right back.'" (Respondent 30)

Male control of girlfriends was also accomplished via the girlfriend witnessing the respondent in male-to-male violence. This form of threat is coined third party violence and refers to any violent incident the girlfriend sees or hears about that might cause her to fear the potential of his violence if directed toward her. Several respondents stated that their girlfriends might be afraid of them:

"She might have been afraid before I went out with her. I would get angry and lose my temper; people would back away. I never lost my temper with her." (Respondent 6)

"Yeah, one time my boy got me really mad and I was really high and almost went at him - she watched me blow up and since then she's been afraid of me." (Respondent 23)

R.L.: Were there ever times when your girlfriend was afraid of you?

Youth: *Yeah probably when she seen me fighting on the street.* (Respondent 25)

"Yeah, when I am drunk. I never hit her or anything but she's nervous when I'm drunk; I never hurt her but she's seen me hurt other people." (Respondent 34)

It is important to note that the respondents understood how witnessing the violence they perpetrated on other males might influence their girlfriends' perception of them in terms of violence as they knew it scared their girlfriends.

At times the threat of violence of a third party was more directly linked to the girlfriend. Although not physically violent with their girlfriend, they demonstrate their capacity to be violent with the end result of raising fear or concern in the girlfriend. To

illustrate:

"I kicked in the front door, grabbed her and threw her against the wall. I told her if she ever cheated again I would fucking kill her. I flipped - took a baseball bat and smashed everything." (Respondent 2)

"Once she was being all cocky in front of her girlfriends; I got a crow bar and started hitting a pole but then I calmed down and she apologized to me for what she said. It never got physical with me and her." (Respondent 22)

"She throws things at me, a hard ball. I pick it up throw it, not at her but at the wall. Just missed her head, but I wasn't aiming at her. I put a hole in the wall; that scared her. Everyone thought I was going to hit her, but I put a curve on it." (Respondent 30)

The respondents can achieve a threat of violence without contacting with her physically, allowing them to continue to believe they are not being violent toward her. Two very poignant examples of the use of physical violence against others (or other things) as a threat to the girlfriend are offered by respondent 13:

"Once she slapped me. She didn't mean to. I could see it in her eyes - I said 'if you ever fucking slap me again, I'll snap your fucking neck,' then I went and cooled off. I came back and my hand was all bleeding. She said 'what happened?' I said 'I either punch the shit out of a wall or I punch the shit out of you.' Her dad saw it, he's a doctor. He's like 'Holy shit what happened?' I said 'I was punching brick walls,' he said 'why?' I said 'either I hit the walls and do damage to myself or I beat the shit out of your beautiful daughter here.' He said, 'oh, I see your point.'" (Respondent 13)

"Oh yeah, the girl I went out with for two-and-a-half years, the first year I was going out with her, I was just in a fight with a guy, so I was knocking hard on her door, and her dad answered, throws a bag of ice at me 'cuz I was knocking so hard. I say 'you want a piece of me?' She got in the way so I said 'get out of the way.' I said 'either get out of the way 'cuz I'm going to fucking hit your dad or you,' she was crying...I knew what she was fucking scared of me, 'cuz I was mad.'" (Respondent 13)

The knowledge that their display of physical violence scared their girlfriends is important. These are not merely random acts, but acts engaged in with one of the intents

being to instill fear in the girlfriend, hence strengthening their masculine status as being powerful and in control of their girlfriend. They are male *because* they are in physical control of their girlfriend.

For some of the respondents, the solution to them not hitting females was that they would get a female they knew to beat her up. Enlisting a female absolved them of responsibility for the act, and their male peers in many cases accepted this. This act would be placed at the least severe end of the continuum as they again did not associate it with violence against females. There were no comments made in any of the interviews about whether this was acceptable - no one raised the issue of beating up a guy who got a girl to beat up his girlfriend. They could justify the solution based primarily on their belief that when a guy hits a girl the girl could really get hurt, the girl cries, but girls hitting girls is acceptable; it is deemed to be fair game. As well, this solution allowed the respondents to remain in control - they are the ones telling her to beat her up. For example:

"Tell girls to go kick some girl's ass because I am not going to hit a girl." (Respondent 1).

Youth: I would have another girl beat the shit out of her and not feel guilty about it.

R.L.: Girls hitting girls is OK?

Youth: Go ahead, fair game, I don't give a fuck. (Respondent 4)

Youth: I have girls who will fight for me, another reason why we collect girls.

R.L.: It's "OK" for girls to hit girls?

Youth: Yeah, just like a guy hitting another guy. (Respondent 9)

Their male peers often supported the tactic of enlisting a female to beat up a

girlfriend. In fact, many of them did the same. When using this type of strategy, the male continues to exercise control over the female - he tells a female to go beat up someone for him reinforcing male dominance over females. As well, it is fairly impressive for a male to be able to say he just asks a girl and she goes and beats her up for him. The typical reason for getting a girl to hit a girl was that guys were stronger and would hurt girls. This plays into their belief in the physical superiority of males and the inferiority of females, providing support for their belief that to be a man means being physically dominant over women (as discussed earlier in this chapter). This solution allows the male to continue to conceive of himself as a protector of females while inflicting violence on a girl via another girl as there is acceptance of female-female violence.

Other forms of violence used against their girlfriends that were classified as in the middle to lower end of the continuum and included:

- Throwing objects (boots, books, hard balls):

"She throws things at me, a hard ball. I pick it up throw it, not at her but at the wall. Just missed her head, but I wasn't aiming at her. I put a hole in the wall, that scared her, everyone thought I was going to hit her, but I put a curve on it." (Respondent 30)

- Pushing

"No it doesn't happen, if it did I would stop it. Don't get to that point in my neighbourhood; nobody hits a girl. Just because we wouldn't hit a girl, might push her if she hits him hard." (Respondent 22)

- Grabbing and constraining

"Yelling, name calling, not really violence - like he's holding her and she's out of control." (Respondent 36)

- Throwing their girlfriends

"All the time, push her around, push each other around. I throw her across the room so she can land on her feet though, more in a playful way. I picked her up and threw her, didn't mean it in a violent way, but she ended up breaking her ankle." (Respondent 2)

- Verbal abuse (bitch, cocksucker, asshole, ho, as well as being told "I hate you" and "fuck off")

"One friend doesn't like his own girlfriend, calls her ditchpig. This guy is a little overweight and is so rude. He sees her [his girlfriend] coming and he yells out - big group of us having a smoke - yells out 'ditchpig' to her. She tells him to stop it." (Respondent 3)

Almost all of the respondents stated that they were against violence against females, still, it was clear that this was typically a stance against hitting females. In other words, they were using other forms of violence against females but due to their narrow definition of violence against females, were able to justify their own use of them. This leads us to an important question: What factors facilitated their use of violence against females?

Section Three: Justifications for Male-to-Female Violence: "I Don't Hit Girls...Unless..."

One of the most dominant resources for violence against females was respondent exposure to the use of violence by their male peers. Several of the respondents spoke of the violence they saw their male peers inflict on their own girlfriends. This is a strong resource in many ways. Male peer support theory argues that in times of relationship stress or when the authority that patriarchal society has led the male to believe he should embody is challenged, the peer group can be used as a resource to learn how to deal with these types of situations (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; DeKeseredy 1988). As well,

exposure to violence can be perceived as indicating that violence is an acceptable means to deal with relationship problems, reinforcing the use of such behaviour. However, not all violence is acceptable - it must be deemed as acceptable and the peer group plays a large role in this process of justifying the use of certain forms of violence against females.

In most cases, the respondents stated that they did not believe that guys should hit girls. However, many were generally quite willing to make exceptions to this rule. In order to understand how they could at times justify the use of violence against females while still claiming to adhere to the notion that violence against females is not acceptable and that they nor their male peers participate in violence against females, questions regarding the context of a situation where male violence would be acceptable were posed. The respondents were asked the question "*Is there ever a time when it is 'OK' to hit your girlfriend?*." Three themes of justification arose: in response to perceived extreme female violence/threat of violence against the male; in response to perceived unacceptable/irrational/emotion behaviour of a girlfriend; and, in response to perceived threats to masculinity. Each theme will be discussed.

1) *Perceived Extreme Female Violence/Threat of Violence Against the Male*

Many respondents stated that the only time it was "OK" to hit a female was in a case of extreme female violence perpetrated against the male. They talked of the acceptance of male-to-female violence if the tables were extremely turned; in almost all cases, these situations were characterized by the females' use of a weapon.

The respondents were opposed to hitting females because they defined males as

physically stronger than females with females having a higher probability of getting hurt.

The extreme cases they cite involve the female having a weapon; these had been defined as the only situations where females would have more physical strength than males.

"No, not unless she was coming at me with a weapon that can kill me or cause severe harm. I don't want to break the bitch's jaw." (Respondent 4)

"No, only if a girls coming at you with a shank or a gun, otherwise it's not OK. It's not good." (Respondent 15)

"No, unless she is pointing a gun at him or something, but that's like the extreme." (Respondent 33)

The theme of a female having to have a weapon to be seen as a threat to the respondent is firmly rooted in a masculine identity that focuses on male physical strength over females. By suggesting that these cases would be the only ones where violence was acceptable, the respondents reinforce a masculine status that promotes male physical dominance over females. Inherent in their thinking is adherence to the ideal that males can hurt females via their physical strength. Masculine ideals often focus on aggression and strength and the use of extreme violence coupled with a weapon is important as it reinforces their status of being tough and powerful (strong indicators of being male). Using an extreme situation coupled with a weapon allows them to be true to the component of masculinity that dictates that males do not hit females. It also enhances male power by having to use only violence against women if a weapon is involved - the use of a weapon makes female strength equal to male strength. Stating that they only use violence against females in extreme danger strengthens their image of being committed to

the ideal of not hitting females.

Although many respondents indicated they would use violence if the female had a weapon, they were quick to add that they would not react as violently as they would if she was a male, regardless of the use of a weapon.

"If I had a gun to my head, but I wouldn't hit her, I would try to get the gun away from her." (Respondent 3)

"If a girl was punching me in my face or with a baseball bat it's OK to hit her, well not hit her with my fist, push her away." (Respondent 11)

"No, never closed fists. Maybe if a girl was attacking me with a weapon, it would take a lot even for open handed." (Respondent 20)

They continued to uphold the image of males as being physically stronger than females, and that even if the female was armed with a weapon, they would not use their full strength. The commitment to the belief in the difference in strength and ability to fight is strong - they are stronger than females who are armed with a weapon. If the situation is altered wherein a male is approached by another male who is armed the reaction is different - they would merely fight back as hard as they could. For these respondents, females were not defined as being physically strong and were not seen as a full threat even if they were armed.

This rings of a traditional patriarchal stereotype where females are not physical entities in terms of violence and are not seen as physically threatening to men (see Dell 2001, 1999). They do not acknowledge the capability of a female to be physically violent. This may be because physical violence is deemed to be a masculine trait; they

can not conceptualize females as being violent as that would be a threat to their own masculine status as they have defined it. As we saw in the previous discussion, many of the respondents defined physical ability (in terms of violence) as a male characteristic and labeled females who were violent as "doing" masculinity. They need to ensure that their use of violence against females is in extreme cases of female violence (with a weapon) in order to maintain their masculine status.

2) *Perceived Unacceptable/Irrational/Emotional Behaviour of a Girlfriend*

A second form of justification for the use of physical violence against females was similarly related to the maintenance of traditional gender roles. There was a theme of physical violence being acceptable in situations where the girlfriend was "out of control." This justification is rooted in patriarchal stereotypes that suggest females are irrational and emotionally unstable. The following respondents indicate that the use of physical violence can be justified if it is in response to a girlfriend needing to be "calmed down."

"Slapping her if they are arguing and wouldn't stop, if it really made you upset, then it would be OK. Not all the time - once in awhile. If you have to then it's OK, but if you can stop it some other way then OK." (Respondent 5)

*"Well if she is capable of hitting a guy then she deserves it. I don't know, the guy shouldn't like punch her, maybe hold her down and **calm her down**, but no like physical abuse, it's wrong."* (Respondent 33)

R.L.: So if they deserve it, it's "ok" to hit girls?

*Youth: **If totally out of control nothing will calm them down**, no use, yelling and screaming...then like just a slap to settle her down or lock her in her room.* (Respondent 36)

Female anger and/or use of physical violence is perceived differently than male violence and anger - it is attributed to being out of control, she is in need of calming down. No one suggested that they would try to calm down a male who was angry - they would just hit back. There is again an underlying adherence to a traditional view of females as needing male guidance and control in their lives - she is irrational, therefore in need of male intervention. Physical violence and/or anger were not considered to be female attributes. In many cases they did not accept that females could be angry or violent. This is not surprising given the discussion earlier in this chapter wherein aggression was perceived to be a masculine trait by the respondents. Males were to be physically strong, able to defend themselves, and be willing to fight. These traits were not considered to be female traits. Hence, when the female demonstrated these characteristics she was thought of as being out of control, irrational, or emotionally unstable. In other words, they were acting out of their traditional gender roles as the males had defined them. The further comment "*lock her in her room*" (Respondent 36, cited above), is commonly associated with the disciplining of unruly children and suggests that the respondent associates a childlike nature to females who are "violent."

The conceptualization of females as irrational, out of control, and childlike, leads to the justification in these cases of the male's use of physical violence to re-establish the roles in the relationship. Furthermore, in the respondents' perspective, the use of physical violence was perceived as helping the female to regain control. If she was seen as being out of control and the slapping of her lead to the regaining of control, it could be

understood as helping the female, or rather, putting her back in her "proper" place, therefore re-establishing "proper" order.

This theme of using physical violence to calm a girlfriend down is similar to the use of physical violence when the female tried to exhibit some form of control over the male. Many respondents felt that the use of physical violence by themselves and/or their male peers was justifiable in response to a girlfriend "nagging" or talking too much. Referring back to the previous discussion in Chapter 4, many of the respondents desired unconditional support from their girlfriend. Along with this support came the understanding or expectation that the girlfriend would not interfere in their lives but rather accept them as they were. Girlfriends were to be seen, not heard, in many cases, and when they acted out of this role, physical violence to re-establish proper roles was often deemed acceptable:

R.L.: Did they [male peers] hit them a lot?

Youth: Yeah, well not a lot. They have a lot of arguments, lots of anger. They didn't beat them, just slap them to tell them to be quiet, sometimes their girlfriends were talking too much.

R.L.: Have you ever see them fight?

Youth: Yeah, they just had a fight; he hit her; I try to stop them.

R.L.: Did they stop?

Youth: Sometimes at the beginning of arguments, sometimes I don't do anything, sometimes I thought they deserved it. Some had big mouths, nagging; they'd just get fed up. (Respondent 5)

"I can see some girls need to be put in their place, but not really, like I've seen them beating the shit out of them. Laying a beating on a girl is not right, but it all depends, maybe a slap but I can't see myself doing that...It takes a fucking pussy to beat up a girl, takes a coward." (Respondent 20)

Implicit in the two excerpts above is the idea that there are certain roles that a girlfriend is

supposed to fulfill. In the first case, a girlfriend was to be quiet and not nag a boyfriend. The respondent can justify his male peers' use of physical violence as the girlfriends were acting out of their expected role. In the second excerpt, the respondent implies that it is the responsibility of a male to keep his girlfriend in her "place"; he does not challenge this "right" but rather accepts the fact that sometimes physical violence can be justified if she is acting contrary to her expected role. Their male peers play an important role in shaping and dictating the traditional roles for females. Both respondents imply that there is an acceptable level of male-to-female violence in intimate relationships while continuing to claim allegiance to the ideology that "beating a girl" is wrong. Violence can be used to keep her in line, but it is only used to the maximum needed in each situation; one can not beat her without losing the respect of other males. There is an inherent understanding that some form of male physical violence is acceptable, but one must not let it get out-of-hand (i.e. beating her). According to male high school student self-report surveys, the desire to gain control over a female partner is one of the most common reasons for their use of violence against a female dating partner (O'Keefe 1997); female high school students also make a connection between male-to-female violence and "show[ing] who was boss" (Jackson et. al 2000:31).

3) *Perceived Challenge to Masculinity*

Another prominent justification for the use of male-to-female physical violence again reflected traditional gender roles. Recalling the discussion in Chapter 4, the respondents commonly described the female role in intimate relationships as being one of

unconditional support; a girlfriend was not to challenge his authority and/or dominance, but rather, accept him and support him. The use of physical violence for many respondents was justified when the behaviour the girlfriend exhibited somehow challenged or threatened his masculine identity or the authority that the respondent felt he should embody due to his status as a male. There were several examples of perceived threats to masculinity by the respondents that resulted in the justification of male-to-female physical violence.

To reiterate, respondent 12 was the only respondent who suggested that he used physical violence with his girlfriends, and accepted this as his right. In fact, he suggests (cited below) that, "*Usually the ones who don't hit girls are lost in her eyes; they are just suckers; the girl runs them.*" Physical violence for both him and his male peers was an acceptable and beneficial aspect of their relationships with girls. For him and his male friends, part of being a male was being in control of the girl in a relationship and this control was gained, in part, via male physical violence. He characterizes male control over females as a positive aspect, and this view was similar to the views of his peers' as evidenced in his comments:

R.L.: Have you seen him [male peers] fight with girls?

Youth: *Fight? It's not like they hit him back - some girl may talk like she's his girlfriend, but she'll catch one.*

R.L.: Catch one?

Youth: *Get a smack.*

R.L.: Do most of the boyz smack the girls around?

Youth: *Myself, a few times, smack her. Steve, he beats her like a kid. He lets her know he's mad, don't have to hit them, he just says it and they know. Usually the ones who don't hit girls are lost in her eyes, they are just suckers, the girl runs them.*

R.L.: What about you?

Youth: Yeah I have. I got lied to, cheated on me and I was really mad. One tried to get brave in front of her friends and tell me something; I smacked her. One was saying shit that shouldn't be said, smack. Trying to be brave in front of my friends, smack. Doing heavy drugs, if I really liked her, smack. Going to a party I don't want her to, could catch one for that.
(Respondent 12)

The respondent justifies both his and his male peers' use of physical violence with their girlfriends in situations where they feel the girlfriend challenges male dominance. In his comments on why he would "smack" his girlfriend, the theme of male control is predominant. The actions that would justify his violence reflect challenges to his masculine identity; for example, if she tried to get brave in front of his and/or her friends, going to a party he didn't want her to go to. These behaviours are perceived by the respondent as challenging his authority and control, hence, he is justified in hitting her in order to re-establish dominance. He receives support for these beliefs from his male peers as well as those he describes as being physically violent with their girlfriends under similar circumstances.

The justification of male physical violence against girls in situations where masculine dominance or authority is challenged by a girlfriend was also found among those respondents who initially stated that hitting girls was not acceptable:

R.L.: What could a girl do to deserve to get hit?

Youth: If she hits a guy in the nuts, deserves a shot. If they keep hitting us, they deserve to get hit. If they get abusive with guys, they start to get the beats, they have to get it. (Respondent 13)

R.L.: Have any of your male friends ever said that it is OK" to use force with your girlfriend?

Youth: Yeah, I know because I've asked why they hit. I ask them but I don't go into

a whole thing. If she slapped the guy, made him look stupid in front of his friends, embarrassed me, jealous. Those are the reasons I would think that would make them. (Respondent 34)

Youth: One thing to slap a girl if she deserves it, like really deserves it. You can't beat on a girl, like that should be in the Ten Commandments.

R.L.: How would she deserve it?

Youth: I don't know. Come up and throw her beer on you and hitting ya, then like just a slap to settle her down... (Respondent 36)

The reasons they provide for the acceptance of physical violence once again hinge on the ideology of male status - if she made him look stupid in front of his friends, embarrassed him (for example, throwing a beer on him), made him jealous. These reasons suggest an injury or threat to the male's status among his male peers. It is important that she does not challenge him in front of his male friends as this is not acceptable. This is similar to findings among violent and non-violent college males who, although stating that dating violence was not acceptable, indicated that there were situations where aggression was justified - humiliation by one's partner was one such situation (Foo and Margolin 1995; Smith and Williams 1992).

One of my respondents stated that *"if they get abusive with guys, they start to get the beats, they have to get it."* (Respondent 13). This suggests that it is important for the males to be able to take physical control of girlfriends. Females are defined as passive and non-violent, therefore the girlfriends have to get hit if they cross that line as they are acting out of their "normal" prescribed lines of being a female and are challenging male dominance and authority. As Dobash and Dobash (1994:19) argue, "...using violence is simply one tool forming an integral part of maintaining authority, obtaining services and

punishing real or perceived misbehavior.” Females are not to hit males and if they do, then it is the norm to respond with violence as they need to be “put in their place.” This again relates to the stereotypical gender roles of female and male behaviour as described under a patriarchal system which promotes male aggression and dominance, and female passivity and compliance. If a female acts out of these roles, then it is the “right” of the male to reinforce female passivity. The peer group helps to define these guidelines and hence plays a role in the justification of using violence to get them back in line. Similar findings in terms of using physical violence (slapping) to “keep a girl in check” is found in Messerschmidt’s (2000) work. In an extended exchange between the researcher and one of the working-class adolescent males in his study, the themes discussed above were also voiced (for example, the justification of slapping girls who “talked trash” to you, who stepped out of their prescribed roles of subservience to the males). As well, the youth stated that slapping her was *not* a form of violence as she knows the rules and if she goes against them she is slapped down and “that’s the way it should be” (Messerschmidt 2000:59, Hugh).

Also relating to threats to masculine identity were justifications used in situations where the male stated the use of violence was in retaliation to the girlfriend’s use of physical violence directed at him or his male friends. In these cases the respondents suggested that their girlfriend was hitting them, and they finally stood up and put her in her place through the use of physical violence. This similarly relates to threats to masculine status; if she is hitting him then he has to stand up and hit her back as this is a

way of taking his control back. Allowing her to hit him damages his image as a male and he is justified in keeping her in line:

Youth: She [girlfriend] hit me with the beer bottle.

R.L.: Did you hit her back?

Youth: Nah, I don't hit girls. It's not right, unless they hit us like ten times first, then it's our right, but I won't like beat her, just slap her and push her out of the way. (Respondent 16)

The next excerpt, also from respondent 16, focuses on the beliefs of his male peers in respect to males hitting their girlfriends:

R.L.: Is it ever "OK" to hit your girlfriend?

Youth: No I don't think so.

R.L.: What do you think your male friends would say?

Youth: Some might agree, some might disagree.

R.L.: When would they agree?

Youth: If she hits them first. I've heard it's after she hits you three times you can give her a shot, by law; that's what I heard.

R.L.: Do you follow that?

Youth: No, I always usually wait till she hits me a few more times then give her a slap and she'll sit down. (Respondent 16)

Respondent 30 (cited below) similarly states the need to use physical violence albeit a restricted one.

R.L.: Is it ever "OK" to hit your girlfriend?

Youth: No, just don't hit a girl period, but sometimes - if you hit her once that's enough, but sometimes...not right to hit at all, but someone who hits, one time is enough not two times. (Respondent 30)

One can assume that under normal conditions, if someone hit a person ten times (see respondent 16, first excerpt cited above), s/he would hit back and s/he would not be too concerned with how hard s/he hit back. If the situation was reversed and it was two males, the respondent would not have been concerned about how he hit back. Again the

notion of females as being weaker is raised, thus calling into question the necessity of hitting her at all. If she is not a threat physically as they suggest because they appear to define girls as physically weaker, then one would not need to use any physical violence, but this is not the case, and this does not achieve what they need. They have to be able to justify their use of violence so they provide guidelines as to when they can hit females while still maintaining their status as a male. Without these allowances, anyone who used violence with a female would result in losing one's status as a male. If they cannot justify their use of violence, they fall into that category of woman beater, which the group has defined to be comprised of weak men. These rules and justifications operate to make violence in certain situations acceptable.

Although the respondents stated that most men would agree with the guy code (discussed in the last section), there are limitations around this male-male retaliation on the behalf of females. Many of the respondents indicted that they would step in if they saw a male hitting a female; however, upon further exploration, it was discovered that there are unwritten rules guiding this action. In reality, there are lines around stepping in and there are justifications that can be applied in certain contexts. For example, respondent 22 introduces the concept of justifications *"might push her if she hits him hard."* While their initial comments suggest that they are against hitting females, it was found that their definition of threats against females was very narrow. There are certain behaviours that would be defined as violence against females that would be deemed acceptable via justifications. These justifications were often applied in situations

involving their male peers' use of violence against females.

Many respondents could justify their male peers' use of violence with their girlfriends. The acceptability of male violence against girlfriends often hinged upon the perpetrator of violence. There is a line between what the respondents would do in the case of a stranger hitting a female versus a male friend fighting with his girlfriend. The justifications offered by the respondents were varied and include the minimization of the violence (for example, *only* slapping), the use of violence as a means to control the female, and that it was none of his business. To illustrate:

"Yeah, she was sort of physical, tried to knee him in the crotch, slapped him a few times. He held her against the wall, said I'm not taking this' and took off. I stayed out if it, none of my business." (Respondent 10)

Youth: I know some who if she didn't do what he wanted he'd hit her...If those girls wouldn't be happy with that they wouldn't be with them, if they are with their boyfriends they are happy with it.

R.L.: You think they are happy?

Youth: Yeah, either that or they would let them go. Not always beat, I don't know what they think. I've never been beat, never beat my girlfriend. I'm in my own world, if everything is good for me it's good. That's how I was raised. I'm in my own house, my own business, what happens in your house is your own business. (Respondent 18)

"Yeah, a couple. Punch them out - girl gets slapped out. To their girlfriends, only seen it a few times. I don't really get involved unless he's killing her, but it might be rude but if he's just doing this thing I am not about to get involved. If she's stupid enough to stay with him, she could leave if she wanted. I'm not going to go over and lecture him and I'm not a cop caller." (Respondent 34)

In the statements above, the respondents justify the girlfriend violence perpetrated by their male peers. Typically, these justifications conceptualized the male peer as only doing what was necessary in the situation which resulted in partially blaming the girl for

the violence she experienced. Respondent 34 (cited above) suggests that if the girl is "stupid enough to stay" then she is partially to blame. Similarly, respondent 18 (cited above) justifies the use of violence by suggesting that if the girls did not want to be with the guys they could leave. Enlisting a form of victim blaming whereby the male is absolved of responsibility for his use of violence was common. As well, this type of justification simultaneously exempts the respondent of his own responsibility to become involved in the situation.

A common distinction in their conceptualization of justifiable physical violence hinged upon retaliation. It was acceptable to use physical violence in retaliation to the female's use of violence¹¹³; however, there were limitations on the intensity of their use of violence. This reflects their overall adherence to the ideology that males were inherently stronger than females. To illustrate, many youth suggested that if a female hit them first then they were justified in hitting her back, however not as hard as they would if she were a male:

"I am against hitting girls for no reason but you have the right to hit her back if she hits you. Not full force though." (Respondent 1)

"If a girl comes up and punches me for nothing they better expect a punch; I won't hit back with all my strength." (Respondent 32)

"Yeah - I don't put up with guys hitting girls or women, zero tolerance. I don't think it's right. If the girl is manly enough to hit a guy first then she deserves a smack. ...Well if

¹¹³ Without the female's version of the story, it is difficult to discern if the violence by the males was truly retaliation or merely framed as such by the males. However, without this information it is still viable to assess their use of justifications - they were retaliating therefore it is acceptable.

she is capable of hitting a guy then she deserves it. I don't know, the guy shouldn't like punch her, maybe hold her down and calm her down, but no like physical abuse, it's wrong." (Respondent 33)

The degree of intensity also governed the response of the respondents to the use of physical violence by their male peers:

"I wasn't mad at first, he [male friend] didn't close his fist or nothing, he would have killed her if he hit her." (Respondent 2)

"Yeah, fighting with his girlfriend one time and the way he hit her, I didn't like it and we fought. I stood up and we fought, it was intense, he almost killed me... He hit her hard. I didn't like the way he hit her. He hit her hard, it wasn't necessary." (Respondent 5)

If the violence used by the male peers was deemed to be too severe (in these cases - closed fist, hitting her hard) then the respondents were more apt to step in and stop the violence. However, as long as the violence was not severe (as defined by the respondents and their male peers), the respondents could justify their lack of involvement in the situation. This again indicates a belief that some physical violence against women is acceptable, however, to *beat* a woman is not. It is inherently suggested that it is common to use some violence to keep a woman in line but one can not go to the extreme or he will cross the line into being a woman beater, which is contemptible.

Section Four: Summary

This chapter began with the exploration of the near unanimous claim (34/36) that the respondents did not believe in males hitting females. Throughout the discussion of *why* they were against males hitting females, the way in which respondents conceptualized masculine identity began to emerge. There was a focus on physicality in

terms of violence as a concept of masculinity: men were physically bigger than females, they could defend themselves physically, and were willing to fight back in aggressive situations.

The respondents expressed a narrow conception of masculinity whereby what it means to be a male is defined in opposition of being a female. Due to their physical strength and ability in terms of fighting, males were considered to be stronger than females. The acceptance of physical aggression was based upon sex lines whereby it was deemed to be unmanly to hit girls, however, male-to-male violence was an avenue to respect. This acceptance of male-to-male violence coupled with the rejection of hitting females often resulted in males being classified as legitimate targets of physical violence. The overarching belief in the patriarchal stereotype of males as physically strong and females as physically weak facilitated the emergence of a role of males as the protectors of females, reinforcing male dominance over females.

The ideology of males as protectors of females was governed by what the respondents labeled the "guy code." The guy code, as these respondents have come to conceptualize it, dictates that men are to protect females from other violent men. Protection often came in the form of males stepping in when they saw another male hitting a female. The act of stepping in was often a group activity and this collective activity provided an avenue of male bonding.

Many of the respondents adhered to the tenet of the guy code to step-in when they saw a female being hit by a male, however, this is not a clear-cut role. It is one with

different elements that provide restrictions and justifications within it. Various elements were stated that characterize the line where one would step in and stop the violence. Most clearly, the guy code encourages the collective group process of stepping in when dealing with strangers. There is an aggregate commitment to the ideology that males should not hit females, in fact, the accepted group reaction to this action has been defined as one of the ways that one can demonstrate one's masculinity. The collective agreement to step in enforces group solidarity and encourages standing up to other violent men in order to protect females.

The line becomes less clear, however, when the respondents witness violence against females perpetrated by their male peers. There is a process of justifications whereby the respondents can rationalize the use of violence by their male peers and this process results in situations where their use of violence is acceptable. Often stepping in with friends was based upon the severity of the violence inflicted on the girlfriend. This suggests that a level of violence against girlfriends is acceptable by both the respondents and their male peers.

An interesting problem arises as it was commonly accepted that it was the guy code not to hit females; however, they did not talk about it among the group. This relates to the fact that there are privacy lines between what goes on with a male and his girlfriend. Many respondents stated that in cases involving their male peers, what happened in terms of violence was none of their business. For many of the respondents, the guy code offered different rules for violence against females depending on the

perpetrator of the violence.

Similarly, the guy code only spoke to not hitting females; other forms of violence were acceptable within the guidelines of the guy code. Many of the respondents conceptualized violence against females as something that was to be assessed in intervals, with the underlying agreement that some use of violence against girls in intimate relationships was acceptable. Certain levels of violence were condoned or justified by the respondents who suggest on the surface that they do not agree with hitting females. At the extreme end of the continuum were forms of severe violence, which the respondents labeled as "beating." The use of such severe violence indicated that you were a woman beater, which was not acceptable by the respondents. Slapping and/or smacking a female was among the least severe categories on the continuum¹¹⁴. Other forms of violence comprised the hierarchy including swearing, threatening, pushing, throwing her, and throwing objects. However, it is important to note that only beating was recognized as an act of violence against females; the respondents did not acknowledge the other acts of violence as such. Conceptualizing violence against females as a continuum wherein some acts are justified and acceptable allows the respondent to believe he is portraying his image as a male. Because he uses violence in his relationship to maintain control over his girlfriend, he has to be able to agree that the use of less severe forms of violence against

¹¹⁴ I am hesitant in my use of the term "severe" as I do not want to promote a hierarchy of violence but rather adhere to the ideology that classifies all forms of violence against women as serious. However, reflecting the perspective of the respondents, the use of a continuum of violence against girls wherein different forms of violence are equated with different levels of severity is indeed appropriate.

females is acceptable.

The definitional distinction of hitting/beating versus slapping was one of the primary justifications invoked in terms of their own and their male peers' use of physical violence against their girlfriends. This reflects a traditional view of violence against females wherein there is agreement that the use of some physical violence is acceptable, but some men took it to the extreme and those men were not respected. Other justifications were also accepted and reinforced by the respondents and his male peer group.

The scenarios provided by the respondents underlie their surface commitment to the male ideology as they and their male peers had defined it. This does not mean that they followed these rules (not hitting girls), but just that there was surface commitment to the ideology of not engaging in male-to-female violence unless under dire conditions. There appears to be consensus as to the situations where violence is justified and many of these situations are based upon the notion of male control over the female. For example, it was suggested that females have a tendency to be out of control emotionally and are in need of being calmed down by the males. There is no discussion of whether the emotional reaction of the girlfriend is justified; it is just important that if the girlfriend is "out of control" (as the males have come to define "out of control"), it is acceptable to slap her, but not to beat her. The hierarchy of woman abusers is again apparent. They justify their own and their male peers' use of violence by comparing them to others - we are not the worst of the men, we are better or above other men.

To “save face” they created various justifications or rationalizations such as it's none of my business, she deserved it, she could leave if she didn't like it. We see two planes of reality almost whereby overall it is not right, but because they do not see another way to have control and dominance over females without the use of violence, they create circumstances where it is acceptable. The acceptance of violence against females was situational, culturally sensitive, and the peer group helped to provide justifications. Therefore, although many respondents stated that they and their male peers did not engage in violence against females, this was not the case. The male peer group provided support and encouragement for the use of various forms of male-to-female dating violence.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

Male peer support research has primarily been conducted with samples of university/college men (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; Sanday 1990; DeKeseredy 1988; Kanin 1985, 1967). One of the key arguments found in this body of literature is that many men may come to the university/college campus with pro-abuse ideologies already in place (Kanin 1967). However, with the exception of DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1994), little research has explored this possibility. My study fills this gap by providing one of the first qualitative studies on the role of male peer support among socially displaced male youth, exploring how affiliation with some all-male peer groups can encourage the abuse of females. The qualitative nature of the study provides insight into more subtle ways in which male peer support for male-to-female dating abuse is provided.

Most research on male-to-female youth dating abuse focuses on prevalence and incidence rates among high school students (Coker et al. 2001; Poitras and Lavoie 1995; Gagné et al. 1994; Bergman 1992; Mercer 1988). Although preliminary evidence of the relationship between male peer groups and pro-abuse ideologies among youth has been found (for example, Messerschmidt 2000; Totten 2000; Pollack 2000; Ageton 1984) there was, and still is, a need for further qualitative studies.

One of the most obvious findings is that many of the respondents were, although in differing degrees of severity and through different means, engaging in male-to-female dating abuse. Respondents described their own and/or their male peers' use of various

dating abuse. Respondents described their own and/or their male peers' use of various forms of male abuse (for example, slapping, threats, manipulation, sexual coercion) within their dating relationships providing support for the claim that male abuse against female dating partners begins prior to college/university age (Kanin 1967).

Through the focus on younger males and their male peer groups, it was possible to establish that support for pro-abuse ideologies exists prior to adult male age. For many respondents, the male peer group played a key role in the encouragement and legitimization of male-to-female dating abuse. Many of the resources (for example, the sexual objectification of females, a narrow conception of male and female) provided to the respondents were similar to those found in male peer support research among adult males (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1997; Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989; Kanin 1967). Overall, my findings suggest that the male peer group often provided resources that contributed to the creation/maintenance of a male dominated environment for the socially displaced male youth.

To review, my study was designed to explore the following two research questions:

1. *Do socially displaced male youth receive similar types of male peer support for male-to-female dating abuse as university/college men?*
2. *How do male peer support processes operate among socially displaced male youth?*

The first question my research sought to answer was whether socially displaced male youth receive similar types of male peer support for male-to-female dating abuse as

university/college men. The quick answer is yes - many of the resources the male peer group provided for the respondents are similar to those found within the research on adult men. However, some different resources also materialized.

This chapter has three main sections. First, the attachment to male peer groups by the respondents will be discussed. Components of their male peer groups often facilitated the sexual objectification of women, a narrow definition of masculine and feminine, that suggested specific ways in which to demonstrate masculinity, and male dominance and control over females. Second, the process of justifications and legitimate targets will be reviewed. The peer group often helped to reinforce and encourage various forms of justifications that made it easier to victimize *certain* females. And third, a discussion of the role of male peers in the creation and maintenance of continuums of abuse that aided in the legitimization of the use of *certain* forms of male-to-female abuse will be provided. My findings will be compared to our current state of knowledge of male peer support, demonstrating similarities and differences that emerged.

Section One: Commitment to and Lessons Exposed to by the Male Peer Group

1) Male and Female Relationships

Many of the respondents were firmly rooted in an all-male peer subculture. Findings from Chapter 4 show that most of the respondents had close affiliations with male peers. Almost half of the respondents (47%) stated that they spent most of their time with male peers, while 41% suggested they spent time with both males and females. However, more than half (58%) considered only males to be close friends, while 19%

said they had close male and female friends. These findings show that many of the respondents were entrenched in an all-male peer subculture that excluded close friendships with females. However, closer examination of the composition of their peer groups suggests a new component that needs to be added into our contextualization of peer support.

As described in Chapter 4, many male peer support studies do not adequately define the term “peer group,” but rather, ask questions regarding one’s peers. Respondents introduce the possibility that the influence of female peers is also important as almost half of the respondents indicated that they spent time with both males and females. Therefore, the support they are receiving may not only come from males but also from females. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it was possible to quickly ascertain that questions had to be asked specifically on *male* peers. In the quantitative studies done in the past, it is difficult to say whether questions pertaining to one’s peers reflect *only* males; future male peer support research must be diligent in clearly defining the relationships inferred when asking about one’s peers.

An interesting dynamic arose in terms of close female friendships. The respondents who suggested they had close female friends felt a need to justify *why* they had these friendships. In other words, the respondents associated having close female friends as somewhat “abnormal.” This introduces the possibility that other respondents had close female friends but were reluctant to disclose this. Pollack (2000) found that many high school males had close friendships with females, yet were not encouraged by

their male peers to have such relationships; they would hide these relationships from their male peers for fear of being bullied or teased. Among some adolescents, the sexual nature of relationships with females is promoted and young men are encouraged to connect sexually with females; they would be teased if they had not "scored" with their female friends (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000). It may be the reality that respondents in the current study *did* have close female friends; however, males were not to engage in friendships with females, but were expected to have sexual relations with females. Although it is difficult to make definite conclusions, it was apparent that there were different notions underlying relationships with females and males.

There were distinct expectations that the respondents upheld in terms of male-male and male-female relationships; the respondents anticipated and received different things from their male and female friends/girlfriends¹¹⁵. The respondents described their male-male friendships using terms such as loyalty and spoke of family-like bonds – “he was like a brother to me,” “like a family.” In fact, many of them had been friends with their male peers since childhood, with some having grown up in the same neighbourhood. They shared a long history with their male friends and the majority suggested that they would be friends with them “forever.” There was a high level of commitment to their male-male relationships accompanied by a high level of loyalty. The findings of loyalty and family-like bonds are similar to what has been found in gang research (Alexander

¹¹⁵ It is difficult to differentiate between female friends and girlfriends as many of the respondents did not have female friends but rather talked of girlfriends as their female friends.

2000; Anderson 1999; Decker and Van Winkle 1996) and university/college fraternity and athletic team research (Messner 1992; Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). It is interesting to note that the peer group for socially displaced male youth in the current research, for gang members, and fraternities/athletic teams groups for college/university men, appear to demand similar traits (for example, loyalty, group secrecy) and provide a similar role - family-like bonds and a sense of belonging. The male peer group appears to be important and plays a similar role regardless of social class.

An additional point concerning the definition of "peers" is relevant in this discussion. During the interviews, many of the respondents suggested that there were distinctions between levels of male friends. A hierarchy of male friends emerged wherein friends were categorized as boyz, friends, or acquaintances, with each playing a different role in the life of the respondents. For example, the "boyz" provided support in physical altercations and were there to hang out with, while "friends" had more of a say in their personal lives. Although all were considered to be peers, they had different levels of interaction and influence in the lives of the respondents. Previous male peer support research has yet to problematize the potential of a hierarchy of male peers and how this relates to peer support. For example, research with university/college men may show that high school peers remain to be important influences on adult men. Findings from the current study reiterate the need to explore further the contribution of a wider circle of friends (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998c).

Most of the respondents stated that they were closer with male friends, yet they

shared a different type of relationship with their girlfriend and female friends. While male friends were typically deemed to be closer friends than females, many of the respondents suggested that they talked about “more important life things” with their female friends/girlfriends. Although their male peers were their close friends, they did not talk to them about their personal issues. Traditional gender stereotypes such as females being nurturing and emotionally supportive while males are deemed to be adventurous, fun loving and supportive in physical situations were discussed by the respondents. These traditional expectations also emerged in their understanding of the roles of males and females in intimate relationships. The characteristics of the relationship with females (friends and girlfriends) are not often explored in male peer support research (for example, DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; DeKeseredy 1988; Kanin 1986, 1967). My study shows that level of intimacy is a key component of a peer relationship which might be related to the degree of importance the respondent associates with the peer in terms of influence.

Male peer support theory contends that men may turn to male peers when they are experiencing relationship stress (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; DeKeseredy 1988). However, the respondents in this study suggested that they turn to female friends rather than males, even though they are closer to their male friends. This introduces a difference in level of intimacy that has yet to be explored in male peer support research. While they may suggest that they are closer to their male friends, respondents discuss more intimate issues with their female friends. Again, patriarchal gender norms dictate that females are

nurturers and are emotional, traits that encourage intimacy. Conversely, males are characterized as independent and aggressive, traits that discourage intimacy among men. Among the socially displaced youth in my study, male peers were not the only ones turned to in times of stress. Female peers played a key role during these times for the male respondents. Their discussions indicate that they clearly gained different things from male and female peers.

The different levels of male and female peer relationships are an aspect that has not yet been fully investigated in male peer support research. With the exception of Gwartney-Gibbs and Stoackard's (1989) work, we have not asked questions pertaining to the role of female peers, nor have we explored the influence of different groups of friends (as Giordano (1995) refers to as the wider circle of friends) among university/college men. The differing level of intimacy attached to different relationships may play a key role in terms of influence. Research with less-privileged adult men (for example, Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995; Liebow 1967) suggests that male friendships are often sporadic and neighbourhood or location-based. This may be different for males who at university/college as they may have access to a broader group of friends. Alternatively, the role of male peers from high school may play an increased role of importance than new fraternity friends. Friendships based on a history (grow up in same neighbourhood, known them since they children) may play an even greater role, which in the case of my study, could indicate that their support is even more substantial. In other words, the youth may be more influenced by peers as they are more committed to the relationship

(less mobility, stay in the neighbourhood with the friends for a longer time period). The level of intimacy of peer relationship is important to investigate more fully in terms of male and female peers.

Many respondents suggested that the role of a female in an intimate relationship was to be the provider of *unconditional* emotional support, affection, and companionship. These characteristics of the female role are patriarchal in nature and are reminiscent of traditional male-female roles in intimate relationships mirroring those that are promoted in broader society (Tyyskä 2001; Johnson 1996). The female is expected to provide emotional support for the male which many of the respondents interpreted to indicate that the girlfriends would not challenge them.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the respondents often justified male-to-female abuse if it was in response to perceived threats to masculinity. A girlfriend was to provide unconditional support and acceptance, and was not to get involved in personal issues unless the male asked her to. The respondents expected this support and, when they did not receive this, felt challenged, and often believed that it was their right to re-establish “proper” roles. At times, this entailed the male regaining his dominance through whatever means possible, in some cases including male-to-female abuse. The emphasis on traditional stereotypes of proper male and female behaviour is not surprising as research has shown that these ideals become entrenched as adolescents develop their own identities (Wolfe et al. 1995). One is reminded of Bowker’s (1983) standards of gratification theory throughout the above discussion of the use of male-to-female abuse to

regain dominance. Recalling the discussion in Chapter 2, Bowker suggests that males have standards of gratification, learned through childhood experiences, which dictate that men should dominate their wives and children. When these standards are challenged, a man may experience stress to which he might react in rage. The reaction of rage is designed to re-establish his control, therefore allowing him to obtain his "standards of gratification" as he has defined them. A similar dynamic seems to be at work with these respondents. The finding in the current study referring to the use of male-to-female abuse in times of masculine challenges confirms previous research findings among marginalized male youth (Messerschmidt 2000; Totten 2000; Ageton 1984) and adult males (Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995), and university/college fraternity and athletic team members (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989). Taken together, the use of male-to-female abuse to re-establish male dominance may not be indicative of a class-specific ideology, but rather, reflective of patriarchal ideology which promotes male dominance over females.

The gender role expectations the respondents adhered to provide insight into how the respondents and their male peer groups have come to define "male" and "female." Many of the respondent's associated "good things" with their girlfriends, such as emotionality and understanding, and "bad things" with their male peers, such as getting into trouble and fighting. Being male was bound up with getting into trouble including fighting, drug use, and criminal activity, whereas being female indicated some sort of rescue from these aspects of life. Girlfriends were in many cases a link to what the

respondents defined to be a “normal life.” The respondents spoke of how they could be themselves and/or be calm with their girlfriend, something they could not be with their male peers. Females were associated with normalcy whereas males were associated with chaos. The findings are reminiscent of gang research that suggests different relationships with male and female peers that provide a male youth with different resources (Anderson 1999; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Campbell 1991). These associations are similar to those found by Pollack (2000:33), who speaks of the “mask of masculinity” wherein males present different images of themselves in different situations:

I call [this] the mask of masculinity, a stance of male bravado and stoicism boys learn to use to cover over their inner feelings of sadness, loneliness, and vulnerability, to act cool, and to protect themselves from being shamed by their peers.

Similarly, the respondents were not typically encouraged to foster or nurture male-male relationships, but rather, these attributes were achieved via their relationships with females/girlfriends. Reflecting their adherence to rigid gender roles, males were not encouraged to be emotional with their male peers. In a sense, the respondents were reaching out to females to nurture that part of them that was emotional. The girlfriends provided an outlet for them to express themselves, and provided a forum in which to be who they were without having to uphold the image of being tough and brave. In other words, they could leave behind their own mask of masculinity and be themselves. Again, research on adult males indicates similar dynamics. Some fraternities encourage male-to-female bonding of a sexual nature, with an emphasis on “scoring,” rather than the building of intimate relationships (Messner 1992; Sanday 1990).

There is similarity across research that indicates that men are not encouraged to develop emotional and nurturing bonds with males, but rather, are to fulfill these aspects through their relationships with women, more specifically their girlfriends. As a society, we encourage male bonding that is focused on partying, physical activity (sports), and male dominance. We see through the comments of the respondents that they engage in relationships with other male youth that are focused on having fun, partying, and demonstrating physical strength. In their words, they are not building emotional bonds with their male peers; this difference has ramifications on their relationships with both men and women. Men of all ages need to be encouraged to develop intimate ties with other males, and need to be encouraged to "be themselves." By putting on this "mask of masculinity," men participate in the reinforcing of a masculine ideal that is dominant, aggressive, and focused on a tough-guy image. This is constraining as one must satisfy or portray this image to be acknowledged as a male. In order to challenge and change the dominant form of masculinity, we need to encourage difference among men without having this difference indicate subordinate or dominant masculine identities.

2) *Being "A Man"*

One of the main resources that the male peer group provided respondents was in helping to define what it means to be a male within their peer subcultures. As Hagedorn (1998) reports in his research on gang masculinities, how males conceptualize their relationships with women provides insight into one aspect of their overall understanding of what it is to be a man. Similar to previous research (Messerschmidt 2000, 1994; Totten

2000; Connell 1995), respondents were exposed to many lessons pertaining to “being a male” from their male peer groups. These lessons included what was acceptable male behaviour as well as what was *not* acceptable male behaviour. Sexual prowess with females, various forms of male-to-female abuse, and male domination of females were often promoted as ways of “doing masculinity,” while other attributes, such as understanding, caring, and emotionality, were defined as what *not* to be. A male dominated form of masculinity which was predicated on patriarchal stereotypical gender norms was promoted. The respondents often embraced this form of masculinity with their male peer groups playing a key role in both its promotion and legitimation. Parallels from male peer support research with adult males can be drawn in respect to this form of masculinity.

Some male peer support research shows that a primary resource provided by some male peer groups is a narrow definition of male and female (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; Kanin 1985, 1967). Research on fraternities and the use of sexual aggression has similarly illustrated that many of the members adhere to narrow definitions of masculine and feminine (Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989; Herek 1987). A narrow conception of masculinity has also been cited by many researchers as one of several factors related to the use of sexual abuse (Messerschmidt 2000; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Scully 1990).

a) Physicality

Most of the respondents conceptualized male and female as distinct gender

categories with little, if any, overlap. An important role of the male peer groups was their provision of guidelines in defining which behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs were associated with the labels of “male” and “female.” Male and female were typically defined in opposition to one another, which is similar to what has been found in the masculinities literature (Connell 1996; Messerschmidt 1993). In other words, to be masculine was to be anything other than feminine. Although Dobash and Dobash (1994:18) are referring to adult males and females, their perspective is equally applicable to male youth:

[T]he social construction of masculinity is such that, in the past and still today, much of men’s identity is shaped in relation to women. Becoming a normal man involves complex hierarchical relations to women in general and to wives in particular.

In many cases, the male peer group provided support for characteristics that are traditionally defined as male. Similar to other research on male youth (Totten 2000; Baron and Hartnagel 1998; Campbell 1993; Messerschmidt 1993), masculinity and physical aggression were integrally connected among the respondents in this study. Many embraced stereotypical ideals of what it meant to be male, and this often included a focus on the physical differences between males and females. For many, to be male was to be physically bigger than females, to defend oneself physically, and to be willing to respond in an aggressive situation. To be seen as physically strong was an important aspect of being male as defined by many of the respondents and their male peers. These male ideals were contrasted with the female attributes of being physically weak, more likely to get hurt, and as possessing a lack of ability to defend oneself physically. There

was near consensus among the respondents that male-to-male physical abuse (perpetrated and sustained) was part of being male. In fact, it was often deemed to be an avenue for attaining respect from one's male peers.

The association between physicality and being male is consistent with other research that demonstrates that male-to-male physical abuse is encouraged and accepted as a male trait (Hagan 1998; Mosher and Tompkins 1998; MacLeod 1995). As Campbell (1993:31) states, male violence is "so tightly tied to masculinity...aggression becomes central to the boy's notion of manhood." As discussed, the version of masculinity promoted by the majority of respondents and their male peer groups was one that did not embrace emotionality and caring as these were defined as being feminine. Rather, focus was on physical strength and being tough. Male-to-male physical abuse was embraced by the majority of respondents and there was a link between physical hitting and masculinity as hitting was considered to be a manly quality or trait.

Male peer support theory at present does not problematize how attitudes toward male-to-male abuse figure in to the relationship. Perhaps those peer groups who provide support for male-to-female abuse embrace a pro-abuse ideology, with an emphasis on the use of abuse in general, not only against females. An ideology that supports the use of interpersonal abuse needs to be explored in relation to male-to-female dating abuse. For example, most of the literature on fraternity members and male-to-female abuse does not include discussion on the use of male-to-male violence by members, whereas most of the athletic member research includes discussions of the importance of physical strength.

One could argue that fraternity men have other means through which to demonstrate their dominance over other men, for example, being in certain fraternities bring with it certain honour and privilege due to membership. Much of the research on less-privileged males, however, shows an emphasis on male-to-male violence as an avenue for status and respect (Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995); when looking at less-privileged youth, this emphasis is even greater (Baron and Hartnagel 1998; McLean 1998; MacLeod 1995). Different resources are available to different men in terms of establishing themselves within the hierarchy of men (Messerschmidt 1993; Connell 1987).

Many of the respondents alluded to a guy code that dictated and reinforced this commitment to male physical aggression. The guy code discussed by the respondents is similar to what Pollack (2000:18) has called the “boy code” which enforces “old rules that force boys into the stereotype of the stoic, unfeeling little hero, rules that exhort boys not to cry but to ‘act like men,’ to ‘fight it out,’ and to ‘stand up on your own two feet.’” The guy code described by the respondents in the current study defined men as physically stronger than females which in turn encouraged the role of males as protectors of weak and defenseless females. Part of this code suggested that it was the responsibility of males to teach other males the code if they did not yet accept it (i.e. if they were beating a female). This teaching often took the form of “stepping in” if they saw a male hitting a female. The act of stepping in played another role as well as it facilitated a male bonding event wherein the male peer group would step in collectively. It was a group activity, almost like a male ritual that allowed the respondents to demonstrate their commitment to

being a man as the group had defined it. They were men *because* of their ability to protect females and *because* of their commitment to do so. Stepping in also facilitated the image of bravery as they were to get involved in situations regardless of potential harm or threat. This provided them with an avenue to demonstrate their commitment to physical abuse which was an important element of masculinity as they had defined it.

Totten (2000) found a similar commitment to “stepping in” among the marginalized male youth in his study. Although abusive toward women themselves, many of the youth took their role as protectors of other women seriously, citing how they would beat up men if they saw them abusing women. Similar to the respondents in my study, the youth could invoke justifications for themselves and their male peers to legitimize their own use of male-to-female abuse while at the same time, condemning those they classified as rapists and woman beaters. It would be interesting to see if this group activity of stepping in is also found among more privileged adult men. For example, do fraternity men engage in similar group physical attacks on outsiders who abuse women, or are they able to demonstrate their public commitment to non-violence against women through non-violent means (for example, participation in on-campus crusades against violence against women)?

b) Sexuality

An additional component of masculinity that was of equal importance to the respondents and their male peers was sexuality. Consistent with findings from other research on masculinity (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Connell 1996), sexuality

was intricately linked to being a male. For many of the respondents, to be male was to be interested in sexual relations with females. The respondents were not new to the dating scene as all but one were currently involved in a relationship with a female or had had at least one girlfriend. Dating females was an important aspect of being a male; most of their male friends were dating females and there was male status affiliated with dating females. Some of the respondents spoke about how having a girlfriend made you tougher, more of a man. The focus or emphasis on *females* as dating partners reflects the perspective of the respondents. None of them mentioned homosexual or bisexual partnering. This does not mean that none of them were of different sexuality than heterosexual, however none mentioned this possibility¹¹⁶. The focus on heterosexual relations is not a reflection of their status as socially displaced, but rather reflects how broader society defines masculinity - the hegemonic form of masculinity promotes heterosexual relations; to be a male means to be interested and engaged in sexual relations *with females* (Connell 1995, 1987; Messerschmidt 1993; Liddle 1989).

The respondents appeared to be perpetuating this component of masculinity among their own peer groups. Being sexually active with females was important to their conceptualization of being male. One way that the respondents demonstrated their commitment to sexual relations with females was through “guy talk” which typically included conversations centred on their sexual experiences with females. In some instances, talking about sexual relations was “doing sex,” demonstrating that you were

¹¹⁶ As stated previously two respondents were reportedly homosexual or bisexual.

having sexual relations with a female via your stories to your male peers. This focus on talking about sexual relations is consistent with other research on younger and adult men (Messerschmidt 2000; Totten 2000; Pollack 2000; Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995; Messner 1992; Sanday 1990). In fact, a youth in Messerschmidt's (2000:44) study, while talking about how he and his male peers would share their stories about sexual relations, stated that "*Other than that, I didn't have any sexuality.*" Respondents in my study similarly suggested an association between talking about sexual relations as a "guy thing" and that "all guys do it." Engaging in heterosexual relations and talking about them with male peers appeared to be a fundamental aspect of being male. This association between sexual activity with females and being a male echoes what has been found in university/college research (Messner 1992, 1990; Sanday 1990; Martin and Hummer 1989) where emphasis is placed on heterosexual relationships and a commitment to share stories with other males. Again, the relationship may be indicative of patriarchal ideology wherein females are conceptualized as sexual objects to be used by men rather than a class specific ideology.

There was also an exclusionary component to guy talk. If one was not sexually active, one could not participate in this form of male bonding, and was therefore excluded. In Messerschmidt's (2000) work on adolescent sexual offenders, this feeling of exclusion was noted as one of the contributing factors in the sexual abuse of younger females. Also, there was an entitlement component in guy talk as it leads to the reasoning that "all guys have sexual relations with females, I am a guy, so therefore I too

should have sexual relations with females.” These examples illustrate the importance of taking guy talk seriously rather than merely excusing it with a “boys will be boys” rationale.

Similar to the entitlement component, guy talk also provided implicit male peer pressure to be sexually active with females. The respondents spoke of how they and their male peers would talk about their sexual relations with females in a “bragging” manner which improved their image as men among their male peers. Male peer pressure to be sexually active with females has been found in a number of studies on adult males (Wilson 1996; Sanday 1990; Kanin 1967) as well as among younger men (Messerschmidt 2000; Ageton 1983; Polk et al. 1981; Blanchard 1959). One way that this peer pressure was provided in the current study was through the reactions of their male peers to their sexual prowess. For example, the respondents spoke of betting on who would be the first to have sexual relations with their girlfriend and about their peers congratulating each other upon hearing about their sexual successes. The reaction of the peers in terms of sexual prowess is strikingly similar to Pollack (2000:60) who provides the following from a 15 year old boy in a Northeast U.S. city: *“If you tell your friends what you did, they give you a high five, like way to go!”*

As has been found in previous studies with youth (Messerschmidt 2000; Totten 2000; Jackson 1997c) and adult men (Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995; Sanday 1990), some of the respondents in my study suggested that they would be classified as a “loser” if they were not having sexual relations. Heterosexual relations for males is linked to increased

status. The respondents were aware that sexual interactions were an important aspect of their relations with females. However, the mask of masculinity was invoked in many cases.

While many provided the image that their male friends would say sex was the most important aspect of having a girlfriend, many qualified this in terms of who their male friends were with at the time. There appeared to be consensus that many would say sexual relations were the most important while in the company of a group of males, but one-on-one they would say other more important issues, such as support and/or understanding. This again is indicative of an overriding assumption that sexual relations with females were an important aspect of masculinity as the group had defined it, and the respondents and their peers understood this and perpetuated that image in front of their male peers. Again, an evaluation of one's maleness was provided through a focus on sexual relations with females and demonstrated commitment to this ideal. Intimacy with females was not stressed. Rather, a sexual focus was apparent.

Similar to previous research findings (Messerschmidt 2000; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Scully 1990; Stanko 1990), the respondents in my study appeared to be learning from their male peer groups that to be male was to conceptualize females as sexual objects. "Women become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale" (Kimmel 1994:129); it appears that males learn this lesson early on in life. It has been argued that sexual coercion must be viewed as a product of a culture that promotes the sexual conquering of women by men (Segal 1990). The

respondents and their male peers demonstrated a “conquest mentality to sex” (Curran and Renzetti 1996:187) wherein females were defined as things to be conquered, often resulting in the identification of females as sexual gatekeepers and males as sexual takers. Typically, females and males were conceptualized as being on opposite teams in the sexual game contributing to an “us versus them” dichotomy, which in turn provided an additional opportunity for male bonding. Parallels again can be drawn to earlier fraternity and athletic research. For example, Sanday (1990) found that an important component of fraternity life was the promotion of sexual conquest (for example, having parties geared toward sexual relations). As well, Messner (1992) found similar conceptualization of sexual relations among male sports team members. Research on youth similarly supports this sexual game ideology (Totten 2000; Pollack 2000; Jackson 1997c).

The sexual game embraced by many of the respondents and their male peers is not a fair game but rather is a game of male sexual dominance over females. The game is predicated on the double standard whereby men who have multiple sexual partners are defined as successful and females engaging in similar behaviours are demeaned and devalued. In other words, male sexual conquest is celebrated and female sexual prowess is frowned upon. The males in this game were denoted as players, emphasizing sexual prowess with several females, while the females were referred to as ho's, emphasizing sexual prowess with several males¹¹⁷. Although both labels emphasize the same activity, the player role was affiliated with respect by many of the respondents, while the ho role

¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note that these are the same terms used in other research, for example Pollack (2000), Totten (1996), and Sanday (1990).

was deemed to be unworthy of respect. The respect associated with being a player was suggested by the “fun” that being a player brought to the male group. The respondents and their male peer groups would joke about who the “bigger player” was, and this was a sought after title. To be a player was in many cases an admirable trait, which is not surprising in light of the connection of masculinity with sexual prowess with females; they were in fact demonstrating their superior commitment to masculinity as the group had defined it via their commitment to being a player. Comparatively, a ho was not respected by the respondents and their male peer groups. In fact, their status as a ho deemed them to be legitimate targets of sexual abuse and other forms of male mistreatment (as will be further discussed in section two).

Male sexual control was often encouraged by many of the respondents and their male peers via this conceptualization of sexual relations as a game. One of the most common examples of male control was demonstrated through the patriarchal assumption that it was the male's right to determine what other males their girlfriends associated with. Many stated that their girlfriend could only hang around *his* boyz. Their reasoning stemmed from an assurance that their boyz could be trusted to not make sexual advances on another male's girlfriend. In the cases where the girlfriend did cheat on the male, the respondents typically physically beat up the male while not being overly angry with their girlfriend. Part of the guy code (as discussed previously) dictates that it is the responsibility of other males to understand that other guys' girlfriends are off limits to them. When a male did in fact have sexual relations with someone else's girlfriend, the

guy was beat up as he was supposed to understand this component of the guy code. Their reaction of blaming the male does not allocate agency to the girlfriends as they were not granted any role in the affair. Rather, it was the male's responsibility. Again, girls were not allowed to make their own decisions pertaining to their personal lives. It was like an ownership relationship reminiscent of historical sexual assault laws where the male had been perceived as the one who was wronged, rather than the female (Sinclair 1994; MacKinnon 1983; Rafter and Natalizia 1981). It would be interesting to see if and how similar ownership issues would present themselves in university/college relationships.

The sexuality promoted by the respondents and their male peer groups was one predicated on patriarchal male control. The only situation wherein it was acceptable to relinquish sexual control to the females was when the ultimate goal of sexual relations was the outcome. Many spoke of "giving girls what they wanted" as they knew the end result would be sexual relations. One respondent spoke of how he, in fact, lost the respect of his male peers as he waited until his girlfriend was ready for sexual relations and did not force her or "move on" to another more willing girl. Although some loss of control was acceptable, the male had to retain sexual relations or he was not respected. Some respondents eluded to female sexual control, but their control was limited and continued to serve the males' purpose of sexual relations. For example, similar to previous findings (Totten 2000; Sanday 1990) the term "whipped" was used to refer to males who had given up some of their sexual control to the female. However, because they were still engaging in sexual relations, it was viewed as a compliment, not an insult,

as it indicated that they were having sexual relations. The only form of power or control associated with the female was via her sexuality; females had the ability to control men because of their sexuality, while other attributes were not valued (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

c) *"Partying"*

Whether the respondents were spending time in male groups, mixed female-male groups, or with their girlfriends, there was a strong focus on partying, drinking, and using drugs. Past research has successfully demonstrated that environments such as these can encourage a high level of male bonding, which can include talk of sexual experiences with females, and can provide support for the use of male-to-female abuse (Hey 1986; Sanday 1990; Schwartz and Nogrady 1996). The link is not a direct link, such as alcohol/drug use causes men to become violent against women, but rather is an indirect link wherein the use of these substances is one of several factors associated with the abuse of women¹¹⁸. Research indicates that some men view females who are somehow intoxicated, by alcohol or narcotics, as legitimate targets for sexual relations (Schwartz et al. 2001; Sanday 1990; Richardson and Campbell 1988). The relationship between partying and increased risk of male-to-female dating abuse emerged as a theme throughout the interviews, and it was referred to indirectly by some of the respondents. The use of alcohol as a weapon in terms of sexual relations was suggested by some of the respondents. As well, the partying culture discussed by many introduce the possibility

¹¹⁸ For a more complete discussion of the relationship between alcohol consumption and abuse against women see Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997:97).

that, similar to the above research, male-to-female dating abuse is more apt to occur in environments where inebriation can be used as a weapon and wherein females who are intoxicated can be justified as legitimate targets for male abuse.

My findings demonstrate that respondents were committed to their male peer groups and that these groups provided various forms of support for male-to-female abuse.

The support was offered in several ways, with some mirroring previous findings with university/college men, less-privileged men, male youth in general, and less-privileged male youth. Findings suggest that respondents were exposed to various lessons about being a male within their male peer group. These factors helped to make the victimization of females easier and as the next section illustrates, helped to provide various justifications and legitimations for the use of certain forms of male-to-female abuse.

Section Two: Justifications and Legitimizations of Male-to-Female Dating Abuse

The male peer group helped to create an environment that was supportive of various forms of male abuse and mistreatment which is consistent with findings from the larger body of male peer support research, as well as in the broader literature on violence against women (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Sanday 1990; Scully 1990; Kanin 1967). One of the main roles played by the male peer groups was their provision of justifications for the use of male-to-female abuse in certain situations. The belief that male-to-female dating abuse is justifiable has been noted as one of the key predictors of inflicting male-to-female dating abuse (O'Keefe 1997; Schwartz et al. 1997). Although

almost all of the respondents said that they did not believe in hitting females or in forcing females to have sexual relations with them, it was a qualified statement as certain exceptions were supported by the male respondents and their peer groups.

The justification process provides acceptable circumstances that enable people to engage in the mistreatment of others without causing harm to their own self-image. Some of the male peer groups in this study provided abusive males with justifications for their actions, allowing the respondent to view himself as a normal and respectable male despite his use of abuse with his dating partner(s). The ideology of justifications is explored in the work of Mills (1940:904) who analyzed the use of language through which people describe their motivations and account for their actions, which he coined "vocabularies of motive." Mills suggests that the way in which people talk about their motives and their resulting behaviour are influenced by the context of the situation - certain behaviours that are deemed to be acceptable in some contexts are unacceptable in others. Scully and Marolla speak of a similar process wherein convicted rapists engage in a vocabulary of adjustment that included justifications and excuses:

We [the authors] view rape as a behaviour learned socially through interaction with others; convicted rapists have learned the attitudes and actions consistent with sexual aggression against women. Learning also includes the acquisition of culturally derived vocabularies of motive, which can be used to diminish responsibility and to negotiate a non-deviant identity (1989:111).

Scully and Marolla (1989) found that there were two types of rapists: those who denied their actions, and those who accepted their acts as rape. Those who justified their actions "accept responsibility for the act but deny that it was wrong - that is, they show in

this situation the act was appropriate" (Scully and Marolla 1989:112). This is similar to what was found in my study¹¹⁹. The justifications employed by the respondents (in terms of their own behaviours as well as their male peers') reflected the patriarchal assumption of male dominance and control over women. The respondents typically spoke of both their own and their male peers' actions as if there was nothing wrong with them; they were acceptable in certain situations. This reasoning is reminiscent of Sykes and Matza (1957) and Matza's (1964) discussion of neutralization whereby traditional moral prohibitions are neutralized in a specific situation and under specific circumstances. The context of the behaviour is important - recall respondents stated that slapping a woman for burning a cake was not acceptable, but if she embarrassed him in front of his male friends it was acceptable. Similar to Bowker's (1983) standards of gratification theory, the respondents and their male peer groups could justify the use of male-to-female dating abuse if the female was perceived as acting out of her prescribed gender role. The use of abuse in order to re-establish male dominance was supported by many of the respondents and their male peer group.

1) Justifications

The situations provided in this context underlie their commitment to the physical strength differences of males and females. Most of the respondents stated that a female armed with a weapon would constitute a situation where they would accept the use of male-to-female violence. However, they were also quick to add that they would not

¹¹⁹ See Shields and Whitehall's (1994) comparison study of the use of neutralization by incarcerated young offenders and high school students.

retaliate using their full capacity of strength. Many of the respondents appeared to believe that males could/would out-power females who were armed with a weapon. The respondents did not appear to acknowledge that females had the capacity to be physically threatening. This is in agreement with how they have defined male and female; to acknowledge that females can be physically aggressive would threaten how they have defined being male. "Male" has to be different than "female" and many respondents indicated that a primary difference was in terms of physical ability. If both males and females can be physically aggressive, it threatens their status as males. In fact, it potentially threatens their overall concept of masculinity - if women can be aggressive and violent, what are men?

The respondents also accepted the use of male-to-female abuse in situations where the female was acting in an irrational, emotional, or uncontrollable manner (as defined by the respondents). The respondents characterized the use of abuse in these situations as being necessary in order to calm the female down as she was out of control. This again reinforces the ideology that females can not be physically aggressive. When females demonstrated physical abuse traits or anger, they were defined as out-of-control as this behaviour was contrary to the traditional notions of femininity. As well, respondents suggested a paternalistic response in some situations, stating that they would calm her down by locking her in her room or by sending her home; both are childlike punishments in nature. This indicates a difference in power, authority, and dominance between males and females. Males were in control and responsible for females similar to the

relationship between an adult and a child.

The last situation that was common among the respondents was the justification of male-to-female abuse when the girlfriend's actions or attitudes were perceived to be threatening to one's masculine status. Girlfriends were not to challenge their authority as males, but to support them unconditionally. To illustrate, the respondents justified the use of abuse in situations where the girlfriend embarrassed the male in front of his male friends when she challenged him, or when she had hit him first. Typically, the respondents justified abuse as a reaction to her acting out of her prescribed gender role. This is reminiscent again of Bowker's (1983) research that suggests standards of gratification dictate that it is the role of the male to re-establish dominance over a woman. Threats to masculine status were justified as legitimate instances where male violence was acceptable as one had to protect his masculine status at any costs. Research with university/college men similarly shows that abuse is more apt to occur in situations where the "rights" of a male are challenged (Coleman 1990; Smith 1990). A key explanatory factor of male-to-female abuse is the belief in the right of male domination of females that some men espouse (Segal 1990). This belief system needs to be challenged.

Research shows that victim blaming is a common justification invoked in the use of male-to-female abuse (Scully 1990; Fattah 1976). Many of the respondents engaged in victim blaming (she was stupid, dumb, she could leave if she wanted to) which succeeded in taking the responsibility for the use of abuse away from the respondents or their male peers and placing it on the female. Victim blaming took various forms in the current

study; however, the most common victim blaming tactic engaged in was that it was acceptable to mistreat *certain* types of females.

2) *Legitimations*

Similar to the larger body of violence against women research (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1993; Sanday 1990; DeKeseredy 1988; Kanin 1985, 1967), my study found that a primary resource offered by the male peer group was the identification of certain groups of females as legitimate targets for male abuse or mistreatment. Several commonalities emerged in both the sexuality and violence chapters.

The differences between certain types of females were a common element discussed in the interviews. In terms of sexuality, a typical assumption was that females who engaged in sexual relations with many males were known as “ho’s.” Interestingly, this term was paired with the term “player” which denoted a male who had been sexually active with many women. The terms, however, held very different consequences. A ho was a derogatory term indicating that the female was somehow less important, devalued, demeaned, whereas a player indicated successful sexual prowess which was deemed to be a worthy element. Accompanying the demeaning and devaluing process was the implicit permission to mistreat them *because* of their status as ho’s. Females who were labeled as ho’s were more likely to be targets of male-to-female abuse and mistreatment. Many of the respondents justified their use of sexual abuse or coercion *because* the females were ho’s - “she’s just a ho.” Her status as a ho (as assigned by the males) signified that she was less worthy of respect, was a suitable target for male abuse, and was less than a

person. This worked to justify respondents' use of abuse. Females were categorized in relation to their status as a sexual being (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

Many respondents suggested that one of the reasons they disrespected the ho's and the street girls was *because* they had sexual relations with them. In part, their sexual status determined whether they were worthy of fair treatment. This is similar to the work by Scully and Marolla (1989) who suggest that one of the most common justifications engaged in by convicted rapists was "nice girls don't get raped." This form of justification suggests that "the victim's reputation, as well as characteristics or behaviour which violate normative sex role expectations, are perceived as contributing to the commission of the crime" (119). This is similar to what many of the respondent's spoke of in terms of the ho's. They suggested that these females have the reputation for engaging in sexual relations with many men, therefore they are willing to have sex with anyone. Consent with other men is translated as consent for all men. In fact, many spoke of how they would tell other males that she was "available." This process of designating certain females as legitimate targets allows the male to use abuse against girls while still maintaining his status as a male as it was acceptable to mistreat certain females. This helped to neutralize their use of abuse as they believed that the girls deserved it.

Research with fraternity men has shown similar justifications. Sanday (1990) repeatedly found that some women were labeled as legitimate targets - drunken women, teases, and sluts. Other research with fraternity members also confirms existence of this justification (Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; Martin and Hummer 1989).

In summary, females who were acting out of their prescribed gender roles (as dictated by patriarchal standards of male dominance over females) and those defined as ho's were deemed to be legitimate targets of male abuse. The male peer group supported and reinforced these ideologies and helped to create an environment of dominance over females. Within this environment of male dominance, respondents and their male peer groups justified certain forms of abuse.

Section Three: Adherence to and Maintenance of Continuums of Male-to-Female Dating Abuse

Hand-in-hand with the designation of certain females as acceptable targets came the legitimization of *certain* forms of abuse - not all forms of abuse were acceptable or justifiable. In their discussions on sexuality and violence, the reference to a continuum of behaviours emerged. There is a hierarchy of sexual abuse wherein the use of physical force in terms of sexual relations was rejected, but other, less severe (as defined by the respondents) forms of sexual coercion were acceptable. Although the respondents did not accept those who they would classify as rapists, they were able to accept those who threatened, conned, or manipulated their girlfriends into having sexual relations with them. In the case of physical abuse, at the one extreme were those classified as woman beaters (not acceptable), while those who used other forms of violence, such as threats of physical violence, slapping, and enlisting other girls to beat up their girlfriend were acceptable. Similar to the sexual abuse continuum, the respondents could justify the less severe forms of abuse, but were adamant in their rejection of those men who beat their girlfriends.

Research has demonstrated that while some abuse is tolerated or accepted among intimate couples, the use of extreme abuse (i.e. resulting in hospitalization of the victim) generates disapproval from society in general (Sinclair 1996). The respondents in the current study were similarly able to accept and justify the use of limited physical abuse but were not accepting of the more extreme cases.

The emergence of a continuum in both cases suggests that the respondents adhered to a narrow definition of woman abuse. They typically believed that, in respect to sexual violence, a rapist was a male who used extreme force on a female for sexual relations. There was no acknowledgment of degrees of sexual force; for example, the respondents felt that it was acceptable to con, use threats, or otherwise manipulate females into having sexual relations. The respondents only acknowledged physical force as qualifying as sexual coercion. They are not alone in their narrow conception of rape or sexual assault.

In her research with convicted rapists, Scully (1990:115) found “like others in our society, these men [convicted rapists] set very narrow limits for the behaviour they would consider rape.” As Scully implies, a narrow definition of what constitutes rape is common among many people, including both men and women. Much of the research on sexual assault/rape suggests that people are generally more willing to call an interaction a rape if it is stereotypical in nature (i.e. a stranger using severe violence, woman fighting back); however, the lines on what constitutes rape in other situations are often blurry (Burt 1980; Burt and Albin 1981; Williams 1979). This is especially evident in cases where the

alleged perpetrator is known to the woman (Bridges 1991; Feltey et. al 1991; Muehlenhard et al. 1985).

There was also no acknowledgment of other forms of physical abuse against girls, such as the threat of physical abuse. Similar to previous research (Totten 2000; Ageton 1984), many of the respondents and their male peers engaged in verbal threats of physical abuse against their girlfriends, which the respondents could often justify. Although this was done to gain control over the girlfriend, like what the use of physical abuse would achieve, the respondents did not conceive of this as abuse against girls/women. Confirming Totten's (2000) findings, the girlfriend witnessing the respondents using abuse against other males and other objects was seen to be acceptable in situations where the male needed to re-establish control over the girlfriend.

The respondents differentiated acceptable forms of abuse along lines of severity of violence. Many said that slapping a girl was acceptable but beating a girl was not. Again, the respondents agreed that beating a woman was unacceptable and this type of behaviour was affiliated with the stereotypical notion of a woman beater - rash, out of control, beat her for no reason. Males who engaged in this form of behaviour were labeled in a derogatory manner, and looked down upon by the respondents and their male peers. The distinction between levels of severity allows the respondents to justify less severe forms of violence; they are not as bad as woman beaters. As well, this also allows them to justify their friends' use of abuse – "he didn't beat her or nothing, just slapped her." The continuum of abuse simultaneously suggests that while severe physical abuse is not

acceptable, there is an acceptable level of abuse against girls in an intimate relationship.

There is implicit agreement that, at times, it will be necessary for a male to use abuse against a girlfriend to "keep her in line."

As the level of severity of the act (as defined by the respondents) decreased, the justifications for the use of abuse increased. The severe forms were not justified and men who engaged in these activities were not respected. The lesser forms of abuse were justified allowing them to engage in these violent activities without damage to their self-image as men in the perspectives of other men. The continuum plays a key role in the maintenance of their self-image; they can define themselves as acceptable as there are other people who are worse than them. Again, the respondents imply that some male-to-female violence is acceptable within a relationship.

The adherence to a continuum of acceptable male-to-female sexual and physical abuse is indicative of a broader problem whereby the respondents do not define what they did to be wrong; this is reflective of a general belief in society that some level of abuse against women is acceptable (Sinclair 1996). It is common for people to conceive of a woman beater or a rapist as an unacceptable person; however, many people offer justifications when the abuse used is not as extreme. As DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1997:60) suggest, men who are violent with women do not operate in a vacuum. Indeed, many of the values and beliefs they express are micro-social expressions of broad social forces. As a subculture, the male peer group draws many of their goals, values, and beliefs from the dominant culture.

Section Four: Summary

Conceptualizing masculinity as something that is socially constructed (Kimmel 1987), it is apparent that being a male must be constantly negotiated and accomplished in different points in life. The sociology of masculinities literature has been successful in challenging our view of gender identity as a fixed concept, and has encouraged the conceptualization of gender as something that is constructed in various settings rather than being static. However, the construction and reconstruction of masculine identity is achieved under the influence of the dominant form of masculinity that is promoted within a given culture at a given historical time.

The dominant form of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, emphasizes heterosexuality, toughness, male sexual domination of females, and the sexual objectification of women (Connell 1993; Messerschmidt 1993; Coleman 1990; Segal 1990; Liddle 1989). Various subcultures of men accept this dominant form of masculinity and adapt their own lives accordingly, seeking their own avenues to achieve and demonstrate their commitment to this dominant masculine model. Using the resources available to them, they construct their own gender identities. Themes of masculinity are presented on two levels: at the social level and at the individual level. At the social level, there are commonly held assertions as to what it is to be a male, and these represent the cultural norms of masculinity. At the individual level, the male draws on his own specific experiences and constructs his gender identity reflective of socially prescribed notions of masculinity, although there is room for individual shaping or

molding.

Peer groups are one source whereby young men learn what is expected of them as men (Tyyskä 2001), and the respondents in my study were exposed to the unwritten rules concerning proper male behaviour in respect to their interaction with females and with males. They drew upon the resources they had access to in their lives to accomplish the form of masculine identity promoted through their male peer groups. Research has suggested that class effects the ways in which middle- and lower-class white and minority men enact various forms of masculinities (Messerschmidt 2000, 1993, 1986; Connell 1987). It is important not to assume that all the respondents in this study adopted the same masculine identity, and enacted it in the same manner. As illustrated in the discussion of sexuality in Chapter 5, respondents interacted with and conceptualized females in different ways. This supports the new trend in gang research that attempts to explore different conceptions of hegemonic masculinity among its members¹²⁰ (Blazak 2000; Canaan 1998; Hagedorn 1998). Although there were similarities across respondents, one must keep in mind that differences were also apparent. A concerted effort to resist thinking of the respondents as exhibiting one, homogenous form of masculinity must be embraced; future research needs to further explore different conceptions of hegemonic masculinity.

¹²⁰ Hagedorn (1998) is one such author who examines the different conceptions of hegemonic masculinity among male gang members. In his typology of masculinities, he distinguishes four distinct masculinities: Frat Boy, Bossman, Stud and Gentleman. These masculinities differed in terms of their sex role enactment and their conceptualization of their relationships with females.

In many cases, the male peer groups were providing the respondents with a form of masculinity that was based on male dominance and authority over females. Many of the respondents demonstrated their commitment to being masculine through their dominance over females. Heterosexuality and physical abuse (male-male and male-to-female) were two avenues that presented themselves to the respondents to demonstrate their commitment to the dominant ideals of masculinity as defined by their male peer groups. In terms of sexuality, there was a clear association between sexual relations and masculinity. To be male was to be interested in sexual relations with females, to be achieving (or at least attempting to achieve) high levels of sexual prowess, as well as to be in control sexually. In terms of physicality, they were learning that they had to be physically able and willing to defend themselves in situations of male-to-male abuse, and that they could use certain forms of physical abuse to gain control over their girlfriend while still maintaining their image as a male within their male peer group.

My findings support the assertion that male peer groups contribute to the encouragement and legitimation of male-to-female dating abuse among socially displaced respondents. This research represents a first step in the development of a larger body of research that addresses male peer support dynamics. The stage is now set for further exploration of male peer support dynamics among youth, expanding our understanding of the role that some male peer groups can play in the encouragement and perpetuation of male-to-female dating abuse. Some potential future research directions are provided in Chapter 8.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Feminist research shows that females are most at risk of male abuse perpetrated by their male intimates, friends, acquaintances, associates, and dating partners (O'Sullivan 1998; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a; White and Koss 1991; Brinkerhoff and Lupri 1988; Koss et al. 1987; Smith 1987, 1986; Straus and Gelles 1986; Kanin 1967). Past research also indicates that male-to-female abuse occurs in various types of adult relationships (Statistics Canada 2000, 1999, 1993; DeKeseredy and MacLeod 1997; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993a, 1993b; Ellis and Stuckless 1993; Elloit et al. 1992; Lupri 1990). My findings confirm previous studies showing that male-to-female youth dating abuse is also a reality and a necessary concern (Silverman 2001; Wingood 2001; Jackson 1997a; Simons et al. 1998; O'Keefe 1997). Many of the respondents in this study engaged in male-to-female dating abuse and were receiving various forms of support from their male peer groups.

Future Research Directions

A key purpose of exploratory research is to inform future research directions; the current study provides several such avenues.

1) Continued Research on Male Peer Support of Male-to-Female Youth Dating Abuse

One of the key findings reported here is that pro-abuse ideologies existed among some of the respondents and that some of their male peer groups provided support and legitimization for the use of male-to-female dating abuse. Although earlier studies found

that male peer influence was a component of male-to-female dating abuse among youth (Messerschmidt 2000; Pollack 2000; Totten 2000; Price et al. 1999; Jackson 1997a; Ageton 1983), this study was one of the first qualitative projects to explore fully this key factor of male-to-female youth dating abuse. As described in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, there is strong support for the inclusion of male peer support in our future research endeavours. As one of the first qualitative studies of male peer support dynamics among socially displaced youth, my work indicates a need for future research with similar populations. My findings show that for this group of males, male-to-female abuse of dating partners served many purposes, and was a component of many of their lives. Future research with similar groups (for example, street youth, other young offenders, disenfranchised youth) of male youth will provide further support for the findings of this study. However, it is also necessary to conduct similar qualitative studies with other groups of youth (for example, high school students, sports teams) to explore further these preliminary findings and to continue to learn about the effect of social class on male peer support and male-to-female youth dating abuse.

It was also obvious that for many of the respondents, the male peer group and the pro-abuse ideologies that some of them supported were starting prior to age 17 (the average age of the youth). Similar to what Kanin (1967) found among college/university students, male-to-female aggressive behaviour among my respondents appeared to be a product of prior learning and socialization during younger years. This is not surprising as research also indicates that sexual harassment among younger children exists (Fine 1987),

and similarly, that both girls and boys are accepting of rape myths (Boxley et al. 1995). In my study, many respondents had a history of friendship with their male peers stemming back to childhood. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours supportive of male abuse against females appeared to be already entrenched, suggesting the need to target younger groups of males to understand the emergence of such pro-abuse ideologies; for example, elementary school students, little league teams, and other groupings of male children.

One potential research need is the completion of a longitudinal study on the formation of peer groups and the development of attitudes and behaviours supportive of violence against girls (similar to Ageton's (1983) longitudinal study of U.S. adolescent's aged 11-17). This type of study would provide insight on the development of all-male peer groups, how the group dynamics change and evolve over time, and would also shed light on the role of these groups in the support for male-to-female abuse.

2) *Exploratory Research on Female-to-Male Youth Dating Abuse*

In recent years, there has been increased focus on female aggression and/or violence (Dell and Boe 1998; Pearson 1997; Priest 1994). In addition, a growing body of research denotes the potential for female youth violence (Dell and Boe 1997; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon 1992; Campbell 1991). In my study, some of the respondents spoke of abuse they or their male peers had witnessed and/or experienced by girlfriends. Without knowing the context of the use of female violence, little can be said about this dynamic based on my study. However, previous research indicates that being a recipient of dating violence is one of the key predictors for a male being abusive with a female

partner (O'Keefe 1997). As well, Jackson et al.'s (2000:34) research with male youth found that males experience a lower level of anxiety by female dating abuse and suggests that this "may reflect the tough and macho construction of masculinity that discourages the expression of feelings and admissions of being abused by a girl." The nature, prevalence, and effect of female-to-male youth dating violence from both female and male youth perspectives needs to be investigated. Questions concerning the effect that being a male victim of female dating abuse has on one's masculine identity and what female youth gain from the use of abuse would be interesting issues to explore. This study suggests that male-to-female youth dating abuse is linked to demonstration of the respondents' masculinity. Would similar behaviours/attitudes by female youth be associated with demonstrating certain types of femininities? Qualitative research similar to the current study focusing on female youth will prove to be beneficial in our understanding of female-to-male youth dating abuse, providing another perspective to our understanding of intimate relationship abuse.

3) *The Impact of Familial Abuse on the Perpetration of Male-to-Female Youth Dating Abuse*

Whether one is reviewing literature on youth crime, adult offenders, and/or violence against women, the experiencing and witnessing of family violence is a recurring theme. In Chapter 3, experiencing and/or witnessing of familial abuse was discussed briefly, as it was not a key component of my research design. However, this aspect needs to be investigated more fully concerning its effect on future use of abuse in dating relationships. Much of the research on familial abuse reflects a social learning

perspective that suggests violent behaviour, similar to conventional behaviour, is learned through interaction with personal groups (Akers 1985). A key premise is that in order for behaviour to be adopted, it must be seen as offering some kind of reward. In the case of witnessing the abuse of a mother by a father figure, it is unclear as to what rewards the witness is associating with the violence. Qualitative interviews with male youth will provide an opportunity to explore the connection between male youth witnessing/experiencing familial abuse in childhood and later perpetration/victimization in youth dating relationships.

New Theoretical Directions

One of the benefits of both qualitative and exploratory research lies in the opportunity to explore new avenues for theoretical modifications. As one of the first qualitative studies on male peer support of male-to-female youth dating abuse, my study indicated several issues that need to be addressed. Each will be discussed.

1) Additional Exploration of Female Peer Support

As the name suggests, male peer support theory currently focuses solely on all-male groups. However, in my study, many respondents suggested that they spent time in mixed peer groups, including both male and female members, and indicated that they participated in a “group dating” practice wherein the male and his girlfriend hung out with his male peers. To suggest that only male peers provide support for men denies the role that women play in men's lives. My findings indicate that female peer support is a component that needs to be incorporated in future theoretical models.

Many of the respondents suggested that they sought and expected unconditional support from a girlfriend, and that they did not want unsolicited criticism from her. One of the most prevalent comments made by respondents was that they depended on their female friends/girlfriends for emotional support, and that they talked to them about more important life issues. Male peers, although referred to as their closest friends, were not "there" for the respondents in terms of talking to them or sharing their problems with them. Female friends and girlfriends provided this outlet for the youth, thus fulfilling a patriarchal assumption that men are not emotional nurturers, but rather, women are to play that role. This introduces a new concept to our understanding of peer support.

While male peer support theory suggests that men may turn to their male peers in times of relationship stress, my findings indicate that both male and female peers play a role in this support function, albeit providing different forms or types of support. It is important to acknowledge that the respondents do not only live in an all-male culture, but experience life through their interactions with both men and women. It is, unfortunately, not only men who adhere to patriarchy's dictation of traditional roles for men and women. Some females also participate in rape-supportive behaviours including sexist jokes, comments, and/or stereotypes, and are unsure of what constitutes "rape" (Davis et al. 1993). There may be a female peer support system providing support for the abusive behaviour as well.

Past research indicates that college males who have sexually aggressive male friends are more apt to have female friends who have been victims of sexual aggression

(Gwartney-Gibbs and Stockard 1989). Moreover, research contends that males who have a combination of male peers who are sexually abusive and female peers who have been sexually abused within their mixed-peer groups, are more likely to be abusive and to be abused in their own relationships (Ageton 1983; Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1985). In terms of resources, some men may turn to women in times of relationship stress and these women, knowingly or unknowingly, may be providing support for the use of male-to-female abuse. If a female friend continues to stay in a relationship that is abusive, she may be showing her male peers that abuse is acceptable in a relationship, thereby providing support for his abusive behaviour in his own relationships.

The construction of various masculinities and the maintenance of the gender hierarchy are processes that involve both males and females (Fineran and Bennett 1999; Connell 1996); we should explore this by examining the different types of support offered by male and female friends/girlfriends. As the respondents demonstrated, they get different types of support from males and females. Male peer support theory should continue to explore the relevance and role of female peer support.

2) *A More Inclusive and Clear Definition of Peers*

As suggested previously, male peer support research has not focused much attention on the definition of "one's peers." Many of the respondents in my work discussed various levels of male friends. Some were considered to be close friends, some were their "boyz," and some were merely associates. There was a hierarchy of male peers and different peers played different roles according to what place they held within this

peer hierarchy. Other researchers have suggested the need to examine this “wider circle of friends” (Giordano 1995); for example, some respondents said that the “boyz” had no role in their life and that they did not have a say in their relationships. For some respondents, their male friendships stemmed back to childhood indicating that they had a history of friendship with them. The theme of different levels of male peers did not emerge until the analysis of the interviews. As a result, it was not possible to explore this dynamic fully. Among some of the respondents, peers who were defined as long-term friends played a key role in influencing their actions, beliefs, and attitudes, while in other situations the more recently acquired peers played a stronger role. Future research should explore this hierarchy of male peers to determine how this influences their own behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. For example, research with university/college men may show that newly acquired male peers override or replace the influence of previous friendships, or perhaps the alternative is true wherein long-term male peers hold a greater influence. The hierarchy of male peers and the differing level of commitment to different groups of male peers needs to be incorporated into male peer support theory.

3) *Level of and Commitment to Girlfriend Relationship*

The level of commitment of the relationship with the girlfriend impacted on the use of male-to-female dating abuse among respondents. Past research has indicated that the length and intimacy of a relationship is associated with male-to-female abuse; the longer and more intimate the relationship, the more likely that male abuse will be present (Henton et al. 1983; Cate et al. 1982). For example, a study of Canadian university men

indicated that “the more serious the dating relationship, the more likely men are to physically and sexually abuse their girlfriends or dating partners” (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998a:115). This finding is partially explained by the Dependency, Availability, and Deterrence (DAD) model (Ellis and DeKeseredy 1989). The model contends that in relationships characterized by high dependency and availability and decreased deterrence, there will be an increased likelihood of woman abuse. Although this study did not specifically address these characteristics, the findings illustrate a different reality than the above.

Respondents who were engaged in more serious relationships (as they suggest) were less apt to discuss their use of violence or coercion, while those who had less serious relationships did. I am hesitant to suggest that this is because they were not as violent with their girlfriends as those who were in short term relationships. However, respondents did provide some insight into the relationship between length/intensity of relationship and the use of male-to-female dating abuse.

As discussed in the findings chapters, the females most likely to be designated as legitimate targets of male abuse were referred to as girls on the side, one night stands, ho's, and street girls. Thus far, male peer support research has focused on asking questions pertaining to "girlfriends." This focus needs to be expanded to include females who are not classified as girlfriends but rather as intimate partners. Some of the respondents said that ho's are not “girlfriend material,” and that this was one of the reasons for their mistreatment. The increased use of abuse on street girls, confirms that

socially and economically disenfranchised females continue to be defined, even by the respondents in this study, as legitimate targets. This is similar to research with adult women. For example, in a study conducted in six public housing estates in Canada, DeKeseredy et al. (in press) found that 19% of the women had been physically assaulted in the year prior to the study. Clearly, women who are economically less-privileged are much more likely to be victimized by their intimate partners (Lupri 1990; Kennedy and Dutton 1989). This suggests a need to continue to strive to reduce poverty, and indicates a need to conduct further research with disenfranchised males and females.

Future research must incorporate varying levels of relationships and explore how the level of female designation interacts with the use of male-to-female abuse. As suggested by the respondents, ho's and street girls (those who one did not have a "relationship" with) were more likely to be targets of male abuse, and our conceptualization of male peer support of dating violence should reflect this. Male peer support theory currently suggests that when men experience relationship stress, they may turn to their male peers for support and advice on how to deal with the stress. However, different forms of situations would cause different forms of stress, possibly resulting in different levels of violence. The level of commitment is different between girlfriends and ho's and this appeared to be connected with different forms of and use of abuse. Studies with youth in different stages of dating relationships while also interviewing their female partners would be valuable in determining the relationship between length and seriousness of a relationship, and the use of male-to-female dating abuse.

4) *The Incorporation of Race/Ethnicity*

When discussing issues of masculinities, one important component absent in this study is race/ethnicity. As Connell (1995:80) suggests, "hegemonic masculinity among whites sustains the institutional oppression and physical terror that have framed the making of masculinity in black communities." Additionally, race/ethnicity is significantly absent in male peer support research. The majority of male peer support research focuses on university/college men, typically Caucasian dominated institutions. Those minority men who are on campus may experience language barriers as the studies are primarily conducted in English (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998c; DeMaris 1990). This exclusion of minority men has influenced male peer support research as past research is most likely theorizing about the Caucasian male experience. However, ethnographic research with disenfranchised men suggests that similar pressure may be experienced (Wilson 1996; Bourgois 1995). It is clear that more research needs to explore the racial/ethnic differences in terms of peer support among adult men. As well, this further component needs to be addressed with male youth. Unfortunately it was not possible to incorporate race in the current study as the respondents were almost exclusively Caucasian. Future research endeavours should employ research designs that capture the experience of minority male youth to explore the intersection of race/ethnicity on male peer support of male-to-female youth dating abuse.

This study has shown that male-to-female abuse in youth dating relationships is multi-dimensional; some of the intricacies that can be missed when

using quantitative research designs have been realized due to the qualitative nature of the study. Hand-in-hand with continued research efforts lies the responsibility to somehow inform a broader society; the following discusses some potential means to ending male-to-female dating abuse among youth.

Steps Toward Ending Male-to-Female Dating Abuse Among Youth

The respondents in this study have suggested that their relationships are often characterized by differing levels of abuse. As a researcher who is devoted to helping youth experience and maintain non-abusive relationships, it is fitting to discuss ways in which we can help them to achieve such relationships.

1) Striving Toward Gender Equality

Many researchers would raise objection to the statement that gender equality has been attained within Canadian society (DeKeseredy 2000; Alvi et al. 2000; Boritch 1997). My study indicates that among this group of youth, gender equality has yet to be realized. My findings also reinforce that masculinity is a relational concept that is defined in opposition to femininity (similar to Messerschmidt 1993; Connell 1987). In many cases, females were conceptualized as “objects through which their partners’ masculinity is displayed to other young men” (Canaan 1998:182). One of the first steps in ending male-to-female abuse, in any type of relationship, is to address the patriarchal ideology that promotes male dominance over females, hence maintaining the hierarchy of masculinities (Dobash and Dobash 1994).

In many cases, the use of male-to-female abuse was justified when the respondent

felt that his masculine status and his "rights" as a male were challenged. This tells us that we need to challenge the feeling of entitlement, control, and dominance over females that the respondents felt they should embody *because* they were men. The findings indicate that there continues to be belief that males are dominant over females, and this ideology helps to justify certain forms of male-to-female dating abuse.

Respondents in this study stated that it is not acceptable to beat or rape females. However, what is lacking in their discussions on these issues is an element of equality. The reasons they suggest reflect differences in physical ability - females are weaker, females are in need of male protection. It is necessary to problematize the messages given to youth in respect to male-to-female abuse. It is commonplace to tell boys that girls are weaker and therefore boys are to protect girls. What is missing from this perspective is equality. Stressing male physical strength encourages male dominance and succeeds in instilling a feeling of male superiority via physical strength, leading to the male "right" to control females. Associations like this can lead to the social control of females. Our campaigns on violence against females need to stress equality and ensure we are not reinforcing that females are in a subordinate position to men.

2) *Breaking Down Patriarchal Gender Roles*

Belief in traditional patriarchal gender roles was strongly evidenced among the respondents. First and foremost, we need to eradicate misperceptions concerning the lack of association between being a male and being emotional, caring, and supportive. This is reflective of a broader problem. As a society we continue to promote rigid gender

roles whereby those who do not adhere to their prescribed roles are seen as unmasculine or unfeminine. Adherence to and promotion of these stereotypical gender roles reinforce male dominance over females and limits the potential of both sexes. For example, we are denying men the opportunity to experience intimate friendships with other males as we have defined what it is to be masculine in very rigid terms.

Societal promotion of males as aggressive, non-emotional, and strong, and females as passive, nurturing, and weak, continues to cast women in a subordinate position to men. We need to encourage the development of male-male relationships that are nurturing. Men should be encouraged to turn to other men for emotional support and men must be taught how to provide such care. We need to encourage men to fulfill and embrace this role, while not to the exclusion of females. It is acceptable to be emotional, caring, and understanding as a male; this should not challenge or threaten one's masculine identity. However, as Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997:47) suggest, many of their behaviours were micro social expressions of broader social forces. Rather than teaching boys that being a man means you are interested in sexual relations with women, and that females should be sexual gate keepers, we need to teach boys about acceptance and difference. As Pollack (2000) recommends, we need to let boys out of their "gender straitjacket," help them to express themselves more freely, and to teach them about respect for themselves and for others.

As we seek to encourage a more intimate relationship between men, there is a need to educate young men on the unacceptability of male-to-male violence as well.

These acts are often explained with a "boys will be boys" mentality that does not address the root of the problem. In fact, many times physical aggression is encouraged as a viable means through which a boy can defend his honour. Male-to-male violence is often promoted as a means to achieving status and respect among many men, not only socially displaced male youth. The association between physical strength, aggression, and being a male needs to be critically challenged.

3) *Education Programs*

One way to encourage gender equality is through broader education programs. Education programs dealing with violence against females need to be addressed in terms of what we are teaching young men. It was evident in the interviews that the respondents did not see speaking out about woman abuse as their responsibility; they saw what other males did as "none of their business." We need to encourage men and teach them how to stand up to the abuse by talking about these issues with their male peers. In other words, to begin a male directed discourse. Speaking out against male-to-female dating abuse with male peers seemed to be unacceptable among the respondents and their male peer groups; this is not unique to that group of males, a man speaking out often runs the risk of being laughed at or thought of as unmanly (Kimmel 1994).

There is a Red Cross program in British Columbia called RespectED: Violence and Abuse Prevention (The Newsletter of the British Columbia Institute against Family Violence 2001). This youth service looks at healthy and unhealthy peer romantic relationships and focuses on communication and violence prevention. Among other

issues, the program helps to teach youth (male and female):

- what healthy relationships are;
- what makes a dating relationship abusive;
- anger management techniques; and,
- behaviours that support a healthy relationship.

Offering programs such as the above help to expose youth to the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and provide alternatives to the use of violence within a relationship. The interviews in this study provided a rare opportunity for the respondents to think and reflect on their relationships. This proved to be insightful for both the respondents and myself. More opportunities for such critical reflection need to be offered.

Although there are some negative aspects of peer support (such as those discussed in this dissertation) there are also some positive aspects of peer support. We have seen through the research on domestic violence that programs that integrate a peer-counseling approach are successful (Jukes 1999). It is promising to see that a program is in initial stages in Ottawa, Canada that deals with some of the issues discussed in this study through the help of peer counseling. A program dealing with the dangers of being in love as well as one entitled "Tough Guy" that looks at challenging masculine stereotypes are currently being proposed.

In addition, dissemination of information sheets or brochures like the ones provided to respondents in my work is a key vehicle toward change. Giving back to the

respondents is an important aspect of my role as a researcher and I am developing a pamphlet

generated from this research to provide as a resource to youth. I also hope to provide workshops, in conjunction with staff, at the facility where the interviews were completed.

The following suggestions are particular to the experience of the respondents in my research, however, I believe they are useful to incorporate in our broader education attempts:

- Encourage boys/men to speak out against woman abuse and to take an active role in educating other males. People often take silence to indicate agreement.
- Encourage boys/men to participate in relationships with females that are not exclusively sexually based. As well, teach them the consequences of sexually objectifying females and to challenge these practices; for example, not repeating sexist jokes.
- Encourage male-to-male relationships - teach boys/men to be confident enough in themselves to have close relationships without feeling threats to their masculinity. Support those who embrace a different form of masculinity than you do - recognize that masculinity comes in many different forms.
- As has been found with adult male abusers (Jukes 1999), the respondents seem to think of the situation through their own eyes, with little or no recognition of how the females felt. We need to expose males to the consequences of their actions and attitudes. Make it respectful to think of females as equals.

Many of the issues that arose in the interviews are addressed in the suggestions.

Providing workshops that offer a safe environment to explore these issues will help to start the process of replacing patriarchal assumptions and beliefs with a system of equality.

My study illustrates how the use of male-to-female violence by youth can be understood as a socially constructed act (Scully 1990; Messerschmidt 2000; Sanday 1990) which is often facilitated via their male peer groups (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1997; Messerschmidt 1994; Ageton 1983). Although the current study is limited in terms of representative, the similarities found among the larger body of male peer support research and with other studies on youth are numerous. Pollack's (2000) nationwide study on male students in the United States tells us many of the same things that the current study does, as does Jackson et al.'s (2000) research in New Zealand. It is interesting to see that populations from different countries are teaching male youth the same things, even down to the use of the words (players, ho's).

My work also represents a first step in the direction of understanding the role of some male peer groups in the supporting and reinforcing of pro-abuse ideologies among socially displaced male youth that can lead to increased risk for intimate partners. It is fitting to conclude this dissertation with the words of one of the youth as this research could not have been completed without the respondents sharing of themselves with me. The words of a 16-year-old male make it apparent that there is much work left to be done.

Youth: Men are built different, we act different. Girls have kids, guys are different. Wouldn't say girls are weak and men are strong, but it's probably true.

R.L.: How do you think the world sees girls and guys differently?

Youth: Some people are sexist. You [referring to the female interviewer] could be working and guys are harassing you, rubbing up against you, say something to you. That's how the world is for us. That's how it's sexist for you. There are more guy things, drinking, going out.

R.L.: How do you feel about that?

Youth: Don't think about it. I'm not going to give up sides - I'm on the guys side and glad. I feel it's good. All the more power to us. (Respondent 12).

As educators, activists, and researchers, it is our shared responsibility to ask how male-to-female abuse is made possible in our society. The thoughts of the above respondent, as well as those who have proceeded him in this dissertation, provide some initial answers to this question. We must continue to challenge others to make the connection between behaviours that are often explained away with a "boys will be boys" rationale and the reproduction of gender inequality that helps to maintain an environment that is conducive to male-to-female youth dating abuse.

APPENDIX A**Informed Consent Form**

Informed Consent Form

An Exploratory Study of Male Peer Support and Male-to-Female
Dating Violence among Socially Displaced Male Youth

I am a Ph.D. student at Carleton University and I am doing some work here with young offenders under the co-supervision of your psychologist, Dr. Ian Shields. I am interested in finding out about relationships that young offenders have with people their own age, both friends and romantic partners. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences. When I share my findings with others, I will not tell them the names of young offenders nor will I tell them things about young offenders' lives that could lead to their identification. However, there are a few specific things you need to understand before we begin.

Because I'm working with Dr. Ian Shields, there are a few situations that could come up where I might share what we have talked about in our interview with him. If you tell me that: 1) a life is in danger (including your own); 2) a child is being abused or neglected; or 3) something is happening that is against the law or might place someone in danger, that information might be shared with Dr. Ian Shields. Also, if I feel that something we have talked about in our interview has upset you I might share that information with Dr. Ian Shields who will most likely want to talk to you. Everything else that you tell me is just between us, unless I get a court order and everybody has to obey court orders. In fact, with the exception of the things I've just mentioned, if I wanted to talk about you to anyone outside this facility, even if it were your family, I would do so only with your written permission.

Because you have criminal charges I expect that you may talk to me about the sorts of things you have done, and that's OK. But if you give me specific details, like the names or addresses of victims of crimes that the police don't know about or that haven't happened yet, that information might have to be shared with other people too. So when I ask you about things you may have done or are planning to do, I won't ask you for specific details. You do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to. You are free to end the interview at anytime, as am I.

If there is something in what I have just said that you do not understand I am happy to give you more information. Just to make sure you have understood what this speech has said, please tell me in your own words what you have just read.

I have been read this speech regarding participation in this research and I understand it.

Participant's Name Participant Signature Date

Roberta Lynn Sinclair _____
Investigator's Name Investigator's Signature Date

You have been given a copy of this form and should keep it for future reference.

If you have any questions about the research or would like to receive a copy of the findings of this research, please leave a message at the following number and I will return your call promptly:

Roberta Sinclair (Principal Investigator)
Ph.D. Candidate
Sociology and Anthropology Department, Carleton University
613-520-2582

Should you have any concerns or complaints about this research and/or your participation in the research, please feel free to contact:

Dr. Dennis Forcese
Graduate Co-ordinator
Sociology and Anthropology Department, Carleton University
613-520-2587

Numbers for Assistance

The Men's Project Survivor Line	Monday - Friday: 10:00 - 6:00	613-230-4219
Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: Youth Line		613-238-3311
Kids Help Phone - Free of Charge		1-800-668-6868
Victim Crisis Unit - Ottawa-Carleton Police		613-236-0311
Sexual Health Centre - Ottawa-Carleton Health Department		613-234-4641
Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual youth Line - Free of Charge		1-800-268-YOUTH
Sexual Assault Support Centre: 24 hour Crisis Line		613-234-2266
Ottawa-Carleton Hospital Regional Sexual Assault Treatment Program		613-738-3762

Thank-you for your participation!

APPENDIX B**Interview Schedule**

**An Exploratory Study of Male Peer Support and Male-to-Female
Dating Violence among Socially Displaced Male Youth**

Interview Number: _____

Date: _____ 2000

Start Time: _____

Finish Time: _____

Interviewer: Introduce myself, tell them I am a researcher from Carleton University completing my Ph.D. research in the area of male-to-female dating relationships, male peer relationships and violence. Read the following:

Thank-you for agreeing to do this interview. The interview will take about an hour and a half. It is important that you understand that you don't have to answer any question(s) you do not want to and that if either you or I want to end the interview at anytime, we can. And last, I need you to understand that I cannot offer any special privileges for completing the interview with me. However, there are no negative consequences should you decide to not participate or if we end the interview after we have started. Again, it is important for you to understand that anything you tell me may be shared with Dr. Ian Shields.

Let's begin with a few background questions.

1. How old are you? _____

2. Before coming to O.C.D.C., where did you live?

Can you tell me a little bit about your living arrangement? (**Probe:** length of time, who else is in the residence, age they left home if not at home)

3. Were you attending school before coming to O.C.D.C.?

4. What is the highest grade you have completed in school so far? _____

5. How did you find school? (**Probe:** teacher/student relationship; extra-curricular activities; friends at school; why did they leave if not in school - suspended/expelled)

The next thing I would like to talk to you about is your work or employment situation.

6. Were you working before you were brought here?
What types of things did you do for money? (**Probe:** panhandling, squeegee)

Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your friends.

7. When you are not here, who do you usually hang out with? (**Probe:** ages, relations, sex)
Do you spend most of your time with just male friends, or do you hang out in groups with male and female friends? What types of things do you do with your friends?
8. When you hang out with your male friends, what types of things do you usually talk about? What about with your female friends?
9. Do you currently have a girlfriend? If no, when was your last girlfriend?
10. What makes/made her your girlfriend? (**Probe:** definition of a girlfriend)
11. What would you say the best thing about having a girlfriend is/was?
12. How would you describe your current/past relationship with your girlfriend?
(**Probe:** level of satisfaction, why or why not satisfied)
13. What types of things do/did you and your girlfriend do when you go/went out?
(**Probe:** time with groups/male peers/as a couple)
14. Do/did many of your male friends have girlfriends? What about your female friends - are a lot of them dating or have they been dating?
15. Do/did you ever talk about your girlfriend with your male friends? What about with your female friends? What types of things do/did you talk about?
16. Do/did you ever talk about what you and your girlfriend do/did together with your male friends? Can you give me an example of what you talk about?
17. Do/Did you and your girlfriend talk much about your relationship? What types of things do/did you talk about?
18. Have you ever heard about a fight between one of your male friends and their girlfriends?
If so, can you tell me a little about what he said happened?
19. Have you ever seen a male friend and his girlfriend fight? If so, can you tell me a

little bit about what happened? (**Probe:** threaten to use or used *physical violence*: hit, throw something, beat her up, choke her; *emotional violence*: insult, swear, put her down, accused her of cheating)

What do you usually/did you do when you see/saw them fight? How did/does it make you feel?

20. How about you, do/did you ever fight with your girlfriend? Can you tell me a little about what types of things you fight about? What usually happens when you fight? (**Probe:** threaten to use or used *physical violence*: hit, throw something, beat her up, choke her; *emotional violence*: insult, swear, put her down, accused her of cheating)
21. Have you and your girlfriend ever fought about your relationship? Can you give me an example? (**Probe:** context, resolution)

The next few questions are about your attitudes and beliefs and your male friends attitudes and beliefs.

22. Thinking about your male friends and their girlfriends/past girlfriends, who usually decides what they end up doing - both as a couple and separately? In other words, do the male and female have an equal say?

What about with you and your girlfriend/past girlfriend, do you both have an equal say in your relationship? Can you tell me a little about how that works?

23. Some men think that it is their decision who their girlfriend hangs out with - do you think that most of your male friends would agree with this? Can you give me an example?

What about you - do you agree? Can you tell me a little about how that works in your relationship with your girlfriend/past girlfriend?

24. Do you think that it is sometimes important for a male to show his girlfriend he is in control of their relationship? Can you tell me about a situation where this might be true?

Do you think most of your male friends would agree with you?

25. What do you think your male friends would say is the best thing about having a girlfriend? How about you - would you agree with them?
26. Do you think there are times when it would be ok for a guy to hit his girlfriend?

Can you provide me with an example? (**Probe:** context)

What about your male friends - would there be times that they would say it was ok for them to hit their girlfriend? Can you tell me about a situation where they might agree?

27. Have any of your male friends ever told you that they used a little force to convince their girlfriend to have sex with them? Can you tell me about an example? (**Probe:** context, type of force)

Can you let me a little bit about how you felt when he told you about it (or you saw it?)

What do you think - are there times when it is ok for a man to use force to convince his girlfriend to have sex with him? Can you provide me with an example? (**Probe:** context type of force)

I just want to finish up our talk with a few questions about your male friends.

28. Thinking about your closer male friends, can you tell me a little about how you became friends? How long have you been friends with them?
29. Are there any particular reasons why you are friends? What makes you think of them as "friends"?
30. Do you think that you will stay friends with them for a long time? Why or why not?

I really appreciate the time you have taken to complete this interview. We have talked about a lot of information - is there anything you would like to tell me that we haven't talked about yet?

Again, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

1. Provide them with information sheets.
2. Remind them that Dr. Ian Shields is available to talk with them if they want.
3. Ensure they take a copy of the signed consent form with them.

APPENDIX C**Dating Violence Information Handout Package**

Dating Violence Information Handout Package

The following documents were included in the handout package that the youth who participated in the study received upon leaving the institution.

Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa Carleton Services Brochure

Brochure listing services in the Ottawa Carleton area for youth including: group services, community crisis services, outreach services, emergency shelters, drop-in centers, and health agencies.

Ottawa Carleton Youth Speak: Let's Listen.

Brochure listing facts on puberty, birth control, relationships, sexual orientation, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Just Between Guys. A Healthy Sex Guide for Gay and Bisexual Youth.

Brochure discussing sexuality, safer sex, sexually transmitted diseases and healthy relationships.

The Dating Game.

Brochure discussing sexual, physical, verbal and emotional abuse in relationships, listing of numbers to contact if you have been abused or if you are abusive, and what constitutes a healthy relationship.

Relationships. Halton Regional Health Department, Sexual Health Program.

Brochure on healthy dating relationships, self-esteem, breaking up, love versus infatuation and safer sex.

Some Important things for Men to Know About Sex and Dating.

Brochure discussing sexual consent, force, abuse, and what to do if you know someone who has been sexually assaulted.

1999 Fact Sheet: No Means No. Violence Against Women, Date Rape/Rape Drugs.

Fact sheet by the Canadian Federation of Students.

Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre. Adolescent Resource List.

Resource sheet listing local numbers for counseling services, distress centres, sexual assault support centres and treatment centres.

APPENDIX D**Demographics of Incarcerated Male Young Offenders**

Demographics of Incarcerated Male Young Offenders

Ever Charged or Convicted with...	Percentage
Shoplifting	56%
Vandalism	26%
Break and Enter	67%
Assault with Violence	26%
Armed Robbery	7%
Trespassing/Loitering	23%
Breach of Probation/Open Custody	44%
Sexual Offence/Sexual Misconduct	7%
Theft Over, Theft Under	81%
Possession of Stolen Goods	67%
Fraud/Forgery	22%

Source: Whitehall, G. (1992). *A Comparison of Incarcerated Young Offenders and Community Controls*. M.A. Thesis. Ottawa: Carleton University.

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