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VIOLENT YOUNG WOMEN:

**The importance of social context
in making sense of
young women's use of violence**

Megan A. Stephens, Honours B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
November 28, 1997

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and Research acceptance of the thesis

**Violent Young Women: The importance of social context
in making sense of young women's use of violence**

submitted by Megan A. Stephens, B.A. Hons.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Katharine Kelly, Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
January 13, 1998

Abstract

This thesis explores young women's use of violence and their understandings of this behaviour. Data for the study were gathered using semi-structured interviews with ten young women living in custodial institutions who had been identified by staff as being violent. The data revealed that these young women's beliefs about their use of violence were much more complex than the explanations that have typically been presented in theories of violence and delinquency. These complex understandings about the use of violence seemed to be rooted in the fact that these young women had been exposed to two contradictory social constructions of violence: one in their home worlds, and another within the custodial institutions. The findings seem to suggest that a thorough explanation of young women's use of violence must take into consideration the social contexts in which they live. The study concludes by commenting on the policy implications of this research.

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1.0 Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

For years the term delinquent has basically been synonymous with 'bad boys'; young women have simply not been considered active participants in the world of crime and delinquency. When girls and women have been included in discussions of deviance, they have tended to be relegated to the role of whores and witches. This has helped to perpetuate the myth that female delinquency is confined to deviant sexuality, which in the case of women and girls has meant any display of sexuality which was not "restricted to zones protected and privileged in the culture: traditional marriage and the nuclear family" (Vance, 1984: 3).

The ideology of female sexuality and its connections to deviance have reinforced the belief that passive sexuality is the only non-deviant and, hence, appropriate form of sexuality available to women. In some ways, however, this ideology has also helped to entrench the proper role of women as passive beings since these images of deviant women and their association with female sexuality have most often been presented in a context where the women receive their 'just desserts' for their behaviour. This can be seen as serving two moral purposes: to reinforce 'appropriate' gender roles, and to act as warnings to those women who might consider straying from these roles (Heidensohn, 1985: 89). As Chesney-Lind points out, "Clearly, harsh public punishment of a few "fallen" women as witches and whores has always been

integral to enforcement of the boundaries of the "good" women's place in patriarchal society" (1986: 78).

Not surprisingly, the idea that women and girls, unlike their male counterparts, are passive beings, incapable of autonomous action, has led to the exclusion of females from any attempts at theorizing explanations of crime and the use of violence. In other words, theories of crime and violence have been decidedly androcentric and have either explicitly denied that women and girls would engage in such allegedly masculine activities, or have implicitly done so by failing to even mention that the theories might (or might not) apply to women.

Recently, it has become much more difficult to sustain the belief that women's and girls' delinquency is primarily an issue of sexuality, and that females are incapable of participating in violent crimes. This myth has been challenged most obviously in popular culture, where the media have helped fuel the public's concern about the supposed increase in youth violence by warning them that they now need to fear young women as much as they had once feared young men. Recent headlines in Canadian magazines such as "Girls can flout the law, too" (Fuller, 1993), "Suburban tragedy: Teenage girls are charged in brutal stabbing death" (Bergman, 1995), and "From Barbie dolls to buck knives: youth violence is rising and girls are getting more heavily involved" (McDowell, 1994) all highlight the fact that, although young women were once invisible in the world of youth crime, they are now portrayed as active participants. Even more importantly, young women are depicted as actively enmeshed in violent crimes, something which used to be seen as the sole prerogative of men.

Despite the apparent acceptance by the media that girls and women are no longer merely passive beings, there has still been very little research or theoretical work that has sought to understand or explain female delinquency and/or female violence. This chapter will provide an overview of how young women's delinquency, and in particular female violent delinquency, has been dealt with in the academic literature. That said, it is perhaps more accurate to say that this literature review will highlight the dearth of information available on female perpetrators of violent crime. The review of theories in this chapter is not comprehensive, however, I have attempted to focus on those theoretical works that have clearly included women and those which have been the most widely accepted as plausible explanations of crime and aggression.

The review will begin by briefly discussing some of the original theoretical work that sought to explain female deviance, which relied heavily on stereotypical assumptions about the nature of females. I will then explore some of the more traditional theories in both criminology and studies of aggression that sought to understand the use of violence by men and boys, with work on female violence taking "the form of a footnote to research primarily directed at males" (Campbell, 1982: 137). Next, I will focus on how women eventually came to be included in studies of violence and crime, the implications of this inclusion, and the reaction to this theory. The discussion will conclude by highlighting some of the more promising recent advances in research on female delinquency and aggression that have helped shape this project.

1.2 Historical theories of female delinquency

Criminologists have typically ignored women and girls in their attempts to explain criminality and delinquency because women have been seen as "less delinquent, less dangerous, and less involved in criminal subcultures than males" (Gelsthorpe, 1986: 125). One of the reasons for this belief is that women and girls have been seen as passive beings, lacking in the autonomy to act on their own. What little research there has been into female crime and delinquency has tended to rely heavily on gendered stereotypes. Edwards outlines the dominant perspective as follows:

... The influence of sexism and male bias in criminology and related disciplines has(s) principally taken the form of neglect, underestimation and misrepresentation of the nature and extent of female criminality; and such accounts as were given tended to be influenced not by evidence, but by stereotyped, often sexualized and highly deterministic preconceptions of 'the female nature'... (Edwards, 1989: 165).

Furthermore, the characterization of girls and women has often been very different from that of boys and men in that there seems to be no 'normal' or 'acceptable' phase of delinquency for females, unlike male delinquency which is often "seen to be a 'normal' (even inevitable) aspect of adolescence" (Griffin, 1993: 117). Historically, when academics have tried to explain female crime and delinquency, they have relied heavily on biological and psychological theories. For years, theories about female crime have focused "almost exclusively on women's anatomy and, particularly, sexuality" (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992: 56). Criminologists have traditionally bought into the notion that "where women and girls are considered, the criminality of some (and the conformity of most) is almost invariably held to be directly associated

with specific (and usually, it is alleged, innate) female characteristics" (Edwards, 1989: 166). The earliest theories of female crime were unable to account for female involvement in violent crimes, and did not even attempt to do so since at that time female crimes were seen as either extensions, or distortions of the traditional female role, i.e. prostitution and shoplifting. As one of the first feminist criminologist observed, "Indeed nearly all theorists have argued that the only areas where girls have posed problems are those of sexual promiscuity and occasional shoplifting" (Shacklady-Smith, 1978: 74).

Two of the earliest academic attempts to theorize female deviancy or criminality typify this trend. Both Lombroso and Ferrero's and Thomas' theories focused on the connection between female delinquency and sexual deviancy, and both concentrated more on biological and genetic factors associated with female crime, ignoring any possible social etiologies. Furthermore, neither theory dealt with female violent crimes, focussing solely on "criminal activities associated with the feminine role" (Somers and Baskin, 1994: 468), such as prostitution.

1.2.1 Lombroso and Ferrero

Lombroso and Ferrero (1959) were perhaps the first criminologists to attempt to theorize female criminality with a highly biological or genetic approach, drawing on both the madonna/whore duality and females' inferiority to males. Lombroso and Ferrero studied the physical attributes of female criminals and prostitutes and concluded that there were fewer females 'born' criminals than men. They proposed that the reason

for the lower incidence of female criminality was that women "have not evolved to the same degree as men and are therefore more primitive and have less scope for degeneration" (Heidensohn, 1985: 114).

Lombroso and Ferrero's theories on females and crime tended to focus on female prostitution and other sexual 'crimes,' explaining that because of women's inferiority to men, they were "less capable of engaging in criminal activities other than petty crimes such as prostitution" (Feinman, 1986: 10). Their focus on prostitution helped reinforce the socially acceptable distinction between madonnas and whores through such observations as "her exaggerated sexuality so opposed to maternity," and "in the ordinary run of mothers the sexual instinct is in abeyance" (Lombroso and Ferrero, 1895: 153, cited in Heidensohn, 1985: 114), obviously relying heavily on the common understanding of female passivity.

Although Lombroso and Ferrero purported that females were much more likely to be occasional than repeat offenders, those who did participate in crime (even occasionally) were depicted as very unnatural and unfeminine. According to them, female criminals demonstrated "an inversion of all qualities which specially distinguish the normal women; namely reserve, docility and sexual apathy" (Lombroso and Ferrero, 1895: 153, cited in Heidensohn, 1985: 114). This 'masculinity' hypothesis has proven quite resilient, returning time and again throughout the last century as a possible explanation of female crime.

1.2.2 W.I. Thomas

W.I. Thomas (1907) was one of the next criminologists to follow up on the work of Lombroso and Ferrero in an effort to explain female criminality. His work has been seen as heavily influenced by Lombroso and Ferrero (Heidensohn, 1985; Klein, 1976). Like them, he believed that women were the inferior sex. He purported that "Man has, in short, become more... specialized an animal than women" (Thomas, 1907: 36, cited in Klein, 1976: 13). According to Thomas, the inferior status of women could be explained in physiological (and sexual) terms. As Klein explains:

He attributes to men high amounts of sexual energy, which lead them to pursue women for their sex, and he attributes to women maternal feelings devoid of sexuality, which lead them to exchange sex for domesticity. Thus monogamy, while chastity for women, is the accommodation of these basic urges, and women are domesticated while men assume leadership, in a true market exchange (Klein, 1976: 13).

Here again, the subordinate social status of women was tied to their 'natural' passivity. Thomas did not question this relationship and, in fact, saw this as quite useful in maintaining social order.

In the *Unadjusted Girl* (1923), Thomas used case studies of delinquent girls to show how human behaviour was affected by four key desires: for new experience, for security, for response, and for recognition (Thomas, 1923). Like Lombroso and Ferrero, his work unquestionably equated female delinquency with sexual delinquency with the majority of his case studies dealing with promiscuous young women or cases of adultery. He maintained that these young women manipulated male desires for sex in their pursuit of some ulterior motive. As Thomas explained:

The beginning of delinquency in girls is usually an impulse to get amusement, adventure, pretty clothes, favorable notice, distinction, freedom in the larger world... The girls have usually become 'wild' before the development of sexual desire, and their casual sex relations do not usually awaken sexual feeling. Their sex is used as a condition of the realizations of other wishes. It is their capital (Thomas, 1923: 109).

Unlike Lombroso and Ferrero who believed that criminal women were actually more masculine than feminine, Thomas seemed to accept that criminal women were indeed feminine. He purported that these delinquent young women had just not been socialized to realize the importance of their sexuality and why it should be kept for marriage. He believed that middle class women were trained to value "their chastity as an investment" (Klein, 1976: 15), but poor women were "motivated by the desire for excitement... and forget the repressive urge of "security"" (Klein, 1976: 15). As Thomas saw it, poor women were "not immoral, because this implies a loss of morality, but amoral" (Thomas, 1923: 98). Consequently, Thomas believed that these 'sexually deviant' young women simply needed to be taught the importance of chastity.

Thomas was not concerned at all with theorizing about the use of violence by young women because he blindly accepted the common assumptions of female passivity. As was typical of the era, his concern about female crime was primarily a concern about sexual 'delinquency' or the display of active female sexuality among the lower class.

1.3 Historical theories of female violence

Although there have been at least some attempts to understand female criminality,

albeit having led to some highly problematic theories, what is perhaps most remarkable about the tomes of social scientific research into violence and aggression is the absence of women and girls. One well-known researcher in the field of aggression claimed that it was not worth the trouble to study female aggression because women are so seldom aggressive (Buss, 1961). Buss and other aggression researchers believed that violence was primarily a male problem and therefore "the study of aggression is properly the study of men and boys" (Frodi, Macaulay, Thome, 1977: 635).

This thinking seems to have been quite widespread among researchers studying aggression. In a review of more than eighty empirical works on human aggression up to 1974, Ann Frodi and her colleagues found "only a handful that discussed sex-related differences" (Frodi, Macaulay, Tome, 1977: 634-635), let alone dealt specifically with female aggression. In addition to the lack of studies on female aggression, there has been an almost complete lack of theorizing about women or girls as aggressors. As one researcher has noted "theories of aggression that even mentioned women as aggressors dismissed their aggression as minimal and insignificant, behavior not worth theorizing" (Burbank, 1994: 2).

The absence of females from both studies and theories of aggression is most likely the result of common sense or popular notions of women, reinforced by seemingly reliable sources of information like crime statistics, which equate femininity with passivity. Although the term passive is not necessarily the equivalent of non-aggressive, some researchers did seem to believe that passive females would not take part in the active or direct displays of aggressive or violent behaviour exhibited by

their male counterparts.

Macaulay (1985) maintained that these beliefs about females and aggression had become deeply ingrained in both the cultural and academic psyche so that "research and explanation of results in social psychology have been heavily influenced by the psychological theories that are popular in Western culture, their theoretical pretensions notwithstanding" (1985: 199). Macaulay pulled together a list of beliefs about females and aggression from a variety of sources, both academic (e.g., research articles, conversations with psychologists) and popular (e.g., fiction, women's magazines, newspapers). This 'list' helps to highlight the stereotypes about female violence that have clouded any attempts to theorize the issue:

1. *Woman are innately nonaggressive...*
2. *Women express their anger in "sneaky" ways. Their aggressive behavior is "indirect" and verbal, meaning that women aggress without using physical violence...*
3. *Women are unable to express anger because they have been trained to repress anger...*
4. *Women are prone to sudden, unexpected bursts of "fury" - with fury defined as near-violence or actual violence... These bursts are sometimes viewed as irrational overreactions to minor slights, teasing, etc...*
5. *Angry women are sick and in need of psychological treatment...*
6. *Women are fiercely aggressive in defense of their children...*
7. *Jealousy is a common source of women's aggression because women are very possessive of the men that they are attached to... (Macaulay, 1985: 199-200).*

Although this list could be seen as highly problematic and contradictory, many of these assumptions seem to have been accepted as 'facts' and, unfortunately, have not inspired many theorists to take on the challenge of trying to 'make sense' of female violent behaviour.

In reality, the small number of historical studies of female violence that do exist tend to focus on "more spectacular instances of female violence, where death or serious injury has been the result" (Campbell, 1982: 138. See for example Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974; Ward, Jackson and Ward, 1968; Cole, Fisher, Cole, 1968). If indeed there was no female participation in violent crime or violent behaviour, it might be reasonable that the issue has not been tackled by theorists. However, this does not seem to be the case. Instead it seems that historically, "those activities that did not fit the official stereotype of "girls delinquency" have been ignored by those in authority" (Chesney-Lind, 1993: 334).

One study of British girls in gangs in the late sixties and early seventies exemplifies this pattern. In this study, Shacklady-Smith found that the majority of delinquent and gang girls she spoke with had been charged with offenses that could be seen as 'sexual delinquencies' (Shacklady-Smith, 1978), even though most of the young women reported that they participated in a wide range of delinquent activities, such as breaking and entering, property damage, and fighting. In fact, nearly three quarters (73.3%) of the gang girls and two-thirds (63.3%) of the girls on probation reported that they had "taken part in a fight" (Shacklady-Smith, 1978: 78). Furthermore, some of the girls' detailed explanations of their fighting reveal that they take these violent confrontations quite seriously. As one girl said:

I reckon we fight as seriously as the boys. You know, if anybody comes up to us we'll smack a bottle in their faces. You know we say, "you try it," and they don't think we will use it on them. But we will if they try anything (Shacklady-Smith, 1978: 86).

Her discussions with these young women also reveal that these non-sexual, stereotypically male offenses were often overlooked by the authorities, who instead focused on the 'sexual' offenses which were typically seen as 'feminine' crimes. One girl's comments on her run in with the police highlights this behaviour:

It's funny because once when I was down at the cop shop for fighting, this woman saw the swastika on my arm and forgot all about what she was looking for. They never did nothing - just told me to stop fighting. But the woman cop, she kept on about the swastika and Hell's Angels. What a bad lot they were for a girl to go around with, and how I better stop going around with the Angels or else I'd get a really bad name for myself. Then she kept asking me if I'd had sex with any of 'em...
(Shacklady-Smith, 1978: 83).

Shacklady-Smith's research, as well as Fishman's work on a black female gang in the 1960s (Fishman, 1988, cited in Chesney-Lind, 1993), help to debunk the myth that all female crimes were simply sexual crimes. What these few studies reveal is that "girls have long been involved in violent behavior as part of gang life" (Chesney-Lind, 1993: 334), and probably outside of gangs as well. However, because historically, this "violence was ignored by law enforcement officers far more concerned with their sexual behavior or morality" (Chesney-Lind, 1993: 334), criminal statistics have likely been biased toward showing relatively high rates of female sexual delinquencies and low rates of female violent behaviour, helping to both perpetuate stereotypes about the innately passive nature of women and to justify their exclusion from traditional studies and theories of delinquency and violence.

1.4 Traditional theories of delinquency

Although male delinquency has also been seen as rooted in biological or psychological problems, by the latter half of the twentieth century, environmental and social factors were more often predicated as the causes of boys' deviance. Instead of focussing on the seemingly 'pathological' nature of boys' criminality, radical criminologists began to focus on the potential 'benefits' of deviant subcultures. Deprivation, strain, control, and delinquent subcultures were just some of the theories advanced by criminologists in the past century to explain young men's involvement in crime and delinquency. These theories have tended to either construct delinquency as the unfortunate consequence of "a variety of social, cultural, economic and psychological influences, all of which are constructed as negative" (Griffin, 1993: 105), or as an actively chosen route to cope with the injustices in society.

Although these theories were a major advance in the field of criminology, there was still no concerted effort to include females in the realm of 'normal' or 'positive' delinquency or subcultures. As Campbell explains:

Although we are now prepared to accept that delinquency among males may be a subculturally normal response to societal frustrations, it is remarkable that even among female urban guerillas, who offer highly articulate accounts of their social grievances, we still ascribe their behavior to clinical disorder (Campbell, 1981: 41).

Albert Cohen's delinquent subcultures. Travis Hirschi's control theory, and Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential association are all theories which were heralded in their time, and continue to be seen today as wonderful advances in our

understanding of crime.¹ For the purposes of this research project, these theories can be seen as highly problematic in that they were based solely on the lives and experiences of boys and men and seemed to be rooted in the assumption that women and girls were, by nature, passive and could not willingly, or would not deliberately, choose to participate in delinquent activities, particularly those that were violent. That said, these theories have all been extensively criticized and found to offer, at best, only partial explanations of the use of crime and delinquency, even with respect to the male population.

1.4.1 Albert Cohen and delinquent subcultures

Albert Cohen's work on delinquent subcultures stemmed from Robert Merton's earlier study on anomie and strain as a cause of crime in American society (1938). In his analysis of delinquent gangs, Cohen postulated that working class boys developed their own delinquent or deviant subcultures based on the inversion of middle class values. The new delinquent subculture was seen as a result of their common frustration in being unable to live up to the standards of the middle class culture.

The delinquent subculture, we suggest, is a way of dealing with the problems of adjustment... These problems are chiefly status problems: certain children are denied status in the respectable society because they cannot meet the criteria of the respectable status system. The delinquent subculture deals with these problems by providing criteria of status which these children can meet (Cohen, 1955: 121).

¹As mentioned previously, this is not an exhaustive overview of all of the previous theoretical work in crime and delinquency. Instead, I have chosen to limit this discussion to some of those theories which have been the most widely accepted as plausible explanations of crime.

Although Cohen's study explored extensively the "versatility" of male delinquency, there was little or no discussion of female delinquency. He clearly believed, "The delinquent is the rogue male" (Cohen, 1955: 140). As he saw it, girls did not need to achieve status in the eyes of their peers the way boys did, because their primary concern was to develop relationships with boys. As he explained, "We mean that the female's station in society, the admiration, respect and property that she commands, depend to a much greater degree on the kinds of relationships she establishes with members of the opposite sex" (Cohen, 1955: 141). In other words, Cohen believed that young women were not autonomous actors, but were concerned only with how boys felt about them. Cohen presumed that, because of this, working class girls would not be as concerned as their male counterparts with trying to live up to middle-class norms. He maintained that:

... (T)he problems of adjustment... are primarily problems of the male role... (D)elinquency of the kind which is institutionalized in the delinquent subculture is positively inappropriate as a response to the problems which do arise in the female role. It is inappropriate because it is, at best, irrelevant to the vindication of the girl's status as a girl, and at worst, because it positively threatens her in that status in consequence of its strongly masculine symbolic function (Cohen, 1955: 143-144).

Cohen quite obviously believed that the female role was a passive one and, therefore, young women would not want to participate in any delinquent activities that might violate that role. Cohen did not actually attempt to deny that there were girl delinquents. However, like Lombroso and Ferrero and Thomas, he believed that female delinquency was much less versatile than male delinquency. Cohen saw female delinquency as "specialized" and purported that it "consists overwhelmingly of sexual

delinquency" (Cohen, 1955: 144).

Although Cohen saw male delinquency as a natural reaction to exclusion from middle class culture, he concluded that "girls became delinquent because they were preoccupied with establishing sexual relationships with boys" (Berger, 1989: 375), once again falling back on the stereotypical image of female delinquency being inextricably linked to sexuality and avoiding any discussion of other, non-sexual aspects of female delinquency.

1.4.2 Travis Hirschi and control theory

Another one of the more popular explanations of crime and delinquency has been control theory, sometimes also referred to as social control theory. The basic premise underlying control theory was that everyone is capable of deviance, and so the crucial question for criminologists is not so much why people commit crime, but why people obey the rules of society and *do not* commit crime (Hirschi, 1969). Although a variety of researchers have posited possible explanations for social conformity, ranging from the existence of "personal controls" such as positive self-concept to the absence of effective family guidance (see Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992), Travis Hirschi's focus on the lack of an effective "social bond" has been among the most enduring explanations (Hirschi, 1969).

According to Hirschi's idea, social bonds were what helped to keep delinquency under control. He believed that "delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken" (Hirschi, 1969: 16). This idea stemmed from Durkheim's

work on suicide. In that work, Durkheim noted that:

The more weakened the groups to which [the individual] belongs, the less he (sic) depends on them, the more he (sic) consequently depends only on himself (sic) and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his (sic) private interests (Durkheim, 1951: 209).

Hirschi delineated four different aspects of the social bond that he thought helped to reinforce an individual's link to 'conventional society' and therefore helped keep people in check: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Hirschi, 1969).

Attachment referred to a person's connection to social groups such as the family, peers, schools, etc. Hirschi saw this as connected to the concept of internalizing the norms of society:

The norms of society are by definition shared by the members of society. To violate a norm is, therefore, to act contrary to the wishes and expectations of other people. If a person does not care about the wishes and expectations of other people - that is, if he (sic) is insensitive to the opinion of others - then he (sic) is to that extent not bound by the norms. He (sic) is free to deviate. The essence of the internalization of norms, conscience, or superego thus lies in the attachment of the individual to others (Hirschi, 1969: 19).

The idea of commitment pertained to a person's stake in conformity and assumed that when a person considered deviating, s/he "must consider the cost of this deviant behavior, the risk he (sic) runs of losing the investment he (sic) has made in conventional behavior" (Hirschi, 1969: 20). Involvement concerned a person's participation in "conventional activities" such as school, work, family life, etc. This idea was rooted in the notion "that a person may be simply too busy doing conventional things to find time to engage in deviant behavior" (Hirschi, 1969: 22). Finally, beliefs referred to the acceptance of basic moral values or laws, or "a common value system

within the society" (Hirschi, 1969: 23).

In Hirschi's work *The Causes of Delinquency* (1969), he set out to test this control theory of delinquency based on data collected on a stratified sample of 5,545 students in public junior and senior high schools in the United States in the fall of 1964. Although the sample was stratified by race, sex, school, age and grade, all of Hirschi's analysis dealt solely with boys and male delinquency. The data that were collected on 1,076 Black and 864 White young women were completely ignored (Hirschi, 1969). In a footnote at the beginning of his methods chapter, Hirschi seemed to casually excuse his exclusion of the young women from his work, "Throughout this chapter, I refer to "non-Negro" students and to girls. In the analysis which follows, "non-Negro" becomes "white," and the girls disappear" (Hirschi, 1969: 35). Hirschi did admit that "girls have been neglected for too long by students of delinquency [and] the exclusion of them is difficult to justify" (Hirschi, 1969: 35-36), however this was as close to a 'justification' for their exclusion as he provided.

It is possible that Hirschi did not attempt to analyze the female data because he knew that the results would not lend support to his theory and, furthermore, that he would be hard pressed to interpret any gender differences within this theoretical framework. Ann Macaulay explains how certain theoretical models make the inclusion of female participants in research problematic:

... (T)he inclusion of women in an experiment was known to be asking for trouble because common sense and experience showed that one was likely to encounter gender differences that were hard to explain. For example, as a novice researcher I learned the hard way not to use "female subjects" when a mixed-sex sample yielded some striking gender

differences. In terms of the model, the results for the women were aberrant. They could be explained, but not within the model. The end result was that half the time and grant money spent was wasted gathering "unusable" data; they were not reported (Macaulay, 1985: 210).

Although Hirschi had indeed taken the time and money to gather data on young women, he seemed to consider them unusable. The two hundred pages of analysis that followed his methods chapter dealt solely with boys' delinquency and how their behavior 'fit' his control theory, once again failing to advance our understanding of female delinquency.

1.4.3 Edwin Sutherland and differential association

The theory of differential association first posited by Edwin Sutherland, maintained that criminal behaviour, much like other aspects of human behaviour, was learned in association with "close, intimate friends" (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992: 67). The concept referred to more than just the associations among people, but to the associations among ideas. As Sutherland explained:

The hypothesis of differential association is that criminal behavior is learned in association with those who define such behavior favorably and in isolation from those who define it unfavorably, and that a person in an appropriate situation engages in such criminal behavior if, and only if, the weight of the favorable definitions exceeds the weight of the unfavorable definitions (Sutherland, 1949: 243).

In other words, the 'learning' of criminal behavior involved learning the techniques and developing the motives and attitudes favourable to its pursuit, often in association with one's peers.

Sutherland's work was innovative in many ways. For example, he conducted

extensive studies of white-collar crime, helping to debunk the myth that crime is solely a lower class phenomenon. However, his research was also male-oriented and continued to perpetuate the myth that delinquency was simply a 'boy thing.' Young women were not a part of his theorizing or his research, perhaps because he assumed that young women would not associate with people who defined delinquent behaviour favourably. His explanation of how differential association worked is indicative of the continuing emphasis on delinquency as a synonymous with 'bad boys':

In an area where the delinquency rate is high a boy who is sociable, gregarious, active, and athletic is very likely to come in contact with the other boys in the neighbourhood, learn delinquent behavior from them, and become a gangster (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974: 77).

What all of these theorists failed to do is improve our knowledge of the importance of gender in the analysis of crime and delinquency. Although Albert Cohen did briefly address the issue of female delinquency, he continued to rely heavily on the idea that female delinquency was highly specialized and was really essentially sexual delinquency. Hirschi and Sutherland's works were equally problematic in that half of the population simply "disappeared" in their theories and analyses.

Of course, the emphasis on men and androcentric research was, in fact, quite typical of this era and was definitely not limited to theories of crime and delinquency. In almost all research at that time, academics conducted studies and tested theories based on male subjects. The exclusion of women and girls from studies of crime was particularly easy to justify, however, given the stereotypical assumptions about female passivity. In a similar manner, traditional theories and studies of aggression and

violence have tended to exclude women and girls from their works.

1.5 Traditional theories of violence

In addition to criminological theories that could be applied to criminal violence, there has been a plethora of psychological, especially social psychological, theories that attempt to explain the use of aggression or violence in society. It should be noted that the terms aggression and violence seem to have fairly nebulous definitions within the academic community. Typically, psychologists and social psychologists seem to prefer to use the term aggression, whereas sociologists commonly use the term violence. In other cases, however, the two terms are used interchangeably.

Three of the most prominent and widely endorsed theories dealing with the use of violence in society include the frustration-aggression hypothesis, the social learning of aggression, and subcultures of violence.² Even though these theories are still popular in some circles today, as was the case with the criminological theories discussed above, they have come to be seen by many as limited in their utility in that they offer only incomplete explanations of people's use of violence. With respect to this study, however, these theories are quite problematic in that they are distinctly "models of men's behavior" (Macaulay, 1985: 209), because research on aggression has "constructed aggression as a stable (male) category, has paid little attention to female

²Again, there are many other theories that have been posited as possible explanations of aggression or violence, however, these three theories have been particularly popular and continue to be presented in introductory textbooks (see for example Sears, Peplau, Taylor, 1991; Myers, 1989) as legitimate, competing rationales for the use of aggression.

aggression, and has produced theories on aggression from male-centered research" (Fry and Gabriel, 1994: 165). Once again, this seems to stem, at least in part, from a reluctance to acknowledge the ability of women to be autonomous actors. The following discussion will outline the major tenets of these three theories and attempt to highlight how they fail to provide a useful understanding of female aggression or the use of violence by women and girls.

1.5.1 Dollard et al. and the frustration-aggression hypothesis

The frustration-aggression theory was one of the first theories that attempted to explain why people were violent or aggressive. This theory, in its simplest form, was first proposed by Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer and Sears in 1939. At the heart of frustration-aggression theory was the notion that "aggression is always a consequence of frustration" (Dollard et al, 1939: 1), where frustration was defined as the thwarting of goal-directed behaviour.

More precisely, there were initially two aspects to this theory. First, aggression only occurred when there had been some form of frustration, and secondly, frustration always led to some form of aggression (Dollard et al. 1939). Frustration was not seen as the direct instigator of aggression, but it was seen as inducing an "instigation" to aggression, sometimes also referred to as an "aggressive drive" (Baron, 1977: 22). This was explained by Dollard and his colleagues in the introduction to their theory:

Although the frustration-aggression hypothesis assumes a universal causal relation between frustration and aggression, it is important to note that the two concepts have been defined independently as well as

dependently. *The dependent definition of aggression is that response which follows frustration, reduces only the secondary, frustration-produced instigation, and leaves the strength of the original instigation unaffected. Frustration is independently defined as that condition which exists when a goal-response suffers interference. Aggression is independently defined as an act whose goal-response is injury to an organism...* (Dollard et al, 1939: 10-11, emphasis in original).

Although in this original formulation, this hypothesis postulated that frustration always led to aggression, this was later modified so that although aggression was still seen as "the naturally dominant response to frustration" (Bandura, 1973: 32), other non-aggressive behaviours were also deemed to be possible reactions to aggression. In other words, it was noted that "frustration produces instigations to a number of different types of responses, one of which is an instigation to some form of aggression" (Miller, 1941: 338, cited in Baron, 1977: 23).

Women were not considered in the frustration-aggression hypothesis or much of the research that ensued in an attempt to test this model because they were believed to be passive beings who would not engage in direct aggressive actions. In other words, women were assumed to be non-aggressive and therefore did not 'fit' the frustration-aggression model. Instead of questioning the fundamental validity of the hypothesis, the female stereotype was accepted and women were omitted from the research. Macaulay highlights the problem with this exclusion as follows:

Another serious limitation of the major theoretical models is that they are models of men's behavior, with women assumed to be generally non-aggressive. In Dollard et al's (1939) original frustration-aggression theory... there was an implicitly normal connection between frustration (or a state of arousal that must be "anger") and aggression. If women are very seldom aggressive, it follows that it must be hard to frustrate or anger them to begin with, therefore no research time need to be spent

studying women. But of course, women do experience anger and do respond to frustration one way or another. Thus, there is some absurdity in the origins of the basic paradigm (Macaulay, 1985: 210).

The frustration-aggression hypothesis was maintained and upheld more 'easily' when women were not included in studies and experiments where their behaviour would prove to be aberrant since they were assumed to be passive and therefore would not engage in the direct aggressive actions studied by these researchers.

1.5.2 Bandura and the social learning of aggression

Somewhat more recently, Albert Bandura attempted to expand the concept of social learning to explain the use of violence or aggression. In this paradigm, aggression was treated as any other form of human behaviour that was acquired and maintained primarily through reinforcement, modelling and imitation.

Bandura explained that the social learning perspective claimed that "psychological functioning is best understood in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between behavior and its controlling conditions" (Bandura, 1973: 43). Bandura believed that a comprehensive theory of aggression had to be able to explain how aggressive behavior was developed, what kinds of provocations led to aggression, and how aggression was maintained. Bandura contended that a social learning analysis of aggression allowed for just that.

Bandura believed that both instrumental learning and social modelling were important aspects in the acquisition of aggressive behaviour. In an instrumental learning approach, people might respond aggressively if they had been rewarded in the past for

such behaviour, or they might choose to avoid this response if they had been punished previously for aggressing (Bandura, 1973). However, Bandura thought that social modelling, or the patterning of one's behavior on the observation and outcome of other people's behaviour, played an even more important role in the acquisition of aggressive behavior than did instrumental learning. He noted that:

Although behavior can be shaped into new patterns to some extent by rewarding and punishing consequences, learning would be exceedingly laborious and hazardous if it proceeded solely on this basis. Most of the intricate responses people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example (Bandura, 1973: 44).

Bandura believed that once aggressive behavior had been chosen as a viable solution to different situations and problems, there were several conditions that served to maintain it. These included the fact that aggression might have been able to provide the aggressor with tangible or material rewards, aggression could have resulted in social rewards such as status and prestige, and aggression may have been self-reinforced through feelings of pride in the ability to harm or 'control' others through the use of and/or threat of violence.

Obviously, social learning theory is very different from the frustration-aggression hypothesis. As Bandura pointed out:

In social learning theory, rather than frustration generating an aggressive drive, aversive treatment produces a general state of emotional arousal that can facilitate a variety of behaviors, depending on the types of responses the person has learned for coping with stress and their relative effectiveness (Bandura, 1973: 53).

Although one might think that Bandura's theory would have led to some interesting research on the ways in which men and women have 'learned' or 'not learned' to

behave aggressively and the importance of specific situations or contexts on aggressive behaviour, Macaulay (1985) has lamented that this is not the case. In fact, this theory seems to have been tested most extensively in laboratory settings or by watching children's interactions while at play (Bandura, 1973). These sort of settings, particularly the laboratory, tend to create an artificial environment where the importance of social context disappears and where the researcher may unwittingly be testing acts that "are not necessarily aggressive behaviour as traditionally defined" (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1993: 53). In fact, several researchers have argued that the use of laboratory measures of aggression, such as the willingness of research participants to administer shocks to a confederate as punishment for a mistake, may be less of an indication of one's tendency to aggress, and more of a reflection of one's desire to be compliant. As Gottfredson and Hirschi contend, "(A)n alternative interpretation of laboratory studies of aggression is that they in fact measure compliance, obedience, or, as it is usually called in survey research acquiescence" (1993: 53). Although this theory might have been able to offer some insights into why men and women use violence, especially if tested in a more 'natural' setting which focused on people's social context, this does not seem to have occurred.

1.5.3 Wolfgang and Ferracuti and subcultures of violence

The subculture of violence was a concept initially advanced by Marvin Wolfgang in the late fifties in an attempt to help account for group differences in homicide rates (Wolfgang, 1959). It was later extended to cover all types of violent or aggressive

behaviour (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967). Although it can be seen as somewhat similar to Bandura's social learning of aggression, Wolfgang and Ferracuti's analysis had a somewhat more sociological focus. The basic tenet of the subculture of violence was "that a pervasive set of values, assumptions, and expectations is directly responsible for much of the high incidence of homicides and assaults in violent groups" (Berkowitz, 1978: 149). This value system set up certain encounters as provocations that warrant an aggressive response in order to 'save face.' Failing to respond violently to this 'provocation' would likely lead to a loss of status in that group. Wolfgang and Ferracuti summed up their argument as follows:

We have said that overt use of force or violence, either in interpersonal relationships or in group interaction, is generally viewed as a reflection of basic values that stand apart from the dominant, the central, or the parent culture. Our hypothesis is that this overt (and often illicit) expression of violence (of which homicide is only the most extreme) is part of a subcultural normative system, and that this system is reflected in the psychological traits of the subcultural participants (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967: 158).

They offered seven "corollary propositions" to help refine their theory. These included the following: (1) The subculture of violence should not be seen as completely antithetical to the greater society. As they saw it the subculture of violence "is not entirely an expression of violence" (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967: 158), but actually shared some values with the dominant culture. (2) Subcultures of violence did not dictate aggressive or violent responses in all situations. In other words. "The normative system designates that in some types of social interaction a violent and physically aggressive response is either expected or required of all members sharing in that system

of values" (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967: 159).

(3) The extent to which an individual had "assimilated the values associated with violence" (1967: 159) could be quantified through an analysis of how many, and what kinds of situations s/he used violence in. (4) Those people ranging in age from late adolescence to middle age were most likely to accept the norms of the subculture of violence. (5) Those individuals who failed to live up to the expected and required violence of the subculture would be banished from the group. (6) Not everyone exposed to the subculture of violence was equally likely to accept and internalize its values. As they explained "aggression is a learned response, socially facilitated and integrated, as a habit, in more or less permanent form, among the personality characteristics of the aggressor" (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967: 160). (7) People who used violence as a problem-solving mechanism in subcultures of violence did not necessarily see the use of violence as unauthorized or illicit and therefore did not have to feel guilty about their aggression (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967).

Although this theory did help to bridge the field between sociological and psychological explanations of violence and aggression, it once again failed to incorporate any understanding of gender. Despite the fact that Wolfgang and Ferracuti went so far as to refine their theory by noting in proposition number four that "the subcultural ethos of violence... is most prominent in a limited age group" (1967: 159), and in proposition number six that people with different personality types might be more or less likely to have internalized the values of the subculture of violence, they did not acknowledge that there might be gender differences in the internalization of the

norms of a subculture of violence.

Perhaps this omission of gender was the result of their belief that it was quite evident that violence was a male enterprise and it was not worth 'stating the obvious'. Other assertions in their explanation seemed to imply that they did indeed believe that violence was more a male than a female prerogative. For example, in 1959 Wolfgang noted that "quick resort to physical combat as a measure of daring, courage, or defense of status appears to be a cultural expectation, especially for lower socioeconomic class males of both races" (189). Similarly, in their later work, Wolfgang and Ferracuti stated that "The adult male who does not defend his honor or his female companion will be socially emasculated" (1967: 160).

Once again, although there might have been room to include gender within this theoretical framework, women were ignored. In fact, women remained invisible in the study of both delinquency and violence until about the mid 1970s when some researchers began to purport that the women's movement had led to a dramatic increase in female criminality. It is to this phenomenon that the literature now turns.

1.6 Female criminals and the women's movement

Unfortunately, but not altogether surprisingly, the serious study of female crime emerged hand in hand with the popularization of the women's movement, before which women had been little more than a footnote in the world of sociology (Campbell, 1981: 1).

During the 1970s, female crime and delinquency burst onto the scene of what we have now seen was a 'male-only' domain, dominated by the belief that women were not

autonomous actors. This was true in terms of both popular and academic culture, through the mainstream media, and the work of social researchers. During this period, there was significant speculation that there had been an increase in female crime rates, and a major shift in the nature of female delinquency, from the 'traditional' female crimes (such as prostitution and shoplifting) to a more violent and aggressive criminality. This apparent increase and change in female delinquency was attributed to the women's movement and was often described as the 'shady side of liberation.'

Freda Adler's book *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Offender* (1975a) was one of the seminal and widely publicized works of the period that posited a direct relationship between women's liberation and increases in female delinquency. She attracted a great deal of media attention for assertions that "the movement for full equality has a darker side... In the same way that women are demanding equal opportunity in the fields of legitimate endeavour, a similar number of determined women are forcing their way into the world of major crimes" (Adler, 1975b: 42). In other words, Adler believed that females were not merely passive beings, but were able to engage in autonomous action in a variety of domains, including that of crime.

Adler believed that technological advances that allowed women to choose when and if they were to have children, as well as those that freed them from domestic responsibilities, when coupled with the ideology of feminism, had 'masculinized' women, leading them to adopt an "imitative male machismo competitiveness" (Adler, 1975a: 98). Although this can be seen as a return to Lombroso and Ferrero's 'masculinity' theories of female criminality where women who took part in crime were

seen as taking on male characteristics through their participation in activities traditionally seen as 'non-feminine', it went beyond that. Adler and other advocates of the liberation hypothesis contended that the second wave of feminism had led all women to be more autonomous and less passive, characteristics which had been associated with men. They believed that, as a result of this, women were becoming involved in activities traditionally seen as male endeavours, including violent crimes. This connection between the blurring of male and female traits is borne out in Adler's view that:

The phenomenon of female criminality is but one wave in... (the) rising tide of female assertiveness - a wave which has not yet crested and may even be seeking its level uncomfortably close to the high-water mark set by male violence... (Females are now) robbing banks singlehandedly, committing assorted armed robberies, muggings, loan-sharking operations, extortions, murders, and a wide variety of other aggressive, violence-oriented crime (Adler, 1975a: 1, 14).

Not surprisingly, during this period when there were heightened concerns about the 'liberation of women' leading to supposedly large increases in female crime, and, more specifically violent crimes, the literature on aggression posited similar increases in female aggression. Although this literature did not generate the 'following' or capture the media attention that the literature on female crime did, it is interesting to note how similar lines of reasoning were used. For example, Frodi et al. (1977) casually note that the use of violence by young women seems to be increasing and that this is likely attributable to the changing place of women in society. As they put it "our observation is that appropriate roles for women are changing in our society; among the behaviors affected should be those that follow provocation and the arousal of anger in

women" (Frodi, Macaulay, Thome, 1977: 634). Once again, this seems to have been the beginning of the shift away from the idea of the passive female.

Similarly, Baron (1977) discusses the findings from investigations into male and female aggression and contends that "the strong and obvious sex differences reported in many early studies have all but totally vanished" (Baron, 1977: 219). In attempting to proffer up an explanation for this apparent change, Baron seems to buy into the 'liberation hypothesis':

(T)he apparent disappearance of clear-cut sex differences in aggression may be related to more general changes in sexual roles and stereotypes that have occurred in recent years... (T)hese changes have involved a reduction in passivity on the part of women, as well as growing self-esteem and confidence. Together, such shifts may have served to render women less inhibited about responding aggressively to direct provocation (Baron, 1977: 221).

Perhaps because the press was eager to "highlight" this direct link between feminism and female criminality (Chesney-Lind, 1986), the more indirect relationship proposed by some researchers has received relatively less attention. The indirect connection between feminism and female delinquency maintained that broader social changes were responsible for changes in female criminality. This viewpoint posited that "the feminist movement filters down to young, black, and poor women in the form of increasing criminal opportunities, growing group support for illegal behaviour, and weakening social controls, especially by parents" (James and Thornton, 1980: 230).

Almost immediately following the advent of these 'liberation' theories of female delinquency, there was a widespread and diverse proliferation of feminist research into the quandary in an attempt to determine if this relationship between apparent increases

and changes in female criminality was indeed due to the women's movement.

1.6.1 Testing the liberation hypothesis

Feminists initially tested the liberation hypothesis by exploring the accuracy of the data that pointed to an increase in female criminality. Almost immediately, these studies raised questions of whether the "increase" in female crime rates and the changing patterns of female criminality was real, or just a distorted image of reality (see Berger, 1989; Chesney-Lind, 1986; and Heidensohn, 1989 for overviews of this debate). Some researchers were unable to discern any significant increases in female violent offenses, and even found decreases in female arrests for murder and aggravated assault during the fifties, sixties and early seventies (Simon, 1975 cited in Berger, 1989: 380). Although some researchers did seem to find an increase in female crime rates, the major increases were concentrated in non-violent property crimes such as shoplifting and check forgery, crimes often seen as typically feminine (Steffensmeier, Steffensmeier, and Rosenthal, 1979, cited in Berger, 1989: 380).

It is quite difficult to determine if there has been an actual increase in female crime rates or delinquency, be it as a direct or an indirect result of the women's movement, partially because of the problematic nature of studying trends in crime statistics. It has been noted that there are a variety of reasons to be sceptical of reported increases in crime rates that rely on official crime statistics. An increasing crime rate may just as likely reflect a change in patterns of criminal reporting, which are influenced by both the willingness of citizens to report offences and of the police to lay

charges, than an actual increase in criminal activity (Begin, 1993). As society becomes less tolerant of violent crimes, particularly among acquaintances (e.g. sexual assault and domestic violence), these crimes are more likely to be reported and to result in charges.

The rise in these indicators [number of violent offense charges and violence-related youth court cases] to some extent may reflect an increase in societal sensitivity to youth violence. For example, a school-yard fist fight that would have resulted in an after-class detention a few years ago may now result in the laying of assault charges (Frank, 1992: 6).

Because of the problems inherent in trend analysis of crime rates, some have felt that a more useful indication of increasing delinquency would be to examine trends in self-reported delinquency among young women.

James and Thornton (1980) did explore both the direct and indirect influence of feminism and liberation on self-reported delinquency among a sample of high school girls living in a small, Northwestern, American city. They assessed respondents' attitudes towards feminism, self-reported social, property and aggressive delinquency patterns, and opportunities and social controls as a measure of the possible indirect influence of liberation (James and Thornton, 1980: 233-234).

They found no evidence of a direct relationship between attitudes toward feminism and self-reported delinquency for social and property delinquency, and although the relationship between attitudes toward feminism and aggressive delinquency was statistically significant, it was in the opposite of the direction predicted by the liberation theory (James and Thornton, 1980: 236). There was also no evidence that

women's liberation had an indirect influence on self-reported delinquency. On the basis of multiple regression analysis conducted on the direct and indirect liberation influences, James and Thornton concluded that:

First of all, we do find evidence that girls' attitudes towards feminism directly link to their involvement in property and aggressive delinquency. We do not, however, report that girls who are approving of feminism in terms of fighting for equal rights and advocating change in traditional gender roles are more likely to engage in delinquency than are girls who support more traditional positions. The opposite appears true: Favorable attitudes toward feminism inhibit involvement in property and aggressive offenses (James and Thornton, 1980: 243).

Other studies that have attempted to determine the direct influence of feminism on female criminality have come to similar conclusions. A review of several studies of female offenders highlights another shortcoming of this theory.

... (S)tudies of the characteristics of female offenders showed that they bore no resemblance to the liberated "female crook" being described in the media but were instead minority women drawn from backgrounds of profound poverty who had committed "traditionally female" crimes such as petty theft or prostitution (Chesney-Lind, 1986: 81).

Such findings, coupled with the fact that women have not really experienced major economic gains as a result of feminism (Chesney-Lind, 1986), have led some researchers to conclude that it is economic discrimination, not liberation, that explains the nature of women's crime (Giordano, Kerbel and Dudley, 1981 cited in Hagan, Simpson and Gillis, 1987). In other words, these researchers contend that the economic marginalization of women forces some women to resort to crimes such as theft and/or fraud as a means of survival.

Despite extensive critiques of the liberation thesis, and the fact that most social

researchers agree that "such a thesis was wrong" (Campbell, 1991: 278), its legacy persists in the nineties, perhaps most obviously in certain aspects of conservative culture:

Impelled by contemporary culture, their daughters are becoming not just difficult, but often violent and ruthless monsters. Modern women may have no one to blame but themselves, however. Girls, after all, are only following their foremothers' lead in seizing the torch of the 1970s' feminist cults of androgyny and victimhood and torquing it up to new extremes. And as they abandon traditional feminine domain for once-masculine arenas like commerce and politics, they are increasingly emulating less savoury male models- such as murderers and maimers (McGovern, 1995: 24).

The idea that violent crime is associated with women's 'liberation' still seems to have at least a small following within the academic community. For example, in an article on women who had killed which focused on non-domestic killings, the authors hypothesized that increasing opportunities for women in the drug trade have led to an increase in the use of violence by women. As they explained:

In traditional, business-model, male-dominated drug markets, women were likely to remain at the lower levels of the hierarchy... In the free-lance crack markets of the late 1980s, where anyone who could purchase a small amount of powder cocaine could start to sell drugs on their own, opportunities theoretically at least, opened to women as well as men to gain their own interest or stake in the drug business. And with the increased availability and use of weapons as a means of social control within the trade, women who had the will to be violent also had the means to use violence, even against larger and stronger adversaries. That is, crack appears to have opened opportunities for women in the drug business... And to reach the higher levels of that business, women would have to have been as violent as their male counterparts (Brownstein et al, 1994: 113).

The idea that women's liberation has led to an increase in female violent crimes obviously still resonates in some circles.

1.6.2 Why the 'backlash' against the liberation hypothesis?

Although the liberation hypothesis is rooted in some questionable propositions, the willingness to acknowledge that women and girls can be and are active participants in the world of violent crime was a major breakthrough in the field of research into female delinquency and female violence. Even though many of the premises of the theory were found to be flawed, it did lead to an incredible proliferation of research on female delinquency. The majority of this research, however, at least initially, has continued to cast women in the role of passive victims.

Since the 1970s, studies on female crime and delinquency have spanned the research spectrum to include research on girls and women as both criminals and victims of a wide variety of crimes, the treatment of females in the criminal justice system, and the exploration of female employees in the justice system. Feminist criminologists have worked to correct the male bias of the discipline through their examination of how the patriarchal structures of inequality are perpetuated in the criminal justice system, and how this inequality affects females who come into contact with the system, be they as criminals or as the victims of criminals. As one prominent feminist criminologist has noted:

Even if the police, the courts and prisons operated with total fairness to women in their own terms (and I do not think that they do) they would still be part of a society which has fundamental injustices based at its core... (P)rocedural justice has to be seen in its wider social context and in particular for women, in relation to the disadvantages they experience in society which makes them unequal to men even before they encounter the law (Heidensohn, 1986: 290-291).

Although this research has been very insightful and ground-breaking in many

ways, there seems to have been a much greater focus on the victimization of women than on their participation in criminal activities. Many feminist researchers have seemingly been much more comfortable casting women in the role of passive victim than with acknowledging their capability to be autonomous actors and active participants in all areas of the criminal culture. This trend has been even more pronounced in research on aggression and violence.

In fact, research advances in the area of female aggression have been much slower in coming. Research in this area has focused overwhelmingly on women as the victims of male violence. When the use of violence by women and girls has surfaced in research, it has almost always concentrated on 'domestic violence,' or perhaps more correctly, 'domestic killings,' focussing on women who are seen as driven to kill their abusive partners in self-defense (e.g., Walker, 1979; 1984; Browne, 1987).

One of the reasons that there is still a gap in the academic literature on violence is that many feminists have been reluctant to depict women as violent, but instead tend to portray an 'idealized' version of women as "moral mothers" who are "nurturant, compassionate, and... innately pacifist" (di Leonardo, 1985: 602). When female aggression is tackled by feminists (as in the case of domestic killings) it is often taken for granted that these women were 'forced' to be "individually violent in self-defense or vengeance" (di Leonardo, 1985: 603).

Some researchers have found themselves attacked by feminists for even considering concepts such as wives battering their husbands. Some feminists have felt that any discussion on 'husband battering' is problematic in that it focuses "on

women's aggression while failing to highlight the far more dangerous injuries inflicted by men" (Campbell, 1993: 180). Others have purported that wives only aggress against their husbands in self-defense and their violence should be seen as such, however there do not seem to have been any reliable data to support this contention (Campbell, 1993).

At the centre of the feminist reluctance to accept that women can be, and are, aggressive seems to be a concern that this recognition may result in a loss of popular, academic, and perhaps most importantly, political support for the eradication of violence against women since women will no longer be seen solely as victims. As Linda Gordon explains:

The obstacles to perceiving and describing women's own power have been particularly great in issues relating to social policy and to family violence, because of the legacy of victim blaming. Defending women against male violence is so urgent that we fear women's loss of status as deserving, political "victims" if we acknowledge women's own aggression (Gordon, 1986: 458).

This point of view has been openly questioned in recent years by other feminists and this has led to much fruitful research into the female use of crime and violence.

1.7 Recent advances in research into female delinquency and aggression

Recently, it has become much more difficult to sustain the belief that women are only passive victims who would never willingly make use of crime and violence. In fact, some feminists have begun to question the usefulness of perpetuating this myth. As Patricia Pearson explains:

(If we concede that women are ambitious, like men, and possess a will to power as men do, then we need to concede that women, like men, are capable of injuring others who thwart them. We cannot insist on the strength and competence of women in all traditional masculine arenas yet continue to exonerate ourselves from the consequences of power by arguing that, where the course of it runs more darkly, we are actually powerless. This has become an awkward paradox in feminist argument. How do we argue that we can be aggressive on every front - the Persian Gulf, the urban police beat, the empires of business, sport, hunting, politics, debate - but never in a manner that does harm? How do we affirm ourselves to be as complex, desirous, and independent as men without conceding the antisocial potential in those qualities? (Pearson, 1997: 32).

Similarly, Anne Campbell does not mince words when she notes that "However distasteful it may be politically to some ideological stakeholders, women are not only victims. They are as capable as men of being aggressors" (1993: 180). Furthermore, she believes that by only focussing on women's role as victims we are not helping women (or advancing our understanding of aggression). According to Campbell, "By stereotyping them (women) as helpless and passive, we sorely underestimate and oversimplify their complex and often conflicted sense of their own rights" (Campbell, 1993: 180).

Jane Flax has also asserted that:

Women may not be any less aggressive than men. We may express our aggression in different but equally culturally sanctioned and partially disguised or denied ways.... (W)e should not fall into the victim's viewpoint: That is, we need to avoid seeing women as totally innocent, acted upon beings. Such a view prevents us from seeing the areas of life in which women have had an effect, are not totally determined by the will of the other, and the ways in which some women have and do exert power over others (Flax, 1990: 181-182).

Working within a framework where women and girls are no longer simply seen

as passive victims has opened up new possibilities in feminist research, perhaps most noticeably in the fields of criminology and aggression research. By beginning to see women and girls as people who have power in various settings, feminist researchers have been able to start exploring more concretely how women and girls understand their use of violence. Recent work on female aggression has spanned the spectrum to include cross-cultural and anthropological studies of the use of violence and aggression by women and girls in non-western cultures (Burbank, 1987; Cook, 1992; Burbank, 1994, among others), the specific nature of aggression used by women as opposed to men (Björqvist, Österman, Kaukiainen, 1992; Glazer and Ras, 1994; Björqvist, 1994), and the importance of understanding the social context of females to make sense of their use of crime and violence (Campbell, 1993; Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992; Harris, 1988; 1994). These contributions will all be addressed briefly in turn.

1.7.1 Female aggression in non-western cultures

Much of the initial proliferation of research into the use of violence by females has tended to focus on specific cultural groups, noting that in certain parts of the world, women are not passive beings but active participants in the field of aggression. These studies have included, among others, cross-cultural comparisons of the use of aggression by females (Burbank, 1987), work on the use of aggression by Aboriginal women in Australia (Burbank, 1994), the role of fighting among females in Margarita, Venezuela (Cooke, 1992), the rules of violent confrontations by girls in Chihuahua, Mexico (Cummings, 1994), and the pervasiveness of violence in the lives of Mexican-

American gang girls (Harris, 1988; Harris, 1994).

These studies have all been useful in that they explicitly reject the notion that women are passive beings, incapable of using violence, but instead maintain that "women are aggressive, and in being aggressive, they potentially augment rather than diminish themselves" (Burbank, 1994: 184). However, because these studies often focus on specific cultural groups, the authors of these works tend to caution against generalizing from their findings to females in North American society. For example, in Cook's study of female aggression in Venezuela, she notes that "matrifocality is the central variable underlying culturally institutionalized patterns of female aggression in Margariteño society" (1992: 149), implying that her findings would not be replicated in patriarchal western societies.

Similarly, Burbank actually contrasts her findings about the normative nature of aggression among Australian Aboriginal females with North American women's understanding about, and use of, violence. For instance, after discussing a seemingly typical fight involving an Aboriginal women named Lily, Burbank notes how this would be seen as bizarre behaviour in the United States:

When asked if women attack each other at their place of work, in the aisles of a supermarket, or at town meetings, most white middle-class Americans would probably say that women do not fight. In the unlikely event that they would see women fighting, they might say that they were "lower class," "drunk," or "crazy" and certainly that their aggression represented chaos - a breakdown of all rules and civilized behavior. Aboriginal women from Mangrove might say that Lily was "mad" or "cranky" when she attacked her son's attackers; however, her fight represents a culturally patterned event from start to finish (Burbank, 1994: 74).

One of the explicit goals of Burbank's work is to elucidate how Aboriginal women's ability to "take the stance of aggressor" (Burbank, 1994: 19) makes them both more able and more willing "to combat the effects of male aggression" (Burbank, 1994: 19). She believes that this is something western women could also benefit from, however it is quite evident that she believes that the situation of Aboriginal women is quite unique and distinct from that of western women.

Such cultural studies of female aggression are useful in that they point out that not all females are passive, but many actually use aggression to their advantage to counter the effects of others. Unfortunately, they tend to be presented in contrast to the situation of women in western cultures, perhaps unwittingly perpetuating the belief that western women are still passive beings. That said, there has been some research into the use of aggression which has contended that this is in fact a myth and that all females are aggressive, however some women and girls tend to resort to different methods of aggression.

1.7.2 The specific nature of female aggression

Kaj Björkqvist has been one of the most prominent researchers in the field of female aggression. He and his colleagues have openly challenged what they call "the myth of the nonaggressive female" (Björkqvist and Niemelä, 1992: 1) and the belief that aggression and/or the use of violence is a male activity. However, he has also purported that "if we limit aggression to physical strategies only, then it is certainly true that males are more aggressive than females, at least in Western societies"

(Björkqvist, 1994: 178). Björkqvist and his colleagues instead contend that female aggression tends to be more indirect than that of their male counterparts (Björkqvist, Österman and Kaukianen, 1992; Björkqvist, 1994).

In an interview study conducted with adolescent girls, Björkqvist and his colleagues (1992) asked how their friends and enemies behaved when they were involved in conflicts with others. He concluded that these young women were more likely to use indirect aggression and manipulation such as gossip and letter writing in these battles than direct physical confrontation. Similarly, Glazer and Ras (1994) have purported that Arab Israeli women use indirect aggression through gossip to help affirm the social cohesion and cultural stability in their communities. Although they contend that the women do not themselves make use of direct, physical violence in these societies, they believe "Arab village women's gossip creates the climate in which the murder of a young woman is inevitable" (Glazer and Ras, 1994: 269).

Although these researchers do not believe that females are passive beings, they believe that women will resort to more manipulative means of aggression, and in some cases may expect men to carry out the physical aspects of aggression for them (Glazer and Ras, 1994). Other researchers have been more willing to acknowledge that women and girls can be, and are directly (i.e. physically) aggressive, albeit to varying degrees, based on their social context.

1.7.3 The importance of social context in understanding female aggression

Anne Campbell has made some of the most significant contributions to our

understanding of female aggression. She recently attempted to theorize about the use of violence by men and women and concluded that the two sexes have different understandings of their aggression (Campbell, 1993). Campbell contends that among middle class men and middle class women, "Both sexes see an intimate connection between aggression and control, but for women aggression is the *failure* of self-control, while for men it is the *imposing* of control over others" (Campbell, 1993: 1, emphasis in original). She believes that female aggression tends to be more of an expressive form of violence in that women aggress when they are driven to it by extreme anger or frustration, which is quite reminiscent of Dollard et al's (1939) frustration-aggression hypothesis. On the other hand, Campbell believes that male aggression is different in that "Aggression for men is what aggression achieves socially: It imposes control over other people, and in doing so creates winners and losers. It publicly affirms the masculine hierarchy" (Campbell, 1993: 55).

Campbell maintains that the social context and social position of men and women lead them to have different understandings and different feelings about the use of aggression. She proclaims quite pointedly that the problem with most theories is that they fail to deal with the importance of context. As she puts it, "Most theories of how people explain events completely ignore the fact that people live in a social context that determines the kinds of explanations they will accept" (Campbell, 1993: 16). It is Campbell's desire to highlight the importance of social context that leads her to acknowledge that this simple dichotomy of male aggression as instrumental and female aggression as expressive falls apart in settings (or contexts) other than that of the

middle class.

For example, Campbell's work on female gang members and their use of violence flies in the face of her notion that female aggression is purely expressive. She notes that girls in gangs seem to adopt a much more instrumental approach to the use of aggression out of necessity, in order to survive within the violent communities where they live. She purports that gang girls grew up in families and communities where they either witnessed a great deal of physical assaults and violence or were the victims of such abuse themselves. Within this context, the young women see the gangs as providing them with a certain degree of safety. As Campbell puts it, the gang "is a sisterhood of like-minded others and an escape from victimization by sheer force of numbers and a tough reputation" (1993: 136). These young women want to develop a reputation for being violent so that people will avoid getting into violent confrontations with them in the future and being a member in a gang seems to help them develop such a legacy. She contrasts this to the experience of male gang members who she sees as eager to exploit their violent reputations to further their potential as drug dealers or extortionists. Campbell maintains that "Girls in gangs are far less involved in these kinds of money-motivated crimes of violence. Aggression in their lives is a means of survival. Reputation is about preventing victimization, not about flashing a wad of bills" (1993: 140).

Campbell's research into female aggression highlights the problems with attempting to rely on universal theories to explain the meaning of violence. It helps to illuminate the importance of taking into consideration a person's social context when

trying to make sense of their behaviour. This is something that has been central in Chesney-Lind and her colleagues' work on female delinquency. They have been integral in acknowledging that, if we are to make sense of the delinquency among young women, we need to focus on their lives and their stories and question the continuing use of androcentric theories as a basis for trying to understand their actions.

As Chesney-Lind and Shelden explain:

In general... if a theory of female delinquency is to emerge, it must draw on the best of a flawed heritage. Theories of boys' delinquency cannot be completely rejected, but their uncritical grounding in male behavior must be recognized and corrected. Theories of female delinquency must get past commonsense constructions of femininity to a broader appreciation of the role of girls' situations and lives in their troubles with the juvenile justice system (1992: 79).

This study of young women and violence attempts to build on some of this recent ground-breaking research into female violence that has sought to incorporate women's and girls' stories and experiences into a more comprehensive understanding of what has traditionally been seen as 'male' behaviour. Instead of focussing on the 'victimization' of young women, I wanted to try and give 'bad girls' a voice, to let them tell us about their lives, their use of violence, and their understanding of that use of violence. I have attempted to answer the call of several feminist criminologists to address a vital gap in our literature on girl delinquency. Chesney-Lind and Shelden have bemoaned the fact that "only a few studies actually allow girls on the margin to speak about their whole lives, and only a very few look specifically at the lives of girls in the juvenile justice system" (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992: 166). This study attempts to do just that. The next chapter will outline the methods that were used in this

investigation.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the literature review, the traditional lacunae of research in female delinquency and female aggression has diminished in recent years as the notion that women and girls can be and are violent has gained acceptance both in the popular press and among a small group of academic researchers. Prior to this newfound interest in female aggression, there were a variety of androcentric theories which sought to explain the use of violence and delinquency, but these theories tended to ignore women and girls, at least partially because they regarded girls as passive beings, unable or unwilling to engage in violent acts. This study is an attempt to build on the growing field of research into female violence. In this study, I have tried to explore the distinctive ways in which young women make sense of the use of violence in their lives, while at the same time testing the insights of both the past theoretical work in delinquency and aggression and the applicability of recent findings with respect to female use of violence.

In order to accommodate these two issues, I was compelled to adopt a methodology that would allow young women to talk about their experiences with violence and what these experiences have meant to them, and yet still be able to test the utility of past theoretical works on violence and delinquency. In other words, the methodology employed in this study needed to "focus on the research participants' subjective reality" (March, 1995: 15) and how their reality fit with the previous

research into delinquency and violence.

In this chapter, I will summarize the methods I used in my attempt to capture the 'subjective reality' of a group of ten young women, living in both open and closed youth detention facilities, who had been identified by custodial staff as having a history of using violence against others. It will begin by outlining the objectives of the study, before providing a thorough description of the study design chosen and details about the construction of the interview schedule. The next section of the chapter will cover the problems encountered in attempting to gain access to the sample and how these complications were handled, before reviewing the details of the data collection process. I will then address some of the specifics of the sample and conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this research.

2.2 Study objectives

The primary objective of this study was to build on and continue more recent innovative research into female violence. More specifically, I sought to give young women who were known to be violent, and who had become enmeshed in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, a forum in which they could speak about their own experiences with violence. At the same time, I wanted to determine whether or not these stories 'fit' with both the more traditional theoretical understandings of the use of violence and delinquency and the insights of more contemporary research into female aggression.

Although I was aware that androcentric theories of delinquency and aggression

were flawed in their omission of the female experience, I still believed that these theories might have something useful to offer in order and thereby enhance our understanding of how and why women and girls become involved in crime and violence. Similarly, despite the fact that the more recent research into female violence and female delinquency has tended to focus on different populations than that of interest for this study, I believed that they offered some interesting new understandings of women's experiences and some useful guidelines with respect to the most effective methodological approach to use in accessing the lives and histories of women and girls. In other words, despite the flaws of these two theoretical and research traditions, I felt that they had both provided me with some useful insights for this study.

2.3 Study design

The methodological approach used in this study emerged out of these objectives. I chose to adopt an approach that allowed me to assess the applicability of previous theoretical works, while still leaving room for these young women to express their own understandings of their unique situations and circumstances, in their own words. To achieve these goals, I needed to choose an approach that would allow for a compromise between a highly structured survey-like method which stringently tested past theories, but did not allow for the development of new insights and new theories to emerge, and a completely unstructured format that would give the young women free rein to tell their stories, but would not necessarily allow for any meaningful analysis of the applicability of prior theoretical work. In the end, I decided that semi-structured

interviews were the most well-suited to this study because they would allow for a compromise between these two more 'extreme' methods.

All of the data for this study were gathered using semi-structured interviews. The decision to adopt a qualitative approach for this study was rooted in my interest in both testing the key insights of past theories, but also in adopting a feminist research method that would give a voice to those on the margins of society, and allow for the potential development of a grounded theory. The semi-structured interview seemed to be the most useful method to allow for the testing of the relevance of past concepts and ideas, while still leaving room for new ideas to emerge.

The semi-structured interview has been seen as a useful method to test the ability of past theories and their relevance to the lives of a specific group of people. As McCracken puts it, the semi-structured interview "establishes channels for the direction and scope of discourse" (1988: 24). In contrast, McCracken sees the unstructured interview as a much less focused endeavour in that it is "an ever-expanding realm of possibility in which the generative power of language is unleashed to potentially chaotic effect" (McCracken, 1988: 25). In order for semi-structured interviews to evaluate past theories, the interview schedule or questionnaire must be rooted in the past literature. In other words, the literature review helps to provide the basis for developing a questionnaire or interview schedule that will probe the pertinence of past theories. As McCracken explains, the literature review "begins to establish the domain the interview will explore. It specifies categories and relationships that may organize the data... It helps to determine what the respondents should ask about and what he or she should

listen for" (1988: 31).

Although the semi-structured interview is useful in helping to judge the utility of past theories, and my own interview schedule was based, at least in part, on the past research into delinquency and aggression (as will be discussed more thoroughly in the following section), examining past theories was only one of the goals of this research. Even if some of the previous androcentric theories proved to be useful in helping us understand how and why young women become violent, they would still fail to help us understand the importance of gender in explaining female delinquency and female aggression. Chesney-Lind and Shelden have criticized the practice of simply testing past androcentric theories as follows:

All the established theories of delinquency were developed with no awareness of and concern about gender and, more specifically, gender stratification. Clearly, though, gender has a dramatic effect on most aspects of girls' lives. Attempts to adapt male-oriented theory to explain female conformity and deviance must, then, start from the realization that all theories of delinquency were built around the lives and experiences of males, whose development, behavior, and options are radically different from that of females (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992: 80).

Furthermore, even if some of the recent research into the specifics of female aggression were found to be applicable to the young women in this study, this research has tended to focus on specific populations that are different from the population of interest in this study. If I only tested the insights of these theories, it would be easy to overlook those issues that are of unique importance to the experiences of young Canadian women, living in custodial institutions.

As a result of these concerns, instead of solely testing past theories, this study

has also stemmed from the belief that "a feminist model of delinquency would focus more extensively on the few pieces of information available about girls' actual lives and the role played by girls' problems... in their delinquency behavior" (Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992: 81). Semi-structured interviews have been seen as useful tools for searching out new insights in a theoretical field. As Reinharz has purported, research based on semi-structured interviews "explores people's views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory. In this way it complements quantitatively oriented, close-ended interview research that tries to test hypotheses" (1992: 18).

By exploring the past assumptions of research into delinquency and aggression prior to beginning my study, I sought to incorporate some of these insights into my interview schedule, but also to raise my awareness of how the young women that I spoke with might have had different experiences with violence than those previously discussed in the research. McCracken highlights how this is possible as follows:

A good literature review... enables the investigator to define problems and assess data. It provides the concepts on which precepts depend. But the literature review has a special importance for the qualitative researcher. This consists of its ability to sharpen his or her capacity for surprise... The investigator who is well versed in the literature now has a set of expectations that the data can defy. Counterexpectational data are conspicuous, readable, and highly provocative data. They signal the existence of unfulfilled theoretical assumptions, and these are... the very origins of intellectual innovation. A thorough review... is a way to let the data of one's research project take issue with the theory of one's field (McCracken, 1988: 31).

In other words, by knowing about the major tenets of past research, I was more adequately equipped to understand when, how, and why the experiences of the young women did not 'fit' with the past theoretical works and was able to begin to attempt to

generate new theories based on the data.

In fact, the adoption of a qualitative method of inquiry has been seen as advantageous in that it can help further the development or 'discovery' of theory from data. The notion of using data to generate theory was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. In this book they lament what they see as a trend in sociology towards merely using sociological methods to verify past theories, as opposed to using various methods to generate data on which theory can then be grounded. As they explain, "He (sic) has been trained only to research and verify his (sic) facts, not also to research and generate his (sic) explanation of them" (1967: 4). They contend that "grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses" (1967: 3).

Although Glaser and Strauss believe that grounded theory can stem from both qualitative and quantitative analyses, qualitative research is especially well suited to generating theory from data. As Strauss (1987) points out, one of the most basic questions facing a researcher is how to make sense of the complexity of reality. Qualitative research can, ideally, capture the subtleties (or complexities) of the phenomena of interest, and arguably allows for more flexibility in data collection and analysis than does quantitative research.

In order to allow for the possible generation of new theory, rooted in the lives and experiences of young women, I tried to adopt a methodological approach that focused specifically on the lives of girls and women and gave them a forum in which they could express their concerns and experiences in their own words. To this end,

Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna's *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (1989) served as a guiding framework for this study. Their explanation of the utility of employing methodologies that allow the voices of those who have been previously ignored in the research domain to be heard, fit well with the goals of this research project:

The methodology of research from the margins is based on the commitment to advancing knowledge through research grounded in the experience of living on the margins. We do not want to contribute further to the public silencing of voices from the margins. Instead, we want to do research in a way that creates opportunities to reclaim and re-name that experience. We want methods that will enable people to identify and examine how living on the margins affects their lives, their opportunities, the way they think and act. In this way we can begin to focus on the social relations which daily help to construct that experience. In particular, methods from the margins must focus on describing reality from the perspective of those who have traditionally been excluded as producers of research (Kirby and McKenna, 1989: 64).

Kirby and McKenna assert that "research activities should empower the people who are usually merely the objects of research" (1989: 41). The use of semi-structured interviewing has been seen as a useful way to allow research participants to be more than just the objects of research. In fact, many feminist scholars have long been advocates of the use of semi-structured interviews and have acknowledged that this type of interviewing is the "principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives" (Graham, 1984: 112). This concern with ensuring that research participants are given an active role in constructing their stories stems primarily from the past exclusion of women from this process (Reinharz, 1992). Put somewhat differently, semi-structured

interviews have been recognized as a fruitful method of data collection, as well as one that allows study participants to tell their stories in their own voices, and in their own words. McCracken explicitly outlines the value of semi-structured interviews as follows:

The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing... The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they see themselves (1988: 9).

I will now turn to the details of the construction of the interview schedule, with the aim of highlighting both how I sought to incorporate questions to test the hypotheses of past theories and also to leave room for the young women to discuss topics that were not specifically addressed in the schedule.

2.4 The construction of the interview schedule

Bearing in mind the objectives of this research, I attempted to develop an interview schedule that would allow me to probe into the insights of past theoretical works, but still give the young women I spoke with room to express their own views on previously unaddressed issues. The semi-structured interview schedule was useful in that although it provided me with a guiding framework for the interviews, it was a "flexible procedure" which afforded me "the opportunity to probe, explore emerging issues, and extend the discussion into relevant areas" (March, 1995: 22).

After having completed the literature review, I developed a key set of themes that I wanted to ensure were covered with each of the young women interviewed for

this study. The interview schedule was divided into six sections, including the initial introductory section where I explained to the research participants what the interviews were all about. The five remaining sections included views on the social acceptability of violence; experiences with and/or use of violence; peers' attitudes toward violence and involvement with violence; family background and use of violence; and personal information including schooling to date and, where applicable, personal histories in the child welfare system.

Within these six broad themes, I attempted to incorporate questions to test some of the insights and hypotheses of both the traditional theories of crime and aggression and some of the more recent research into female violence, in order to try to understand what violence meant to these ten young women. I was interested in discerning the extent of these young women's involvement in the use of violence in order to test some of the assumptions of the theories discussed in the previous chapter. More specifically, I wanted to determine whether or not these young women were active participants in the world of violent crime, or if they were passive victims who had been coerced into this behaviour by others. If the young women indicated that they were involved in violence, I wanted to delve into these experiences to try and understand how they explained their actions, and whether these explanations were similar to those posited in previous theories.

For example, I included questions in the interview schedule which probed into the young women's feelings before, during, and after having engaged in violent confrontations. These questions sought to test the plausibility of the frustration-

aggression hypothesis and Anne Campbell's notion that women experience aggression as a loss of control due to extreme emotions. I also developed a set of questions concerning whether or not there were rules governing the use of violence to test both the subcultures of violence and learning theories. Similarly, I incorporated questions about the use of violence among the young women's peers and family members to see if violent behaviour was something they considered normative, testing the pertinence of differential association theory, as well as the subcultures of violence and social learning theories.

Although I spent some time developing the list of issues that I wanted to try and address with each of the young women interviewed, the interview schedule remained more of an 'interview outline' in that it consisted primarily of the key themes that I wanted to cover with each of the young women, but was not a formally scripted list of questions. As explained above, one of the reasons that I avoided relying on a highly structured interview was that I wanted to allow the young women to describe their experiences in their own words, and to try to avoid steering them in any specific direction. This also seemed like the most appropriate way to allow for the emergence of new and interesting issues which had not previously been addressed in the academic literature.

I tried to let questions evolve naturally out of a process of careful listening, introducing new questions as the interviews proceeded, and probing in new directions that the young women seemed most comfortable and interested in discussing. In other words, I sought to adopt an interview process where "the interviewer, the interview,

and the study become interviewee oriented" (Reinharz, 1992: 21). When new issues were raised by the participants that had not originally been considered as one of the themes to explore, I would try to follow their lead and ask them more questions about those issues. When certain issues began to emerge time and again in the interviews, I attempted to incorporate them into my list of topics to address. This helped to ensure that the young women that were interviewed all remained active participants in the research process and were not merely relegated to the role of research 'objects.'

2.5 Gaining access

All ten of the young women interviewed were living in either open or closed custody institutions run by two different agencies, which will be referred to as Centre A and Centre B throughout the rest of this paper. Centre A is a closed custody facility which houses young offenders serving sentences for a variety of offenses, ranging from running away from open custody facilities, to robbery, to murder. Centre A houses approximately thirty young offenders at any given point in time, the majority of whom are male. In fact, when Centre A was first contacted about this project in the spring of 1997, there were only four young women incarcerated on their premises and based on discussions with both the Director of the centre and the study participants living there, this is fairly typical.

Centre B is a much less specialized agency than Centre A, offering a variety of programs for youth in the Ottawa area, including a crisis intervention centre, a secure treatment facility, and open custody community residences. Although some of the

youth living in the care of this agency are serving dispositions for convictions under the *Young Offenders Act*, many are either wards of the Children's Aid Society or have been remanded to custody for 'mental health' reasons, which include such things as running away from a foster home, and 'acting out', in general.

There were two primary obstacles that I encountered in my attempts to gain access to the young women living under the care of these two agencies. These included assuaging the concerns the directors had about 'protecting' their clients and ensuring that their institutions would not be placed in a 'compromising position' as a result of the research. It was not surprising that these agencies were quite 'protective' of their clients because the youth living under their supervision are between the ages of twelve and seventeen. The agencies, quite rightfully, wanted to ensure that the young women I met with would not be exploited in any way by my research. The Director at Centre A raised several concerns that I needed to address before he would agree to allow me to talk with any of the young women in his care.

His anxiety about the project centred primarily around possible disclosures of abuse. He wanted to know what I planned to do if I was told of a situation of abuse, be it a case where a girl had been the victim of abuse, or where a girl reported having abused someone else. He indicated that the law required that any new disclosures of abuse be reported. He then requested that I pass on any stories of abuse that I was told by the young women to the staff working in the Centre. In fact, he actually asked if I would provide the Centre with copies of my interview notes after each interview so that the staff members would be aware of what had transpired during the course of the

interview.

Instead of agreeing to pass on my interviews notes, which would have violated the confidentiality of the research participants, we decided that if any of the young women started to tell me about seemingly new disclosures of abuse they had suffered, I would let her know that if she told me any more information I would have to pass it on to the staff at the Centre. Similarly, we agreed that anything the young women told me about situations where they had abused someone else was technically hearsay and not something that would necessarily need to be reported to the authorities. However, if any of the young women became too explicit in revealing the details of their encounters, and I became uncomfortable with the situation, I would either warn them that they should avoid being so specific, or simply move on to the next topic. Finally, we agreed that after each interview I would have an informal 'debriefing' session with the staff on duty to let them know if anything I had discussed with the young women had upset them or would be something they would be wanting to talk about with staff later.

His second concern dealt with how I would maintain the confidentiality of the young women that were interviewed because they were all young offenders and their identity is protected by law. I told him that I intended to ask each of the young women to choose a pseudonym for the interview so that no one would ever be able to identify them as having been a part of the study. I also explained that any other information which was disclosed during the course of the interviews that could be used to identify one of the young women (e.g. names of friends, place names, etc) would be changed.

His final concern pertained to the fact that most of the young women were not yet sixteen and would require permission from their parents or legal guardians to participate in this study. I explained that I would draft a permission form and he agreed to contact the young women's guardians to get them signed.

The director at Centre B was much more amenable to the research project right from the beginning since another graduate student had conducted a similar study with young women living in their care in 1994/95 (Swern, 1995). She was, therefore, already familiar with the procedures which had been used at that time with regards to confidentiality, obtaining parental permission, etc (Swern, 1995). She simply asked me to send her a copy of the topics that I planned to cover in my interviews as well as the permission letter for the parents and legal guardians. She then had one of her staff members start to identify those young women that had a known history of violent behavior and to obtain permission for their participation in the study. It seemed to take much longer to obtain permission for the young women living under the care of Centre B to be interviewed than was the case with Centre A. Apparently, because many of these young women were legally wards of the Children's Aid Society (CAS), it was their CAS workers who had to agree to have them to participate in the study. Many of the workers wanted to check with their supervisors before consenting to the project, adding to the delay.

I ended up conducting interviews with all four of the young women incarcerated in Centre A in July, 1997. Six of the young women living under the care of Centre B were interviewed during the month of August.

2.6 Data collection

During the course of the interviews, I made a conscientious effort to employ a variety of interviewing techniques to build rapport with the young women. Overall, my goal was to play down the status differences between myself and the participants in order to help earn their respect and trust, and hopefully allow them to be honest and upfront with me (Reinharz, 1992). That said, it is important to note that these young women were no doubt aware that there was an imbalance of power between us. Despite the efforts that I made to play down this difference in power, it would be naive to assume that the young women felt that it had been eliminated. To this end, however, I did make a conscientious effort to allow the participants to help structure the format of the interviews, and to some extent, as discussed above, the interviews themselves. This is consistent with other feminist research which has tried to avoid controlling others and to ensure that participants are active in the research process (Reinharz, 1992: 20).

With this in mind, before each interview began, I asked each of the young women if it would be okay if I tape recorded our meeting, but if this made them uncomfortable, I would just take notes. All of the young women agreed to be taped, which allowed me to focus more on our discussions and less on trying to record on paper every detail of our meeting.

I also asked each of the young women to choose their own 'alias' for the study. Although some of the young women seemed to appreciate this exercise, several opted not to do so. When a young woman did not choose a pseudonym for the study, I still assured her that I would change her name when the interviews were transcribed so that

she could not be identified later.

I also attempted to let these young women feel that they could tell me their stories in their own words. For example, a few of the young women apologized for swearing during the interview and I quickly assured them that that was perfectly acceptable. Similarly, I tried to let them know that I valued their expertise and that, in fact, they had much more personal knowledge about this topic than I did. For example, I often asked the young women to clarify certain slang terms or euphemisms such as 'lips skids', 'doing oil', etc., that I was not familiar with. This seemed to help put them at ease and let them know that they were indeed helping me out and making a useful contribution to this study.

At the beginning of the interviews, I asked each of the young women if they had any questions or concerns that they would like addressed, either about the study or about myself. Similarly, at the end of each interview I asked the young women if there were other issues that they thought were important or interesting that they wanted to discuss, or if they had any further questions for me. This was done to help emphasize that they had a say in the interview process and to let them know that I was equally willing to share my own experiences with them. This is something that other feminist researchers have noted has helped put research participants at ease and to feel more comfortable discussing personal issues (Oakley, 1981). In fact, Ann Oakley has purported that to avoid doing so can be detrimental to the interviewing process. As she puts it, "an attitude of refusing to answer questions or offer any kind of personal feedback was not helpful in terms of the traditional goal of promoting 'rapport'"

(Oakley, 1981: 49).

The interviews were all conducted in a variety of different settings. All four of the interviews at Centre A were held in a private room just off the front lobby of that facility. The six young women from Centre B came from three different facilities. The first interview was with a girl living in their secure treatment facility and also took place in a private room off the lobby of the building. The next four interviews were conducted in the backyard of one of the open custody residential facilities and the last interview was held at a park across from another one of the open custody residences.

The interviews ranged in length from ninety to one hundred and thirty minutes. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews. In the process of transcribing, I tried to ensure that the written interviews mirrored the oral interviews as closely as possible. I included slang, linguistic nuances, and, whenever possible, those aspects of non-verbal communication, such as extended silences and laughter, that were recorded during the course of the interviews. As a researcher who is explicitly concerned with allowing young women to have their voices heard in their own manner, it was important to me to ensure that their voices on paper corresponded with their actual spoken (or unspoken) voices. This is something that has also been seen as important to many feminist researchers (Reinharz, 1992: 40).

I attempted to compensate for any time lags in transcriptions by writing down my thoughts and comments immediately following each interview. This included notes on the demeanour of the young women I spoke with, aspects of their body language that communicated their mood, observations about the facilities in general, details of

any conversations that occurred either before or after the 'official' interviews with the young women, and my own personal reflections on how I felt after each interview.

Recording one's reflections on both the research content and the research process is something that has been seen as an important aspect of "researching from the margins." As Kirby and McKenna explain, these reflections are "the beginning of the evolving analysis" (1989: 125), and recording them "enables you to become more skillful and intuitive as a researcher" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989: 126).

This process did indeed prove useful in helping me question the assumptions of past research and forcing me to not "take for granted the very things that are supposed to be the object of the research" (McCracken, 1988: 31). For example, immediately following the first interview I began to question the validity of seeing these young women as passive victims. Furthermore, during my reflections, I noted that even though these young women told me stories that seemed fairly 'crazy' given my social background and experiences, when they described them to me, they obviously did not see their behaviour as bizarre. Instead, these young women seemed to believe that their actions were fairly normal. This helped me begin to realize the vital importance of social context in understanding the behaviour of these young women. This process of recording my reflections about the interviews also made me realize that I needed to peruse some of the literature on institutions in an attempt to understand the specific impact of institutionalization on these young women.

2.7 The sample

Ten young women were interviewed during the course of this study. Although most of the young women interviewed were 14, they ranged in age from 12 to 16, a group commonly known as 'phase one offenders' for the purposes of administering the *Young Offenders Act* in Ontario.

Four of the young women were the only female residents of Centre A, the closed custody facility for young offenders. Two of these young women had an extensive history of convictions under the *Young Offenders Act* and reported that they had been in and out of closed custody facilities since their twelfth birthdays. These two young women were not from the Ottawa area, but had been transferred there from other facilities in Ontario, apparently because the staff in the juvenile justice system believed that a different setting might help to 'straighten them out.' The other two young women that were interviewed at Centre A were in a closed custody facility for either the first time, or one of the first times. One of these young women had also been transferred to the Ottawa area from another region of Ontario.

The remaining six young women that were interviewed were all under the care of Centre B. One of them was in the secure treatment facility, and the other five were living in open custody residential homes. Most of the young women living in the residential homes had been there for at least one year; only one had lived there for just under six months.

Although I did not specifically inquire about the racial or ethnic background of the young women I spoke with, only one made a point of speaking about her

background as an Aboriginal Canadian. The other young women all appeared to be white. English was the mother tongue of all of the young women I interviewed.

All of the young women were voluntary participants in the study. Each was asked by my initial contact person if they would be willing to talk with a student about young women and violence and their own personal history of using violence. All agreed to do so and were not offered any type of remuneration for their participation. The young women were all informed that they would only have to talk about those things that they felt comfortable discussing. When I felt that someone was not at ease with a certain topic, I tried to avoid delving into that area because I wanted to ensure that the young women felt that they had some power to decide which intimate details of their lives they wanted to remain private.

2.8 Limitations of the study

As is the case with most research, there are a few important limitations of this study that need to be addressed. Perhaps the most obvious limitation of this research is that the sample of young women interviewed for this study was not selected randomly. Random selection involves a process whereby each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected for study (Singleton et al, 1993: 144). Inclusion in this study sample was specifically restricted to young women, living in custodial institutions, who had been identified by staff as having a history of using violence. Because the sample involved such a specific group of young women, the findings should not and indeed cannot be seen as generalizable to the rest of the population.

In addition to this drawback, two of the other glaring limitations of this methodological approach are that there is no way to verify whether or not the young women I spoke with were telling me the 'truth' about their experiences, and the findings are based on just one meeting with each girl.

Several researchers have noted that interviews can lead to a biased perception of 'reality' since it is based solely on the research participants' interpretation of events. For example, Becker and Geer have observed that "things may be reported in an interview through such a distorting lens, and the interviewer may have no way of knowing what is fact and what is distortion..." (1957: 30). However, I do not believe that this a major problem in this research project. Although Becker and Geer were concerned that research participants can distort 'facts' through their own interpretations (1957), this research is specifically interested in trying to understand the *subjective* reality of young women who use violence, and not with trying to determine the *objective* reality of their violent encounters. This position is summarized nicely by McKenna and Kirby as follows:

A research participant may provide an account of a situation that in the eyes of the researcher is "untrue." There are distortions and inaccuracies in all information, and the researcher will need to decide whether to check the information against fact or accept the participant's account as one the participant accepts and knows to be true. In the method of researching from the margins, it is the perceptions of the participants that are being sought, their understanding of social reality. Be prepared to listen and hear the participants' story of their reality (Kirby and McKenna, 1989: 124).

In other words, I was not as interested in discerning the 'truth' of the situations the young women described to me, whatever the 'truth' may be, but in how they made

sense of their lives and, indeed, how they presented the stories of their lives is also useful data. This position has been adopted by several researchers over the past couple of decades. For example, Anne Campbell has asserted that "social representations of acts or beliefs constitute a legitimate focus of research in its own right" (1984: 143). Berkowitz's statement of faith in the data he gathered in an interview study of violent men in British prisons also highlights this perspective and indeed is equally applicable to this study:

As in any interview study... we cannot be certain that the answers were always accurate, or for that matter, that the men even tried to be entirely truthful. Our candid impression is that they were usually straightforward. But even if they distorted their replies on occasion, seeking to put the best face on their behavior, how did they attempt to justify their actions? Any self-serving answers to our questions could also tell us what they think are the important values and ideals guiding social conduct (Berkowitz, 1978: 152).

Another perhaps more troubling concern about this research has to do with the fact that there was only one interview held with each of the research participants. Because of the difficulties arranging the interviews, and because of the time constraints that I was under in order to complete the data collection for this thesis, I was not able to arrange to interview the young women more than once. This is problematic for two reasons. First of all, because I only met with each girl once, they did not have a lot of time to grow comfortable with me and some of them may have felt inhibited about discussing personal issues such as their own victimization. This is particularly problematic given the obvious power differential between me and these young women, as discussed above. As mentioned earlier, however, I did make an effort to develop a

certain amount of trust with the young women and, based on the data collected in these interviews, this did not seem to be a big problem.

The second problem with only having one interview was that if I realized after an interview that there were issues raised by the young women that I did not explore satisfactorily, there was no way to go back and do so. In the future, it might be useful to plan to have at least one follow-up session with each research participant in an attempt to cover previously unaddressed matters.

Finally, I think it is important to note that this study might well have been enhanced if I had included some participant observation in my research. Initially, I had dismissed the idea of doing participant observation because it did not seem to be a viable option. I still believe that participant observation in public settings would have likely proven to be a long, arduous, and not necessarily fruitful endeavour since violence and aggression have been seen as having a "low base rate of occurrence in public situations" (Campbell, 1984: 139). In other words, because violence is a relatively rare public event, it would have likely taken a long time to observe enough violent encounters that involved young women to come up with useful data for analysis.

However, the interviews I conducted with the ten young women have led me to believe that participant observation within the custodial institutions that they lived in would be quite useful in helping to enhance our understanding of how the youth and staff interact in these environments, what types of situations create tension in the facilities, and when and how these 'tensions' escalate into violent encounters. In the

future, studies of young women and violence might want to include both an interviewing and a participant observation component to their research.

3.0 Young women and violence: The contradictions and complexities

3.1 Introduction

The use of violence and aggression in western cultures has almost always been presented in a pejorative light, and this is particularly true of interpersonal violence. In other words, with the exception of certain specific acts, such as war, western cultures have almost unanimously agreed that violence is pernicious. Western cultures have not only purported that the use violence is corrosive, but they have also assumed that violence is the prerogative of men. As we have seen in the literature review, both academics and the popular press have portrayed women as passive beings, incapable of autonomous action, and consequently, incapable of choosing to behave violently. When women have been violent, there are very few rationales offered for their actions, and those that do exist are rooted in prejudicial or sexist assumptions about female nature. As a recent author on female aggression pointed out in an interview with the Ottawa Citizen, "The operative assumption is that the violent women couldn't have wanted, deliberately, to cause harm. Therefore, if she says she was abused/coerced/insane, she probably was" (McLeod, 1997: A2).

This monolithic understanding of violence as both male and evil is not typical of many non-western societies, as was demonstrated by Victoria Burbank in her work on aggression among Aboriginal women in Australia (Burbank, 1994). The ten young women that I interviewed also failed to endorse this dominant western view of

violence. Instead, these young women seemed to have a decidedly complex understanding of violence. According to them, violence is neither wholly good, nor wholly bad. Throughout this chapter I will explore in some depth what these ten young women thought about violence and how they made sense of the violence in their lives. I will begin by providing an overview of how these young women define violence, and their thoughts and feelings vis-à-vis violent behaviour. This will lead into a discussion of some of the rules of violence as they were explained to me by these young women. I will focus first on the prescriptive rules for the use of violence, that is, what these young women saw as legitimate reasons for engaging in violent action. I will then concentrate on some of the more detailed proscriptive rules for violence, which pertained to specific behaviours which were deemed to be unacceptable in 'fair fights'. The chapter will conclude by examining how the young women's complex and often contradictory understandings of violence were related to their sense of self.

3.2 What did these young women see as violence? How did they feel about the use of violence?

As was noted earlier in this work, academics have tended to offer fairly nebulous definitions of violence and/or aggression. What some academics called violence, others referred to as aggression. Still others tend to use the two terms interchangeably as if they were simply synonymous. At the outset of each interview, I asked the young women to tell me what they thought of when they heard the term violence, that is, what violence meant to them. Unlike academics, there seemed to be a fairly high level of

consensus among these young women about what violence was. In fact, all ten young women spoke specifically of physical aggression when they were asked about violence.

What follows are some of the responses that the young women gave when asked to explain what violence made them think of:

Violence. It makes me think of fighting and things like that... Fighting, like with a bat. Fighting with... your fists or with your knee. Taking a person and cutting them. Kicking people in the face (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

Street violence, like fighting on the street, and you think of gangs and, you know, abusive relationships... (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997).

Fighting (pause), killing (pause), things like that (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

(H)itting things and throwing things and getting angry and getting aggressive with people (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Well, when I think of violence I think of like the shootings at Rideau and people getting stabbed and all the killing, like killing (pause). Anything that has to do with using your physical ability. And using weapons (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

Physical abuse or somebody inflicting abuse on somebody... like one person inflicting pain onto someone else, rather than onto property or themselves, you known what I mean? (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

What was immediately obvious from these young women's responses was that all of them seemed to see violence as a physical activity, which was often associated with fighting. Although some of the young women did mention aggression as something they connected to violence, they focused primarily on physical aggression. Furthermore, all of the descriptions of violent situations that the young women were either personally involved in, or had known people to participate in, dealt with physical

violence and not the 'indirect' forms of aggression, such as gossip or trying to get others to dislike someone, that have been most commonly associated with females (Björkqvist, Österman and Kaukianen, 1992).³

Although the young women offered similar, fairly restricted definitions of violence, they were all much more ambiguous about their feelings with regard to violence and, more specifically fighting, which is the aspect of violence that came up most often in these interviews. In fact, each of the young women presented conflicting and sometimes contradictory views on violence and fighting. At times, especially when asked explicitly about how they felt during and after a fight, the young women expressed regret and guilt about having behaved violently. Other times, the young women would tell me about violent confrontations that they had actually enjoyed being a part of, or at the very least, had thought they were compelled to participate in.

3.2.1 Feelings of guilt and regret about fighting

Many of the young women reported that they had feelings of regret or guilt about having participated in a fight or aggressing violently against others. Typically, the young women seemed to indicate that their regret materialized after the fact, once they had had time to reflect on what had transpired. The young women's regret about fighting seemed to focus primarily on three key issues: feeling angry at themselves for 'losing control', feeling that fighting was a 'waste of time', and feeling badly about

³It is important to note that several of the young women did indicate that they had felt compelled to participate in violent confrontations in order to defend themselves and/or those close to them from these indirect forms of aggression such as particularly pernicious name-calling.

hurting others.

Several young women reported that they regretted fighting because they believed it meant they had lost control by letting others get to them. As Natacha put it, "If I get charged, it's because I got mad and I did something really stupid and I regret that" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997). She explained to me that when she gets mad, she just "flips out" and does not think about what she is doing. Koryn also got annoyed with herself when she reacted violently to people. This was obvious from her response to my question about how she felt when she participated in a fight:

I don't know. I feel stupid after because it's like, I sit there 'that was a really dumb thing to do.' It was like stupid because then I'm wasting my time. I'm letting somebody get under my skin. And normally I'm the type of person that's like 'I'm not going to let them take my power and make me get mad.' Because I mean they can pick and they can pick and they can pick and try to get me mad, but if I don't get mad at them, then it just shows that I'm a better person because they're being an idiot. And that's the normal person that I am. But I dunno, when I get in a fight, I'm just like 'damn. I let them get to me.' (Interview # 6, August 4, 1997).

Not only does Koryn indicate that she got upset with herself for reacting to other people's taunts, but she apparently saw this behaviour as a 'waste of time'.

Several other young women also reported that they did not like fighting because they saw it as a waste of time since "violence doesn't show anything. It's the easy way out" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997). The young women who felt this way often seemed to see violence and fighting as a waste of time either because they do not believe it 'solves anything' or because it has led to problems with the legal authorities, which was something they all claimed they wanted to avoid. For example, when I asked one of the

young women what she meant when she said that fighting "is not worth it," she replied:

You're gonna get charged, you're gonna get off program here, which means you have to stay in your room like forever. Oh, you have the cops. People lose respect in me. I'd probably lose respect in myself. I mean like oh my god I've been doing so good and then, you know, I go off and fight somebody, but I don't think I'm gonna fight when I get out... The court thing, I'll probably be on probation, as I said, and it's just not worth it anymore. I used to think it was the thing to do, but not anymore (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997).

Fiona's experiences with fighting had been primarily as part of the many group fights she told me took place in her community. She indicated that she thought these encounters were quite silly and definitely a waste of time. When I asked her how she and her friends felt when youth from other neighbourhoods started showing up in their community in search of fights, this was her response:

Just that it was pathetic. I mean basically everybody was like "Who the hell comes down here for a fight?" And then everybody of course was gonna fight them, but I mean it's stupid. It's a waste of time. Don't people have better things to do? I mean let's all be passive aggressive. Let's just get them back in another way. I mean it's a waste of time cause either way, you know, somebody's like (pause). Somebody's gonna get hurt (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

In this response, Fiona revealed that she not only saw fighting as pointless, but also that she did not like it when people got hurt when they fought. This concern about hurting others was expressed time and again in the interviews as perhaps the primary reason that the young women disliked fighting. "I don't like hurting people. I've been hurt so I know how it feels..." (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997) was a common sentiment expressed in the interviews. The fact that the young women did not like to hurt people seemed to cause them to feel guilty both during, and after their fights, as the following

passage highlights:

I know what it's like to be a victim or whatever and that's like what I was thinking when I looked into that girl's eyes before I punched her I was like "ooohhh" and I felt guilty for it so I punched her some more. [What about afterwards. Did you feel guilty?] Yeah (pause). Well I was mad... but ummmm (pause). I regretted it (pause). I was like 'Oh god, what did I do? And I dunno, I guess I try not to think about it, but I feel guilty about it. (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Other young women also indicated that they felt guilty about hurting the other person they were fighting and that this was part of what made them stop the confrontation. For example, when I asked Carolyn what made her stop beating a young woman who had accused her of being a racist, she replied "Cause nobody deserves that. No matter what they say or no matter what they do, nobody deserves to be in pain like that" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

Another one of the young women told me that she sometimes felt so badly about hurting someone in a fight that she would bring that person to her home to try and help 'fix' them up:

That was always why I had a problem with fighting - cause I didn't like hurting other people... Like I remember once I kicked the shit out of this girl... and then she left... (S)o anyways I'm going home, I follow her and then I brought her back to my place and like "Okay. I'm sorry." And I felt so bad cause like I mean I didn't... I didn't really hurt her bad it was just like "okay fine. Come to my place. Dammit I'll fix your face or whatever. Call your mom. Get a drive. I don't care." (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

Fiona was the only young woman to report that she had actually helped to take care of her 'victim' after her attack. She contended that her girlfriends had also done this on several occasions, but that it was not something her male friends would do. Although

this situation was likely the most extreme example of the mixed and indeed contradictory feelings these young women had about violence, many of them obviously felt torn between what they believed were the negative aspects of fighting and the fact that they sometimes believed that fighting was necessary.

3.2.2 Constrained choices about fighting

Despite the fact that almost all of the young women spoke about the negative aspects of violence and fighting, there was a definite consensus among all of them that it was something that could not always be avoided. As one of the young women explained to me, "When I get into a fight I have to fight" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). Even more pointedly, Addy told me "I do it (fight) cause I get forced to do it" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

These young women did not necessarily see the use of violence as an option; they believed their ability to choose not to be violent was constrained. Although these young women believed that it was not necessarily 'right' to resort to violence, they also realized that in some circumstances it would be 'wrong' and perhaps even deadly, not to do so. For example, Kristal, who repeatedly told me throughout our interview that she was not a violent person, also spoke about a few times where she had attacked her abusive boyfriend. The following quote reveals why she believed that there were times when she really needed to 'fight back':

I'm more of a mellow person. I'm not a violent person. I'm really not... But if something goes on around me that I can't help, you know what I mean?... Like I mean, if a guyfriend is hitting a girlfriend, or you know,

J's in my face, or you know, he thinks that I'm sitting here smiling at buddy sitting across from me and he grabs me by the throat and tells me that he's gonna kill me, well I mean (pause). That's where you say, you don't sit there all mellow, "Oh ok." It's like, you have to be, you have to be, you have to hold your own though, especially in a violent relationship (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997).

Quite simply, these young women maintained that there were situations where they needed to resort to violence even though they would not usually condone its use.

My discussions with the ten young women revealed that every one of them, even those who indicated that there were quite opposed to the use of violence, had been active participants, and even the instigators, in at least one fight. In fact, each of the ten young women interviewed told me the details of an average of ten violent confrontations that they had been personally involved in. Of the young women who emphasized repeatedly that they were not violent, the average number of confrontations that they told me about having participated in was six. What became obvious in all of the discussions was that there were issues or situations which the young women saw as either compelling or at least legitimate reasons for getting involved in a fight or behaving violently. The next part of this chapter will focus on those issues where there seem to be socially prescribed rules legitimizing the use of violence.

3.3 Prescriptive rules of violence: When is violence legitimate?

All of the young women told me both explicitly and implicitly that they thought there were situations where the use of violence was both warranted, and in some cases, necessary. Most of the rules for prescribing the use of violence became evident

throughout our discussions of the young women's specific fights and the reasons they provided for having participated in these disputes. In the most basic sense, these young women saw violence as necessary in order to both defend themselves and to defend those close to them from the attacks of others. However, the defense of self and the defense of others should not be seen as merely a defense against physical attacks, but also assaults on one's reputation or sense of self.

3.3.1 The defense of self

Most of the young women interviewed indicated that they believed that fighting was authorized if you needed to defend yourself from others. Their discussions of the reasons that they aggressed violently against others goes beyond our usual understanding of self-defense, which typically refers primarily to defending oneself against physical assaults. Instead, they seemed to talk about a defense of self in a more general sense, since it included both defending oneself against physical violence, but also defending oneself from personal affronts or assaults on one's definition of self.

Perhaps the most simple reason the young women gave for feeling impelled to fight was that they thought that if they did not, they would end up being badly hurt. Most of the young women seemed to agree that "If you are defending yourself, then it's okay to be violent" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997) and many of them discussed instances where they had had to use violence to defend themselves. In these instances, the young women were often being attacked by someone already and they fought back in order to minimize their own injuries. As Kristal pointed out in the earlier quote, she

knew that it was not appropriate for her to remain calm or 'mellow' when her boyfriend grabbed her by the throat and threatened to kill her. The consequences of not resorting to violence in this type of situation could be quite grave. Similarly, Carloyn explained how she needed to fight back when another young woman tried to strangle her. As she put it, "You can't go around letting people trying to kill you. I mean if I would have just stood there and been in shock as soon because she like when she started strangling me..." (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997). Although she never actually finished her thought, the outcome of inaction under these circumstances was fairly clear.

My interview with Kristal highlighted how the need to defend oneself against someone's physical attacks can manifest itself even after the immediate danger of the situation has passed. The following account of one of her boyfriend's attacks on her, and her later reaction exemplified this point:

Well, he had thrown me out of a three-story window, and he made me lose my baby, and uh (pause). I had been in the hospital for 3 days and he never came to see me... When I got out, I went there and (pause) I had a gun and I was going to kill him. And it just so happened that my best friend and her uh new boyfriend had been there and if they weren't, I would have killed him... Yep, for sure I would have. Because I was so angry... Like I said I'm not a violent person and um, if they hadn't been there I would have definitely killed him and uh (pause). Part of the bruises was from her wrestling me to the ground to get the gun out of my hand. And I had been grabbing like switchblades and anything, you know, I could get my hands on. Like I resorted to a damn flashlight. I was going to beat this guy if it was the last thing I did. (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997).

In addition to fighting in order to avoid being physically hurt, the young women also informed me that they sometimes believed they had to fight to fend off attacks on

their definition of self. Many of the young women told me about having gotten into violent confrontations with people who had not shown them respect. For these young women, if people did not show them respect, it was legitimate to respond with violence. In other words, disrespect was a prescription for fighting. As one of the young women explained "You respect me, I respect you, nothing happens. But if you disrespect me, you turn on me, anything, you'll get your ass whooped" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997). Carolyn reiterated this point when she spoke of one of her friends who tended to react violently when people disrespected him:

(I)f anyone disrespected him, he would like - he used to beat them up eh? And that's how a lot of people are. Don't disrespect me or look at what you're gonna get. I understand that. I mean if people are disrespecting you for no reason. I mean they want to start stuff with you for no reason. I wouldn't be happy (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

Disrespect for these young women included both trying to force them to do things they did not want to do, spreading rumours about them or calling them names, or violating their privacy by making their private matters, public information. Several of the young women told me about having gotten into violent confrontations with the staff at the residences they had lived in when they tried to force the young women to do something. In one of the more extreme incidents, Sara reported that she had poisoned one of her staff members as revenge for having been physically restrained. Her description of this event went as follows:

I was told to go clean my room. I said no. She said "Go clean your room or we'll escort you." "Yeah come on." You know they escorted me. I got restrained. I said "Payback's a bitch." They were like "okay fine, bluh bluh bluh." You know. I cooled down. I go "Do you want a coffee?" They're like "Yeah sure. Why don't you make me a coffee for part of

your work."... So like I make them coffee, but I put rat poison in it. Just a little bit. A little bit in the sugar. Next thing you know, my staff's rushing off to the hospital to get her stomach pumped (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997).

Although this was perhaps the most extreme example of one of the young women retaliating against the staff, others also told me about lashing out against staff members. For example, when I asked Alexis if she had been violent since having been in Centre B, she replied, "Yeah, I punched a staff. She wouldn't let me out of my room cause I was getting stuff taken away cause I kept calling one of the staff an asshole" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997).

Of the ten young women I spoke with, Natacha was the one who seemed to most resent the staff interfering in her affairs and trying to discipline her. She told me that she had been transferred to Ottawa from another facility in Ontario because she had gotten too many charges while at the other facility for both threatening and assaulting the staff. When I asked her about the staff at the other facility she told me "(T)hey were just power trippers. They'd tell me what to do and ain't nobody going to tell me what to do. You ain't my parents, you ain't going to tell me what to do" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997). Natacha's deep-seated resentment against staff members had its roots in her extended history in the child welfare system. She reported that she had been in and out of foster homes and group homes since the age of two and she quite obviously resented having been separated from her family for so long. At one point when she was telling me about getting into fairly vicious fights with her brother, she noted:

You're probably thinking that's a violent family and a violent brother. And, yeah, that's pretty violent but... we weren't raised like that. We're

rebels cause all these people have been pushing us around, telling us you can't be with your mom, telling us we can't be with our dad, and telling us who we shouldn't respect, and what we can do, and how we can breathe, and all that kind of stuff. And after a while you just kinda get sick of it and tell them to go to hell (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

Many of these young women were quite offended at being told what to do by staff members. They seemed to see this as being quite disrespectful in that it violated their own personal ability to choose what to do, and to speak out when they thought they were not being treated properly. In some cases, this resentment led them to strike out violently against those who were attempting to impose what they saw as unfair conditions and restrictions on them.

Most of the ten young women interviewed also indicated that they tended to engage in fights with people who sullied their reputations by either spreading malicious rumours about them, calling them names, or just generally making fun of them. For example, one of the young women told me that she believed she had to fight when someone made her mad, and when I asked her how people did that she replied "Like when they call me names and stuff" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). Most of the young women, however, indicated that only certain types of 'name-calling' were offensive enough to drive them to fight. For example when I asked Janice about what kinds of names upset her she explained, "Cause somebody makes fun of my epilepsy" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). This also became evident when I asked one of the young women to explain to me what made her angry enough to fight:

I guess it, the majority of the time, it's when they start calling me names. It sounds dumb, but I'm not talking like little kid names like they used to call you when I was a little kid. It's not like that. It's when they call me

like a bitch or they start saying like little rumours about me or start saying stuff like that. That's what gets me mad (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Similarly, Fiona, who claimed that she normally disagreed with the use of violence, told me about two occasions where friends of hers had gotten into fights that she thought were quite legitimate. In both cases she indicated that the young women's reputations were being 'trashed' to the point where their violent reactions were justified. In the first case, Fiona was on the receiving end of her friend's violent outburst because she had called her friend a slut and told her "You'll sleep with anybody" (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997) and she admitted, "I think I would have hit her too had she said it about me" (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997). In the second incident, a friend of Fiona's had hospitalized another young woman when she kicked her in the head repeatedly with her steel-toed boots. When I asked her if her friend's behaviour had upset her, she replied:

Not really because I mean that was (pause). That was one occasion that didn't bother me at all... Like this one girl, the stuff that she did, I thought you know what I mean, go ahead S. I thought you know, go ahead. I mean I couldn't care less about this girl. Cause this girl what happened was she started all these rumours about my friend S and the whole school hated her. Like they were saying (pause). 'Kay cause she has eczema, and they were (pause). The whole school was saying that she does heroin, she had AIDS, that's what all the spots are... Everybody wouldn't go near her. Nobody would talk to her... And then S just started beating her down and I'm like "Good you deserve it", you know what I mean? You don't do something like that... That's just wrong (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

Several of the young women reported that they also got upset when they believed that people were not respecting their privacy and revealing details about their

lives that they wanted to keep to themselves. For example, it upset Natacha when the staff at her previous custodial institution spoke openly about her charges. She explained part of her animosity against these people as follows:

Like staff there, they know your charges so they were using it against me. When I was off program they're saying "What are you gonna do? Cut my fingers off?" and, to me, like, my charges are none of their damn business. They're there to make sure that, I dunno, that I'm behaving myself. I ain't there. I'm there to do my time. I ain't there to be lectured about my charges and all that kind of stuff. (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

When I asked her why she did not like people to know about her charges, her answer made it clear that she did not want people to see her as a bad person because of what she had done:

Because (pause) it ain't something I'm proud of and I'm kind of ashamed. Like nobody knows my charges and I ain't going to tell anybody my charges. Cause (pause) I dunno. I mean if somebody asks me my charges and I go "I cut somebody's fingers off," I'll sound like a crazy person (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

Natacha was not the only young woman who disliked having intimate details of her life made public. Carolyn also indicated that she responded aggressively when her teacher "would like say stuff about my grades and stuff. I mean like it's not anyone else's business what I'm getting in school. And then I'd go up to her and tell her ... that she better shut her mouth or I was gonna slap her" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997). Similarly, JD had attacked a boy in her class when he started to tell her new schoolmates and teacher that she had stolen a car:

I stole this car and I never got caught for it. And this guy was saying out loud "JD I saw you in the parking lot with it rah rah" and the teacher was right there. And I was like "Yo guy, shut up man" and I started

swearing at him and everything... And I was getting pissed cause the guy just kept going on saying "rah rah rah rah rah"... And he was just in my face (pause). So I picked up my desk and I whipped it on him, and I started jumping on it... (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

These young women see all these acts as highly upsetting because they seem to violate their own sense of who they are. Having someone impose what they see as undue restrictions on them, having people speak poorly of them or spread rumours and lies about them, and/or having people make public those things that they would prefer to have kept private all challenge their ability to present a unified and favourable sense of self to others. As a result, these young women tend to believe that they are compelled to react violently against those who disrespect them in a variety of ways in an attempt to defend their non-physical selves much like they would their physical selves.

In some cases, they seemed to feel compelled to fight in order to defend both their physical selves and their definition of self. Several young women revealed that they felt obliged to fight, especially if someone else initiated the confrontation, because walking away was seen to lead inevitably to their further victimization because people would come to see them as afraid to fight. JD explained the problem with backing down from challenges to fight as follows:

Like if someone hits you first then like (pause). Like people say, "Well be the bigger person and walk away," but what's that going to solve? The other person's just going to come after you (pause). And then she'll tell her friends and you'll just get jumped by a whole bunch of people for being a pussy and walking away cause they'll all go "Oh she walked away so that means we can take her man. She must be easy or something." (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Similarly, when I asked Natacha how many fights she thought she had been in, her response was, "I don't go around looking for fights like some people. But if someone comes up, then I'll fight. Or if somebody calls me on to a fight, I ain't going to sit there and say "No man, I don't want to fight you"" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

These young women indicated that they needed to establish a reputation for being tough so that people would steer clear of them in the future. JD articulated this most eloquently when she told me, "(L)ike I'd beat up people so that like people would think "oh look at her - she's tough and I'm not going to screw around with her" so I gave myself a rep like that I was big and bad and mean so that no one would hurt me" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

In some instances, it seemed that once the young women thought that they had developed such a reputation, they believed they would be able to avoid fighting and engaging in criminal behaviour. For example, Koryn told me that some of her friends still pressured her to participate in delinquent activities, however. when I asked her if she found it hard to say no to their requests, she responded:

No. Because they all (pause) it's like they all knew that I was like that... They wouldn't sit there and call me a pussy like they do some kids, cause they know that I'm not and they know that I normally would. Just because I don't want to be like that anymore, it has nothing to do with me being a pussy, it has something to do with me not wanting to. Some of the kids that they call pussy are because they are and because they wouldn't do anything (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

These young women seemed to believe that they were compelled to engage in fights to both protect themselves physically and to defend their definitions of self when it is under attack from others. In some cases, these two defenses of self came together.

This was most obvious in the situations just discussed where the young women decided that they could not walk away from a fight because to do so would be to develop a reputation as a weak person who could then become a target for more attacks in the future. The young women saw the development of a tough reputation as having served them well in that people had avoided fighting with them, and, once they had had such a reputation for some time, they then thought that they could avoid participating in violent confrontations without provoking more attacks on themselves.

3.3.2 The defense of others

In addition to believing that the use of violence was justified or even prescribed in order to defend themselves, the young women I spoke with also indicated that fighting was sometimes necessary in order to defend those that were close to them (i.e., family members and friends). In my interviews, however, the young women spoke less frequently about the practice of defending others as a legitimate reason for fighting than was the case in the defense of the self, possibly because some seemed to believe it was wrong to intervene in others' disputes. (This will be discussed further in the next section). That said, the defense of others seemed to follow the same patterns as the defense of self with a focus on defending others from physical attacks as well as defending their reputations from attack.

Interestingly, almost all of the young women who talked about defending their friends or family members from physical attacks spoke of the need to intervene in violent confrontations when a male was attacking a female. All together four young

women told me about having fought with a boy who was attacking, or threatening to attack, one of their girlfriends. For example, Kristal, who had suffered abuse at the hands of her boyfriend on numerous occasions, became motivated to fight when he pushed her girlfriend:

(H)e comes in the bathroom with both of us and he locks the door and he's standing there. And I'm pushing him, and I'm like "Let me the F out, you know. I want to get out of here, you're not going to stop me." And he is so drunk, like I mean the guy can barely stand up. And uh, I kept pushing him, "Let me out of here, let me out of here," and he pushed me back and then he pushed her [friend who was pregnant] and she landed in the bathtub and I totally lost it, like dropped everything and boom, boom. I started laying right into him, you know, punching him. She got up, started punching him in the head too. So we're both beating on him and finally he had letten us out of the bathroom, and I went running for the phone (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997).

Alexis, who admitted she had never seen a fight between a male and a female, told me that she would most definitely attack a guy if he was hitting a young woman even though she was planning to avoid violent confrontations once she got out of custody:

I've never seen a guy hit a girl, but if I ever would, I'd jump on him... If I ever saw a guy hit a girl, I'd be scared, but I'd go (pause) I'd go after him. Just because that's wrong to do. Even now, like even that I'm not going to fight when I get out, but if I ever saw a girl hit a guy, I'd jump on him (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997).

Another one of the young women told me about having fought with a young woman who she believed had let one of her close friends get hurt by a guy. More specifically, she told me that she thought it was right to fight with this young woman because she had done nothing to protect her friend from being raped by two boys. Her story went as follows:

Like I fought once where I knew how I felt and I dunno, I was happy, I felt good. Because the person I was so mad at... This girl let my best friend get raped... She didn't call, but she left while it was happening and didn't call the police or anything, just left. Went home and left, let it go. And I (pause) I'm like the minute I seen her I was like "Come here." And I was really mad at her and I felt good because I thought, you know what I mean, you left. You were able to leave. You could have went and used the phone, called the police, got them there, you know what I mean. You could have stopped it. (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

In this case, Fiona was not around to intervene and physically defend her friend when she was being raped, however, she still believed that she was compelled to attack the one person that she believed could have done so, and she reported that she felt "happy" when she did this, even though she was often quite critical of those who used violence.

Perhaps surprisingly, despite the fact that several young women spoke of defending young women against being attacked by boys, when I asked the young women in the interviews how they felt about young men and young women fighting, I received a somewhat more varied set of responses. Although some young women believed that "a guy shouldn't hit a girl at all" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997), others told me "if a girl can hit a guy, then a guy can hit a girl you know" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997). Still others saw the issue as more complex than either of these understandings. For example, JD indicated that she thought it was okay for guys to fight back if they were hit by a young woman, but it was not acceptable for a male to initiate an attack against a female. As she explained:

I believe in equal rights. If I hit him then I believe he has every right, not to blow up and haul off and like, I dunno, give me like his hardest shot or whatever. But I think that he has the right to get physical, or, I dunno, whatever he has to do to protect himself from me. But I don't believe in a guy whaling on a girl for no reason or starting it with a girl.

I think that's pathetic. 'Cause guys are just built to be like stronger and bigger or whatever. And I dunno, I don't think it's right. 'Cause they just do it for like a sense of control, but if a girl's beating on a guy then I think he has every right to respond. (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Koryn also seemed to think that the issue of guys fighting young women was not black and white. When I asked her how she felt about guys hitting young women she replied, "I don't think it's right. I don't think it's right for girls to hit guys either, but I mean" and then paused, implying that although it was not right, maybe it was somewhat less wrong for a young woman to hit a guy. She then went on to explain, like JD, that one of the main problems with inter-gender fighting was the size difference:

I don't think any violence is right, but it's just like (pause) they're bigger than us. It's an unfair advantage. Like, to a certain degree, if I was the same size as some guy, then I wouldn't care because he's my size. But when guys are bigger and they start hitting little twelve year old girls, that's when it becomes a problem (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Indeed some of the young women who had defended other females from male attackers were most bothered by the fact that the guys were beating young women who were smaller than them. For example, Janice told me about getting into a fight with a boy at her school who was picking on one of her friends. Her explanation of why this upset her was, "Well you see, he was calling her names and like hitting her and stuff. But she's small. She's like small, small. Chinese, small, small. And (pause) it made me angry cause he was really big, big, Sumo wrestler big. Really, really big. So I got mad" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997).

In addition to defending friends from physical attacks, many of the young women told me about fights that they had gotten into in order to defend the reputations

of those close to them. In many cases, these fights seemed to start simply because someone called a friend or a family member a name that the young woman found offensive. For instance, several of the young women when asked why they had gotten into a fight would give me curt responses such as "this girl called my best friend a bitch" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997), or "they were calling her names cause J is black..." (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997), or "people call my dad a cripple" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

Although many of the young women did tell me about times when they had defended the reputations of their friends, they seemed to feel even more obliged to fight when their family members' reputations were on the line, perhaps because this could reflect badly on them as well. Natacha was perhaps the most unequivocal in her beliefs about what things she considered worth fighting over. When I asked her explicitly what things she did think she would fight over, she told me that she would fight to defend herself and "if anybody ever talks bad about my brother or EVER rats my brother out, then God be with them" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997). She also was quite indignant that she had been accused of starting a fight over her boyfriend and told me quite vehemently, "I would cause no shit or get no charge for no boy" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

3.4 Proscriptive rules of violence: Are there rules against 'hitting below the belt' in the female world of fighting?

As we have seen these young women claimed that they preferred to avoid engaging in

violent confrontations, and only did so under certain prescribed conditions when they believed they were left with no alternatives. However, once a young woman had decided to participate in a fight, there were still many aspects of fighting and the use of violence that were governed by unwritten rules or a code of conduct of sorts. Although there was not often unanimous agreement among the ten young women that I spoke with about what was permissible and not permissible when fighting, certain key themes emerged time and again during our discussions. In general these rules were more proscriptive than prescriptive in that they focused more on unacceptable things that the young women should not do, as opposed to what they should do, when fighting. My discussion on proscriptive rules of fighting will focus on those issues that arose most frequently in my interviews with the ten young women: the rules on intervening in other people's disputes, the use of weapons in fights, and the use of stereotypically female fighting techniques (sometimes known as cat fighting).

As mentioned above, despite the fact that the young women sometimes thought they were obliged to fight to defend people close to them, they actually felt quite strongly about intervening in other people's fights. All of the young women who discussed this with me told me that they thought it was quite inappropriate to step into someone else's dispute both because they believed that you should keep your nose out of other people's affairs, and because intervening when someone else was fighting could lead to ganging up on others which was seen as quite unfair. Carolyn felt particularly strongly about the first of these two issues:

(Y)ou don't get involved in other people's business... But when two

people, they made a decision, obviously they're responsible enough to do it, then you have to let them deal with it, with that, because it's none of our business. I mean it's the cops' business cause they're like the highest authority and stuff like that. But not kids (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

Fiona also expressed dismay over the number of group fights that occurred in her neighbourhood which apparently grew out of two individuals' personal disputes. She believed that it was just wrong for everyone else to become involved in a dispute that did not pertain to them directly.

It was just so stupid. I always found it pointless because, you know what I mean, I don't really care if people fight, but like why get like (pause). Like if like one person will be mad at somebody and then another person will be mad at them, you know they'll be mad at each other and then somehow fifty other people get involved. And it's stupid. Like you know what I mean?... Like it's not your fight, get out of it. Like let people solve their own problems (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

As I mentioned earlier, Fiona thought that the group fights were a 'waste of time' and purported that if people were going to fight they should do so one on one.

Furthermore, she explained that when people do fight one on one, they should not expect others to intervene on their behalf:

I think it should be one on one, it's like you know what I mean? And don't jump in... So what if your friend isn't winning? I mean... if they started the fight, they started the fight, let them be. It's their fault. The thing will end one way or another... I know a lot of people who say you know like that say, "Ok. If I'm losing, jump in." It's like no! I mean if you want to fight, go ahead. I mean I'm not going to jump in. (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

Others were seemingly more concerned that intervening could lead to people ganging up on others. For example, when I asked Koryn what was not acceptable in a fight, she immediately replied, "I don't like like in that situation where it's like a whole

bunch of people on one person" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997). Natacha also contended that she would never want other people to intervene on her behalf in a fight. She told me that she only ever fought one on one, "Cause to me a group against one - I don't care if this person is bigger than me - I ain't going to get another 5 people to help me out. Cause if I get myself into a situation like that and I can't deal with it, then I guess I'm just going to have to take it" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

Although these young women obviously believed that there were some circumstances (as described above) when coming to the defense of others was quite justifiable, in general they were against intervening in other people's disputes. As one of the young women explained, "Fair fighting is one on one... nobody jumping in" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

For most of the young women I spoke with, resorting to the use of weapons in a fight was also not seen as proper 'etiquette' for a 'fair fight'. Other than Kristal, who had told me about taking a gun to her boyfriend's with the intention of shooting him, none of the young women that I spoke with reported actually having used a weapon such as a knife or a gun in a fight. Some young women did talk about using other objects such as rocks, sticks, and bricks in their fights with others. For the most part, however, the young women that did this told me that they felt badly about it. For example, when Addy told me about having used a rock to smash another girl's head in a fight, she told me "I thought it was so mean when I did that" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). Similarly, Koryn told me that she thought that smashing her staff's head on a rock "was the craziest thing I've ever done to somebody" (Interview # 6, July 5, 1997).

That said, some of the young women did indicate that they had carried a weapon, including guns and knives. 'for protection,' or to threaten people that were trying to attack them. However, most disliked carrying the weapon, and if they had not believed their lives were in danger, they would not have done so. For example, Koryn told me that she had carried a gun for two months when she was living with her ex-boyfriend who was a gang member. When I asked her why she thought that she needed a gun, she replied:

Just because of the gang. I didn't like it though. I was always scared of guns. All my life. I don't know why... And my boyfriend just had them, and we had a conversation one day about how he didn't like me walking down the street alone, especially in the neighbourhood, knowing that I was his girlfriend. And if somebody from a different, or somebody who, who didn't click with his gang, saw me and something happened or they tried to jump me or rape me or whatever, he didn't like that idea. And he decided that he thought it would be a good idea for me to have a gun. And at first I didn't like the idea. But then after, when I would start walking down the street and people would follow me and I'd see cars stopping behind me and stuff and all these people. And I was like "Ok, maybe I do." Like I didn't believe him at first, that, you know, somebody would actually try to hurt me because they didn't click with boyfriend. But, I was thinking maybe he was right. (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Although Koryn would have preferred to not carry a weapon, she began to see it as something that she needed to do in order to protect herself from potential attacks. This seemed to be a justifiable use of a weapon.

Several young women noted that although it might be okay to carry a weapon for protection, it was definitely wrong to actually use a weapon in a fight. Fiona acknowledged that this could become problematic, however, because someone who carried a weapon for protection might very well feel compelled to use it if they ended

up in a fight:

Like I don't mind people, you know, having a knife for protection, but when you use it on somebody that's like a problem. If you have a knife on you and you're in a fight, you're going to use it. Even if it's just for protection, you're going to end up using it. Because if you're losing, you're going to pick it up and you're going to use it. (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

Basically, the young women seemed to believe it was wrong to use in weapons in a fight for two key reasons. First of all, they believed that a fight with weapons was much more likely to lead to serious injuries than a fight that involved just fists, and as we saw earlier, this was something these young women felt badly about. JD made this point when she explained to me, "Like using a weapon is like killing someone. It's like you damage them seriously. I couldn't do that" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

The second reason given for not wanting to use a weapon in a fight was that "it's kind of pussy to fight with a weapon. Like I mean if you're going after someone, make sure that you can get him, like not with a baseball bat and stuff like that" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997). These young women seemed to think that using knives or guns against other people should not even be seen as a fight because "a fight should be based on your physical abilities" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997). Fiona reiterated this point:

I mean I personally don't believe in fighting with knives because you know what I mean, if you can't fight with your fists, you don't fight at all. Because you know fist fights they won't get you in as much trouble as knives will. And personally it's just (pause) It's just pathetic. It's considered that... you might as well call yourself weak and walk away... It's like wrong. Like if you have to use your weapon to fight somebody, you might as well just not do it at all because there's like no point. You can't fight them, live with it (Interview # 9, August 10,

1997).

In addition to these young women indicating that the use of weapons during fights was not considered acceptable, they also told me that other behaviours were not acceptable in fights, albeit for different reasons. Almost all of them abhorred engaging in what have been seen as stereotypically female fighting methods such as scratching, pulling hair, and biting. Many of the young women believed that these stereotypes of how young women fight were simply not true and indeed quite humorous because they thought that their girlfriends were just as tough and fought just as roughly as most guys. For example, JD's reply to my inquiry into her feelings about the stereotypes that young women scratch and pull people's hair when fighting, was fairly typical. "Oh that's bullshit - cause I have some girlfriends that would kick, like literally kick guy's asses" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997). Addy also made this same point when I asked her about young women's fighting. "I seen girls that fight like (pause) - they're wicked. They never scratch or they never pull hair or anything. They never scream. They just fight" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

When I asked JD if she had ever pulled hair or resorted to scratching or biting in a fight, her answer did not fit with the image of a typical 'cat fight':

No. Well just, I'll pull her hair down to smash her face off my knee but that was it. If I had to like bite somebody then I'd like bite their face off or something like if I really had to protect myself, but I would never be like a pussy and bite their ankles or doing something like that (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Koryn also indicated that she believed people sometimes ended up scratching each other or pulling each other's hair during the course of a fight, but that this behaviour was in

no way confined to young women and certainly was not the primary means of attack used by young women in fights:

I think that's bullshit. I think guys do it too. I think that if they have a chance, they'd grab guys by their hair and swing them around, you know. Like everybody does it. Like I don't think it's just girls. Maybe girls, they think it because we have nails or whatever and then when we grab a hold on something, maybe our nails would dig in or something. But I've never once in my life, and I've seen so many fights, ever seen a girls scratch somebody, or pull her hair to hurt her. I had a guy pull my hair, but when I was young, and that's the only time I've ever seen it. So I don't believe in that crap. (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

The main reason that most of the young women I spoke with did not believe that you should fight 'like a girl' by scratching and biting, etc., was that it was just not effective. Simply put, they believed that "people who fight like a girl will never win fighting" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). One of the young women who told me that she had been in a fight where the other girl was pulling her hair and scratching told me that this "made me feel like it was gonna be really easy to hit her" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). Similarly, Sara who referred to stereotypical young women's fighting as "pussy fights", asserted, "You know girl fights aren't dangerous. That's why they're funny" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997). Referring to some of her girlfriends, she noted, "My girls are big. Like they're strong. But they don't like using it so they fight pussy fight. If they were to fight me - a real fight - I'd get my ass whupped" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997).

Although these young women did not like to resort to scratching and pulling hair in a fight since they believed it was not very effective, they also told me that people who fought in this manner were labeled as wimps. As we saw before, these

young women wanted to avoid this type of reputation which would damage their definition of selves as someone tough. The following quote highlights how some of the young women had very distinct views on what was acceptable and what was unacceptable violent behaviour:

'Kay the thing that Tyson, Tyson did to Hollyfield. That's pussy fighting. Biting his ear. That's pussy fighting. You don't fight like that. You fight with your fists and your feet. You don't pull hair or scratch or do stuff like that (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997).

The young women's negative feelings about the use of violence, discussed earlier in this chapter, were obviously at odds with their expressed obligation to participate in a variety of violent confrontations. This clash seems to leave many of the young women feeling confused about how to make sense of their experiences with violence and, perhaps more importantly, how to feel about themselves.

3.5 A confused sense of self?

Although I did not spend much of the interviews probing directly into the young women's self-esteem or their perception of self, it became obvious that many of the young women were indeed quite confused about how to make sense of the violence in their lives and their own use of violence. As we have seen, the young women all expressed quite negative feelings about the use of violence, including their own aggression against others, and yet all of them also indicated that there were times when they felt that aggression was appropriate and that they had no choice but to aggress violently against others. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that the young women

also seemed to have fairly contradictory and ambivalent feelings about themselves. In others words, just as they did not see violence as either wholly bad or wholly good, they also did not tend to see themselves as either wholly bad or wholly good.

As mentioned earlier, a minority of the young women maintained quite adamantly that they were not violent people, but that violence had been, unfortunately, an omnipresent feature of their lives. As Kristal explained, "I'm not like a violent person, but I have violent experiences that just evolve around my entire life" (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997). Similarly, Carolyn told me, "Well I didn't get involved in violence, but the violence came to me. Like I wasn't being violent but people were being violent to me" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

In contrast, several young women indicated throughout the interviews that they saw themselves as violent or aggressive people or, more generally, as people who had behaved badly. These negative perceptions of self were revealed in comments such as, "I've always been like really violent - like my whole life when I was a kid and everything" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997); "I've been a bad ass since... six years ago. I've been like fighting, drugs, stuff like that" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997); "I wish I could be one of those young women that... don't like fighting and stuff... (but) I'm just not like that" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997); "I started to get like a bad kid when I was 12" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997); and "I am very aggressive" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997).

Some of the young women did not necessarily see themselves as 'bad' people, but spoke about having problems 'controlling' their behaviour. In other words,

although these young women might not have actually defined themselves primarily in pejorative terms, they did see themselves as having a problem that needed to be 'fixed'. For example, it was not unusual to hear the young women say "I have a problem accepting authority" or "I had a behaviour problem" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997), or even "I know I have an anger management problem" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Those young women that saw themselves as violent, or at least as having some violent behavioural tendencies, varied to the extent that they saw themselves as responsible for this 'problem'. Most of the young women believed that they had not had a choice about becoming violent, helping to temper their negative definitions of themselves to some extent. For example, Janice who told me she had become a 'bad kid' when she was twelve, explained that this was not really her fault, but another side effect of her epilepsy "because the doctor said I was gonna become a bad kid because they were putting me on medication" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). Perhaps more typical of the reasons the young women gave for having been forced into violence was the one provided by Natacha who explained:

(W)hen I wasn't a criminal... I wasn't as violent. I wasn't exposed to as much violence. I wasn't exposed to as many things as I am today... I used to get into trouble, like talking in class or something, but now I get into trouble for more serious things... I used to fight with my fists, and spit and scratch, and pull hair or whatever. But now I just (pause) I'm more violent (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

In other words, some of these young women believed that their exposure to violence had in fact made them more violent.

Other young women told me quite explicitly that they believed they had chosen

to become 'bad'. This was perhaps most obvious in the case of Sara when she told me about how she had become embedded into the juvenile justice system:

It was my choice to get involved in that stuff. I always said that nobody pulled a gun to my head and said start dealing or else. You know I said screw it. I need cash so I just started to deal. You know? I'd steal, I'd deal, I'd do everything. Like I was just like a big, big, big, I guess you'd say criminal (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997).

Still others were obviously torn between the belief that they were not really responsible for behaving violently or participating in fights and the fact that they had indeed chosen to do so. For example, Fiona at one point told me that "fighting was never my problem - it was always my friends' problem" (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997). Then later, when she discussed her participation in the community's group fights she professed:

Even if I didn't fight with them, I'm still wrong for being there. Like you know what I mean? I didn't have to be there. I could have like left or whatever. I could have said you know "I think it's time for me to find some new friends" you know what I mean? But I didn't. But I think it's cause like there's not really anybody else to hang around with in V and O that's not (pause) that doesn't fight because everybody is together. So I didn't really have a choice. It was either them or myself (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

The young women all agreed that they would like to change and try to remove themselves from involvement in both delinquent activities in general, and violence more specifically. They indicated that they no longer wished to be seen as violent. JD told me that she had been somewhat relieved to be transferred into a facility where no one knew her history. As she explained:

I was kinda glad to come here cause nobody knows me here and back home, like my nickname was Baby Tyson and I don't like that. I want to

be known for like being smart and I dunno, I guess a lot of things (pause) and not for being violent and robbing people and kicking the shit out of people and that (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

These young women all told me that they wanted to change because they believed that they were not going to achieve anything in life if they continued on the path they were on. As Addy put it, "Now I'm not into violence no more. I don't want to fight at all. I want to be home. I want to be a big sister. I want to be somebody. Like I want to be a lot of things" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). This sentiment was echoed by Koryn when she told me "I used to want to do crime and kill people and think I'm all cool with my fat gun and stuff. It's not the way I want to be anymore. I'm like actually going to school and stuff" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997). Natacha also indicated that she thought that she needed to change her life and lifestyle, "I'm just going to chill and avoid. Because this ain't getting me nowhere, flipping out. It ain't getting me nowhere and I want something out of life. I don't want to be pumping gas or whatever the hell grade twelve or eleven can get you" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

It seemed clear that these young women had ambivalent feelings about themselves which were rooted in their conflicting views on violence. Although these contradictory views on violence might seem strange, once we take into consideration the social worlds that these young women inhabit, these discordant messages begin to make more sense. In the next chapter, I will attempt to provide an overview of these worlds in order to help explain these conflicts.

4.0 The social worlds of these young women

4.1 Introduction

As we have seen, the young women that I interviewed painted a very complex portrait of violence and their multifaceted understanding of violence seemed to have an impact on how they came to see themselves. In this section, I will explore some of the possible roots of these incongruities that are found in the social worlds of these young women. I will begin by exploring the home worlds of the young women, focusing on their families, their peers, and their communities. I will then examine the institutional world that these young women currently find themselves in, highlighting the institutional discourse with respect to violence and how this differs from the young women's home worlds. I will conclude by trying to delineate how these two social worlds clash or come into conflict, leading these young women to have such contradictory feelings about the violence in their lives.

4.2 The family

It would certainly not be an exaggeration to state that all ten of the young women interviewed for this study came from families which had experienced undue amounts of turmoil and disruption. Although in many cases these young women grew up in families which were perpetually chaotic, others seemed to have experienced much more sporadic episodes of disorder. The interviews revealed details of family dysfunction that spanned the gamut of social problems to include divorce, mental illness, disability,

drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, and death.

All of these young women came from homes where they had experienced at least temporary dissolution of the family be it as a result of a divorce, the death of a parent, or having the Children's Aid Society intervene and take away the children. Only one of the young women reported that her birth parents were still married and living together with their children, however even in this family, the father had left home periodically from the time that she was four years old. She explained:

My dad used to have a lot of problems... He used to have a drinking and drug problem, so he used to always leave home with the money... It's like a three month process. My dad would be gone for like three to four months and then he'd come home and it's like "Oh. Back again." The longest my dad ever left though was like six - seven months (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

The nine other young women indicated that their parents were no longer together either because they had gotten divorced or because one of their parents had died. Four of the young women told me that their fathers had died, and at least two of these men died violent deaths, one having taken his own life because, as his daughter explained "his business went bankrupt and mom and him weren't getting along and stuff" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997), and the other having died in a car accident before the birth of his daughter (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

The five other young women whose parents had divorced reported varying degrees of contact with their parents. Prior to their incarceration, most of the young women had either lived alone with their mothers, or with their mothers and their stepfathers. Many of these young women had had little or no contact with their fathers

for years. For example, JD, whose father had left her mother before she was born told me "I haven't seen him in eight years" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997). Another one of the young women told me her father was in Calgary and had left when she was just three years old (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). Several of the young women who lived with stepfathers indicated that they disliked these men, either because "I thought he was trying to take the spot of my dad and that would never happen" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997), or because these men were abusive.

In addition to these young women's families having been separated by death and marital breakdown, many reported that they had been taken away from their families by the Children's Aid Society. In fact, half of the young women had fairly extensive histories of involvement with the child welfare system. These five young women indicated that they had been in and out of foster homes, group homes, and their own families periodically since they were young. The young women who had been wards of the CAS seemed to move in and out of the system in a seemingly tumultuous fashion, often without their siblings. For example, Koryn, who had been living in group homes for the past six years, told me that she and her sister were never placed in the same home:

The only time she [her sister] stayed in my group home was when... my mom and her got in a fight. I was living in this one group home out in B, and uh, she needed a place to stay. Like it was a long weekend and it was a Friday night and there was nowhere for her to go, and so we took her in my house for like four days or whatever and she lived with me there for a bit. But that's the only time I've ever lived with my sister since I was a little kid (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Perhaps the most extreme example of the disruptive nature of this life was presented by

Natacha. When I asked her about whether or not her parents lived together, her response was quite protracted:

My mom split up with my dad when I was two. And I went to foster care and I have been in since... (A)ctually I've been in group homes too. And my dad took my two brothers and went off to Edmonton and my mom took me and (pause) then we were given over to the CAS. Well (pause) my mom gave my dad me because my mom has schizophrenia, and then we were all taken into custody and my dad took off and then he came back and was drinking for so many years. And then one day he was drinking and some other guy who was drinking, he wasn't the driver but he got into a car and they smashed it. And then he broke his neck and the other guy broke his arm. And then my dad sued him... My dad got his money (pause) September of 96, so when I was living with him... we didn't really have that much money because we could only live on welfare... It would have been better if we had money to pay for nurses and stuff (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

In Natacha's case, her mother's mental illness and her father's drinking precipitated her being made a ward of the Children's Aid Society. Other young women indicated that abuse in the homes had led to their involvement with the CAS. For example, Koryn explained how she first came into contact with the CAS as follows:

(O)ne day my dad, he grabbed me by my hair and swung me on my bed, cause I used to have really long hair (pause). And he was all high and stuff, and so I was like, I went to sleep at my friend's house... And when I was just having a bowl of cereal and on the milk thing it had that kid's help line thing, and uh (pause) so she was like maybe you should call and just ask them and see what you should do. And the next morning the Children's Aid got involved and they took me away (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

At least one of the young women told me that she was not really sure why she had been shuffled between her mother's house, foster homes, and group homes since she was four. When I asked her why she did not live with her mother all the time, she replied simply, "Because she can't handle me" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997). When

I probed further to ask her to explain what she meant by that she said, "I dunno. I don't even know why" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

One of the young women also indicated that she believed that her mother had not cared that she had been taken away by the CAS, and this obviously left her feeling quite rejected. This was clear from her response to my query about how her mother felt when she was removed from the home:

She didn't care. We thought that, you know, maybe if she sees one of her kids got taken away that she'd, you know, want to change, but she didn't. And then when her second (daughter) got taken away, she still didn't change... When they were gonna take my brother away then she was like "Ok," and pulled herself together. I don't think she really cared that much when it came to my sister and I. She never did though. It was always my real daddy that cared (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

As I have suggested, much of the family breakdown seemed to be the result of drug and alcohol problems and violence in the homes. Six of the young women I spoke with talked about having at least one parent who had a drinking or drug problem. Some of these young women told me stories about their parents completely foregoing their parental responsibilities because of their drinking and drug addictions. For example, Addy's reply to my question about whether she lived with her mother or father (when he was alive), highlighted how her parents drinking was quite disruptive:

I was with my dad and then with my mom and then sometimes I stayed with my mom's family. Cause my dad sometimes abandoned me at the store and left me there. So I was like "Where do I go? Where did he go?" Cause he'd get his cheque and sometimes he'd abandon me for no reason or whatever... He'd go down to a liquor store to fend for himself, get a treat for himself (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

In the most extreme cases, both parents were involved in drug and alcohol use.

For instance, Koryn reported that her when her mother remarried, she and her stepfather "started drinking and selling pot and stuff" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997). Addy also implied that both of her parents were alcoholics, however she differentiated between her father's and her mother's drinking in that she claimed, "I don't mind if he drinks, because... he doesn't act up when he's drunk" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). In contrast, Addy's mother reportedly became quite abusive when she drank. The following was an example of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother when she had been drinking:

When I'm sleeping, my mom would come in my room and start beating the hell out of me while I'm sleeping. And then next morning I'd find a big bruise on my face and I'd just go down and go "where'd I get this?" My mom's sleeping there with a (pause) I had a bleeding nose... Well she had blood on her hands and I was like "Where'd you get that?" And then I was cleaning my nose, and... she gets up. She's part drunk. She looks at her hand. She goes, "I dunno." And then I go, "Yeah right, you know where you got that." (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

Not surprisingly, many of the young women were quite critical of their parents' behaviour and some indicated that they were trying to avoid succumbing to the same patterns. For example, one of the young women told me that she did not drink "Cause I know my mom's an alcoholic so I know that it's... in our history, so I know that it would be more easier for me to become an alcoholic and not just be able to have an occasional beer with my friends or whatever" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997). Another young woman, whose father was an alcoholic also declared, "Nope. I'll never drink.... Cause of my dad. I've never drank" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

One of the young women actually told me that she had convinced her father to

quit doing coke and heroin by threatening to pick up the habit herself if he did not stop. As she put it, "One of the reasons that he stopped was that I said, "Look okay. Here's all I got to say to you. If you don't stop, I'm gonna start." And then he stopped. The minute I said that he stopped. He never did it again. Because he said he didn't want me getting into that." (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

That said, many of the young women seemed to be quite heavily involved with drugs and alcohol and some implied that their habit had roots in the home, be it through their parents, their siblings, or other relatives. As one of the young women explained, "Well my sister is more into heavier drugs. Like she does all sorts of drugs. When I was younger like I used to watch her do pot and stuff. She taught me everything I know" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997). Similarly, Addy told me that she had started drinking when she was nine or ten because her mother "would be too drunk to say yes or no" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). She also told me that she would meet her aunt and "we'd sit there and drink and sit there and drink all night... She's really cool. She lets me drink. She lets me smoke. She lets me do anything" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

Drinking in the home often seemed to be connected to abuse in the home, however violence was, in general, a pervasive aspect of home life for these young women. With the exception of two young women, it became obvious throughout the course of the interviews that violence truly permeated the homes of all of these young women. In some cases, as discussed above, these young women related tales of having been abused by their parents and stepparents. Others told me about violent

confrontations with their siblings, several of them purporting that these fights were what forced them to learn to fight. Finally, many of the young women told me about members of their family's aggressing against others, be it other family members or people outside the home.

As mentioned above, many of the young women reported that they had been the victims of abuse in their homes at the hands of their parents and stepparents. At least one of the young women I spoke with admitted that she had been most badly hurt in fights with her mother and her brother. When I asked how she was injured, she responded:

Like they'd throw me down the stairs and everything, and my brother used to like drag me across the kitchen by my hair and then he'd start jumping on me, like jumping on my head. And punching me in my stomach. I'd be covered with bruises and bloody noses and stuff like that (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Many of the young women reported that violence had been an omnipresent feature of their lives since they were young. As one young woman put it, "I got used to seeing violence when I was a little girl... in my home, my mom hitting me when I was a little girl, black and blue" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). Similarly, Sara told me that she had run away a lot when she was young because "basically my mom hit me all the time. And hit my brothers" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997).

In addition to having been abused by their parents, many of the young women told me that they fought with their siblings. Six of the young women specifically told me about getting into fights with their brothers and/or sisters. Even Kristal, who claimed that she attempted to avoid violence whenever possible, confessed that she had

gotten into a fight with one of her sisters who had jumped her from behind. At least one of the young women had actually been charged for fighting with her sister. Alexis explained how this happened as follows:

I was only 12 and me and my sister were fighting. And uh, it was like a nasty fight and she went to throw a trumpet or something at me. And then I was running down the hall and I had a glass in my hand and I threw it back and it hit her right there (the eyebrow). So she had a scar right there. But, my mom charged me for that (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997).

Several young women also explained that they believed they had learned how to fight out of necessity, in order to avoid being badly beaten by their siblings. As JD put it, "My brother is in wrestling and all that and he used to use his moves on me and kick the shit right out of me, so I would have to defend myself" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997). Natacha also declared that "When you have two brothers that used to beat on you... after like two years of taking all that crap, you learn how to fight. You learn how to take it... One punch ain't going to get me down now, but before it could" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

Many of the young women also reported that they witnessed violence in their homes even if they were not the victims of the abuse. For example, Addy told me that her aunt often fought with her mom in order to protect Addy from her mother's abuse (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). Kristal also admitted that "my sisters are fairly violent with each other" (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997), and Natacha told me that she had grown up watching her father beat her stepmother when he was drunk (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997). Violence not only infiltrated the homes of these young women, but they

were also aware of their family's use of violence outside their immediate family.

Some young women discussed the fact that their families were known for being violent in their communities. JD explained to me that she had learned to fight because of her brother, but that, in reality, her whole family was quite violent. As she put it:

All (pause) my family is tough, Like my mom's not. She's a wimp. But like my whole family all have assault charges and stuff like that. Like they all grew up in the ghetto so I dunno they're all violent... Like all my uncles, they were all in kick boxing and two of them have been to jail and my aunt, she always gets kicked out of bars for fighting and stuff. Like bar fights and all that (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Similarly, Kristal indicated that her father had quite a temper and had gotten into many fights at local bars. She told me, "(M)y dad's sort of a nutty guy... He doesn't give a care. He's constantly threatening to kill people and all, he's taking down bars and stuff. Like that's not good things" (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997). Natacha even insinuated that she thought that she had received an extra long sentence for threatening the staff at one of the custodial institutions she had lived in because of her family's reputation:

I got more because they know I would've went through with it. Because they know my family's got a violent history. And I said, "I swear man I'll shoot you down. I'll shoot you down man" or whatever, and they know my family's got guns and that's cause my brother got nailed for a couple of them (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

These young women were definitely not the only members of their family to have had run ins with the law. Half of the young women specifically told me that other members of their families had been charged with a variety of offenses. In many cases, these included charges for violent crimes. For example, Koryn explained how her sister how come to be charged with robbery and assault as follows:

She ran away from her group home one day and she uh (pause). She needed some smokes so she robbed somebody and assaulted (pause). She beat this little girl down... Like my sister's sixteen and this girl was only ten years old and she beat her down... She got her cigarettes after all, but she got charged for robbery and assault (Interview # 6, August 4, 1997).

Others had siblings in jail for car thefts, breaking and entering, weapons possession, mischief charges, etc. At the time of the interviews, only one of the young women had a parent in jail. Sara's father had recently been incarcerated on an arson charge for attempting to blow up a house. She also told me that her mother's best friend had recently been charged with murder.

These young women all grew up in home environments where violence was ubiquitous. In these surroundings, they came to see violence as a normal part of life. This normalization of violence was also further reinforced by the young women's friends and associates.

4.3 Peers and violence

Every one of these ten young women had friends who had been involved in violent confrontations and, in fact, with the exception of one of the young women, violence seemed to be a fairly routine aspect of life amongst their peer group. Many of the young women indicated, almost boastfully, that the majority of their friends were tough and, indeed, violent. They all seemed to agree that, as Sara put it, "I don't got no goody goody ass friends" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997). Many of the young women would have concurred with JD when she told me, "All my friends are violent"

(Interview # 1, July 8, 1997), although some indicated that they did have friends who did not get involved in fights. As one young woman explained to me, however, these people did not engage in violent confrontations "cause they're like real weenies" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). Indeed fighting and violence seem to be fairly normative behaviour among these young women's peers. This fact was exemplified by Natacha's response to my inquiry about whether or not her friends fought. As she put it, "Fighting is normal man. Most of my friends... they're like me. They don't go around looking for fights. But if a fight comes their way, then you don't give" (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

In some cases, the young women admitted that they felt more compelled to be violent because their friends were. This was perhaps most evident in the interview with Addy. She told me that she had "wanted to get into fights cause my friends were doing it... I thought it made you brave to do it" (Interview #2, July 10, 1997). In fact, six of the young women told me that they had participated in group fights with their friends in the past. Many of the young women told me that they actually preferred participating in these 'collective' fights because they thought these confrontations were much less serious than one-on-one confrontations. JD explained the difference between these two types of fights as follows:

It's more fun in a group. You make a joke about it and everything. Like when you are sitting there cutting them up and pushing them around and you get to laugh at them. But when you are by yourself, it's serious. Like you don't do it as a joke. It takes something very serious to do it. I like it more as a group cause then it just usually means that I'm not pissed off. You're just doing it for fun. It's like when I'm by myself when I get really mad. Not that I'm afraid of the other person, it's just that I don't

really give a shit (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

A couple of the young women who had implied that their friends had influenced their decisions to become violent, consequently reported that they would make a point of avoiding their violent friends when they left these institutions. As Alexis put it, "Like I mean if my friends were real, real fighters, I would probably not hang around them when I get out cause I don't want to get back into that" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997). Similarly, Fiona told me she did not think she would become involved in fighting when she got out of Centre B because she would no longer be associating with the same group of people. She explained, "They're not like my ideal friends anymore. Like I totally am going to block them out of my social life. Because like I mean I wouldn't be here right now had I not hung around with them" (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

These young women not only indicated that their friends engaged in violent confrontations, many had friends and acquaintances who had seriously injured, or even killed other people, and in many cases, these friends were females. For example, Natacha had a girlfriend who had cut up another young woman's face with a razorblade; Fiona and Carloyn both had girlfriends that had severely beaten other young women to the point where they had to be hospitalized; Addy and her girlfriends had left two other young women for dead after a major fight; and Kristal and Koryn were both friends with a young woman who had been charged in the gang torture and murder of another youth. Some of these young women seem to have become quite hardened as a result of being exposed to their friends' extreme violence. For example,

when I asked Koryn how she felt when she found out that someone she knew had killed somebody, her reply indicated that she had become almost oblivious to their violence and brutality:

I'm getting used to it. The first time I ever found out that one of my friends killed somebody I was like (pause). I was angry in a way. But when they start (pause). Like the person, the two people that I knew right now that are in there (custody), the kid they killed, I wouldn't blame them. I hated the kid. He's an idiot. But like the first time I heard... I was angry at them for that (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Others told me that they did not want to be as violent as their friends, indicating that perhaps they believed that their friends had crossed the line, or even broken some of the rules of fighting. This view was borne out when I asked Natacha about her reaction to her friend cutting a young woman's face with a razor:

Slicing somebody's face? (Long pause) You know what? I could never picture myself doing something like that because (pause) I dunno. I never want to mess up anybody's face because that's their face - they got to live with that man... The person can be ugly as it is, but you don't want to mess up their face... That ain't something I do. You have to live with that face the rest of your life, and you can't conceal it. So I wouldn't do it (Interview # 4, July 16, 1997).

Similarly, when JD told me about her friends' use of weapons in fights, she told me that she didn't think she could do that. As she put it, "They're not afraid to stab anybody during a fight (Pause). I just could never do that though. They must feel so bad for what they did... Like using a weapon is like killing someone it's like you damage them seriously. I couldn't do that" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Not surprisingly, given the severity of some of the violent behaviour these young women said they had witnessed amongst their peers, many reported that they had

friends who had been in custodial institutions in the past. Only one young woman actually told me that she had not had any friends who had been incarcerated. In fact, she said, "I didn't even know there was places like this. Or I wouldn't have been so bad" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997). A much more typical response to my question about whether or not they had had friends who had lived in institutions such as the ones they were in was "Lots of them. Like all of them (laughs)" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997) or "Almost everybody I know has been in or out of a group home, whether it was Centre B, CAS, whatever. They've all been in or out" (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

Many also told me about being reunited with their friends when they moved in and out of the various custodial institutions. For example, Sara told me that one of her friends from school had recently moved into her residence at the Centre B. Similarly Koryn maintained that "Normally I know a lot of people who come through here. But they're all new... I knew- the last group we had - I knew four people that were like from the outside, and like my old group of friends and like they all came in here to serve some time" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Although these young women reported that their friends had been incarcerated for a variety of reasons including family problems and running away from home, many indicated that their friends had been charged with fairly serious crimes. For example, when I asked Koryn what types of things her friends had been charged with, she replied:

I have two friends right now that are in Centre A for murder. Two of

them were from that gang... I had a couple of friends in here for an armed robbery. Um, I got my sister in for robbery. I had a friend that just moved out of here that's in for assault. They're all like serious crimes like that. Like I don't have friends that are in for shoplifting or something. Like it's just not my friends type of thing. They'd rather rob a bank and buy the stuff then shoplift it... (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Almost all of these young women seem to be surrounded by peers who believed that the use of violence, and sometimes even extreme violence was legitimate and justifiable. In fact, fighting seemed to have become quite normalized in these young women's peer groups, just as it was in many of their families. In addition to seeing violence in the family and among their friends, some of the young women also told me about the widespread violence in their communities.

4.4 Communities and violence

Several young women I spoke with explained that violence was quite rampant in the communities they had grown up in. Many seemed to believe that this was one of the reasons that they had become involved in violent activities, and indicated that they did not want to have to return to these communities because they would probably be forced back into behaving violently. This point was perhaps made most eloquently by JD who hoped that she would not have to return to her hometown when she was released from Centre A:

Well, I live in the South end of O, which is like the bad part of O and everyone is poor and on welfare and crack houses and everyone in my complex does drugs, like adults and everything. Well and it's not exactly the safest spot on the earth (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Koryn indicated that she was worried about her little brother, the only child still

at home with her mother, because she thought that he was being exposed to some pretty seedy lifestyles in her parents' neighbourhood. Koryn obviously believed that her parents' lifestyle had had a negative impact or influence on her own life and wanted to protect her brother from that for as long as possible. Her concern became evident when I asked her about whether or not she still saw her mother:

Yeah. Yeah. I go to my mom's house. I don't really like it though cause she lives in a bad neighbourhood, so when I go it's like I'll stay in the house. And I don't really like my brother going outside, cause in my apartment building, there's like all these people sitting on the stairs drinking and then all the little kids running around in the front of the building... Like I like him to have friends and play and stuff, but I don't want him to see the alcohol and stuff like that. Like I don't want him even knowing what that is until he's my age. Cause I was too young in finding that out and I don't want him to be doing the same stuff
(Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Finally, Fiona told me that her parents had moved neighbourhoods while she was in Centre B, so when she moved home she would be away from her old friends that she thought had been a bad influence on her. However, she made it obvious that the move to a new community would in no way remove her from violence. In fact, it sounded more like she was moving out of the frying pan and into the fire. As she explained:

My parents moved. They don't live there anymore. They moved two months ago... But I've met some people in this area, but see all my other friends they fought one on one... They fought, it's just they don't use knives. And in the new area it's like everybody's got knives and guns and stuff like that. It's like "Great! From fist fights to knives and guns. Geez I'm progressing!" (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

Essentially, it seemed that in almost all aspects of the home worlds of these young women, from their communities to their friends, to their families, they had been

surrounded by violence and taught that fighting was normal, legitimate, and even necessary. Although there were apparently limits to what was acceptable in terms of the use of violence, there was a general belief that violence was not always pernicious. However, when the young women arrived in these custodial institutions, they were greeted by a new message. The institutional philosophy was that violence was always unacceptable.

4.5 Institutions and violence

It is essential to introduce a caveat about the data on institutions prior to this discussion. First of all, and perhaps most importantly, I did not interview any of the staff at the various institutions that these young women lived in. Consequently, any and all of the impressions presented here are those of the young women and, perhaps because of the fact that they were all being detained against their will, they were all quite critical of these institutions. It is also important to note that I did not begin these interviews with the goal of probing into the institutional environment in great detail, however as the young women began to bring up these facilities time and again, I attempted to incorporate questions about this atmosphere into our discussions. However, I did not have as much information about the institutional world these young women live in as I did about their home worlds.

That said, I did gather enough information about the young women's institutional environment to at least begin to make sense of how these facilities attempted to resocialize the young women into adopting a non-violent, non-aggressive

and non-confrontational lifestyle, that corresponded more closely with the traditional views on appropriate female behaviour. What became clear from my discussions with the ten young women was that the institutional settings were quite different from their home worlds. In the institutions, the staff seemed to try to teach the young women that violence was not an acceptable form of social behaviour, and they punished those young women who were confrontational or questioned 'the system.' Furthermore, these young women talked about some of the programmes that the institutions had developed to help indoctrinate this non-confrontational approach into their residents, focusing on the individual as opposed to their home environments as the 'problem' that needed to be 'fixed.' Finally, some of the young women spoke of the obvious contradictory nature of these institutional environments in that although the institutions and their staff claimed to be trying to help these kids develop a non-confrontational and non-violent lifestyle, in some cases the young women believed they were faced with more violence in the institutions than they had encountered on the outside.

Once they were in the institutions, and sometimes even before they entered into the system, the young women quickly became aware that violence would not be tolerated and indeed was condemned as aberrant or deviant behaviour. In some cases, the young women were aware that violence was seen as bad because they had been charged for being violent. In fact, five of the ten young women reported that they had been charged at least once for a violent crime such as assault or robbery. Some of these young women, particularly those who had a fairly extensive list of prior convictions, told me that they thought that they were given extra long sentences to 'teach them a

lesson' that they need to change their ways. For example, JD explained, "Assault you won't get that long (a sentence). Me, I get a long time because I'm known in the court system. But for the first assault, like if you don't have a past rap, or whatever... you usually only get like seven days" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997). However, she also noted that she knew of at least one case where the young woman was given a fairly lengthy sentence on her first conviction and she contended that there was a rationale for this apparent harshness. As she explained:

(T)here was a girl in O who got two months secure and two months open for like an assault charge causing bodily harm. [What did she do to the other girl?] She broke her nose. And that's all that she did in this fight. And like she went to school everyday, she had straight A's, she hasn't been in fights any other time before that happened. [So why do you think she got such a harsh sentence?] I think the judge wanted to make an example out of her. To show all the other girls cause there's a lot of girls causing problems and stuff. And this is like "See we are mean and we mean business" and stuff (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Even those young women who were living in Centre B as wards of the CAS and had not been charged under the *Young Offenders Act* indicated that they believed that part of the reason that they were being institutionalized was because they were known for their fighting and just generally being delinquent. For example, when I asked Janice how she came to be in Centre B, she replied, "Cause... my social worker after all of this reasons - stealing cars, getting into fights and all of this - she said she was gonna put me somewhere" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997). Similarly, Fiona believed that at least one of the main reasons that she had ended up in Centre B was that her parents had not known how to handle her fighting and violent behaviour. She explained this to me when I asked her if her parents had known about the fights she was in:

They know I used to fight a lot. They know I used to watch big fights. But like, just like I said, you know what I mean, my parents they weren't really... My parents weren't really good for the authority figure. They didn't know what to do, you know what I mean? And then eventually they somehow got the crisis line and then started sending me there (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

As soon as the young women arrived in these institutions, it became more obvious to them that violence and indeed any confrontational behaviour was highly censored and sanctioned. Half of the young women reported that they had in fact been charged for assault or making threats, either against other residents or against the staff, when they were living in a custodial institution. In addition to sanctioning the young women for threatening to fight or fighting, these institutions seemed to try to censor discussions about violence among their residents. At least in Centre A, there seemed to be explicit rules that prohibited the young women from talking about violence. For example, JD told me that she found Centre A much more strict than the other institutions that she had been in in terms of censoring discussions of violence. As she put it, "(T)hey say "Don't talk about your crime" (pause) and everything is inappropriate. Like they say don't talk about your crime and I think that's stupid cause if you don't talk about it then it's just inside and you never get to... get it out" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997). She also bemoaned the fact that certain 'violent' television shows were prohibited because "they think it has a negative effect on us - which is so stupid" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

The staff at these institutions also seemed to punish other less obviously violent, but nonetheless potentially confrontational behaviour, perhaps in an attempt to

resocialize these young women. In fact, even swearing was something that the young women reported they were punished for. One of the young women became concerned during the interviews that I might tell her staff she had been swearing. When I assured her that I would not since what we spoke about was strictly confidential, she responded, "Good cause we're not allowed to swear" (Interview # 10, August 26, 1997). Another one of the young women living in Centre B specified that they were fined twenty-five cents each time they swore. The staff at Centre A seemed to impose even more austere punishments when their residents were caught swearing and at least one of the young women living there indicated that she thought the staff overreacted to their use of blasphemy. She purported, "Like if we swear here, oh god, frig. They take it as if you like killed somebody. If you say shit... they can like keep you in your room for the whole day" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

In addition to punishing the residents at these institutions for swearing, the staff seemed to forbid the young women from questioning their authority. The young women told me that they became quite frustrated with the staff who did not always seem to be able to agree on the Centre's rules. In some cases, the young women indicated that they thought the rules were really quite arbitrary and therefore difficult to abide by. As Janice put it, "Here they make up the consequences and the rules as you go along. So you don't know what's gonna happen if you do something here. And you don't know what you're allowed and not allowed doing" (Interview # 7, August 6, 1997).

Similarly, Alexis seemed quite disillusioned by the fact that she did not seem to be able to keep up with all the latest rules at Centre B's secure treatment facility. She stated

somewhat sarcastically, "I've been here six months and new rules... are still coming and coming and coming" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997). Janice indicated that she and the other residents questioned the reasons for the changing rules quite regularly, and although they were not seemingly punished for these inquiries, nothing came of their queries. Alexis, however, told me that she was seen as a thorn in the side of the staff for not accepting their authority unquestioningly:

I'm the only one that like speaks up... So that's how I get in the most trouble. Like I'm the only one here who actually is like, you know, will say "No. That's not the rules." And the staff who do this - there's like these part-timers and... part-timers don't know half the rules, so you've got to say like "No, this is the rules. This is what we always do", you know?... I get into trouble that way... [The staff will say] "Are you questioning staff? Take five minutes." I have a special program, nobody else has it. But if I question staff, I get five minutes... Like in the room. And then if I uh, if I even say one word when I'm going to my room, an hour. I'm the only one that has that program now, cause I always question staff (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997).

The staff not only punished the young women for behaving in any sort of a confrontational manner, but they also seemed to cultivate a belief in the young women that they, individually, were responsible for their troubles and that they needed to modify their own behaviour and lifestyles if they want to be released from the institution and remain 'free.' Whenever the young women spoke about having received treatment within these facilities, they spoke predominately of having taken anger management courses, and many of them seemed to accepted the institutional rhetoric on anger management. In other words, as mentioned previously, several young women told me that they thought they had had 'an anger management problem' and believed that they needed to learn to control their tempers or emotions. At least two of the

young women believed that they had changed a lot since they were institutionalized directly because of their anger management courses. For example, Addy told me with great pride that she no longer saw violence as acceptable, thanks to her anger management courses. When I asked her if she thought that fighting was 'normal', she replied:

Yeah, it's just normal. But the thing about now (pause) It's not normal no more. Ever since I came in here, this place. It's just this place, the other places, the other centres, they tried teaching me this, but I didn't listen because... I wasn't near ready to listen. But here, it really helps. I took anger management. We did a test. I passed the test so I got a certificate (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997).

Alexis was also a convert to the benefits of anger management courses. She believed that her anger management group had taught her "what to do with my anger and stuff" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997). When I asked her specifically what she had learned in the course, she replied, "dealing with an accusation, um, dealing with frustration. Right now we're doing showing affection, yeah, expressing affection. Different ways of dealing with anger, stuff like that" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997). All of these issues seemed to focus on an individual's ability to control his or her emotions, and not necessarily with those circumstances that might compel the young women to behave violently. However, there was no doubt that these young women seemed to believe that anger management worked and consequently, that they were personally responsible for their previous violent behaviour.

Some of the young women so thoroughly accepted the merits of the anger management program that they told me that they knew people that could use it. For example, Addy planned to try and pass on her 'newly found wisdom' to her mother.

She told me "I have this little pamphlet, booklet. I'm going to show my mom so she can control her anger, learn to control her anger. It teaches us everything" (Interview # 2, July 10, 1997). Similarly, Alexis explained that two of the people living with her in Centre B had not taken the anger management course because they were new arrivals. However, she was quite convinced that "they need it" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997). In fact, she revealed that "the group's probably going to start back up again just for those two, cause they're real bad like that. They're all (pause) aggressive" (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997).

It would be misleading to pretend that the institutions presented a completely unified and coherent message that all violence was bad and should never be used. In fact, even though the institutions condemned the young women for behaving aggressively and being confrontational, the staff at these residences seemed, at times, to resort to violence in an attempt to enforce their rules. As Koryn explained, "when you don't do something that they tell you to, then they're going to help you do it" (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997). This "help" seemed to come in the form of using physical force to restrain those residents who were not behaving as the staff would like. More specifically, these young women indicated that restraints were commonly used "if you hurt yourself, hurt somebody, or destroy the property" (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997). Carolyn, one of the young women who reported that she was not a violent person, indicated that she found these restraints quite troubling and believed that she had actually been exposed to more violence since she had been living in Centre B than she had previously.

When I came into my house, I never got restrained. Like before I came here I didn't have as many problems. I mean I've never got restrained. I just got restrained a couple of weeks ago... (I)t was my bedtime and a girl had my sweater ok?... She said, "Okay, go to your room now." And I said "No cause I wanna wait for my sweater." And he's [the staff] like "Well go to your room." I stood up and I walked by him, she handed me my sweater and he started dragging me up the stairs. I started going like this (arms flailing). And I went with a fist into his eye and I started kicking him. He threw me down. I have (pause) Here I'll show you. See right there? (There is a fairly nasty cut in her leg, about one inch long, which is now beginning to scar). That's from... him pushing me down (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

Carolyn also contended that she felt very uncomfortable among the other residents in the home because as she put it, "Violence is the answer to most of them... Everyone says stuff like "She better shut her mouth or I'm going to slap her"... That's the answer to everyone's problems here" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997). She was obviously frustrated with the institution and believed that they were not helping her to deal with her problems, and if anything, were exacerbating them. She lamented, "They're sticking me in a house, they say, "Sit here. Don't run away please." Then they have kids coming up to me and saying that. That's running me out of my house cause I'm like scared to live in my own house" (Interview # 8, August 7, 1997).

Carolyn was not the only person to speak about being uncomfortable living in these institutions. Kristal, who had also told me she was not really a violent person, told me that violence was an omnipresent feature of life in Centre A. She explained:

(Y)ou do hear about violence in here, like you "I beat him and this guy got in my way..." And you know, some of the people here are gang members, and so I guess it's just a wide array of things in here. You got people who are in here for murder, and you know, people who are in here because, you know, they walked out of their open custody group home. You know, big time criminals (Interview # 3, July 14, 1997).

In other words, despite the institutions' attempts to resocialize the young women into a non-violent and non-confrontational lifestyle, violence was apparently still fairly common within these institutions. The young women were exposed to violence in the institutions by the other residents who, in some cases, may have come from more violent and aggressive backgrounds than their own, and by the staff who resorted to violence and the use of physical force to enforce the institutional authority.

4.6 The clash between the home world and the institutional world

Ultimately, these young women were bombarded with conflicting messages about the use of violence. In their home worlds, they had grown to experience violence as a normal feature of life. In their families, among their friends and in their communities, they had come to see that certain situations can be, and may need to be, resolved through violence. On the other hand, these young women knew that the criminal justice system, and in some cases the child welfare system, condemned the use of violence. When they had resorted to violence, many of them were taken away from their homes and incarcerated in institutions where the message that "violence is bad" was preached regularly. However, the reality of life in the institutions did not always jive with this message in that many of the residents continued to speak of their experiences with violence, and indeed, even the staff employed violence to enforce their authority.

Given the conflicting messages about violence that these young women have been exposed to, it is not surprising that they too seem confused about how they felt about violence and, as a result, were confused about how they thought about

themselves. As mentioned earlier, the young women revealed that they had fairly contradictory perceptions of self. If they had come from home worlds where violent behaviour was seen as aberrant as it was in the institutional settings, then those who had chosen to be violent would likely feel much more unequivocally that what they had done was indeed abominable. On the other hand, if the young women had only ever been subjected to their home worlds' discourses on violence, then perhaps they would have only felt guilt or regret about behaving violently when they violated their own prescriptive or proscriptive rules of violence. Instead, these young women were caught between two different social constructions of violence and they were left to attempt to make sense of these messages and work towards developing an acceptable guiding framework for their own lives. Although all of the young women told me that they wanted to avoid violence and delinquency when they got out of these institutions, there were variations in their views on the plausibility of this.

In some cases, the young women believed that they could rise to the challenge. They believed that their time in the custodial institutions had set them on the right path and they would be able to lead a productive, non-violent life when they were released. This mind set came through quite clearly in the cases of Addy and Alexis, two of the young women who thought that their anger management courses had truly reformed them. For example, Alexis told me about that she believed she had changed her attitude towards violence:

(B)efore I was like "Oh yeah, I'm cool cause I fight. I'm cool cause I fight." But then I don't think that way anymore. If I, if I was to see two girls fight, I'd be like, "They're so immature," you know, now. But like

five months ago, I would have been like "Let's fight, let's fight"... You know it's not worth it. I've learned that (Interview # 5, August 1, 1997).

There seemed to be little doubt in Alexis' mind that she would be able to avoid violent confrontations once she was released from Centre B. Fiona also seemed convinced that she would be able to lead a 'normal,' non-violent life with her family when she left her group home. Although she had not necessarily bought into the doctrines of anger management or emotion control, she believed that she had benefitted from her stay in an institution. As she put it:

As much as I hate to admit it, it [Centre B] has taught me some good things... It has taught me to see the positive in some stuff... Whenever I'm there I realize like how much being an idiot at home, running away, whatever - none of it's worth it... Like I realized how much I had to lose... It didn't seem like a lot, but once you lose it it's like "Oh my god. I lost the world." (Interview # 9, August 10, 1997).

Fiona also indicated that not only had she grown up or matured in the fifteen months since she had first been institutionalized, but her family had pulled itself back together and she saw this as giving her a more positive and supportive home environment to move back into upon her release.

Other young women were more aware of the difficulties that they would encounter when and if they tried to change their lives upon their release. For example, JD indicated that she did not want to have to return home to her mother where she was known for being tough since she believed she would fall back into the same patterns of violent behaviour. She explained, "everybody knows me there as "Big, Bad JD" and I don't wanna be like that cause like if they treat me like that, like I'm big and bad, then that's how I'll act. That's why I want a fresh new start" (Interview # 1, July 8, 1997).

Instead, JD was hoping that when she was released she would be able to go live with her father and his new family. Unfortunately, however, this seemed unlikely given that JD had not seen her father in eight years and had only spoken to him once during that period.

Koryn was even more depressed about her chances to have what she saw as a 'normal' life. She told me that she hoped to be able to move into a foster home when she was released from Centre B, yet she lamented that this would probably never happen. This became evident when I asked her why she wanted to go into a foster home. Her response went as follows:

Because I want a family. I've never really had a family. And I want a chance to have a good family you know? But (pause) I don't know. I don't think I'll be able to get one though. Cause nobody wants to have a kid that's like been in jail and stuff... I feel stupid sometimes... I want so many things out of life, but I know I just can't have everything now because I made all these dumb mistakes. And a lot of people look at me differently now because I've done time... and because I've smoked marijuana, they look at me like I'm a bad kid. But I'm not. I may have done my share of crimes and got myself into situations, but it's not like I'm like that now (Interview # 6, August 5, 1997).

Ironically, some of these young women were seemingly more astute about their social circumstances and the reasons for their violence than were the staff at the institutions. Although they might have agreed that they had problems 'controlling' their anger, they knew that their home environments had exacerbated their difficulties. In some cases, as we saw with JD, the young women hoped to be able to move to a new familial setting where they could avoid violence. However, some of the young women saw their options as quite bleak. By the age of fourteen, some were already convinced

that their life chances had been inevitably hindered by their violent and delinquent
pasts.

5.0 The young women's stories and theories of delinquency and violence

5.1 Introduction

In many ways, these ten young women's stories took me quite far from the theories of delinquency and aggression originally discussed in the literature review. In this chapter, I will not attempt to go through, theory by theory, highlighting their deficiencies, since most have already been extensively critiqued. Furthermore, the data gathered in this study do not really allow for this type of systematic testing of theories. As mentioned in the methods chapter, given the small, non-representative nature of the sample of young women, these findings should not be seen as generalizable to the rest of the population. Furthermore, the data are limited in that we cannot compare the experiences of these young women with those of young men, nor to those of other young women from the same social background, nor to those of young women living in different social contexts.

Instead, in this final chapter, I want to focus again on the voices of these young women and the insights that were revealed in their stories. I will begin by providing an overview of the major findings that came out of the interviews. I will then focus on what seems to be perhaps the key finding of this study: the importance of social context in making sense of these young women's use of violence. This discussion will take us back to some of the recent research into female delinquency and female aggression, highlighting how some of these researchers have also been attuned to the importance of social context. I will then focus on the problems encountered by these young women

when they are exposed to two different social contexts that present two unique and quite contradictory understandings of violence. Although none of the theories discussed in the literature review deal with this issue, Erving Goffman's work on total institutions will be used to help elucidate the impact of institutional living on young women. I will conclude by briefly noting some of the future research possibilities that would help further enhance our understanding of female violence, and by outlining the policy implications of this research.

5.2 Overview of study findings

The young women interviewed for this study presented me with a very complex picture of the role of violence in their lives. Although the young women all seemed to agree on a fairly straightforward definition of violence as involving physical aggression, their understanding of violence was definitely not monolithic. As discussed in the previous two chapters, these young women maintained that there were both negative and positive aspects of violence.

Although they all indicated that they regretted, or even felt guilty about having participated in some violent confrontations, they had all done so at least once in their lives. The young women seemed to regret having fought primarily because they did not like to hurt other people, since many had been the victims of violence themselves. Some also expressed dismay at their use of violence because they saw it as a loss of control or a sign that they had let other people get to them. Still others disliked fighting because they saw violence as a waste of time and they believed that it did not solve

problems but could actually exacerbate their difficulties in that it sometimes led to further involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Even though the young women all believed that there were many negative aspects of violence, they also maintained that there were situations where they had little or no choice but to fight with others. They described a variety of fairly specific rules or conditions under which they believed the use of violence was prescribed. The young women indicated that they believed that the use of fighting was at least justifiable, if not necessary, when they were being attacked physically, but also when they thought that their sense of self or their reputations were being assaulted by others. These assaults included any signs of disrespect such as trying to force the young women to do things against their will, spreading malicious rumours or calling the young women hateful names, and revealing intimate details of the young women's lives that they would prefer to keep secret.

When these young women did become involved in fights that they believed had been prescribed under these conditions, their actions were governed by other proscriptive rules concerning the use of specific behaviours during the actual confrontation. These rules included a reluctance to intervene in others' fights or have people intervene in their disputes, and the prohibition of both the use of weapons and the use of stereotypical female fighting techniques such as scratching or pulling their opponent's hair.

Given that the young women indicated that they felt guilty and regretful about their past involvement in violent confrontations, and yet they still believed that they

actually needed to resort to violence at times, it is not surprising that these young women were left feeling confused about how to make sense of their actions and themselves. Some of the young women dismissed the idea that they were violent, but instead explained that violence was just an omnipresent and unavoidable aspect of their lives. It was much more common, however, for the young women to see themselves as either bad or violent people, or at the very least, as someone who had violent behavioural tendencies or problems controlling their behaviour.

At first glance, it might seem bizarre that these young women had such conflicting feelings about the use of violence, however, given the social worlds that they have grown up in, their contradictory viewpoints seem to be quite understandable. In other words, these young women have been subjected to two very different discourses on the use of violence, both in their home worlds and in the institutional environments.

In their home worlds, almost all of these young women had grown up receiving a fairly coherent message condoning the use of violence and they had come to understand their own use of such behaviour within this moral framework. Put somewhat differently, violence had been a normative feature of everyday life within the social context of their home environments. The young women's families, friends and members of their community helped them to understand that violence was not something forbidden, but instead something which was to be used under legitimate conditions or justifiable circumstances.

This framework fell apart when the young women entered custodial institutions

such as Centres A and B. In the institutional world, the young women quickly became aware that the old rules about using violence were no longer seen as appropriate. Some of the young women were charged for their use of violence, and many of those who had not been officially charged with a violent crime or any other offense under the *Young Offenders Act* believed that they had been confined because of their known tendency to fight. The message that violence was not acceptable, but actually deviant behaviour, was further elucidated in the institutional rules that prohibited the discussion of violence, and punished any seemingly confrontational behaviour, including swearing or the questioning of staff's authority. In addition to preaching a message of non-violence and non-confrontation, the institutions attempted to indoctrinate the belief in these young women that they were in fact individually responsible for their current situation since they had problems controlling their behaviour, or more specifically, they had 'anger management' problems.

That said, the institutional message about the pejorative nature of violence was not quite as coherent as the discourse on violence that these young women had been witness to within their home worlds. For example, the staff at the institutions contradicted their own anti-violence message when they resorted to using physical restraints to control the residents living under their care. In some cases, the young women indicated that they believed they had been exposed to more violence in these institutions, both at the hands of the staff, and the other residents' actions, than they had been witness to in their home environments.

The young women obviously experienced a distinctive clash in the messages

about violence from their homes and their institutions. Some thought that they would be able to resolve this conflict and would bring their new, non-violent approach to life back to their home worlds and still be able to survive and even thrive. Others were much more cognizant of the incredible difficulties that they would face in attempting to integrate back into their home worlds and avoid using violence as mandated by the institutions and the juvenile justice system. Some believed that they would need to move into a different home environment if they were to do so, and others actually believed that they would never really be accepted into mainstream society because of their past known use of violence.

There are several key findings that emerged from this research. First and foremost, this study forces us to acknowledge that young women can be and indeed are violent. Furthermore, this research makes it clear that young women who are violent are not crazy or irrational, but instead offer very coherent and fairly comprehensive accounts of their violent behaviour and the reasons why they thought that this behaviour was acceptable. Finally, perhaps one of the key findings of this study is the fact that violence is something which is socially constructed within specific social contexts. To make sense of these young women's use of violence, we need to consider the context in which this behaviour occurs. Within the social context of these young women's home worlds, they had come to learn when it was appropriate to resort to violence and when such action would be deemed unacceptable. The interviews also seemed to reveal that when the young women's social contexts changed (i.e. when they moved from their home worlds into the institutional environment) their guiding frameworks of when

violence was justifiable were openly challenged by the institutional discourse that dictated that violence was never acceptable.

Put somewhat differently, although these young women indicated that they had developed a highly contextualized understanding of when, how and why violence was appropriate in their home worlds, the institutions seemed to adopt a highly decontextualized understanding of violence in that they preached that violence was always deviant behaviour, no matter what the context. This decontextualized understanding of violence is something which has been true of much of the past research and theories into female aggression and delinquency, however, some of the more recent research has acknowledged the need for a contextualized understanding of female violence.

5.3 The need for a contextualized understanding of female violence

All of the theories discussed in the literature review fail to capture the complexities of these young women's lives. In many ways, the findings from this study reinforce the criticisms of recent researchers in the field of female delinquency (Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992) and female aggression (Campbell, 1993; Pearson, 1997) that to depict women solely as passive beings or passive victims is fundamentally problematic.

As these researchers have noted, the androcentric theories of delinquency and violence which depict women as passive beings, incapable of autonomous action, are fundamentally flawed. In contrast to the predictions of these theories, each one of the girls that I spoke with had engaged in violent behaviour at least once in their lives.

Although they may have believed that they had somewhat constrained choices about whether or not they did so, this was more the result of abiding by the prescriptive rules of engaging in violence, and not because they were passive beings coerced into using violence.

As we have seen, some feminists have also continued to perpetuate the myth that women are never violent, but only the passive victims of violence. According to some feminists, when females do behave violently, they were either driven to do so by years of brutal victimization at the hands of men, coerced into the violence by their male partners, or unknowingly participated in such behaviour because they were mentally ill (see Campbell, 1993 and Pearson, 1997 for discussions of this trend).

The findings from my ten interviews fly in the face of these feminist theories. The young women that I spoke with did not see themselves as passive victims, incapable of protecting themselves and choosing to engage in autonomous action. Although it became obvious throughout the course of our interviews that many, if not all of them had suffered abuse at the hands of others, they did not dwell on their victimization. The young women explained quite cogently that they behaved violently in order to defend themselves from physical assault and assaults on their definitions of self. These young women did not see themselves as crazy, insane, irrational young women, acting without reflection about the consequences of their actions. Instead they explained that their actions were quite deliberate, and in fact, seemed to be governed by a set of guiding prescriptive and proscriptive rules.

In this sense then, both the androcentric theories and some of the feminist

theories of violence and delinquency are fundamentally flawed. These interviews force us to accept that "one of the most abiding myths of our time" (Pearson, 1997: 7) is just that: a myth. In other words, the idea, perpetuated in both popular and academic culture, that women have no part in violence, except perhaps as the victims of such behaviour, falls apart once again in these interviews.

That said, it would be wrong to dismiss all of the previous theoretical work in crime and aggression as completely useless in helping to make sense of these young women's behaviour. In fact, several of these theories do seem to provide some insights into specific aspects of the use of violence by these young women. For example, one could argue that some of these young women's experiences were consistent with the major tenets of Sutherland's theory of differential association in that these young women have learned about violence in a context where they were affiliated with people who depict such behaviour in positive terms, and were isolated from those people who cast it in a more negative light (Sutherland, 1949). Similarly, the social learning theory (Bandura, 1973) and the subcultures of violence theory (Wolfgang and Feracuti, 1967) could also be seen as applicable to at least some of these young women's experiences.

However, none of these theories is able to deal with the comprehensive complexities of these young women's lives and why they use violence. Instead, these theories only seem to fit with the experiences of these young women when applied in a piecemeal manner, drawing on the insights of one theory and different hypotheses of another. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, these theories remain fundamentally troubling in that their underlying premises are rooted in the experiences of men and

boys and, consequently, will never be able to account for the unique experiences of women and girls that might help explain their reasons for participating in crime and/or violent confrontations.

When we turn back to the voices of the young women in this study, the findings also seem to suggest that these theories are fundamentally flawed in other ways. Many of these theories fail to deal with what are seemingly the most important insights to be drawn from this research: that young women are violent; that violent young women are not crazy or irrational but are able to provide coherent explanations of how and why they chose to be aggressive; and that these young women's violent behaviours are culturally constructed within specific social contexts. Instead, these theories tend to present an understanding of violence that is highly decontextualized and only make sense if the violence is discussed outside of the context in which it occurs. These theories can also be seen as decontextualized in that they ignore the important differences between the social context of men and women in our society and how these contextual differences might affect male and female decisions to make use of violence and/or crime. The findings from this study seem to indicate that these androcentric theories may be too simplistic. In fact, these young women's actions only seem to make sense if it is understood within the social contexts that they inhabit. These androcentric theories would become decidedly more useful in helping us make sense of young women's use of violence if they were modified to emphasize the importance of gendered understandings of experiences or, put somewhat differently, if an understanding of gendered contexts was incorporated into these works.

That said, as discussed in the literature review, some of the more recent research into female aggression has focused on the importance of social context. Some researchers have argued quite pointedly that aggression is a cultural construction. This is evident in both the cross-cultural work of researchers such as Burbank (1994) and Cook (1992), as well as Chesney-Lind and Shelden's research into female delinquency (1992) and Campbell's studies of female aggression (1993).

For example, in Kimberley Cook's work on aggression among Margariteño women (1992), she notes that although female aggression has tended to be either ignored or interpreted as deviant or masculine behaviour in western cultures, this is not the case in Margarita, Venezuela. As she explains, "Margariteño women express aggression with a socially recognized authority that goes largely unquestioned. The use of verbal and physical aggression by women is not considered abnormal. A women's physical strength and ability to defend herself is a source of pride and is central in the self-concept of women" (Cook, 1992: 156).

She believes that it is the matrifocality in Margariteño culture that mandates that female aggression is seen as acceptable and indeed, normal behaviour. Cook maintains that the central social roles that women have in Margariteño society does not afford them high social status, however it does mean that they have a great deal of 'informal' power. As she puts it, "It is this informal power that, in part, underlies their ability to use various types of aggressive behaviour in different contexts" (Cook, 1992: 158). In other words, Cook believes that the matrifocality of Margariteño culture has created a social context where the use of female aggression is seen as legitimate and is accepted

by members of the community, both male and female, as such.

Similarly, Victoria Burbank (1994) maintains that Aboriginal women have a different cultural understanding of aggression than do North America women. Although North American women tend to see fighting as incredibly aberrant and dysfunctional behaviour, this is not the case among Aboriginal women. As Burbank explains:

Women at Mangrove are, from time to time, angry and aggressive. But they are not regarded as "sick" by their community. Nor are their aggressive acts seen as "unexpected," "irrational," "unnatural," or "unfeminine"... For the most part, their anger is accepted as justified and its aggressive expression viewed as predictable. These are not women deviating from societal norms, "rejecting their proper sex role," or "having identity problems." Rather, they are women who are displeased with a turn of events and express their displeasure in culturally prescribed, culturally expected ways (Burbank, 1994: 184).

Burbank believes that the reason that there is such a difference between the Aboriginal Australian and North American women's views of aggression is that "our understanding of gender and aggression is socially constructed" (Burbank, 1994: 184). In other words, within the context of mainstream North American culture, female aggression has been socially constructed as unacceptable, whereas within the Australian Aboriginal and Margariteño cultures, physical aggression is seen "as part of normal female sex role behavior" (Cook, 1992: 149).

Within the context of their home environments, the young women that I spoke with seemed to have adopted a cultural understanding concerning the use of violence that was perhaps closer to that of Aboriginal and Margariteño women than that of the stereotypical western female. Although these young women had very contradictory and conflicting views on the use of violence, all of them had been active participants in

violent confrontations. However, as we have seen, their use of violence was not an anarchic and emotion-driven pursuit, but seemed to be quite structured by a set of prescriptive and proscriptive rules that dictated which types of situations justified a resort to violent behaviour, and once in a violent confrontation, which specific acts were deemed unacceptable. In other words, fighting for these ten young women was "expected and rule-governed behavior" (Burbank, 1994: 74). I have contended that these young women saw violence as a normalized behaviour, governed by specific rules, because they had grown up in a social context where they have seen their families, their friends, and their neighbours resorting to violence under given circumstances. In other words, within their home worlds, these young women came to understand that violence is not deviant or aberrant behaviour, but something that is at times both justifiable and, in their minds, even necessary.

The realization that social context plays an integral role in helping to understand the violent actions of young women has not solely been confined to research based in non-western cultures. In fact, Chesney-Lind and Shelden's research on female delinquency (1992) and Campbell's work on female aggression (1993) take this understanding somewhat further in that they highlight both how important it is to explore the social context that women and girls live in in order to make sense of their actions, as well as the fact that females may have constrained choices about participating in crime and/or the use of violence which tend to be rooted in these social contexts. As discussed in the literature review, these researchers have emphasized the importance of understanding the unique context of young women's lives and young

women's situations when we attempt to make sense of their use of violence. This is summarized succinctly by Chesney-Lind and Shelden as follows:

(G)irls' delinquencies are shaped by the unique problems they face in a society that gives women, particularly girls, very little power, few options, and even fewer civil rights. These burdens become heavier when girls' problems are compounded by poverty, abusive families, and membership in a minority ethnic group (1992: 51-52).

Furthermore Chesney-Lind and Shelden warn us against simply dismissing delinquent young women as deviant, crazy, or irrational, but instead encourage us to try to understand their actions as an attempt to make the best out of the difficult circumstances of their lives. As they explain, "Their behaviour may puzzle us until we understand their predicaments. Their delinquencies are, in fact, attempts to pull themselves out of their dismal circumstances" (1992: 182). In other words, these young women's actions may seem bizarre, given our social context, but their behaviour may in fact make a good deal of sense given the limited options available to these young women. It is important to note, however, that not everyone living in these social contexts would choose to react as they young women did. In other words, individuals within these environments vary in their willingness to resort to violence. Violence is something which may be an important option for these young women, however, in at least some circumstances, it would be an exaggeration to claim it was an essential one.

Campbell's (1993) work on female aggression has also highlighted the importance of trying to understand how and why females aggress and how different life circumstances and situations affect their reasons for doing so. As we have seen,

Campbell's theory of aggression posits that there are different reasons for using violence and different feelings about their use of violence for men and women, and also for different groups of women, such as middle class women and female gang members. Much of Campbell's work in *Out of Control* deals with middle class women and their view of aggression. She maintains that these women adopt an expressive view of violence, in that they are only violent when they lose control of their emotions. Although this understanding of female aggression does not seem to be supported by these findings, Campbell's work on the use of violence by female gang members is much more pertinent to this study. This work is particularly useful in bringing to light how a young woman's social context can lead her to choose to resort to violence and how her choices are constrained by her social circumstances.

For example, Campbell maintains that within the gang subcultures, young women learn that violence is necessary given the environments they live in. As she puts it, for young women in gangs, "Aggression in their lives is a means of survival" (Campbell, 1993: 140). In other words, within the violent subcultures that the young women in gangs inhabit, they need to learn how to defend themselves in order to avoid victimization. This was something that came through quite clearly in my interviews. Like the young women in the gangs that Campbell studied, the young women that I spoke with quite clearly indicated that they believed there were times when they chose to resort to aggressing against others in order to defend themselves from victimization. In fact, as we have seen, many of the young women actually reported that they had first learned to fight in order to defend themselves from others.

Campbell (1991: 1993) also noted that there seemed to be culturally mandated and acceptable reasons for the young women in gangs to use violence. She contended that female gang members felt compelled to participate in violent confrontations in order to develop a reputation for being tough, which would help them ward off future violent attacks. As one of the female gang members explained:

I'm glad I got a reputation. That way nobody will start with me, you know, Nobody will fuck with me - they know, you know. They're going to come out losing. Like all of us, we got a reputation. We're crazy, nobody wants to fight with us for that reason - you know. They say, "No man. That girl might stab me or cut my face or something like that." (Campbell, 1991: 262).

This quote could have come from the mouth of almost any of the young women I met with. The young women in these gangs, and the ten young women that I interviewed, believe that if they participate in violent confrontations and refuse to back away from fights, they will develop a reputation for being tough and in the future people will steer clear of them. In some social contexts, this type of reputation would not likely be necessary, however, these young women all seemed to believe that in order to survive in their home environments and avoid becoming victims, they needed to adopt an "'aggressive stance" as a means of opposing violence" (Burbank, 1994: 186).

Campbell believes that these female gang members adopt an instrumental approach to violence, in that they "begin to see aggression as a way of controlling other people" (Campbell, 1993: 140). I would contend that it goes beyond that. Not only do these young women see aggression as a way of controlling other people, but within the social contexts that they have grown up in, they believe that they need to maintain a

unified sense of self and integrity by defending themselves when people disrespect them. This finding has been supported in the small number of other studies of young women and violence that have been done in recent years.

For example, Campbell noted in her work on female gang members that almost one quarter (24.2%) of all the fights they spoke about were the result of attacks on their integrity such as an "accusation of cuckoldry, promiscuity, cowardice or stupidity" (Campbell, 1984: 146) and/or fights that they had gotten involved in on behalf of someone else whose reputation was under attack. Campbell found that only domestic disputes were cited as a more common reason for fighting (35.5% of all fights) than were attacks on integrity or loyalty (Campbell, 1984: 147). Campbell saw these violent confrontations over personal integrity as rooted in the normative beliefs of the gang subculture that violence was the prescribed response to insults and attacks on one's reputation. As she explained:

(F)ights over personal integrity are quite common among girls... The girls in this study often responded as individuals to attacks on their reputation or that of their lovers or children. Within the cultures from which they come, failure to respond in this way would constitute deviance from an implicit prescriptive rule - "No one says that and gets away with it." (Campbell, 1984: 154).

Mary Harris' work on young Mexican-American women and gangs highlights similar rationales for these young women's involvement in gang life and gang violence (1988; 1994). Harris posits that these young women have grown up in families and communities where they have learned that resorting to violence is a perfectly acceptable response to dealing with problems. The young women in these Mexican-American

gangs became involved in violence not only because they believed that they needed to do so in order to protect themselves, but because it was seen as a normal response to certain provocations. In other words, within their home environments, these young women have been exposed to a cultural understanding of violence as an acceptable and legitimate behaviour. As she explains:

This subculture of violence crosses generations - the parents of many of the girls in this study are or had been gang members. Core gang members share a commitment to the use of physical aggression as a major mode of personal interaction and a device for solving problems. The girls described here will fight instead of flee, assault instead of articulate... (Harris, 1994: 297).

Violence was a normalized part of gang life for the young women in Harris' study.

"(I)t is clear that the norms of the gang demand violence and violent acts and being "bad," "crazy," or "wild" earn respects and status" (Harris, 1988: 136).

Once again, this was something that was supported in my study as well. The young women that I spoke with had grown up in home environments where their families and their friends had dictated that violence was not always a negative thing, but was actually sometimes useful in terms of protecting themselves both physically and with respect to their reputations. Furthermore, as in Campbell's work, these ten young women had seen others respond violently to personal affronts and insults and so they felt justified and even believed that they were compelled to do so. Anne Campbell's conclusion from her study of working class females and their fighting is an equally apt observation of these study findings, "Girls as well as boys need to establish and maintain a positive public self-concept. In the face of an assault on their personal

integrity, steps must be taken to regain the *status quo*" (Campbell, 1982: 148).

However, I would maintain that the way in which young women choose to "regain the status quo" varies depending on their social contexts. In other words, for the ten young women in this study and many of the young women in other studies of female violence (Campbell, 1982; Marsh and Paton, 1986; Harris, 1988), the use of violence is seen as a legitimate route to help 'regain that status quo' or reaffirm a sense of integrity and a sense of self. In other social contexts, such as those of middle-aged and middle class women in western cultures, the use of violence to re-establish one's integrity would probably be seen as anything but legitimate (see Campbell, 1993; Burbank, 1994).

That said, as mentioned above, it is important to note that it would be quite naive to assume that all females or all males in a given social context would respond in the same manner to the same provocations such as an attack on one's integrity. For example, even though all of the young women that I spoke with had been involved in violent confrontations, it was obvious that some were more likely to resort to the use of physical violence at the slightest provocation than others. In other words, although it is apparently essential to understand a person's social context in order to make sense of their use of violence, there are individual or personal factors that also contribute to a person's willingness to engage in violent confrontations.

5.4 The impact of institutional life

The importance of social context in understanding the use of violence emerged out of the fact that the ten young women that I spoke with did not present a coherent and

monolithic understanding of violence. I have contended that the reason that these young women were so confused about the use of violence and indeed their own sense of self was because they had received contradictory messages from their home worlds and the institutional worlds they lived in about the 'appropriate' use of violence. In other words, because these young women seemed to have a highly contextualized understanding of the use of violence, when the context changed, and the discourses about the legitimacy of using violence changed, these young women were left feeling quite confused.

These young women seem to have been subjected to two different processes of socialization, based on two different environments or social contexts: that of their home worlds and that of the institutional setting. This supports the contention that has been noted by several theorists that, "One of the most obvious but important features of socialization processes is that they take place within a broader social context. The structure of that social context may be expected to have an important effect upon the nature of the socialization process itself" (Wheeler, 1969: 1005).

As mentioned previously, none of the theories discussed in the literature review seem to address the issue of how people deal with conflicting messages from different social contexts and the effects that these clashes might have on the sense of self. Even the more recent research into female aggression that posits that aggression is socially constructed does not explore how people manage to deal with conflicting cultural constructions of violence. Furthermore, none deal with the issue of what happens to violent or delinquent people when they become enmeshed in either the justice system

or, more specifically, an institutional environment. Although Erving Goffman did not theorize specifically about the reasons behind the use of violence or delinquency, his work on the effects of total institutions on changes in self does provide us with some very useful insights into how and why these young women seem to have a confused sense of self.

Erving Goffman differentiated total institutions from other institutions because he maintained that "Their encompassing or total character is symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire..." (1961: 4). I believe that each of the institutions that the ten young women lived in could be seen as total institutions. Although the open custody facilities of Centre B had few physical barriers which barred the young women from the 'outside' world, they were still not permitted access to this world without the explicit permission of staff members. Their social connections to the outside were thoroughly monitored, and the staff were the gatekeepers to their home worlds, being able to withhold visiting privileges and even phone calls when they believed that the residents were associating with people who might be considered a bad influence. This meant that the young women were seemingly thoroughly encapsulated in a social context which was distinctly at odds with that of their home worlds.

One of the primary reasons that Goffman was interested in total institutions was that he believed that "they are the forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self" (Goffman, 1961: 12). Goffman

believed that total institutions were involved in a process of "disculturation" or "untraining" (1961: 13) whereby the residents' home worlds were picked apart, which made it difficult for them to sustain a coherent understanding of their sense of selves. In other words, although the residents of these institutions came from home worlds or social contexts where they had developed a sense of self based on the norms and rules of that environment, upon being institutionalized, these rules were no longer applicable. Goffman explained the importance of the home environment on the definition of self as follows:

It is characteristic of inmates that they come to the institution with a "presenting culture"... derived from a "home world" - a way of life and a round of activities taken for granted until the point of admission to the institution... Whatever the stability of the recruit's personal organization, it was part of a wider framework lodged in his civil environment - a round of experience that confirmed a tolerable conception of self and allowed for a set of defensive maneuvers, exercised at his (sic) own discretion, for coping with conflicts, discrediting, and failures (Goffman, 1961: 12-13).

Upon admission to a total institution, Goffman felt that residents were forced to endure a "process of mortification of the self" (1961). He maintained that within total institutions, residents were expected "to engage in activity whose symbolic implications are incompatible with his conception of self... (T)he individual is required to undertake a daily round of life that he (sic) considers alien to him (sic) - to take on a disidentifying role" (Goffman, 1961: 23). In other words, Goffman purports that residents within total institutions have their sense of self, which is rooted in their home environments, broken down within the institutional environment where the supports of this sense of self are non-existent. Instead, the residents are forced to develop a new

sense of self that is more compatible with the institutional environment.

The self, then can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself (sic) and those around him (sic). This special kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self as constitute it (Goffman, 1961: 168).

Just like Goffman postulated, each of the young women interviewed arrived at the institutions in question having come from a 'presenting culture' where they had come to learn that violent reactions were condoned as legitimate responses to attacks on their sense of self, physical assaults, and/or attacks on those people close to them. But within the institutional environment, this guiding moral framework was removed. As Goffman put it, "Upon entrance, he (sic) is immediately stripped of the support provided by these arrangements" (1961: 14). Instead, the young women were submitted to a process of re-socialization, or perhaps more aptly put, "untraining" (Goffman, 1961: 13) where they were taught that their violent behaviour is not only unjustified, but completely deviant and abhorrent.

In other words, the institutional approach to the use of violence seemed to decontextualize the young women's behaviour and ignored the fact that these young women had come from a specific social context which had a major role in determining their use of violence. That said, it is important to note that the staff working in the institutions are likely aware that these young women's difficulties stem from much deeper social problems and indeed the environments they come from. However, it would be very difficult for the staff at the institutions to deal with these more

fundamental issues, given both their mandate and their resources. The institutions seem to be caught in a difficult situation where they can either do nothing, or they can choose to try to work on changing the aggressive behaviours of the individuals living under their care. Although this decontextualized understanding of violence seems to be quite troublesome in many ways, perhaps it is not without some merits.

The untraining of violent behaviour or re-socialization into a non-violent lifestyle that these young women were subjected to in the institutions seemed to lead them to question the validity of their understandings of violence that stemmed from the context of their home worlds, but more importantly left them feeling very confused about how to feel about themselves and their use of violence. This was because they were being asked to accept the institutional doctrine of non-violence, when they had lived for years in a social context where they had come to believe that the use of violence was sometimes quite legitimate.

That said, as discussed in the previous chapter, the staff in these institutions seemed to have a hard time maintaining a coherent message that violence was always inappropriate. Although the staff espoused a decontextualized understanding of violence when they told the young women that it was never appropriate to use violence, their own use of violence was actually quite contextualized. In other words, although the staff told the youth living in their care that violence was something to be abhorred and considered highly deviant, they too resorted to the use of violence and physical force by restraining the young women and young men who were not abiding by the rules. The staff seemed to legitimate their use of violence within a social context where

this behaviour was not actually considered violence, but was understood as just another means of enforcing the institution's rules.

Goffman believed that the mortification of the self was particularly pronounced in institutions that adopted a medical model approach to treatment because the focus on therapy, as opposed to merely custody, allowed staff to explain a person's problems as rooted in the individual. As he put it, in institutions with a therapeutic approach, residents were more likely to "be confronted by high-ranking staff arguing that his (sic) past has been a failure, that the cause of this has been within himself (sic), that his (sic) attitude to life is wrong, and that if he (sic) wants to be a person he (sic) will have to change his (sic) way of dealing with people and his (sic) conceptions of himself (sic)" (Goffman, 1961: 150).

The young women's stories of life in the institutions also seemed to support Goffman's contention that those institutions that focused on therapy in addition to just custody could be particularly pernicious in their attacks on a person's sense of self. Many of the young women were subjected to therapeutic programs such as anger management where the staff attempted to have them question their own individual behaviour and see that as the cause of their problems. Within the institutional environment, the young women were taught that they were individually responsible for their past and its shortcomings, and if they wanted to have a chance to succeed in the future they would need to change both themselves and their sense of self and accept the values of mainstream society that "many, if not most, acts of aggression are taboo." (Burbank, 1994: 160) and that "women's aggression, particularly when it is expressed

physically, is "unnatural"" (Burbank, 1994: 134). In other words, these young women were expected to adopt a decontextualized understanding of violence.

Goffman believed that the institutional attempts to place the sole responsibility for a resident's 'problems' on the individual, forcing him or her to accept the institutional definition of the situation, and then releasing him or her back into their home worlds was highly problematic. He not only believed that it was troubling that the inmates' sense of selves became somewhat warped under these circumstances, but he also believed that this 'treatment' did not really address the residents' true problems or concerns because it ignored the importance of the residents' home environments. As he put it:

Instead of there being a relatively benign and passive environment and an isolated point of trouble, the figure and the ground of usual service conceptions merge into one, the patient's interpersonal environment being inseparable from the trouble he (sic) is experiencing. Theoretically, it might of course be possible for a slight therapeutic change in the patient to have a benign circular effect on his (sic) environment when he (sic) gets sent back to it, and it might be possible to arrange to return him (sic) to a new environment, but in practice the patient is usually returned, when he (sic) is discharged, back into the system of which his (sic) psychotic response is a natural part (Goffman, 1961: 363).

Unfortunately, as was also purported by Goffman, the institutional attempt to change the selves of these ten young women would likely not allow for them to make a 'successful' return to their home environments. If the institutions were successful in untraining them from their violent behaviour, they will then be returned home incapable of dealing with the situations that they could handle before when they were aware of the norms and rules of their community that prescribed the use of violence.

However, if the young women refused to accept the institutional doctrine of non-violence, they would likely be confined for longer times in these institutions, or if they were able to leave, would likely be returned to the system before long. Of course, this is highly speculative and the findings of this study do not allow for definitive conclusions on these matters. In fact, it is possible that the anger management courses run by the institutions would help these young women make more discerning choices about when the use of violence was truly essential and when other non-violent reactions might be more appropriate.

5.5 Directions for future research

This exploratory study only begins to bring to light some of the issues of importance in understanding female violence. It has introduced a variety of ideas that will need to be explored more thoroughly by other researchers and theorists in the future if we are to further enhance our understanding of the use of violence by young women. Although this study does seem to highlight the need to consider people's social context if we are to attempt to understand their use of violence, there are many questions that this study does not address.

For example, although it seems clear that young women have some room to choose to act violently and they do not seem to do so solely because they are coerced into this behaviour, we need to explore more thoroughly the differences between those women who make a constrained choice to behave violently and those who are forced to do so as a result of years of abuse. Similarly further research must seek to determine

why some women choose to resort to direct, physical forms of violence, and others choose to utilize only indirect, non-physical forms of aggression as posited by Björqvist and his colleagues (Björqvist, Österman, Kaukiainen, 1992; Björqvist, 1994; Glazer and Ras, 1994). Future studies of female aggression could also explore how and why some instances of indirect aggression escalate into direct violent confrontations while others do not.

This study also highlights the need for more comparative research in the field of female delinquency and female violence. This research could include studies on why some young women opt to resort to physical violence, while other young women from the same social context do not. In a similar vein, it would be interesting to study young women from a variety of different social contexts to determine how they are similar and how they differ in terms of their willingness to resort to violence. It would also be useful to conduct a study that would compare young men and young women from similar social contexts to determine the gender differences (and/or similarities) in their use of aggression.

5.6 Policy implications of this study

I have tried to argue throughout this chapter that the key findings of this study include the fact that young women can be, and are, violent, and that violent young women are not crazy or irrational but actually offer coherent explanations of how and why they choose to use violence. Perhaps most importantly, however, this study highlights the fact that if we are to try to understand the use of violence by young women, we need to

understand how violence is socially constructed within the specific social contexts that they live in. The ten young women interviewed in this study indicated that in their home worlds they had come to see violence as a justifiable and even necessary means of protecting themselves and those close to them from the attacks of others. However, when they moved into the institutional environment, they quickly realized that this understanding of violence was not universal. In fact, within the context of the institutions, these young women were taught to question their past behaviour and to see it as something that they were personally responsible for because they did not know how to control their behaviour. The institutional doctrine of non-violence and non-confrontation as well as their emphasis on anger management courses seemed to indicate that the institutions bought into a decontextualized understanding of violence.

Unfortunately, this approach could prove to be quite problematic for these young women. If the young women embraced the institutional discourse with respect to violence and chose to never behave aggressively when they were returned to their home worlds, they would essentially be giving up those tools that had helped them survive some of the extremely difficult circumstances that they encountered in that context to begin with. On the other hand, if the young women refused to buy into the doctrine of their anger management courses and continued to lash out against the staff and other residents in a manner that would be appropriate in their home environments, they would likely become further enmeshed in the webs of the juvenile justice system and find it almost impossible to be released. If these young women managed to convince the staff that they have accepted personal responsibility for their violent behaviour and

would not get involved in violent confrontations the future, they would still likely find themselves returned to the institutions when and if they behaved violently in their home environments again.

Several feminists have recently begun to question if it is legitimate to deny women and girls the use of violence and aggression. Some, like Anne Campbell have noted that it is not morally or ethically responsible to expect those women and girls who need to use violence and aggression as a means to survive, to relinquish these tools. More specifically, with reference to the use of violence by female gang members, she posits:

Secure in our relationships and relatively protected from physical harm, most women do not need to use aggression as a tool to keep the world at bay. But when the ties that bring women close to others are destroyed, what do they have to fear in aggression? They cannot fear the loss of what they do not have. And the indisputable law on the street is fight or get beaten. The reasoning that leads women to this instrumental use of aggression is not confined to the gang. Wherever women face lives of brutal exploitation that destroys their faith in the value of trust and intimacy, they will be driven to it. We cannot demand that women desist from its use when their survival requires it (Campbell, 1993: 140).

Similarly Victoria Burbank has argued that "women's overt aggression is, in some circumstances, a positive, enhancing act... (W)hen we deny women their aggressive possibilities, we potentially diminish their beings" (1994: 1).

Instead of making it a priority to lock up youth, society must begin to try to deal with the environmental factors that compel these young women to behave violently. If the young women that I spoke with were victims, they were the victims of a system that has dismissed them as 'bad girls' instead of trying to understand why they

think that they are driven to act violently. We can not expect custodial institutions to single-handedly eradicate the problems of youth violence. At times, the institutions' adherence to an individualized approach to reform through such programs as anger management courses may actually be quite legitimate. These courses may help raise awareness among violent youth that they actually have more options for dealing with confrontational situations than they might have previously thought. This is not, however, something that can be determined by this study. What this study does do is alert us to the problems inherent in solely focussing on the reform of individuals. Any attempt to 'eliminate' youth violence will need to take into consideration the social contexts from which these children come and will need to try to understand how these contexts seem to make the use of violence not only legitimate but, at least in the minds of these young women, sometimes even necessary.

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