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YOUNG WOMEN AS PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE

by

Elisa Swern, 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 21, 1995**

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YOUNG WOMEN AS PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE

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

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

January 8, 1996

Abstract

This thesis explores young women's use of violence and their understanding of this behaviour. Information gathered for this study was elicited from fifteen young women who were clients of agencies that provide services for young offenders and youth at risk. The findings reveal that these young women are similar to young men in their use of violence. However, the reasons behind the actions of the young women appear to vary considerably from those of young men, as do the explanations that exist in the literature for male violence. This study concludes with a call for additional research into this area including the use of a gender sensitive methodology in order to learn more about women's use of violence.

Acknowledgements

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Gregory, to whom I owe my deepest thanks for your support, patience and most of all for the inspiration you devoted to me.

Dedication

**For my grandmother, Lillian Gernstein,
who left me a piece of her soul and a wealth of
wonderful memories.**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

...both in the past and present, most female delinquency is placed within a context relative to girls's sexual behaviour precisely because of women's defiance of patriarchal control over their sexual "capital"-control that historically has been central to the maintenance of patriarchy (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992:92).

Typically, men have been the main perpetrators of violence in our society. Increasingly however, sensationalized media accounts of young women involved in violent acts have come to the attention of the public. This has dramatised the fact that young women are indeed capable of, and do engage in, violent behaviour. This research examines the use of violence by young women and explores their understanding of this behaviour.

The concept of violence is referred to frequently in a number of contexts; however, for the purpose of this research, violence was defined as: acts performed by an individual or group who use physical force, with or without the assistance of a weapon, against another individual or group (Walker, 1990:103). During the course of the interview process, this definition became even more specific to include: when a young women becomes extremely angry for a multitude of reasons and expresses her anger against herself or another person through violent means, such as punching, kicking, hitting, and/or the use of weapons. In practical terms, the focus of this project centres primarily on acts involving physical violence perpetrated by young women.

Historically, little criminological research has been directed toward women's use of violence. When female criminality was examined, female criminals were commonly represented as either mentally disturbed or as social misfits. Two early

influential theorists who studied female delinquency were Cesare Lombroso and Sigmund Freud¹. Lombroso described the female criminal in terms of her commonalities with children, such as being revengeful, jealous and cruel. He concluded that the female criminal should be viewed as "a monster" (Adelberg and Currie, 1987:191). For his part, Freud related female deviance to genetic defects that allow women to demonstrate behaviour that is "homosexual" and "pseudo-male", thus justifying their deviant behaviour (Campbell, 1981:38).

More contemporary theorists have taken similar approaches; Albert Cohen for example, argues that female delinquents should be viewed as social misfits since their delinquency threatens their feminine status. Essentially, Cohen claims that female delinquents violate gender roles and adopt typical male behaviour patterns (Cohen, 1955:143). He also contributes to the misconception that female delinquents specialize in sexual delinquency, whereas their male counterparts are involved in more diversified delinquent behaviour.

One of the most comprehensive studies of violence to date has been Wolfgang and Feriutti's The Subculture of Violence. These authors define a subculture of violence as a system or group of individuals who hold violence as a commonality and will inevitably have conflicts with the larger dominant culture. Those in the subculture of violence uphold traditional values, norms and laws that reflect the negative connotations associated with the use of violence (1982:99).

¹Several other authors were influenced by Lombroso and Freuds' research. For instance, Thomas, Pollack, Knopka, the Gluecks, Cowie, Cowie and Slater, excetra.

Within the subculture, violence stems from conflict that arises between members of the subculture and members of the dominant culture. Generally, violent subcultures will create their own norms with respect to violence. These subcultural norms include: the values, socialization and interpersonal relationships of its members (1982:140).

Other subculture of violence characteristics include a shared ethos of violence. This is especially true for members ranging from late adolescence to middle age. The potential or willingness to use violence emphasizes the diffusive nature of this cultural theme (1982:158). As well, the use of violence is not viewed as "illicit" conduct, therefore, it is not considered deviant to the participants or other members of the subculture² (1982:158).

Despite extensive research on violence, Wolfgang and Feriutti did not discuss womens' use of violence, although women may have been participants in the subculture of violence. The characteristics of a subculture of violence identified by Wolfgang and Feriutti are nevertheless features that help us to understand how the use of violence can become normalized. This may have important ramifications in our consideration of how young women understand their use of violence. In particular, this approach shows how violent behaviour can be considered normal under certain circumstances.

²Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza, 1957, devised a theory of delinquency entitled "Techniques of Neutralization" which explains methods commonly employed by youth to justify their delinquent behavior

Although a considerable amount of research has been conducted on young men as perpetrators of violence, we cannot infer that these explanations pertain to young women. Young women's use of violence needs to be viewed in its proper context, by taking into account the motives and meanings that the young women involved attach to their behaviour. This has been difficult since patriarchal discourses have typically denied women the ability to be delinquent in contexts outside sexual delinquency. A compelling site for research therefore, involves the examination of the use of violence by young women. This includes assessing the inner tensions that young women may feel as a result of their participation in predominately male practices. Conversely, this may involve a consideration of the impact of the dominant culture on young women, leading them to repress their use of violence.

In order to understand young women's use of violence, we must look at them from many perspectives. A more realistic understanding of young women, their experiences using violence and their perceptions of events, is possible if we take into account the fact that they live in a male defined and dominated society. For example, if we look at the responses of the criminal justice system toward men and women, it becomes apparent that young women's sexual behaviour and young men's criminal behaviour have been treated more harshly than either young women's criminal behaviour or young men's sexual behaviour (Geller, 1987:113). This reflects a double standard applied by the justice system when dealing with female delinquents.

Another aspect of living in a male dominated society, includes the fact that women's lives do not carry great value to some men and consequently female victimization and homicide occur much too frequently. While women do commit homicide, these occurrences are less common. For example, "male killers outnumber their female counterparts in Canada by a ratio of approximately 6 to 1" (Gomme, 1993:204). This implies that men are typically more violent than women. Interestingly, when homicide victims are broken down by gender, men outnumber women as victims by a margin of only 2 to 1, reflecting the fact that "men kill both men and women, while women tend to kill men only", suggesting that women's use of violence in circumstances involving men can likely be linked to self defence (1993:204).

The theme of women as victims has reverberated throughout criminological writings. Over the past few decades, there have been several insightful accounts of women as victims of violence; for example, Brownmiller, 1975; Freedman, 1985; Wolfe and Gruberman, 1985; and DeKeserdy and Hinch, 1991. With few exceptions, such as Campbell, 1981, 1983, 1987 and 1993 and, Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992, the topic of young women as perpetrators of violence has been virtually ignored.

A series of unaddressed questions pertaining to young women as perpetrators of violence still remain. For instance, the following questions can be raised:

- 1) How do young women understand their use of violence;

- 2) Is there a relationship between one's home environment and violent behaviour;
- 3) Do a young woman's delinquent peers affect her violent behaviour;
- 4) What are the contexts in which the use of violence is likely to occur;
- 5) What types of violence are young women more likely to engage in; and
- 6) Who are the victims of this violence.

As this list demonstrates many questions need to be addressed in order to develop a better understanding of this phenomena. The purpose of this study is to examine the use of violence by young women. It is not intended to divert attention from the frequent occurrences of violence against women, nor to minimize the harm they experience. Instead, this study seeks to give voice to young women who use violence, in order to discover how they interpret and understand their behaviour.

The literature review provided in the next chapter demonstrates the paucity of theoretical explanations for causes of female criminality and in particular, young women's use of violence. Research conducted by men with predominately male subjects will be examined for its relevance in studying young women and violence. A feminist analysis will be employed to generate new insights into the issue at hand. This method of inquiry will allow us to view young women who use violence for who they are, while avoiding misconceptions of female delinquents and, in particular, women who use violence.

Following the literature review, a methodological chapter will provide a discussion based on an approach which allows the voices of young women to be

heard³. The methodology described therein forms the basis for data collection undertaken for this project. Listening to the participants' voices emphasizes the reality of their experiences. The data for this thesis was gathered using a semi structured interview schedule, where face to face interviews were conducted with young women who have exhibited violent behaviour. The main questions for this research were derived from the review of literature.

The findings chapter presents an examination of a set of complex commonalities that exist between the experiences of the young women interviewed for this thesis. This chapter will also discuss the usefulness of the three theoretical approaches that were assessed for the understanding they provided of young womens' use of violence. The concluding chapter reviews the key findings of this study and the implications they have for future theorizing in this area. In addition, this chapter addresses the need for more research on young womens' use of violence.

³The idea of allowing women to use their own voices was derived from Dorothy Smith, 1987 and 1990.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This review considers literature concerned with delinquent youth as it relates to young women and violence. Although many of the theories utilized have ignored women, they do provide a general context for understanding violent young women. The literature examined here includes three theories of juvenile delinquency, namely: social disorganization theory, strain theory and feminist theory. Each of these approaches will be described and analyzed to identify the key theoretical constructs they provide which may be applicable to the study of young women's use of violence. The final section of this chapter provides a discussion of violence that involves women in other contexts, such as: date rape, sibling abuse and wife abuse.

2.1 Social Disorganization Theory

The concept of social disorganization has been associated with Frederick Thrasher and his 1927 study of 1,313 gangs in the Chicago area. According to Thrasher, gangs or groups of delinquents tend to develop in specific areas of cities that are marked by poverty and transiency. Delinquent activities and gang formation occur due to the overall disorganization of a community, which begins with a lack of parental supervision. Thrasher's work supplied two reasons for the lack of female delinquents. First, he argued that females tend to be more closely supervised than males. Second, he noted that female socialization stresses conformity and discourages delinquent or violent behaviour.

Important contributions to the advancement of social disorganization theory and further linkages to the understanding of violent young women are brought to light by the identification of common characteristics within these communities. For instance, Baskin and Sommers' (1993), research on women involved in street crimes found that several similarities existed among their participants. Features such as experiences with abuse and being excluded from many social institutions such as, marriage, education and employment are some of the commonalities of people living in a disorganized community (1993:578). In addition, a study by John Hagedorn pointed out that an "underclass", or those who are permanently excluded from the work force, often emerges from these communities (1988:7). Hagedorn's research suggests that poverty in the underclass helps to promote the continuation of an underclass across generations. A cyclical pattern emerging over generations in a family could be related to the rationality behind some young people's decisions to become involved in crime.

Lewis Yablonsky, who based much of his theorizing on the social pathology of youth, made two contributions to social disorganization theory. First, he stated that conditions of violence do not belong solely to the lower classes, but prevail throughout all social classes. Second, he noted that sociopathic personalities arise due to the lack of social conscience and difficulty in relating to others, resulting in aggressive and socially destructive violent behaviour (Yablonsky, 1962:203).

Social disorganization theory notes the lack of cohesion and organization that are characteristic of certain communities and how these factors influence

delinquency and violence among youth. Baskin and Sommers, Hagedorn, and Yablonsky have all shown that many delinquent youth, including young women, exhibit behavioral problems that can be directly related to their environment. As well, these authors suggest that delinquent activities are the result of an attempt by young people to create their own organizations, in order to meet their needs, in areas of cities where conventional forms of community organization are lacking. The relevancy of certain aspects of social disorganization theory were examined in this study to determine their usefulness for helping us to understand the use of violence by young women. Specifically, this included an exploration of the relationship between social environment and the willingness to use violence.

2.2 Strain Theory

Robert Merton's strain theory had its roots in Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie. Strain was related to the difficulties in achieving the American Dream, an ideal version of success. Merton's strain theory is based on the imbalance between legitimate goals and the availability of legitimate means for achieving these goals. According to Merton, difficulties in accessing legitimate goals leads to strain, which in turn, can result in a deviant (or innovative) adaptation (Ellis, 1987:27).

Questions regarding Merton's strain theory flow from his assumption that all people aspire to the same goals and share the same definition of success. This assumption disregards the fact that many sub-groups such as, women and people of various races and ethnicities exist within our society and uphold a variety goals

and values (Bisenthal, 1992:33). Where women fit in to Merton's definition of success based on the "American Dream" is unclear. This theory assumes that womens' success is based on love, marriage, and raising a family, leaving little room for women who reject these mythical and stereotypical ideals (Bisenthal, 1992:33).

Strain theorists appear to retain an assortment of views on women and delinquency. For instance, theorists who completed their studies between 1955 and 1966 viewed women in a completely different light than contemporary theorists do. For example, Albert Cohen believed that delinquency was learned and not an innate behaviour, and that females were generally incapable of demonstrating such behaviour. He also felt that "the delinquent subculture is tailor-made for the male role, therefore eliminating the female role" (1955:143). Cloward and Ohlin's research demonstrated that being part of the lower class creates barriers to legitimate opportunities of achieving legitimate goals, which can lead to delinquency. They too argued that female delinquency was a rare occurrence due to the possible negative implications this would have for a girl's reputation.

Gisela Knopka researched female delinquency during the 1950s as well, however she claimed that when women attempt to reach goals through traditionally male methods such as, crime, they are judged not only by their acts but also by their unwillingness to follow society's norms and values. Unfortunately, being a product of her time, Knopka did not pursue these insights but rather followed commonly held beliefs about women. For instance, she claimed that young

women's motivations for delinquency are based on emotional problems. By choosing characteristics which are all "emotionally" inherent in the female gender, her study falls prey to biological determinism (Adler and Simon, 1979:76).

More contemporary strain theorists whose research was completed between 1983 and 1993, showed that little advancement has been made in women finding opportunities through either legitimate or illegitimate means (Bowker and Klein, 1983:739). A recent study by Berkowitz demonstrated that the dimension of violence as a method of achieving goals can be gender neutral. However, he does relate the lack of aggression in females to socialization and sex hormones, specifically to the greater levels of testosterone in males (Berkowitz, 1993:395).

With only a relatively few exceptions, in field research as well as in laboratory experiments and employing many different kinds of measures, boys have been found to be typically more aggressive than girls (1993:394).

Based on this discussion, strain theory offers several concepts that may be pertinent to understanding the use of violence by young women. These include: the difficulties involved in achieving certain goals, and not having the same degree of access to particular goals compared to their male counterparts.

2.3 Feminist Theories

Feminist perspectives differ from the previous two theoretical perspectives since their theories are newer, originating in the late 1960s and early 1970s and, their authors are predominately female. Not long after the women's movement

began, two theorists predicted that once women began taking part in the "male dominated" world, they would also become part of the criminal population. Although female crime has increased since the late sixties, adult women still account for less than fifteen per cent of the total criminal population in Canada (Adelberg and Currie, 1987:14). Some theorists have claimed that the female rate of crime was lower than that of males due to chivalry exhibited by members of the criminal justice system, whereas others have stated that the majority of female crime exists due to the poor economic conditions that women must endure. Each of these theories must be carefully examined to assess their relevance for understanding the experiences of violent young women. More contemporary feminist theorists have focus on two areas that pertain to young women and delinquency. These include: socialization practices and elements of one's home environment.

Three versions of feminist theory put forth as explanations for the increases in female crime need to be examined in order to consider their relevance to the present study. Those who subscribe to the first theory, chivalry, claim that the reason for the increase in female offenders is due to a decline in the etiquette of chivalry. This argument is based on the fact that in the past, men who were in control of the criminal justice system would hesitate in arresting and charging women with various crimes based on their gender. This raises the question of whether "women commit significantly fewer crimes than men or [whether they are] treated more leniently by decision-makers in the criminal justice system" (Axon, 1989:71). This viewpoint, however, does not correlate with women from racial and

ethnic minorities nor those from lower socio-economic statuses, since these women have frequently been charged and convicted of various offenses (Feinman, 1985:27). Feinman further claimed that "chivalry is reserved for white middle and upper-class women..." (1985:28).

Despite the fact that research conducted to test the chivalry hypothesis is equivocal, some still argue that women are treated more leniently than men and this accounts for their more lenient sentencing and lower rates of incarceration. For instance, studies conducted by those who subscribe to the chivalry concept have shown that when a woman cries or shows concern for her children, she is less likely to be arrested. Other conflicting studies have produced opposite result. These studies note that police hold a certain amount of discretionary power over minor offenses and that they will be more lenient to those who are polite and respectful towards the police, regardless of their gender (Feinman, 1985:29).

The second theory, the "emancipation hypothesis," attempts to describe the connection between increases in women's crime and their emancipation through the women's movement. The emancipation hypothesis has two versions. The first was put forth by Adler in 1975. Adler claimed that as women accumulated more social equality, they would likely become more involved in criminal activities (Axon, 1989:16). Therefore, women's liberation and their changing roles would result in an increase in female crime. The second version by Simon was also put forward in 1975. Simon predicted that women would become increasingly involved in crime as their exposure to "commercial occupations" increased (1989:17).

Neither version of the emancipation theory has proven to be valid, since the rate of female crime has increased only slightly over the past twenty years. Although young women are now treated in relatively the same manner as young men, their crime rates remain significantly lower than those of their male counterparts (Axon, 1989:8). According to Canadian crime statistics, the largest category of female crime was petty property crime which can be described as "non-liberating" activities such as welfare fraud and shoplifting. Most of these crimes are acts of necessity and not for the purpose of profitable gain (1989:8).

The final version of feminist theory examined was economic marginalization. This theory claims that it is the "absence" of employment opportunities for women that has lead to increases in female crime and not the other way around (Simon and Leach, 1991:9). This theory is based on three factors: first, more women in the workforce does not mean equality between the sexes in employment or wages; second, the majority of female offenders are concentrated in low wage positions; and finally, most female crimes are petty property crimes, displaying a "rational" response to economic insecurity (1991:9).

Theorists who have studied women in conflict with the law (Feinman, 1985, Adelberg and Currie, 1987 and Axon, 1989), found that most female criminals had similar demographic backgrounds. These women were often young, poor, undereducated and unskilled. Such findings support the theory of economic marginalization and the notion that women are more likely to commit property crime due to their economic insecurities. While economic insecurities appear to be

common among both men and women prosecuted by the law, why is it that female crime rates remain significantly lower than those of their male counterparts?

Each of the three feminist theories on increases in female crime offered a variety of views on the issue. However, both the chivalry and the emancipation hypotheses have proved to be untenable over time. Economic marginalization, on the other hand, has identified many problems experienced by women in the nineties. This may partially explain why some women are involved in crime, for survival (Simon and Landis, 1991:11). Although economic marginalization raises some key issues, this theory needs to be expanded to cover other pressing concerns for women such as links between escaping abusive homes/partners and crime.

2.3.1 Young Women, Delinquency and Violence

The experiences of young women with delinquency and violence has been given considerable attention by Anne Campbell, Meda Chesney-Lind and Randall Shelden. These contemporary theorists have identified two important factors related to young female delinquents: first, socialization is a key issue in the explanation for lower rates of female involvement in criminal and violent acts; second, most delinquent girls are escaping from problem home environments.

Anne Campbell's research emphasizes the notion of socialization as it relates to young women and delinquency. In her 1981 study, she used the criminal justice system as an example of how the socialization process affects young

women. She states that "regardless of whether girls commit as many illegal acts as boys, the courts prefer to judge girls in terms of their moral welfare rather than in terms of their status as delinquents" (1981:7). Interestingly, in the same study, she found that girls admitted to committing more criminal acts than were recorded (1981:16). This finding could lend itself to the chivalry hypothesis, but it would be difficult to confirm since we do not know how many young men have committed crimes that were not recorded. She further learned, during her 1990 study, that although males and females commit similar crimes, females are less likely to engage in serious crime and have lower rates of recidivism (1990:46).

Campbell's most recent work raised the question of why women use violence less often than men. Here, she carefully examined different aspects of the socialization process and how boys are taught from a very young age to be independent and autonomous, while girls learn to be dependent and desire a sense of connection (1993:27). As well, boys often use aggression as a method of obtaining goals or rewards, whereas girls use discussion techniques to achieve the same goals. Developing ideas of how one should or should not act is an integral part of the socialization process to which both males and females are subjected. However, their understanding of when to use violence varies considerably. Campbell also found that for a woman, aggression is about losing not winning, since losing command over her actions displays a loss of control over her womanhood (1993:50).

Meda Chesney-Lind and Randall Shelden (1992) claim that the delinquency of young women needs to be divided into two categories: criminal acts and status offenses, which are mainly for juveniles (i.e., runaways, truants) (1992:7). The high frequency of girls committing status offenses demonstrates that many girls are experiencing severe troubles in their homes and must escape through methods such as running away (1992:52).

Chesney-Lind and Shelden state that the misrepresentation of female delinquency is based on the "sexualization" of girls and the criminalization of their attempts to escape from problem families (1992:65). Here, the authors speak specifically about young women who run away to escape familial problems such as incest and abuse. The actions of these girls once out of their homes often leads them to a courtroom, where they are prejudged and often prosecuted for committing status offenses such as sexual misconduct.

... female delinquency, unlike male delinquency, is sexual and interpersonal in nature. that it is 'treatable', and that differential socialization of male and female children is a significant cause in delinquency (Chesney-Lind, 1982:77).

Chesney-Lind's findings further demonstrate that young womens' acts are not confined to sexual offenses and in fact, police tend to respond differently to crimes committed by women. For instance, Chesney-Lind's findings showed that officers were less likely to "pick up" a female suspected of a serious offence and more likely to pick up a woman for sexual offenses (1982:77).

The feminist theories discussed above provide a number of important ideas that can be applied in the study of young women's use of violence. Campbell, Chesney-Lind and Shelden for example, have suggested that socialization is a major component in understanding the relationship between young women and the use of violence. Socialization can be seen as a one of several factors related to why some young women commit acts of violence. While both of the other theories discuss the family and its relationship to violent/delinquent behaviour, Chesney-Lind and Shelden further expand our knowledge by considering certain neglected areas that may contribute to one's actions. For example, how is the nature of one's home environment related to the use of violence by young women? Is previous abuse a factor in this relationship? Overall, feminist theories provide a new angle for viewing female delinquency. They offer insight into a number of factors that may help us to better understand the experiences of young women who use violence.

2.4 Other Cases of Women Using Violence

The topic of women's use of violence has been considered in contexts other than the one being discussed here. For example, dating violence, domestic violence and sibling violence have all been studied. Although these areas do not correlate directly with the current research, it is important to examine them for any relevant insight they may provide. While studies of domestic violence include women, their focus is on the use of violence against women. Some incidents of domestic violence, however, do involve women as perpetrators. Female violence

in domestic situations has generally been used as a method of self defence. This type of violence is substantially different than the use of violence as a method for achieving goals (DeKeseredy and Hinch, 1991:34).

Another context in which violence is used by women includes sibling violence. Sibling violence reflects the use of violence as means of power and control. This is of interest to the project at hand. Unfortunately, violence between siblings is a relatively new area of study with little information currently available.

Violence that occurs in dating relationships is a controversial topic that has influenced research on womens' use of violence. Several researchers (Pirog-Good and Stets 1989, Sugarman and Hotaling, 1989, Burke, Stets and Pirog-Good, 1989, and Makepeace 1985), have demonstrated that both women and men use violence equally when dating. Authors such as Pirog-Good and Stets relate dating violence to dysfunctional homes and the possibility of witnessing violent acts. Burke et al., (1989:30), attributed dating violence of both males and females to accentuated feminine gender identities. They found that people with this type of identity are more likely to inflict sexual and physical abuse (Burke et al, 1989:87).

"As in the official data, the gap separating male and female self-reported deviance and crime is especially large for incidents involving violence and aggression" (Gomme, 1993:184). The research described above overlooks several important factors. First, it does not discuss the specific acts that were committed in particular situations. For example, it is difficult to compare the physical consequences of a female slapping a male, to a male punching a female. As well,

the reasoning behind the acts committed are not discussed. For instance, what if a female slaps her male date when he attempts to touch her inappropriately or against her will (Molidor, 1993:26). Moreover, within their own research, Pirog-Good and Stets contradict some of their results by claiming that "the available evidence indicates that males initiate severe violence more often than females and females are victimized more seriously by male severe violence" (Pirog-Good and Stets, 1989:10).

The study by Burke et al. (1989), which claimed that those with more feminine gender identities had a greater likelihood for being abusive, was also lacking in evidence. For instance, a definition including specific characteristics of a "feminine identity" was not included. Neither were possible motivations explained nor descriptions of the abuse provided. Molidor (1993), found that males tend to underreport their use of violence in dating relationships (1993:27). These reports minimize male violence in dating relationships and leave the impression that women are as violent or even more violent than men.

2.5 Discussion

Three different approaches to the study of young women and violence have been examined. No single approach offers a complete explanation of this phenomenon. Aspects of each theory, however, can contribute to a better overall understanding of this phenomena. Social disorganization theory focuses on where people live, the organization of their communities and the cycle of violence in these

communities as factors related to delinquency. Strain theory raises several important questions such as: what are the goals of young women, and do they follow society's ideal image of success. Also, if men and women have the same motivational factors for using violence such as peer influence, why do women use violence significantly less often than men?

Feminist theories suggest that the socialization of young women plays a key role in their delinquent behaviour. These theories also stress the importance of the family/home environment in determining the occurrence of delinquent actions. Research on dating violence has shown that considerable biases are apparent in the current data which exaggerate women's participation in this type of violence. However, the applicability of dating violence research in studying the use of violence by young women needs to be further examined.

This literature review demonstrated how some of the major explanations for juvenile delinquency may inform the current study of the use of violence by young women. Each theory provides different insights into the issue at hand. Factors derived from each theory were taken into consideration in an attempt to develop a more complete understanding of the use of violence by young women.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

"Research is like embarking on a voyage of discovery. As the voyage takes place, the researcher maps or charts the process of exploration" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:43).

3.1 Introduction

Based on the review of relevant sociological literature presented above, it is evident that young women who participate in violent behaviour have been understudied. In researching the use of violence by young women what becomes apparent is that the available studies are based on males and are inappropriate for understanding female behaviour. The existing literature not only presupposes that female violence is anomalous but it ascribes motives to using violence that are typically male. According to Bjorkquist (1992), women often use indirect methods of aggression, such as gossip, and in the end are no less aggressive than men. Currently, little uniformity exists in understanding the causes of higher rates of physical violence in males as opposed to females and, it has yet to be determined if these causes are genetic, hormonal or related to a person's socialization.

An integral part of the exploratory approach involves examining a variety of theoretical concepts that form the foundation for this project. A questionnaire was developed on the basis of questions and concepts derived from social disorganization, strain, and feminist theories in order to examine how young women understand their use of violence.

A qualitative approach was chosen to collect the data for this study. The rationale for using this particular methodology was to explore and elaborate on the theoretical concepts found in the literature and to enhance the information available on this subject matter. This would be difficult to undertake using a quantitative approach since as McCracken points out, "qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it" (McCracken, 1988:17). Given the exploratory nature of this research, due to the dearth of information on young women and violence, an open ended semi-structured interview technique was considered most appropriate. Such techniques allow the interviewer to incorporate and adapt to the subjects insights more effectively than a structured process.

In order to avoid any confusion, it must be noted that the word "aggression" which is used throughout this project refers to a range of emotions that are commonly pursued through violent means. However, at no time did the use of this word ever truly deviate from the definition of violence provided in the introduction of this thesis. As well, during the interview process the word aggression facilitated in illiciting responses from the participants.

The remainder of this chapter consists of four sections. The first deals with the limitations involved in conducting quantitative research. The second discusses the process of gaining access to respondents and the difficulties encountered in the process of completing this study. The third section outlines the collection of data and the interview schedule. Finally, feminist methodology is discussed as a means

of researching a marginalized group in order to gain a clearer and more meaningful understanding of the participants.

3.2 Note on Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, there was no random selection involved in securing subjects for this study. Random selection refers to a process which affords each member of a population an equal chance of being included in a particular project (Singleton, et al, 1993:144). The possibility of being included in this study was restricted to young women who have used violence. In order to gain access to an appropriate sample, subjects were sought from two special-care facilities for youth. Only a small number of young women in these facilities had used violence. Since these were the only agencies that dealt with young women in the region where the study was being undertaken, the number of potential subjects was very small making random selection impractical.

A small sample raises questions regarding the reliability of the data. Are the girls who participated in this project unique, or are they similar to other young females in Ontario or Canada who have used violence. This cannot be answered by the current study. However, there is no reason to believe that if similar studies were conducted in other cities across the country, the results would be different than those obtained in this project. Another consideration is the validity of the results. It was assumed by most of the subjects, that I had spoken first to their respective counsellor/social worker who was acquainted and knowledgeable of their

behaviour and criminal offenses. This reduced the opportunities for the participants to relay fraudulent accounts. Moreover, most of the young women answered many of the questions by their own accord before they were even posed. The fact that the young women were willing to provide details of their lives prior to the researchers inquiries, indicated that they felt comfortable enough with the situation to recount extremely painful and revealing information about themselves. This further reduced the likelihood of their responses being untruthful, however, it does not necessarily make their response completely valid. Another method used to enhance the validity of the data was to recount events chronologically back to the respondent and then go over any inconsistencies in their stories.

Another potential impact on this study was that the researcher was an outsider or stranger to the participants. These girls had not met the researcher prior to the interviews and did not expect to ever see her again. Care was taken not to influence the nature of the responses provided and all questions were asked in a neutral way to avoid any biases by the interviewer. The respondents were encouraged to clarify their positions and not to respond in a way that they thought would please the interviewer.

3.3 Gaining Access

Fourteen of the fifteen participants came from one of two agencies. The first agency is composed of nine residences with a full-time resident population of sixty-two clients. This agency's clients consist of young people whose ages range from

12 to 17 at the time of application. Facilities are offered for members of both official language groups and both sexes. At present, the agency has developed a complete spectrum of programs ranging from pre-residential assessment and crisis intervention, through community residences, rural residential programs, secure treatment, therapeutic foster homes and community support.

The second agency works as a community support team which aims to limit or prevent the need for custodial depositions for young offenders. This agency has the capability of serving between fifty and sixty young offenders at any given time. The clients of this agency range from 12 to 15 years of age, are of both sexes, are serving a custody disposition or, are on probation but at high risk of re-offending. The Community Support Team will assess a client's needs and develop an individual goal-oriented intervention plan to meet the identified needs. This agency provides intervention programs in the following areas: substance abuse, education/employment, family, peer relations, accommodation, and psychological/psychiatric problems. Services are offered on an individual, family and group basis in both English and French.

These two agencies are very protective of their clients. Consequently, to be granted permission to move forward with this project, it was necessary to meet with the senior administrative staff or agency directors. The initial meeting with the directors included a brief discussion of the intentions of this research, followed by a presentation, copies of the introduction and literature review chapters of this thesis, along with the questionnaire and consent form to be used. Arranging to

meet with the directors was very time consuming, however, upon meeting them immediate approval was granted for the project. After receiving permission from the directors it was then necessary to have the consent of potential participants and their parents/guardians in instances where the girls were under the age of sixteen.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 The Interviews

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. They included fairly general and exploratory questions, encouraging discussion that was wide ranging. Certain questions were developed spontaneously during the course of the interviews (McCracken, 1988:25). The location of the interviews varied: some were conducted in offices within an agency location, others were held at restaurants. The approximate length of each interview was between ninety and one hundred and twenty minutes. All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed.

The role of the interviewer is one which needs to be discussed and put into context for the purposes of this research. According to McCracken (1988), there are two ways to identify with participants during a study of this nature. The first involves relating the participant's experiences to your own, or putting yourself in their shoes. The second method states that if their experiences are completely beyond your own experiences, you must use your imagination and attempt to reconstruct events in order to develop a genuine understanding of their behaviour

at the time (1988:19). During the course of these interviews, this researcher encountered occasions where both types of identification with the participants was necessary.

3.4.2 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into five sections. The initial section deals with demographics such as age, educational status, personal descriptions, and the use of recreational time. The second section begins by asking the participants who they lived with, if they have/had siblings and whether or not their parents work outside the home. The next section includes questions that ask the participants to describe what it was like growing up in their home. The following section examines peer relationships, such as how many friends they have, their friends' gender, what they do for fun, their involvement with the police and their use of drugs and alcohol. Section four includes more specific questions regarding education. Participants were asked about the highest education level they achieved, their grades, positive and negative experiences at school and if they had ever been suspended and/or expelled. The final section deals with experiences with violence. Here the participants were asked if they had been in a fight (physical as opposed to verbal) and if it involved "typical male fighting techniques" such as punches to the face, the body and kicking. Next the respondents were questioned about their understanding of their aggressive behaviour and their use of violence. For

example, one item asks "when are you likely to use violence?" While another asks "how do you express aggressive feelings?"

Key concepts derived from the theories presented in the literature review were used in the construction of the questionnaire. As was noted above, social disorganization theory focuses on dangerous and criminal behaviour that can emerge when youth are raised in an unorganized environment with little parental supervision. Various questions were posed which pertained to this theory. For instance, participants were asked how they spend their recreational time, how they came to know their friends and if their parents worked outside of the home.

Strain theory discusses issues related to the strain people feel when they are unable to achieve certain goals. The participants were asked to be self reflexive and explain what they would see if they could step out of their bodies and look back at themselves. This question intended to have the young women analyze their difficulties in obtaining access to certain goals.

Feminist theories which stress the role of one's home environment and socialization formed the basis of several additional questions. These theories were incorporated by inquiring into the quality and stability of the relationships the respondents had with their parents and siblings. In addition to the items based on the theories discussed above, several questions attempted to explore how young women understand their own violent behaviour. These questions sought to go beyond existing theories and explanations.

3.4.3 Fifteen Young Women

In total fifteen young women were interviewed. The participants ranged in age from twelve to sixteen years inclusive, commonly referred to as 'phase one girls' according to the administration of the Young Offenders Act in the province of Ontario. Although demographic questions concerning race/ethnicity and mother tongue were not asked, based on visual contact it appeared that three of the girls were part of visible minority groups, while the remaining girls were white. English was the mother tongue for eleven of the young women, while the rest were Francophones. Most of the girls were in school full time, except for three who attend adult high school in the mornings only. The education level of the participants ranged from grade seven to grade ten.

All of the young women volunteered to participate in this study. They were not given any rewards or compensation for their time. Also, all of the participants had had some involvement with the police and/or criminal charges brought against them. In addition, each of the girls, with the exception of one, were clients of one of the two agencies that work with young offenders and/or distressed youth. The remaining participant was a client of a law firm. This respondent was identified by a lawyer at the firm, who was familiar with this project and suggested that his client may be interested in participating.

These young women used certain words or terms which are uncommon in everyday speech to describe various situations. In order for the authenticity of

these young womens' stories to be preserved, such terms were included in the analysis.

3.5 A Feminist Approach to Researching Marginalized Groups

"...research has often been a tool of domination which has helped perpetuate and maintain current power relations of inequality" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989;17).

Kirby and McKenna (1989), identify four tasks that are essential in conducting feminist research on marginalized groups. The first is unmasking, whereby the researcher needs to question the knowledge that currently exists by asking who created it and why, in other words, whose meanings or experiences are presented. The second is creating; here knowledge is built out of a basic understanding that social reality is constructed by members of society and that those on the margins and those within the status quo or members of the dominant culture have different experiences in the social world. The third task is affirming or developing an understanding of the complex and subtle ways in which people on the margins are kept invisible and silenced. Those on the margins are affirmed by participating in naming their social reality in a way that remains faithful to their experience and does not further exploit it. The final task is sharing and reconstructing, to act responsibly; to know when to use research skills to create knowledge for social change, and to combine knowledge with action (1989:65).

Young women who use violence have conveniently been overlooked, mainly because those who maintain the status quo do not like to admit that females do engage in this type of behaviour (1989:80). Violence in young women has been commonly seen as extremely rare and does not constitute a "social problem" since it is primarily an individual response. We need to make sense of their experiences from the margins of our social world. Knowledge has predominately been used as a technique of oppression by members of the dominant culture. The young women included in this study have described a reality that has been excluded from our present knowledge (1989:64). This project seeks to take these young women who have been traditionally marginalized by the research process and scientific knowledge and expose their unique experiences.

The methodology incorporated in this research covered two important features: the importance of the female voice, and subsequently allowed the respondents' to participate directly in the study. Presenting peoples' ideas, thoughts, or memories in their own words and not in those of the researcher adds a dimension to traditional research which has not been commonly used. It also allows us to learn from women whose ideas have been conventionally overlooked or taken over and spoken by men (Reinhartz, 1992:19). Interviews conducted in this manner, between two women can create an environment whereby one woman listens carefully and cautiously while the other can develop her ideas and construct her meanings. Feminist research methods are not only interested in womens' voices and the way they express themselves but also in experimenting with formats

to put those voices on paper so that an understanding of a womens' place in the world can transpire (1992:41).

The implementation of these methods took place during the interviewing process where young women had the opportunity to have their voices heard and were encouraged to "digress" into details of their personal histories. Incorporating the young womens' accounts directly into the research as part of the analysis is a little used but well known methodological approach for interview research. Perhaps it is only by listening to women speak and understanding their role in our social system that we can truly appreciate the extent to which they have been neglected and come to value their experiences as meaningful.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four provides an in-depth view into the lives and experiences of young women who have participated in violent behaviour. This chapter consists of the following sections: 4.2, the relationships between the young women, their parents and their siblings are discussed; the experiences the participants have had at school are presented in section 4.3; section 4.4, examines the girls' self perceptions; in section 4.5, the young women describe their friendships and the implications these relationships had for their behaviour; and section 4.6, presents an examination of the girls' experiences with violence. The final section 4.7, examines the theories discussed in the literature review (chapter 2) for their relevancy for understanding the experiences of the participants.

Prior to introducing the reader to the fifteen young women who shared their stories and experiences, there are two factors to be noted: first, all of the participants had been physically violent on at least one occasion; second, all of the young women gave themselves a pseudonym to ensure anonymity and to further encourage them to be open and frank in their responses.

4.2 The Family

The family played an integral role in the lives of the fifteen young women. Generally, the young women described their home life in negative terms. In this section, detailed accounts are provided of: the young women's relationships with

their parents, their living arrangements, their relationships with siblings and descriptions of the abuse they encountered at home.

4.2.1 A Place Called Home

All of the young women had experienced family breakdown..."My parents got a divorce when I was two years old" (Ribero, 1995). More specifically, their families were often shattered by divorce and remarriage, both of which were a source of some confusion for the girls. For example, H.B. learned at age nine, that the man she believed was her father was really her step father.

I grew up living with my mom and step dad, I thought he was my real dad until I was about nine. We moved back to Ottawa, and one day I came home from school and there was this guy there, she [mother] introduced me and then we played Atari [computer game] After that I saw him every second weekend. ...We got really close but I didn't know he was an alcoholic and so was his whole family. He [father] used to come by my house and ask my mom to see me but he was drunk so she wouldn't let him. When I was about thirteen, he killed himself. His suicide note said he couldn't live without me but he couldn't get sober. He hung himself in his girlfriend's closet. She found him there (H.B., 1995).

Deedee described her home life by revealing that her parents were divorced and were both seriously ill. Her father had been in prison and two years ago, her step father and mother had a child. These circumstances have created pain and frustration for her, especially with her mother. Deedee and her mother continually argue over maintaining contact with her father and the lack of attention she is being given since the arrival of her half-sister.

I live with mom, my aunt [mother's friend], my younger sister and my step dad. My real dad is on a pension, he has heart problems and my mom is sick too. She has a pancreas disease. My parents got divorced when I was 3 months old. When my dad lost his job, he started selling drugs. He was in the Hell's Angels. I used to see him nearly every weekend, until he went to jail. My mom didn't want me to see him, but now she can't stop me. My mom hasn't been paying attention to me since my little sister was born, and I've been getting into trouble and everything (Deedee, 1995).

Taisa explained that her parents were divorced when she was only three years old. Her mother claimed that her father beat her, but Taisa maintained that this was not true. This is what she described:

I lived with my mom and she's crazy. She doesn't buy me or my older sister nothing, only for my younger sister cause she steals for her [mother]. When I was little, I would go to school with dirty clothes, messy hair, and no lunch. I was so skinny people thought I was sick (Taisa, 1995).

The majority of young women interviewed (13 of the 15), had lived with a single mother for most of their lives. Only two of the girls lived in a two parent home, however, one lived with foster parents and another had parents who were separated from one another on more than one occasion. Both of the latter girls now live in group homes. For all of these young women their mothers were and are their primary parent. She was the parent they remained with after the divorce or separations and she provided them with a home and other necessities. But for eleven of the girls, this primary relationship was often conflictual. The source of conflict varied H.B. attributed her and her mother's difficulties to a clash of personalities:

I'm going to be like my mom. I can just see it now. And we clash because she always has to have the last word and so do I, so it never ends. It's really bad at home sometimes the things we say...that we could never take back, you know (H.B., 1995).

Rosey on the other hand, explained that over the past three years, she and her mother have been arguing frequently over her behaviour, among other things. She claimed:

Me and my mom don't get along. Me, I'm always getting in trouble and not going to school. It's always something different with her everyday, and if there's nothing new, she'll go into the past. I'd like to choke her...but she's my mother (Rosey, 1995).

A.B. also revealed that she and her mother do not get along very well and in the past, her mother's anger has turned from verbal to violent. She described the following situation:

My mom and me fight alot. Once my mom went crazy on me, cause I was late for curfew (probation requirement). She chased me up the stairs throwing everything at me and kicked a hole in my door. She started ripping my phone out of the wall and throwing it at me and then she did the same with my lamp. I ran outside and she grabbed me and said "get the hell inside!" And I said "fuck you, your crazy!" And then I ran to my neighbours (A.B., 1995).

Although the particulars of each confrontation between mother and daughter varied, the source of this conflict appeared to centre around three main issues: personality clashes, behaviour which was disapproved of by their mothers and the breaking of rules set by their mothers, the court, or both.

4.2.2 Siblings

Conflict with siblings was another common theme among the responses of the participants. While it is fairly common for siblings to have disagreements, six of the young women reported incidents of physical violence between themselves and their siblings. For Taisa, the issues of her younger sister being favoured and the unfair treatment she felt she received from her mother were sources of pain and jealousy, though she also suggests that conflict between siblings is normal:

My younger sister, she's just like my mother. She lies about everything. Her and I fight alot. She's a miniature version of my mom. That's why my mom favours her. If I want to borrow her jacket, I have to give her something for it. My mom doesn't buy me any clothes so I have only one drawer full and she has a closet full. Sometimes we fight. All sisters fight. Its hard to get along with people you live with (Taisa, 1995).

On a more severe level, Angie described how she and her older sister "fought" (physically) constantly and on occasion, to the point where her sister was hospitalized:

My oldest sister and I used to fight, fight all the time. Like when she caught me drinking or smoking or something. I would usually freak out and hit her. Once I almost killed her. I was banging her head on the ground and it was cement. I was about 8 or 9 then. That's when I came back from my dad's (Angie, 1995).

Angie also noted that on this occasion she was predisposed to being violent after returning from a visit with her father. She indicated in the interview that she had been physically abused by her father. This experience may be connected to the violence that transpired with her sister.

In a slightly different setting, Krissy revealed that her sister used to severely beat her. These beatings forced Krissy to be hospitalized on three occasions. In the following quote she described the abuse she and her family endured from her sister:

As the judge and the psychiatrist said she's as aggressive as a father beating his kids. She beat on us [herself and her younger brother] almost everyday. She'd beat up my whole family. I was in the hospital because she hit me with a frying pan on the head and another time she smashed my head against the ground. I had a concussion (Krissy, 1995).

Not all of the young women reported incidents of violence with their siblings and, the girls who did, encountered various degrees of violence against themselves or toward their siblings. It would be difficult then to determine if sibling violence has had any additional effects on the young womens behaviour.

4.2.3 Abuse in the Family

Each young woman came into contact with at least one of three types of abuse. Overall, thirteen were physically abused, ten were emotionally abused, and six were sexually abused. In addition to the abuse inflicted on the young women during occasions of physical and sexual abuse, some of the girls were given drugs and/or alcohol by their abusers in an attempt to relax them and force them to forget about what was happening. Raptor T. relays a graphic account of the physical abuse she experienced:

I was adopted. My real parents, my dad was a druggy, glue sniffer and my mom was an alcoholic and did lots of drugs. I got abused from

them. I was beaten up. I had a broken arm, two broken legs, a fracture in my hip, my neck had cuts on it and I had cigarette burns everywhere. This lady who did foster care saw me and she was wondering what happened to me, cause I was in really bad shape. She asked the doctor if I was physically abused cause when I was around my parents, I would start crying and all. I was only 4 1/2 months old (Raptor T., 1995).

Blacky was a victim of all three types of abuse, including being drugged by her first step father.

Things were very hectic. See with my first stepfather, he was...that's how I got my anger. When he came into the picture, we used to do alot of family things together, and then things started going down hill. He started drinking. He's an alcoholic. He went on welfare and would spend all his money on booze. And then he abused me alot, while I was at home. He did everything emotionally, physically, sexually and all that. Then he...started telling me not to say anything and threatening me. So I was scared. He always did drugs and he used to make me do them with him, so I wouldn't remember anything. And he used to take me to his friend's house. His friends are totally gross. They were alcoholics and abused drugs. And I ended up being there and I ended up being caught in fights and abused by his friends too (Blacky, 1995).

A few of the young women only hinted at the fact that they were abused. They appeared to be embarrassed about admitting what had happened.

My parents were really nice to me, but always fighting with each other. My dad was a supreme alcoholic and was always out drinking. We were really close when he wasn't drinking, but that sort of ruined it. *[Is there something you want to tell me about your father?]* Sometimes, he would hit me. That's when he was really drunk. He would get really violent at night then okay in the morning. Until I was about ten, me and my mom don't remember too much. So I guess it was pretty horrible (Jammez, 1995).

It should be noted that all of the young women are in counselling in order to deal with their anger and emotions from the abuse they suffered.

4.3 School

Currently, all of the young women are in school, some of their own free will and others as required as part of their probation. Previously, however, two of the girls had dropped out, and nine were expelled at least once. Each of the girls described having difficulties in school which led to their suspension, expulsion or dropping out of school. Interestingly, most of the young women had achieved relatively high grades during their studies. This subsection looks at the problems the young women encountered at school, their academic performance, as well as the relevancy of the literature in this area.

4.3.1 Experiences at School

All of the young women had two common complaints regarding school: the first was that they had trouble following the rules and were often disciplined by their teachers. Second, many of the young women claimed that the lack of attention they received from their teachers was troubling for them. For instance, Taisa stated that she was constantly in trouble at school for misbehaving. She gave the following examples:

I got suspended all the time. Once I set a desk on fire, another time for a fight, and once for stealing money from people's pockets, 'cause I was hungry (Taisa, 1995).

Rosey claimed that she has been suspended numerous times and last year was expelled. Here she explains why:

Since grade 6, I been suspended alot. Last year I was suspended 15 times and then expelled. [Why?] For fighting and hitting a teacher. [What happened?] This teacher was being really mean to me and some other kids, than she grabbed me by the shirt and I turned around and hit her (Rosey, 1995).

Tia also described her difficulties with school:

I got suspended 12 times this year. [Why?] Usually for swearing at the teachers, refusing to do work and skipping classes (Tia, 1995).

Another common complaint of the respondents was related to the rules and regulations they had to comply with at school. For example, beginning classes at 9am., having lunch at noon, and finishing the day at 3:30pm. was something that these young women rejected. "I just hated waking up early and getting to school on time and than having to sit there all day. It was terrible (A.B., 1995). H.B. also explained why she did not enjoy attending classes regularly "What I like about correspondence is that I can do it whenever I like. I don't have to wake up and go to classes everyday" (H.B., 1995). It should not be surprising that the majority of the young women do not care for school.

4.3.2 School Achievements

Interestingly, thirteen of the fifteen girls claimed to have grade point averages of B (70%) or higher, while the remaining two girls reported that their grades ranged from C's to E's, but had improved significantly since being required to attend school as part of the program they were in.

Two of the girls revealed that they had dropped out of school due to the difficulties that confronted them. H.B. explained how she disliked school so much that she dropped out, however, she is now taking courses by correspondence and achieving very high grades:

I'm outta school, I dropped out a year ago. I work more than part time but less than full time. I'm doing a correspondence course right now. I'm trying to graduate early and I'm doing pretty good in school. I just got a 96 on grade eleven physics. I always knew I could get those marks, but not in school because I hate high school with a passion.

A.B. also dropped out of school when she was 13 years old. Now, at sixteen, she is trying an alternative method, adult high school:

I go to school from twelve till four-thirty everyday. It's like an adult school for people who dropped out of school. I dropped out in grade eight. If I would've went to every class and tried for five minutes, I would've had good grades but all my grades then were just passing (A.B., 1995).

Bubbles revealed that she used to receive excellent grades in school until her family began to relocate every year or two, causing her to start over in new schools. Consequently, her grades dropped due to the time it took her to adjust to and feel comfortable in a new setting. Recently, Bubbles has begun to achieve higher grades:

I'm in grade 9 now, but I'm going to start grade 10 soon. I always had good grades until I started moving schools then they went down. I guess now my grades range from 70s to 80s.

4.4 Self Perceptions

Many of the young women described themselves as being a "bad" person, and were unhappy with their behaviour and actions which have hurt others. The guilt and shame they felt contributed to an overall poor self image. This was evident in their responses to a self description question which asked, "If you could step out of your body and look back at yourself, what would you see?" Eleven of the fifteen young womens' responses displayed that their perceptions of themselves were not very positive in nature. Krissy expressed her feelings about herself this way:

Honestly, I would see a really depressed person who doesn't like themself and really wants to die. [Why?] I don't like life. I get pressured alot. So I want to die. Life is depressing and people are either self-sh or cruel and I hate that. I like to sit and be depressed all the time (Krissy, 1995).

Tia saw herself as someone filled with a build up of regret over her actions.

I would see a troubled child with alot of problems that I have to work out. Someone who's been in alot of trouble and who wants to change that. I've hurt alot of people you know. I'm not like everybody else I have alot of problems (Tia, 1995).

Strong support for the young womens' poor self image is reflected in finding that nine of the girls had attempted suicide and/or been involved in self mutilation

Deedee revealed the following incidents:

I locked myself in my room and tried to kill myself with pills. I've even tried slashing my throat. There was lots of other times. I've tried hanging myself and I even paid someone to kill me, but all I ended up with was getting stabbed in the butt and leg (Deedee, 1995).

The way the girls felt about themselves appeared to be clearly reflected in their actions. Bubbles explains:

I used to cut my arms and wrists, but it wasn't deep enough, unfortunately. [*Do you still want to kill yourself?*] Yah, I still do, but I won't. I'm not afraid to die. I don't like my life...I took a razor blade and put it through my wrist, but I didn't go too hard because my mom was coming. Once I put a pillow over my face but I just lost air and had to go to the hospital. Another time I hung a cord over the beam in the basement and tried to hang myself but then someone came and caught me and took the cord off. I don't do it really anymore, only sometimes I hit myself (Bubbles, 1995).

Many of the girls accounts of self mutilation and suicide attempts included feelings of self blame associated with their actions. Sandra described her feelings of guilt:

I used to feel guilty for everything. I would blame everything on myself. That's why I tried to kill myself. I thought it was my fault that my dad was an alcoholic and that he'd beat up my mom and me (Sandra, 1995).

Blacky also felt that her being abused was partly her fault and she contemplated suicide several times:

A lot of suicide thoughts in my head. I thought that I wasn't worth it. I blamed myself for everything that happened [abuse]. ...I cut my wrists, even once since I've been here [secure care unit] this year. And I used to cut my arms. I didn't care if I did. [She showed me scars, which covered her arms] (Blacky, 1995).

Interestingly, many of the young women detailed the enormity of anger they held inside themselves as a result of their abusive experiences at home during childhood. Coinciding with this deep seated anger came feelings of guilt over what had happened. Often, the young women blamed themselves for the abuse. Some girls revealed that if they are alone when this anger arises, they will release it on

themselves by "slashing", or cutting their arms and on occasion other body parts, with a razor blade or knife. Sandra explains:

Sometimes I would fight but other times I was too high, so I'd just watchIf I'd hit someone I'll feel guilty. So I'd turn to drugs or try to kill myself. I tried alot. I've taken tranquilizers, cut my wrists and put a gun to my head...Before, I would be happy to be aggressive, cause I was high, I'd forget about everything that happened in the past [referring to her abusive father] (Sandra, 1995).

Raptor T revealed that when she becomes upset, she attempts to take her anger out on herself to avoid any violent encounters with others.

When I came here [secure treatment centre] I was really angry, because I didn't want to be here and I didn't like the staff. I was depressed. I didn't want to hurt anybody. No one knew that I was cutting [cutting her arms and legs with sharp metal scraps]. Then the staff noticed [two months ago] and I tried really hard to stop, but I still cut my stomach once after they noticed [two weeks ago]. Now the staff checks my arms regularly to make sure I've stopped (Raptor T, 1995).

4.5 Friends

The influence of the young womens' friends was especially important in relation to their involvement in violent behaviour. In some cases, certain incidents of violence may not have taken place or may not have been as severe if the participants' peers had not been present at the time. This section examines the role the young womens' friends played in their use of violence. The following areas will be discussed: a description of the young womens' friends (number, gender), the use of drugs/alcohol, the girls own involvement with the criminal justice system, their

friends encounters with the law, and peer pressure (which had a direct influence on the young womens' actions).

4.5.1 A Description of the Girls' Friends

During the course of the interviews, the participants were questioned about their friends. Specifically, they were asked about the number of friends they had and their gender. The question was posed in the following way: *"Some people have many friends. Others describe themselves as loners. How would you describe yourself?"* Most of the girls claimed to have many friends, however, a few responded by revealing that they liked to spend a considerable amount of time alone. Krissy explains, "I have alot of friends but I like to be alone. I don't really hang out. I'm very anti-social" (Krissy, 1995). On the other end of the spectrum, Rosey recounted that she is very popular and has as many as fifty friends.

I've got too many friends. 'Cause, like last summer some of us got together, there was like fifty of us and I was like "where did I meet all these people". I usually meet people who like to join in fights or who have seen me fight and say oh my god look what you did to her and I say "your problem is? Your point is?".

[I'm wondering since your group of friends appears to be quite large do you consider yourself a gang?] Well... other people call it a gang but we're just friends. We go to different schools, but if something happens everybody's gotta know about it. We protect one another. We see each other everyday after school. We go to the food court at a shopping mall and sometimes steal clothes. It's just so easy to do. ...Okay, when I got in trouble they asked me if I was in a gang and I said no, so I wouldn't get in more trouble and neither would

anyone else. We call ourselves the OGB's (Ottawa Gangster Bitches). We fight alot and get high (Rosey, 1995).

When questioned about the gender of their friends, eleven of the young women claimed that the majority were male. "Most of my friends are guys, we just get along better" (Little One, 1995). Sandra described the following:

I have many friends. They are mostly guys I know from my neighbourhood or sometimes I just go up to a guy and give him my number. You know, it's a good way to meet people (Sandra, 1995).

Blacky claimed that the majority of her friends are male because they commit criminal acts together and the few female friends she has will not. She explains:

I had 3 girlfriends, the rest were guys. I was the only girls who could call herself a criminal though, the others never wanted to do anything. I guess that's why most of my friends are guys (Blacky, 1995).

Other girls, like H.B. claimed that most of their friends were male because other girls her age were jealous of her appearance and the attention she received from boys at school.

In grade seven I met my best friend, we hung out with older kids who were already stealing cars. Her and I got along better with guys than our girlfriends. My best friend and I were very popular, and most of the girls were jealous, so we didn't have many female friends (H.B., 1995).

The remaining young women reported a fifty-fifty split in the gender of their friends.

Well, I would say about half my friends are guys and the rest of them are girls. There kinda split half and half, you know (Ribero, 1995).

4.5.2 Peers, Drug and Alcohol Use/Abuse

All of the young women claimed to have tried drugs, alcohol or both in the company of their friends. Four of the girls have been and are still using and/or are addicted to drugs. Sandra explains:

I used to do alot of drugs. I just finished a seven month rehab program and now they're [agency] trying to get me back into school. *[How could you afford the drugs?]* Mostly from stealing cars and from stealing my parent's things and selling them (Sandra, 1995).

Deedee who is still addicted to drugs describes what she and her friends do in their spare time.

I go to the mall to meet friends then we go the Rideau Square and we sit there and do drugs. *[How do you get the money to pay for the drugs?]* I'd steal from my parents or take a fit and start breaking things till they'd give me money. If they'd find my drugs and hide them, I'd get really aggressive. So they always gave me my drugs. I still get stoned during lunch, but I cut down since I've been in the group home (Deedee, 1995).

Friends were an essential component in all of the young womens' lives. Drug and alcohol use was a common link between most of the girls and their friends. The young women and their friends would commit crimes such as theft together so they could steal alcohol or money to purchase drugs and/or alcohol.

Drugs were often a contributing factor to the young womens' violent actions. Four of the girls reported that they are currently recovering or have recently recovered from an addiction to drugs. These four young women further claimed that

drugs heightened their aggressiveness and caused them to commit other crimes (mainly theft) for money to pay for drugs.

4.5.3 Fifteen Young Women and Crime

Although most of the crimes committed by the young women involved their friends or being part of a group/gang, each of the participants had themselves been charged with an offence. These included: break and enter, fraud (under \$1,000), assault, possession of narcotics, possession of an illegal weapon, and theft (under \$1, 000). Bubbles gave the following example, "I've got 11 assault charges, theft over, theft under, possession, assault with a deadly weapon, and car theft. I had 17 charges all together. Nine of those charges were from one girl" (Bubbles, 1995). Taisa felt that she had been falsely accused in the charges brought against her, but acknowledges that she has broken the law in other situations where she was not caught or charged.

My charges are really stupid. I mean I did alot of crimes, but the ones I got caught for were really stupid. I don't like the way the legal system works. I've been charged with two counts of assault and uttering death threats. But I didn't threaten anyone. No one believes me even though the girl who really did it admitted it. They [police] think I did it, so I got charged (Taisa, 1995).

4.5.4 The Influences of Friends and Their Criminality

All of the young women reported that at least one, if not most, of their friends had also been in trouble with the law. The offenses their friends were charged with

included: auto theft, break and enter, theft (both under and over \$1,000), fraud (both under and over \$1,000), assault, assault with a deadly weapon, possession of narcotics, possession of illegal weapons, and armed robbery. A.B. reported that nearly all of her friends have had brushes with the law. "Pretty much everyone I hang out with has been put in jail for a weekend or so. Probably all for B and E [break and enter] or auto theft" (A.B., 1995). Angie explained that what she and her friends share in common is committing crimes and fighting.

I go out with the same group of friends. We hang out and do crime together. We're a gang called the "Overbrook Bad Boys". I'm the only girl. *[Was there an initiation to go through?]* I had to fight [physically] with them, even though I'm a girl. There was five guys who were 15 and 16 years old. They started punching me down [beating her up] and if I lived, I was in. But I defended myself. And I had to do a crime. I had to break into a rich house and take something to prove I went in. I got some alcohol and I didn't even get caught (Angie, 1995).

Violent behaviour among the young womens' friends occurred quite frequently, according to the responses obtained during the interviews. Nine of the girls claimed that their friends fought at least once a week, while three revealed that they were part of a gang who fought almost daily. The remaining girls reported that their friends fight less than once a week. Some girls indicated that having their friends around when they were violent added to the thrill of the fight. Moreover, police involvement tended to run high among the friends of the participants. In fact, every young woman claimed to be friends with at least one, if not more people who had criminal records.

4.5.5 Peer Pressure and Fighting

This sub-section explores factors related to peer pressure and the violent behaviour of the young women. H.B. affirmed the effects of peer pressure when she recalled how her friends cheering her on, gave her the strength to continue hitting her victim, and drove her to attempt to hit the victim with a hammer. H.B. reflects on her true feelings regarding her violence toward 'A', the girl she attacked:

I hate to say it, but I fell into peer pressure. All my friends were there and I just kept on going. I was really feeling angry. I don't feel good about it....At first I felt good about it, but I don't now. I'm big on attention.....I got alot of attention from that [fight]. People kept calling me and saying "right on"! Then she [A] called and asked if I would be her friend and I felt really bad (H.B.,1995).

Another example of the effects of peer pressure over the young women can be seen in the description Bubbles provides of her and her friends fighting patterns. "My friends fight as much as I do or more. They usually fight two or three times every week. Sometimes we get drunk and go out to fight for fun" (Bubbles, 1995).

4.6 The Use of Violence by Young Women

Based on the definition of violence being used in this thesis, the participants were asked seven questions regarding their violent behaviour. The initial question asked during the interview was "have you ever been in a fight". The word "fight" was specified as involving any of the following: punching, hitting, hair pulling, kicking and/or the use of a weapon. Each of the fifteen girls answered "yes" to this

question. The remaining six questions inquired into personal experiences which coincide with the young womens' understanding of their violent behaviour.

4.6.1 Experiences with Violence

While the interviews were being conducted, a question was posed regarding when the young women were most likely to use violence and the frequency of its occurrence. This question was intended to provide insight into each of the young women's experiences with violence, by having the participants relay a specific occasion when violence was used, allowing the researcher to verify that the young womens' definition and experiences with violence were the same as the one used for this project. Responses to this question helped to categorize the participants into two groups: those who have been involved in one major violent occurrence and those who have been involved in several of these incidents.

There were four girls who had taken part in one major violent act and eleven who had participated in several violent incidents. The experiences of the four girls who were involved in one major violent incident consisted of severe harm being inflicted upon another person such as bruising or broken bones. This is in contrast to the experiences of the remaining young women who were involved in violent situations more often but who did not always inflict severe harm on another person. An example of a young women involved in one major incident was H.B.. She described the following situation:

It started like this...a friend of mine called me up and said that A [a pseudonym] called me a slut. I hated her [A], since I met her.... So we [H.B. and four friends] went to her place. She wouldn't let me in, so one of my friends held the door open. I started screaming at her and saying why don't you tell me that you called me a slut? She [A] said she didn't. Then I pushed her. I didn't realize my strength. She started kicking at me and hit my lip and it started bleeding. I flipped out. I grabbed her by the collar and I just went...I just don't know what I was doing. I picked her up and threw her against the corner of the wall. Then my friend gave me a hammer and I started swinging it at her. I was this far [displaying an inch with her fingers] from her head. I would've killed her. Oh my god, I must have punched her in the face about sixteen times...(H.B., 1995).

Jammez was also involved in one major violent incident. She described the following situation:

Yah, I didn't start it. This girl, she said I was a racist because I was wearing Doc's [combat boots]. She called me a white supremacist. And I said what! So she started pulling my hair and pushed me around. I denied it and said I don't know what your talking about. So she was going to punch me. So I punched her in the face and she fell down. Then I kicked her a few times. I didn't stick around after that, I ran away (Jammez, 1995).

The remaining eleven young women were involved in violent acts on more than one and sometimes on numerous occasions. Rosey, who has been in countless violent situations explains, "Every time we're [gang] together it [a fight] happens; either someone picks a fight with us or we pick a fight with someone else." She recounted one particular night:

We got to this party and when we were dancing, some girl called my little sister a "bitch". She's not my real sister, but I've known her for a few years. I said [to the girl who shouted the insult], she's my little sister. She

said "so". So, I grabbed a chair and cracked it over her back. I'm like, nooo way. Nobody calls her a bitch. Then I started kicking the girl in the face. I was just steppin on her and then my friends pulled me away and they started beating her up. I just took care of my business and left (Rosey, 1995).

Krissy had just been in a fight two days prior to our interview. This is how she described the event:

I'll be blunt, I can't believe what I did. But the other day I punched this girl and she fell to the floor and I started kicking her, than I pulled her up by her hair and I punched her and slapped her (Krissy, 1995).

The situations described above echoed those of the other girls. Although, each of the girls' experiences differed slightly, in the end, they all resorted to violence as the immediate solution to their problems.

4.6.2 Provocation

The girls were also questioned regarding what provokes them to be violent. Here, the researcher was interested in why these young women use violence and the possibility of identifying specific provocations. Taisa explains:

If someone hits me, I'll hit them back. One time I was sitting there and this guy hit me with a bottle by accident. I said what are you doing and he yelled "fuck you", back at me. So I hit him. We had a fist fight, then he grabbed a stick and hit me and fractured my collar bone (Taisa, 1995).

Since the fight Krissy was involved in was so recent she was asked "what made you angry enough to use violence?" She described the following:

It's been a year and a half of hell living with her [in a group home]. She lies all the time and you can never believe what she says. She's a pathological liar and I couldn't deal with it. And I was on dope [drugs] and she started mouthing off to me in front of my friends. So I just started it (Krissy, 1995).

When speaking of their violent behaviour several of the young women conveyed that the victim "deserved it". Upon further inquiry into the reasoning behind why he/she deserved it, the common response was "because she shouldn't have done that, it's not right" (Bubbles, 1995). Interestingly, each of the girls who gave a similar response was an abused child. This suggests that these young women were socialized to believe that when someone does something wrong, such as hurting another person either verbally, physically, or emotionally, they deserve to be hurt back (physically). Ribero explained that sometimes people deserve to be hit because their actions are unbearable to herself and/or others. She recounted the reasoning behind one of her violent incidents:

He deserved it. He was kicking me and no one liked him. He really got on my nerves. He was always bugging me, so I punched him in the face.

Questions of justification for these actions left the girls in a difficult situation. Additional inquiries were made into the differences between their actions and the actions of the person whom they had beaten up. Not one of the young women could account for her use of violence, other than to say that it was the "right thing" to do at the time.

Another common explanation for resorting to violence was the use of certain demeaning words. Words such as "slut" and "whore" appeared to have a dramatic

affect on these girls. Nearly all could recount at least one occasion when an insult of this nature provoked them to act extremely aggressively. In the account reported above Rosey said she was physically violent with a girl who called her friend a "bitch". Angie explained how certain words affect her behaviour:

There are certain words you don't say or I'll freak. There's alot more things, like when someone's hurting my friends. You have to push me really hard, but if you keep going I'll hit you. This guy once told me that my eyes changed colour to yellow and redish when I freaked out. I just block out, I don't see the person or nothing. I just hit and hit. I continue and it's hard to pull me off. Sometimes I try to talk it out first, it depends (Angie, 1995).

Another example was provided by A.B. who described the following situation:

My sister's and some of my friends were at this bar and a girl called my sister a "slut". No one messes with my sister without going through me first. Miss toughee here. So I hit her (A.B., 1995).

4.6.3 The Act of Violence

The major form of violence involved the respondents' participation in a physical fight. The targets of these young women were often females; however, six participants reported that they also fought with males. One girl claimed to like fighting with males because they are more of a "challenge". Most often the fights primarily involved the use of fists, although on two occasions weapons were used. The first instance when a weapon was used was during a large brawl: one of the young women from this study had a gun and fired it into the air. The second example of the use of a weapon occurred during a planned attack. In this case, the

young woman was upset because a schoolmate had tried to break up a relationship between two of her good friends. The participant attacked the victim at a bus stop and used a knife to cut her across the face.

The question of "when you become aggressive, how do you express those feelings" yielded responses which varied considerably. For example, Deedee explains:

Sometimes I get mad for the hell of it. I punch walls or beat someone. I take out all my problems. If I get frustrated I'll beat someone up cause I'm mad, not that they did too much. I ran after my mom with a shot gun once, and I hit her when she tried to restrain me. Once in awhile I get these flashbacks and I have to hit my head to get out of it. I'm still addicted to crack [cocaine] (Deedee, 1995).

Little One recounts how her temper flairs up quickly and the feelings she has towards her behaviour and her self:

When I get really angry, it takes awhile. Little things piss me off. Like if someone breaks something of mine. People imitate me. If someone insults me I'll get angry quickly. I don't have good self esteem. I'm just a rotten child (Little One, 1995).

Some of the young women described how they are currently attempting to deal with their anger. Bubbles stated that her present reactions are somewhat more subdued.

I just build it up. I cry when I'm really angry. I don't even realize it. My therapist said to go for a walk, but then I punch trees or street signs. [What causes this anger most often?] I'm usually angry about the past, and the things I did to my mom and brother (Bubbles, 1995).

The young women were asked to provide a specific example of how they express their anger. While most of the young women were quite explicit in their descriptions of an aggressive encounter, Raptor T was by far the most graphic. Here is Raptor T's version of an aggressive incident:

These two girls were bugging me cause I didn't shower, cause I was sick all day. Then one of the girls threatened me, so I just punched herEvery time I punch people they're hanging on to me so I push them away but I make sure they're in my face and I'll hit them really quickly....After I punched her, I kicked her and punched her in the stomach and knocked her with my elbow....Then the other girl tried to smother me with a blanket, so I grabbed it and threw it away. And I was hoping she'd grab my arm so I could do something to her, cause she was really making me mad. She grabbed my arm, so I kicked her in the bladder. And she has to have a bag [for her bladder] now. Well she chose to have it. So they said it was assault with bodily harm, but I said it was self defence so she dropped that charge (Raptor T).

While Raptor T's account may sound excessive, it was comparable to the other young womens experiences.

4.6.4 Reflecting on their Violent Behaviour

The girls were asked to reflect on their violent behaviour through the question: "how do you feel after you have been aggressive". The answers to this question provided more insight into the young womens' interpretations of their actions. As well, this question provided an opportunity for the young women to express their thoughts on their violent behaviour. Several of the girls claimed to feel nothing or to feel better after releasing their anger. When asked how she felt

after a violent act, Ribero replied "I just go to bed". The researcher further pursued this issue by asking "do you not feel bad after you have hurt someone?" Ribero responded by saying "No, I don't remember it. In the morning it's all forgotten" (Ribero, 1995). Tia also explained:

Sometimes I feel good that I got it out because some people I've been waiting to do this to for a long time. But with others I feel really bad. Like the fight with my good friend. I feel bad that I hit her even though she started it. I always feel guilty in a way. I won't start a fight for nothing"(Tia, 1995).

When questioned about what led them to actually fight, many indicated that they were angry, most often at themselves or circumstances that did not involve the victim of their violent behaviour. Blacky describes the source of her anger:

It [violence] was coming mostly from inside me, more than anything my anger was always found from him [stepfather]. He did this [violence], so why can't I. He gave me an attitude. He taught me to fight, do drugs and drink [alcohol]. And I thought it was okay cause he did it. So with all this if someone called me a name like a "bitch" or something or gave me a dirty look, I'd just kick her ass (Blacky, 1995).

Tia explained that her anger can be easily evoked with sometimes the smallest provocation. She recounts:

If someone lies or hurts me or my friends with insults or rumours, I'll yell at them. If they continue I have to beat them up, but first I try to talk about it (Tia, 1995).

In many instances, a violent occurrence was based on one comment or look that was made at the wrong time when the aggressor was angry.

Ten of the young women experienced a "blackout", a complete loss of memory when their violent behaviour transpired. After the first hit/punch/kick they tend not to have any recollection of the incident until they are pulled away from the victim. Angie explained:

You have to push me real hard, but if you keep going, I'll hit you. I don't see the person or anything, I just hit and hit. I continue til someone pulls me off and that's hard to do (Angie, 1995).

Bubbles also experienced blackouts when she becomes violent and while she is blacked out she cannot control her actions. She recounted:

Most of the time when I fight, I usually blackout. If I blackout someones got to pull me off, cause I'll punch them until they're way down. When I blackout I don't really see the person or what I'm doing (Bubbles, 1995).

Quite often the girls were surprised at what they had done, and in some cases the girls described themselves as being in a state of disbelief. H.B. claimed that she could not believe what she had done to her victim. She described her feelings during and after her violent encounter:

I didn't know what I was doing, I was totally out of control. I guess I had alot of built up anger and I sort of took it out on her and I shouldn't have. I really couldn't believe what I did (H.B., 1995).

Sandra revealed that after a violent incident she becomes so troubled by her actions that she uses drugs to relax and make her forget about her actions:

After a fight I can't believe what I did. I mean at the time I thought it was the right thing to do, but after I feel

bad. When I feel like this I usually get high and then I can forget about everything.

Nearly all the young women stated that they felt relieved after a violent encounter, since their anger had been vented. After the initial sense of relief, most girls felt remorse and apologized to their victims, except under certain circumstances when they felt that the victim deserved it.

4.6.5 External Issues

The final avenue to be investigated concerns the ways in which our culture has affected the young womens' personal beliefs about violence. The question posed was "from your point of view, when is it okay to be aggressive". It became obvious that most of the girls agreed that physical violence is not acceptable, aside from cases of self defence. A.B. summarized the majority opinion when she explains,

It's not really okay to be aggressive. I think its okay to be aggressive, except when you become physically violent or whatever, then its not okay, but if you're just yelling it's okay. Or if you need to stick up for yourself. Sometimes it's necessary" (A.B., 1995).

Some girls claimed that although aggression is not acceptable, they have not yet determined a method to control their actions. Krissy answered the question by admitting that she does not agree with aggression or violence:

It's never okay to be aggressive. [Why do you use aggression] It's the only way to express my feelings. [Are there any other methods you could use to release

your anger?] I can't find it yet, but when I do I'll try to talk it out or something (Krissy, 1995).

This section provided an examination of the interpretation and understanding of violent behaviour by the young women who participated in this study. An analysis of the experiences that each of the young women underwent prior to and after they exhibited violent behaviour was presented. Furthermore, this analysis focussed on common experiences that were evident in the young women's responses.

4.7 Discussion: Considering Existing Theoretical Explanations

The lack of existing theory and research addressing the use of violence by young women was discussed at the outset of this thesis. In view of this absence of material specifically on this subject, existing research on youth violence and delinquency, although malestream, was examined in an effort derive concepts and insights that could be useful to the present study. This literature was also used in the design of the research instrument used in this study. The three theoretical models that informed this thesis include: social disorganization theory, strain theory and feminist theories. In this section, the usefulness of each of these three theories for understanding the use of violence by young women will be assessed in light of the findings presented above.

4.7.1 Social Disorganization

Social disorganization theory discusses the effects on young people of growing up in a disorganized community. These theorists have argued that youth in these communities are often left unsupervised. This lack of supervision can be the result of parental neglect, disinterest or because parents have to work long hours to make ends meet. The young people living in these situations often turn to single-sex peer groups in order to meet needs that would normally be met at home. These single-sex peer groups often become youth gangs as the young people turn to crime and delinquency in their search for fun and excitement or to meet their material needs.

Various insights and concepts derived from social disorganization theory were included in the interview schedule. These dealt primarily with the impact that family and peer relations had on the behaviour of the young women who were interviewed.

The findings outlined above indicate that social disorganization theory was relevant to the lives of these young women in a number of ways. First, the majority of the young women who participated in the study grew up in a single parent family. Many of them reported having problems with their mothers, including getting into arguments and fights. Also, many of the young women said that they lived in poor neighbourhoods and that their families were not well off. These young women talked about not having anything to do and just "hanging out". These findings are consistent with social disorganization theory.

Second, the young women interviewed for this study were heavily influenced by their peers. In some cases, the presence of peers and their encouragement led to an escalation of violence. As well, many of the girls gave examples of using violence to defend their reputations or those of their peers.

Third, the young women displayed little interest in pursuing conventional goals to meet their needs. Many had dropped out of school and few had jobs. The findings reported above indicate that involvement with like-minded peers was the major way these young women spent their time and met their immediate needs.

While social disorganization theory was useful in certain respects, it could not account for several important findings related to the way these young women understood their own use of violence. For instance, while most of the girls did grow up with a single parent, not all experienced the lack of supervision claimed by social disorganization theory. In fact, the amount of supervision they received was dependent on a number of factors. In this regard, the young women described their parent as being in one of three categories: i) those who work all the time, ii) those who are ill or addicted, and iii) those who are too busy "partying" or self absorbed to provide supervision. At a glance, this may appear consistent with a social disorganization explanation. However, the findings indicate that some parents were, in fact, genuinely concerned about the well being of their children and made an effort to know where their children were and who they were with. Furthermore, for many of the young women, parental concern was often a point of conflict between them and their mothers.

Another problem with using social disorganization theory is that its focus is primarily macro-sociological and structural. It seeks to explain youth crime in large urban areas in the United States where youth gangs are prominent. These youth gangs reflect the consequences of being socialized in single-sex peer groups and in an environment which lacks parental supervision. These gangs are extremely territorial and often persist over several generations. The phenomenon under investigation in this study, differs dramatically from that examined by social disorganization theorists. Few of these young women were members of organized youth gangs. Moreover, even fewer had experienced the level of poverty and neglect reported in the studies conducted by social disorganization theorists in major urban areas in the United States. Finally, the data reported herein has a much more micro-sociological focus than is usually associated with social disorganization theory. Aside from issues related to experiences within the family and with peers, social disorganization theory has little to tell us about the experiences of the young women interviewed for this project.

4.7.2 Strain Theory

Strain theory represents the second theory informing this project. It examines the adaptations that young people develop in response to blocked opportunities, including participation in deviant or criminal subcultures in order to achieve conventional goals. In particular, strain theory focuses on the importance

of a person's involvement with delinquent peers and the way that this influences their behaviour.

Insights derived from strain theory were incorporated into the interview schedule through questions related to school experience, including academic achievement. The young women were also asked what they liked and disliked about school. The particular adaptations they chose were examined, including whether they were involved in youth groups/gangs and whether they engaged in criminal activity.

Strain theory provided little value for explaining many of the issues raised by the young women involved in this study. For example, strain theory has little to say about the unhappiness many of these young women experienced as a result of their family lives. Nor can strain theory account for the impact of growing up in a home where violence is both accepted and seen as an effective means of achieving certain goals.

One finding that was consistent with strain theory was that education was not of great concern to these girls. While the young women did aspire to many conventional goals, they had trouble adapting to the rules and regulations of society, including those they encountered at school. Many expressed greater concern over their immediate situations, including their friends and their social lives.

The use of violence by the young women participating in this study does suggest a potential, albeit weak, link between meeting wider needs for status and recognition, coinciding with the power and control gained through their use of

violence. However, this is not a classic expression of strain theory in that the young women were not involved in organized crime or crime for profit. Nor can their activities be understood primarily as responses to blocked opportunities.

As a final note, strain theory reflects a macro-sociological approach. The explanations provided by the young women in this study, however, have a much greater micro-sociological focus emphasizing their personal experiences with family and friends.

4.7.3 Feminist Theories

Feminist theories also informed the present study. Incorporating feminist insights, however, presented a significant challenge since there is no single feminist theory. Instead, the work of various feminist scholars was consulted based on its relevance to the present research. This literature provided a more textured analysis of the impact of gendered social relations and how these social relations influence the way that women experience and make sense out of their lives. Also, feminist theories place the experiences of women in a socio-historical context that includes insights from both macro and micro sociological levels of analysis.

Insights and concepts derived from feminist theories were used in the questionnaire construction and in the design of this study. For example, a methodological approach was developed which allowed the young women to speak in their own voices. It also facilitated the exploration of intimate topics that might otherwise have been difficult to do. In addition, during the interviews, questions were asked regarding the relationships the young women had with their families.

Feminist theories were invaluable when examining issues related to the family. For instance, feminists paid particular attention to the impact that growing up in a violent household had on their subsequent development. This line of inquiry was based on existing feminist research which claims that such experiences may have indirect links to the delinquent behaviour of adolescent females. This literature discussed how girls growing up in an abusive family are likely to runaway in order to escape their situation. It is possible that for the young women in this study, their escape may be to release their frustration through violence. Feminist theorists also stressed the role of socialization and its impact over the young women's behaviour. Socialization emerges as an essential factor behind the girls' motivation to use violence. Through the responses provided by the young women, a partial explanation for their use of violence is directly related to violence being a learned behaviour or reaction they have become accustomed to.

As was the case with social disorganization and strain theory, the concepts derived from feminist theories could not account for some of the experiences reported by the young women who participated in this study. For instance, feminist theories were not able to explain the degree to which self mutilation was used as a form of violence. The fact that many of the participants reported blacking out when perpetrating violence against others is another important finding which has not been reported in the existing literature that deals with women and violence. While feminist theories did provide some insight into the relationship between being abused during childhood and subsequent involvement in delinquency, the link

between experiencing childhood abuse and subsequent involvement in violence remains tenuous.

Overall, the applicability of the three theoretical perspectives in explaining the use of violence by young women was limited. They highlight certain aspects of the experiences of the young women but obscure others. Feminist theories proved to offer the most insight of the three. What is apparent after this review of the usefulness of existing theoretical explanations is that further exploration is needed into some of the findings discussed above, such as the blackouts experienced by the young women while committing acts of violence and their use of self mutilation as a form of violence. Furthermore, appropriate methods, similar to those employed in the present study, need to be used to expand on several of these key findings. Many of the implications, for example, the role female socialization plays in determining the behaviour of young women, and the connections between growing up in an abusive setting and ones own violent actions need to be elaborated and teased out. This could contribute to the development of feminist models that address young women and violence. Feminist theories themselves need to more fully expose the experiences of this segment of the female population.

5.0 CONCLUSION

An apparent increase in crimes of violence by young women has become an important area of social concern. Increasingly, researchers have begun to realize that the use of violence by young women is a normal, human response which has been largely ignored by social scientists. In the past, this has resulted in a failure to understand the experiences of delinquent young women, especially when they are involved in typically male activities like crime and violence. Thus, while considerable research has been conducted on young men and their use of violence, this research has virtually ignored the experiences of young women. The purpose of this thesis was to conduct an exploratory study of the use of violence by young women.

The methodological approach used in this study explored the use of violence by young women while bearing in mind that womens' experiences and knowledge have usually been excluded from many forms of expression. Accordingly, special features were incorporated into the methodology used in this study, such as: emphasizing the importance of the female voice and using an interviewing technique that was adaptable to each young woman individually; preparing a research instrument that was sensitive to the gendered nature of the phenomena in question; and using a qualitative approach to enable the researcher to explore and elaborate on ideas suggested by both the literature and the young women themselves. The interviews were conducted in such a way as to allow the participants to feel comfortable about sharing their experiences and talking about some of the more troubling aspects of their lives, such as their experiences with

abuse. By making the environment supportive, the young women spoke freely about their lives, without worrying about legal or social consequences.

Many insights were drawn from the three theoretical models which addressed the use of violence by youth. The findings chapter illustrated that both social disorganization theory and strain theory were limited in their applicability to the present study since both have a macro-sociological focus. Feminist theories include a micro-sociological emphasis which was more appropriate for analyzing the type of data collected in this study. As well, social disorganization theory and strain theory did not offer explanations directly related to the subject at hand, namely understanding the use of violence by young women. However, they did anticipate some of the difficulties encountered by the young women with regard to their families, friends and educational experiences.

Feminist theories proved to be most useful, since they could link both the macro and micro-sociological approaches. The feminist literature referred to in this study offered explanations that fit in with the experiences of the young women and the various contexts they experienced. These feminist theorists also pointed out that delinquent and violent behaviour is typically male stream and women engaging in such behaviour experience substantially different consequences than men do. While feminist theories were the most comprehensive of the three used in this study, they provided little insight into some issues of importance to the girls. For example, the young women's experiences with blackouts and self mutilation were not explored or elaborated on in the feminist literature reviewed for this study.

The limitations of this thesis need to be highlighted when considering the findings reported above. To begin with, the sample used in this study was small, consisting of only fifteen young women. Each of the young women were chosen for this study because they had been involved in violence. No attempt was made to select a random sample, thus, the findings cannot be generalized. In addition, girls who grew up in similar circumstances to the participants in this study but who had not committed acts of violence were not considered for inclusion in this study. Young men were also excluded. Since the sample used in this study was not compared to other groups, such as those mentioned above, it is difficult to assess the magnitude of the findings.

Each of these limitations has an important impact on the significance of this project. However, since there is a lack of information on this subject and other related issues, this study does provide an important glimpse into the use of violence by young women.

Certain key implications can be derived from the findings of this study. Upon examining the family life of the young women, particular commonalities were evident among the girls. For instance, thirteen of the girls grew up in a home with a single female parent with whom they were in constant verbal conflict. Similarly, many had a father with whom they rarely, if ever, spent time. Another aspect of family life for these young women involved being victims of abuse. The abuse endured by the girls may have played a crucial role in their own use of violence and their understanding of this behaviour. Finally, difficulties experienced by many of

these young women may be indications of the problems existing at home. These findings have important implications for policy makers and educators trying to respond to the needs of these types of students.

Negative self perception was an extremely important issue for all of the young women in this study. Each of the girls categorized their feelings about themselves in a negative light and some acted upon these feelings by attempting suicide and/or self mutilation. The young women's friends constituted another integral part of their lives. Friends were able to influence the girls' behaviour in negative ways, such as using drugs/alcohol, fighting and committing criminal acts. It is interesting that for most of the young women, participation in these negative behaviours was the binding factor behind their friendships.

Socialization appears to be linked to the self mutilation reported by these young women. During the process of female socialization, many girls are taught to be passive and control their emotions, especially in public. Releasing their anger through self mutilation allow these young women to keep their emotions private and thus, fulfil the role expected of a socialized young woman. The blackouts which were reported by the girls may be understood in a similar context. The process of socialization for girls also dictates that young women should not use violence. Blacking out and not being able to recall their actions allow these young women to believe that they were acting like a proper young woman while simultaneously venting their anger.

The willingness to resort to violence as the solution to their problems was another factor in the socialization process for these participants. These girls learned early on that violence was an acceptable method of dealing with the anger. In contrast, while all of the young women agreed that violence is not an acceptable method of dealing with problems, many felt it was their only option. Moreover, it is important to emphasize the fact that the young women all revealed that they felt remorse over their violent actions on those occasions when their anger was with themselves, and not their victim.

The descriptions provided by the young women regarding their behaviour displays a strong relationship between the way they were socialized as women and their subsequent actions. It further suggests that concrete differences exist between how the literature explains male violence and how these girls accounted for their actions. For instance, if both males and females use similar external techniques of violence such as, kicking, punching, hitting and/or the use of weapons, why is it that only the girls are filled with so much guilt and shame that they report incidents of self mutilation? It could be hypothesized that females encounter different experiences when dealing with their anger and find that they cannot always externalize these emotions the way young men typically do, and so they direct their anger internally through self mutilation.

The majority of experiences these girls had with violence are clearly not identified or dealt with in the existing literature. There is a need for considerable research in this area as in other areas of deviant behaviour involving women.

Based on these findings, further research in this area needs to be conducted based on feminist theory. In addition it is important that feminist models develop a more detailed understanding of womens' experiences while emphasizing that the experiences of young women reflect the gendered nature of social reality.

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