# A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE YOUNG WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE WITH VIOLENCE

by Heather Grace McLennan

Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education (Counselling)

Acadia University
Fall Convocation 2000

# ABSTRACT

Past research on violence has been focused on males. There has little been research on the violent experiences of females. The present study examines violence from the perspective of three female youth who committed violent acts. The major purposes of this research were: to hear the stories of violent acts from those who had committed them and , specifically to hear their perceptions of self as a violent person and the congruency between this view of self and how they perceived others as viewing them in their role of a violent person. Three young women who had committed a violent indictable offense at 17 years of age comprised the sample. During the research period, one of the participants was 17 years of age and the other two were 21 years of age. Each participant was interviewed individually using the supporting questions as a guide. The stories were analysed individually and how they related to one another. The major themes were: social learning, relationships with parents, external attributions, shame, anger, neutralization, anti-societal behaviours, situational factors, and lack of intervention. Recommendations are grounded in the participants' perceptions of themselves as non-violent and their perceptions that others perceived them as non-violent. Suggestions for participatory research, programming and counselling interventions are offered using the narrated experiences of clients as the starting point. Specific areas to be considered are: developing empathy, reducing neutralization, emotional and social literacy, gender sensitivity and parental involvement.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to all the women who have blessed my life - most especially my mother, Grace Ladd McLennan and my gift from God, Catherine (Kaye) Leaker both of whom provide(d) me with unwavering faith and limitless love. The loves of my life, Alexandra and Hilary, are the children of my heart and have been understanding beyond their years. The support of an incredible amount of my family and friends has helped make this work possible. I would particularly like to thank my father George. He was often the target of my ill-humour yet never refused any of my countless requests for help.

I would like to thank the three young women who trusted me with their stories. Their experiences have provided a perspective on violence that contributes to our understanding and can be valuable in the prevention of violence or further violence.

I have developed an appreciation for the time and energy required to oversee a thesis. Dr. Heather Hemming gracefully accepted my request to be second reader. She has been an accomodating, sensitive and discerning contributor to this work. Finally, I must speak of my supervisor and teacher - Dr. Ron Lehr. This has not been a painless process but the pain was eased by Dr. Lehr's competence, constructive criticism, guidance and encouragement. Thank-you.

Tashi Deley

# CHAPTER 1

Research to date has focused mostly on violence perpetuated by males, little has been written about female youth who have committed violent crimes. Literature on the etiology of violence committed by females only began to emerge about 15 years ago. Little is know about young women's pathways into violence even though there has been, what could be described as, a bombardment of intense media coverage of seemingly senseless violence, particularly that carried out by youth.

## Statement of the Problem

Media reports would lead us to believe that there is an unprecedented rise in violence generally and youth violence specifically. Violence committed by youth has doubled since 1986 accounting for 3.5% of all crime in Canada (National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), 1997). It must also be noted, however, that youth are two to three times more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators of violence. Elliott (1994) found it is not so much that violence committed by youth has increased but that violence committed by youth is more likely to result in serious injury or death. More importantly, for the purposes of this study, the NCPC (1997) reported that violent crime perpetuated by adolescent females is increasing at a rate faster than that for young males.

Media presentations indicate that public sentiment strongly favours longer terms of incarceration and harsher disciplinary measures for youth convicted of violent crimes. This disputes research that consistently showed that such measures are not only much less effective then prevention and intervention but exponentially cost more (NCPC,

1996). However, Cullen, Wright, Brown, Moon, Blankenship and Applegate (1998) concluded that "policies that seem harsh toward at-risk children are inconsistent with public mood" (p. 198). These discrepancies point to the need for more research into these specific areas.

Significance of the Problem

The literature on youth crime and violence calls repeatedly to focus research on offenders and their life circumstances and not on offences ( Cullen et al., 1998). Brezina (1996), Baron and Hartnagel (1997) and Cullen et al. (1998) all expressed a need to direct greater attention to the experiences of young offenders and their perceptual, attributional and emotional reactions to these experiences and how, together, they lead to criminal behaviour. Despite this, there is a dearth of literature in this area.

Given the importance of personal experience, the current research examined the lived experiences of female perpetrators of violence. Olson (personal communication, 15 April 1999) believes that significance in research is attained from the specific and than applied to broader instances. Hearing the experiences of youth who have committed violent crimes can assist those of us in the helping professions to work more effectively with youth who have committed violent crimes and those youth who may potentially commit violent crimes. Their stories can help in planning programmes in schools, communities and counselling milieux. We can develop a better understanding of where to direct our efforts and resources.

Research based on stories from personal experiences can also provide a human

element and may allow others to see violent youth from a different perspective, perhaps, even see similarities. This can influence public opinion to the point that there may be support for intervention and prevention programmes that have been demonstrated to be both more effective and far less costly than incarceration and other punitive measures. Ultimately, to stop crime before it starts, we must set aside theories and begin listening to, and working with, those who are at risk (Cullen et al., 1998).

Rationale

If we take perception to be any individual's mental image or concept, then every researcher, with or without a hypothesis, has some preconceived notion of youth who have committed a violent crime prior to beginning their work. Some research on public perception of youth crime demonstrates the influence of the media (Elliott, 1994), other research focuses on particular groups', such as teachers and social workers, perceptions of violent youth (Price & Everett, 1997), while other research even claims to be giving voice to youth (NCPC, 1997) and, yet, there seems to be a lack of literature pertaining to their stories, in their voices, about their experiences and, therefore, their perceptions of themselves.

Though prevention and intervention has focused on male violence toward females or male violence toward other males, a relatively new thread of female violence is just beginning to be recognized and researched. The intent of my research was to hear the voices of female youth who had committed violent acts. I wanted to gain understanding through hearing the stories of their violent activities. There was a particular emphasis on

their perception of self as a violent person and the congruency between this view of self and how they perceived others as viewing them in their role of a violent person.

Definition of Terms

There are many available definitions for violence. For the purposes of this research, violence was determined by the Pocket Criminal Code (1995). There are seven basic types of violent Criminal Code offences: Homicide; attempted murder; abduction; robbery; sexual assault; non-sexual assault; and other sexual offences. The violent offences committed by the participants in this study were physical assault and subsequently would be classified as non-sexual assault in the Criminal Code of Canada.

By giving informed consent, participants entered into the research voluntarily, understood the nature of the study and the obligations and dangers, if any, that were involved. They also knew they could stop the process at any time. A sample of an informed consent form can be seen in Appendix A.

Personal Assumptions

I read extensively on the subject of violence in search of understanding to better guide my work as a counsellor. Bogdan and Biklin (1998) and Osborne (1990) recommend that one should not delve too deeply or extensively into the literature prior to conducting research based on phenomenological methodology since it might be too influential in data analysis. It is understood that my reading has influenced my theoretical perspective. My assumptions and beliefs motivated me to work in this particular subject area.

The literature on youth violence is extensive. Researchers recognize that, except for the last ten to fifteen years, inquiry into violence has been male focused. The recent explosion of youth violence coverage in the media piqued my interest in general but the reported increase in female youth violence disturbed me.

I assumed society had truly run amok. The violent acts I read or heard about were, in my view, totally without concern for any of the social mores I had experienced in my youth. When I was a teenager, boys fought but, even then, only rarely. Oftentimes, the fighting was in socially sanctioned venues such as between players in a hockey game. Girls did not fight and no one carried weapons.

A 1997 CBC radio report on the beating and subsequent murder of a female teenager named Reena Virk provided the catalyst for my interest in female youth violence. The assault and murder were committed by middle to upper class youth. I had assumed youth violence was far removed from my world because I thought violence was a combined product of poverty, abuse and drugs.

There were two issues which arose with Reena Virk's murder that were discordant with my former, nebulous beliefs. I was unaware that young females committed violence to that degree and that the young women who committed violent crime could come from middle and upper class families. My desire to learn more on this topic came from a professional interest with the purpose being to find out not just why violence perpetrated by youth occurs but also to develop ways to work effectively with youth in the prevention of violence or further violence. The other issue was personal and equally, if not more,

important. I have two daughters. The social reality of Victoria, BC, and these teenagers, held many similarities to Port Hood, NS and the children and youth with whom my children attend school. I do not want violence to be part of their reality.

I did not think I had enough awareness of youth violence to have been accused of "sticking my head in the sand." I truly had very little knowledge of it. However, once my awareness was heightened, the incidences reported in the media seemed to come in a steady stream. A few weeks following the murder of Reena Virk, a taxi driver in Pictou, NS. was murdered by two teenage boys while a teenage girl watched. I continued to pursue the issue of youth violence and its "new face". I found a vast literature on the subject of violence and discovered there was considerable variance in the conclusions as to why violence happens and what should be done about it.

I entered into my own research with some strong beliefs. I believe that the family, community and school, in which a child exists, have strong influences on the development of that child. I think these factors are instrumental in whether the child resorts to later violence and they are equally instrumental in the prevention of later violence or in the success of intervention programmes with children and youth who have already committed violent acts (we are all responsible.) I also believe children and youth today are the first generation who know their "rights" but do not know or seem unwilling to accept their responsibilities. I think consumerism has led to a society that largely sees parenting as purchasing properly labelled clothing. Neglect in the form of inadequate parental supervision and monitoring and inattention has led to children being left without

guidance and support. Social mores are no longer clear and our children and youth operate under a Zeitgeist of "anything goes."

Finally, I think the family is blamed, although also recognized, as being an integral part of the amelioration. I also sense that professionals have an attitude of "we know best" and therefore have the answers to impose upon families. I do not think the family is always fully respected in its ability as necessary participants in the process.

My readings have led me to expect that participants will see themselves as victims either because of their family and life experiences or because of the various public systems under which we are all expected to co-exist. I also suspect they will not hold themselves responsible for their actions. There may be remorse but this may not necessarily be for their victims. It may be because they have been caught.

In articulating my biases and assumptions I have claimed them and have become more aware of them and, hopefully, as a result of this, made them less influential. I believe I am now able to create greater distance between these assumptions and biases and the data which needs to speak for itself. My counselling training and experience will be instrumental in separating my biases from the data. Respect for individuals and their narrated experiences are an inherent aspect of the counselling process. I assist clients in identifying and working on problematic issues in their lives but it is incumbent upon me not to impose my values on to them.

Overview of Chapters

This chapter has provided a summary of the statement of the research problem and

the significance of the study. A section on personal assumptions was included as I felt it was an integral aspect if rigor was to be instilled in the work.

A detailed review of the literature on violence is presented in Chapter 2. It should be noted, that, unless otherwise stated, the literature refers to males. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and research procedures along with a section discussing the literature on how we perceive ourselves and how we view others as perceiving us. The lived experiences of the participants are presented, by telling their stories, in Chapter 4. Accompanying these stories are the themes that emerged for each participant. Chapter 5 consists of my interpretation of the data, conclusions, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

# CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Attempts to explain human aggression began with the earliest theologians and philosophers. There is, in these explanations, an underlying commonality that humans struggle constantly with the need to create and the equal need to destroy. Zegans (1973) suggested that this need to destroy encompasses one's inner self and the physical outer world where the latter may be against others or against nature.

An exhaustive review of the literature was conducted based on the topic of this thesis. This review has been thematically organized based on the patterns that emerged in the literature. The literature, unless otherwise stated, refers to males. The chapter begins with a look at the crime statistics for Canada, followed by an overview of the psychological theories of human violence and aggression. Offender profiles and the risk factors that contribute to violence are then presented. The next section discusses the emerging issue of gender differences in the literature on violence and concludes with a specific look at literature that discusses the systemic, cultural and societal interpretations of why violence occurs and proposals for prevention and intervention. These latter interpretations are also interwoven throughout the literature.

## Canadian Crime Statistics

The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) (1996) says that there is good

evidence to suggest that we do not live in an especially peaceful country. Canadians view crime as only secondary in importance to unemployment and their sense of insecurity may be justified. In 1993, 24 % of all Canadians were the victim of at least one criminal act. The NCPC (1997) states that violent crime among youth is increasing twice as rapidly as among adults and more than doubled since 1986 accounting for 3.5% of all crime in Canada but also notes that in 1998 the total number of youths charged fell for the second consecutive year. Statistics Canada (1998) indicates that violent crime perpetuated by adolescent females has continued to rise both in number and severity. Elliott (1994) and Price and Everett (1997) found that young people continue to be disproportionately victimized by crime and violence compared to adults. Children and youth are anywhere from two to three times as likely to be victims of assault and their victimization has risen to unprecedented levels. The difference that has occurred, according to Elliott, is that violence committed by youth is more likely to result in serious injury or death.

The NCPC (1996) asserts that the cost of crime in Canada in 1996 was $46 billion which included a projected amount of $36 billion for the ripple effect of crime The $46 billion represents more than 5% of our GNP and costs every four person family as much as $5000.00 per year. It is also believed that these numbers understate the real extent of crime in Canada as much violent crime takes place in the home where the perpetrator is well known to the victim and where the crime goes unreported.

Psychological theories may help us understand this notion of violence. The theories

are presented in relation to human violence and aggression. I have attempted to provide a comprehensive review of the relevant theories keeping in mind that the focus of this work is the experience of the individual.

Psychological Theories of Human Aggression and Violence

Kelsey (1973) discusses Freud in relation to his, biologically based, Aggressive Instinct Theory. Freud developed this theory from his readings and interpretations of several philosophers, in particular, Plato. Freud posited that humans have a death wish which he referred to as Thanatos. This death wish is directed toward the self at first and then turned outwards to others. The result is aggression in some form, from anti-social behaviour to war. Freud believed that social or economic conditions did not contribute to violence and therefore any changes in these would be useless in its' amelioration.

Nickolaas Tinbergen (1968) discusses the theory of human aggression, based on animal behaviour, that was developed by Konrad Lorenz with whom Tinbergen worked. This is a theory, Tinbergen notes, that has been both widely accepted and widely criticized. The theory argues that, unlike other species, man lacks natural restraint and the inhibiting instincts that keep animals from destroying their own kind. Aggression serves the purpose of keeping a balanced distribution over the available environment, ensures the survival of the best and protects our young.

Kuttner (1983) discusses this latter point by looking at the reported, and projected unreported, incidents of child abuse in New York city in 1977. These numbers, according to Kuttner, categorically refute Lorenz's and Tinbergen's premise that humans

use violence or aggression to protect their young and, in fact, the opposite is often the case.

Pinel (1997) notes that the search for explaining violent and aggressive behaviours includes studying biological factors such as blood chemistry, hormone levels and disorders in neural mechanisms. In this area of study it is recognized that biological processes work in tandem with social and cognitive factors.

Following this theory, Gladue (1991) conducted a study of aggression levels of 155 male and 150 female undergraduates using a self-report inventory. The purpose of the study was to determine, on the basis of hormone levels and sexual orientation, if males are more aggressive than females based on the resting levels of testosterone and oestradiol. Men reported more physical and verbal aggression than did females. No differences were found between heterosexual and homosexual men but homosexual women reported lower amounts of physical aggression than heterosexual women. Testosterone and oestradiol were found to be positively correlated with aggressive behaviour in males but negatively correlated in females.

Moving away from biological and instinct theories, (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowerer & Sears,1939, cited in Baron and Byrne 1997), believe that Drive Theory can be used to explain human violence and aggression. Baron and Byrne state, that Drive Theory proposes, that any interference with goal-directed behaviours arouses a strong motivation to harm others i.e., external conditions, particularly frustrations, lead to violent behaviour.

Feshbach (1984) discusses three models of the catharsis hypothesis and their efficacy based on this Drive Theory of aggression. The purpose of catharsis, in this application, would be to cleanse oneself of the drive to harm others. The catharsis models debated by Feshbach are the Dramatic model, the Clinical model and the Experimental model. The Dramatic model is based on Aristotle's premise that partaking in, or viewing, dramatic works has the effect of purging our "violent passions". The Clinical model is based on the psychoanalytic process of a "talking cure" where the patient gives verbal vent to his or her anger. The Experimental model espouses venting anger and frustration in a socially acceptable and non-harmful way e.g., hitting an inflated dummy or playing contact sports. Feshbach concludes his review of these models by stating that, based on his analysis, catharsis is not an effective means of reducing war or criminal violence. He does feel, however, that catharsis methods may help maintain good mental health and social relationships.

Another psychological theory which pursues this notion of human violence and aggression is Cognitive Theory. Baron and Byrne (1997) describe Cognitive Theory, in relation to aggression, by saying that violent behaviour arises from a complex combination of moods, experiences, thoughts, memories and cognitive appraisals of a given situation. This complex combination also affects our level of physiological arousal.

Anderson, Deuser and DeNeve (1995) combined Cognitive Theory and Excitation Transfer Theory to study aggression. The subjects were 59 female and 48 male

undergraduates using hot temperatures as the aggressive stimulant. Using various methods, they found that hot temperatures did increase hostile thoughts and created excitation transfer effects. Excitation Transfer Theory suggests that physiological arousal, however produced, tends to dissipate slowly over time and, therefore, may persist as a person moves from one situation to another.

Baron and Hartnagel (1997) followed another line of research on human violence and aggression, stemming from Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) and Attribution Theory (Feather, 1990). Strain Theory proposes that anti-social behaviour is an adaptive response to aversive environments rather than maladaptive and irrational behaviour. Baron and Hartnagel (1997) interviewed 200 homeless male street youths basing the first part of their hypothesis on Strain Theory. They concluded that delinquency arose from their homelessness, that the youths adapted to an aversive environment. Two types of these adaptations, compensation and retaliation, involve violence. Youth committed compensatory and retaliatory acts based upon their perception of having been unjustly deprived of valued resources or they perceived that they were victims of injustice and violence was justified to even the score.

In the same study, Baron and Hartnagel (1997) used Attribution Theory to explain differences in individual's responses to similar conditions i.e., homelessness. The researchers used this theory in relation to the way people explain outcomes and what determines their explanations. It has been used to demonstrate why certain individuals enter into violent, criminal behaviour. If an individual believes that failure, or

anticipated failure, in achieving a goal, is the cause of personal inadequacies then they are less likely to react with criminal activity in general, and violent crime in particular, than another individual who believes public systems and/or "others" are to blame. The researchers found this to be particularly true in conditions of chronic unemployment, poverty and serious drug and alcohol abuse.

Brezina (1996) also tested the Strain Theory hypothesis by conducting a cross-sectional analysis on interview data collected from 1966 to 1969. The original sample was 2,213 male public high school students beginning when they were in Grade 9. The sample was reduced to 1,799, or 81%, by the fourth year when subjects were in Grade 12. Brezina concluded that delinquency enabled adolescent males to minimize the negative consequences of strain and that delinquency is an adaptive response to aversive environments.

Gilligan (1996) and Real (1998) both note that the perception of inequality, as outlined in Attribution Theory, is an underlying determinant of violence. This perceived inequality can also be referred to as injustice. The perception that one is a victim of injustice causes shame and this, in turn, causes violence. The violence transforms the shame into grandiosity, shifting the perpetrator from a sense of helplessness to a sense of omnipotent control. Certain preconditions exist for this shame to lead the individual to violence. The individual feels there are no nonviolent means of warding off the shame, lacks the emotional capacities that normally inhibit the violent impulses that are stimulated by shame, and is too ashamed to ask for help. The NCPC (1997) found that

social and economic inequality, parental neglect and abuse, academic and/or social problems in school, and unemployment are among the most potent stimuli of shame.

Bandura (1978) also believes that humiliating affronts and threats to reputation and manly status are major precipitants of violence. Bandura has used Social Learning Theory to explain human violence and aggression. Muuss (1976) describes Social Learning Theory as "eclectic in that it draws on concepts, hypotheses and methodology from a variety of quite different psychological sources" (p. 61). Conceptually, therefore, it is appropriate that Baron and Byrne (1997) discuss Social Learning Theory in relation to this notion of violence. They state that violent behaviour is acquired in the same way as other complex social behaviour either through direct experience or by observing the actions of others. Specifically, individuals learn who is an appropriate target, what actions by others justify retaliation, and where it is appropriate to carry out the violence.

Bandura (1978) argues against many of the other psychological theories.as he finds their explanations of violence to be limited:

> Psychological theories of aggression have been largely concerned with individual physically injurious acts that are aversively motivated. In most of these accounts aggression is not only attributed to a narrow set of instigators, but the purposes it presumably serves are limited. Inflicting injury and destruction is considered to be satisfying in its own right and hence is the major aim of aggressive behaviour.
>
> A complete theory of aggression must be sufficiently broad in scope to encompass a large set of variables governing diverse facets of aggression, whether individual or collective, personal or institutionally sanctioned (p. 12).

In the same work, Bandura (1978) asserts that virtually all learning, including violence and aggression, results from direct experience or by observing the behaviour of others and its consequences. He states: "Findings of numerous studies show that

children can acquire entire repertoires of novel aggressive behaviour from observing aggressive models, and retain such response patterns over extended periods" (p. 14). There are three principal sources for this learning: family members, the subculture in which people reside and the "abundant symbolic modelling provided by the mass media" (p. 15).

Groves (1996) looked at the effects of the exposure of children to violence. In a review of the literature, she concluded that children exposed to violence in the home, community or through the media suffer from fear to explore, loss of a sense of safety, and helplessness and suggested that all of these can lead to later violence. Groves notes that more than 3,000 studies have examined the relation between television violence and violent behaviour in children. The results overwhelmingly showed a positive correlation between the two. It was also repeatedly shown that exposure to television violence increased the viewer's apathy and desensitization to aggression.

The psychological theories have a range of explanations for why human beings commit violent and aggressive acts. Violent and aggressive behaviour has been attributed to instinct, biological factors, cognitive appraisals of a given situation, strain, attribution and social learning. However, not everyone commits such acts. The next aspect of the literature looks at the characteristics of violent youth offenders and the specific risk factors which contribute to an individual becoming a violent offender.

Offender Profiles and Risk Factors

Adolescent offenders are divided into two distinct groups: Serious Nonviolent

Juvenile offenders and Serious Violent Juvenile offenders (SVJ) (Loeber, Farrington & Waschbusch, 1998). It is the latter group that will be the focus of this thesis. Loeber and Farrington (1998) identify serious violent offenses as homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault and kidnapping. These offenses are the same as those cited in the Canadian Criminal Code.

Farrington, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, vanKammen and Schmidt (1996) found that even those individuals who have been charged and convicted in a court of law may not see themselves as an offender. Elliott (1994) also found that the public may not perceive the reality that violence committed by youth crosses all class, race, gender and residence boundaries. Violence is not just a problem for the poor, or minorities, or those in large cities.

There appears to be a general agreement amongst researchers that the risk factors for becoming a violent offender are as varied as the individual. Given that the research is extensive, a representation of the findings are presented.

Hawkins, Farrington and Catalano (1998) identified early risk factors for violence based on physical events. These include perinatal difficulties, physical trauma to infants, minor physical abnormalities and brain damage. Deschenes and Esbensen (1999) suggested that delinquency could be predicted by parental neglect, family conflict and disruption and parental deviance especially for girls. They also inferred that inadequate child rearing practices and low self-control result in delinquency. Price and Everett (1997) concluded parental neglect may have a stronger effect than physical abuse on later

violence because it appears to be more damaging to the subsequent course of youth development and involves three times as many youth.

According to Gilligan (1996) severe and inconsistent punishment, during childhood and adolescence, increases feelings of shame. This leads to a decreased capacity to love others and decreased feelings of guilt about one's actions towards others. Elliott (1994) states that weak family bonding decreases the capacity for bonding. The repetitive finding in a series of National Crime Prevention Council publications (1995-1997) is that negative early life experiences, coupled with a lack of appropriate support, is a fatal combination i.e., strongly predictive of later violence.

Gilligan (1996), Hawkins et al., (1998) and NCPC publications (1996-1997) found that school experiences are an important factor in later violence. The research indicates that unsuccessful school achievement often begins very early. Children who commit violence often experience peer rejection which can lead to feelings of anger and alienation and subsequently violence.

The research of Chaiken and Chaiken (1984), Loeber and Farrington (1998) and Marcus (1999) presents consistent findings in several characteristics of serious violent offenders. These researchers agree that there are behaviours between the ages of 6 and 11 years and between the ages of 12 and 14 years that can be used as predictors for serious violent offending. In the younger group these include non-serious delinquent acts, aggression, drug and alcohol use, poverty and antisocial parents. In the older groups the behaviours include lack of strong social ties, antisocial peers, non-serious delinquent

acts, poor school attitude and performance, and psychological conditions such as impulsivity, criminal self-identities, and hedonistic motives. The younger the age of onset the more likely the individual will be a life-course-persistent offender committing more serious crimes for a longer period. The older age of onset group has a higher probability of offending behaviours being limited to adolescence.

Dean, Brame and Piquero (1996) believe that there is no typical youth offender although there is a consistency in that a small minority commit a disproportionate amount of crime. Loeber et al. (1998) assert that most active offenders commit a larger proportion of serious crimes than general crimes and are responsible for much of the violent crime. Elliott (1994) found that most youth offenders are involved in a variety of crimes that usually start with lesser offences and build to more serious ones. The latter usually involve a variety of violent acts which are often exacerbated by serious drug use.

Chaiken and Chaiken (1984) analysed self-report and official record data from approximately 2200 male inmates in three states in the US. The purpose of the analysis was to be able to identify and categorize offenders' criminal behaviours. They developed 10 categories of criminal behaviours ranging from the least serious to the most serious. Property crimes were considered to be the least serious and violent crimes were described as the most serious. Individuals in the latter group were called "violent predators". The researchers found the "violent predators" had begun regular use of hard drugs as juveniles, committed violent crimes before they were 16, were more socially unstable, had few, if any, family obligations, and had a history of long-term

unemployment.

Dean et al. (1996) examined the debate between two theories. The theory that criminal propensity variation is due to variation in one or more causal traits and the theory that there is more than one type of offender based on more than one causal trait. The former theory suggests that the variation in criminal propensity can be attributed to a variation, with-in and between individuals, in self-control, and that these individuals are low in, or lack, "social or personal capital". The theory recognized that such social controls wax and wane over time due to changes in life circumstances.

The latter theory defines two distinct groups of offenders: "early starters," before adolescence and "late starters," in adolescence. The latter group have shorter criminal careers that are limited to adolescence whereas the former group may offend for their lifetimes.

Dean et al. (1996) tested these two theories by looking at the recidivism rates of 848 males, 16 years or older, who had been released from institutions in North Carolina. Basing their analysis on the age when the individual first appeared before the court, they found support for both arguments. There were some similarities and some differences when the age for the later onset group was set at 12 years. When this age was set higher the differences disappeared which the researchers attributed to the "criminogenic" effect of child abuse on the early onset group.

Tolan and Gorman-Smith (1998) reviewed the literature on the development of serious violent offending careers and found that there is evidence indicating a general

pattern of development with serious violent offending being the final step. However, there was no substantial evidence to predict individual progression. They state, "It appears that violent and serious offenders can be differentiated from other offenders based on age of onset, presence of childhood behaviour problems and relative aggression level" (p.83).

Tolan and Gorman-Smith (1998) also noted that, although these risk factors tended to have a high correlation, they are not interchangeable. They added, "There are frequent but not serious offenders and serious but not frequent offenders, and both of these variations can occur with a wide variety of crimes exhibited or with a few occurring" (p. 71). The researchers also noted that these conclusions have arisen from studies of males. Females and certain minority groups are under represented or completely absent in this literature.

As noted in the introduction to the literature review, the research on youth violence has been predominantly focused on males. Somers and Baskin (1994) suggest that, at that time, there had been a virtual absence of studies concerned with non-domestic female violence. The intent of this thesis is to look at the experiences of female violent offenders. It is necessary, then, to look at some of the research on gender differences in violent behaviour with a specific focus on the violent behaviour of females. This will assist in situating this thesis in the current context of research and suggestions for future work.

Differences between Gender and Females' Violent Behaviour

According to researchers Somers and Baskin (1994), Rowe, Vazsonyi and Flannery (1995) and Deschenes and Esbensen (1999) males have committed more crimes and more serious crimes than females. This holds true across historical periods and across societies. Little is known about young women's pathways into violence. Theories of female violence that have been advanced have placed great emphasis on personal maladjustments and because female violence goes against traditional social standards, it is seen as more problematic than male violence.

Rowe et al. (1994) and Deschenes and Esbensen (1999), in their respective studies, discuss Social Control Theory in relation to gender differences and violence. These researchers believe that delinquency is a result of variations in the weakness of social bonds. Traditionally, a strong social bond was more of an insulator against delinquency for females than males because parents selectively imposed greater controls on daughters than on sons.

Rowe et al. (1995) conducted personal interviews and telephone surveys with two birth order adjacent siblings from 917 families to determine if there was a significant difference in delinquency levels between sexes and found that any psychosocial variable that was associated with crime within one sex also seemed to be associated with crime within another. They also found that males and females were led into crime by essentially the same social forces, individual dispositions and by similar etiological determinants. Males were also more often exposed to these common etiological factors

(e.g., males were more likely to be in peer groups engaging in delinquent activities).

Deschenes and Esbensen (1999) examined gender differences in violent behaviour and gang membership among 2, 792 male and 3,030 female Grade 8 students. They found that the influence of pro-social peers was more salient for girls, that neighbourhood violence was an important predictor for female violence and males significantly used neutralization to justify their violent behaviour more so than females. In other words, if males were hit first, they felt they had to protect their rights or if there was a perceived threat to someone they felt obligated to protect such as a family member or a friend, they would be justified to retaliate. Although they found gender differences in violent behaviour in non-gang members there were no significant gender differences in gangs except for the most serious violent crimes e.g., gang fights and carrying and using weapons. The researchers found that the strongest predictor of violent behaviour was victimization in the past year.

Marcus (1999) also looked at gender differences in violent behaviour. He administered a self-report inventory, measuring antisocial behaviours, to 72 male and 91 female adolescents. He found that males were more likely to steal, break and enter and be picked up by the police whereas females were more likely to cut classes and be drunk in a public place. Males who engaged in aggressive acts were usually formally charged whereas females who committed the same offenses were more likely to be diverted to a court related programme. Marcus also found that females who were violent also displayed a number of other antisocial behaviours that were not directed at hurting others

or destroying things. Males who were involved in stealing, substance abuse and drug sales were not the same ones using violence. Males also showed continuity in their aggressive behaviour from childhood to adulthood. Females were more likely to begin their aggressive behaviour in adolescence.

Somers and Baskin (1994) interviewed 42 women arrested for non-domestic felony crimes to hear their life stories. Like Marcus (1999) they found that women who committed violent crimes were also involved in other offending behaviour and deviant lifestyles. Somers and Baskin found two distinct groups in the sample - those who began violent activity in early adolescence (60% of the sample) and those who began in later adolescence (40% of the sample). The early onset group began street fighting at a mean age of 10 years and began carrying weapons at a little over 11 years. This group reported committing many crimes, including violence, before they became addicted to drugs. The later onset group became addicted to drugs first and then turned to crime, including violence, as a means to feed their habit. Both groups reported a wide variety of negative childhood experiences and both groups reported they came from multi-problem homes. The women consistently reported experiencing detachment from such conventional institutions as school, marriage and employment. The researchers concluded that this affirms the importance of social factors in accounting for violent career patterns. Somers and Baskin continued by saying that "poor women may be fast on their way to becoming one of the most rapidly growing groups of violent offenders" (p. 484). This issue of poverty as a major contributing factor to violence is highly disputed. In direct opposition

to the conclusion of Somers and Baskin is a NCPC publication (1997) that quotes a John Howard Society spokesperson as saying, "If poverty caused violence than the jails would be full of women."

Laidler and Hunt (1997) interviewed 65 female gang members who were older teenagers of colour from extremely marginalized families and communities. They found females who were members of boy gangs were both more violent and more often victims of violence, from both males and females in their gang, than females who belonged to all girl gangs. The all girl gang perceived their group as serving the purpose of a surrogate family. The female gangs worked as units, shoplifting and selling drugs to raise money to improve the lives of their children and to get out of their current neighbourhoods. The all-female gang members were also victims of violence at the hands of their male partners. The majority of the girls, despite their past and current victimization, appeared to understand caring and good conduct. Respect and a good reputation were considered important though the problem appeared to be that they had no skills in achieving either of these.

The presentation of research studies on gender differences as well as females' violent behaviour suggests that many determinants are at play as there are with males' violent behaviour. The consistency in the research that has been conducted thus far appears to be that the culture and society in which we exist, and the larger political and economical systems that control these, contribute to the prevalence of violence and, as a result of that, its amelioration.

Systemic, Cultural and Societal Interpretations of Violence

The media, in its myriad presentations is certainly a pervasive and, one could argue, a powerful factor in our society. In this current age of advanced technology it is difficult to ignore media presence and, subsequently, its influence. This omnipresence is believed, by some researchers, such as Bandura (1978), to increase the incidence of violence and to influence public opinion of violent youth offenders and the measures that should be taken to punish or rehabilitate them.

It appears that this is now being recognized in the media itself. In a newspaper article, Lambert (1999) quotes her source, Paul Mallea, as blaming the media for focusing too much attention on violent crime. He is quoted as saying, "I think violence is happening more, but it might be happening more because of the media. There's a lot of copycat kind of stuff" (p. A22).

The NCPC (1997) criticized the media for the news coverage of the proposed changes to the Young Offender's Act (YOA). The NCPC believed the media focused negative attention on the YOA that heightened the call for harsher sentencing instead of informing the public about the purpose and effect of the act itself and the realities of young offenders. Price and Everett (1997) support the NCPC stance in their conclusion that the overriding message in media reports gives the impression that adults need to be personally concerned about violence perpetuated by youths.

Hickman-Barlow, Barlow and Chiricos (1995) conducted a content analysis of

articles on crime appearing in Time magazine during the post-World War II period. They found that media portrayal escalates the threat of crime and de-emphasizes the fact that most crime is simply the acquisition of property. They came to the conclusion that crime news is an important means of gaining the public's consent for harsher criminal justice policies that are implemented with the misguided intent of ensuring a stable political economy yet fail to have a significant impact on crime.

Results from the literature do not tend to agree with the media presentations. Cullen, Wright, Brown, Moon, Blankenship and Applegate (1998), based on a 1997 survey of Tennessee respondents, reported that the public strongly supports early intervention with youth as opposed to incarceration as a strategy to reduce offending.

There is a social justice, or perhaps social injustice, theme that runs through the commentary of the literature. This is strongly stated by Bandura (1978):

> Agencies of government are entrusted with considerable rewarding and coercive power. Either of these sources of power can be misused to produce detrimental social effects. Punitive and coercive means of control may be employed to maintain inequitable systems, to suppress legitimate dissent, and to victimize disadvantaged segments of society.
>
> Thus, in conflicts of power, one person's violence is another person's benevolence. Whether a particular form of aggression is regarded as adaptive or destructive depends on who bears the consequences (p. 13).

The NCPC (1996) asserts that the increasingly large gap between the rich and the poor, with fewer and fewer dollars being directed toward social programmes, is perceived as a major factor in increased crime levels in general and violent crime in particular. It is believed that the roots of crime lie, in large part, within the broad social and economic environment of the child. Children born into poverty are at a greater risk of experiencing

discrimination and victimization. Bandura (1978) states that the majority of impoverished people, in fact, do not aggress. According to Bandura, the poor, over generations, have become apathetic through learning they have no power to effect change.

Elliott (1994), Gilligan (1996), Price and Everett (1997) and Real (1998) all came to the general conclusion that violence becomes either the only, or the most effective way, to achieve status, respect and other basic social and personal needs. Violence, like money and knowledge, is a form of power and for some youth it is the only form of power available.

The systemic, societal and cultural interpretations of violence extend into suggestions for prevention and intervention. These suggestions arise from the results of research or from an empirical position. Some of the research findings on the prevention of violence are highly controversial. A study reported in the Guardian Weekly newspaper suggested that the drop in the crime rate in the 1990s was due to the high abortion rates in the 1970s by "women whose children would have been most likely to commit crimes as young adults ( "Abortions 'responsible for...," 1999).

Other results arising from the literature are less polemic. Deschenes and Esbensen (1999) suggest that efforts be directed to reducing the neutralization of violence. They believe that the lack of perceived guilt among those who commit crimes suggests a need for greater accountability with special prevention and intervention efforts aimed specifically at females. Hawkins et al. (1998) propose that there is a need for

interventions that: provide greater prenatal care to mothers at risk for pregnancy and delivery complications; change the general precursors of antisocial behaviours; help youth develop positive beliefs and standards for behaviour that rejects violence and; develop social and emotional literacy.

Park (L. Park, personal communication, 4 June 1999) suggests that the key to reducing youth violence is to make young people part of the decision making process. Youth need to be provided with success, learning, self-respect and responsibility because it is believed that youth who have respect for self and others will be less likely to commit crime.

Riley's (1997) suggestion, based on his research, is that prevention and sustainability cannot be based on the fortunes of a particular government. This is also recognized by the National Crime Prevention Council (1997). The council concludes that it is necessary to have civic communities with "social capital". This latter term is described as being "the protective network of supportive and positive relationships among children, parents and families, social institutions and all community members" (p. 4) where diversity is recognized and celebrated. According to the NCPC it is also necessary to improve the ability of a community to meet the material, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual needs of its members.

Price and Everett (1997) conclude that teachers have an important role to play in reducing violence because they interact with students all day. Groves (1996) agrees by

concluding that schools must emphasize respect, nurturing, and tolerance for all students. The National Crime Prevention Council (1996) continues on this theme by stating that the role of schools, and the way in which they provide services, has to adapt and evolve to meet the changing realities of children, families, and society and that there must be an increasingly collaborative effort. Elliott (1994) also believes that there needs to be community based planning to establish a single base to coordinate funding and integrate service delivery. This means involving all levels of government and government departments such as education, social and health services, police, courts and corrections.

O'Callaghan (1993), a family therapist, believes that politicians and leaders in the various departments have led the public to believe that all we can really do in the face of "senseless violence" is to grieve, heal and hope it doesn't happen again. He goes on to note that events such as school shootings are predictable, explainable and preventable. Youth violence is caused by ineffective parenting and defective management by other adults. The key, for O'Callaghan, in preventing violence, is having an organized collaborative system in place whereby all deviant child behaviour is observed early and solved through a school-based family-school parenting intervention.

Sykes, in his 1992 book "A Nation of Victims", puts the blame for society's "formidable social problems", including violence, firmly in the laps of the "decision making elite". Sykes notes that the family is consistently blamed for the problems yet is given no role whatsoever in dealing with it. He suggests that there is a subtle bias against the family which pervades much of the literature and research of social science.

Research evidence suggests a central role for the family in developing social controls but there is caution over implementing it. This, according to Sykes, is because the family holds a privileged position in a free society and in our current Zeitgeist the family stands for traditional middle-class values. This latter notion implies character which is deemed to be an archaic notion yet public problems arise out of defects in character formation. Sykes states, "Society can offer support and assistance to the family...it can never take its place" (p. 251). Gilligan (1996) supports this need for families as he believes that when families disintegrate we need their cooperation and input if we are going to be effective in long-term amelioration of social problems.

Sykes (1992) continues his argument by stating that social mores are also important in determining whether or not individuals commit criminal acts. He asserts that the zone of acceptable conduct needs to be reduced as there is a generally held belief that "anything goes". There are others who support Sykes in this concern. It has been observed that young people today, from all socioeconomic levels, are able to recite their rights but few can, or want to, recite their responsibilities (O'Callaghan, 1998; M. Ennis, personal communication, 4 June 1999; C. Leaker, personal communication, November 1998).

The one constant throughout the literature seems to be that it is never too early to work with children at risk of committing later violence and never too late to work with youth who have already entered into violent careers. Prevention requires working with children and their families in-depth and long term. Counselling, psychotherapy and

education can help prevent violence, or further violence, and there is a need for more counsellors in communities if this is to be effected (Gilligan, 1996; Riley, 1997; "Shift focus to prevention..., 1999). Sykes (1992) makes a point, regarding prevention and intervention, that was not noted anywhere else: "Programs that are put in place must be judged on their results - on whether they improve the lives of people rather than on whether they enhance the self-esteem of the authors" (p. 251).

Finally, whatever is done, it is important to support, in a non-judgemental way, those with whom the work is being done (Riley, 1997; M. Ennis, personal communication, 4 June 1999). If we are going to help we must be careful not to shame and blame further those whose needs are exposed (Gilligan, 1996).

Summary

There is an extensive range of literature available on human violence and aggression. This has been an area of thought, study and commentary from the early Greek philosophers to the present. Yet, there remain many questions both to the cause, and the prevention, of violence.

The research on violence, in general, has focused on males. There is an emerging body of literature on females' violent behaviour. This research is limited and it has found little common ground in its conclusions. It is believed that a qualitative study exploring the experiences of individual female youth, who have committed a violent act, may provide a clearer understanding of this phenomenon that would help professionals improve on preventative measures.

It appears there has been very little research on hearing the lived experiences of female youth who have committed a violent act and thus learning more about their pathways into violence. In addition to this, there appears to be little know of their perceptions of themselves, and others' perceptions of them, in the role of a violent person. It is the purpose of this thesis to enrich the understanding of females' experiences as perpetrators of violence. The research question that has arisen due to this is as follows:

How do female youth, who commit violent acts, view themselves in their role of a violent person and is this congruent with how they perceive others as viewing them in that role?

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with a discussion of the phenomenological method of research and its applicability to this study. A fundamental aspect of this thesis, is the self-perceptions of female youth who have committed a violent crime. Therefore, in the next section, a presentation of the literature has been included on perceptions of self and the congruency between these perceptions and how we view others' perceptions of us. Following this is the procedure and supporting questions. The chapter concludes with section on ethics and rigour and the possible limitations of this research.

The phenomenological method is based on the premise that the meaning we give to our experiences constitutes our reality, where experience is the starting point of all social science inquiry and reality is lived time, lived space, lived body and live relationships. Phenomenological research attempts to produce an understanding of a person's reality and thus a starting point of developing an understanding of the human condition (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

A proposal based on the phenomenological method is not intended to test a hypothesis because this can lead to preconceptions. The researcher may speculate about the form the research may take and the direction the study is likely to go but must be careful not to overextend this process as it can "frame the work too rigidly, erecting barriers to discovery" (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998, p. 69).

Clandinin and Connellly (1994) and Merriam (1998) note the phenomenological method is based on the individual's experiences in particular situations and seeks understanding from that point of view. It gains validity based on being rigorously conducted including the researcher's rigour in bracketing her own experiences through self-relfection, paying careful attention to the ways in which data are collected, analysed, and interpreted by ensuring that the researcher's interpretations of participants' experiences are checked with the participants, presenting coherent and convincing arguments through a holistic representation of what is happening based upon strong rhetoric and, finally, whether or not the interpretation of the phenomena rings true to readers and other researchers. This latter aspect can be enhanced by rich, thick description that does not jump to conclusions too soon. There is no assumption by phenomenological researchers that they know what things mean to their participants. It is a process of mediating human experience through interpretation knowing that there are multiple ways to interpret experiences.

The perception of ourselves within an experience constitutes one aspect of that experience. This perception varies with the actual event and with the individual. The literature on violence examines the perceptions of others about violent youth but it appears to be lacking in both how these youth perceive themselves and how they view others' as percieving them. An integral aspect of the research question is the perception of self and the congruency between this view of self and the views of others' perceptions of self. A representative presentation of the literature in the area of self-perceptions is

presented in the methodology and not the literature review because it is specific to my research and not to violence.

Narrative: Self-Perceptions

Literature on perceptions of self and perceptions of others' perceptions of self is presented. The purpose of this is to provide the reader with a reference point for the research question, supporting questions and the analysis of the data.

The terms self-perception and self-concept are used interchangeably in the literature. One's self-concept is a reflection of one's perceptions about how one appears to others. Funder (1980) refers to this as our "looking glass self". Self-concepts, or perceptions, are tied to our emotions and our emotions are tied to our behaviour. van Aken, van Lieshout and Haselager (1995) noted that if, for example, we undergo a negative change in circumstance such as a lowering in status, we may also lower our estimation, or perception of ourselves. Funder (1980) and van Aken et al. also found that we tend to attribute our negative behaviour to an external situation to which we respond while others tend to attribute such behaviour as arising from within.

Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979) reviewed the literature on self-perceptions from 1945 - 1973. The overwhelming conclusions of this literature suggested that people's self-perceptions are congruent with the way they perceive themselves as being viewed by others. They also found, along with John and Robins (1993), that this congruence tends to occur with judgements of highly evaluative characteristics and that this phenomenon is due to the tendency to assume greater similarity between our own and others' attitudes

than actually exists.

In John and Robins' (1993) study of 50 groups of undergraduates (N=250). Subjects described themselves as having known each other for at least one term and that they were generally well-acquainted. Subjects rated themselves and others on five traits called the "Big Five". These were: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and introversion. The authors found that subjects rated highest agreement on observable traits and lowest agreement on internal or non-observable traits. John and Robins concluded that self- and other perceptions are not congruent since self-perceptions may become distorted when the trait that is being evaluated is affectively charged. The subject may distort reality to maintain self-esteem. John and Robins suggested that parents' emotional involvement in their children may cause them to be as affectively charged in evaluating their own children as the children themselves.

Continuing with this line of thought, Miller and Davis (1992), studied parents', teachers', peers' and students' perceptions about subjects on cognitive traits, self-assessments of preference and personality traits and predicted the response of two peers to all of the measures. Subjects were 60 children in Grades 2 and 5 (mean ages = 8.5 and 11.5 respectively). They found that childrens' predictions on self and others were less accurate than either parents or teachers. Parents were found to be better at some types of predictions about their children but the results were inconsistent. When parents erred , it was in overestimating.

Self-perceptions are influenced by the feedback of others. Luft and Ingham (1969)

developed a model of feedback they called the Johari Window. The window is divided into four areas or "panes" and can be used to help us see ourselves as others see us. This is achieved through communication. However, the difficulty seems to be that communication of feedback to others may often be infrequent or ambiguous. Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979) suggested this difficulty may be due to strong sanctions that are often maintained against making direct appraisals, especially those that are negative. The exception may be direct feedback, by parents and other adults, in the socialization of young children.

Researchers who study adolescence consider the congruence of an individual's perceptions of themselves, their abilities, and their perceived emotional and physical support with the perceptions significant others have of them i.e., parents, teachers, peers (Miller & Davis, 1992; Sarason, Pierce, Bannerman & Sarason, 1993). Funder (1980) and van Aken et al. (1995) assert that adolescents' perceptions of themselves ought to be fairly congruent with significant others' perceptions of them. Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979) concluded that accurate cognitions about oneself are vital mediators in the maintainance and modification of behaviour. This self-knowledge can facilitate the development of competence and make it easier for the adolescent to adapt to new behaviours, both pleasant and unpleasant. If congruence between self and significant others, is low it can lead to uncertainty about what to expect and how to behave.

Methodology

The intent of my thesis was to hear the lived experiences of the participants. To ensure that I obtained the richest possible description of my participants, I developed a list of questions supporting the research question. The research question was: How do female youth, who commit violent acts, view themselves in their role of a violent person and is this congruent with how they perceive others as viewing them in that role? The supporting questions arose partially from the literature and were meant to assist, if necessary, in broadening the story that arises from the main question. The supporting questions requiring reflective inquiry were:

1. Please describe the violent act you committed.

2. Describe to me how you felt before, during and after you committed the violent act.

3. How have you typically solved your conflicts or problems? Please describe a time, or times, you can remember when you were in conflict, had a problem or did not have your needs met in a satisfactory way. e.g., How old were you? What was the setting and situation? Who was there? What happened?

4. How do you see yourself differently than how you think other people might see you relative to this notion of violent person?

5. Describe to me how you think your parents, siblings, teachers, peers or neighbours may describe you to me. e.g., If I met your mother and I said, "Tell me about_____." What would she say?

6. Do you think that the way others describe you is accurate? Please explain why. Tell me how this feels i.e., for others to see you as you have described to me they do.

7. How would you like to handle problems, conflicts and meeting your needs? If this is not satisfactory to you what things do you think might help you to handle them differently?

8. How would you describe the support you had around the time that you committed the violent act?

This thesis attempted to gain a greater understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who had committed a violent act, thus, the next step was to determine the criteria for participants keeping in mind that the amount of data would, quite likely, be extensive for each participant. The final sample was three young women as the criteria I had developed applied to a hard-to-find population. The decision for this was made on the basis that this would provide considerable data, yet, not be overwhelming.

Participants

Participants for this study were three female youth who had committed an indictable offense, under the Criminal Code of Canada, when they were 17 years old. The particular age group was chosen because it was felt that the young women would be able to speak from their position as a young offender but were also very close to the age when they would go to adult court if they reoffended. I also thought that particiants of this age would be able to more clearly articulate their experiences than younger offenders and they were able to agree to informed consent without parental permission. Females were chosen because there is less understanding of their experiences with violence. The names of participants and their geographical locations were changed to assure anonymity.

The three young women ranged in age from 17 to 21 years. They all grew up in small rural communities in Nova Scotia. During the research period two of the participants still resided in rural communities. One participant lived in a small town where she attended university, the second had not completed high school and the third had completed a one year training programme at community college. The socio-

economic backgrounds of the three participants ranged from low-income to upper-middle class.

Procedure

A modification of snowball sampling was used to obtain participants for this study. Schweigert (1998) describes snowball sampling as a method of contacting members of a hard-to-find population by asking research participants to identify other potential participants. I modified this in that I asked other professionals to assist me rather than other research participants.

I began looking for participants by contacting two probation officers I knew. I explained to them the nature of the research, the process of such research including informed consent and the changing of names, places and types of crimes to assure anonymity, and the criteria for participants. One of the probation officers had a client in his current caseload and gave me the name of another probation officer who he knew had a client who fit the criteria.

One identified participant, Hope, who was 17 years old, had been court mandated for anger management where I was doing a counselling placement. Hope had physically assaulted a 14 year girl. During the referral, the probation officer told me he had seen the photographs of Hope's victim. He said she had been beaten so badly that she was unrecognizable. He commented that Hope was a really nice girl who had had a rough home life and whose mother had not even accompanied her to court. I received approval from my counselling placement supervisor to make contact with Hope. I telephoned

Hope and she came to meet with me at the facility where I was interning. We discussed the process of my research and arranged to meet in my home for the interview.

I remembered a young woman, Ginger, 21 years old, with whom I had worked in my position as a contractor with Victim's Services. She had been referred for having been assaulted by her former boyfriend. However, she had also been charged, and subsequently convicted, of assaulting him. She was 17 years old at that time. I contacted Ginger at the university she attends. We went over the process and she agreed to participate. I e-mailed her a list of the questions and informed consent which we then reviewed together over the telephone. We arranged to meet in her off-campus apartment.

The third participant, Mairi, 21 years old, was another court mandated client to the anger management group due to having been recently convicted of assault. My supervisor asked me to meet with her to determine if she should join the group or go into individual counselling. During the assessment, it became clear that physical violence had been a consistent factor in her life. Although this was her first conviction, she had committed several violent acts during her teenage years for which she could have been charged. At the end of the session, I asked her if she would consider taking part in my research. She agreed to do so. We arranged to meet at the facility where I was doing my placement.

First Contact

During the initial contact I explained the nature of the research, the assurance of anonymity and the assurance that agreeing to meet with me did not mean that they had

agreed to be part of the research. Each participant was given a copy of the main question and supporting questions with a written and verbal explanation that these were some of the things I wanted to look at or was interested in. I explained that I would want to hear their stories in their way, although, I might ask for further description, definition or explanation for clarifying my understanding. They were assured that the lead would be theirs and that no topic would be discussed that they did not wish to discuss.

I told each participant I would be making a typed transcript of the interview. I would write their story from the transcript and then give each individual her copy to check for errors, omissions, or to add anything if she wanted.

The next step was to review the informed consent. I informed all participants that the process was confidential, all names, places and types of crimes would be changed to assure anonymity and the possibility that the process could bring up unresolved or dormant emotional issues for them. If this occurred I would assist them in finding an appropriate professional with whom they could meet. I asked each participant to clarify their understanding of all of these issues to insure that it was clear between the two of us.

In the cases of Hope and Mairi, who had both been court mandated for anger management, I assured them that if they chose not to participate at any time that this would in no way affect their probation as the research was something entirely separate. All three participants were reminded during each contact that they could drop out at any stage if they desired. It was agreed with each participant during the initial contact that I

would telephone them the day before our agreed appointment to remind them we would be meeting.

It has been noted that I already knew Ginger through my work with Victim's Services. At that time we had had a good rapport and it became apparent by her readiness to participate that this rapport had remained over the intervening four years. The initial meeting with Hope was characterized by some restraint on her part. She seemed willing to participate but I was concerned that she felt it was something she was required to do. I reviewed this with her and pointed out that it was a favour to me and that she was under no obligation whatsoever and, again, that she could drop out at any time if she so chose. The initial meeting with Mairi was met with great enthusiasm and she said she would enjoy taking part in the research process. There was immediate rapport. This I attribute to Mairi's personality. She presents as being very pleasant, cheerful and eager to please. I cautioned her again that there was no obligation on her part but she brushed it off and told me she would like to be interviewed.

Analysis of the Data - Discussion

The phenomenological method recognizes the unavoidable presence of the researcher (Osborne, 1990). It is not expected that this presence and the inherent prejudices and attitudes that accompany this presence should be avoided, rather, they become another element of the data. It was absolutely incumbent upon me, as the researcher, to undergo a rigorous process of self-reflection on opinions, feelings and my presence in the process during both data collection and data analysis and to include these

as part of the data analysis (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998; Osborne, 1990).

The counselling process shares similarities with phenomenological research. It is the counsellor's role to hear the story and from that, interpret and analyse what is being said. It must be understood by the counsellor, as it must be understood by the phenomenological researcher, that there is a gap between experience and language. Therefore, throughout the interviewing, transcribing, and analysing, of the data I attempted to be open to what Hill (1994) refers to as the "third meaning". I took the term "third meaning" to be what was not said i.e., the unspoken but perhaps intended meaning behind the spoken words.

I striveded to keep my writing consistent with the data so that the reader would have an empathic understanding of the participants' stories. The focus of the data analysis was to extract meaning and significance. I looked for "patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes, either within or across individual's personal experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

Second Contact - The Taped Interview

I began each session by reminding the particpant she did not have to talk about anything she did not want to talk about. Before I started interviewing the participant, I explained what is meant by a role, and gave examples of some of my roles e.g., mother, daughter, student counsellor. I continued with discussing her roles, one of which was now, in the eyes of the court, a violent one.

I asked each participant to begin her story by describing the events leading up to the

assault they committed and the assault itself. At various times, during the narrative, I asked for clarification of their meaning. I also asked questions, to incorporate the experiences and perceptions of each participant, specific to my research question. I did not follow a prescribed model because I wanted, as much as possible, to maintain flow and open-ended dialogue.

The similarities shared between phenomenological and the counselling process became apparent during two of the interviews when I assumed a counselling role. Relating their experiences, caused two of the participants obvious pain. When this happened, I went off topic and briefly explored these issues with them until they felt comfortable in continuing with their stories. Throughout the interviews, I was aware of how eager each participant was to tell her story and not be judged for her actions. It was as if they had been relieved of a great burden.

Analysis of the Data - Step 1

After each interview I listened to the tape, made written notes, and noted themes for each participant individually. As each interview was completed, I noted any narrative threads that were shared with the preceding interview(s). A preliminary coding system organized the data specific to the research question and the individual participant. The codes were: perceptions of self as a violent person, participant's views of others' perceptions of her as a violent person, and the congruency between these two perceptions. Interwoven through the three main themes were perspectives held by the participants on reoffending, relationships, social structures, and real or perceived support.

A second coding system organized the data based on the narrative threads across individuals. The common themes were: congruency between self-perceptions and perceptions of others' perceptions, social learning, relationships with parents, external attributions, shame, anger, neutralization, anti-societal behaviours, situational factors, and lack of intervention.

Supportive research questions helped construct Hope's, Ginger's, and Mairi's stories. Because Hope's story followed more closely to these research questions, the resulting narrative was used as a prototype for the other two. Themes and points for discussion came from the analysis of the constructed stories.

Third Contact - Reviewing the Constructed Stories

I arranged to meet individually with each participant so they could read their stories to make any changes. I began this meeting by explaining that I needed an addendum to the informed consent, regarding not changing the type of crime they had committed, because her description of the violent act was an essential part of her story. A copy of the addendum is inculded in Appendix B. I gave each participant a copy of the story I had written from her narrative, a pen to make notes, and then left her alone to read.

Hope and Ginger did not make any changes. I asked Hope if she had known of, or had access to, counselling. Her response was then included in her story with her approval. Mairi said she was surprised at some of the things in her story because she couldn't remember saying them. I showed her the passages in the typed transcript of the interview and assured her they could be changed or deleted but she wanted them left the

way they were. She did want to change a comment she had made about her mother. We discussed this change, I rewrote it and gave it to her to read.

I think Hope, Ginger, and Mairi felt like collaboraters in the process and were proud to be a part of it. Each young woman asked questions about writing a thesis and each requested a copy of the final product.

Data Analysis - Step 2

After the stories were approved by the participants, I wrote an analysis of each using the identified themes. I reviewed the interview transcripts and the stories to ensure I included all relevant information. I drafted my discussion of the data based on the literature, the research question, support questions and statements, and the experiences of the participants.

Ethics and Rigour

I maintained anonymity of participants throughout the stories, as well as in the following chapters, through the use of pseudonyms. The participants were aware that, at any time, they had the freedom to withdraw from the research as outlined in the informed consent. When it became necessary to make a change to the informed consent it was explained why and, again, they were given the opportunity to withdraw.

I acknowledged the participants contributions and respected their ability to tell their stories. They were the experts. Every attempt was made to extract form the narrative that which was truly representative of the story and the person rather than my construction based upon my biases and interpretations. I took no liberty in comparing the participants.

If there are commonalities across participants it is for the reader to find. I have also woven in my reflections, from my journal, when my presence or my issues may have intruded upon the process. Even though I have attempted to follow a rigourous process I also recognize that there may be limitations to this method.

Limitations

The research text is my interpretation of the data, with amendments from the participants, and my interpretation of my relationship to the process and to each participant. The results of the research are not generalizable. Phenomenological research is, by its very nature, not meant to be replicated. Rather, it was incumbent upon me, as the researcher, to extract significance and meaning from the data so that it can stand on its own strength.

Schweigert (1998) points out that snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique. This means that the outcome may be biased as each member of the population was not equally likely to be selected. (See Appendix C for a further explanation of the research context).

Summary

This chapter has attempted to explain the methodology of this thesis through the theoretical basis from which it arose and the practical application of that theory specific to this work. The process of finding the participants was described. The chapter concluded with a look at the ethics, rigour and possible limitations of this research. The next chapter is a presentation of the data using a narrative style.

# CHAPTER 4

# THE STORIES

I have attempted to remain true to the phenomenological approach by recognizing my voice and the voice of the participants in respect to how they see themselves in their experiences of being perpetrators of violence. The intent of this chapter is to give the reader an understanding of how young women experience violence in their lives so as to provide authenticity to the work. I editorialized the stories based on my interpretation and strived to maintain the integrity of the young women's stories. The stories were extracted from the transcriptions of the taped interviews using, as a guide, the research question and supporting questions. The experiences of the three young women have become narrated stories. I have chosen to use the same style of quotations as literary authors where closing quotes are not used until the speaker has completed a passage. Single quotes are used when the speaker is quoting someone else or relating what she had thought. This style has been used to emphasize that I am presenting stories and to make the work aesthetically pleasing.

The discussion of themes specific to each participant's story is presented following each individual's story. These themes, as noted in the methodology, are: perceptions of self as a violent person, views of others' perceptions of her as a violent person and, congruency between self- and others' perceptions. The themes were drawn from the research question, supporting questions and the stories. Interwoven in these are sub-

themes of relationships, social structure, contradictions, and participant's perspectives on reoffending, self-responsibility and perceived support. A discussion of the predetermined themes is presented following each individual's story. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the stories across the individual participants with reference to the relevant literature.

Each participant began by describing the violent incident that qualified them for this study. After each individual's story I discuss the themes that emerged that are relevant to this research specific to the individual. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the young women and the shared narrative threads in their stories.

Hope's Story

Hope is 17 years old and the mother of a one-year-old child. Her parents divorced when she was six years old. Her mother remarried a few years later. Hope left home at 15 years of age to live with the father of her child in his parents' home. She has a Grade 10 Education and at the time of the interview was enrolling to take her General Education Diploma (GED) with the intent of attending community college to take a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) certificate. During the research period she discovered that she was too young to write the examination for the GED so she returned to high school in February. I asked Hope to begin her story by describing to me what happened in the evening leading up to the assault and the assault itself.

"My friends and I went out to her (one friend's) house and we had a party and were drinking and talking and that. We decided to go for a drive and we were driving around

and Ana, the girl who I beat up, was driving around also and she kept flashing her lights and that so we pulled into the tavern parking lot. She was already in there and she was with my friend's boyfriend who was in the car with me. (Hope's friend was in the car). So, she was already behind the tavern with him and we walked into the tavern for us to use the bathroom and came back out. Bobby (the friend's boyfriend) and her were standing beside the tavern and we could see them.

"So, I got back in the car and I said to Cara (her friend), 'Go over and say something to him.' Then Bobby bent down and kissed Ana as we were coming out. Bobby didn't know we were there. So I said, 'Go over and say something to her, or to him.' She said, 'No, get back in the car.'

"And she wouldn't say anything to anybody anyway, and so, we were sitting in the car and I was getting pretty upset because he didn't know... he couldn't see the car from where we were at and he was still just standing there talking to her and he had his arm around her. And Bobby and I are really good friends so I went over and I said something to Bobby, I said, 'What are you doing? Cara is right over there.' He said, 'What?' And he was shocked and everything. Ana told me it was none of my business and all this. I was kinda drunk and I said, 'Ana,' I said, 'You shouldn't be doing this'."

I wanted to understand, as much as possible, Hope's experiences of the violent act to construct with her, a truly representative story. I inquired about her thoughts and feelings beginning with how she felt just before she committed the assault.

"I, I just, I felt like I wanted to kill her. I was so mad."

Hope's anger, although tempered, was still apparent. I asked her what happened next.

"I started screaming and hollering at her and then she started screaming and hollering at me and I punched her. First I went to walk away and she said something else and I turned around and then I punched her in the face and then she fell down and I think I kicked her two or three times. Then she got back up and she ran after me and I was walking back and I don't know if she wanted to hit me or if she wanted to grab me or something and I turned around and I swung my arm back to get her off of me and I cracked her in the face with my hand. She was, like on top, holding me by my shoulders.

"Ana went into her car and she left and then we all got into the car and we left. Ana was still driving around and so we went and we were flashing the lights and screaming and hollering at her to get out of Newtown and never to come back to Newtown."

The extreme violence Hope described, and her actions and the action following the assault, made me think physical violence may have been a regular occurrence in their social lives. I asked her if she had ever hit anyone before this.

"No! Before this I would never in a million years think of ever touching her. I never thought she'd do something like that. I never thought she was like that."

Although Hope said she had never hit anyone before this, she did say that she had been "... in the middle of it" at dances, where her self- appointed role was to support a female friend who was fighting, by standing behind her in a group "... in case other people start jumping in and then if a big brawl happens everybody's, you know, pushing

and shoving." This is, according to Hope, a regular weekend event at the local dances, particularly when girls come into one community from another. I wondered if fighting was something she was accustomed to being around.

"Yeah, at dances where it's usually about boyfriends. It's usually girls like, 'You looking at my boyfriend?' That's usually what you hear like, if they're drinking or something, 'You looking at my boyfriend? Stop looking.' Crack! They punch ya. That's usually what you see. Girls are worse than guys in Hometown. Guys are scared of girls in Hometown.

"It happens at dances more because they're drinking. If you're drunk or you're feeling pretty good I think you're more able to fight. You don't give a shit about anybody, you don't care and you don't care what people think about ya. That's what I find when I'm drunk."

It was clear that alcohol was a factor the evening of the assault. I commented that I knew she had been drinking the evening of the assault and was curious if she could remember how she felt before she hit Ana.

"Uhm, I just felt angry all over, I just felt mad and angry. The first time I punched her, like, it felt good punching her and then I stood up and looked down. After it was over, she was laying there on the ground and she got back up and I looked at her while she was laying on the ground and I was like, 'I can't believe I'm doing this. I can't believe I'm doing this'."

I continued in this line of questioning by asking her about her thoughts both before

and after the assault. I first asked if she could remember what she was thinking before she hit Ana.

"Yeah, it could have been me."

Hope meant that it could have been David who was with Ana. David is Hope's partner and the father of her child. There was not a moment's hesitation in Hope's response to the former question nor when I asked what her first thoughts were after hitting Ana.

"I'm a mother! Oh my God! I'm a mother!"

Hope told me that when she returned to the car she pretended like it was no big deal but that was not how she felt. She said she was scared of the consequences and kept thinking about her child. Hope continues to be ambivalent about her actions. Despite fear of the consequences, she made it clear that she is not entirely remorseful.

"I just got so mad, it just sobered me right up and I stood up and I was like, 'Oh, my God!' I just turned around and went to get back in the car and she came after me again like she came after me the first time there and I went and hit her and then I was like, 'I'm not sorry for doing this to you, you know', after she came after me, 'I'm not sorry for doing this to you.'

"And now when I see her I'll talk to her. I've apologized to her but still there's something about her that I can't stand. There's something about her that I want to pound her again. I know I won't, but I want to. Like, it's just something inside of me that every time I see her this is what I think, 'You little slut I want to kill you.' That's what I think

when I see her. Like, it just drives me crazy when I see her."

This last comment led to the issue of problem solving. I asked Hope if she had a problem with someone like Ana, even though it was her friend's boyfriend, how she would have usually solved such problems when she had them with friends.

"Uhm, when I have a problem with a friend or something, we usually like just talk and then it seems like it's over with. Like we don't sit down and say, 'Well, we should talk about this. Let's talk about this.' That's not the way. We just, you know, like, I'm sorry for this, you know. I'm sorry I did this to ya, you know."

Hope said she is not able to do this with David, her partner. She says he will want to talk but she said she needs to "... rest it off" until she's not mad anymore and then come back and talk. This is done to avoid saying something she will later regret.

Hope's description of her problem solving techniques are not violent. I wanted to know how she saw herself in the role of a violent person and did she think of herself as a violent person.

"I don't think of myself as a violent person. Like, I know that I am. I did this but I don't consider myself to be violent. I didn't know that I could do something like that and when I looked down it kinda made me...like in a way, I'm sorry that I did it to Ana but in a way I'm glad it happened because now if a girl ever started screaming at me I'm just going to turn and walk away. Cause I know the punishment you get and I know how bad you feel for doing it. When I looked at Ana I was like, I can't believe I could ever do something like that.

"I was surprised that I had that much, you know, that I, like pounded her. Like now, if a girl came up to me and she was screaming at me, 'F you! F you!' and she was screaming at me and hollering at me I think I'd either just say, 'Get away from me or just shut up' or something and turn around. I know that I wouldn't just be able to look at her, you know, and turn around. Cause I'd feel like I'd look like an idiot if I didn't say anything so I think I'd just say something and then leave. If she hit me first I think I'd fight then. I think I would. Yep, I'd defend myself."

There were contradictions in Hope's perceptions of herself as a violent person. I asked how she thinks other people might see her with the notion that they know that she had hit this girl. I asked her to think about the people that were there that night and other people who know her.

"A couple of days after this we were up in the bedroom of one of the girls that was there with me. And her little sister, she's about 15 or something. And her and a couple of her friends were in her room, and the rooms are right beside each other, and the doors were open and we could hear and, like her little sister wasn't there but she knew everything right? Like my friend told her everything. And, ah, I could hear her, you know, 'Oh, you'd better not mess with her you know, she's crazy, you know. She'll kill you. She's crazy because she beat her up.' And I was just sitting there and I kinda just laughed. I'm like, 'Oh, my God!' Then Fern's like, 'Don't. I'll talk to her later.' And I'm like, 'No, it's alright, you know, just tell her. Make sure you tell her and tell her friends I'm not crazy and I'm not going to go beating everybody up.'

"When I heard her say that I'm like, 'Gee, how many other people think I'm crazy?' you know? And how many other people think I'm crazy with a little boy? They probably go around thinking - Oh, she's probably beating her little boy up or something, you know? But even if you do it once and it's just something that you never did before like I did, you're automatically, you know, your reputation is, 'Oh God, don't mess with her, she's crazy.' I don't want somebody to be saying that about me, you know?"

I returned to the notion of thoughts and feelings. I wondered what hearing those perceptions of others felt like for her.

"All I thought about was my little boy when they were saying that. It was the first thing that come into my mind. They're going to be thinking ... everybody's going to be thinking that I'm frigging hitting my little boy or something. It was all I thought about. I didn't think about myself."

These comments led into Hope's views of significant others' perceptions of her as a violent person. I began by asking Hope how her mother would describe her in this role of a violent person.

"I don't think she'd describe me as violent. I think she'd describe me as angry sometimes like, but I never raised a fist to her. I never hit my mother but I think she'd describe be as angry towards her sometime, yeah. Not now that I don't live there but when I lived there - probably angry."

Hope does not live near her father nor does she see him very often. She says he does not know of the assault so I asked her how he would describe her not knowing this had

happened.

"He wouldn't describe me as violent at all. He'd probably say, 'Oh, she's smart and she's quiet and she doesn't talk that much.' Because I don't talk when I'm at his house. I just kinda sit there and listen. He'd probably say, 'She's very quiet.'

"I think you can give, um, different reputations to different people. Like, it's the way you act in different places. Like, I feel like when I'm here, when I'm talking to you I can be myself and I can tell ya how I feel. The first time I met David's parents I was quiet and I didn't talk and now I'll say anything to them."

I see this latter point as deeply insightful on Hope's part. It also was the beginning of my understanding of her and her perception of not seeing herself as a violent person. I continued by asking Hope how David and David's parents would have seen her after this happened because they did know she had done it.

"David's father just said to me, 'You know Hope, you know you can't be doing stuff like that,' you know. And I just said, 'I didn't mean to do it Harold, like, I didn't intentionally go out there knowing I was going to pound her. I went over there to say, You know - What are ya doing? I didn't go over there knowing that I'm going to kick this one's ass, you know. I didn't think I was going to do that.' And I think with Isabelle, David's mother, she didn't say anything. She just said, 'I know.' Like she knew I was sorry about it. She knew I felt bad.

"Ah, David, he was pretty upset. Yeah, he was pretty mad. He just said, 'You know that was pretty stupid. Grow up.' He like, more or less, made me feel stupid about it you

know? 'Grow up Hope. God Almighty." You know? And I was like, 'I know it was stupid. It was stupid.'

"And I was just getting tired of people saying stuff you know? Just forget about it. I'm sorry about it. Just forget about it. You know just make them be quiet about it."

Hope had told me her older brother and sister do not live close by and did not know of the assault, nor did her younger sisters. I asked her to speculate on what the thoughts of her older siblings would be if they did know.

"My brother would probably laugh. My brother would laugh at me because he would, like, he's the type of guy that's just right easygoing. He doesn't take anything seriously. Everything's a joke to him. And my sister? My sister would kill me."

According to Hope, there were few people who knew that she committed the assault. I continued with her views of significant others' perceptions of Hope by asking her about how she thinks they would describe her.

"Not violent at all. I always talked in a soft voice to my teachers but I always talked a lot in school. Like they'd probably say, 'Oh, she likes to talk.' You know? I always talked. We'd always be in the back talking about something. And it would always be, 'Girls talking, now quiet down.' But they wouldn't say I was violent.

"I think my neighbours in Hometown would kinda say that I was kinda like a crazy person - not crazy to want to fight just crazy to joking around and that. Like, I think they'd view me, like, you know - funny."

I concluded this particular line of inquiry by moving on to Hope's friends who weren't present at the time of the assault. I confirmed with her that they knew of the assault and then asked her for her views of their perceptions of her in the role of a violent person.

"I don't think my friends think I'm violent. They know that I'm not violent but they also know my limits. Like, they know that I'd never, ever do that again UNLESS a girl came up to me and started punching me. Then I know that I'd do something and before this whole thing happened with Ana I'd never even do that. If somebody punched me I'd be gone. And now I would. I'd stand there and I'd punch them back. Like, it changes...it changes the way you look at things when you get in a fight, I think. Like, if when you get in a fight and you pound the person then you think, you know, well, I'm not going to let somebody do this to me."

Again, it seemed to me, that physical violence was a part of Hope's social reality. I wondered if she had even been hit and, if so, by whom.

"Oh yeah, I've been hit a coupla times. I don't know who, like, just like I told ya like everybody's huddled together and everybody's fists are going you know, and nobody's trying to punch anybody. Hands are just going and, you know, so you might just get one, you know? I got cracked in the side of the face and I didn't know who it was. That was because everybody was pulling, you know, trying to pull the people apart."

It appeared that Hope was playing the role of peacekeeper and not perpetrator in

these circumstances. I asked her is she was trying to stop the fight.

"Right. Like I was trying to pull everybody, you know, and I got it right in the side of the face - right there."

Hope indicated the spot where she had been hit. I winced and commented that it must have hurt. She merely said, "Yeah." Hope's descripton of the fighting at dances indicates that she took a non-violent role. We moved on by Hope relating her thoughts regarding the accuracy of others' descriptons of her in the role of a violent person.

"Hmm, yeah I do think they're accurate because I don't think I am violent. I know the court thinks I'm violent. Like the judge does, and that, but they don't know me, you know? They just know that I did this. That's the way they look at me, you know, she did this. I consider myself, like, not violent unless something happens. Unless she hits me you know. Like I would never in my life ever do that again - never. And I KNOW I wouldn't and it's more the judge scared me more than anything. The judge made me not want to go back there ever, ever again, for anything. I know that I'll never let myself get that mad to do something like that again."

Hope had already explained how she typically handled difficulties with friends with the exception of Ana. I was curious to know how she would avoid becoming so angry again in the future.

"David's mother told me ... and it did work for me because me and Fern got into an argument after this happened. I just got SO mad and I just clenched my fists together. She (David's mother) said, 'Just count...when you do it. Just close your eyes and just

count.' It works for me all the time.

"So I think I'd just stay in there like that and kind of like relax, just calm down. But David's mother says the more you clench your fists, you know, just keep them beside ya and just count or do something to relax ya. I think that would work. You know I'll find something like that. I'm not going to let myself do something like that again. (Hit someone).

"I'm not 100% sorry that I did it. Like, I can't say, 'Awww,' you know, 'I'm really, really sorry that I did that to Ana.' You know I said it to the judge because, you know, I didn't want to say, you know, 'Well, I still want to pound her.' I know I wouldn't and I know if I was, even if I was drinking, I wouldn't cause I never want to see that judge again. But I know like when I look at her I'll be nice to her and I'll smile and talk but at the same time I'm thinking, Oh, you little slut. I want to pound you so bad."

Hope said that anything bad that happened was never spoken about in her family. Anything that might bring shame to her family was kept quiet and a secret. Hope left home because she had put an ultimatum to her mother to choose either Hope or her step-father and she chose the step-father. This was when she left to live with David. I remarked on the really supportive people she said she could rely on. I asked what she would have done without those people or if there was anyone else she could have called upon.

"Oh, God, I coulda gone anywhere. If my mother and I got into a fight or me and John (her step-father) got into a fight. If my mother was working, I'd just go next door to

Uncle Monty's. I had lots of places to go."

This response was a bit vague so I probed further. I asked her to be as specific as she could.

"Uhm, probably my son's godparents. They're very, very good to me. I knew I coulda went there and I know there would always be some place I can go.

"Often my sister wanted me to move there with her, like, to Anothertown. Like me and my sister are very, very close and, uhm, we're kinda, like, we kinda drifted like away since I moved to Newtown. We don't talk as much. But, like she wanted me to move up there with her."

Hope identified David's parents as supportive, however, she is in a common-law relationship with David. I asked her to tell me how supportive David is.

"I used to trust David. When we first started going out I trusted him 100% but after this I don't know if I do, you know? Cause I kinda saw David standing there. Cause Bobby and David are so much alike. After it happened I told David exactly how I felt. I'm like, 'I don't know if I trust you anymore after what you...'He's like, 'WHAT? I didn't do anything!' And I'm like, 'But you and Bobby are just identical.' And David is like, 'You can't do that. It's not fair. You can't say that I'm going to do that to you because I'm not. Maybe Bobby doesn't like Cara . I love you and I'm NOT going to do that to you.'

"Now I don't think I'd go to anybody if I had a problem. I wouldn't want to put somebody in that place where they have to take a child and, you know, have two people

in their house."

All the support, Hope identified, came from family or close friends. I asked if she had been aware of, or had access to counselling.

"I knew but I wouldn't have gone. It was William (the RCMP officer) who told my mother it would be good for me to go for Anger Management. He and my mother are good friends and he said it would lower my community service hours."

Hope's Perceptions of Herself as a Violent Person

Hope did not see herself as violent. This violent act, according to Hope, was a one time thing and "... completely out of character." She said she surprised herself because she did not know she could do something like that. She said she would never reoffend because she never wanted "... to be in front of that judge again." She also said that she would never want her little boy to find out about it.

> Ewan (her son) went through my mind because...I was...I'm a mother that's beating somebody up and what kind of reputation...what am I going to give off to him? You know, it's not OK to fight. Well, you did it, you know. But I think that if a child comes home from school or from somewhere and they know the parents did something, they're going to put that off to the parents. Like, "You did it!. Why can't I do it?" If they see you smoking or drinking, "You do it. Why can't I do it?" Right? You know? So, I think that if Ewan ever finds out, which I hope he doesn't...If he ever finds out that I did...that if he ever gets into a fight...What am I supposed to say to him?

> I know it's years away but I'm just like saying if it ever comes up in a conversation, years from now, you know? But, of course, I wasn't thinking of that. (At the time of the assault).

> I wasn't thinking, you know, years from now Ewan's going to ask me, "Did you, you know..."

Hope's reasons for not reoffending were three-fold. She did not want to be in front of the judge again, she did not want her child to know she ever did something like that, and she wanted her criminal record cleared so she could go into nursing after she completed her Grade 12. There were incongurencies in Hope's narrative. She said she would never assault anyone again but she also thought she had changed due to having hit once. She said she would now find it easier to do and she would do it if she had to. She

said she never wanted her son to find out what she had done but she made no indication that she would distance herself from the type of social structure that certainly contributed to the assault. Her desire to enter into a care-giving field was countered by her having said she will hit again if she "has to" and, in fact, still wants to "pound" Ana.

The inconsistencies in Hope's story continued when she spoke of self-responsibility. She claimed responsibility for the act by pleading guilty and by telling the judge she was sorry, however, she also said she really was not sorry. Another inconsisitency occurred when Hope vehemently stated that she knew she would never do this again, countered with a statement of almost equal vehemence, that if attacked, she would defend herself and continued to feel like "pounding" Ana whenever she saw her.

Hope's comments lacked congruency as evidenced in her perceptions of her actions and the reality of the viciousness of the violent act she committed. She said that in one way she felt bad for hitting her but in another way she did not. Almost as soon as she hit Ana she thought of the consequences, however, she also said that she was "...just getting tired of people saying stuff, you know?"

Hope's Views of Others' Perceptions of Her as a Violent Person

Hope's perception was that the people who knew her would not perceive her as violent. She held to this perception whether or not the person, or persons, in question were aware that she had committed the assault. Her perception was that those who knew of the assault realized she was sorry and that it wouldn't happen again.

Hope described herself as being seen by others in her family and community, as a

fun girl who talked too much in school. When Hope overheard her friend's sister's conversation regarding how violent Hope was, she thought they perceived her as crazy, not violent. She thought they were wrong because they did not really know her. Her main concern with the perceptions of these younger girls was that they, and others, would " ... be thinking that I'm frigging hitting my little boy or something." Hope thought her close friends would not describe her as violent, however, "... they also know my limits."

Congruency Between Self- and Others' Perceptions

Hope's perceptions of herself as a violent person and her views of others' perceptions of her as a violent person are congruent. Hope's comment that a person could give "... different reputations to different people" is accurate.

During the research process Hope was soft-spoken, mannerly and co-operative. She had, in the two years leading up to the assault, taken on several new roles. She left her mother's home at 15 years of age to live with her boyfriend. Shortly after this she became pregnant and, subsequently, a mother herself. She appeared to genuinely want to improve herself and her situation. Nothing she said indicated that she was anything but a loving and responsible mother. Her situation, in general, is greatly assisted by her spouse and his parents. This may be a double-edged sword because their support, while admirable, does not discourage her from continuing the anti-social behaviour that contributed to the assault. She and her other underaged friends were "... drinking and driving around" the evening of the assault. The victim, who Hope described, as having been a former friend, was 14. She was also drinking and, in addition to this, was driving

her father's car. Hope seemed to think that it was inapproprite for Ana, who was only 14, to be involved in this scene but not she and her friends who were also under the legal drinking age and were operating a motor vehicle while imbibing alcohol.

The congruency between self- and others' perceptions of Hope gains further support when Hope described the reason for her overwhelming anger that led to the assault. Her fear of losing David appeared to be congruent with her mother's attitude toward relationships. The victim was with David's best friend, Bobby. Hope was with Bobby's girlfriend, Cara. When Hope saw this, her first thought was that the victim could just as easily have been with David. It was this thought that Hope identified as the reason she "pounded her." Hope noted that, because of this, she no longer trusted David 100%.

> You know, my mother says to me, 'Now, Hope, can you picture yourself living with David for the rest of your life?' And I'll be like, 'Yes!' And she'll say, 'Within 20 years time you won't because you're only 17.' She'll say, 'Even in five years you might not. Cause it just happens like that. Some things just don't work out. Me and your father didn't work out.'

Hope said that she didn't "... hold that against either one of them. Like it doesn't bother me that they're not together. I don't care, you know."

Perhaps Hope does not care that her parents separated but the presence of her step-father was instrumental in Hope's leaving home. Hope had commented about keeping all shameful behaviour that occurred in her family, a "secret". This seemed to have applied to her parents' separation because when I asked her why they had separated she did not know because it had never been discussed.

Hope said she knew what happened with her friend could happen to she and David. She said her friends told her he wouldn't do that to her because they have a child

together. Hope's reaction to such statements was strong, possibly arising from her own childhood experiences.

> You know I hate when somebody says stuff, something like that to me. Like Fern will say, 'Well, it's different, you have a baby.' If we're just talking and that, she's like, 'You guys have a kid together, you know.' It just makes me, ooh, so mad and I'm like, 'No, it doesn't matter, Fern.' You know, I don't think that matters.
>
> But I feel that if David and I ever came across a problem that we were going to break up over, I think we wouldn't break up. We would sit down and we would talk and talk and talk and talk until we found the solution to it.

Yet, Hope's main reason for assaulting Ana was because she so easily saw Ana with her boyfriend. On the one hand, she knows through experience that relationships are not necessarily permanent because she no longer trusted David 100% and, yet, she thought there was nothing the two of them couldn't work out.

Hope's description of her relationships with her father and sister lends further support for congruency between self- and others' perceptions of Hope as a violent person. She said she was close although she rarely sees them. Hope's parents separated when she was six years old. Her father lives in another province but she said she has a great relationship with him. She also described herself as being very close to her older sister. Hope said neither her father or sister knew of her having committed the assault therefore their perceptions of her would not include violence.

Accuracy in Hope's preceptions of congruency were further substantiated when she described her home situation. Her relationship with her step-father was acrimonious and he beat her mother. This led Hope to give her mother an ultimatum to choose Hope or her step-father. She chose the step-father so Hope left home and began living with her

boyfriend and his parents. This may indicate that neither her mother or step-father would see Hope's act as either violent or unwarranted.

The final point made by Hope confirms the accuracy of Hope's perceptions of congruency between self and others. This came when Hope spoke of the family pattern of keeping any shameful behaviour secret. She used the relationship between her mother and one of her mother's sisters to illustrate this. She described them as "...very close" but, "In my family we don't talk about anything. Nothing."

Summary

A discussion has been presented of the themes arising from the research question relating specifically to Hope's narrated experiences in the role of a violent person. Hope said she knew she had been violent but her perception was that she was not a violent person. She maintained congruency with her views of others' perceptions of her in that she stated others would not see her as a violent person either. The richness of Hope's narrative belies the apparent simplicity of her perceptions in relation to the research question. She has provided a unique and complex description of one female's experience in the role of a violent person.

Ginger's Story

Ginger is 21-years old. She is in her third year of nursing and works part-time while attending university. This job, and her dislike of the area where she grew up, keeps her living full time in the university town. She returns home only to visit with her family. She lives alone in an apartment off-campus. Ginger was charged with assaulting her boyfriend in July of 1996. She was 17 years old at the time. I began by asking Ginger to describe the events leading up to the assault she had committed and the assault itself.

"It was on a Thursday. Kendall (her former boyfriend) was driving my car and I was like, 'Slow down!' He got out of the car and he was right mad at me for saying that. He was walking down the road and I went, 'Get back in the car.' We were fighting. He gets back in the car and we go to this gravel pit. He gets out of the car and he was saying that he was going to kill himself. He grabbed me around the neck and he grabbed my hands and grabbed my wrists and put them above my head and was standing like about a metre away from my face and there was spit and everything coming in my face. He was saying, 'I'm going to kill myself.'

"Then after, you know, we were fighting and that. I just go in the car and I drove off to go get my friend Lucy. We came back and he already had sliced a little bit of his wrists, so (sigh) after that night I didn't want anything to do with him. Then there was a teen dance the following night on Friday and he's there with his ex-girlfriend and I guess the ex-girlfriend thing was happening while I was seeing him. And I was having a good time and he was walking towards the bathroom and I was walking towards the dance

floor. And he muttered, 'You whore.'

"I can't really recollect exactly what he said and then his hand was up above his head and I was like, 'Go ahead and hit me.' And then he came closer and then he slapped me and I said, 'You hit me for the last time.' And then I decided to deck him. He tried to come back at me but I defended myself again."

I needed to draw out Ginger's experience of the actual assault. I did so by asking her to clarify her meaning several times to a get a more in-depth description.

"I hit him and it was, more or less, hit-push. Then I punched him in the face. I used a fist and I hit him by his eyes and he did have black eyes for almost a couple of days. He was coming towards me again and I pushed him and I did kick him in the shins as well."

I asked Ginger if Kendall had done anything else to her. She said he had not and moved on to the next part of her story.

"Oh, I just backed off. I'm like I don't need this. I just backed away. I just got away from the situation. By that time there was people gathered around and the chaperones of the dance ... they came up and were talking to me about the whole thing."

I inquired whether there had been other witnesses. Ginger was not exactly sure who was there and, again, I had to probe to get a fuller understanding

"Uhm, I think there was a friend. Kendall's cousin, so she had more or less took his side of the story so... Well, there was a ton of people around but half of them were like all loaded and you know, so there was not a lot of people...you know... noticed it."

I was curious to know how the chaperones of the dance handled the fight. Another element Ginger spoke about was that they knew both Ginger and her parents.

"I knew the chaperones and they knew my parents. They told me to just leave him alone, he's not worth it and then they checked to see if I was alright. After that I stayed away from him for the rest of the night and had a good time."

I am sure my surprise registered by her comment that she stayed at the dance and that she had a good time. I asked what happened after the dance.

"I went home. My parents were up in bed and I came in and I told them the whole story. My dad was like, 'If you touch my daughter, I'm going to kill you.' I called Matthew (RCMP officer) and I charged Kendall and he (RCMP) drove out and charged Kendall and Kendall charged me. When Kendall was asked for his statement from Matthew, he said, 'Yeah, but she did this'."

Ginger giggled after the comment she attributed to her father as though she were pleased with her father's reaction albeit Kendall had already "... touched her." I asked if she remembered how she felt before she hit Kendall.

"Oh boy, I was like really angry with men and I'm just beginning to see that, you know, but how can someone, after being hit and abused like emotionally abused and everything, not want to strike back? Until I was 17, before I met Kendall, I was a bubbly, happy girl."

Due to Kendall not following court orders to secure a lawyer Ginger was the first to appear in court. When Kendall did appear he was given a lesser sentence than Ginger.

This made her very angry at the time and, four years later, the anger remains.

"Hmph! I was sitting...it was coming close to the court date and there was a phone call and I answered the phone and it was Matthew Smith, and Matthew said, 'Hi Ginger, how you doing?' I said I was alright. 'You don't have to go to court.' And at that time I just broke down crying and it turned out the judge, or whoever, just gave Kendall...he got less than I did. I was very upset about it."

During the period leading up to the assault on Kendall, Ginger said that if she did not get what she wanted from her parents there would be a lot of yelling. The issue was often their car which she would want to use so she could go to visit Kendall. She said her parents did not want her seeing Kendall yet, despite the behaviour she described, they would give her the car. I asked Ginger how she typically solved conflicts. We began with her siblings.

"Hmph. A little like shove and push or, you know, shut up, but, you know, then ten minutes later, we'd slam our doors and everything, but then ten minutes later we'd be out playing again and everything. We weren't allowed to hit each other. It was a bigtime no-no. You know, I remember bifting socks at my little sister but that's just normal sibling ... you know ... we weren't allowed to physically throw a punch."

Ginger giggled a lot when she was relating her description of conflicts with her siblings. I asked if she would describe her problem-solving techniques outside the family unit.

"I would have written a letter, or called or sat down and talked to them. I was in

fear, basically, if I did confront somebody that they would ... and I am still like that, if I confront somebody that they will retaliate and be very abusive toward me or physically abusive. I am still, to this day ... I can't ... I am not one to verbally confront. I like to write my feelings out and give them to them without having any face to face contact with them because I am not one to come back. This fear happened ever since I went out with Kendall. He would shove me, he would hit me. He would grab my hair. He would, uhm, push me on the bed. Uhm, there was one time, I remember him sexually abusing me. Well, we had intercourse when I didn't want it."

I asked Ginger if Kendall had raped her. She said he had but she had never told anyone about it. I asked her to tell me about the pattern of abuse by Kendall.

"We had been going out two or three months. It started off at the honeymoon stage, to be honest. 'Oh, I love you, and, you know, he did eveything for me and everything was so great and, you know ... and then after he knew he had me he started pushing me. I never told anyone about it until after I charged him and then I told my parents."

The seriousness of the subject matter was often accompanied by Ginger giggling. I was curious about her parent's reaction to Ginger's disclosure about the abuse and if they were supportive.

"My dad was ready to kill him. 'He hurt my daughter.' Were they supportive? Oh God, yes, very supportive."

When this all happened, Ginger was just about to start Grade 12. I asked her to tell me how that had felt now that she was a convicted person of a violent crime.

"I know I wasn't a violent person and I know I'm not. I can't stand it but I was really afraid of what others thought about me like people in the community you know? I had support from everybody - the sisters (Catholic Nuns), teachers, friends of the family - the highly respected people of my community all knew that I wasn't that type of person and they knew the kind of person I was and that I wouldn't do that ... and even my priest said, you know, 'Ginger you're a wonderful person.' You know? They know that I'm not that person."

Since Ginger said little about her perception of herself as a violent person, I clarified with her that she did not see herself as a violent person. I moved on to how she thought significant others would perceive her in the role of a violent person. We began with her parents.

"My parents knew that I wasn't violent, uhm, but they also didn't like the daughter that they had at that time when I was going out with Kendall because I wasn't the same person. I was verbally abusive to them, uhm, and very much emotionally abusive too."

I continued to find it necessary to clarify the terms Ginger used and to get more details throughout this part of the interview. Ginger cried while relating the following passage. I checked with her to see if we should stop for a bit but she said she was OK.

"There was a lot of crying, a lot of ... it almost caused a divorce of my parents because they didn't know how to handle me. Mom was, more or less, saying, you know, 'She's just going through this. She will come to realize ...' and Dad was like, 'Well, I don't know if ...' There was a lot of fights about, you know, how to raise me and whose

fault it was that I turned out like this. Just stuff like that, so ..."

Ginger continued to cry after telling me this. I was curious to know if she was present during these arguments or had overheard them.

"I overheard. I overheard. It was just recently that I was ... last Christmas ... that I said I'm sorry to Mom ... that I was fully, you know, like, and, and, that was when Dad told me they were about to divorce. I was not their daughter. That I was totally not like that ... that I had totally changed. I was not the same bubbly, happy girl. I was very selfish and I'm not a selfish person and, ah, very uncaring and very, just mouthy. They were thinking about putting me out of the house and that was part of the conflict too. One of them wanted me out and the other wanted me to stay. My mother knew I would come out of it. Dad, Dad ... I know that Dad knew too, he just didn't know how to handle it."

Ginger was crying again during this. I checked again to see if she wanted some time but she said she was fine. I asked her to tell me how she thought other family members would have seen her at this time.

"My Grandmother hated me. She hated the person I was and she told me that. She knows I'm not violent but she was not very surprised I did it. She couldn't understand why I was like that. She said, 'She shouldn't be like this because she's not the person she was.' You know? My younger sister hated me. My older sister hated me. They each told me, 'I hate you for what you're doing to my parents.' But they didn't think I was violent."

Ginger emphasized what she was doing to her parents as the reason she was hated by her family. I wondered how her friends, at the time, would have perceived her after having committed the violent act.

"Uhm, my really close friends were like, 'Good for you.' You know? Other ones were like, you know, 'Why did you hit him? He didn't deserve that. He's a great guy and, you know, I can't see him hitting you.' So I was kind of thinking ... Oh. And his new girlfriend was in my class and she liked to go on a lot, you know?

"But then there are some people who still say that you are violent. It is still coming back to haunt me today and I'm at university. They say I'm psycho. Crazy. Like people who fly off the top of their head. They don't tell me to my face. They're expecting me to verbally say something to them. That is why I hate Hometown. My family is the only thing that draws me back there. I hate that place."

Ginger no longer lives in the community where the assault took place. I inquired how she thought her current friends, who wouldn't know of the assault, would describe her.

"They don't ... well, my good friends do know. Partway through my first year everyone knew about it. I just wanted them to understand where I came from and, and maybe why sometimes I would get depressed. I just wanted them to know. And they completely understand. They understand that I'm not violent and that I'm a beautiful person who is there for others and who puts others first.

"They were very surprised. When I first told them they were like, 'Wow, you were

charged?' Some of my professors know too. I was concerned about my record cause I was going into nursing and that was the least thing I needed. They're very surprised because they think it is very out of character."

Ginger gave different descriptions of herself based on the perceptions of former friends and the perceptions of current friends. Without specifying either group, I asked if she thought the way these others saw her was accurate.

"Mmm, I mean my friend, she said, 'You're too passive to, to want ... to even think about raising a hand to somebody.' You know? I can't even be verbally abusive to anybody because I keep going back and seeing what Kendall did to me and how it made me feel and I can't make somebody else feel that way."

Ginger continues to write letters and talk over her differences with any person with whom she is having a problem. She also has a tendency to avoid conflict and, in some instances, not see it. She described a relationship with a man she communicated with on the Internet, but had never met in person, and whom she described as abusive.

"A couple of weeks ago my girlfriends told me I was in an abusive relationship. I knew it subconsciously but I was like there's a good person underneath. I started, ah, doing a lot of drugs. I was having sex with anyone. Nora and Olivia (two friends) had enough of it and they came up, you know, and they were talking and they were crying and I brought up this whole Kendall thing and, you know, I'm still not completely 100% over it. Look, I didn't want to ruin my friendships. And at that time I was thinking about writing a letter to the two of them and then they came up to me. But they made me

realize that, you know, you're better than that. You don't need that - get out of it!

"I had already started seeing a counsellor. I tell them (her friends) what goes on in the counselling sessions. I am a very open person and I can trust them. I am very easily influenced and I'm very drawn into the "bad boy" you know and I don't ever want to hurt my parents again and if I know that I'm getting into ... I just want to break that off."

Ginger said that she wants to change her patterns with men and she seeks help in this through counselling. This current counsellor is the second one she has seen in two years. She sought the counselling through the university.

"I'm just hoping to not be attracted to that type of person because that's not the person I am and right now I'm, uhm, talking with somebody ... off the Internet again. I met him on the Internet and we've just been conversing on the phone. What is really overwhelming is that he is not like them - AT ALL! He takes care of his mother. He's so into family. He's flying down on the 16th and he's staying here until the 21st. He graduated from Yale and his dad's a doctor. It's just a totally different scenario."

This scenario did not seem totally different to me. I aksed her what she would do if this relationship also turns out to be abusive or it just doesn't work out.

"If he turns out to be abusive I have my counsellor there right now, uhm, and if it just doesn't work out, if there's nothing romantic there I can always have a friend you know?"

Ginger had spoken of the support she had from her parents and community members. I concluded the interview by asking her how her current relationship is with

her parents.

"My relationship with my parents now is very good. I'm their little girl again. I confessed to Dad there, 'I'm sorry and that.' He went, 'You're the one that caused us the most trouble but you're the one that's going to go the farthest, you know, and we can see that. You're always going to be my little girl and you're the smartest one of them all so don't ever lose that'."

Ginger's Perceptions of Herself as a Violent Person

Ginger gave one brief, direct, response to her perception of herself as a violent person. "I know I wasn't a violent person and I know I'm not." She did, however, have a negative perception of her behaviour which she described as verbally and emotionally abusive toward her parents. She attributed her behaviour change as coinciding with the peer group she joined when she was 17 years old and, her relationship with Kendall. As this relationship progressed, Kendall became increasingly abusive towards her. It played itself out until the evening of the mutual assault when Ginger said she was not going to take it anymore. Ginger described how this change in peer groups came about.

> I had always been in the loser group. They were never asked to parties. They were, uhm, more or less to themselves, like, you know? More or less geeky, you know, not going out to dances ... and up to that point I didn't care. I didn't care to go out to dances. When I lost a lot of weight, like, the ones that never even thought I was alive started asking me to go out. I was getting a lot of attention from these people. I started getting in with a bad crew and all this and that's just how it started. I began using tobacco and alcohol at dances. My parents still don't know. No drugs. I was around it but I wouldn't.

Ginger plead guilty because, as she said, she had committed the assault. She said she was not sorry for hitting Kendall but the criminal record that resulted from the incident was of concern because she was going into nursing and she knew that she could not practice as a nurse with a criminal record.

She also experienced frustration with the outcome. She felt she had committed the act and taken the punishment but, due to Kendall not obtaining a lawyer, as ordered by the court, his trial was after hers and he received a lesser sentence. Ginger recognized

the unfairness of this especially because this had not been Kendall's first court appearance.

The actual assault continued to take a back seat to her perception of what she had done to her parents. Ginger said she would never do anything like that again because she would never want to hurt her parents. She thought her behaviour, at the time, negatively affected their image.

> The way my family is betrayed in Mytown. You know, like upper class. My parents don't go out drinking or sleeping around on the other spouse or they don't go and drink their faces off or gamble.

Ginger's Views of Others' Perceptions of Her as a Violent Person

When speaking of others' perceptions of her as a violent person, Ginger continued on the theme of her behaviour, again, by referring to what she had done to her parents. She said her sisters and her grandmother hadn't thought she was violent but they had hated her. The reason she gave for their hatred was because of what she had been doing to her parents.

Ginger said the assault, and the year leading up to the assault was "... all out in the open in the community." All the "... highly respected people" of her community knew she wasn't that "... type of person" and "... they knew the type of person I was and that I wouldn't do that." However, the fact remained, that she had commited an assault and had been convicted for it.

Ginger said, "I was really afraid of what others thought about me, like people in the community." Again, this refers to the "highly respected" people. At the time she was

convicted of assault, her peers either praised or vilified her for her actions. She added, "There are some people who still say that you are violent. They say I'm psycho." This perception has made her "... hate that place" and the only reason she gave for returning there was to see her family.

Ginger said her friends at university saw her as "... a beautiful person who is there for others and who puts others first." When I asked if she thought these perceptions of others were accurate she did not answer directly but instead responded by giving what a friend had said about her, "You're too passive...to even think about raising a hand to somebody."

Congruency between Self- and Others' Perceptions

Ginger's views of self- and others' perceptions are generally congruent. Those in her former peer group who still see her as violent and psycho are the exception. Ginger said these former peers did not know her and, therefore, were mistaken in their perceptions. She tried to minimize this incongruency through emphasizing the importance of the perceptions of the "highly respected" group. However, she also noted, that the perceptions of her former peers are "... still coming back to haunt" her. On one level Ginger appeared to be aware of the incongruency but at the same time, she either ignored, or was genuinely unaware, of the incongruency.

Throughout Ginger's story she gave many descriptions of self-abuse, or abuse by others toward her, indicating that she believed she was more of a victim than a perpetrator. She said she realized that she continued to be attracted to the "bad boy"

because she always thinks there is something "... good underneath." She described her electronic relationship as abusive which led to having "... sex with anyone" and "... a lot of drugs." It was her friends who brought this to her attention and, as a result, she sought counselling. She said one of her counselling goals was to break this pattern in her relationships with men. "I would never get into them (abusive relationships) again. Never." However, soon after her negative experience with the first internet relationship she began another. According to Ginger, the latest fellow is a Yale graduate, takes care of his mother and his father's a doctor. Ginger apparently accepted this information, from a virutal stranger, at face value and without thinking of proper precautions that he, too, could be abusive.

At the time of the assault Ginger was eligible to receive counselling through Victim's Services. She did not access that service. She had gone to counselling twice since she began university. Both of these times were in response to events that arose with men. The most recent time was over her "abusive" electronic relationship. The other was last year.

> Last year I was raped so, uhm, I was date raped and, ah, I definitely needed her (the counsellor) to get over that. He's a nursing student too but, ah, I've come over that, and him and I, we talked. He still can't look me in the eye cause he knows what he did was wrong. He has no recollection of what happened. I know this because, uhm, his girlfriend, wasn't his girlfriend at the time, and she talked about it with me.

Ginger spoke of being raped, talking about it with the rapist who knew what he did was wrong and then saying he couldn't remember having raped her.

The final point on congruency was Ginger's description of her current relationship with her parents. She said she now had a great relationship with her parents and

everything that happened was now "... out in the open." However, she and her parents, did not discuss this event until three and a half years after it happened and when they did her father informed her that she had almost caused them to divorce. When I had asked Ginger if her parents were supportive during the time following the assault her immediate response was, "Oh God! Yes, so supportive!"

Summary

A discussion has been presented of the themes arising from the research question relating specifically to Ginger's narrated experiences in the role of a violent person. Ginger did not perceive herself as violent. She did not once say that she could be violent. She maintained congruency with her view of others' perceptions of her except for one group. She said everyone, with the exception of some of her former peers, would not perceive her as violent. She stated this particular group of peers didn't know her and, by that, implied they were wrong in their perceptions. Ginger's description of herself in the role of a violent person suggests she was as much a victim as a perpetrator. Her story has provided another insight into the intricacies involved in a young woman's experience with violence.

Mairi's Story

Mairi is 21 years old. She had dropped out of school, but returned, and completed her Grade 12 when she was 20 years old. Mairi then attended community college where she obtained a certificate in Home Health Care. She works, on a casual basis, at the nursing home in her community. She lives at home with her mother, three older brothers and her 11-year-old nephew. Although Mairi was 21 years old when she was first convicted of assault, she had committed assaults that were indictable, between the ages of 14 years of and 17 years of age. Mairi's relationship with her victim went back several years. I asked her to begin by describing the time leading up to the assault and the assault itself. Mairi began her story by going back almost a year before the incident.

"The victim was with me, uh, in Bigtown, living not too far away from me and I walked her home and we out for coffee and we were good friends. She was actually trying to get out with my older brother. She wasn't even old enough at the time so, uhm, when I got back here she had quit school and everything was different and she wasn't speaking to me and, uh, she was talking behind my back and she was in my face everywhere I was. She just, if she was driving by in a car she'd get out and walk right by where I was. If I was sitting in the park she would sit in front of me or behind me, somewhere close. Not look at me, just, you know, everything was quiet when she'd walk by and whoever I was there with they, ah, they didn't say anything to her when she walked by or even after she left.

"I had worked in the evening (of the assault) and, ah, I went home and got cleaned

up. I had one beer and was going to meet some of my friends but when I got downtown I felt tired so I decided to go home. So, ah, I guess I went up to the car that night and, to my brother's car, and I told her to get out of the vehicle. She said no because it was none of my f...ing business why she was in there and that it was none of my business who he had in the car and I didn't own the car.

"And I felt that because of the fact that I'm his sister and she had no relation to him other than a friend, somebody who kinda drove him crazy on and off, that she shoulda listened to what I said to her and when she refused to and she cursed at me and asked me why I dislike her so much. I told her to shut her mouth and not to speak to me. And when I told her again to get outta the car she refused to. That's when I reached in and I grabbed her. The door was open. I grabbed her by the scruff of the shirt and I shook her and she still didn't move. She sat there. And I grabbed her by her face and I punched her a coupla times.

"I told her the next time when I tell you to get outta the car you listen to me. And, uh, she sat there and she cried and then she got get outta the car and then the next thing I know it's all over Mytown that I'm being subpoenaed to go to court for assault causing bodily harm."

Mairi's brother, Curtis, had witnessed the entire event. I asked her what he had done, if anything.

"He sat there. Now after hitting her and going on and on, on this big spiel about ... 'When I tell you to get outta the car ...' And he's sitting there, 'That's enough Mairi.

Now I'm not telling you again Mairi.' That's exactly how he said it. I walked away. Well, I KNEW, I don't want to get him riled up because that's, you know, I mean he's got a temper!"

This was not, as mentioned earlier, Mairi's first violent act. I wondered how she felt physically when she was hitting someone and whether she could remember what her thoughts were when she was punching this victim.

"When I hit somebody I feel angry and then I shake. I shake all over. Before and after I hit them. I shake. I feel remorse after I hit them. My thoughts were that I was getting her to do what I wanted her to do. That I felt I had the control over more so than she did. The control to say that she shouldn't, that she couldn't, ah, that she couldn't be in the car. Like, I was after warning my brother to keep her get outta the car cause she's yipyapping about him. He's too old for that garbage. She's only after turning 18."

Mairi said she knew the victim made a complaint to the RCMP immediately after she left the scene of the assault because she heard it on her scanner. I asked her if the RCMP had asked for a statement from her before they laid the charge.

"When the RCMP officer called me and asked me if I wanted to tell him, talk about it, or if I wanted to give a statement and I knew from previous experience, like not mine, by my brother's friends ... My mother always said that if you give a statement then you're signing yourself away right there. So, ah, I contacted a lawyer and I said, 'No, I wasn't going to make a statement.' You know I've taken law in high school and I knew my legal rights as a Canadian citizen first of all and then as an offender. When I'd throw

little questions into him, (the RCMP officer) he put me on hold and then he'd call me back or he'd come back and tell me ... It seemed like he was kinda stupid you know? He's only young and he's a rookie and probably first time out in the field so I could be sending him for a little stupor. I get along with all the RCMP officers but him. The way he treated me was very rude and ignorant. I stepped up to bat and I took the punishment that was coming to me and I paid a lawyer. I ended up going to court and the judge thanked me for actually pleading guilty and told me he'd take into consideration my age and I'd never been an offender before."

Mairi had never been a convicted offender before but her history of solving problems was be beaten or fight back. She gave several examples of her violent experiences, beginning with a girl she described as her best friend.

"I always got pounded. I didn't have any bruises or anything like that but like, I mean everyday for, God, for years I got pounded. I grew up with it. Everyday going home from school she used to come in behind me and stick my face in the snow and get on top of me, sit on me so I couldn't breathe. I was probably 8 years old and it went on and on for years. I always used to beg my mother to help me. She'd steal my shovel and wouldn't give it back to me. I used to beg my mother to go and retrieve it for me. She refused to and, ah, she'd say, 'I'm not going to fight your battle.' You know, like with kids, it's over and done with, you know because the next day you're going to be best friends again anyway.

"But, ah, she (the friend) almost got me killed one time. She, ah, the road wasn't

yet paved and there was a fella going up. He was a drunk driver. He was going up the road quite fast and she told me that if I didn't cross the road that she was going to hit me with this wooden baseball bat. I had to cross the road. The man had to jam on his brakes. It almost put him in the ditch.

"I had many the shiners. Actually, one shiner I got in particularly, I remember, the guy that had given it to me. I was fighting for my first cousin that eventually took the victim (the victim described in the above assault) over to call the cops at his house. I was fighting for him because he was, he was very, ah, sophisticated, you know?"

I was not sure what Mairi meant by "sophisticated" so I asked for clarification. She said he was effeminate and maybe homosexual but she wasn't sure. She then continued recounting her history of violent experiences.

"I got some lickins from my older brother too. He's 24. So my father got sick and tired of me whining and hooting and hollering about continuously getting pounded. Even older girls threatened me and pushed me around and everything.

"It was probably when I was in Grade 3. He took me in the room and he gave me, ah, Arctic mittens that were his. He wore them on the skidoo eh?. And, I mean, he was such a large man, I'm sure they were right up to my shoulders they were so large. And I went in there. He told me how to do it and so, we had bunk beds side by side, and I was in one and I just got one of the boys (one of her older brothers that her father had made come into the room) in the corner and I just pounded the head right off of him. My father was coaching me along. The way things are in my household are totally different. I had

my older brothers and sisters telling me what to do. And my father always said, 'If she's doing this or they're doing that then you drag them home and kick them in the rear and you do this.' You know what I mean? So, so, ah, I ended up, ah, I fought with them and, ah, everything and after it was all over and I had the gloves off and I turned away and I went to turn around right quick and my brother came with a good right and gave me a shiner. So, I mean, ah, I went to school with lots of shiners. My first one was in Grade Primary.

"I didn't fight until then but I wasn't shy. I wasn't a bit shy. I've always ... as far as I'm concerned, even to this day, some people my think that I'm ignorant and outspoken. I think that I'm just telling the truth and you've got to respect me for my honesty.

"Before you know it every guy on the street I pounded him. Older or younger, it didn't matter, I pounded him. But, ah, no, ah, even baseball or anything that we played. I actually made one guy eat horse manure. He was being an idiot. We were playing baseball and, ah, he was just making sarcastic remarks and being downright ignorant. We were trying to play, ah, baseball and I was on his team and, I guess, just the fact that these little quirks that he had really bothered me and I had done that.

"Another time, I got shot in the back with a BB gun by this guy. Well, there was a big, old, one of those old, ah, wringer washers that you had to put clothing through and drain the water out. I picked one of those up. I was that angry and I picked it up ... And the guy that owned it, he said, 'Oh, Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Don't touch that! That's Anguie's washer!' I said, 'I don't give a goddamn who owns it and I just dropped it.'

(Slapped her hands).

"After that (same incident) I took a steel baseball bat that he owned. He had a bicycle. He says it was brand new. It wasn't brand new. I broke a bunch of the spokes and I took the baseball bat to a telephone pole and I bent it and I just whacked it and he tells me that he was going to get his father and mother and I told him to go get them that I'd stand right there and I would. That's the way I am.

"My father always fought a lot. Well, not everyday but when it occurred and he had to then he did, you know, he did it. My mother, on the other hand, was the type that always said that if you see trouble put your hands in your pocket and walk away.

"The fact that my father, he, would make me do things. You know, if I got pounded well he'd send me back out to fight again. If I got pounded again well I had to go out and do it again, you know? He must have taught the other girls how to fight too. I don't know where they could've got it. But I was the tomboy. I was the one who understood my father.

"After he died, ah, I went through a big, big change, ah, for a long time the only time ... well it's only been, I think the past year I can actually talk about the fire without breaking down into tears. (Mairi's father and one of her sisters died in a house fire when Mairi was 14). Uhm, I used to get very angry towards myself when I'd get drinking and somebody would mention it. Anything including fire - I just needed one little thing - mention my sister's name and it broke me every time. And I would get angry and I'd pound my fists on something, a wall or anything. And I think since my father died, it will

be eight years, I fought with three people.

"One was the victim that I'm being charged for. Ah, two other girls were, ah, when I was 16, one actually tried to burn me with a cigarette so I fought with her. I went up to say something to her because ... I don't know to this day, to tell you the truth, if she actually did say anything. But again I had somebody who was the type to get these little things into your head, you know, having a couple of drinks. So, I went up and I faced her for it and, ah, she just automatically went to go with the cigarette and she knocked my glasses off my face. And then I just ... I grabbed her and I had her up against the car by the throat and we fought from there. My brother came along, Quentin, two years older than me, and pinned my arms around my back and took me off of her. And then this other girl who had got this fixated into my head, that she had said this, she fought with her and I just stood back and watched.

"The time before that I was drinking also. I was in Grade 8. It was just after, a couple of months after the fire, and I was after returning to school and somebody had told me that, like, they had got a card and put money in it. I find it very difficult to accept gifts or money or anything cause it's ... I, I start to cry and I don't want it. And, ah, she had made a comment to a friend of mine, my first cousin to be exact. (This is the same cousin mentioned earlier). He said that she said that I didn't deserve a card. Whether I deserve a card or not is another thing. And I didn't ask for a card and I said that to her. He described her. I was at the youth centre and I was drinking and I was after having a half a pint of vodka at that point. And I went in and I grabbed her and I punched her

three times and I walked out."

I confirmed with Mairi that there had been no complaints made or charges laid in any of these incidents. I asked her if she thought she was violent.

"I think I can be violent. Uhm, I think I do what is necessary. I don't think that I'm any different from any other Joe or Mary that you see on the street. I definitely don't think that."

I moved on to her views on others' perceptions of her in the role of a violent person. I began by asking abour her teachers' perceptions.

"I quit school when I was in Grade 9. I went back the next year and I failed. And at that point ... I mean I was BAD in school. I got kicked out everyday and, you know, just bad - just plain, downright bad. Laughing and carrying on."

Mairi had sidestepped the issue of violence. I asked her if the teachers would have seen her as violent.

"Ah, no, no. Probably not."

I then asked her to give me her perceptions of significant others. Mairi began with her friends, followed by, her mother, siblings and people in the community.

"Uhm, my friends, ah, they know that, uhm, I'm a sucker for punishment first off. You frig me over, you frig me over, you frig me over, I'll take it. Right? But, as for my friends, I think that they ... they view me as easy going sometimes, quite easy to take advantage of and maybe on the other hand ... ah, that I do what I HAVE to do and only do it if I HAVE to do it.

"Uhm, my mother thinks that, ah, anger management could do me a lot of good. Uhm, she thinks we shoulda gotten help a long time ago. We (she and her siblings) are very quick tempered, very, very quick tempered. A lot of us are very quick tempered, ah, you know, pigheaded is there too, you know. They're going to do it they going to do it. (i.e., physically fight). And even if it is right or wrong they're going to do it. But, ah, yeah, a lot of us are. Uhm, my brother Sam, for instance, a very quiet, shy guy but when he gets angry his eyes get as big as toonies. And I'm telling the destructive (sic) he has, ah, he would do severe damage. My brother Quentin, the same thing.

"My mother would definitely view me as something different than anyone else would. Uhm, the fact that she figures she knows me best and she doesn't. My friends actually know me better than my mother does. I don't tell my mother nothing.

"I think (sigh), to tell you the truth, I have no idea what my mother would tell you. I think she'd come and tell you that, ah, we should've gotten some help after the fire. Ah ... I don't know ... I really, I really don't know what she'd tell you. But I know the way I was at home. If she wouldn't give me a cigarette then I'd swish everything off the table and onto the floor. But this is years back and I can look back and I think - Did I do that? Did I REALLY do that? I couldn't believe it that I could have done such a thing."

"Uhm, I don't know what my siblings would say, to tell you the truth. I don't know if they do think that I'm violent.

"Uhm, I think that, that, ah, in the community, people view me as a certain way. Uh, you'd never hear me curse in public. For a long time I wouldn't smoke in public.

And I've always babysat my whole life all over Mytown and I've looked after the elderly. And, ah, a lot of people think that I'm just like a little old lady because I'll sit there ... I'd rather sit there and talk to an elder person than to sit and talk to somebody my own age. I like to be laid back and relax, you know, tomorrow's always another day. They know I have a lot of physical strength but they wouldn't see me as violent.

"I get along with all the RCMP. They often carry on conversations with me and one of them, that's been there since quite a few years, made the comment, 'I didn't know you were like that.' And I said, 'No, I didn't know either.' That's when they was getting my fingerprints and my picture taken."

There was an obvious incongruence between Mairi's descriptions of her violent actions and her perceptions of others' perceptions. I wondered if she thought the others' perceptions were accurate. Mairi responded to this by referring to her perceived public persona.

"Oh, yes, it's accurate. I could leave my house angry, slam the door, leave. I'll see you one minute later and I'll say, 'Hello, how are ya, just fine.' I've always been a certain profile. It's not that I've hidden the true meaning of me behind anything. I've always been a certain way and, ah, for this to occur is something just, you know, it's outta the ... it's way out there in centre field. I don't like everybody knowing when I'm cross. Although, when I'm cross, I walk fast. There's no keeping up to me and I just want to get to where I have to go."

I returned to the point Mairi had made earlier when she noted that she only did what

she had to do. I asked her why she had to hit someone.

"Well, uhm, if somebody's going to stand in front of you and hit you and you're going to walk away and they're still continuing to hit you, well then, you'd be a bigger fool than I not to take your hands out of your pocket, do what you have to do - self-defence. And, ah, I feel like my friends have done their fair share of despicable things too. I've tolerated a whole lot. I didn't go after them cursing and hollering and screaming and yell like a crazy, loony bin in their face. I just go calmly, you know?

"I guess I got a lot of that from a good friend of mine that was a very, very intelligent girl. She was actually going to be a major in English at university. Wrote poetry. She's very manipulative and she'd get anything she wanted out of ANY fella she wanted because that's the way she was. She wasn't overly pretty, uhm, but just act crazy. Like if she was going to have sex with a guy, he insinuating (sic) on a condom, she'd say, 'No, no, no let's do it without it.' And she'd get him to do actually what she wanted him to do. And that's the type of girl she was. And through hanging around with her I've learned to come across with talk instead of fighting first. You know, use words and not necessarily cutting words but just come and see what's occurring."

The change from violence to manipulation indicated Mairi was developing new problem-solving techniques. I asked if that was how she planned on handling her conflicts in the future.

"I think that fighting has already got me in trouble, after $450.00. (This amount refers to Mairi's fine and the lawyer's fees). Uhm, to tell you the truth, like right now,

for me to go and get angry or say anything ... Like, what I'd normally do ... I know like my brother, like the craziness that he had done to me ... (He had rung the doorbell so that she would run down the stairs to get it and when she did this she fell and hurt herself) ... I woulda probably thrown a plate at him or something. That was Quentin. I woulda probably thrown something at him. I just laughed. I got up and I kinda laughed. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, looking down at my foot. I said, 'You idiot. What'd you do that for?'

"But I find that ... since, since the first time that I came here or even since I've gotten charged I've taken a different perspective on how I deal with everything. Because ... well, I knew before hand that ... I don't know why I was so stunned not to comprehend what was going on. And the fact, you know, you gotta watch what you say and do. And, ah, I think that I would like to, to definitely change how I do things and I think that I HAVE started changing on my own. Just knowing what I'm going through and how that, you know, ah, being charged I actually ... I can't go into nursing like I wanted to."

I asked Mairi what support she felt she had in her life. Mairi gave an account of her home life that indicated, during her childhood and teenage years, that she could either have her mother's support or her father's support but not both.

"My father was a big influence on my life. He ruled the roost. He wasn't physically abusive. He was emotionally, however, towards my mother. Uhm, and somewhat towards us some of the time. We didn't get physically punished, just the back of the head thing. I got one spanking in my life. I'll never forget it. Oh, God, he (her father)

hurt me. He didn't hurt my bottom but he hurt my heart.

"I was very close to him. I'd make him sandwiches and get him his beer, shave him and whatever he'd want me to do I did it. And whenever he'd get drinking and go on his crazy extravaganzas, driving, I had to be with him because I didn't want anything happening to him. If he decided to leave, I left. If he wanted alcohol at the bootleggers, I called up. I was 11 or 12. And, ah, to tell you the truth though, although it may sound terrible, I wouldn't change one thing about it. It makes you who you are today.

"What he said goes and, ah, I think of everybody, I was the one ... I got away with a lot. When he was alive, like, if my mother ... if it boiled down to my mother yelling at me and telling me to come with her and my father saying no I was to go with him. Uhm, my mother would probably ... she'd ask me, 'Why are you being so stupid? Sticking there with him and putting up with his garbage?' But when my mother wasn't around, my father, he was the nicest man you could meet."

Mairi said that her father's death did not stop his influence. She described an incident that occurred when she was attending community college, to illustrate this.

"I walked into the bar and I was just kinda looking around. I wasn't making any special faces and I didn't even see this girl. And she got behind me and she tapped me on the shoulder. And she was saying something but I couldn't hear her over the music. I had never seen her before and I'd been at that bar a thousand times before that and I'd never seen her so I wheeled around and I kept going. She grabbed me by the back of the hair and had my head down. So I ended up kicking her and I punched her once and I got

her in the corner. Then I went home.

"I had to get an old boyfriend of my sister's to walk me home because I was nervous. I didn't want to go by myself because, I mean she had three or four friends with her, being from Bigtown. You don't know what they're going to do. So I asked this guy and all his friends to walk me home. And, ah, he came up to my place and he and I sat and we talked for a little while, had a cup of tea and a cigarette. And, ah, I woke up in the morning and there was blond hair all over the pillow and I went to run my fingers through my hair and my hands were just polluted with hair. I laid there and I listened to fiddle music that reminded me of my father and that he used to listen to. I was just laying there and looked over at my father's picture and I began to cry. You know, like a child. I've got to find her cause I knew my father WOULD have made me go look for her if I was in this shape. So I got ready and I walked up and down the streets. Couldn't see her and I don't why I wasted my time because I wouldn't know what she looked like anyway.

"When I got back, I called my mother and was talking to her. And everything was fine and I hung up the phone and then I started crying. Fiddle tunes and my father's picture standing there. Over an hour or two later I called my mother again and said, 'Mom, could you have Sam come and pick me up in Othertown?' 'Yeah, yeah, I can have ... what happened?' She started to talk, 'See? I told you not to be going out. I told you that you were going to get in trouble.' I said, 'Mom, be quiet, I don't want to hear it right now.' So I just ... I came home and, ah, I was very upset. I was quiet too. I wasn't

saying much. And just ... like that hasn't happened to me since I was a young girl."

After Mairi finished at community college she moved back home with her mother. She described how it is for her to live there.

"Believe it or not, the age that I am, and after living on my own and then I moved back into my mother's house you'd think that she'd kinda be lenient. But no, she growls and hoots and hollers and wants to know what I'm doing. She, ah ... she keeps bringing up a pack of dope fiends and yadda, yadda, yadda. And my mother, you know, my mother is very angry over me being charged."

Mairi said her mother was angry with the victim, not Mairi. I continued on the subject of support by asking Mairi what school was like for her.

"I quit when I was in Grade 9. Yeah, my teacher told me that if I want to go home and watch Sesame Street and Mr. Dressup, that it's on every day. So at three months into the school year she told me I wasn't going to pass anyway. I went home. Yeah, I took her advice. She told me I wasn't going to make it and now I understand how can ... how could somebody tell you that you weren't going to make it three months into the school year, right? Not exactly a self-confidence booster. So I ended up going home and I stayed home for the rest of the year and I told my mother what had occurred and the next year I failed."

It appeared that Mairi was sadly lacking in support. I wondered if she had anyone she felt she could turn to for support or help, or if she had known about counselling?

"I knew about counselling but we just never took it. Ah, to tell you the truth it was

because of _____(She named an individual). Counselling? Uhm, no, we weren't brought up like that. I would talk about things cause I didn't give a damn what anyone thought and a lot of stuff was, ah, just the fact you didn't know how to strike up a key to lead to that, you know? But my father never believed in that. My mother didn't either."

I pointed out to her that she had told me that her mother had wanted her in anger management. I asked did her mother think anger management and counselling were two different things and wondered if she would be upset if she knew of all the things Mairi had told me.

"Yes, I think she does think anger management and counselling are two different things but I think that she would probably tell you herself what I've told you. Uhm, if you were to go to my house today and talk with my mother and ask her some of these questions and ... we'd just sit there and talk about anything and then lead up to something like this. She'd come out and she'd tell you everything."

During the meeting, when we reviewed this story, Mairi told me that, after reading the preceding paragraph and thinking about it, she now thinks her mother would be quite upset if she knew of the details Mairi had given me about their family.

I concluded the interview on this notion of support. I asked Mairi if she felt that she had any support at all.

"We're not the close family. We're not the ones to say, 'I love you.' Never. I'll never hear that."

Mairi's Perceptions of Herself as a Violent Person

Mairi clearly has a long, almost lifetime, history of violence as was evidenced in her description of numerous incidents. Despite her long narrative, she did not think she was violent but, rather, could be violent. She also clearly stated she did not want to go to court again and she was concerned about her criminal record since her future plans included enrolling in a nursing programme, and she knew she would not be able to practice nursing with a criminal record. The latter statement was countered by Mairi when she said, "I do what I HAVE to do and only if I HAVE to do it." Her distinction, between the two statements, was being the instigator of a fight, or having to act in self-defence.

> Somebody's going to stand in front of you and hit you and you're going to walk away and they're still continuing to hit you. Well, then you'd be a bigger fool than I not to take your hands out of your pocket, do you what you have to do, self-defence.

Mairi stated that she knew her "... rights as a Canadian citizen and as an offender." She would not give a statement to the RCMP based on her mother's advice but she "... stood up to bat" and "... took the punishment." However, both she and her mother thought the victim should not have made a complaint. Perhaps this was because she was doing what was "necessary." Her opinion that she could be violent was neutralized by adding a disclaimer.

> I don't think that I'm any different from any other Joe or Mary that you see on the street.I definitely don't think that.

Mairi's line of reasoning had a firm basis in social learning and her current reality as was evidenced throughout her narrative. The evening of the assault Mairi was tired and

wanted a drive home with her brother. She felt she had the right to be in his car, and in the front seat, more than anyone else especially the victim. Her brother made no comment until after she had grabbed, kicked and pounded the victim. He then told her to stop because that was enough. She did so only because she knew he had a bad temper and she didn't want him to take it out on her by hitting her.

Mairi's Views of Others' Perceptions of Her as a Violent Person

Mairi described a lifetime of violence. She gave two descriptions of herself based on her views of others' perceptions of her as a violent person. One description came from her thoughts on her family's and friends' perceptions and the other from the community's perceptions. Mairi thought her mother did not know her at all and was of the opinion that Mairi and her siblings all needed help with anger management. Mairi said she was not sure what her siblings' perceptions would be regarding her as a violent person as they had never discussed it. Certainly, physical fights were, and continued to be, part of her relationships with her brothers.

Mairi said her friends would know she could only be pushed so far. As a child, violence was an accepted part of her relationship with her "best friend". The same person was described as her best friend today although they no longer hit one another. Mairi said that her friends knew they could "... frig me over and frig me over" but if push came to shove, she would fight. She mentioned that she admired, and was trying to emulate, the behaviour of one friend whom she described as solving her problems with manipulation instead of violence.

Mairi's perceptions of how people in the community saw her was quite different from family and friends. She said she had a "certain profile" in the community. She maintained amicable relationships with the elderly and the RCMP. She said her public persona was pleasant and easygoing. Despite the many violent incidents she described, she said the RCMP were suprised at the complaint made by the victim because they did not know she was like that and her comment back to them was that she didn't know it either.

Mairi related that her school experiences were not pleasant. Some of these earlier experiences were attributed to the teachers and some she claimed responsibility for. She said she was "bad" in school and "... got kicked out everyday" but that those teachers would "probably not" have perceived her as violent.

Congruency Between Self- and Others' Perceptions

Mairi maintained accuracy between her self-perceptions and those of family and friends. She described a distant relationship with her mother who "...didn't know her at all." This resulted partly from her closeness to her father and his resulting influence which was anathema to her mother who could not understand why Mairi would "... put up with his garbage."

Mairi said her family did not talk about anything. She did not identify any of her family as even having made a comment about the assault, for which she had been convicted, except her mother who was angry with the victim for laying a complaint. It appeared that the assault was considered to be a regular event. The unusual part, of this

specific assault, was that the victim had made a complaint.

Mairi perceived herself as easygoing in the community and that no one, including the RCMP, would perceive her any differently. Given her lifelong involvement in violence, this seems implausible, however, she may very well be accurate in her perceptions. Her narrative indicated she wanted to change her methods of handling conflict and she said she had begun to do so. Perhaps, because she perceived herself as changing, she thought this was reflected in the perceptions of people in the community.

There was congruency between real and perceived support in Mairi's story. She did not identify any support in her life with the exception of her father, and his support was contingent on her going out to fight until she had won. She did not have support from her siblings or teachers. The only support she mentioned from her mother was when she felt the vicitm was wrong to have made the complaint. Mairi's description of her parents' relationship helped illustrate the accuracy of Mairi's perceptions regarding support.

> He (her father) drank everyday for as far as I can remember. My mother told me that, ah, he never drank before they got married but once they got married then he drank, he cheated on her. She knew about it. She stayed with him and nine kids later she's still with him.
>
> My mother used to leave all the time when my father was drinking. She'd go down to her mother's place or she'd go to Bingo which irritated my father. She'd go to Bingo and thenshe'd come home saying, 'Well, I don't have any money.' And then the fight would be on. So, ah, it went on like that right up to, oh, the time he died.

Her mother could not understand why Mairi "... put up with his garbage" but this passage indicates Mairi felt she had little choice since her mother left when her father was drinking and he "drank everyday."

Mairi said her family was aware of counselling because her oldest sister had gone but it was not a pleasant experience and the counsellor "... really screwed her up." Her mother thought that Mairi and her siblings should have been in counselling years ago, because of the trauma resulting from the fire that killed their father and sister, not violence. When Mairi was court ordered to anger manangement her mother was in full approval but Mairi indicated her mother would see anger management and counselling as different things and that she would be upset if she knew what Mairi had disclosed to me. This supported the accuracy of Mairi's perceptions - she did not have any support and she was fully aware of that reality.

Summary

A discussin has been presented of the themes arising from the research question relating specifically to Mairi's narrated experiences in the role of a violent person. Mairi's perception was she knew she could be violent but it was only when it was "necessary". She was unsure of what her mother's or siblings' perceptions would be of her in the role of a violent person. She did not say her friends would perceive her as violent but that she was "no worse than they were." Mairi did think her former teachers, members of the community and the RCMP officers in her home town would not see her as violent. Mairi's perceptions were congruent with how she viewed herself as being perceived by a particular group e.g., she considered herself to have a good relationship with the RCMP in her home town and when an RCMP officer told her, following the assault, he did not know she was like that, she said, "I didn't know either."

Mairi portrayed a long and involved history of violence. Her perceptions of herself, and how she views others perceiving her in the role of a violent person, are ambivalent. This may suggest that despite the amount of violence in her life she does not see herself solely as a violent person and this alone provides further depth to our understanding of females' experiences with violence.

Discussion of the Data

The theories that are used to explain why people perpetuate violence against others encompass a broad range including those focusing on societal factors, to psychological theories focusing on the emotional, cognitive, biological and social characteristics of the individual. The review of the literature indicated that little is known about young women's pathways into violence (Somers & Baskin, 1994). The participants' stories demonstrated that each individual had a unique experience and history but there were similarities across the participants in this study and with some of the findings of past research.

On three different summer nights, under the influence of alcohol, three young women committed three separate violent acts. Their experiences were as unique as the individuals themselves. Themes emerged from the research question and supporting questions and have been discussed that were specific to each participant. In this section, I will discuss the themes, patterns and narrative threads identified across individuals in their stories. The commonalities I found, in relation to violence, were: congruency between self-perceptions and perceptions of others' perceptions, social learning, relationships with parents, external attributions, shame, anger, neutralization, anti-societal behaviours, situational factors, and lack of intervention.

Congruency between Self-perceptions and Perceptions of Others' Perceptions

All three young women did not perceive themselves as violent nor did they perceive significant others as perceiving them as violent. Funder (1980) and van Aken et al.,

(1995) found that adolescents' perceptions of self and perceptions of significant others ought to be fairly congruent as these help adolescents adapt better to both positive and negative situations. John and Robins (1993) found that adolescents often perceive themselves in a more positive light than may be their reality, as a means to protect their self-image and their self-esteem. This striving to maintain positive self-esteem may explain the participants perceptions. They did not perceive themselves as violent and they did not believe any of the significant others in their lives saw them as violent. The perceptions they held of themselves as non-violent may be a result of viewing the world based on their experiences. Non-violent perceptions may also have helped them maintain self-esteem and reject the socially unacceptable role of a violent person.

Mairi and Hope expressed incongruencies throughout their stories. The perceptions of themselves as violent people were inconsistent with the reality of the viciousness of the violent acts they had committed. Hope persisted in her perception that others did not see her as violent, even after overhearing the conversation of her friend's sister and her friends. Hope even went so far as to wonder if other people would be thinking the same thing, yet, she maintained that others did not perceive her as violent. Hope did not express concern with what others thought of what she had done to her victim, only that they may have thought she may have been abusive to her child.

I had specifically explained to Mairi that she had been included in the study because she had told me of two violent acts she had committed when she was under 17 years of age. Mairi said that she " ... could be violent" and that her perception of her violent acts

was that she was no worse than her friends or " ... any other Joe or Mary on the street." When she quoted the RCMP officers as saying, (in reference to the assault for which she had been charged) that they didn't know she was like that (violent), her response was, "I didn't know either." According to Mairi, "I was only doing what I had to do." Mairi was, however, clearly amazed that she could, in a temper, " ... swish everything off the table."

Ginger's description of the assault she committed appeared to be less violent than the assaults described by Hope and Mairi. She said that she was acting in self-defence and that she did not seem to believe she had been violent herself. Ginger said that she understood that I had asked her to be a participant based on her conviction of assault when she was 17 years old. She described the assault, yet her impression was that she was not violent and could never be violent. She consistently downplayed the violent act she had committed, focusing instead on her behaviour in the year leading up to the evening of the assault. Ginger noted that she had the support of " ... the highly respected members of the community" including teachers, the parish priest and Catholic nuns who she said knew she "... wasn't like that". Ginger related that her family hated her because she had brought negative attention to her family through her behaviour. Ginger did not mention any significant other who was concerned with her having committed a violent act. She described some of her peers as the only group who perceived her as violent. She implied that these peers belonged in the lower echelons of her Hometown's caste system and insinuated that their opinions didn't matter.

Mairi and Hope recognized that they had committed violent acts and were capable of doing although they said that their preferred behaviour would be non-violent. They shared a similarity to the all-female gang members interviewed by Laidler and Hunt (1997), in that they seemed to understand good conduct but appeared to lack the necessary skills to achieve it. Mairi told how she planned to use manipulation of others to replace violence as a problem solving technique. Hope gave no indication that she would distance herself from her anti-social peer group nor did she seem to realize her association with them may have contributed to the assault. Ginger did not believe she was violent but believed she was protecting herself from an individual who had abused her. Even though she had been convicted of a violent crime, she did not think she was violent at all and unlike the other young women, she made no reference to not committing violence in the future. However, she too seemed to lack the skills necessary to make healthy choices. In her case, the skill she lacked seemed to be in determining what constituted a healthy relationship because she related a pattern of abuse in her relationships with men.

Social Learning

Social learning, as posited by Bandura (1978), seemed to have played a part in Mairi's and Hope's violent actions. Both of these young women related how they had observed violent behaviour by others or had been part of violent activity.

In Mairi's story, violence appeared to be a socially learned and sanctioned activity. She related how her father had taught her to fight and how he had expected her and her

siblings to continue a fight until they had won. Mairi said, "My mother, on the other hand was one to tell you to put your hands in your pockets and walk away." She also said that her mother was aware of the violent activity of her children but did not comment on it. Mairi noted her mother had encouraged Mairi and her siblings to attend counselling in response to the trauma arising from the deaths of her father and sister in a house fire but not for violence.

Social learning also appeared to be a factor in Hope's story. Hope said that she had witnessed the physical abuse of her mother by her step-father. She related her experiences of violence at local dances where she would be back-up for a female friend who would be fighting. She reported that fighting among girls was a regular occurrence at the local dances she attended. Neither Mairi or Hope mentioned that anyone they knew had been charged for their violent acts which perhaps had led them to believe there were no consequences for violent behaviour.

Unlike Mairi and Hope, Ginger indicated socially learned violence was not a factor in her family life or within her peer group. She related the abuse from her boyfriend as her first experience of violence.

It appeared that all three young women had learned not to talk about things. This was explicitly stated by Mairi and Hope and, tacitly, in Ginger's description of her relationship with her parents. Ginger related that she had been apart from Kendall for two and a half years before she spoke with her parents about the assault and the events leading up to it. It was noted earlier that the participants did not mention that any of the

significant others in their lives were concerned with their violent acts. The participants related their parents' concern over the criminal charge for the violent act bringing negative attention to the family. The participants' perceptions that significant others were not concerned about the violent acts they had committed may explain the congruency between them perceiving themselves as non-violent and their beliefs that significant others perceived them as non-violent.

Relationship with Parents

Deschenes and Esbenson (1999) and Price and Everett (1997) suggested that violence could be predicted by parental neglect, family conflict and disruption, and parental deviance, especially for girls. The related experiences of the three young women include descriptions of their strained relationships with their parents including family conflict and disruption. Mairi depicted the relationship between her parents as acrimonious and marked by the alcoholism and extra-marital activity of her father. She said her mother could not understand why Mairi would "... put up with his garbage" in reference to Mairi's close relationship with her father. The family conflict recounted by Hope was largely based on her negative relationship with her step-father exacerbated by his physical abuse of her mother. Hope said that the reason she left home was because her mother would not leave her step-father. Ginger related several incidents about the disruption and conflict in her family which she believed arose from her behaviour. She described her sisters and grandmother as hating her for her verbal and emotional abuse of her parents. She also believed that her parents were contemplating a divorce as a result

of the conflict and stresses her behaviour had caused.

The descriptions the participants gave of their involvement in anti-social behaviours suggest they were without parental monitoring and supervision. There were indications throughout the stories that there was a possible lack of parental monitoring and supervision. This may have resulted from the parents not being aware of their daughters' activities or because the young women refused to abide by parental direction.

Hope recounted that she was forbidden by her mother to go out with David but she did so anyway. She also described going to dances where she drank alcohol. Mairi's description of her social activities included the consumption of alcohol at fourteen years of age. She implied throughout her story that her mother had little control over her activities. Ginger said her parents did not want her seeing Kendall. She noted that she would insist and would argue with her parents over her use of their car for the purpose of going to see Kendall. She said she smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol but her parents did not know. She added that she still smokes and drinks and her parents still do not know.

The next section of the analysis harkens back to Hill's (1994) "third meaning" which I understood to be what is intended rather than what is said. The three participants either were neutral about the perceived support from their parents or felt that their parents were very supportive. It did not appear from the narratives of the three young women that the parents were supportive. It seemed that when the participants' behaviour, or the behaviour of others toward them, was at its' worst, their parents

appeared to have neglected them. Hawkins et al., (1998) found neglect may be the form of child maltreatment that was most predictive of later violence. This was consistent for gender, race, socioeconomic status, family structure and family mobility. Price and Everett (1997) asserted that parental neglect and lack of supervision at home may have the strongest effect on later violence because it appeared neglect was the most damaging form of abuse to the subsequent course of youth development.

Ginger's portrayal of the relationship between her and her parents, prior to the assault, did not include any descriptions of support. She described her family's hatred towards her and believed she had "... almost caused them (her parents) to divorce." Ginger said that her parents were very supportive of her after she had been charged with assault. She also said that her relationship with her parents improved because she had "confessed" to her father and he had "forgiven her." She said she was then, "Their little girl again." Ginger did not suggest that she felt her parents had any responsibility for her negative behaviour or the amelioration of that behaviour. It seemed parental support for Ginger was contingent on conformity to their expectations. She described how her assault of Kendall marked the end of their relationship and that her behaviour had brought shame to her family. She related incidents of continued deviant behaviours including drug use and involvement in abusive relationships during her time at university but said that her parents were unaware of this behaviour. She seemed to imply that her relationship with her parents was fine as long as they thought she was conforming to their expectations.

Hope also perceived her parents as having been supportive but the content of her story appeared to be incongruent with this perception. Hope said that her relationship with her father was great but that she had only seen him occasionally since she was six years old. She stated that she had left her mother's home because she could no longer live with her step-father. When given Hope's ultimatum to choose, her mother chose her step-father over Hope. Hope felt she and her mother had regained some of their former closeness since Hope had become a mother. Hope, like Ginger, did not criticize her mother and also did not seem to recognize that she identified parental support only at those times when her behaviour conformed to parental expectations.

Mairi did not claim to have parental support but she did follow the pattern of Ginger and Hope in ignoring or minimizing anything that may have reflected badly on her parents. When Mairi was five years old she related how she had begged her mother to help her retrieve her snow shovel but her mother refused and told Mairi she wouldn't fight her battles. According to Mairi, her mother said that the argument over the shovel was between kids and they would be friends again the next day. By the time Mairi was in Grade 3, she related how her father had become "... sick and tired" of her "... whining and hooting and hollering and continuously getting pounded." She described how he not only taught her to fight but to fight until she had won. She said that if she came home the worst for it, he would send her back to fight again so she knew there was no sense in returning home until she had won. Conformity to parental expectations, in Mairi's case, appeared to be violent behaviour. She said this meant she gained her father's support but

was further alienated from her mother. Mairi related that when her father drank, which was almost daily, her mother left the house while Mairi tended to her father. The first description she gave of any support from her mother was not until after she was charged with assault. Mairi said this was a result of her mother being angry with the victim for laying a complaint. She said she realized her related experiences sounded terrible but added, "I wouldn't change one thing about it. It makes you who you are today."

External Attributions for Behaviour

I had expected the participants would see themselves as victims because of their family and life experiences. Ginger was the only one who said she had been victimized, and this was by her boyfriend Kendall. However, the participants shared a commonality of externally attributing their violent behaviour. They described their anger erupting into violence because of what someone else had done. The explanations for not reoffending, given by the young women, were also externally attributed.

Hope blamed the assault she committed on her victim because the victim was with her friend's boyfriend. Hope said she wouldn't assault anyone again unless she "had to" because, "The judge made me not want to go back there ever, ever, again, for anything. I never want to see that judge again." She related that her first thought after hitting her victim was, "Oh my God! I'm a mother!" She expressed concern that her child never find out she had committed the assault. She believed that if her little boy learned of this assault, or if she reoffended, that she would be setting a poor example for him.

Ginger described the violent act she had committed but did not say she had been

violent. She blamed her assault on her victim because she had taken enough abuse from him. She said she would not be violent again because she would not want to hurt her parents.

Mairi followed the same pattern as Hope and Ginger by attributing the blame for the assault she had committed to the victim. Mairi said the victim was in the front seat of her brother's car and wouldn't give it to Mairi. She indicated that she was proud she had accessed a private lawyer instead of legal aid. However, she noted the cost of the fine and the legal fees, totalling $450.00, contributed to her not wanting to reoffend.

All three of the young women mentioned their concern over not being able to enter a career in the nursing profession because of the record they carried and the assaults they had committed. Not one of the three young women mentioned that what she had done was wrong. They described their fear of court, the costs involved and how they may have negatively affected their futures or their families. Mairi and Hope entered counselling as part of their probation order. None of the three participants indicated that any of the adults in their lives discussed the immorality and personal responsibility of physically harming another individual.

Shame

The narrated experiences of the three participants shared a common thread of perceived injustice, fear and shame which may have been contributing factors to the assaults they committed. Gilligan (1996) and Real (1998) asserted that the perception that one is a victim of injustice causes shame and this, in turn, causes violence. Baron

and Hartnagel (1997) found violence is often used as justification to "even the score."

Hope seemed to perceive an injustice when she told her victim that it was wrong for the victim to be with her friend's boyfriend. She said she could imagine the victim with her common-law spouse and that her fear was based on her sense of insecurity in her own relationship. She said her friends told her she had nothing to worry about with David because she had " ... a kid with him." She related how she found this both ridiculous and infuriating. Her reaction may have been a result of knowing people with children do break up as her parents did when she was six years old.

Ginger described how she had been shamed by Kendall and had reason to fear him. She said she struck back because she was not "... going to take it anymore." She tacitly related the shame she felt in her relationship with her parents. She noted several times she was blamed by her entire family for "... what she was doing to them," for a potential divorce and the embarrassment her behaviour had caused them because it did not reflect well on them, or their image. Ginger also noted she had been in the "loser group" and implied this was because of her size. It appeared that she was ashamed by her large size because she identified losing weight as the action that got her noticed by the more popular group.

Mairi's sense of injustice emerged in her description of the change in her relationship with the victim. She claimed to have no explanation of the growing animosity directed toward her by the victim who had been a friend. Mairi thought she had been treated unjustly by the victim and believed she had "... the right more so than

the victim" to be in the front seat of her brother's car. When the victim wouldn't move from the front seat of the car, at Mairi's directive, the shame seemed to have deepened to the point where Mairi struck out violently.

Anger

Anger was another pattern in the narratives. The anger they voiced towards their victims before they assaulted emerged throughout the context of their experiences. It seemed the participants felt they had to suppress the anger. They often used language that implied anger but spoke in dulcet tones or would raise their voices but use euphemistic terms.

Hope followed this pattern of suppressed anger as she calmly related how she had apologized to her victim but every time she sees her she thinks, "You little slut I want to kill you." She added that it drives her "crazy" when she sees her. Hope also noted, "I was surprised that I had that much, you know, that I, like pounded her." Hope vehemently stated that she knew she would never do this again, countered with a statement of almost equal vehemence, that if attacked, she would defend herself.

Ginger's anger over Kendall getting a lesser sentence than her continued four years after the fact. She said, "I was very upset about it." The tone of voice she used indicated she was irate over the lesser sentence and had maintained a strong resentment towards Kendall because she noted that before she met him, she was, "... a happy, bubbly girl."

Mairi noted she was angry because the victim laid a complaint. Again, though, this was said in a tone that belied the strong emotion behind the words. Throughout her

description of the assault there was an undercurrent of anger directed toward the victim. It seemed as though Mairi saw herself as the wronged party. She said that as a result of the victim laying a complaint, she now had a record, her future plans were in jeopardy and it had been a financial cost.

Neutralization

Deschenes and Esbensen (1999), in their study on gender differences in violence, found males were significantly more likely to use neutralization to justify their violent behaviours. This was based on whether they had been hit first, had to protect their rights, or if they had perceived a threat to family or friends. It appears neutralization was used by each of these three young females. Hope felt that her friend Cara's relationship with Bobby was threatened and immediately transferred this to her own relationship with her common-law spouse. She also noted she thought she had to protect her own relationship. Ginger described the abuse by her boyfriend over the months leading to the event she described in her story. She told how he had hit her first the night of the assault and therefore she felt she was justified in hitting him. Mairi related she felt it was her right to be in the front seat of her brother's car and she thought the victim was a threat to her brother because the victim "... kinda drove him crazy on and off" and "... he was too old for that garbage."

Anti-societal Behaviours

Marcus (1994) found that females who were violent also displayed a number of antisocial behaviours that were not directed at hurting others or destroying things. This

theme surfaced in the three stories. All three participants smoked. Hope and Ginger related, explicitly or implicitly, that they had engaged in early sexual intercourse. Hope, Ginger and Mairi had consumed alcohol the evenings they committed their assaults.

Deschenes and Esbensen (1999) found that the influence of pro-social peers was more salient for girls. Hope told of being one of two passengers in a vehicle with an underage drinking driver. Ginger labelled her new group of friends as "... the bad crew." Mairi said anything she had done was " ... no worse" than anything her friends had done. The behaviour each of them described may be attributed, in part, to low self-control, one of the risk factors identified by Hawkins, Farrington and Catalano (1998). Dean et al. (1996) found self-control to be an individual characteristic that may wax and wane over time as a result of changes in life circumstances. Mairi's story suggested that the assault she committed was not the result of a significant change in life circumstances. However, Hope described a major life change in the year leading up to the assault she committed when she entered into a common-law relationship and became a mother. Ginger also related a significant life change when she left the "loser group" at the invitation of the "bad crew."

Situational Factors

Hawkins, Herrenkohlm, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano and Harachi (1998) looked at factors that would explain why a person is more likely to commit violence in some situations than others. These included the presence of alcohol, the role of bystanders, the relationship between the perpetrator and the possible future victim and, whether or not

the victim resists. Hope, Ginger and Mairi said they had been drinking alcohol. In all three stories they discussed the bystanders who did not intervene until after violence had occurred. The three young women mentioned the animosity between them and their respective victims. Mairi noted her victim put up no resistance. Hope said that when her victim made an attempt to fight back Hope "pounded her" again. Ginger described the emotional hurt and physical abuse she had undergone from her victim and said that when he called her a whore she, " ... wasn't going to take it anymore."

Lack of Intervention

The experiences of these three young women support the assertion of O'Callaghan (1998), in that, they all exhibited behaviours that would provided cause for concern. Hope recounted going out at 15 years of age with a man seven years her senior. She described the antagonism between her and her step-father. She said this led her to give her mother an ultimatum to choose between them. Hope said that this was why she moved in with her boyfriend. Ginger depicted herself as an honours student, and "... a bubbly and happy girl" who had rarely gone out. She suggested that her behaviour changed considerably for the worse. Mairi began her narrative by telling how she had gone to school as early as Grade Primary with her first "shiner." She said she began to fight back under her father's tutelage at eight years of age. After the traumatizing event of her father's and sister's deaths by fire, she said her behaviour in school deteriorated to a low point. She went on to describe her teacher at the time suggesting that she quit school. When she returned to school she described her behaviour as being so bad she

was "... kicked out almost every day."

There were no interventions, or attempts at interventions, cited by any of the participants. The only indication that a significant adult responded was when Mairi said her Grade 8 teacher told her, three months into the school year, to go home and watch children's shows on television as she was going to fail anyway. Mairi related that when returned to school, the response of school officials to her behaviour was to kick her out.

Summary

The violent experiences of these three young women have provided support for the etiology of violence found in previous research. The stories indicated that there was not one single identified cause for violence nor were there indications that the possible contributing factors that emerged were specific to females.

The congruency between perceptions of self- and others was expected but the contradictions between their stories of committing violent acts and their perceptions of being non-violent, even after having read their stories, was not expected. Social learning played an important role in the lives of two of the participants. Strained relationships with parents appeared to be particularly salient in all three stories. Internalized feelings such as shame and anger combined with externalized behaviours that appeared to relieve the participants of self-responsibility were also factors in each of the young women's experiences. The apparent lack of intervention prior to the assaults, and various environmental factors the evenings of the assualts, also seemed to be meaningful. The method used in this thesis of collecting the data through interviews seems to have

expanded on the preceding research. Hearing the stories of female youth who have committed a violent has provided a personal view into what often may seem like an overwhelming problem. The issues specific to these young women may assist in the development of effective and sustainable interventions. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in the fifth and final chapter.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this study was violence committed by female youth. The specific question was, "How do female youth, who commit violent acts, view themselves in their role of a violent person and is this congruent with how they perceive others as viewing them in that role? The phenomenological method of research was used to hear the stories of three young women who had been convicted of a violent crime. The narrated experiences of these young women were presented with the purpose of gaining further understanding of why violence happens - particularly when it is committed by female youth. It is important to keep in mind these were the experiences of only three people and thus were unique to them. However, it is possible to draw from the specific and apply it to the general.

The participants in this study did not perceive themselves as violent nor did they perceive others as perceiving them as violent. It would seem that the violent act was a small part of the bigger picture. The young women suggested the violent act was something they had done and was not a reflection of who they were. They gave the impression they saw themselves in a much broader perspective than just as violent offenders.

The research by Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979) on self- and other perceptions noted there tends to be the highest agreement on external traits even when the "self" and

the "other" are well acquainted. This may suggest that when one person is making a judgement on another, there is a tendency to objectify the other. In this type of judgement the larger narrative may not be taken into consideration. This may also be applicable in society where the inclination may be to essentialize others as a result of not being aware of the larger narrative. The stories of three young women who committed violent crimes indicated that they saw themselves as more complex than the one aspect of violence.

The themes arising from the data were separated into two categories. The first category dealt with the themes specific to the research question that emerged from the individual participants' interpretation of her experience. The participants did not see themselves as violent and this was congruent with their views of others' perceptions of them.

The second category of themes stemmed from my interpretation of the common narrative threads that emerged across the individuals and from the relevant literature. Hearing the experiences of the participants in this study provided support for prior research findings and introduced fresh concepts in relation to violence committed by female youth.

Support for Prior Research

Bandura (1978) found violence and the understanding of the consequences of committing violent acts to be socially learned behaviours. Gilligan (1996), Baron and Hartnagel (1997), and Real (1998) concluded violence may result from the perception

that one is a victim of injustice. Injustice gives rise to fear and shame and these two emotions, in turn, cause violence. Laidler and Hunt (1997) determined that girls in all female gangs appeared to understand caring and good conduct but it seemed they lacked the necessary skills in achieving these behaviours. Somers and Baskin (1994) and Marcus (1999) found females who committed violent crimes were also involved in other anti-social and deviant behaviours.

Suppressed anger appeared to run as an undercurrent throughout the narratives of the three young women in this study. Artz ( S. Artz, personal communication, 19 May 2000) believes the suppression of emotions does not begin with girls until adolescence - unlike boys who experience such suppression in early childhood. According to Artz, the timing of the suppression of an emotion such as anger coincides with the emergence of girls' violent behaviour. A common narrative pattern in the stories of the three young women in this study was they did not "talk about anything" with their parents. The concept of suppressed anger also appears to support the general conclusions of Elliott (1994), Gilligan (1996), Price and Everett (1997) and Real (1998) who suggested violence may be the only, or most effective way to achieve power, status, respect and other basic social and personal needs. Artz found girls who commit violent acts define equality as having as much power over girls as boys do. Artz also found girls are far less committed to violence than boys but will make use of it when they think it is necessary. Mairi said she was only doing what was "necessary" and demonstrated her "power" by assaulting her female victim. Hope described herself as upset and angry when she saw

her victim with her friend's boyfriend. Hope said she took it upon herself to "do something" when her friend would not do "anything about it."

Concepts Introduced in the Current Study

Deschenes and Esbensen (1999) found males to be significantly more likely to use neutralization to justify their violent behaviour. However, neutralization emerged as a theme in the stories of the three females in this study.

The use of external attributions was another concept introduced in the stories of the participants. The three females' external attributions of their violent acts seemed to suggest they lacked an empathic connection with their victims. It appeared that they had no understanding of their victims' point of view. This could possibly be attributed to developmental delays. When we develop we gain a greater sense of the consequences of our actions. The female youth in this study appeared to lack an awareness of the connection between their actions and the effects of those actions on the other's including the victim's feelings. Artz (S. Artz, personal communication, 19 May 2000) found girls beat up other girls who were very much like themselves. Artz suggested that girls who commit violent acts have a strict and rigid moral code. It seems girls justify their violent behaviour because they believe it is their responsibility to beat up "sluts" because they "deserve" it. Hope described her victim as a "slut" and believed it was wrong for her victim to be with her friend's boyfriend. Hope did not make any comment about the boyfriend having responsibility for being with the victim. Mairi said her victim had "no right" to be in her brother's car and he was "too old for that garbage anyway." Artz

attributes the moral code of girls who commit violent acts to the objectification of females by other females, males, the media, and societal and cultural expectations.

The process of hearing the lived experiences of female youth who have committed a violent crime has provided awareness of their self-perceptions and their perceptions others have of them. The analysis of the data suggested support for prior research and introduced concepts not discussed in the previous research. The purpose of hearing the stories of the participants in this study was to further understanding of female youth violence and to use that understanding to develop effective methods of prevention and intervention. It seems particularly salient that throughout the research process the three participants perceived themselves as non-violent and perceived others' perceptions of them to be the same. Perceptions held by the participants were an integral part of the research question and provide grounding for the recommendations.

Recommendations

Artz (S. Artz, personal communication, 19 May 2000) suggested enough time and effort have been spent on researching the causes and contributing factors of violence. The time is for action. The review of the literature has shown widely varied findings and subsequently widely varied proposals for violence prevention and intervention. The recommendations presented here consider the research, focus on the issues arising from the research question and consider the specific concerns that emerged from the experiences of three female youth who committed violent acts. I am not going to differentiate between research, programming and counselling because I believe the three

complement one another and are all necessary components for the prevention of violence or further violence. Programming and counselling initiatives could be regularly evaluated and provide the basis for continuing research.

The three young women involved in this study believed they were non-violent and possibly continue to maintain this belief. The purpose of this research was to add to the understanding of why female youth commit violent acts with the ostensible purpose of assisting in developing methods of intervention. Further research would perhaps be most useful if it were conducted as a complementary process within counselling and other intervention techniques. The steps followed in this study could be extended by increasing the participants' direct involvement after they had approved their constructed stories. The stories could be used to provide a basis for further inquiry and to assist in creating specific interventions with individuals. Participatory research might elicit further understanding for counsellors and clients by videotaping stories of violent acts committed by clients, viewing them so clients could see and hear themselves, discuss the tapes and provide feedback. This process could be equally useful with individuals or groups and would provide clients and counsellors with multiple perspectives. Additionally, it may be helpful to hear the participants' definitions of violence and non-violence, hearing the perceptions that significant others had of the participants and, the participants' perceptions of their victims' feelings. The examination of this material could lead to understanding the level of moral development of the participants.

I think caution is necessary when we speak of morality. We may need to be

reminded to avoid imposing personal standards of morality on the societal need to prevent violence or further violence. It appeared that the young women in the story needed to develop empathy, a sense of personal responsibility and, to internalize a higher ethical standard regarding violence. However, effective work may very well depend on beginning at the developmental level of the individuals and their subjective views of the world.

The narrated experiences of the three young women indicated that they saw themselves greater than the violent acts they had committed. Programmes might be most successful if the notion of the whole person is recognized. One aspect to consider would be the validation of feelings such as anger. It seems that the theme of suppressed anger points to a need to learn socially appropriate methods of expressing anger. A constructivist approach may facilitate this learning. Savickas (1993) believes constructivism encourages people to make a commitment to their culture and community as well as learning to develop their values in the real world. The eclectic philosophy of constructivism could be equally efficacious in working on issues of shame, neutralization, anti-societal behaviours, situational factors and how they may have contributed to the violent acts that were committed.

Some of the suggestions from the literature provide support for the preceding recommendations and correspond with the experiences of the participants. These include: reducing neutralization (Deschenes & Esbensen, 1999), developing positive beliefs and standards for behaviour that reject violence, social and emotional literacy

(Hawkins et al., 1998), and learning self-respect and responsibility (O'Callaghan, 1998; M. Ennis, personal communication, 4 June 1999). Not one of the participants in this study claimed self-responsibility for the acts they committed. This latter point accompanied by the neutralization of the act indicates that accepting responsibility for one's actions would be a necessary component of any prevention or intervention programme.

The suggestions for working with female youth who have committed violent acts may be equally as applicable for working with youth at risk of committing violence and the general youth population. Artz's (S. Artz, personal communication, 19 May 2000) belief that the objectification of females by other females, males, the media and society seems to be particularly germane. It may be productive to initiate gender sensitivity programmes with small groups from an early age.

It was not apparent if the parents of the participants in this study contributed to their violent behaviour and I do not think it is necessary to determine whether or not they did. I think the key point is to invite parents to be part of the intervention process and to actively engage them when a child begins to show cause for concern. I think an essential aspect of parental involvement is to believe in, and recognize, the value of what parents have to contribute to the prevention of violence and further violence perpetuated by youth.

There is a need for counsellors to educate parents, teachers, agencies, communities and governments about the counselling process. I believe I have provided support,

through the lived experiences of three female youth who committed violent acts, that counselling can be an integral part of a collaborative effort in effectively and sustainably preventing violence or further violence.

# References

Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. Criminology, 30, 47-87.

Anderson, C. A., Deuser, W. E., & DeNeve, K. M. (1995). Hot temperatures, hostile affect, hostile cognition, and arousal: Tests of a general model of affective aggression. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21(5), 434-448.

Bandura, A. (1978). Social learning theory of aggression. Journal of Communication, 28(3), 12-29.

Baron, R. A., & Byrne, D. (1997). Social Psychology. (8th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Baron, S. W., & Hartnagel, T. F. (1997). Attributions, affect, and crime: Street youths' reactions to unemployment. Criminology, 35(3), 409-434.

Bogdan, R .C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). Qualitative Research for Education. (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Brezina, T. (1996). Adapting to strain: An examination of delinquent coping responses. Criminology, 34(1), 39-59.

Chaiken, M. R., & Chaiken, J. M. (1984). Offender types and public policy. Crime & Delinquency, 30(2), 195-226.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelley, F. M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N.K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Editors), Handbook of Qualitative Research,(pp.413-427). Thousand Oaks, LA: Sage.

Cullen, F. T., Wright, J. P., Brown, S. Moon, M. M., Blankenship, M. B., & Applegate, B. K. (1998). Public support for early intervention programs: Implications for a progressive policy agenda. Crime & Delinquency, 44(2), 187-204.

Dean, C. W., Brame, R., & Piquero, A. R. (1996). Criminal propensities, discrete groups as offenders and persistence in crime. Criminology, 34(4), 547-569.

Deschenes, I. P., & Esbensen, F. (1999). Violence and gangs: Gender differences in perceptions and behavior. Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 15(1), 63-96.

Elliott, D. (1994). Youth violence: An overview. Paper presented at the Aspen Institute's Children's Policy Forum "Children and Violence Conference" February 18-21, 1994. Queenstown, Md.

Ellison, M. (1999, August 12-18). Abortions 'responsible for large fall in US crime rate'. Guardian Weekly, p. 2.

Farrington, D. P., & Loeber, R. (1998). Executive summary. In R. Loeber, & D. P. Farrington (Editors), Serious and Violent Offenders. Risk Factors and Successful Interventions, (pp. xix-xxv). London: Sage.

Farrington, D. P., & Loeber, R. (1998). Major aims of this book. In R. Loeber, & D. P. Farrington (Editors), Serious and Violent Offenders. Risk Factors and Successful Interventions. (pp. 1-12). London: Sage.

Farrington, D. P., Loeber, R., Stouthamer-Loeber, M., Van Kammen, W., B., & Schmidt, L. (1996). Self-reported delinquency and a combined delinquency scale based on boys, mothers, and teachers: Concurrent and predictive validity for African-

Americans and caucasians. Criminology, 34(4), 493-506.

Feather, N. T. (1990). The Psychological Impact of Unemployment. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Feshbach, S. (1984). The catharsis hypothesis, aggressive drive, and the reduction of aggression. Aggressive Behavior, 10(2), 91-101.

Funder, D. C. (1980) On seeing ourselves as others see us: Self-other agreement and discrepancy in personality ratings. Journal of Personality, 48(4), 473-493.

Gilligan, J. (1995). Violence. New York: Vintage.

Gladue, B. A. (1991). Aggressive behavioral characteristics, hormones, and sexual orientation in men and women. Aggressive Behavior, 17(6), 313-326.

Groves, B. A. (1997). Growing up in a violent world: The impact of family and community violence on young children and their families. Issues in Early Childhood Education, 17(1), 74-103.

Hawkins, J. D., Farrington, D. P., & Catalano, R. F. (1998). Reducing School Violence Through the Schools. In D. S. Elliott, B. Hamburg, & K. R. Williams (Editors), Violence in American Schools: A New Perspective, (pp.127-155). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., & Harachi, T. W. (1998). A Review of Predictors of Youth Violence. In R. Loeber, & D. P. Farrington (Editors), Serious and Violent Offenders. Risk Factors and Successful Interventions. (pp. 106-146). London: Sage.

Hickman-Barlow, M., Barlow, D. E., & Chiricos, T. G. (1995). Economic

conditions and ideologies of crime in the media: A content analysis of crime news. Crime & Delinquency, 41(1), 3-19.

Hill, A. (1994). Surprised by children: A call to pedagogical possibilities. Canadian Journal of Education, 19(4), 339-350.

Jackson, D. (1999, June 6). The Sunday Herald, p. A5.

John, O. P., & Robins, R. W. (1993). Determinants of interjudge agreement on personality traits: The big five domains, observability, evaluativeness, and the unique perspective of the self. Journal of Personality, 61(4), 521-551.

Kelsey, M. T. (1973). Aggression and religion: The psychology and theology of the punitive element in man. Religious Education, 68(3), 366-386.

Kuttner, R. E. (1983). Is child abuse a human instinct? International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 29(3), 231-233.

Laidler, K. A. J., & Hunt, G. (1997). Violence and social organization in female gangs. Social Justice, 24(4), 148-169.

Lambert, S. (1999, December 2). Youth violence. The Chronicle-Herald, p. A22.

Loeber, R., Farrington, D. P., & Waschbusch, D. A. (1998). In R. Loeber & D. P. Farrington (Editors), Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders. Risk Factors and Successful Interventions, (pp. 13-29). London: Sage.

Luft, J., & Ingham, H. (1969). Of Human Interaction. Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books.

Marcus, R. F. (1999). A gender-linked exploratory factor anaylsis of antisocial

behavior in young adolescents. Adolescence, 34(133), 33-46.

Merriam, S. (1998). Dealing with validity, reliability and ethics. In Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, (pp. 198-219). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, S. A., & Davis, T. L. (1992). Beliefs about children: A comparative study of mothers, teachers, peers, and self. Child Development, 63, 1251-1265.

Muuss, R. E. (1976). The implications of social learning theory for an understanding of adolescent development. Adolescence, 11(41), 61-85.

National Crime Prevention Council. (1996). Money well spent: Investing in preventing crime. Ottawa, ON.

National Crime Prevention Council. (1996). Preventing crime by investing in families: An integrated approach to promote positive outcomes in children. Ottawa, ON.

National Crime Prevention Council. (1997). Preventing crime by investing in families: Promoting positive outcomes in children six to twelve years old. Ottawa, ON.

National Crime Prevention Council. (1997). Preventing crime by investing in families: Promoting positive outcomes in youth twelve to eighteen years old. Ottawa, ON.

National Crime Prevention Council. (1997). Young people say. Ottawa, ON.

O'Callaghan, J. B. (1998, August/September). Preventive family therapy: The case for working in the schools. Family Therapy News, pp. 13, 16.

O'Callaghan, J. B. (1993). School-Based Collaboration with Families. NewYork: Jossey-Bass.

Osborne, J. W. (1990). Some basic existential-phenomenological research methodology for counsellors. Canadian Journal of Counselling, 24(2), 79-91.

Pinel, J. P. J. (1997). Biopsychology. (3rd ed.). Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

Price, J. H., & Everett, S. A. (1997). A national assessment of secondary schools principals' perceptions of violence in schools. Health Education and Behaviour, 24(2), 218-229.

Price, J. H., & Everett, S. A. (1997). Teachers' perceptions of violence in the public schools: The MetLife survey. American Journal of Health Behaviour, 21(3), 178-186.

Real, T. (1997). I Don't Want to Talk About It. New York: Fireside.

Riley, D. A. (1997). Using local research to change 100 communities for children and families. American Psychologist, 52(4), 424-433.

Rodrigues, G. P., & Ouellet, J. (Eds.). (1994) Pocket criminal code. Toronto: Carswell.

Rowe, D. C., Vazsonyi, A. T., & Flannery, D. J. (1995). Sex differences in crime: Do means and within-sex variation have similar causes? Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 32(1), 84-100.

Sarason, B. R., Pierce, G. R., Bannerman, A., & Sarason, I. G. (1993). Investigating the antecedents of perceived social support: Parents' views of and behavior toward their children. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65(5), 1071-1085.

Savickas, M. L. (1993). Career counselling in the postmodern era. Journal of Cognitive Career Development Quarterly, (7) 3, 205-215.

Schweigert, W. A. (1997). Research Methods in Psychology. Pacific Grove, CA:

Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Shrauger, J. S., & Schoeneman, T. J. (1979). Symbolic interactionist view of self-concept: Through the looking glass darkly. Psychological Bullentin, 86(3), 549-573.

Sommers, I., & Baskin, D. R. (1994). Factors related to female adolescent initiation into violent street crime. Youth & Society, 25(4), 468-489.

Statistics Canada (1998). Canadian crime statistics, 1994. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

Sykes, C. J. (1992). A Nation of Victims. The Decay of the American Character. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Tinbergen, N. (1968). On war and peace in animals and man. Science, 160(3835), 1411-1418.

Tolan, P. H., & Gorman-Smith, D. (1998). Development of serious and violent offending careers. In R. Loeber, & D. P. Farrington (Editors). Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders. Risk Factors and Successful Interventions, (pp. 68-85). London: Sage.

van Aken, M. A. G., van Lieshout, C. F. M., & Haselager, G. J. T. (1996). Adolescents' competence and the mutuality of their self-descriptions and descriptions of them provided by others. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 25(3), 285-306.

Zegans, L. S. (1973). Philosophical antecedents to modern theories of human aggressive instinct. Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 42(2), 239-266.

# Appendix A

## Copy of Informed Consent

I am inviting you to participate in research for my thesis in the Masters of Education (Counselling) at Acadia University. The research is focusing on female youth who have been convicted of a violent act as defined by the Criminal Code of Canada. I am specifically interested in your perception of yourself in the role of a violent person and how you see others' perceptions of you in that role of a violent person.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed at a location which is convenient and comfortable to you. There will be a maximum of three interviews. The first interview will be one to two hours in length, the second will be for you to review what you said in the first meeting and the third is to clear up any unfinished business on either of our parts.

In order to make sure the interviews are confidential, certain procedures will be followed:
1. All interviews will be tape recorded and the tapes will be labelled only with code names and numbers.
2. The tapes will be kept by me in a secure location.
3. Fictitious names will be used for you, your home location and the type of crime you committed will be changed.

You are able to stop being involved in the research at any point - before you are interviewed, during an interview, following the interview.

There is the possibility that issues may arise for you that are unexpected and, perhaps, unwelcome. My commitment to you is that if this occurs I will assist you in finding an appropriate person with whom to meet, if you want.

I understand the nature of the research and that I may withdraw at any point in the process if I want. I give my permission for Heather McLennan to conduct interviews with me regarding my perceptions of myself in the role of a violent person and how I see others' perceptions of me in the role of a violent person.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

# Appendix B

## Addendum to Informed Consent

I had an interview with Heather McLennan on_____. The interview was for the purpose of her thesis for her Masters of Education (Counselling) at Acadia University. The interview was based on a violent act that I had been convicted of. At that time, part of the informed consent was that the type of crime I committed would be changed. Heather McLennan has explained to me why this is no longer the case.

I agree that the type of crime does not have to be changed.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

# APPENDIX C

## Oral Presentation - Thesis Defense - 14 July 2000

My neighbour happens to be taking the Master's in Counselling. His 9 year old daughter was sitting drawing at my kitchen table with my 9 year old daughter while I was washing the dishes. My neighbour's child said, "My Dad won't be finished all his courses until the September after next. I said all I have left to do for my degree is the defense of my thesis on 14 July. My daughter piped up and said, "You have to protect it's feelings don't you mommy?" To my daughter, a thesis was an animate object. The end product represents portions of many people's lives not least - my daughters.

The process began as a quest. My quest was to find out more about young females' experiences as perpetrators of violence. The knowledge would result in greater understanding of the phenomenon and subsequently assist my work and, ideally, the work of others in the prevention of violence or further violence. My academic obligation was combined with religious fervour. Fortunately, the latter passed. I began, at some undefined point, to appreciate the journey. James Hollis, in his book, The Middle Passage, notes, "No one can say where the journey will take us."

My journey began in November 1997 while driving along Route 19 in Inverness County. I was in Creignish when Michael Enright of the CBC interviewed a reporter in Victoria, BC regarding the beating and subsequent murder of Rena Verk. Three aspects of that interview startled and disturbed me - the suspects were teenagers, mostly females and came from middle to upper class families. I think I sounded naive in my proposal when I wrote about this and perhaps I was. However, I worked in a centre for almost 7

years with hundreds of females who were labelled "juvenile delinquents". These female youth came from a variety of backgrounds - cultural, ethnic, social, economic and educational. Some of the girls presented more problems than others but I cannot recall one girl, who came to the centre while I worked there, who had been charged with a violent crime. So, perhaps I was naive but the idea of young females committing seriously violent crimes was truly new to me.

Over the next two years, with the assistance of many people, I came to what was considered to be a manageable research question:

How do female youth, who commit violent acts, view themselves in their role of a violent person and is this congruent with how they perceive others as viewing them in that role?

I planned on interviewing four young women using the research question and supporting questions as a guide. I decided probation offices would be a good source for participants. My assumption was that it would be a matter of choosing among sizeable numbers. The first probation officer I spoke with had 6 females in a caseload of 100 clients and none fit the requirements for my research. The second probation officer had 2 females in his caseload of 100 and it seemed one fulfilled the requirements but would she agree to participate? This was in September of 1999 and I was, as we say in Cape Breton, in a clear panic. What was I going to do? Where were all the females? How misled had I been by the media? I had dozens of newspaper accounts of violence committed by female youth across Canada. Was my research, at this late date, based on a useless premise? One good thing happened - it was the beginning of the end of the religious zealot in me. One of the probation officers told me that the police are the first

judge and it was his understanding that where they tend to charge young males on a first offense they tend to divert females. The quest for knowledge was turning into a quest for participants. I did find three participants all of whom were first time offenders to the knowledge of the police and yet all were charged.

Hope may have been charged following the complaint of her victim because according to her probation officer, she had inflicted so much damage on her victim that even he was shocked when he saw the photographs of the victim's face. Mairi was 21 when the complaint against her was made which may account for the charge being laid. In 1995 when Ginger was charged, the police had begun to implement a policy that required them to lay charges in any case involving violence regardless of circumstances.

Since I did not have the anticipated situation of being able to choose from a number of possible participants, I was faced with an ethical dilemma. It was incumbent upon me not to exert influence upon them to participate and at the same time I was on a quest and I really needed them. My relationship with Ginger had been established four years prior to my calling her and she quickly agreed to participate. I had to be more careful with Hope and Mairi. I twice informed them that if they did not choose to participate, it would in no way affect their probation order or their right to access counselling services.

I know the experience was positive for each of the young women and I do not think that is what they expected when they agreed to participate. I followed their lead at all times during the interviews and the meetings to review their constructed stories. I was respectful and neither commented or made judgements on their behaviour. The

opportunity to tell how they felt and what they experienced in their roles as violent people seemed to lift a great burden from them. Ginger, in particular, was as much a victim as she was a perpetrator. A victim of her boyfriend and a policy that did not consider individual cases. Telling her story in a therapeutic environment provided her with an appropriate venue to vent her frustration and anger. Mairi was surprised when she read the story I had constructed from the interview because she noted a few points that she could not remember saying. I assured her anything she wanted to change or take out would be but she chose to leave her story as it was. She had said near the end of the taped interview, "Although it may sound terrible, I wouldn't change a thing because it makes you what you are today." The thing she would not change was her upbringing. However, reading the constructed story seemed to be the first time she realized the extent of violence in her life. Hope had said, "I just wanted everybody to forget about it." She wanted everyone to stop telling her how "stupid" she had been. During her story she said that she felt she could tell me anything. When I feel that way it is because I know that the person being told is not going to judge me. I did not condone what these young women did but neither did I condemn. The fact that all three requested a copy of the final product indicated to me that their participation had been a rewarding and unique experience. They also seemed proud that they had helped me and were part of the research.

I began making notes for the data analysis following the interviews and continued during the transcribing of the tapes and the constructing of the stories. I interviewed

Hope, Ginger and Mairi respectively. I considered the individual first in relation to the research question. Each subsequent interview revealed similarities to the preceding one. I then developed the list of commonalities across the participants. Some of these applied to all three participants and some to two.

The three young women all have a place in my heart and I was often torn between analysing data and wondering how they would feel when they read the analysis. At the same time I had to fight the tendency to lump them together as research data. Thank God for a thesis supervisor! Through the guidance of Dr. Lehr, I was able to present the data analysis and maintain respect for the participants and their families. This was not always easy because my affection for the young women created a moralistic and judgemental attitude toward their parents. When Dr. Lehr firmly, but gently, pointed this out - the zealot breathed her last.

What is it like for these three young women to be in the role of a violent person?

It seems to be a bit embarrassing not just to themselves but to their families. It also appears to be somewhat troublesome - community service hours, meetings with probation officers, anger management, fines, legal fees, people nagging at them, those pesky criminal records. It also appears to be empowering. Hope heard her friend's sister say, "Don't mess with her." and she noted how much easier it would be to do again. Mairi said her friends would, "Frig me over and frig me over and frig me over" but they knew and perhaps so did others not counted as her friends that there was a point when she

would not take it any more and she would take control with violence. When Ginger hit her abusive boyfriend she felt she had been at least partially vindicated. The violence they had committed is something they had done, not who they are. They admit to having been violent but they are not violent and they are not wrong because they did what they had to do. They believe significant others would perceive them in the same way.

Why did they commit the violent acts?

I believe, given a certain set of circumstances, that each of us has it within us to be violent. Ginger had her issues but I don't think violence was one of them. However, given a certain set of circumstances, she became violent.

The particular incidents that brought Hope and Mairi to my attention support Artz's notion that female youth take it upon themselves to control the sexual behaviour of other girls. This certainly does not apply only to young females. I could provide several anecdotal incidents but I will use myself. I am 41 years old with 20 years counselling experience, countless hours of introspection, philosophical discussions with friends and colleagues and the owner of a small library of self-help books. However, I recently saw a fellow upon whom I had cast my eye (unbeknownst to him) and whom I thought was single - with a woman. I immediately cast several mental aspersions her way. I was hurt by him and resented her. I am glad to say this was brief and within a few moments I was laughing at my foolishness and angry with myself for reverting to such behaviour even if it was mental behaviour. The point is - I was not very different from Hope or Mairi. I

wanted to control her sexual behaviour. She was in the wrong.

Hope, Ginger and Mairi were contending with a lot more than I was and, additionally, lacked the skills and support necessary to ensure that strong emotions do not result in violent behaviour. Their relationships with their parents were strained. They had learned to suppress strong emotions such as anger and shame, they justified their behaviour by blaming the victim and/or because they were only doing what they had to do. They had not seen or experienced any consequences of committing violent acts. They were in a certain set of circumstances that contributed to the violence and they had not been offered any intervention despite what appeared to be noticeably negative behaviour.

This has been a wonderful journey. There were many challenges and frustrations and there was more than once that I thought it was fruitless. The general finding that the participants did not perceive themselves as violent nor did they view others as perceiving them as violent is certainly not earth shattering. It was expected.

I have not rewritten the Bible but the lived experiences of these three individuals as perpetrators of violence has valuable implications in the prevention of violence and further violence. I have gained the greater understanding I sought of the phenomenon of violence committed by female youth. I understand from my three participants that such an act was something they did - not who they are. They perceive themselves as more than that act or acts, as in the case of Mairi. They spoke of being good friends, caring that their parents, families and others thought well of them and, in Hope's instance,

concern over setting a good example for her child. They all seemed to believe they were acting from a position of moral correctness i.e., controlling the unacceptable sexual behaviour of their victims. Even though Ginger was retaliating against her abusive boyfriend, there was a sexual undertone. She said he called her a whore and he went to the dance with another girl who Ginger believed he had been seeing while he was also seeing her.

The quest is over. The mission has begun - albeit a tempered mission. It is time for action and not just after the fact.

The young women in this study did have a moral code, thankfully, it is not the moral code of the majority. Violence is not an acceptable means of solving one's problems. Exacerbating their suppression of their anger, shame and sense of injustice was their apparent lack of empathy for the other. I know it is difficult to genuinely empathize with those with whom we believe we are morally and even spiritually and philosophically opposed. I have to deal with a personal tendency to discount the other when I am faced with those who are on the opposite pole from where I stand politically, socially and spiritually. Once again, I have the skills to cope with this by respecting the rights of others and realizing no one is a law unto themselves. Counselling and emotional literacy could help develop greater empathy in young women who have used violence or may in the future.

One of the most valuable results of this work is the way it was conducted. Further research would be most beneficial as a component of a counselling programme. Mairi's

surprise at her own words spoken only a week or two before she read the constructed story lends support to the notion of seeing ourselves more clearly through our stories by reviewing the stories in written or videotaped form. The process used here could be extended. I wanted so badly to have a third contact with each of the young women to discuss the discrepancies between how she perceived herself and the story she had told. Her own recorded experience could be a significant tool for implementing change.

Another important theme of the stories was how deeply embedded the objectification of females is in our society and culture. I realized as a result of my research that this is not just perpetuated by female youth who commit violent crimes, or males or the media. I too am guilty of objectifying females. When I became cognizant of this I also became more aware of it in my female peers. For a person, such as myself, not afraid of preaching my own gospel, this is a significant realization. I hope that counsellors and educators who are conscious of the pervasiveness of the objectification of females will also be more vigilant in how they conduct themselves in their work with all clients.

The ideal way to prevent violence and further violence would be to begin individual and/or group counselling interventions whenever there is a cause for concern. This absolutely requires the assistance and cooperation of parents, teachers and any others who may be in contact with children and youth. An integral aspect of this is to further public awareness of counselling i.e., it is not a sign of weakness but a process of helping implement positive and sustainable change. If this is to be truly effective we must follow

our own code of ethics by believing in and honouring the dignity and ability of those with whom we are privileged to work.

Thank-you.