

HONOURING THE PROCESS OF ANGER:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF ANGER
IN WOMEN'S LIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study is a subjective inquiry into the meaning of anger in women's lives, as experienced within the context of their own unique life experiences. The central thesis of this study is that women's acceptance and integration of anger is a complex and dynamic process of exploring and understanding the origins of anger and recognizing the power of anger to be a positive and healing force in their lives.

Five women participated in a three stage research process which involved in-depth, one to one interviews, a weekend retreat group experience, and a process of collaborative data analysis. Five major themes were identified: suppression and denial of anger, fear of anger, exploring the origins of anger, women's special needs in opening to anger, and emergence of self. Verbatim excerpts from interviews, journals and followup meetings are integrated with related literature in the presentation of these themes.

Each woman's process of exploring and understanding her anger was different. The themes presented describe common elements in women's experience and portray how women's anger is influenced by oppressive social structures. Reflections on the research experience stress the importance of honouring one's unique process of opening up to anger as a way of becoming more self-assertive and using the voice of anger for personal and social change.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Love and anger are both emotions of free will, yet only love is acceptable for the powerless to express. For women, or any category of people whose fair treatment would upset the social order, anger becomes the most punished and dangerous emotion. Therefore, showing it is also a sign of freedom (Steinem, 1994, p. 259).

This research project has sought a more in-depth understanding of the experience of anger in women's lives. The central thesis of this study is that women's acceptance and integration of anger as a part of our life experience, is a complex and dynamic process of exploring and understanding the origins of our anger and recognizing the power of anger to be a positive and healing force in our lives. Five themes will be presented in support of this thesis, and will expand upon the major findings in this study. The findings reveal that women have learned to internalize and deny anger and through exploring and experiencing the many layers of anger which have accumulated over a lifetime, women can gain acceptance of anger and learn to give it voice. This can assist women in moving toward more authentic and self-assertive ways of being in the world, and in becoming agents of our own personal and social experience.

Anger is a natural and, at times, necessary part of the human emotional framework, being recognized as one of the five prototypic, or basic, core emotions, along with fear, sadness, joy and love¹. Studies on the anatomy of anger have shown that one of the universal triggers for anger is the threat of endangerment, which can present not

only as a physical threat, but as a threat to personal self-actualization (Goleman, 1995). Often described as a fight or flight reaction, in the course of everyday human interaction, we can see the presence of anger at both the micro and macro levels of society. Whether it be through the outright display of conflict, aggression and violence, the passive avoidance and the seething buildup of resentments, or the voice of assertive self-expression, anger is a natural and normal emotional response to internal and external stimuli, to which the body responds with a range of physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses.

Within the counselling and human service field, anger is commonly identified as one of the stages experienced when working through many issues for which counselling is sought, whether it be trauma, loss and grief, childhood physical, sexual and emotional abuse, adult victimization, family and marital problems, depression, or addictions, to name a few. The need for individual counselling and group work for anger management has become increasingly acknowledged in the counselling field, as anger has become recognized as a prevalent, yet destructive force in people's lives. In the area of adult and juvenile corrections, anger management groups are used widely as a treatment approach for violent offenders ². Conflict resolution programs, also increasingly common in the human service field, recognize anger as a mitigating factor to be managed in the effective handling of ever-present situations of conflict (Justice Institute of B.C., 1992). In the area of domestic violence, anger management is considered to be a critical component of spousal abuse treatment programs (Pence and Paymore, 1993) and in the area of addictions treatment, studies have found lifelong difficulties handling anger and rage to

be the most striking emotional pattern (Goleman, 1995, p. 255). Even at the pre-school and primary school levels, programs which help children to deal more effectively with anger and conflict are being implemented (Vis-a-Vis, 1995).

Conceptual Framework

Anger has the potential to be large and destructive in its externalized form, while, when internalized or suppressed, it can be self-destructive, isolating and immobilizing. I have entered this research with a belief that for women, anger is more often internalized or suppressed than externalized, for the social, political and cultural forces which have served to oppress, dominate and devalue the voice and experience of women in our patriarchal, male dominated society, have notably served the same function in regards to women's anger. It is with an acknowledgement of this female oppression in our society, still alive, though, with hope, changing, that I have engaged in this exploration of the meanings women attach to their subjective experiences of anger.

Within the feminist therapeutic community there has been a growing recognition that anger lies at the root of many female psychological symptoms, including depression, eating disorders and addictions (Chaplin, 1988; Greenspan, 1993; Jack, 1991). Feminist therapy argues that, though women have historically adopted a false consciousness imposed by the dominant structures of male patriarchy, within which anger is considered an unacceptable emotion, women are indeed angry - angry at female oppression and the many ways which this oppression is manifested in our day to day lives and which has had

no socially acceptable outlet (Greenspan, 1993; Jack, 1991). Feminist writers have argued that "the creative power of anger is shaped by owning this great strength of women and others who have struggled for the full gift of life against structures of oppression" (Harrison, 1985, p. 7). Feminist theory supports a therapy which assists women to move beyond the acknowledgement of anger as an emotion to be recognized and managed, as so many of the current approaches to anger management work admonish, to supporting and validating women in a process of allowing anger to emerge and be voiced in a way which can serve to empower them and alleviate their own personal and social oppression (Greenspan, 1993; Lerner, 1989; Estes, 1992).

This research will also embrace phenomenology as a theoretical framework for exploring, understanding and describing anger in women's lives. Anger has been sometimes referred to as the dark or shadow side of our consciousness, a negative emotional state which carries with it a range of underlying emotions, images, cognitions and behaviors, which are typically unpleasant and undesirable. Yet, it can be argued that feeling, even in its darkest sense, is the basic bodily ingredient that mediates our connectedness to the world. If feeling is cut off, which may be true for those women who have been denied their feelings of anger, "our power to image and act into it (the world) is impaired. Failure to live deep in 'our bodies, ourselves' destroys the possibility of moral relations between us" (Harrison, 1985, p. 13).

Phenomenology has served to inform and shape the development of more recent, growth-oriented therapies such as gestalt and psychosynthesis. These therapies propose that increased self-awareness and change necessitates the deeper exploration of one's

emotional barriers to self-actualization. Simkin and Yontef describe phenomenology as,

a discipline that helps people to stand aside from their usual way of thinking so that they can tell the difference between what is actually being perceived and felt in the current situation and what is residue from the past (Simkin and Yontef, 1989, p. 323).

Therapies which derive from phenomenological thought aim to promote a deeper emotional awareness, using experiential exercises and dialogue, and provide rich opportunity for clients to move into more authentic ways of being in the world. Phenomenology proposes that we examine and experience ourselves at deeper levels of consciousness, in order to experience our own truth, and in so doing, make meaningful changes in our lives. Through this research, I have engaged in such an exploration of the phenomenology of anger, with the intent of showing more insight into the subjective experience of anger itself. It is anticipated that this insight can contribute to a better understanding of ways in which to respond to and support all people, not only women, in embracing their anger and finding healthy and safe ways to allow its expression, so that healing and prevention of its often devastating effects, can be achieved.

Using anger as a pathway for women in becoming agents of our own experience is a further concept to be explored through this research. Patti Lather, in Getting Smart, expands upon the notion of agency in her discussion of feminist research. She proposes that, for women and other marginalized groups, agency necessitates an understanding of the hegemony of oppressive forces in our culture, which serve to silence and control individual and collective choices. She proposes that acting on one's own truth requires that we search for ways to generate knowledge that turn critical thought into emancipatory

action, and that through agency, we "produce rather than reflect meanings" (Lather, 1991, p. 37), acting from the knowledge produced. However, we must recognize the interplay of agency, structure and context, and the structural constraints which serve as barriers to human agency. Lather urges us, as researchers, to continue to work toward understanding our own subjectivity, hearing our own voice, and seeing "our will to power in our work as clearly as we see our will to truth" (Lather, 1991, p. 119), seeking ways to voice our way into action. This research will examine the role of anger in women's process of finding this voice and in assisting women to become agents of our own personal and social experience.

Drawing from both qualitative and critical research paradigms, I have employed a feminist methodology ³ to examine the meaning of anger in women's lives, contextualized within our own subjective experience. Questions explored during the course of this inquiry included, what women are angry about, how women experience and express anger, how these experiences and modes of expression impact on women's lives, what women's learned experiences of anger are, how these have shaped our perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about anger, and, most importantly, can anger be a transformative force in women's lives? The goal of this research has therefore been twofold - first, to gain a deeper understanding of women's anger and how it is manifested in our lives, and second, to become more informed as to what women need in order to constructively use anger in the process of our own personal growth and development. The research will demonstrate that women, through a process of personal reflection, sharing and interpretation, can gain a recognition of anger as a natural response to conditions and

experiences in our lives which, when embraced and utilized in constructive ways, can serve to empower women to make positive changes in our lives and the social conditions which contribute to gender inequality and oppression.

It has been my intent, in conducting this research, that I and the other women involved, would gain more insight into and understanding of our own issues of anger and its meaning in our lives, while expanding upon the existing theory in relation to women's anger. It has been recognized that "theory is always informed, illustrated and challenged by practice...and likewise, a good practice must be informed and grounded in careful and systematic theoretical reflection" (Carpenter, 1995, p. 4). It is intended that the counselling and therapeutic community will benefit from the knowledge and theory generated through this research and thus be even more informed in our work of supporting women to use anger as part of their healing process.

DEFINITIONS

Recognizing that anger, as an emotion, is difficult to define, due to its often value-laden and variable nature, this research has sought to illustrate and illuminate rather than to define anger. It has thus become a search for the different possibilities for making meaning of the basic human life experience of anger. Anger is often accompanied by a whole range of other emotions, such as fear, grief, shame, guilt and helplessness, and is accompanied by diverse physiological, cognitive and behavioral responses. Though attempts have been made through empirical research methods to define anger through

measures of these responses, the contextual meanings are often lost in the controlled settings of empirical studies ⁴. For the purposes of this study, anger has been examined, not through a measurable definition, but through a qualitative, interpretive methodology. This approach seeks definition through the identification and meanings which the participants attach to anger and our subjective experiences of anger, and by the way women experience the impact of our own anger, and that of others, on our lives.

Within this study, the causes of anger will be referred to as the personal, social, political, cultural and economic conditions, at both the micro and macro levels of our lives, that contribute to women's anger, as seen through the eyes of our personal experience. Anger expression will be referred to as the way in which women deal with anger, whether it be overtly or covertly. The impact of anger will be examined as it relates to how anger affects the various aspects of women's lives, whether it be in the areas of physical and mental health, relationships, self-concept, spirituality, perceived choices or adopted roles. Transformation or healing will be illustrated through the process of increased awareness and change that participants have experienced as a result of engaging in this research experience.

PERSONAL AGENCY

Research which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical (research) work. Our own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail (Lather, 1991, p. 80).

As a woman engaging in research such as this, which is both critical and interpretive, my own subjective experience cannot help but be present within the context of this inquiry and its interpretation. Thus I see the importance of stating up front, my own theoretical leanings and my own life experiences which have motivated me to engage in this research. My own voice has already been evident in the conceptual framework of this study. As stated, I have a belief that women's anger is related to the conditions of social and cultural oppression that exist for women as a result of dominant, patriarchal social structures in our society, and that women's anger has typically been internalized and suppressed. I believe that women's anger, acknowledged, accepted and allowed the life, voice and power it has, can be utilized as a positive force for personal and social change. Further, expanding upon this theory, I embrace those therapeutic strategies, and subsequently research methodologies, which serve to promote a deeper self-awareness in regards to emotional realities, as integral to the process of healing and self-actualization.

It has been the reflection on my own experience with anger in my life as a woman, and my professional experience in counselling women in abusive relationships, that have first and foremost prompted me to begin this inquiry into women's anger.

Working as a counsellor with women recovering from the effects of spousal abuse and sexual assault, I became increasingly aware of the intense anger and sometimes rage, which women carried as a result of their victimization, yet the resistance women experienced in acknowledging and allowing their anger to be voiced. Common themes in counselling these women included depression, fear of their anger, or shame and guilt at expression of their anger which, in some cases, would be accompanied by violent outbursts or abuse against children. In addition, I encountered women who were increasingly being referred through the Criminal Justice System for anger management counselling, due to charges of assault.

Reflection on these experiences in counselling women prompted a colleague and myself to develop a three-hour workshop, entitled "Women and Anger", which we facilitated at an annual Yukon Women's Conference on Women's Healing in September, 1994, with over fifty women in attendance. During small and large group discussions, women explored several issues surrounding anger, including, what causes women's anger, how society has defined anger for women, how women dealt with anger presently in their lives, and why they felt it was important to talk about women's anger.

The themes evolving from these discussions were strikingly historical, and reflective of the cultural and social context in which we, as women, experience oppression. Stories of abuse, violence, unequal and unfair treatment, and feeling silenced were the most common responses. Many women shared earlier experiences of fear associated with anger they had observed in others, perceived as more powerful, or clear messages that, as women, outward expression of anger was unacceptable and therefore

not permitted. Exploring how they dealt with anger presently in their lives, many identified suppression and denial, avoidance of conflict, moodiness and depression, consistent feelings of resentment and negativity, or misdirecting anger toward their children, spouses, friends or impartial others. Several women identified using substances and food to keep their anger "down".

These experiences have suggested to me that it is not uncommon for women's anger to run very deep and to accumulate over years with abuse and oppression and the consequences of personal and societal messages which translate into fear and shame associated with anger. As a result, I have come to believe that treatment for issues of women's anger must go far beyond the traditional cognitive-behavioral approaches to anger management typically used to address issues of anger (Deffenbacher, et al, 1990), to an approach which recognizes the depth of anger and the unique social and cultural realities which have served to shape women's experience of anger.

This heightened awareness of the special reality of women's anger further prompted me to reflect on my own life and the role anger has played in my own ongoing healing and growth process. I became aware of the relationship between my own earlier struggles with food, alcohol, drug and nicotine addictions, bouts of depression, self-contempt, and relationship problems, and the role played by the anger I had accumulated within me as a result of my experiences with loss and grief, abuse, frequent denial of my own needs, and the devaluing of my own voice.

Having been raised in the 50's and 60's in a conservative, middle class, traditional Baptist family, I had little exposure to, or permission for, the expression of anger. As a

result, I learned to silence my own anger, rather than experience the shame I felt on the occasions when I allowed it to be openly expressed, in typically inappropriate and unacceptable ways. I also learned to fear anger in others and, consequently, I developed the classic avoidance and accommodation of others when faced with the reality of conflict in my life. As a young woman, I felt validated only as the "nice girl", the caregiver and the peacemaker, and only those closest to me caught even fleeting glimpses of my dark side, where my anger continued to fester.

In my early thirties, after becoming a mother, I subsequently began to address some of my addictive behaviours, at which time I began to recognize how little joy I felt in my life. I became cognizant of the frustration, resentments and bitterness I felt a good deal of the time. I began to recognize that my feelings were no longer being contained, I was no longer being told what a "nice" person I was. I became aware that something inside me, still as yet unnamed, which was very unpleasant and unacceptable, was sneaking out all over the place. My partner often described me as a nag (or other choice words!), and my daughter learned how to survive within the context of the emotional unpredictability of her mother. Embarrassedly, even the innocent bankteller or store clerk received the brunt of my misdirected anger. And though I had stopped using substances, I was prone to bouts of depression and continued with sometimes extreme self-abusive behaviors. For still, I had not named my anger or its sources, nor had I learned how to effectively embrace its energy.

If not for a dear friend who, upon viewing the circumstances of my life at that time, said to me very directly and compassionately, "I can see that you are really angry

and I believe you have a right to be angry", I might still be engaged in the struggle of coping with life through this mask of undetected anger. But in the safety of women's groups, the therapist's office, and trusting friends, I began to open up to my anger and to understand its many layers and sources, rooted in the suppression of my own voice and needs within a social structure where, frequently, I felt unsupported or invalidated for my values and choices, often described by others as untraditional. I began to feel less afraid and ashamed of my anger as I began to give it voice, to feel it alive and strong in my body, to cry about it, to write about it and, eventually, to fight back with it.

Through the support and validation I received from other women in my life, I was able to recognize more and more clearly that my anger, when given healthy expression, could support me and empower me to remove myself from the oppression I was then experiencing in an abusive, alcoholic relationship. My anger gave me the power and strength I needed to fight my way through the social, economic and legal backlash I experienced in "getting free", and from the guilt and shame I held so closely in my role as victim. In essence, it was the power of my anger which got me in touch with my own voice, my own needs, and my own power to shape the course of my life and become agent of my own experience. This has motivated me to further pursue my personal, academic and professional development and to engage in social activities aimed at heightening awareness of gender inequality and female oppression, while seeking ways to actively promote more equality and empowerment of women in our society.

These experiences, then, have shaped the direction of this inquiry into women's anger and have served to provide the conceptual framework from which I began this

process, together with a small group of women, of engaging in a search for the meaning that anger has played, situated within the contextualized, subjective reality of women's lives. It is through their voices, interwoven with my own, in a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of experience, that I intend to illuminate anger in the lives of we, the participants in this research.

Throughout this thesis text, my own role as both participant and observer within the research process, will be reflected in my use of language which is, at times self-inclusive and self-reflective, as a participant, and at times observational, in my role as a researcher.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will cite several pieces of literature which have served to support and shape the direction of this research, including those drawn from feminist theory and feminist-oriented therapy as well as various psychological and social problems with which women's anger has been associated. Literature will also be presented in support of theories which propose that anger, when acknowledged and given voice by women, can become a powerful force for personal and social change. Literature offering more general discussions on anger, as well as empirical research on gender issues in regards to anger will also be presented.

Feminist theory has emerged out of the recognition that social structures based on the values inherent in male, patriarchal systems of domination, competitiveness, and suppression of women and other marginal groups, have served to influence those in positions of less power. This hegemony has created for women,

social practices ...(which) work to bifurcate our consciousness, and in so doing, prevent us from actually talking about or knowing the illusions, assumptions and learned values which organize our everyday experiences. These forms work to silence women in many social contexts (Brooks, 1992, p. 10).

Feminist theorists argue that the gender stereotyping evolving from this false consciousness has resulted in anger being defined differently for men and women.

Expressions of anger are not only encouraged in boys and men, but may have been glorified to pathological extremes...In contrast, women have been denied the forthright expression of even healthy,

realistic anger...To express anger - especially if one does so openly, directly or loudly - makes a woman unladylike, unfeminine, unmaternal and sexually unattractive (Tavris, 1982, p. 181) ⁵.

Harriet Goldhor Lerner, in her book, The Dance of Anger, proposes that, in women's ascribed roles as caretakers, nurturers, peacemakers and keepers of the family, little room exists for the outright expression of women's anger. She proposes that those women who do deviate from these norms are called "bitches", "manhaters" and "nags", particularly if that anger is expressed at social injustice and sexist discrimination (Lerner, 1985). Lerner also postulates that women have thus learned to either suppress their anger or, equally destructive, emote it in ways which are unproductive and alienating. Lerner further offers an insightful discussion on intrapsychic determinants which serve to prohibit women against expressing anger, citing women's fear of their own destructiveness, coupled with their fear of separation and aloneness, which is typically believed to accompany the expression of anger, as prohibiting women from expressing anger (Lerner, 1980).

Expansions on this theme have more closely examined the fears and resistances that exist for women in allowing their anger to surface (Bernandez-Bonesatti, 1978). In particular, it has been proposed that women's fear of separation from meaningful relationships, which are at the core of women's self-value and purpose, and frequently their source of status and economic support, contributes to women's denial of anger or, if expressed, to extreme feelings of guilt, self-contempt and decreased self-esteem, resulting in an increased sense of powerlessness.

Dana Crowley Jack, in her book, Silencing the Self: Women and Depression,

discusses the relationship between suppressed or denied anger and depression in women. She expands upon relational theory as it relates to female psychological development, proposing that the feminine view of self is defined through social experience and intimate connectedness to others. She poses that a woman's self-esteem is tied to the quality of her relationships with others. Jack argues that loss of self, compliance, and subsequent anger at the inequality in marriages, are key issues in relationships for women. She also postulates that any anger experienced, especially toward a loved one, is frequently accompanied by anxiety about the attachment (Jack, 1991). Citing a study by Gottman and Levenson (1986), on ways men and women communicate negative feelings within marriages, findings revealed that 78% of husbands use anger while 93% of wives use whining, sadness and fear to deal with negative emotions, and that anger expression by wives is perceived as a prediction of withdrawal by husbands. Findings also revealed that for women, sadness and fear led to deterioration in marital satisfaction, due to their inability to express negative feelings and resolve conflicts, and their restricted sense of self-expression. Jack proposes that, within the context of non-egalitarian marriages, women tend to experience a covert rebellion, hiding the conflict they experience, while the marriage appears harmonious on the surface. Within this covert rebellion, children become the objects of the woman's misdirected anger, due to the friction, lack of warmth and hostility she experiences in holding on to these negative emotions (Jack, 1991).

Irene Stiver, in her discussion on male and female dependency needs within relationships, again, uses a relational theory of female development to explain women's need for connectedness through relationships, leading women, in adult life, to become

more dependent on relationships. In this dependency, she proposes that women learn to develop more nurturance and sensitivity to other people's needs within relationships, especially the emotional needs of others. Stiver proposes that "women experience considerable underlying anger and despair as a consequence" (Stiver, 1984, p. 7), yet experience own their need to be taken care of emotionally as selfish. Subsequently, women don't easily identify with their own inner needs or pursue gratification of these and may stay in positions of weakness and dependence so that the relationship will survive (Stiver, 1984).

Women's anger tied to issues within the relationship is also recognized in the recent work by Bergmann and Surrey, on gender differences and their impact on male-female relationships.

At this time in our history, many women are feeling angry, despairing, and tired of taking care of men and of doing all the work in the relationship...we have seen over and over how the beginning point of dialogue is around women's anger. Women want to hear men's experience but often first need to feel men moving toward them, learning to connect empathically, listening and seeking to understand their experience, especially to understand the origins of their anger. Only after this happens (or even after a slight forward movement is felt) are women able to listen fully to men... (Bergman, S. & Surrey, J., 1992, p. 9).

That women seek to express their anger and be heard is a central theme in women being able to stay with the inevitable conflicts in relationships, and thus work toward mutuality and equality within their relationships.

Jean Baker-Miller discusses women's first steps in breaking out of patterns of subordination and the process toward becoming oneself.

Anger can be one of the first authentic reactions. While it is not pleasant in the traditional sense, it may give its own kind of pleasure because of its undeniable, hard reality. It can be a mobilizing and strengthening factor (Baker-Miller, 1986, p. 109).

Baker-Miller also proposes a new approach to conflict which women are currently acknowledging - one which recognizes the value in "waging a good fight", based upon mutuality and negotiation, or a win-win approach. She poses that women are seeking to change the typical avoidance strategies which they have traditionally adopted within the patriarchal, dominant value structures where conflict, based on a win-lose model, is often feared by women, for the loss and retaliation, or backlash which they fear will follow.

Much of the feminist literature recognizes the destructiveness of violence against women and the place that women's anger holds in relationships where violence occurs, as well as in the process of recovery for women who have been victimized by abuse and violence in their lives. Gillian Walker, in her 1996 workshop on "Disempowering Violence: Strategies for Intervening in Abusive Relationships", cites from her manuscript based on the Ackerman Model of Intervention⁶, that a woman who experiences violence within intimate relationships tends to tiptoe around her partner's rages while her needs become secondary. However, once her partner has made a commitment to becoming violence-free and her safety is more assured, a woman will begin to express the impact of the violence quite contemptuously due to her contained anger over time (Walker, 1996). Pence and Paymore, citing from their manual on the Deluth Model of Intervention⁷ in situations of domestic violence, discuss men's fear of women's anger and their retaliation in forms such as trivializing, ridiculing or violent backlash, when women do begin to express anger at the abuse they experience. Recognizing the power

imbalances that exist between men and women in abusive relationships, the authors state that,

"if women aren't considered important, then neither is their anger: if anger is powerful, then women shouldn't be angry, because women shouldn't be powerful. Women are to be subservient, but their anger implies that they have power, and it should therefore be stopped (Paymore & Pence, 1993, p. 63).

Fear of retaliation in the form of violence has also been cited in recent research done by the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (Women's Safety Project, 1993). And, in her feminist analysis of research on anger, Biaggio has cited empirical studies which support the theory that external conflict in the form of retaliation, aggressive responses and rejection, and internal conflict in the form of guilt and fear of separation, contribute to the restraint of women's direct expression of aggression (Biaggio, 1986).

Anger has been cited as one of the primary emotions experienced by women who have been sexually assaulted or where sexual boundaries have been violated. Yet the sexual assault victim is known to commonly suppress her anger at the time of the assault, or direct it inward, expressing instead, guilt, shame or depression, or directing it toward other people in her life (Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre, 1986; Burgess & Holstrom, 1974). In his discussion on sexual violation of women by men in designated positions of power, authority or trust, such as those held by clergy, therapists, doctors and professional mentors, Peter Rutter expands on this theory. Having conducted qualitative research whereby he interviewed women who have experienced sexual violation, his findings reveal that women possess, in their own voices, powerful

instruments of change, and that getting angry at victimization, though painful, can help to restore a sense of self and often helps women to fight back. Rutter argues that many women who have been sexual victims have learned early, through family and societal messages, that they are responsible for their sexual victimization and that,

recovering the right to be angry and to express it or not, in any way she wishes, helps a woman ensure that she will go back out into the world with a feeling of deserving to be treated respectfully and having her gifts honoured...

and, in her process of recovery,

as she punishes herself less, she is able to mobilize her anger more, which in turn makes her even less self-punitive. And even if she never takes external steps to redress the wrong done to her, the recovery of anger not only heals her self-hate, but expresses her growing conviction that she deserves better (Rutter, 1989, p. 189).

Expanding on why it is critical to women's self-expression and self-actualization, that we learn to embrace anger, Marion Greenspan, feminist therapist and writer, in her book, New Approaches to Women and Therapy, presents case studies which exemplify themes of female dependence on male relationships, fear of being alone, depression and internalized rage. She proposes that therapy with women should acknowledge both the personal and social roots of women's anger, helping women to surface this repressed anger and use it on their own behalf.

The ultimate goal of a woman-oriented therapy is to help the female patient overcome the ways in which she colludes with her own depression, and therefore to help her to come to a fuller awareness of her power, both as an individual and as a member of a community of women. To reach this goal, therapy is fundamentally involved in surfacing the repressed rage embodied in so many female symptoms (Greenspan, 1993, p. 37).

Greenspan goes on to say that once a woman can learn to name her anger and to explore it within the context of her oppression, the fear of its power and destructiveness, which many women associate with anger, can be replaced with a rightful ownership of anger and a search for ways to express it more effectively.

Validating and letting go of this crippling rage of the past is the necessary precursor to experiencing the genuine sense of freedom and power that comes from using our anger rather than having it use us (Greenspan, 1993, p. 310).

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Jungian analyst, storyteller, artist and writer, offers an insightful discussion on women's propensity to store anger for extended periods of time and the impact and challenges that denying anger can have on a woman's life. "First, she often has a problem with intrusion recognition; she is slow to notice territory violations and does not register her own anger until it is upon her" (Estes, 1995, p. 366). Estes argues that women develop patterns of denying anger in our attempt to be peacemakers and, in our persona of "niceness" at all costs, we will endure pain and ignore dissensions.

Typically, such women do not act upon their rage at the right time, perhaps jumping the gun or having a delayed reaction weeks, months, or even years later, realizing what they should have, could have, would have said or done...too much trying to be nice and not enough acting from soul (Estes, 1995, p. 367).

Estes encourages women to seek connection with their wildish nature, the instinctual, intuitive soulful inner self, which, when understood, "animates and informs a woman's deepest life, (and) then we can begin to develop in ways we never thought possible" (Estes, 1995, p. 11). She stresses the importance of naming and describing our most deeply hurt parts, and offers creative and insightful stories and metaphor to assist

women in naming and exploring the origins of anger and rage.

Other theories have been presented which recognize anger inhibition in women to be related to the high incidence of depression and eating disorders experienced by the female population (Cline-Naffziger, 1974; Sharkin, 1993).

Daniel Goleman, though he does not propose gender differences, nor offer a feminist analysis in regards to anger, offers valuable insight into our emotional experience and the integral role that responding effectively to emotions plays in our personal and social development. In Emotional Intelligence, Goleman discusses the balance between the emotional and rational minds and their interconnectedness within the brain circuitry. In acknowledging the power of the emotional response to outweigh the rational mind during instances of strong emotional triggers, he says,

In the dance of feeling and thought, the emotional faculty guides our moment-to-moment decisions, working hand-in-hand with the rational mind, enabling - or disabling - thought itself. Likewise, the thinking brain plays an executive role in our emotions - except in those moments when emotions surge out of control and the emotional brain runs rampant (Goleman, 1995, P. 28).

Goleman stresses the importance of finding balance between emotions and rationale, through developing an understanding of our emotional selves and learning ways to use our emotions "intelligently". He proposes that emotional intelligence is developed through self-awareness and recognition of our feelings as they occur, through managing our emotions and developing emotional self-control, through developing empathy with others, and developing effective interpersonal skills (Goleman, 1995). His insights and prescriptions for developing emotional intelligence provide some helpful guidelines for

women in developing more effective ways of handling anger.

Carol Tavris, in her book, Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion, refutes the feminist analysis of gender differences in regards to anger, and argues that men and women have similar patterns of dealing with their anger. Within her discussion, however, she proposes that anger suppression is evident within both sexes in the presence of people of authority or power, citing fear of retaliation as a cause. However, if we accept the feminist analysis that women have been stereotyped into a position of less power in our society, there is consistency here with the feminist view that women are more likely to suppress and internalize or misdirect their anger. In response to Tavris, I do not wish to suggest through this research, that women have the lease on anger suppression, denial or misdirection, as I believe these patterns do exist for men as well. However, from a critical theory perspective, I contend that women's experience of anger must be considered within the social and cultural context of gender inequality and power imbalances and thus, a false consciousness exists for women around their comfort level with anger as an emotion.

Most of the literature which proposes gender differences in anger experience and expression has been theoretical in nature and is based upon clinical observations of people seeking counselling. The empirical research, on the other hand, has produced inconsistent findings on gender difference with regard to anger, with some studies showing women and men to exhibit similar levels and frequencies of anger expression. Others observe men to have more physical and verbal reactions to anger provoking situations, while women tend to cry more often and are more likely to show anger and aggression in

defense of loved ones (Sharkin, 1993; Biaggio, 1986). A review of experimental research on female and male aggression revealed that, when observed under conditions of justification for and permission to be angry, women act as aggressively as men (Frodi, et al, 1977).

Studies on anger and aggression amongst boys and girls of school age show boys becoming angry more often than girls and using more physical aggression, while girls use more indirect forms of aggression such as backbiting, avoiding and manipulation in the face of anger provoking situations (Huesmann, 1994).

The empirical research has typically sought to study anger as a controlled variable, defined through a variety of self-reporting inventories of cognitive, behavioral and physiological responses to anger. Anger research within the empirical paradigm is usually conducted within controlled laboratory settings using anger provocation stimuli and these response measures (Deffenbacher et al, 1990; Jacobsen et al, 1994; Sharkin, 1993; Biaggio, 1986). This methodology, in its inability to observe anger in its natural, contextualized setting, overlooks the psychological aspects associated with anger, or the subjective and variable measures one attaches to anger. Empirical studies have been critiqued in the feminist literature as ignoring the social, cultural, political and economic context of research participants (Biaggio, 1986).

It is this lack of research on anger within the qualitative paradigm, which seeks to understand anger from the subjective, contextualized experience of women, or within the critical paradigm, which seeks to understand the influence of power structures on women's experience of anger, which both my personal and professional experience has

supported, that has prompted me to conduct this particular study of women's anger, using a feminist methodology.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The feminist movement has well been recognized for the forum which it has provided for women in which to explore, reflect, voice and act upon their own subjective realities, housed within a social structure built on patriarchal values which have historically served to oppress women (Belenky, et al, 1986; Lather, 1991; Maguire, 1987). Feminist research has gained increasing recognition within discussions on research methodologies, in the search for ways to generate knowledge which give voice to women's own subjective experience and which promote a more critical consciousness regarding the influences of social structure on women's lives (Lather, 1991; Maguire, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). Feminist research has sought to facilitate change-enhancing, emancipatory action through the knowledge generated. Patti Lather defines feminist research within the human sciences as research which places "the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry", with the goal of "correct(ing) both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social positions" (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Lather proposes that, in doing feminist research, we draw from multiple research paradigms in an effort to "maximize the research process as a change-enhancing, reciprocally educative encounter" (Lather, 1991, p. 72).

This inquiry into women's anger is, in essence, a feminist approach to research, in its recognition of the impact of social structure on women's experience of anger. It has sought to provide a forum for women in which to explore and seek a deeper understanding of their anger within the context of their own subjective experience, as a way to generate insights which can add to the already existing body of knowledge on this subject. It has required the use of a methodology which is both interactive and contextualized, involving joint participation between researcher and researched, in the exploration and interpretation of this research issue. It has necessitated the creation of a space where those involved would have the opportunity to engage in a deeper personal inquiry and to speak and act on their own behalf. Hence, it has drawn from both the critical and the interpretive paradigms of research.

Participatory Research

Critical research is defined by the recognition and acknowledgement of those underlying structures which shape our social world in terms of power and dominance. It involves returning oppressed people to power through participation in knowledge creation and utilization of that knowledge to realize their capacity to grow, change and create (Maguire, 1987). This inquiry into the meaning of anger in women's lives, as such, is a form of participatory research within the critical paradigm, where the subjects of inquiry become participants in the research process, rather than objects or targets of

research. Through the self-understanding, self-determination and recognition of false consciousness generated, it was intended that participants in this research would become empowered to understand and change their situations, becoming more open to their own anger as a healing force in their lives. "Participatory research aims to develop critical consciousness, improve lives and transform societal structures and relationships" (Maguire, 1987, p. 3). Park describes participatory research as a reflection-action-reflection cycle. "As action emerges from critical knowledge, so does knowledge issue from action. Critical consciousness is raised not by analyzing the problematic situation alone, but by engaging in actions in order to transform the situation" (Park, 1993, p. 8).

Research of this nature necessitates an environment of trust, openness and support, whereby self-reflection can occur and the theoretical formulations forthcoming can be tested in dialogue between participants. It was intended that this process would contribute to the raising of consciousness regarding anger, thus enabling participants to view themselves differently, and for both participants and readers to become more aware of the transformative possibilities inherent in anger.

Maguire argues that participatory research is built upon a critique of positivism. Empirical research within the positivist paradigm assumes that there is a social world which exists independent of people's subjective awareness or experience of it, whereby the subjects become objects of study (Maguire, 1987). Empirical research postulates that knowledge generated from observed, objectified methods of seeing, measuring and recording can be seen as truth. It neglects the crucial aspects of life that cannot easily be measured, such as the value-laden and subjective experience of emotions such as anger,

and the contextual experiences which contribute to emotional responses and expressions.

Recognizing that part of the process of participatory research is personal inquiry (Maguire, 1987; Lather, 1991), this research has sought to merge the critical paradigm of research with the qualitative paradigm, with particular emphasis on the phenomenological approach to research. Through the merging of these two paradigms, my intent in developing a methodology for this research, was to find a place to stand from which to view the subjective realities of those involved, each in the full uniqueness of what it means to experience anger in the context of their own unique lifeworld experience, while at the same time acknowledging the power, domination and oppression that exists for women.

Phenomenological Research

Belenky et al, in Women's Ways of Knowing, make the distinction between ontological truth for women which comes from positions of silence and received knowledge and that which is generated from a subjective epistemology. They argue that truth is a personal, subjective and private matter, based on intuitive and experiential epistemologies as opposed to more scientific, imposed theories which are outside of women's own experience and feeling. They argue that,

every person has her own unique body of knowledge that's been given to them through their life's experience" and that "for women at the positions of silence and received knowledge, there is absolute truth that is true for everyone; at the position of subjective

knowing, truth is absolute only for the individual... The subjectivist discovers that each person's life experience gives a different view of reality from that of any other person... and that truth should not be imposed by another person (Belenky, et al, 1986, p. 69-70).

Within a subjective epistemology, the researcher must adopt a methodology which will "allow a search for different possibilities of making sense of human life, for other ways of knowing which do justice to the complexity, tenuity, and indeterminacy of most human experience" (Lather, 1991, p. 52).

These views are consistent with the phenomenological approach to research, which aims to describe the lifeworld of the researched and the associated states of consciousness, without making assumptions about the influence of social structures on everyday experience. Phenomenology does not attempt to study people in the context of groups, nor does it attempt to draw cause and effect relationships or conclusions. "What phenomenology does attempt to do is describe what is, and to search for the meanings inherent in what is, as lived in the everyday existence or lifeworld of those involved in the research, with the aim of becoming more fully who we are" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 11&12).

Dana Jack, in her longitudinal study of women's depression, utilizing a methodology based upon phenomenology, describes research of this nature as "a phenomenological, descriptive approach that assumes that women are reliable witnesses of their own psychological experience" (Jack, 1991, p. 23), stating further that,

to know the response a woman has to her context, we need to know the meaning she makes of that context - how she interprets her actions and evaluates herself and her worth within her culture and her relationships. Listening to (women's) reflections about

themselves, paying attention to their words and recurring themes, can help us to restore their experience from invisibility, to bring it out from behind the screen of traditional interpretations (Jack, 1991, p. 25).

Within the phenomenological approach to research, methods are contrived to access material which conveys the deeper, subjective meanings within the lifeworld of the participants, as it is immediately experienced within consciousness. It involves uncovering and describing the essence and meanings of one's experience as it occurs within the structures of the lifeworld of those being studied. Phenomenological research requires an understanding that the researcher (or reader) can never completely come to know the full meaning of this lived experience. The descriptions and interpretations can only serve to deepen our understanding of what an experience is like for another, and will always be filtered through a reflective lens of our own knowledge and experience. The researcher must, however, strive to feel and communicate these meanings as experienced in the pre-reflective moment, before they become objectified (Van Manen, 1990).

The position of the researcher, situated within the research itself, becomes a key element within phenomenological research. As researcher, my task was "to construct possible interpretations of the nature of a certain human experience" (Jack, 1991, p. 41), in this case, the nature of anger in the lived world experience of women. Thus, my task became one of deconstruction and critical analysis of my own prior conceptions of women and their experience of anger, of playing against what felt familiar to me, derived from my own personal experience and as presented in my introductory conceptual framework.

Inquiry itself is the behavior of the questioner. Interpretive research enters the hermeneutic circle by placing the researcher and the subject in the centre of the research process. Each circle

overlaps to the degree that the researcher is able to live his or her way into the subject's personal experience and self-stories. The best that can be hoped for is understanding (Denzin, 1989, p. 53).

Utilizing the methods of open-ended, semi-structured interviewing, as well as a group process whereby I became a participant, along with the women involved in this study, I saw an opportunity to foster dialogue in an environment of collaboration and reciprocity, and for sharing and deeper probing in a reciprocally educative manner. This, then, became the process of generating further knowledge and insight into the meaning and experience of anger in the lives of the women participating.

Language also becomes a key element in the interpretation and description process. As researchers, "we must be attuned to the meanings within the language, to what the words, terms and phrases mean. We need to listen for the patterns and meanings behind even the negatively valued words and then translate them into terms that more accurately reflect the experiences women are trying to convey" (Jack, 1991, p. 27). Employing methods of data collection and analysis which honoured the unique voice and language of the research participants and myself as researcher, became a critical component of this research process.

Methods, therefore, were contrived to promote a process of personal reflection and group sharing which facilitated an openness and self-reflective sharing amongst participants in an reflection-action-reflection cycle. They included dialoguing through personal interviews, group dialogue, self-disclosure on the part of the researcher and written personal reflections by all of the participants. Exercises within the group experience were aimed at supporting a process of women's deeper exploration, self-

awareness, and in body experience of anger, in the context of group sharing, again, with written personal reflections through journaling. An analysis of emerging data, housed within a spirit of collaboration, reciprocity and mutual negotiation of meanings, was integral to this process.

Van Manen describes phenomenological research as a poeticizing experience. He encourages, in our writing, the use of language which "speaks the world rather than abstractly speaking of it" (Van Manen, 1990. p. 13). The writing of my own experience as well as those of the other participants, in a way which describes the feelings, moods, cognitions and context, was therefore sought. Including the verbatim voice of the subject can further help to promote the unique voice and understanding of meanings women attach to anger, being sought through this research. "An authentic speaker must be a true listener, able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing, able to listen to the way the things of the world speak to us" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 111).

Lather, in her discussion of feminist research, describes a process of dialectical theory building whereby participants negotiate meanings of the research, as opposed to theory imposed. She proposes that as researchers, we must look at the relationship of theory and data and how theory *a priori* shapes the data collected and interpretations made. She proposes that we must "think constantly against ourselves as we struggle toward ways of knowing which can move us beyond ourselves" (Lather, 1991, p. 83), developing a self-critical attitude regarding how our preconceptions are influencing and shaping the research and allowing the logic of the data to guide the theory. Allowing the

data to speak for itself in this manner requires what she describes as a "systematized reflexivity" (Lather, 1991, p. 67). The researcher must show how one's own perspectives are altered by the logic of the data. Within this process, both the researcher and the researched must engage in a process of self-reflection and construction of theory. The process of data analysis itself can begin with a scheme of coding and categorizing, merging those themes which emerge. However, in order to achieve a reciprocity and a negotiated meaning within the data analysis and theory development, it became necessary to analyze the data collaboratively. This involved continuously going back to the participants with results of the data analysis and refining these in light of their reactions. In addition, as researcher, I needed to be open to other important concepts which emerged and to which I may not have been initially sensitive, and to be aware that these might indeed modify my initial conceptual framework.

The validity of a study such as this is linked to the understanding that, while truths in the spirit of the positivist, scientific paradigm may not necessarily evolve, what can occur through an interpretive and critical inquiry, is a process of good dialogue and an opening of the windows to the minds of those involved, including myself as researcher, the research participants, and the readers of this thesis.

Dialogue reaches beyond conversation, descriptions of interactions, and social role expectations to the deep inside of relationships. It refers to the human capacity to recognize others as unique and to respond to them as independent and existing with their own interests, purposes and goals: dialogue refers to the encounter that occurs when one person meets another in the sphere of...the in between. Reciprocity and mutuality are characteristic of this sphere (Grunebaum, 1990, p. 196).

Through this process of personal reflection, group sharing and deeper inner exploration, we the research participants, were able to engage in a deconstruction of preconceived ways of defining anger in our lives and reconstructing for ourselves, the meaning of anger, evolving from the truth of our own experience.

We must also remember that research of this kind serves to illustrate and illuminate rather than to define what is. The purpose is to describe what is, rather than to search for solutions or conclusions. It is a search for the different possibilities of making sense of human life. Recognizing that anger is value-laden and not value-free, it cannot be determined via the notion of truth or fact. It is with these principles in mind that I proceeded through the research process, employing research methods and procedures which would foster this individual and collective exploration, in search of meanings which women who were part of the research, make of our experience of anger.

METHODS and PROCEDURES

Having highlighted key points and assumptions underlying both participatory and phenomenological approaches to research, this section will present an overview of the methods and procedures used to conduct this research into the meaning of women's anger, as understood within the context of our own lives. A more detailed account of the research process, incorporating the data analysis and findings in support of the thesis will constitute the following chapter.

THE SAMPLE

I chose to use a small sample of six women, believing that this number would effectively constitute an interactive process while still allowing for a rich and contextualized subjective inquiry. In choosing a sample, I sought women who were aware of anger issues currently impacting on their lives and were preferably engaged in a process of healing or personal growth, either through therapy or involvement in other personal growth and development initiatives. The reason for this was twofold. First, I felt that women involved in a healing process would be more likely to have some awareness of their anger issues and how they were impacting on their lives; and, second, though the research was designed to generate knowledge on the subject of women's anger, I was

cognizant of the fact that involvement in the research was likely to have therapeutic impact on women as they engaged in a deeper exploration of their anger. I therefore felt it necessary, as a criteria for participation, that they have supports available to them outside the research process itself. Hence, I sought to secure a sample through sending letters to a variety of counselling and therapeutic resources, explaining the project, and inviting referrals for screening (see Appendix A).

Women who responded with interest in participating in the research were first pre-screened through a telephone conversation to determine whether they identified with anger as an issue currently in their lives, whether supports were available to them, and whether they were able to commit to the process and the timeframes of the project. This initial contact also provided me with an opportunity to explain the research project fully and to discuss issues of confidentiality. As well, it helped to gain involvement and to build rapport with each of the participants prior to engaging in the more personal content of the one-one interview, which was the next stage of the research process. With two of the participants, the pre-screening occurred over a series of phone conversations and personal contacts, so that they could more thoroughly examine the process they were committing to and explore questions, concerns and issues arising for them as they considered making the commitment.

Of the six women selected to participate, four identified strongly that their feelings of anger were playing an active part in their current day-to-day lives. These women welcomed the opportunity to explore their anger in more depth in anticipation of gaining more understanding of why this was so and how they could more effectively deal with

it. One of the women selected identified that, though she did not see her anger as problematic in her life currently, she was aware of the significant role that dealing with her anger had played in her own ongoing process of healing from childhood abuse, and therefore felt that she could both contribute some valuable insights to the research, as well as benefit from a deeper exploration of where anger was situated in her own life presently. Another woman selected, again, did not identify that her anger was impacting currently on her life; however, she expressed an awareness of its presence and her resistance to acknowledging it in an effort to maintain balance in her life, yet a desire to explore it more deeply as a way of gaining more self-awareness and understanding. All of the women selected had issues of childhood abuse with which they identified and three of the women had experienced abuse in their adult relationships. Four of the women were currently engaged in therapy, which they believed would provide them with support, if necessary, during the research process, while two were no longer seeing a therapist but had ongoing support available to them through their involvement in self-help support groups.

I was initially seeking a sample which would be representative of a somewhat diverse population, particularly with regard to age, marital status and family constellation, socioeconomic background and, if possible, cultural diversity. However, those women who eventually responded to the call for participation and who screened positively during the initial telephone contact, were basically representative of the 35-45 age range, were of middle class, Caucasian, and native Nova Scotian. Of the six women chosen for participation, two were married, one with two small-aged children and one with a pre-

adolescent child. Two were separated or divorced but currently living in common-law relationships, one with two grown children and the other with a blended family of three children ranging in age from 2 years to 14 years. One woman was divorced and living as a single parent of two adolescent boys and another had been single for most of her adult life, though was currently embarking on a relatively new commonlaw relationship. Five of the women were employed, while one was unemployed due to a permanent disability.

Though these six women were initially interviewed, only five were able to participate in the entire process of the research. One woman, regrettably, was unable to attend the weekend retreat because of unexpected work commitments and, due to the process nature of the research, findings from her interview were not included in the analysis of data.

THE INTERVIEWS

The methods of data collection included a one-one, semi-structured, open-ended interview which was taped and transcribed, as well as written journal reflections by participants, myself as researcher and facilitator, and another therapist who served as co-facilitator. These journals were kept during and after a weekend retreat, whereby women engaged in a group process of deeper exploration of their anger issues. The final phase of data collection came through verbatim notes taken from a post-retreat meeting with participants approximately one month after the retreat, where we again explored our

perceptions on the subject of women's anger, using the initial interview questions as a discussion guide. Though this latter discussion was originally planned to take place on the final day of the weekend retreat, due to both time constraints and a general feeling amongst participants that we would require some time to process the experience, we agreed to have this meeting within a week or two following the retreat. However, due to the illness of two of the participants, this meeting did not occur until one month after the retreat.

Women selected and agreeing to participate in the research were then invited to engage in a one-one interview with myself as researcher. The purpose of this interview was two-fold. First and foremost, the interview served as a primary source of data collection and provided an invitation for women to talk about their own experiences of anger from the perspective of their own subjective life situations. Though I developed a series of questions based on my own experiences and understanding of anger to serve as a guide for the interview (see Appendix B), I was interested in promoting dialogue with each of the women which honoured the unique voice and experience of each. I therefore recognized the importance of facilitating an interview which fostered interactive dialogue, and not be confined solely to these questions, but rather allowed each participant to explore areas in relation to the topic of anger which they deemed as important. The guide questions were designed to explore various aspects of anger within the context of the lives of each of the participants and included areas such as what had prompted each woman to want to participate in research into the meaning of anger in women's lives, what their current experience of anger in their lives was like, how they currently dealt with anger,

what they saw as being the causes of their anger, what their experiences of anger earlier in their lives were, what they saw as the impact of anger on various aspects of their lives, and what they felt they needed in order to deal effectively with this emotion as a real and active part of their lives and their healing and growth process.

A pilot interview was conducted prior to the actual research interviews, to provide an opportunity to apply the questions I had developed and to examine my interview style within the open-ended, semi-structured interview format chosen. The pilot interview proved valuable in assessing the appropriateness of the guide questions in eliciting a discussion on various aspects of anger in women's lives, and in heightening my awareness of the deep and personal content of the discussion and the need to be sensitive to the sometimes highly-charged emotional experience which the questions prompted. A question was added to the original guide questions, exploring where the turning point was for each of the participants, in beginning a process of opening up to their anger, as each had identified in the pre-screening process that their interest in working with their anger was a relatively recent phenomena in their lives.

I saw as my primary role within the interview process, to establish an environment of trust, respect and safety whereby women could be supported to explore this often difficult issue in their lives. Using my skills as a counsellor, I believe, was integral to establishing rapport and building trust. Through use of the facilitative counselling skills of empathy and respect, gentle probing and clarifying, some self-disclosure, genuiness and immediacy, a deeper exploration of the behaviors, cognitions and underlying emotions associated with their experience of anger was encouraged. The interview

session, as well, provided an opportunity for me to clarify responses and explore meanings in more depth, thus ensuring more accurate interpretation in the data analysis stage of the project. In this way, I sought a more collaborative approach to seeking a mutual understanding of the meanings women attached to their anger.

The second purpose of the interview was to provide an opportunity to explore with potential participants, what particular needs they may have in engaging in a group process with other women, as a way of more deeply exploring anger in their own lives. The latter part of the interview, therefore, focused on issues of safety, environmental supports, previous experience with groups, and logistical needs in participating in such a project. Having facilitated support groups for women experiencing spousal abuse, I have learned that the pre-group interview provides an opportunity for women to establish a more comfortable rapport with myself as a facilitator, as well as with the notion of participating in a group process with other women. It also provided me with insight in regards to their ability to participate in a group such as this, where strong and sometimes highly charged emotional content is likely to be exposed.

Criteria for non-participation in the group included such issues as strong discomfort with participating in groups, unavailability of either personal or professional supports if needed upon completion of the weekend retreat, or unwillingness to engage in or share with myself as researcher and subsequently readers, non-identifying personal reflective journal writing. An indication of behaviors which may have the potential to harm self or others, as a way of responding to potentially painful emotional self-awareness, was also considered. I anticipated that these restraints would become fairly

obvious during the interview itself and, fortunately, each of the women interviewed were screened as appropriate for participation in the weekend retreat, as assessed through the identified criteria. The retreat screening portion of the interview further provided me with valuable insight into the particular needs that women had in regards to participation in the weekend retreat, and helped with the planning of the retreat. Participation agreements, outlining the nature of involvement, timeframes and responsibilities, and parameters of confidentiality were offered for signature at commencement of the interview (see Appendix C).

The interviews were held over a period of three weeks, the last of which occurred one week prior to the weekend retreat. Each of the interviews, approximately an hour and a half in duration, were held in a comfortable, private residence, without interruption. The interview space provided an informal atmosphere where we were able to engage in dialogue over coffee with a sense of relaxation and privacy. As I had had previous contact with each participant and had thoroughly described the research project, most of the participants had a clear understanding of the purpose of the interview and had begun to reflect on their own experience and awareness of anger in their lives, and rapport was therefore easily established. The visible presence of the tape recorder did initially pose a barrier for two of the participants, to their level of comfort and openness, and on one occasion, I was asked to turn the tape recorder off during a highly-charged emotional moment. However, each of the women understood the necessity of the tape recorder for data collection and were able to release their preoccupation with it within the first half hour of the interview.

Using a semi-structured, open-ended interview format afforded each of the participants an opportunity to explore more fully, those areas which they identified as significant in their individual experience and process of anger. It is important to note here that for each woman, the focus of the interview was very different and set the stage for the process which each engaged in during the weekend retreat. Some of the women were very connected to how anger was currently impacting on their lives, while others were more focused on historical events and the relationship of these to the anger they had experienced or were presently experiencing in their lives. Others were more focused on what they could do in the present to gain a sense of control over their anger. Common themes did, however, emerge in the analysis of the data, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter on findings, following a discussion of the individual process of anger exploration and awareness each woman engaged in during the course of the research.

As the research interviewer, I was presented with the challenge throughout the interview process, of creating a balance between the areas of deeper exploration in which each of the participants wished to engage, and the need to explore the various aspects of anger within the individual context of each of the lives of the participants, coupled with the task of screening for the participation in the weekend retreat. I had a sense of needing to somewhat contain the discussion, in the interest of time, and found that my use of empathy, respect for where each woman was at in her process of anger, and clarifying questions, as well as grounding techniques to bring the focus back periodically, to the purpose of the interview, helpful. The interview also presented the challenge of keeping

the session within the boundaries of an interview as opposed to a counselling session, as some of the participants began to see issues in their lives in relation to their anger in a clearer light, with a desire to reach some kind of resolution or change in the way anger was being experienced in their lives. Again, my reference back to the interview questions from time to time, as well as reference to the process which the upcoming weekend retreat experience promised, helped to defer dealing with those issues arising more therapeutically during this phase of the project.

As noted, the pre-group screening questions allowed for a discussion to occur regarding what particular needs each of the participants might have in participating in a group process with other women. Questions such as, what would you need in order to feel safe to explore your anger in depth, what do you know works for you within the context of groups, what special needs might you have that we should be aware of in planning for the retreat, and what is the strongest experience you have had of your own anger, helped each of the women and myself, to identify any areas of discomfort which might require consideration in the planning and facilitation of the retreat. Each of the women identified a need for safety, acceptance and respect as paramount. One woman identified a need to be supported to stay with her anger if it should arise, as she had had a previous group experience where she had felt that she was not given an opportunity to explore her anger in any depth and was asked to, once again, contain and suppress it. Another woman identified a need to know that the facilitators were managing the safety within the group so that any risk to herself or others could be avoided. Another shared that she needed to know that each of the participants were stable enough that there would

be no risk of violence, either physically or verbally, associated with expressions of anger. Another identified strongly that she needed to feel validated and accepted for where she was at presently in her process of dealing with her anger, and to be given permission to hold onto it for as long as she needed.

During this phase of the interview, I also expounded on the proposed strategies of art therapy, guided imagery and gestalt which would be utilized during the weekend to engage us in an in-depth exploration of our anger. Though only some of the participants had engaged previously in art therapy, all expressed anticipation at entering into a process of image-making and making meaning of their images, which is the process of art therapy. Most had been engaged in imagery work before and felt comfortable with this technique, as well as the proposed gestalt techniques such as the empty chair, psychodrama, role playing, and the more physical methods of bringing their anger more to life, such as throwing knotted towels, tug of war, stomping feet, body sculpting and movement. During this phase of the interview I also discussed the format for the group, and the proposed use of ritual of a spiritual nature, such as the use of the First Nations Talking Circle and Smudging Ceremony, to create a safe and special or sacred place for the work we were engaging in. Each of the participants agreed to the inclusion of ritual of a spiritual nature, believing that spirituality was an important component of one's growing process.

During the subsequent months following the retreat, transcripts were made of each of the taped interviews, and were distributed to participants for review and feedback regarding areas on which they wished to expand, change or omit. However, only minor

changes were offered which in no way affected the content of the interview data.

GROUP PROCESS

The group forum provides a valuable way to engage in data collection in an inquiry such as this, which is both interpretive and critical in nature. The group provides for an environment of reciprocity or mutual negotiation of meaning and dialectical theory-building. Combined with the process of personal reflection initiated in the interviews, the group sharing and further personal reflection provided by the group, further perpetuated the cycle of reflection-action-reflection which Park proposes as part of the process of participatory inquiry (Park, 1993). As part of the intent of this research was to help participants explore, discover and understand their anger more fully, as well as exploring positive ways to experience and use their anger as a motivating force for change in their lives, groups can "provide tremendous potential for deeper probing and a reciprocally educative encounter" (Lather, 1991, p. 77). Groups can offer a sense of community where knowledge about anger is created. In an environment of trust, acceptance, reciprocity and validation, women can be supported to engage in a process whereby deconstruction and reconstruction of perceptions about anger can occur - its dimensions, its manifestations, its deeper emotional content, beliefs and attitudes about anger, its consequences in our lives, its voice and desire, and personal action plans to safely allow anger the life that it has. It should be noted here that the purpose of the group process

was to generate knowledge as opposed to engaging in a therapeutic process or evaluating a possible treatment program for women who were experiencing problems with anger in their lives. However, since the techniques employed included counselling strategies aimed at promoting deeper levels of emotional awareness and experience, the weekend did have therapeutic impact for each of the women, which will be discussed later in this chapter, as the individual process of each woman is discussed.

A weekend retreat was chosen as the format in which to engage with the participants in the facilitation of a collaborative approach to exploring more deeply, the meanings women attach to anger in their lives. The retreat format offers a process which has the potential to be much different from the more traditional weekly group sessions, in that participants have the opportunity to separate themselves from the day-to-day responsibilities and demands of their lives and to focus solely on themselves and the issues which prompted them to engage in the research process. As most of the women interviewed had identified issues associated with repression or suppression of their anger, the weekend could offer an opportunity to engage in a process of personal reflection and deeper exploration, on a continuous basis, in an environment which is both permissive and supportive. As the proposed strategies to be employed during the group process were chosen to engage participants in deeper self-exploration and awareness, the weekend retreat provided a forum which was more conducive to opening up to deeper parts of their anger without fear of this impacting, during the process, on other aspects of their lives. The weekend retreat also offered a marathon-like quality in its format of two continuous days without interruption, allowing for a more intimate contact between participants.

Though at times emotionally exhausting, it allowed for a breaking down of defenses, encouraging and supporting a deeper inner experience. ⁸ Though I was prepared to change this format if participants were unwilling or unable to commit to the proposed weekend, all of the women were willing and most saw the retreat as a welcomed opportunity to escape their daily responsibilities and focus solely upon themselves, each other and their anger.

Counselling Strategies

Several counselling strategies were employed during the weekend with the aim of promoting a personal and group experience which fostered increased self-awareness among the participants, of their own subjective realities, as they related to the emotion of anger. As stated in the introductory section of this thesis, strategies to be employed were borrowed mainly from the phenomenological school of thought, with a theoretical perspective based upon depth psychologies, which view healing and change as stemming from more awareness and experience of self. Therapies which derive from phenomenological thought aim to promote a deeper emotional awareness, using experiential exercises and dialogue, and provide rich opportunities for individuals to move into more authentic ways of being in the world.

Art therapy was chosen as a primary counselling strategy to be employed within this process as it provides the opportunity, through the making of images followed by

dialoguing with the image, to promote a close examination of the subjective meaning inherent in the visual image as portrayed by the image-maker. "Moving into the subjective quality of the art experience and encountering the richness of the visual phenomena created, underlies the tenets of a phenomenological approach to art therapy" (Franklin and Polisky, 1992). Through the experience of image-making and art therapy, it is possible to allow the deeper emotions of the soul to emerge, and in understanding these to be part of one's experience of being in the world, to promote change which is transformative in nature. As such, art therapy lent itself well to the weekend group process in which women were engaging, as part of this subjective inquiry into their anger.

In doing art therapy, it is important that the image-maker have freedom to create an image which is not bound by artistic or aesthetic standards, but rather, is a free and open expression of one's own inner self, guided by one's own unique experience. It is important that the image-maker not feel pressured to make recognizable objects, but rather, see the exercise as an opportunity to explore oneself through a new language. Rubin proposes that "what seems most critical in art therapy is that the patient be enabled to find his (her) own true self, by discovering and developing preferred media/style/thematic modes" and "what matters is that the work feel right and authentic to the (patient), whatever the mix of outside inspiration and inside generation that goes into its creation" (Rubin, 1984, p. 19). Art therapy, using various mediums of colour, painting tools and paper surfaces, was utilized as a strategy twice during the weekend, first as a way to facilitate the participant's introduction of themselves and the issues they

were working with in relation to their anger, and later in the retreat process, following a guided imagery on anger, expressing their experience within the imagery through the making of this second image.

Following both image-making exercises, we engaged as a group, in a process of dialoguing with the images. Shaun McNiff, in his book, Art as Medicine, describes his use of dialoguing with the image as emerging "from a desire to deepen psychological engagement with images and amplify the spectrum of expression" (McNiff, 1992, p. 145). Nucho offers a five step process of dialoguing with the image to include distancing, decoding, searching for affective responses, creating meaning, and closing and consolidating (Hadley, 1996). In dialoguing with the image, it becomes necessary to create a therapeutic triad between image, image-maker and others engaged in the dialoguing process, be it therapist or group members. It requires an environment of respectful and attentive listening to the image, through careful attention to the process of creating the image, the interaction of colours and various parts of the image, the movement and lines of the image, and the identification of different shapes and textures within the image. As part of the therapeutic triad, it is important for all involved to listen to what the image is saying and to hear the meanings which the image-maker attaches to the image. Questions during the dialogue with the image should therefore be asked solely for clarification, and interpretations other than those of the image-maker should be avoided. In both situations where art therapy was used during the weekend, the exercises were introduced within the context of these image-making and dialoguing principles, with guidelines offered for care of self and each other throughout the process (see Appendix

D).

Other strategies employed during the weekend included guided imagery, gestalt work, free association and personal reflective journalling by both the participants and facilitators, of which the latter was used as part of the data analysis. Guided imagery is a counselling strategy using visual and auditory imagination to promote deeper awareness of internal processes within the unconscious, through deep emotional or symbolic exploration relating to issues or concerns present in one's life. Though variations of guided imagery are used within other counselling strategies such as relaxation training and systematic desensitization, its application within psychosynthesis is the context in which it was used here.

Psychosynthesis, derived partly from the psychoanalytical tradition and partly from Eastern philosophy, embraces the concept of levels of consciousness in helping to understand human growth processes. Guided imagery is a technique which helps to access and work with the subpersonalities which are perceived, within the theory of psychosynthesis, to be part of the middle unconscious and to be attached to the "I", or the self from which we operate on a day to day basis. These subpersonalities are derived from the lower unconscious and are manifested in beliefs and attitudes, habits and drives, organized to adapt to the internal and external environment. The subpersonalities are viewed to be the result of repressed needs in childhood and can be integrated with, partially integrated with, or segregated from the centre "I". The goal of psychosynthesis is the integration of these subpersonalities with the "I", or centre of pure awareness and will, through recognition, acceptance and coordination of parts, and integration with the

centre, thus promoting more freedom, harmony and higher consciousness. Guided imagery, as a tool for promoting awareness, uses the symbolic language of images to promote emotional, physical, mental and spiritual awareness and greater connection between mind, body and feelings, from which changes and growth can occur. Thus, this technique lent itself well to the process of the weekend retreat, where the focus and purpose was to promote greater self-awareness in regards to the emotion of anger and ways anger can be used constructively in one's process of healing and growth or change.

The guided imagery used within the context of this retreat experience was one borrowed from a clinical training manual on mind/body intervention strategies and was designed to access the angry part or subpersonality of the participants (see Appendix E)⁹. As with all guided imagery, the intent was to help each of the participants access unconscious material associated with anger while consciously using her will to interact with the material. As facilitator of this exercise, it was my role to guide participants to flow with their own inner processes, keeping focused, deepening emotional awareness, clarifying issues and grounding the experience in everyday life, working with the issue of anger toward recognition, acceptance, coordination and integration.

Throughout the weekend, various gestalt techniques were employed as a way to access emotions and experiences which the participants might be blocking, avoiding or denying, and to integrate these more fully into their present experience. Gestalt therapy is an existential approach which stresses the here and now of one's experience and the importance of taking responsibility for one's own life. It is, however, phenomenological in its focus on the client's own perceptions of reality, and experiential in its focus on

experiencing thoughts, feelings and actions in the present through the use of experiments designed to increase self-awareness. Gestalt therapy recognizes the role of unfinished business, or unexperienced feelings such as anger, resentments, guilts, loss and abandonment, which impede us in functioning totally and wholly in the present. The goal of gestalt therapy is increased awareness, growth and autonomy, through awareness and acceptance of denied or disowned experiences and parts of ourselves. Through experiencing and externalizing these, we can be with our feelings more fully in the present.

Several gestalt techniques were introduced, most of which were utilized during the weekend to bring anger more to life in the present. These included the more interactive methods such as the empty chair technique, role-playing and psychodrama and more body-oriented methods such as throwing knotted towels, tug of war, stomping feet, body sculpting and movement. These techniques, to be described more fully as they were employed within the retreat process itself, were discussed, demonstrated and practised in the earlier phase of the retreat and employed at various times, both individually and within the group dialoguing process, as anger emerged throughout the weekend.

Free association was used as a strategy to promote dialoguing within the group on the topic of women's anger, in the opening phase of the retreat. Free association is a technique borrowed from the psychoanalytic tradition and is a tool used to begin the process of opening up to unconscious experiences, thoughts, wishes, conflicts and motivations, by allowing any thoughts encountered during the exercise to emerge, flow and be expressed. In the context of the weekend retreat, this technique lent itself well to

prompting an open and frank discussion about women's experience of anger, emerging from a place of the unique and subjective experience each of us were bringing as a result of our life experiences and circumstances.

Journal writing was a strategy used throughout the weekend to encourage more personal reflection on each woman's experience. Journals were given to each woman at the onset of the retreat, with an invitation to write anything they wished regarding their experience of anger throughout the weekend. As such, the journals became a way in which each of the women were able to process, on a more personal level, thoughts, feelings and insights emerging from the group experience. Time was built into the agenda after each session to provide space for journal reflections. Each of the participants was aware and in agreement that the journal entries would be used as part of the data analysis and that excerpts would likely be presented, in a non-identifying form, within the text of the thesis. As researcher, I also entered this process, using my journal as a way to record my own perceptions and cognitive and emotional experiences arising for me as the weekend unfolded. In this way, I was better able to observe my own reactions to the process and to more objectively determine how my own experiences and perceptions were entering into or influencing the research process.

The inclusion of ritual within the process of the retreat, became another strategy to strengthen the identity of the group and to create a sense of honouring the space and process we were engaging in together. Having experienced the use of ritual of a spiritual nature in other retreat settings, I have found rituals to be helpful in creating a sense of commitment to the process and a sense of safety within the group. Rituals have long been

recognized throughout history as a way of honouring life passages, nature, sacred parts of self, and spiritual connectedness, and can offer a sense of renewal or awakening. This, I believed, would support the process of opening to deeper parts of the soul, which the weekend experience could promote. Thomas Moore, in Care of the Soul, describes ritual as a way to "maintain the world's holiness. Knowing that everything we do, no matter how simple, has a halo of imagination around it and can serve the soul, enrich life and makes things around us more precious, more worthy of our protection and care...(and) evoke a dimension that truly nourishes the soul" (1994, p. 226 & 227).

The ritual of the Talking Circle set the stage for the format of the group. The Talking Circle, borrowed from First Nation tradition, is symbolic of the cycle of life, where it is recognized that all things are inter-related and everything in the universe is part of the whole. Within this tradition, all people are seen as part of life and are connected in some way to the whole. In order to gain true understanding of one another, an acceptance of each other as being equal and valuable parts of the whole is embraced. "In the Talking Circle, participants sit in a circle. A Talking Stick (carved staff) or an Eagle Feather is passed from one participant to the other in a clockwise direction around the circle. The Talking Stick symbolizes that whoever is in possession of it 'holds the floor' and must be respected until they are finished with their words and have passed the object to the next participant. In addition, the principles of the Talking Circle also teach an individual active listening skills, balance of thoughts and emotions, and memory skills. This process continues until all participants have had their turn, when finally general discussion takes place on subjects revealed in the circle. Within this tradition, respect is

seen as the basic law of life and is shown within the Talking Circle through not interrupting another who is talking unless invited to do so, speaking in a soft voice, never putting another down or speaking about another in a negative way, whether they are present or not, and listening with courtesy to what others say, even if you disagree, i.e. listening with your heart" (Source unknown).¹⁰

As facilitator of this group process, I recognized the importance of being able to attend to the needs of individuals within the group as well as the process of the group itself. Being aware of the intensity of the emotional material we would be exploring, I felt confident that my past experience in both individual and group counselling in the area of family violence, often with clients engaged in highly intense emotional experience, had equipped me with the skills and understanding to be present with the women in a supportive and facilitative way. However, I saw the value in having another therapist present to assist in the weekend, as an added measure of safety and support, as well as to offer another counselling style and approach. I, therefore, invited another facilitator, trained in counselling, with emphasis on art therapy techniques, to co-facilitate the weekend. This was discussed with each of the participants and agreed upon by all. The co-facilitator was also invited to engage in the personal journal reflections, which were included as part of the data analysis. Prior to the retreat, I met with the co-facilitator on three occasions, to plan the agenda for the weekend, to develop the strategies to be employed, and to prepare materials to be used. The agenda for the weekend is presented in Appendix F.

THE WEEKEND RETREAT

This section will describe the weekend retreat from the perspective of the process of the group. Though excerpts from personal journals are used to guide and illuminate this phase of the research process, the more subjective and individual process of each of the participants will be presented in the following chapter on findings. For the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms have been given to each of the participants.

In the pre-retreat screening portion of the interview, two locations were proposed as sites in which to hold the retreat, a private country residence in rural King's County which would offer all the amenities, and an outdoor, private camping area, used for similar weekend retreat events, which would necessitate camping but would provide a serene, natural environment in which to work. Though the outdoor site was attractive to some, two of the women had health concerns which necessitated indoor facilities. Since the agreed-upon date for the retreat was in late September, it was decided that the indoor site would be more comfortable.

A pre-retreat meeting was held four days prior to the weekend to give the participants a chance to meet one another, begin the process of developing group guidelines, and to plan meals, to which each woman had agreed to contribute. This meeting, which was held in my home, was informal and relaxed, and since everyone had had previous group experience, with some having met through previous groups, they were comfortable with this forum and quickly engaged in the evening's agenda. The

evening included a round of informal introductions, with an invitation to share anything they wished with each other. A list of group guidelines were generated, which were to be revisited upon opening the weekend retreat. Meals and other logistics for the weekend were also discussed and planned. The atmosphere during the evening was light and humorous and carried with it a sense of enthusiasm and anticipation for the upcoming weekend experience. The guidelines which were identified evolved out of our previous experience with groups as well as our awareness and consideration of the fact that the weekend had the potential to become highly-charged emotionally. The guidelines were recorded and later transferred to a flipchart for further discussion and consideration during the opening session of the retreat.

As the location for the retreat was rather difficult to find, all seven of us agreed to meet in a local coffee shop at 6:00 p.m. on Friday evening and travel in tandem to the site. One-by-one, Jane, Margaret, Vicky, Deb, Sheila and myself trickled in, got coffee and seated ourselves across two tables, relieved to have a few moments to relax while waiting for Marie, whom we knew would be a few moments late. The atmosphere and affect amongst us while waiting was striking. Each of us had arrived, armed and prepared, with food, bedrolls, personal belongings, and looks of anticipation, fear, excitement and exhaustion, describing the full day we had had in preparing not only ourselves, but our families, for the two day "time-out" we were taking solely for ourselves, to be spent, for some of us, with virtual strangers, for others, with familiar and comforting faces, but for all, with an issue which we all knew would evoke painful moments. Meals had been prepared, instructions left, last minute errands run, phone

arrangements made, crying children kissed and hugged goodbye, and cars packed, each with something special of ourselves to support us through the weekend. As we sat waiting for Marie, the energy was high, and humorous, as funny stories were shared about our day and "how" we all managed to get here and "be" here together, to spend this weekend talking about our anger. As Marie at last rushed in with apologies for being held up, we picked up our coffees to go and piled into several cars. With instructions not to lose one another, we headed off through the maze of back country roads which would lead us to our site, the sun now beaming strong on our windshields.

Our retreat site was an older-style, large country farmhouse, surrounded by hayfields and apple orchards and huge, stately elmtrees, nestled at the base of the north mountain of the Annapolis Valley. Two dogs outside and two cats inside quickly assumed their spots as part of our group for the weekend, offering at times, comfort and at times disturbance, within our circle. After taking a few moments to explore the spacious, yet cozy and comfortable house which was to be our home for the weekend, each claimed her private space and got settled in. Before beginning the evening's session, we shared a quick, but hearty meal together around the kitchen table, a ritual which became an important part of our weekend together. Here, we enjoyed some light conversation, storytelling and laughter, and in this way, began to strengthen our sense of identity and connectedness as a group.

Each woman had been asked to bring an offering for the centre of the circle, something which held meaning for her personally and could be used as a point of grounding or centering, if needed, during the sessions. As we came together in the circle,

items were carefully placed in the centre, seating spots were claimed, and cushions, blankets and other nurturing items were placed close by for those who felt the need for added comfort. As the evening sun was setting, lamps and candles were lit to provide a warm and comforting ambience as the opening ritual began.

The opening of the circle was observed with a smudging ceremony, a ritual again borrowed from First Nations tradition, where, in silence, the smoke from a bowl of smouldering sweetgrass is dispersed around each participant, standing in a circle, as a way of cleansing away outside thoughts or intrusive energy, and creating an honoured and sacred space for our coming together for this special purpose. This was followed by the passing of the Talking Stick, symbolizing the honouring of each person's unique voice within the circle. With the passing of the Talking Stick, we were each invited to share what we were bringing to the circle and what it was that we hoped to take away with us. In this way, goals for the weekend were identified. As we each, in our turn, shared with the group, the significance of the item we had brought to the circle, we began to share a piece of ourselves - a significant event or moment, an important person or item, a personal ritual, which had offered us strength at some point along the way and which we knew could give us strength and support over the weekend. These items remained as a centrepiece for the circle throughout the entire weekend and were frequently referred to, picked up and held close, as a reminder of this place of internal strength and centre, which was familiar and empowering for each of us. The passing of the Talking Stick became a significant ritual with which we opened and closed exercises throughout the weekend, or when we recognized a need to regroup ourselves and check-in as a group,

helping us to focus and honour the process we were engaging in together. The honouring of the Talking Circle and the passing of the Talking Stick carried with them, an energy of reverence and respect for the circle as our place of work, and for the unique place and voice of each of us who were part of the experience.

As each woman shared with the group, what they hoped to take away with them from the weekend, feelings of fear, excitement and anxiety were expressed. Among the goals identified were, learning to express anger more freely, learning how to express anger, learning more about self and anger at a deeper level, learning how to be with other people's anger without owning it, recognizing anger as like a volcano and wanting to deal with the fear of that, learning ways to work anger out, learning tools and finding ways to channel the energy of anger, finding courage to face anger at a deeper level, and leaving the weekend with sanity, humour and trust. Margaret captured the essence of what was shared as she described her perception of the weekend as "*soul surgery*", something she was doing for the little child within her. As she shared this, she stared at the photograph of herself as a young child, which she had brought for the centre of the circle. Others nodded in understanding.

Upon completion of this opening ritual, we revisited the group guidelines which had been generated at the pre-retreat meeting, qualifying them further and adding to the list, which was posted and visible throughout the weekend for our reference when and if needed. The guidelines addressed issues of confidentiality, respect within the group, safety, staying with and leaving the circle, honouring the principles of the Talking Circle, breaks, smoking, openness to the emotional experiences we may encounter, and the use

of humour (Appendix F). The guidelines served well throughout the weekend to create a balance within the group between necessary boundaries and respect, as well as openness to each woman's process and that of the group.

Though we had originally planned to do an art project as a way to more fully introduce ourselves and get comfortable with image-making as a self-awareness tool, through group consensus, we decided to defer this exercise until morning, as the evening was passing quickly and art therapy would require a lengthier timeframe.

A quick refreshment break was therefore followed by a free association exercise on the subject of women's anger, prompted by the question, "What comes into your mind when you hear the word 'anger'?" Words forthcoming were recorded on coloured paper and stuck on the wall, quickly filling two walls, generating an energetic and, at times, passionate discussion of ways we have experienced anger in our lives, both our own anger and that of others. Within this group discussion, further questions were explored around the issue of women's anger, including:

- Where does women's anger come from?
- How is women's anger unique?
- How has society defined anger for women?
- Why is it important to talk about women's anger?

The content of this discussion is best described through reference to journal reflections entered upon completion of the Friday evening session. Within this discussion there was a strong focus on the fear, violence, destructiveness and aggression which we associated with anger, as well as the violation and injustice that most had experienced as

women in our society. There was a strong sense of womanhood and, as Sheila described, the "*collective wisdom of women, finally spoken in unison*", of speaking out and learning how to move beyond the fear of anger. Marie's journal entry encapsulates the spirit of this discussion when she writes,

Anger - when you start looking at it in particular to women's issues I believe it's one of the fundamental reasons we begin to change - as individuals, as a small group and eventually as a larger group. It is so crucial that we discuss anger in groups and with each other and the society at large because until we 'try it on, hold it and "wear" it for awhile' will we become comfortable dealing with the feelings of anger. Not unlike any other issue - sexual abuse, homosexuality, etc., the conspiracy of silence breeds the sick, devastating freezing hold anger has had on us!

Jane captures parts of the discussion when she identifies the personal reasons why it is important to address anger in our lives when she writes,

Although I realize that it may not be pleasant and in fact may hurt like hell, it is a journey that must be if I am to find peace within myself and be able to be happy in my life. I also would like to be able to help my daughters by way of example so they won't have to re-visit these same issues 20 years from now.

At 10:30, the discussion slowing down and yawns and stretches indicating that energy was waning, closure of the evening's discussion was facilitated with the passing again of the Talking Stick. Each shared closing thoughts about where we were at presently, some indicating their fatigue, others that they were aware of the opening to difficult places within, needing personal time to reflect and process the evening's experience. Support was offered by the facilitators and suggestions shared about how we might all take care of ourselves this evening. In closing, we all stood in the circle, where

the following poem, written in honour of women coming together to share and make meaning of their experiences, was recited:

BELLY DANCERS

The women come to share a dance
Each in their fluidity
A gesture from one received by another
A collaborated dance begins
Time, reflection and opportunity
Give space to honour the integrity of community
The magic of moments shared
While a birth is danced. (Wilson, J., 1996)

We finished by holding hands and squeezing with the next person in succession around the circle, as a way to pass on the collective energy and strength we were finding within the group. We then dispersed in different directions to find private space in which to reflect in our journals and to find comfort in preparation for a much-needed and hoped-for rejuvenating and restful night.

Saturday morning was ushered in with a glorious sunrise and the promise of another bright and sunny day, to which many of us responded by treating ourselves to a long walk, a run, or a session of Yoga Sun Salutations before breakfast, or by just sitting on the lawn bench situated under the trees in the yard. It was not uncommon throughout the weekend to find one or more of our group outside at this spot, writing in journals, sharing thoughts and feelings with one another, or resting after a refreshing hike through the fields and apple orchards surrounding our weekend home. Gradually, each woman arrived at the kitchen table, warming to the aroma and crackle of the wood stove, to share coffee and breakfast, while describing their nights, some having slept restfully,

while others were plagued with sleeplessness or interrupted sleep due to racing thoughts or disturbing dreams. Each woman offered support to others in her own special way by listening, validating experiences, offering humorous stories, or quietly acknowledging that she understood the pain that others were experiencing.

By 9:00, dishes done, fresh coffee made and our centrepiece again carefully placed in the centre of the living room, we all gathered to open the circle for the morning session. The circle began with the reading of another poem, which spoke to us of the difficult but important journey we were sharing and our need for the support, understanding and connectedness that was shared by all.

THE THAW OF FELT CONNECTEDNESS

An energizing bright light, an embodiment of warmth awakens hope
as it warms the seed, the essence of the body, nurturing it to
melt and absorb the nutrients of that which has fallen upon it.
Connected we know and grow.

The garden has changed and continues to change, since the
perennial roots first took to the ground.
The climate seems harsher, the seasons more sporadic,
yet the will is to flourish.

The grand gardener planned and plotted a vision.
Those who did not seem to fit were pulled by the roots.
If the seed dared to bend, braced to a stake was the fate.
As the wind cries for the song of colours lost.

A challenge to the gardeners of the world,
watch and protect with the slightest touch.
A seed begins to bend as it grows. Is the prescribed straight
manner of growth what is needed?

Reflect, as you brush the dirt. What is it that you need?
Did I give you too much water? Did I shade your seed?
I think that you are beautiful.

Don't close your petals as others walk by.
Open them and sing your colours,
as the gardener continually tries to follow in harmony.
For it is the forward leaning that is needed for a beautiful
arrangement. (Wilson, J., 1996)

The Talking Stick was passed around the circle and each of us tried to communicate the emotions which were rising to the surface, for some, as a result of the previous evening's discussions and restless nights, for others, stemming from the anticipation and anxiety, as I shared the day's agenda and the inner journey on which it promised to take us. There was, however, throughout the group, a clear sense of strength, commitment and trust in ourselves, each other, and the process.

Before entering the first art-making exercise, a number of techniques were described, demonstrated or practised, which could be utilized throughout the next two days as a way of expressing, diffusing or working through anger or other intense emotions as they emerged. We practised the throwing of knotted towels, forcefully into the centre of the room. We engaged, as pairs, in a tug-of-war exercise, pulling each on the end of a sheet while using our most forceful and assertive "yes" and "no" voices. We then practised body-sculpting, in which we contorted our bodies and voices in a way which most vividly described how we were feeling in the moment. Some shared that they found these exercises to be energizing, while others found them to be helpful in diffusing the energy of what they were feeling at the time, while others found themselves getting closer to feelings of anger that they were aware of being present, just under the surface. The empty chair technique was presented and described as a way to bring anger more alive and to work with it toward possible resolution of conflict they may be experiencing

with a significant other. It was presented as a process of using an empty chair to engage in conversation with this person, interacting first with myself as facilitator and then alone with the other person seated in the empty chair, with prompting, to fully experience the emotions arising. The similar technique of psychodrama was also described. This technique uses props and other people as players in a drama to re-enact a moment, event or image, as a way of working through the associated emotions. These techniques remained visible and available and were well-utilized throughout the remainder of the weekend.

We then moved into the first art therapy exercise, introduced and facilitated by Sheila, who presented the image-making as a way to further introduce ourselves, adding to what we already knew of one another, and as a way to take us further into ourselves. She emphasized the importance of viewing our images as an expression of whatever emerges from our inner beings and to try to avoid viewing our images as a test of artistic or technical skill. We were each offered large sheets of thick, white paper with a light pencil line on one side to mark a section which would be covered as we hung our completed images in a circle on the wall for further reflection during the weekend. Several mediums, including paints, oil and chalk pastels, crayons markers and different sized brushes, were set up in our "artroom". It was suggested that we choose a space throughout the three large open rooms that housed our daytime activities, and to spend 15-20 minutes to create a visual introduction of ourselves to the group, exploring the question, "Who are you now, here in this circle, as you bring yourself to the group?"

The next few moments were spent in silence, as each found her own way, some

gingerly, others fastidiously, into movement of colour onto paper, listening within, and portraying the inner thoughts, images and emotions, many as yet unidentified or unrecognized, onto the paper. As time was called, some were reluctant to leave their images, being caught up in the moment of expression and feeling that the image-making process generated. We enjoyed a coffee-break while cleaning brushes and carefully placing images to dry, and shooing the kitten away from adding displaced paw marks on what had become, a part of ourselves. As we reconvened back to the circle, Sheila introduced the dialoguing part of the exercise, offering us helpful guidelines on how to observe the image, keeping it as the focus, while searching for its meaning. She described how, by responding to our own observations of the patterns in the image, the colour intensity and balance, the movement of brushstrokes, and the placement of pieces within the image, we could support the image-maker to search for meaning within the image.

Around the circle, each took a turn at being guided through the process of dialoguing with her image, spending approximately 20 minutes on each image. Though at times we got caught up in our own experience of another's image, we listened, observed, questioned and supported one another through the sometimes difficult, sometimes humorous, and sometimes strengthening, but always revealing, process of interpreting and making meaning of the images. Stories were shared, needs, wishes and desires were revealed, anger, rage, guilt, fear, loss and empowerment were touched. Tears were shed, laughter evoked, and hugs were offered and received - this collective journey into deeper places begun. Later, as time was taken to reflect in journals, the energy of the group and how it touched on individuals was described. Marie writes,

"Weekends like this are so much better. People speak their minds with people who care...The strength of the women here is tremendous...Wow...so hard to articulate!!" Margaret writes, *"I am angry for myself and for all of us here today who have been victimized. For these women I see who are at such a fragile place, such a needy, vulnerable spot"*. Jane writes, *"In almost all the pictures was a feeling of how innocent and good we started out and how being abused, molested or hurt has changed us"*.

As we broke for a one and a half hour lunchbreak, we were reminded of our self-care, which each engaged in as they needed - a long walk in the noon sun, alone or in the company of others, a rejuvenating nap, a private space with special soothing music, pen and journal held close, or enjoying community in the kitchen, sharing in the seemingly endless supply of good, wholesome and comforting foods which each of us had so carefully prepared for this event. During the break, our circle of images was placed on the wall, a reminder of where we had come thus far on our journey into anger.

In our circle once again, we shared the verse of this song, which spoke to us of the place we were at together and of the pain and strength we shared, and which gave us a sense of grounding in the present as we embarked, throughout the next stage of the weekend, on the journey of deeper probing into the darker corners of our experience, where our repressed anger was held:

I WILL HOLD FAST

Echoes of childhood whisper violence
Cold wind beating out the past
Rage in your throat muffles silence
Hold on, I will stand fast.

In the darkness your guardians have left you

Cold wind beating out of the past
No one to hear you cry, no one to defend you
Hold on, I will stand fast.

CHORUS

**I will stand fast, I will stand fast
You are safe in the daylight at last
Nightmare and fear, they have no power here
I will stand fast.**

I will listen to the terrors that try you
Cold wind beating out of the past
I will cradle the child that breaths inside you
Hold on, I will stand fast.

When you take the shape of a 100 ancient horrors
Cold wind beating out of the past
When you strike at me and play into your sorrows
Hold on, I will stand fast.

CHORUS

Birds flash upon a branch in winter
Cold wind beating out of the past
Ice in the sun begins to splinter
Hold on, I will stand fast.

You will walk with no fetters to bind you
Cold wind beating out of the past
All the love you have wanted will find you
Hold on, I will stand fast.

CHORUS

The Talking Stick was passed with a summary by each of where we had come thus far in the process, how anger was being experienced, and the sharing of feelings of courage, fear and anxiety at the remainder of the day and what we expected would come

forth. There was a strong sense of respect and validation within the group, an understanding that though we were each on a personal journey, we were sharing this experience together and were thankful for the support that was being offered through our being in this place together.

The guided "anger" imagery was then introduced, with emphasis on the women utilizing their own will within the imagery process, so as not to feel pressured, threatened or unsafe with the images emerging. The women were encouraged to communicate with different elements within the imagery, identify with a particular person in order to experience the emotions more fully, or to explore a specific aspect of the imagery more fully if they felt this would help bring the experience of anger more to life. Each person prepared a space for herself which would provide room and comfort. The imagery was preceded with a session of abdominal breathing and progressive muscle relaxation to promote a more relaxed state where inner focus could occur. The imagery was then presented in a quiet, calming voice and a slow, smooth pace, allowing time for each woman to experience the emotions and interact with the images more fully. The imagery was immediately followed by an art-making exercise portraying the image or the experience emerging for each from the imagery experience. Again, Sheila reminded the group of the guidelines for image-making and dialoguing, with an acknowledgement that we may find this to be an intense time, with strong emotions arising unexpectedly or images emerging in surprise. She stressed the importance of regrounding, of stepping back from the work if necessary, to remind ourselves of where we were and that we were safe.

We then engaged, again, in a process of dialoguing with the images as a group, with the intent of helping each person to identify, through her artwork, with specific parts of her imagery experience, to name them, dialogue with them, talk with them and about them, ask them what they needed, write about them, and allow the feelings to come alive and be more fully experienced in the present. In this way, it was intended that anger which was more subconscious, could be brought forward and more fully explored, experienced and understood as a way of giving more meaning to each woman's subjective experience of this emotion.

This session of dialoguing with the images was much lengthier than the morning's session had been. Likened in their journals to a "*marathon*" by two of the participants, the image dialoguing continued through the afternoon and throughout the evening, until, in exhaustion, we were satisfied that we had encountered anger in a fuller and deeper way. For some, this meant allowing its release in full and intense expression, for others, in embracing it and choosing to hold onto it until they felt they no longer needed it, for others, experiencing much deeper thoughts, images and emotions associated with their anger, but for each, anger had become clearer, more meaningful, more accepted and understood. Many utilized the gestalt techniques to bring the feelings more to life or to help diffuse the intensity of emotion they were feeling. Passionate discussions emerged at points where we found connections, similar experiences, a knowingness amongst us. A moment of disagreement brought with it an opportunity to approach conflict in a healthier way, a new beginning for one who had always avoided such moments. Throughout this session, after breaks, the Talking Stick was passed, as a way of each

woman connecting with the group, sharing where we were at and stating what we needed. This session was described in journals as "intense" and "deep". Sheila captures the flavour of this session as she writes, "*Moved by the intensity and depth at which people shared their images. Anger seething, difficult to express, often tears first, then words of anger to person, situation, self*".

Themes emerged from our collective experience during this session, again captured by Sheila in her journal reflections.

Beneath the anger is deep hurt and unexpressed pain. We acknowledged the importance of being heard, of having a voice, and that trust is a major building block for expressing anger. Belief that others can change is an influence on willingness to confront. Fear of losing relationships is a block to expressing self. Talking eases the pain and in emptying, we are filled with greater things. There is a need to find meaning in pain and letting go is a decision.

At 11:30, spent and exhausted, we closed the session with the passing of the Talking Stick. Through our words, we shared a recognition of our exhaustion and the need for time, to reflect and process what had occurred for each person and the group as a whole. We squeezed hands in the circle and dispersed to find quiet space and rest. The journals would have to wait.

Sunday morning, though the mood was lighter, there were expressions of both relief and sadness - relief in the belief that the deepest part of our journey into self-exploration was behind us and sadness that we would be leaving this space and the warmth and comfort we had created within the group. The session planned for the morning was on "Care of Self and Anger", which had the promise of offering an uplifting

sense of control over ourselves and how we managed our anger. The circle formed early, as the group wanted we, the Co-Facilitators, to share our image-making experiences as well, on which we agreed to spend some brief time. As in previous image-dialoguing, the process was revealing, shedding light on places where anger touched most closely, and though brief dialogue sessions, both Sheila and myself were left with new insights with which to continue our own growing processes. Doing this became an important part of the retreat experience and the process of the group, of which we were all so much a part, as we explored the meaning of anger together. It allowed me as researcher, to more closely examine my own process of anger and to promote more collaborative making of meaning which was inclusive of all present. Some of the women wrote about this experience in their journals, seeing it as contributing to the sense that we were all in this together.

Following this session, we made a group consensus decision to include in the morning, the showing of a video clip which had been planned for the previous evening, but due to time, had been omitted. The clip was from the movie, "Steel Magnolias" and portrayed a passionate, yet wonderful display of healthy anger associated with a deep loss, and in the supportive environment of a group of women who were close friends. It was shown as an example of healthy anger expression in its moment of intensity. The clip was evocative for many, who had emotions still present, triggered by the previous day's experience. For Deb, it was the catalyst she needed to bring her feelings of anger, so deeply associated with loss, to the surface, and to experience a release which she had tried so hard to reach the night before during our session of dialoguing with her image,

but had been unable to. Deb wrote of this in her journal, saying, "*It touched my anger and pain*". Others were there to support Deb, but not to interfere or impede the process which had begun for her and was to continue on after the retreat, as was the case for most.

After coffee, we resumed the circle and, after passing the Talking Stick, we moved into what was to be the final session of the weekend which was introduced as a "Wholistic Plan of Care for Ourselves and Our Anger". As part of this exercise, the group was guided through a visualization to a time in their lives when they felt unwell, followed by a time when they felt well and in harmony with themselves and others. They were guided to bring to life, a rich and detailed vision of their thoughts, feelings, and actions during each of these times. Using the Wheel of Health (see Appendix H) as a framework, we then explored and shared, through brainstorming and discussion, five aspects of our lives - the physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual - and ways we knew that we were not caring for ourselves, followed by the sharing of choices and options available to us to care for ourselves in each of these five areas.¹¹ The particular emphasis was on caring for ourselves in anger. From this, each woman developed her own personal plan of self-care which she could take home and refer to when needed. Many ideas were generated for both embracing and managing our anger, many forthcoming from our experiences over the weekend.

Several methods of self-care were shared and generated through this discussion. In the physical realm, we recognized the importance of exercise, movement, dancing, healthy diet, singing, touch, relaxing baths, massage, venting anger, laughter, taking

action, sex, employing various physical ways to release anger and, most importantly, listening to our bodies, as ways to care for ourselves and our anger. In the emotional realm of our lives, we identified the importance of acknowledging, accepting and expressing our feelings, writing about them, feeling validated, love, friendship and support, owning our feelings, calmness and clear expression of feelings, humour, hope and doing emotional body checks using time-outs, deep breathing and self-talk, as ways to care for the emotional experience that is so much a part of our lives.

Socially, we recognized that choosing healthy, supportive relationships, communicating openly and honestly, establishing healthy boundaries, learning problem-solving strategies, reaching out of isolation, having fun and contributing positively and constructively to our communities could all assist us in dealing with our anger in healthier ways.

Mentally, we saw the importance of work, professional and personal development, reading, educating ourselves on issues which impact on us both personally and globally, intellectual conversation, changing negative self-talk and challenging thoughts which impede our growth, as ways to nurture our mental selves and have more control over our experience of anger as it arises.

We all identified the importance of nurturing our spiritual selves, that point of inner connection with self and our religious or spiritual beliefs which is so integral to maintaining a clear sense of oneself. Though we identified this part of ourselves as quite personal, we recognized the value in taking time out to do personal reflection, rest and rejuvenation, creative activities, spending time with nature, meditation, personal renewal

retreats, music, and connection with others, as ways to honour and nurture our spiritual side and tap into the inner strength with which to confront anger when it should surface.

As our time was limited and we were aware of the need for time to process the experience of the weekend, the final session on "Making Meaning of Our Experience", which had been planned as the final session of the weekend, and was to be a third stage in the research process, was deferred until a later date, approximately two weeks forward. Each of the participants agreed that it would be helpful to keep their journals and to continue writing as they reflected on their experience of anger throughout the retreat and the subsequent days.

The retreat closure occurred in three stages. First, each woman wrote a personal message in the journal, or on the first image, of each of the others, offering one another the gift of positive feedback and sharing something they felt they had received from one another. This completed, we joined in the circle, reciting another poem which captured the essence of what we had achieved together as collaborative researchers:

Finding Collaboration in Spirit

You recognized the Meaning to my Tension
You hear my voice to speak your own.
We communicate in relation - a spirit.
Only the words of our meanings are different.
A paper writes itself.

You may have heard the tears of my diaphragm,
Weakened by a voice without expression.
Recognition and a call to collaboration.
Dialogue, time and reflection,
Give sense and sight to persuasion.

Opportunity for the integrity of spirit, makes way
for the weaving of voices that share meals, twirls, wet boots and

brutes.
Stories told, threads of friendship, hope and care.
In all this I see our meaning reflected.

I lean forward, reflecting on the no ordinary moments.
No longer stuck on my not doing.
Rather, celebrating on that we were being.
And the circle flows weaving a bracelet.
A paper writes itself. (Wilson, J., 1996)

Then, holding hands, each woman around the circle shared a word or phrase which described for them most vividly, the meaning each had made from our experience of exploring anger. The words which came forth were:

- * injustice
- * abuse
- * helps to talk about it
- * support
- * validation
- * trust
- * shame
- * loss
- * fear of loss
- * layers
- * needs confrontation
- * taking action
- * helping someone else
- * need for tools
- * anger is part of self emerging

As hugs were shared and we began the work of dismantling our centrepiece, gathering artwork and packing belongings, there were some within the group who made plans to stay connected over the next while as they felt they would need the support that only those present through this experience could provide. Several women lingered on, enjoying a last meal together, talking or writing in journals. One woman stated that she was reluctant to leave the comfort of our weekend home, and sat curled up in the rocking

chair by the wood stove. Another expressed loss at the closure of this group, feeling reticent to return home to continue processing her experience alone. All were encouraged to use their supports and were invited to call me during the next few days if they felt a need. Several did, finding that the emotions which had been stirred during the weekend were still present. Several of the women took action regarding situations associated with their anger, which will be discussed in the next section describing the individual process of each woman.

THE FOLLOWUP MEETING

Though we had planned our followup meeting for two weeks after the retreat, two of the participants became quite ill and the meeting was, therefore, held one month after the retreat. Unfortunately, at this time, only two of the participants attended, as one was still ill and two others had to cancel at the last minute. Though disappointed, those that attended participated avidly in the session, entitled "Making Meaning of Our Experience of Anger", which was spent re-visiting the initial interview questions, having had time to reflect on the experience of the weekend. Reflections shared at this meeting were recorded, verbatim, on flipchart paper while the women were present, to ensure that I captured the essence of their comments. I met with the remaining participants over the subsequent weeks, using the same questions as a guideline for discussion. In each instance, comments were recorded verbatim, and became part of the data analysis from which quotations will be used in the discussion of findings. The meanings generated about anger through discussions at these meetings were both personal and social. Each woman recognized that she had gained a stronger sense of how anger manifested itself in her life, what she needed in order to allow anger a place in her life and, in so doing, we identified ways in which our lives were better as a result.

Only one woman did not engage in the follow-up meeting, despite repeated attempts to schedule a meeting time. However, we did engage in a phone discussion where she shared with me some personal reflections on her experience with the research and how she was perceiving anger in her life at present.

CHAPTER 4

HONOURING THE PROCESS OF ANGER

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Methods of Data Analysis

The analysis of data for this research project involved a three-stage process. First, I engaged in multiple readings of the data, through which a number of different categories were developed. A process of bracketing or examining and describing each woman's individual process throughout the stages of the research then occurred, followed by a final collaborative stage of presenting this discussion of the data analysis to the participants for their reflection and feedback, as to the accuracy with which their experience was presented and meanings interpreted.

With the reading and rereading of the data in the first stage of analysis, a number of categories were identified, as they occurred repeatedly in the data, which spoke to the early experience of anger for each woman, the impact that anger had had on their lives, what they were angry about, and their experience of anger at the present time. These categories were listed on separate sheets of paper with partial quotes, identified by page number, and cross-referenced within the data itself, by writing category names in the margins of the transcribed text. These categories are listed in Appendix I.

The second stage of the analysis process involved a system of bracketing. Denzin

describes bracketing as a process of taking phenomena out of the context, dissecting and uncovering, defining and analyzing elements and essential structures, looking for key phrases and statements, inspecting the meanings for what they say regarding essential and recurring features and getting the subject's interpretation (1989). Here, the individual process of each of the participants from the time of the interview, throughout the retreat, until the followup meeting, was closely examined and described, and will be presented first in the body of this discussion on findings. Each of the participants were offered a copy of this description and were invited to provide feedback and discuss any changes, deletions or additions which they felt would more accurately reflect their individual process throughout the research. Through this system of bracketing, several themes emerged as common to all or most of the women's experiences, which were listed and then linked to the categories in the first phase of the analysis (See Appendix J). Through searching for commonalities and recurring elements within all the data in this way, a list of five major themes was developed with sub-themes attached to each theme (see Appendix K). These themes will form the basis of this discussion on findings.

The third phase of data analysis involved more collaboration with the participants, as the discussion of findings was presented to them. Categories, themes and sub-themes were listed on flip-chart paper for discussion and group analysis and a copy of the written discussion of themes was provided to each participant. Engaging in group dialogue regarding the findings provided the opportunity for participants to reflect and provide feedback regarding the analysis and the meanings which emerged from the research. In each instance where the participants were involved in the data analysis, changes and

additions were made to the text which were more reflective of their individual and collective experiences. Engaging in dialogue with the participants in this way, I, as researcher, attempted to maintain an element of objectivity and to engage in what Lather defines as systematic reflexivity (Lather, 1991), working against my own preconceived notion of the meaning of anger in women's lives to ensure that the findings reflected the voice of their experience. However, it is still important to acknowledge that within the interpretation, my own conceptual framework was present and influencing what I saw and heard. My own position within the research process will be further discussed in the last chapter of this thesis text.

Honouring the Process of Anger

As the analysis of data provided through the interview transcripts, journal entries and verbatim segments of the followup meetings progressed, what emerged was a recognition that, for each of the participants, there was a dynamic process of opening to anger and to its subjective meaning, a process which, for most, had begun at an earlier point in their lives, but which continued to unfold during the course of this research. What will be presented in this section of the data analysis and findings chapter will be a synopsis of this individual process for each of the participants. It should again be noted that this portion of the presentation of findings did, in fact, become part of the data analysis from which themes emerged, to be presented in the next section of this chapter. As with the entire analysis of findings, this portion has been offered to each of the participants to review for accuracy of information and for their feedback and interpretation, in keeping with the spirit of a collaborative and negotiated approach to making meaning from research.

Again, it should be noted here that, in the interest of confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in the presentation of data and inclusion of any identifying information will be avoided.

Marie

Marie is a vibrant and energetic 39 year old, Caucasian woman, born and raised

in Halifax, where she resided with her mother and her two older sisters. She is contentedly married to her husband of 17 years, with whom she has been together for 23 years, and the couple have one pre-adolescent child. Marie has been employed in various capacities as an educator for 13 years, and has been an active member of her community as a volunteer on several boards and committees to promote social change and provide supportive services to youth and adults.

Marie describes her childhood as physically, emotionally and sexually abusive, having been raised from the age of two, after her father's death, in an inner-city neighborhood with an alcoholic mother. Marie has had a long and arduous journey to reaching what she describes now as a much healthier place in her life, having suffered bouts of depression and agoraphobia, for which she has been hospitalized on two occasions, as well as suffering from an eating disorder. Marie is currently diagnosed with a bi-polar disorder for which she receives medication, is diabetic, and has continued to suffer from various health-related problems.

Marie was interested in participating in the research because she had a strong recognition of the role that her own anger has had in her ongoing process of recovering from childhood abuse. She describes anger as,

powerful and awesome...Anger can be the most motivating factor that can happen. It can be the end destruction of us. We shut down, close off and we exist but we don't live, or, if we make friends with the anger it can be the greatest catalyst for change. For me, getting in touch with my anger helped me to see real growth in myself...inner honesty. I no longer have to wear the mask.

She also stated that, although she has seen real growth in herself since she has

"developed the anger", she is currently seeking more spirituality in her life, and, recognizing a need to "go deeper on this focused topic (anger)", she was attracted to doing this work within the context of a small group of women.

Marie was an active and supportive participant in the group, engaging openly in all of the group discussions and allowing the art therapy, imagery and gestalt work to assist her in releasing what she described as a rage that she was experiencing prior to the retreat, and in taking some action which she felt necessary to diffuse the intensity of anger she was feeling.

At the point of the initial interview, Marie recognized that she had generally moved away from the pattern of her earlier life, where she had never been able to acknowledge her own anger because she had never believed that she had a right to be angry. This, she explained, was due to her experience as a child, of being restrained from expressing any anger, despite the abuse which was happening to her. In describing other people's responses to anger, she says, "*If you're angry, you get beat..because men would beat my Mom*" and,

memories of restraint...in Grade 1, I got a strap for getting angry at something that happened at school...so the messages out there were, no, it's not acceptable and we're gonna teach you that it's not acceptable by being violent with you. So anger and violence seemed to go hand in hand, you know, for me.

She describes internalizing and stuffing her anger for years, saying,

I used to just...I'd stuff it because I felt I had no right...I don't know if I even knew...if I could articulate it. I just for so many years, um, what it was that I felt I had no right to have those feelings, or I didn't know what those feelings were so I would tend to, I'd be off or I'd be feeling angry inside so I would become more self-destructive...then I would eat....

This pattern followed her well into her adult life and she believes internalizing her anger had a great impact on her life, stating that she has been suicidal three or four times, has had ongoing health problems, and that, in the past, it impacted on her relationships and even presently, on her own sense of spirituality.

Marie states that she first began to deal with her anger three to four years ago, at the time of her mother's death, when she began to have flashbacks to her own childhood abuse and was hospitalized for agoraphobia. She recognized then that anger was the strongest emotion that needed to be dealt with. She states,

the anger was paramount, I guess because so much of its anger. It's anger at the other people that committed the atrocities, and its anger at yourself and you don't understand that you shouldn't be blaming yourself and so anger is just so much a part of it all...and as I started to work through the process so that I was feeling healthier, probably the anger in a healthy sense because dammit, this won't get the best of me.

She describes her first encounter with anger as an adult, as rage. "*There was just this rage and I ranted and raved when I went to my mother's grave and some of my abuser's graves and I ranted and raved*". She also describes feelings of vengeance associated with her anger at this time, along with thoughts of violence and when encountering these she would "*feel sick inside and go away within myself and dissociate quite often*".

At the time of the interview, Marie recognized that the rage she had encountered earlier in her recovery process was now gone, saying "*now, you get mad, you get sad, you get happier. It's not all-consuming anymore*". Marie recognized that there were still strong triggers to bring forth her anger, especially when she encountered people in

authority taking advantage of others, or when she herself feels she is being manipulated. However, she has learned that, by opening up and allowing herself to feel the anger, she no longer lets it build up to the crisis which she believes had led earlier to her bouts of hospitalization. She says that she has learned to do healthier things with her anger, such as screaming it out, venting it with her support group with whom she feels safe, and by learning more self-care around her anger, such as meditation, sitting and regrounding herself, soothing herself by the ocean, and writing. She also describes that now, when she is angry, she feels herself taking control of the feelings, by acknowledging them and asking herself what it is that is making her angry, and then doing something with it, turning it around to give her strength. She says, "*you don't give power over to other people to push your own buttons, they're my buttons to push*".

During the few weeks between this initial interview and the time of the retreat, Marie experienced the traumatic loss of a close friend and was recognizing that this was triggering a lot of anger for upon entering the retreat. She described later that this incident "*had brought me to the feeling of rage all the time*". Taking excerpts from her journal as well as quoted notes from our followup meeting, she describes allowing the process of the retreat to take her deeper into these feelings. During the Friday evening group free association discussion, she identified strongly with the societal messages against women expressing anger, recognizing the impact of this as, "*the conspiracy of silence (which) breeds the sick, devastating freezing hold anger has had on us!*"

In working with the initial art therapy exercise, Marie identified two distinct issues associated with her current, strong feelings of anger - that of her own childhood abuse

and process of recovery, and the issue of her friend's recent suicidal death and the events leading up to it. Regarding her own issues she writes, *"I have anger issues and process still to work on but I definitely feel I have worked through and grown so very much. I do feel proud of me"*. Regarding the death of her friend, she was able to verbalize for the first time, in her journal, that she believed her friend died because of her victimization, both as a child and as an adult, by family members, and within the context of important intimate relationships, as well as by a system which repeatedly failed to respond and support her in her cries for help.

After the guided imagery and art therapy exercise, which she described as *"deep"* and within which she experienced *"the support and strength of a caring group of women"*, Marie was able to verbalize aloud, her deepest thoughts regarding why she believed her friend had died. Through engaging in a role-play dialogue, she confronted two of the key people she felt were responsible for her friend's death. She describes this experience by writing, *"It was terrific to get to have my say with them and to see my own anger released!!"* This experience led her to a recognition that turning her anger into action was part of her process of dealing with anger. She writes, *"action with my anger is the only way to truly ensure (her friend's) life had meaning. I know I will have to do something unique, more/different than what I have done so far!!"*

During the days subsequent to the retreat, though Marie describes in her journal feeling some release of her anger, which was also noticed by her husband, she began to experience health problems which she associated with stress and which she identified as *"a true combination of fear and anger"*. She continued to write about her feelings of

anger but also took action by confronting another person whom she felt had some responsibility in her friend's final decision. She also recognized that, during the few weeks subsequent to the retreat, she was experiencing new nightflashes, to which she responded by writing,

I have support, I know how to access the system when necessary and my language is very foul, so, I'm feeling like I'm needing me time...Anger leads to action when dealt with and acknowledged but leads to self-destruction when stuffed and denied.

During our followup meeting, Marie shared some reflections on the retreat experience and the experience she had with her anger during that time. She stated that, though her friend's death was a catalyst for her anger to surface, the bigger issue for her was injustice, which has been a theme for her throughout her life. She shared that she has been giving a lot of thought to how she can take action on this larger issue, either by studying law or professional counselling. She stated that the weekend experience provided her the support, validation and safety, as well as the time, to process her feelings of rage. She states,

you have to provide an environment which is safe and secure and where the focus is on you...and you don't have to deal with day to day life. This gives permission for deeper roots of anger to surface and look at - it allowed us to take that risk. The group process reinforced the idea that deep anger and intense emotion is okay...and others doing it validated our right to have that intensity...it gave me the courage to take action, enabled me to explore the rage and see what to do to let it go.

Further, she was able to recognize through her experience of exploring and working with her rage, that she was still able to be with anger of this intensity and not move into the self-destructive patterns of her past. She states,

I had enough rage to take a shotgun and hurt someone, but I

didn't...I didn't go to self-destruction, and that is affirming, that I do have control over it, it lets me know that I'm okay, that the phoney-baloney truck isn't coming,

a metaphor that Marie has used to express her previous fears that she would never truly recover from her childhood experiences and achieve a healthier quality of life. She says that since this experience, she has been enjoying more inner peace, and is enjoying being with herself and she feels she is slowly developing the ability to control her self-destructive eating behavior.

Margaret

Margaret is a strong, independent and caring 42 year old woman of Scottish and English descent, who grew up with her family in a small Nova Scotia town. She has been consistently employed throughout her career in the area of scientific research. Margaret has been single for most of her life and owns her own home. She currently resides there with her partner in what has only recently become a common-law relationship. Margaret is actively involved in community-based initiatives to support survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Delving deeper into the subject of anger through this research appealed to Margaret because, as she reflected on her own continuous process of healing from what she identifies as childhood sexual abuse, she realized that her own anger from the time that she was a child, had a major impact on her adult life, particularly in the way she felt about herself and the way she related to others. She described a childhood of always

being afraid of anger, both her own and that of others, which she believes stems from being punished as a child on the few occasions when she did allow herself to get angry, and from feeling afraid that she might get hurt when others around her became angry. She remembers, "*When Mom's voice went up, that was it, I just always wanted to go run and hide...and I could feel myself shrink when Mom would holler and I felt like I was going to disappear...*". She also describes feeling responsible when others became angry, believing that she was somehow to blame and feeling like she had to make the anger stop. This she saw as giving people a lot of power over her and left her "*denying that (she) had any right to be...Margaret didn't exist*". As a result, Margaret recognized that, as a child, she developed a pattern of stuffing her anger or turning it into hurt and sadness. As an adult, she saw herself denying that she ever felt angry, until it reached the point of explosion. She says, "*It was almost like losing control was the only way you could express anger, so, you'd let everything build up and build up and build up until you did loose control*".

Margaret saw herself, as a result, as a very rigid and passive person who became a people-pleaser in her adult life, especially in her more intimate relationships where she was especially fearful of expressing anger or of exposure to other people's anger.

I didn't respect myself because I never allowed myself to stand up for me. You know, I was always so afraid that somebody would get angry at me, and that was my controlling thing, that's how Mom controlled me as a child. If she got angry, that was it, game over, mouse in the corner...gone...I couldn't trust myself to be there to protect myself.

She also recognized that she was misdirecting her anger, saying, "*It made me more angry than warranted in other situations. All my anger was being expressed in other situation*

(work) because it was safer, not personal".

In her early 20's, Margaret sought the help of a psychiatrist with these issues, but she says he did not want to talk about the anger and she therefore "*stuffed it all back down for another 20 years*". In her late thirties, the explosiveness of her anger was triggered by an occasion where she was caregiving her adolescent niece for a period of time. She describes being both afraid of, and afraid for, her niece and found herself striking her on several occasions. This, she says, "*led me to recognize that I had a problem with anger and I wasn't dealing effectively with it in my life*", so she again sought help. Through therapy and a treatment group, she discovered another side to herself, one that could be angry and in control at the same time and that the choice was her own. She saw allowing herself to experience her anger as instrumental in allowing herself more freedom.

She (Margaret) couldn't be born or exist in the world until I learned to deal with anger...because...Margaret was very angry...through the healing and stuff...I realized, Jeez, you know, all these years I've been so pissed off at everything that happened back then,...I guess I kind of had to give myself permission to go back and be angry and to feel that anger was okay.

Margaret believes that, in the safety of a group, which was a controlled environment managed by a therapist, and through listening to others get angry, she was able to give herself permission to open up to her own anger. She describes a process of allowing old memories to emerge, saying, "*I had to go back and not just see them but feel the feelings...I needed to feel safe to express it and I needed to express it*".

Margaret identifies that her anger is still triggered when she hears about child abuse or when she feels she is not being treated with respect. She says that in learning

to stay with the feelings of anger when they arose, her anger was not as terrifying to her. *"I learned that I could control it, get angry and not go overboard. If I did anger in small doses it was not as hard to handle"*. Margaret recognizes that though she still has difficulty with other people's anger, and still associates anger with violence, she is learning not to own it and feel responsible. *"When someone gets really angry around me that little child part of me still thinks, okay, anger, you've got to get the hell out of here or stop the anger. I have to stop myself and say, no that anger is their's, not mine"*. She identifies safety as paramount in expressing anger, particularly in close relationships. She says of her current relationship with her partner, *"I think it's a mark of how good our relationship is that I can tell him I'm angry. We can be angry but there still seems to be enough respect"*. Margaret states that she has learned that if she writes about her anger or vents it with supports that she knows will not respond with anger toward her, she can allow it the expression it needs. She also needs to physically release it and finds walking, throwing rocks and gardening helpful and she likes to sooth herself after an angry release with special comfort foods or a hot bath. Margaret also identifies a need to use her anger at childhood abuse to take action against abuse.

Margaret was interested in participating in the retreat because, as she states,

I find that I go deeper and I learn things that I never knew about myself before. It intrigues me. I'd like to see what else is there. And I think the more I learn about my anger, the better able I will be to do anger in a healthy way.

Throughout the weekend retreat, Margaret identified strongly with her inner child whom she refers to as *"Little Mar"*, describing her as *"sad and afraid, but also very angry"*. Following our Friday evening group discussion, in which she was an

avid participant on the subject of abuse and violation against women and children, she refers in her journal to the emergence of a black room, which she associated with Little Mar's sadness and anger. This dark room emerged in her second image-making on Saturday, as a large black room with impenetrable walls with Little Mar present, but keeping her distance. She describes this room in her journal as, "*a place where I could deposit all the stuff I didn't want to have in my life*". As she wrote, she became more aware of the anger she felt as a child who was being abused but did not dare tell, for fear of punishment. She reflected on her process of piecing images together of her abuse, and wrote of how the strength of her anger was starting to surface, with an awareness that she was "*holding it at bay*". Using the metaphor of the black room, she says,

I can feel it (the anger) pushing at the open door but some unseen force is keeping it from being able to escape. The image of that black room is strong...it is blackness, the total absence of light and it is swirling and gathering energy, but why?"

Listening to the stories of victimization from the other women intensified her anger, while at the same time she was aware of a strength, courage, love and protection. This was symbolized for her by the presence of an eagle feather which she had brought for the centrepiece.

Margaret continued to reflect on the image of the black room through her journalling over the weekend. She was aware of her resistance to entering the door of the dark room, though she had been able to enter it once before, and of her fear and sadness associated with this image. This led Margaret to question,

I keep asking what else is there? What more do I need to know? How can I help her (Little Mar)?...She needs a voice She wants to be heard. She wants to tell the world what was done to her.

As her feelings of anger intensified throughout the art therapy sessions, she wrote, *"I realize that I have begun the journey of moving beyond my pain to being able to give voice to our collective suffering"*, identifying her anger as *"the motivating force that I have used to take the steps necessary to fight the abuse in the world"*, and in so doing, be the voice for the anger that her little child feels.

Throughout the weekend, Margaret could be found alone, listening to music and curled up in a comfortable chair writing in her journal. She identified in her journal, a need to withdraw and isolate in her anger, a pattern which has been present with her since her childhood. Though in dialoguing with her second image, she was not able to enter the dark room, she continued to process her feelings of anger during the subsequent days and weeks and found herself becoming more acutely aware of anger when it occurred. Through reflecting on anger she felt in the moment, and rationalizing what she thought it needed, she was able to respond to a situation of conflict, where she felt she was being treated disrespectfully, with a determination to be heard and a new-found assertiveness, to which she wrote, *"I think I handled that respectfully and assertively. I am pleased with the outcome. That feels good!"* She also recognized that she was more openly communicating her feelings with her partner, and, as the trust grew, she became more open to his anger, identifying a fear of his anger connected to a fear of losing him, stemming from childhood experiences of trusting others and then losing them.

Throughout this time, Margaret experienced increasingly vivid and disturbing dreams, depicting scenes of abuse against her and another family member. With each dream, she wrote graphically of the anger, venting the way she felt toward the abusers,

while increasingly gaining a clearer awareness of previously fragmented memories. Throughout this process she identified strongly that *"rage and determination are my familiar friends!"* A month after the retreat, she wrote of her continuing dreams, *"Anger was the feeling that stood out the most for me. I wasn't saying no. I was telling him (her abuser) to go to hell...My inner child was certainly filling her boots!"* She writes further,

I have given myself permission to be angry and to express my anger in appropriate ways. Therefore the permission of others no longer seems as important. I am doing better at not feeling as if I am responsible for other's anger, even when at time my actions may have triggered someone's anger....Anger is an indication that something is amiss. It therefore can be a useful tool...It is very freeing to have control over how, where and at whom I express my anger...doing anger in this "new" way isn't necessarily easier for me; however it does feel better and is healthier. I still struggle with anger at times probably always will.

Deb

Deb is a humorous, sensitive and intuitive 36 year old woman who has lived her entire life in the Annapolis Valley. She is married with two small children, aged two and three, and is employed as an office administrator. She loves being with people, enjoys the outdoors and places great emphasis on self-care and maintaining a balanced lifestyle.

During the initial interview Deb did not identify that anger was a large issue presently impacting on her life. She was interested in participating in the research because she has experienced strong feelings of anger at other points in her process of therapy,

which was connected to childhood incest and her experience of an abusive, alcoholic father whom she described as controlling the family through fear. Having had glimpses of the presence of anger in her day to day life, she was attracted to the opportunity to really explore it. Deb recognized that, for her, exploring anger is not just about being upset at day to day events, but sees her anger as connected to deeper and larger events in her life. She therefore recognized that, in entering the research process, she would need the support and understanding of both her family and others involved, to allow her the space, as she describes, "*to go to those deeper places*". She, therefore, required several discussions with me as researcher to fully explore the process of the research and to feel assured that she was ready and able to participate, without it robbing her of the balance she felt she had created in her life.

Deb stated that she sees her anger as a signal and an opportunity to process things more deeply. Deb recognized that for her, "*anger is not about being violent or angry, its about being hurt*". She is aware of two main areas where her anger is triggered - the crying of her children and experiences where people let her down or do not follow through with their commitments to her. She feels that her children crying sometimes triggers her own pain, which she describes by saying,

It lets me know that if I can treat them, understand their anger, how they were crying, if I can nurture them and care for them in that, then I'm caring for myself. If I say SHUT UP, then it's just like saying (this) to myself. I learn a lot from them. They've taught me a lot. I'm two years old now.

She says that because she is usually quite even-tempered, she recognizes that when she responds to her children in anger it is usually a sign for her that things are not okay, at

which point she will try to work with it. Describing this process, she says, "*I walk with it and now other things that come up. What is it touching on? What are the feelings? What does it feel like?*" She is aware of dealing with anger on two levels, saying when she feels angry,

that's present and you're actually angry, but it can also go on a deeper level of trust issues... kind of indicates to you where things weren't safe in the past, so anything coming in the future or the present touches on those insecurities over things in the past.

Deb recognizes a strong association between anger and hurt as well as issues of trust. She describes it as "*a sense of power being taken away*". She says that in the past, when she felt hurt by friends, she would withdraw and make a lot of assumptions without checking these out with them. She is aware that, over the past few years, as she is slowly developing trust through the individual and group therapy she has done, as well as building a relationship with her husband, she is able to take more risks, when angry, by checking things out with the person or situation that has triggered her anger. She recognizes her feelings of anger as more of an asset, a chance to build on her communication and relationship skills.

Deb also associates anger with a deep sense of loss. She began to recognize this during a recent group therapy session, where she identified a strong feeling of anger toward her mother, whom she saw, through her therapy as being unable to provide her as a child with nurturing and protection. She said the anger was like,

feeling like you needed something so bad and you were just not going to get it, you know, loss, knowing that you have lost and knowing that you were never going to be able to recover it.

She identified that she sees the anger for her, though she is just beginning to

identify with the concept of anger, as "*an outburst of "Be Quiet"*", going on to say, "*it could have been that the anger for me is that there is a limit to people*". She says she feels "*anger at being robbed of something that should have been part of my life*".

Deb also associates her anger with guilt, a feeling that she is somehow to blame for the abuse perpetrated against her. She believes this stems from the fact that her "*father would blame women for the actions of men and her mother would support him in this by not saying anything*". In regards to the abuse, she says she has tried in the past to work with her images associated with the abuse and her feelings of guilt and,

I'm wondering if there is a block there and that, or also a way of realizing that I probably did more blocking than I realize I have done, even though I say that I have a good memory...I probably remember everyone who abused me but I can't remember, I may not remember what it feels like...I can't remember the feelings, you know, so it's a big area shut down.

Deb says that she has always avoided the intensity of anger and she wants to stop avoiding it. She believes that confronting her anger more so in the present is making her healthier. She feels that avoidance of her anger has impacted on her life, saying,

I think it payed it's price in other ways...I wasn't as healthy. Stress. My body was under stress a lot more, but not really realizing it...maybe it impacted on living a quality of life, maybe always being afraid...scared of being found out...was it abuse or was it initiated by me...you know, all the blaming part.

She recognizes that now, though when her anger triggers hurt, she still withdraws and isolates, her anger becomes more obvious in withdrawing. She says,

I state what I'm feeling, walk and speak out loud with it. I think there is some benefit in stating out loud, stating what you're feeling out loud to the universe. It's not like you're keeping it inside... You're listening to yourself, you're able to process things, put things more in place... I just keep working at it...it might be

tears, it might be anger and yelling it out and it's, you know, just release.

She also identifies a need, when she is exploring her anger on a deeper level, for someone to support her by listening, and letting her stay with it. She says, "*I need to be embraced, someone as a guide, someone to listen, someone else taking control for that amount of time...if I have that trust, then I can be with it*". Deb stated that, in participating in the retreat, she wants to be able "*to go from the beginning to the end with my feelings*" and would need support to stay with them and to know that it is okay for her to be angry.

Deb entered the retreat with strong emotions as she had been writing a lot prior to the weekend in an effort to get in touch with what she described in her journal as a "*deeper place of pain and anger*". After the group discussion on Friday evening, she felt a need to weep and had a restless, almost sleepless night, being awakened with a very disturbing dream. During the first art therapy session, she drew an image from her dream, which spoke to her of her own incest, her role within it and the mixed emotions of sickness and enjoyment which she experienced. She responded to this image saying, "*I will embrace the image*".

In response to her guided imagery experience, she drew an image of a cave, which she saw as anger, and a comforter and a meadow. She described not wishing to go to the cave nor leave her comforter and felt the emotion of anger, which she depicted with black streaking encircling an image of a person in red, crying tears with a bleeding heart. She described in her journal having a sense that no one could hear her need for nurturing and she experienced deep pain associated with grief and loss and aloneness. She

writes of this,

I didn't do anything wrong. Don't I deserve to be nurtured, to be loved? What was so terrible that caused me to be in that place without anyone? Who will be there? Where were you Mom? Where were you universe?

In listening to and dialoguing with the images of the other women, Deb identified common themes - courage, anger used to empower, confronting abusers, sadness, pain and aloneness. While dialoguing with her own image, she identified strongly with the absence of nurturing from her mother and her anger at this, but had difficulty in experiencing her anger beyond the intellectualizing of it. Though we engaged in an empty chair exercise with her mother, she was still unable to actually feel any emotions. She writes of this experience,

As always, I have nothing to say, yet a lot to say. Just sometimes words cannot express the sadness and grief which I feel on a deep level. I had nothing to say to (Mom), it was too late. Maybe I discovered that I wasn't ready to give up my anger towards my Mom yet. That's okay. I will have to honour that.

On Sunday morning, after watching the clip from "Steel Magnolia's", in which there was a strong but healthy display of anger connected to grief and loss, Deb had a very intense release of emotion in which she became like a child, wanting to be held and supported while she cried. She writes of this experience. "*It touched my anger and pain...anger toward my mother*". During closure of the retreat, Deb identified a need to stay connected with others in the group and to get support, knowing that "*it's okay that I may be in a bad place*". After the retreat, Deb wrote several pages and walked with her feelings, writing passionately of her childhood incest experience, stating that she wished to give voice to this by sharing it, as well as her anger toward her mother, with her

therapist. Regarding her anger toward her mother, she writes,

I accepted that I wasn't ready to give up my anger as yet and to make peace with her. Before that can happen, I need to talk about my anger, express it and then I will give it up, then I can go and talk to Mom, for then I would be ready to let go of my anger and allow my Mom that forgiveness.

She also identified a need to do more roleplay concerning this anger toward both her mother and her abuser, saying,

My voice has been silent for so long that it will take awhile before I can truly get in touch with the anger and I want to tell "them" about it. What right do they have to hear me? I was never heard before. But this isn't about them, it's about me and what I need to help me free the pain.

Over the next few days Deb continued to write in her journal and called and spoke with me as well. She began to recognize that the abuse she had suffered and for which she had felt so responsible because, at times she had felt pleasure, was one of seduction in her neediness for affection and nurturing. With this she was able to give the responsibility over to her abuser, saying, *"I realize more and more that (he) is responsible and maybe one day I can truly say that I was truly the victim and receive the peace I need so much"*. A week later, Deb writes that she is still with the anger and needs to listen to her self-care needs. She went for a drive and says,

for the next hour or so I talked it out, yelled , screamed, cursed, touched my anger, embraced the hurt, so much pain, trying to integrate it into the whole, - so hard - it felt good to get rid of a lot of garbage but I still felt there was more there - I got out 50% of it - I wanted to get rid of it all. Fuck!

She continued to touch the anger during the subsequent week, and though frustrated, wrote that she was *"trusting the Goddamn process"*.

During the followup meeting, after reflecting on her experience, she says,

"Sometimes we get stuck in that inner place...When not expressed, it (anger) is like a weight on my spirit...we have to honour it's need for expression".

Jane

Jane is a jovial and fun-loving, yet sensitive, 36 year old woman of French and English descent who grew up in a large Nova Scotia family. She spent several years in northwestern Canada where she was married with one child. She separated from her husband and returned with her child to Nova Scotia five and a half years ago and, at the time of her participation in the research, was residing with her partner, whom she describes as her childhood sweetheart, in a blended family of three children. Jane is on a permanent disability from an active government career in computers, due to what she describes as a chemical imbalance caused by stress. Now a stay-at-home Mom, Jane enjoys being with her family, socializing with her friends, and doing craftwork. Jane takes medication regularly for depression and hypothyroidism, has suffered bulimia and weight problems all her life and has experienced several health problems over the more recent years which have been diagnosed as stress-related.

Jane was interested in participating in the research because she is aware that she has a lot of anger presently. She describes her family of origin as one where she was never allowed to express emotions and recalls experiencing her father, who was alcoholic, as violent and aggressive when angry during drinking episodes. Jane harbours considerable anger over the fact that she felt silenced as a child and had to endure alone,

both sexual abuse by an uncle and repeated physical beatings by an older brother, without help or support from her parents. Jane's marriage was also physically and mentally abusive and she is aware of having anger toward her x-husband whom she believes has abandoned their seven year old daughter.

Jane is aware presently that she angers easily, saying, *"I get angry very easily at silly things. I'm very intolerant of what I call stupid people"*. She recognizes that she has experienced this type of behavior in the past and felt that, *"I've reached a new level of it, like I'm digging deeper into stuff"*. Jane describes being unaware of her anger for several years during her adolescence and early adult life. She believes she masked her anger a lot through what she describes as the self-destructive behavior of excessive use of drugs, alcohol and a period of promiscuous sex. She describes her first awareness of the intensity of her anger as an encountering of rage, during a family party where her abuser attempted to hug her daughter. She says, *"I just lost it, you know, I started screaming 'don't touch her'... 'I'll kill you' and all this stuff just came pouring out of me and it was like watching someone else"*. Jane advises that after this incident, she unsuccessfully sought the help of a psychiatrist, from which point she began taking anti-depressants, and experiencing a barrage of physical, emotional and psychological problems.

Jane experienced this intense rage again a brief period later, when, in response to her husband's repeated mental and physical abuse of her, she threatened to kill him. She says, *"I would have killed him where he stood, I had gotten to the point where I wasn't taking any more shit from anyone. This was it. The bottom was full, that was it"*.

And again, a year ago, Jane describes an incident where her anger exploded into violence.

I don't know what happened or how it started, but the volcano erupted and I ...I just lost control...I started throwing things, I hit him, my sister...big mistake...came over and had this holier than though attitude and I decked her...the police were called...and that's something I've been very ashamed of...it's taken me a long time to be able to even talk about that...I mean, I take responsibility for it because there is no excuse for hurting someone else...I guess if I had known that it was there and it was that...um...volatile, that I may have found a way to express it safely, but...

Jane describes dealing with this incident by dissociating from the feelings, saying, "*I don't remember, it was like seeing a movie in front of me but not a...me doing it*".

Jane recognizes that her anger presently is connected to her earlier experiences of abuse and she sees herself taking it out on her partner. She says, "*There's never been a positive male influence in my life, until now,...and I take out on him what everyone else has done to me*". She feels that the intensity of her anger now scares her to the point where she doesn't know how to handle it. She says when she encounters her anger, she tries to separate herself from people, locks herself in her room, or stacks firewood, but feels she needs something more. She says that she is exploring with her therapist, the avenue of confronting her abuser, but is afraid of blowing up at him in his present sickly state. She sees her anger not only impacting on her relationship with her partner, but also her kids and others that she is close to. She says, "*I'm no fun to be around...my kids are still feeling the effects and right now, because I'm angry, I'm staying away from my parents*". She describes being constantly "*violent with my tongue*" and afraid of losing

control and in so doing, losing relationships which are important to her.

Jane also associates her anger with loss, which she describes as, "*The loss of a childhood, loss of the nurturing I should have had...the things I have lost because of my medical history...and loss for my daughter, of her father*" and recognizes the accumulation of anger over the years and the impact of this by saying,

It feels like a bottle that, for all these years you put things into it and you put things into it, and then all of a sudden there's no more room and the cork goes on, you know, I mean, there's got to be some way to pick that bottle up and dump all the crap out, you know, and I don't know what that way is...You strip away layers and, now, I don't know what has triggered this but in the last month it has come closer to the top...I don't know why all of a sudden it's been stripped away to reveal this layer.

Jane was hoping that the retreat, in its focus on a deeper self-awareness, would help her to "*become more aware of what's in there and what, how I can use it*". She recognizes that when her anger is triggered by abuse or neglect of women and children, she has a need to take some sort of action and will often intervene when she encounters such incidents. She says, "*When this happens it feels like it's me all over again*". She recognizes when she has reached the point of needing a time out and uses this time to relax and regroup herself. She says she would like to be able to deal with anger in the moment and not let it accumulate and spiral and become so large,

not having to stuff it anymore...so that it doesn't store and become volcanic...I want to feel whole and recognize that these experiences are part of who you are and how do I live with them and how do I have them not debilitate me anymore.

Between the time of the interview and the retreat, Jane visited her uncle and confronted him about his sexual abuse of her. She shared this experience with the group by saying that in doing this she confronted her anger about the abuse and that she is

feeling stronger and more in control. She said that although she felt like vomiting and found herself vibrating after her meeting with him, she has been laughing all week and has felt a great release. She writes in her journal of where she sees herself in her healing process.

I am trying to nurture myself more. Part of that is recognizing the anger within me, owning it and expressing it safely. But also recognizing what isn't mine and giving it back where it belongs. It's a very difficult but freeing process.

Her anger was again triggered by the Friday evening group discussion on what she described as oppression of women and the disallowing of their anger and she found herself struggling with her spirituality, questioning, "*how God could let bad things happen to nice people*".

Jane found the art therapy exercises very powerful for her in bringing forward her feelings of anger about her own abuse and that of others. A black heart appeared in both of her images which she identified as the robbing of innocence caused by abuse. She experienced strong feelings of sadness at how this loss of innocence can change us. She shed tears of sadness as she identified how her anger was affecting her relationships saying, "*This is not my fault*", and was able to ask for and receive nurturing hugs from others in the group. She spoke and wrote fervently of the anger she felt and saw herself letting go of the self-blame, though recognized that she had to take responsibility for her anger so that it was not so large and fearful in her life. Between the art therapy sessions, Jane went outside and used physical release techniques to diffuse the energy of her anger. She shared with the group that she had felt a need to hold onto her anger for protection and that she felt empowered by her anger to take action as a way of protecting other

children. She also saw clearly that she needed to take action for herself by confronting all of her abusers. She wrote pages of anger toward her x-husband saying, "*This is not to punish you but to release me...I have carried this hurt, mistrust and anger long enough. I am giving it back to you where it belongs*", identifying all the ways that her life was changed and hindered by his abuse of her.

The day following the retreat, Jane wrote, "*I have been doing a lot of work lately, really hard stuff and I feel as though I am lifting the layers slowly, not only of anger but of hurt, loss and all the other emotions that I have stuffed inside for all these years*".

In the weeks following the retreat, Jane continued to write about the difficulty of being with her anger and identified a need to be once again with the group. During our followup meeting, she identified that she was experiencing some positive growth in regards to her anger, saying,

I can see more clearly, things aren't so shadowy, I'm more able to separate the present from the past...recognizing my limits and when it's time to take care of myself...I haven't dealt with my anger until now...I can say (now) 'I'm angry' and not let it build up to explosion...it's getting lighter, I feel freer with my children, more playful.

Vicky

Vicky is a small, somewhat serious and very articulate woman of 43 years old, who is divorced with two sons, aged 21 and 22. She is of British descent and has lived her life in the Annapolis Valley. She owns her own home and is employed in the area of

human services. At the time of the interview and retreat, she was residing with her two sons, with whom she describes having very positive relationships, two women with mental challenges for whom she provides care, and her boyfriend. Vicky has recently engaged in private therapy and was attending anger management groups at the time of our interview and the retreat.

Vicky was interested in participating in the research because she was recognizing the presence of a rage inside of her. She describes,

I've had a history all my life of having my feelings blocked out, but I wasn't sure what this emotion was I was feeling. But when I reached the point of... I began to recognize that there was some sort of a rage inside of me, not just anger, I had reached a raging point where I...felt like it was controlling me rather than me controlling it...I know it's rage because when something happens that offsets or gets me upset, I can't control it. I have to smash things...stomp out of the house...not able to rationalize it...it's like a fire coming over me.

She identifies that expressing her rage in this way is not helping her to get at the root of her problem and though she is attending anger management, she sees learning to deal with her anger as a long process. She described having lived a life of stuffing her feelings down because, in her childhood, when she expressed anger, she was trivialized and usually banished to her room and, therefore, never acknowledged. She sees that these responses,

not only added to my anger but also destroyed my self-esteem and made me feel like I was wrong, that I had no right to be angry at things that were happening to me and I just kept stuffing it all in a tiny box and leaving it there to fester and fester until boom.

She feels she is just now learning to handle her anger, saying, "It's sad at 43, I'm just learning to deal with it" and recognizes that, "My anger doesn't need to be cured,

what needs to be cured is the way I control it".

Vicky identifies anger as *"the hardest emotion that I've had to deal with"* in her own growing process and recognizes that she is still easily angered by experiences of betrayal and lack of trust, especially when it involves close relationships. She sees that her inability to express feelings has had a major impact on her relationships, saying, *"I've never has a successful relationship...everything would come out as anger...its affected everything I've ever done"*. She also recognizes that for a long time, she felt like *"a puppet on a string...void of a lot of feelings"*. As an adult, she has experienced a lot of guilt and shame associated with her anger because as a child she learned from her mother that *"anger causes violence and women shut up and put up"*. Vicky has had a history of turning anger inward and becoming very depressed and at times suicidal. Her worst experience of externalizing her anger was, after several years of physical abuse by her husband, fighting back. She says,

I reached a stage where I fought back...and that was an uncontrollable anger. I had actually thought and planned that night to kill my husband...I was sitting in front of the door with a loaded shotgun waiting to shoot (him) as soon as he walked through the door...hearing my son's voice was like an instant snap...made me realize that this was a place, a place in my life, a place where I didn't want to be.

Vicky describes this as a turning point in her life and recognized,

I could have been living in hell and it couldn't have been any worse than the way I was living and I just thought about it for awhile and at that point I was having a lot of thoughts of the past coming at me and I just thought, I can't live like this. Something has to change. And it's sort of been straight ahead since then.

She has learned, through talking to counsellors and group therapy, that she has to take the responsibility for the quality of her future and sees learning to deal more

effectively with her anger as paramount. She says she still feels angry today, that *"people in my childhood or my past didn't recognize the part that they played in it...I'm angry because those same people don't see that I'm a wonderful person with my own ideas and thoughts..."*.

Vicky feels that for her, recognition of her anger is the key to changing her responses and being able to be with her anger. At the time of the interview, she was dealing with a lot of anger associated with issues of trust and infidelity within her relationship with her partner, seeing him as *"repeatedly pushing my buttons from the past"*.

Vicky carried this particular issue with her into the weekend retreat. Through her process of dialoguing with her images, she identified anger at how abuse impacts on children, their future relationships, and capacity for intimacy. She became very present with her anger toward her partner, with whom she had been attempting to communicate her feelings, while his response was that she was insane. She identified with her own personal voice of assertiveness through her anger and saw her anger as a way to stand up and become large, depicted in her second image of her more powerful self, in the face of people and situations where she had always been made to feel as though her feelings and thoughts did not matter. During this process, Vicky wrote in her journal, *"I know I have to reach my anger core and perhaps I have not done so. Perhaps I have and don't recognize it. Perhaps I'm not ready"*.

Through an empty chair exercise, Vicky identified a fear of losing her relationship with her partner and feeling guilty for expressing her anger to him. She then

moved beyond this to feelings of extreme anger which she felt were again being denied and minimized and an awareness that she had a right to her anger and that she had to be the one to choose when and how to let the anger go. She diffused her anger through verbalizing it to her partner and using knotted towels to physically release it. Vicky used poetry and letter writing in her journal as a way to allow her anger at past abusers, her family situation and her partner, to be voiced in it's largeness, yet always with compassion and understanding for both herself and those she wrote about. Through the writing, she gained some insight and understanding of how the incidents of abuse had impacted on her life. Later in the weekend, she experienced a strong feeling of anger at the content of one of our group discussions and was able to assertively and positively confront me as facilitator and then the group as a whole as a way to resolve her anger.

Vicky identified that her sense of connectedness to the group helped her to process the anger she had brought and encountered during the retreat. She wrote of her experience in the group, saying,

What an incredible amount of mixed emotions and feelings arose from me today and this evening. A rush of happy, sad, anger, denial, truth, and I felt accepted, cared for, heard and respected, truly a unique day. I feel a bit sad that this will be finished tomorrow and I have to go home. The sad me wants to stay because I'm safe and validated. At home I'm not.

During the days following the weekend, she attended her anger management group and found her anger was triggered by other men in the group who were not taking responsibility for their behavior. She confronted the group about this in what she felt was an angry, but appropriately assertive way. Within her relationship, she continued to stay with her anger though tried to communicate it with her partner. However, he responded

by escalating to violence and she sought support at this point, taking steps to care for herself and the safety of her family. Through this experience, she learned that being honest with herself sometimes necessitates making some difficult choices, but recognized that she was feeling stronger and more in control of her anger and her life.

Vicky identifies that she is learning to take control of her anger by learning to take control of herself and that now when she feels anger, she can identify it, allow it and get support with it. She also tries in some situations to tell the other person, though she recognizes that she has no control over their response. A significant change for her is in recognizing that she can stay with her anger as long as she needs to and that others do not have a right to tell her how long she can be angry.

Discussion of Themes

Having explored with each of the women who participated in the research, the stages and process that they encountered as they explored their anger, several themes emerged which were listed and then linked to the categories identified through the multiple readings of the data. In this way, five major themes were identified, to which sub-themes were attached. These themes reveal some striking findings which can provide useful insights into the way in which women perceive the emotion of anger and the needs that they have in order to allow the reality of anger in their lives to be embraced and used in a positive way. These themes will be offered in support of my thesis, that women's acceptance and integration of anger as part of our life experience is a complex and dynamic process of exploring and understanding the origins of anger and recognizing the power of anger to be a positive and healing force in our lives. Expanding on the major findings in this study, the themes will suggest that, as women, we have learned to internalize and suppress anger, and through exploring and experiencing the many layers of anger which have accumulated over a lifetime, we can gain acceptance of anger as a natural response to circumstances in our lives, and, thus, learn to give voice to anger. This voice can assist women in moving toward more authentic and self-assertive ways of being in the world, becoming personal and social agents of our own experience.

This discussion will include verbatim quotations from interviews, journal reflections and the followup meeting with participants, whose voices will be reflected in

italicized print within the text. Relevant literature will also be included within this discussion, in support of the following five themes:

Themes

- 1. Women have learned to suppress and internalize anger and as a result, anger has had major negative impact on our lives.**
- 2. Women experience fear associated with anger which impacts on our ability to deal effectively with anger.**
- 3. Women's present experience of anger is linked to experiences in the past and therefore requires a process of deeper exploration in order to understand its origins and gain acceptance of anger as part of our lives.**
- 4. Women have specific needs in dealing effectively with anger in our lives.**
- 5. Women experience an emergence of self when anger is embraced and used as a healing force in our lives.**

Suppression of Anger

Learning to suppress and deny anger was a theme common to all of the women who participated in the research, from which each developed patterns in their adult lives of denying that they had anger or even had a right to anger. All of the women talked about their experiences in childhood, of being punished, silenced or ridiculed for expressing anger, which led them all to believe that feelings of anger were not acceptable within the context of their lives as children. Marie describes being punished at school with the strap for expressing anger. Margaret describes a similar response from her mother, if she expressed anger as a child. As a result, she writes,

Little Mar was not permitted to express her anger. Anger was not permissible in my home, except by the adults. Displays of anger were met with punishment. So I learned I didn't have a right to be angry and it wasn't safe to get angry no matter how justified or how it was expressed. As a result, as an adult, I have a great deal of difficulty doing anger, feeling I have a right to anger.

Jane describes a family where she was permitted no expression of emotions, including anger, and where, as a girl in the family, her role was to be responsible for others without support for herself and without being heard. Vicky describes her attempts as a child, to express anger as being met with ridicule, minimization and punishment. Deb describes a home environment where she was silenced through fear, so that expressions of any kind, be it anger or other emotions, were never permitted. "*My father would destroy other people, your right to be, your right to live...you had to walk a very tight rope...he had a lot of power*".

Some of the women also identified that observing the manner in which their

mothers dealt with anger served to influence their own suppression of anger. Vicky says that she learned from her mother's silence that "*women shut up and put up*". Jane describes how her mother would deny her own anger toward her alcoholic and sometimes violent spouse by denying and avoiding the problem and pretending to the outside world that everything was fine. "*We couldn't express any emotions. We couldn't talk to her. To the outside world we were this perfect family...she was this wonderful person*". Deb describes her mother as,

wanting to be the master of anger. She came across being, looking like an angel, never got mad, never retaliated back ...where she suppressed anger or didn't even recognize it...she probably lived in denial...but I think anger comes out in different ways.

Others experienced their mothers expression of anger as both punitive and fearful, again, creating for these women, a denial of their own right to anger. Marie describes her mother as,

verbally, very, very abusive and she physically hit my other two sisters a great deal and I'm sure she must have hit me...my mother was a very, very angry person, very angry, and whatever she did, she slammed things...you just didn't talk in a nice voice, you just didn't hear it. That's the way it was, you know, and I think of the many men that came through, she is the one that pops into my mind as being the most angry.

Learning to suppress and deny anger created for each of these women, an inability to acknowledge or deal effectively with anger as it was encountered in their adult lives. This, subsequently, had far-reaching impact on the lives of each of the participants, particularly in the areas of **relationships, self-esteem, and health**. Patterns of **avoiding anger** or **misdirecting** it were identified, as was a tendency to turn anger into **hurt** and

sadness. **Withdrawing and isolating**, when faced with anger, either within themselves or in the presence of other people's anger, was also cited as a common strategy for coping with anger.

Margaret describes the impact of these earlier experiences of anger on her self-esteem and her relationships. Developing a pattern of denying her own anger, learning to feel responsible for other people's anger, and avoiding conflict, particularly within her closer relationships, she says,

I learned to be a people-pleaser. I learned that... don't do anything, don't stand up as a person...I didn't respect myself and, you know, my self-esteem was poor...it gave people a lot of power over me...especially the part where I felt responsible for making the situation better and getting rid of the other person's anger. Anger just had to be gotten rid of as quickly as possible...so...that gave people a lot of power...I would take the blame for whatever happened...it was my fault...or if I had expressed that I wanted to do something, I'd say, no, that's not important to me. I'll do what you want...denying that I had any right to be...avoiding any conflict within my closer relationships.

As a result of not acknowledging or allowing her anger in these situations, she would frequently find herself becoming angrier than warranted at little things, misdirecting her anger toward people at work or in situations which were less emotionally threatening.

Marie describes a pattern of internalizing her anger and, when first encountering it as an adult, she would dissociate from it. This, she believes, had an impact on her health, which has been problematic for her throughout her life.

I'd go away in my mind... It (the anger) was probably in my body, just harbouring, like probably...I've always had a lot of trouble with my bowels, I've always had a lot of trouble with my stomach, and I've always had...it just stayed in my body, you know. I wasn't dealing with it in a healthy way and getting it out so it was internalizing inside of me...so settling down there in my bowels,

kinking my bowels or, you know, festering.

Jane attributes many of her present relationship problems and her low self-esteem, to her inability throughout her life to deal effectively with feelings of anger. She has been unable to control her anger to the point of assaulting others and describes herself as having "a violent tongue". She believes she is taking out on her partner, the anger she has toward other people in her life who have abused her. She has severed her relationship with two of her brothers and is avoiding her parents presently because of her anger toward them. She is concerned that her children are suffering the effects of her inappropriate anger expression. She says,

It (anger) impacts on my relationships. , not only how they perceive me but how I perceive myself - I think I'm a bad person. It has an effect on your children. My daughter's outbursts are like mine in the past.

Deb believes that, as a result of repressing her anger, she has blocked out a lot of her experience from the past. She has also had difficulty with relationships, finding that, when she became angry with friends, she would withdraw and isolate herself, feeling hurt and making assumptions about their behavior rather than checking things out with them or trying to resolve the conflict. She also recognizes that she is only recently even acknowledging that anger has existed in her life and believes her suppression of anger has impacted on her health by creating added stress on her body.

The influence of mother-daughter relationships on women's development of relationship skills, particularly in the context of intimate relationships, has been expanded upon by Jack, Lerner and Stiver (1991; 1980; 1984). Jack and Stiver propose, in their discussions on relational theory, that women learn to suppress their own needs within

relationships in the interest of preserving the relationship and that this phenomenon is particularly strong as young girls experience their mothers doing the same. Stiver proposes that women typically develop an early dependency with mothers which continues to be reflected in their adult relationships.

The identification with mother...contributes further to women playing a more nurturant role than men in most relationships and becoming highly sensitive and vigilant to the nuances in interpersonal relationships (Stiver, 1984, p. 5).

Lerner postulates that women are influenced by mothers to prohibit expressions of anger, for fear of disrupting relationships. She has also proposed that women who do express anger, have often learned to do so in unacceptable and alienating ways, and therefore fear its destructiveness, as a result of being denied the opportunity to learn healthier ways to deal with this emotion (Lerner, 1980; 1985).

Self-destructive behavior was also identified by participants as a result of repressed anger. Four of the women had experienced suicidal thoughts which they associated with anger. Two of the women related their denial of anger directly to eating disorders. Marie, in describing her experience with self-destructive behavior, stated:

I would be feeling angry inside so I would become more self-destructive, well then I would eat, when I would be upset...I've had three, maybe four, three definite very serious suicidal times when I had a plan and maybe twice when I actually engaged in a plan and then I'd stop. So when I felt really angry or this frustrated and there was just nowhere to go and so self-destructive in that sense. But again, because I always thought I never really was entitled to those feelings.

Jane also believes that she masked a lot of her anger self-destructively in her

earlier adult life with drugs, alcohol and sexual promiscuity, saying, "*I was just pushing it in because I was not allowed to ever express any emotions*".

Vicky describes the impact of turning her anger inward as **depression**.

When my anger becomes so angry that I turn it inward. I become very depressed, um depending on how long that lasts, I have in the past become ...have had thoughts of suicide. I don't like who I am, I don't like being angry ...I've never had a successful relationship...it's affected everything I've ever done.

Each of the women cited being **unaware of their anger** and the effects it was having on their lives until it reached a **critical point**, when the intensity of their anger began to create problems within their lives. Four of the five women related a period, well into their adult lives, where they first became aware of anger as an **uncontrollable rage**. They all recognized, at this point, that their anger had become out of control. They saw their anger as all-consuming and controlling them, before they were able to even acknowledge its presence, yet they still lacked an understanding of it or how to deal with it in an effective way. Marie described her rage, emerging after her mother's death, as anger which was

all-consuming...I would react and go off on a tangent and not even know why I was angry...My own personal anger was something I had a great deal of difficulty accepting that I even had a right to personal anger..I would rant and rave and rant and rave...I got very good at throwing plastic bowls clear through to the living room without breaking anything.

Margaret discovered that she had problems with anger when she found herself, while caring for her 12 year old niece, repeatedly hitting her. At this point she became aware that the only way she could allow herself to recognize her anger was to let it get to the point of explosion, where she had no control over it.

Anger was something I didn't do. I basically denied, if someone said, well, are you angry?...nope....I wouldn't admit to being angry at all until it got to the point of being...I just couldn't control it and then it would be, okay, the situation was so bad that, yeah, I got angry, it was an explosion. I couldn't control it. So it was almost like, it was, well, not an excuse but I had to reach that point before I was able to express it.

Jane first experienced the severity of her anger as explosive and out of control when, as an adult, she encountered one of her abusers. Describing this incident, she says,

I had this reaction and I hadn't really explored why or anything...and the first time I knew I had that kind of rage in me...I would have killed him where he stood...I don't know what happened or how it started, but the volcano erupted and...I just...lost control.

She continued to experience this rage on subsequent occasions, leading her in one instance, to assaulting both her partner and her sister, an incident which has created for her, a lot of shame, guilt and fear, which she is still carrying.

Vicky described being stuck in rage at present, believing that she is just now, after 43 years, recognizing the severity of her anger.

I've had a history all my life of having my feelings blocked out, but I wasn't sure what this emotion was I was feeling...I began to recognize that there was some sort of rage in me, not just anger, it had reached the raging point where...it felt like it was controlling me rather than me controlling it...emotions and feelings start coming out that I didn't even know I had...and I began to recognize that there's this anger and it's probably the hardest issue, the hardest emotion that I have had to deal with.

Though Deb did not experience this out of control rage described by the others, she is aware that it has been only recently that she has begun to recognize anger and its intensity, saying, "*prior to the retreat, I was focused underneath the anger. I was*

resistant to using the word anger. I didn't like the word". She says now, "When certain things, like all the injustices, really touch my anger, I am angry, and I don't like to do it".

The **accumulation of anger** which has been internalized was also described by some of the participants. Jane describes the volatility of the accumulation of her anger and her need to work with it in layers,

It builds up to an explosion, violence erupts, which leads to guilt, shame and suppression...it feels like a bottle that, for years you put things into it and put things into it and then all of a sudden there's no more room and the cork goes on...I think you just go through... layers, you strip away layers...

Margaret describes a similar experience when she says, "*You'd let everything build up and build up until you lose control*". Deb says, "*There's probably years of repressed anger...*" Vicky vividly describes herself as, "*stuffing it in a tiny box and leaving it there to fester and fester, until boom*".

David Goleman, in Emotional Intelligence, presents research conducted by Zillman on the accumulation or buildup of anger, proposing that, without intervention, anger which is already aroused, can be built upon with new thoughts or triggers, into "a far greater intensity of anger than one (thought) that comes at the beginning. Anger builds on anger. The emotional brain heats up. By then rage, unhampered by reason, easily erupts into violence" (Goleman, 1995, p. 61). These women, in their patterns of denying and internalizing their anger and in being unable to learn effective ways of intervening when anger was encountered, were clearly vulnerable to this kind of anger build-up.

Four of the participants identified anger as the most prevalent and the most

difficult emotion to deal with as they began their journeys into recovery from childhood abuse. They described the intensity of anger they felt and the difficulty they encountered in expressing it, having no understanding of how to handle these feelings. Greenspan offers an explanation for these overwhelming feelings of intense anger which women experience when they begin, after years of suppressing and denying anger, to acknowledge and open up to their anger.

All the hurts of being a woman in a patriarchal society, accumulating in the subconscious for years, build up to an extraordinarily powerful subterranean rage. To peek into this "Pandora"s Box, by examining even the most specific and smallest of anger, often feels very dangerous...and (a woman) can feel even more trapped in her subconscious. Anger seems to be the trap. But it is not. It is just that the accumulated sludge of the Victim's rage, which has clogged up the woman's consciousness for years, has to be cleaned out before anything else can happen (Greenspan, 1995, p. 309-310).

Suppression and denial of anger has been cited in the literature as having far-reaching impact on women's lives. Lerner refers to the accumulation of anger as a result of the "nice lady" syndrome, a term she uses to describe society's expectation that women work "to preserve harmony in our relationships at the expense of defining a clear self" (Lerner, 1989, p. 6). Lerner maintains that anger is a normal, natural emotion which is inevitable when we continually assume responsibility for other people, stating that, "the more we are "nice" in these ways, the more we accumulate a storehouse of unconscious anger and rage" (Lerner, 1989, p. 6). She maintains that women have learned to suppress anger, or conversely, express it outwardly in ways which are unacceptable and ineffective. As a result, Lerner says,

Feelings of depression, low self-esteem, self-betrayal and even self-hatred are inevitable when we fight but continue to submit to unfair circumstances, when we complain but live in a way that betrays our hopes, values and potentials or when we find ourselves fulfilling society's stereotype of the bitchy, nagging, bitter, or destructive woman (Lerner, 1989, p. 4-5).

Greenspan uses social context to explain the concept of women's suppression of anger. She cites women's oppression and the expectation that women maintain the charming and beautiful qualities of traditional femininity is in direct conflict with women's outward expressions of anger. Thus, women have learned to internalize their anger, turning it instead, against themselves in the form of depression, self-loathing and self-destructive behaviors (Greenspan, 1993). She describes women's anger as,

(taking) many forms. There are the hidden and self-destructive forms of powerlessness with which we are so familiar: depressions, wrist slashings, overdoses and other suicidal gestures. There is also the kind of stubborn bitterness and helplessness which poisons our minds and bodies and deadens us to living; or there is unconsciously held resentment at men without an awareness of its meaning. All of these forms of anger keep us immobile; either locked up in the prisons of ourselves or antagonistically pitted against one another (Greenspan, 1993, p. 315).

Jack, in her longitudinal study of women and depression, recognizes the impact, for women, of denying their own needs, rights and emotions in their learned role as caretakers of relationships. "Being taught to respond to external expectations and to ignore the self's needs and feelings emerges as a crucial issue in the psychological development of each of these depressed women" (Jack, 1991, p. 155).

Estes describes how women are often unaware of their anger until it has reached the point of uncontrollable rage and discusses ways in which women become stuck in anger, further perpetuating its destructiveness in our lives. She says,

A person creating out of rage tends to create the same thing over and over again, with nothing new coming through. Untamed rage can become a constant mantra about how oppressed, hurt and tortured we are....A woman may have difficulty releasing anger even when it impedes her own life, even when it causes her to obsessively dwell upon events years old as though they happened yesterday (Estes, 1995, p. 354-355).

The experiences of these five women, in learning to suppress and internalize anger, can be viewed as supporting these theories which acknowledge that internalized anger has a negative impact on the social, psychological and emotional development of women. They exemplify the many reasons why it is critical to our well-being and growth, that we learn to move beyond the social and cultural barriers which serve to suppress anger and why it is critical that we gain insight and understanding of old angers, which, if left to the unconscious, can accumulate and increase even further, the destructive force of anger, unvoiced, in our lives.

Fear of Anger

Fear associated with anger was identified in several ways throughout the research by each of the participants, as a primary reason for women to resist or deny their own anger, or to engage with others, in situations which might evoke anger. Most of the participants had experienced people in their lives who had displayed violent behavior associated with their anger, leading them to believe that anger, be it their own or that of others, was likely to result in **violence**. As most of them had experienced their own anger reaching the point of rage and explosiveness, there was amongst them, a **fear of losing control** if they were to allow their own anger to be expressed. **Fear of other people's reactions**, should they show their own anger, was a common theme, as was the **fear of losing important relationships**. **Shame and guilt** often accompanied this fear.

For Jane, fear of losing control, played a major role in her struggle to find a healthy and effective way to express the intense and frequent anger she was experiencing. Jane had experienced violent displays of anger in both her father and her brother and had been victim to frequent beatings by her brother and later, her husband. When her own anger began to surface as an adult, she had no awareness of its intensity until it reached the point of explosion, leading her on one occasion to assault her partner and her sister. Jane has experienced intense shame and remorse since that event and has expressed fear of it happening again, should she allow herself to open to the anger she feels inside. She says, *"It's the consequences of what happened that night, I have to live with!"* She is aware that this incident has affected the level of trust between herself and her partner.

Her biggest fear is that she will lose her relationship with her partner, a relationship which she has come to value immensely in her life. Prior to the retreat, Jane expressed concern that she was unable to find a safe outlet for her anger, which at times is so overwhelming, despite the several skills and techniques she has learned through counselling, to manage her anger. This fear had led Jane to a recognition that she needed to focus on her issues of anger and gain more insight and understanding of its roots, as well as how she can gain control over her anger.

Deb recognized that the fear she experienced as a child through her father's use of anger and violence as a way to control the family, had a major impact on her ability to allow her own feelings of anger to surface and be handled effectively. She said,

My father was very angry. He used, he controlled with his anger. He controlled the whole situation by his anger. He used it for fear. He used it against people. He used it to blame people for what was his lot in life... To live with that fear, that constant fear...you don't realize the impact that can have on a person, the stress...and the way that it silences you, shuts you down as a person...I wasn't even aware of the anger I had.

She also recognized her own resistance to "*going to those deeper places that are triggered by my anger...it takes me away from my family, my work and the balance that I strive for in my life*", as a result of her pattern of "*shutting down*" to her anger. She believes that now, she needs to be supported to go through her anger from beginning to end so she can learn, "*not to think that its so big and large and be real fearful of it*".

Margaret's fear of both her own and other people's anger was paramount in her denial of her own anger and in her process of learning to deal more effectively with anger. Margaret has memories of victimization within her family by angry family

members, and learned to feel responsible for stopping other people's anger. She says, "*I have a problem with the physical expressions of anger... It's scary when someone gets angry and they've lost control*". She also learned, through her own explosiveness, to fear the destructiveness of her own anger.

I've always been afraid of my own anger because I always felt that, even though I didn't do anger, I knew that there was anger there and that I didn't know the extent of it and that I was always afraid that the anger would do damage, like that if I ever did allow it to come out, it would either destroy someone else or destroy me...I controlled myself as much as other people controlled me with anger because I wouldn't let myself express anger at all.

Through her process of opening to her anger, she identified a fear of losing the very meaningful relationship she had with her partner, should either of them engage with the other in anger or conflict. She writes about this, saying,

I'm aware that I'm not sure what to do when someone I'm close to gets angry. I feel it is my responsibility to not get angry in return as that might escalate the argument and I would not only lose the argument but the person and their love.

Even in situations where anger was evoked with people whom she was less attached to, Margaret expressed fear of their anger escalating should she express anger with them. As a result, Margaret identified safety as her strongest need when looking at ways to "*do anger*" more effectively.

Marie had experienced violence and abuse as a child when adults around her would become angry, and saw her association of anger with violence as a factor in her development of the pattern of disallowing her own anger. "*Anger and violence go hand in hand...in terms of my abuse...(it) was all very violent and the men, my flashes of them was anything less than, always seem very angry, totally angry*". As Marie reflected on

her own process of opening to her anger, during the period in her life when she was hospitalized on several occasions for agoraphobia and severe depression, she identified fear as a key issue, saying,

It was through that process of regaining confidence to go back out into the world that I thought, okay kids, this is the bottom and if you're gonna go out into the world then you've gotta have a right to deal with these things that are coming up or else....

Vicky learned from her earlier life experiences that "anger causes violence". As a victim of spousal abuse in a marriage where she "was beaten several times", she describes reaching a point where her own anger became out of control.

I reached a stage where I fought back...and, that was an uncontrollable anger. I had actually thought and planned to kill my husband that night.

In the process of exploring her anger more fully during the weekend retreat, Vicky identified fear associated with her anger. She writes, "Anger for me is scary, painful and inappropriate behavior...I fear a violent me". She recognized that her anger was closely related to the many fears she has developed in her life, fears which had been holding her back from enjoying her life more fully. She identified that taking the risk to confront others when she encountered anger toward them was her biggest challenge in dealing more effectively with anger. She saw fear of getting too close to her anger and fear of losing important relationships, or of others retaliating against her if she should express anger, as her biggest barriers to dealing more effectively with her anger. She saw trust as her primary need in learning to communicate her anger with others. It is significant to note here that in the days subsequent to the weekend retreat, Vicky did attempt to communicate her anger over an important issue she was experiencing within her

relationship with her partner. This attempt resulted in her partner's anger escalating to the point of violence, requiring Vicky to take action to ensure her safety and that of her family.

Lerner's discussion on women's fear associated with their anger is consistent with these findings. She states,

our unconscious fears of destructiveness and of separateness may block us from maintaining our clarity and using our anger as a challenge to take a new position or action on our own behalf (Lerner, 1989, p. 98).

Greenspan argues that fear contributes to the pattern of suppressing anger for women, who are traditionally viewed as the less powerful in our society. She argues that anger is viewed by women as an "immensely destructive force" (Greenspan, 1995, p. 309) and that women's fear of their own anger can be seen as fearing their own power and the possible alienation or backlash from others which a display of such power can generate (Greenspan, 1995). As a result, she says,

To the extent that we are frightened of our own anger, we choose, whether consciously or not, to be victims (Greenspan, 1995, p. 314).

Greenspan also acknowledges that there is a risk to women, in being angry alone, without support, skills or clarity of self to allow our anger its effective expression. She says,

Of knowing how and where to channel that anger so that we serve our own interests as women and avoid getting burnt out, fired, violently out of control, psychiatrically hospitalized, beaten up, raped or any of the other consequences that sometimes lie in wait for women who experience or act on their anger without support. Women's problem with anger is not simply a problem of denial that we feel angry. It is also a problem of knowing how to name

our anger properly, understand its origins in our lives, and act on it effectively (Greenspan, 1995, p. 314-315).

Jack also expounds on the role of women's fear in further suppressing and containing anger, due to the threat that anger poses to the stability of her relationships and the challenges posed in a woman's life once she acknowledges her true feelings.

The fears that lead a woman to hide her authentic self both arouse anger and, at the same time, require its repression. A woman quiets her anger not only because she thinks it will cause reprisals or drive away the love and closeness she seeks, but because anger potentially brings clarity of vision and a requirement to act that threaten the established order of her life (Jack, 1991, p. 140).

For women, who have learned that anger is an unacceptable emotion, learning how to name anger and to effectively act on our anger is one of the greatest challenges in doing anger work - a challenge which also involves having to face very real and frightening personal and social consequences. That people do leave, people do lash back, that systems are not always open to the honesty and assertiveness in the voice of women's anger is evident in the stories of individual women and in the larger societal backlash that has become part of the women's movement. This fear serves to perpetuate the cycle of silencing which women, individually and collectively, have had to endure.

Patti Lather, in her discussions on human agency as a part of generating knowledge which promotes a critical consciousness and emancipatory action, cautions us as researchers to be aware of the social and contextual constraints which inhibit action. She presents a model of consciousness-raising which occurs for women in stages where we move between states of liberation, anger and action, or conversely, feelings of hopelessness, burden and fear (Lather, 1991).

The research methods used in this inquiry into women's anger, provided a space where women could hear their own voices of anger without fearing judgement or backlash. The participants were able, through personal reflection and sharing, to identify what was angering them and how anger was impacting on their lives. They were able to voice anger with a new and deeper awareness of what they were angry about. Though they identified areas where fear still served as an inhibitor, they were able to identify ways in which to care for themselves and voice their anger in the safety of trusting relationships. In these ways, each developed a more critical consciousness regarding their anger and the social contributors and constraints influencing their experience of anger.

For those women who are just beginning to open to the strength and power of anger, it is important to acknowledge the fear associated with anger and to name the many ways in which our culture continues to be an unsafe place in which to give voice to anger. Supporting women to "try anger on", in safe places and in safe ways, in the therapist's office, in support groups, and with trusted friends, may be a first step in going out into the world with the full force of newly-discovered anger. Learning effective ways to manage our anger and "tame" our rage, ways which fit for us in the context of our unique life situations, can help us to voice our anger in ways which can help to keep us safe.

Understanding the Origins of Anger

Recognizing that many of the triggers for **anger in the present** were **linked to issues from the past** was a common theme for all of the participants in this research. With this recognition came an identification by most, of a need to engage in a process of **deeper exploration of the origins of anger**, as a way to understand their anger more fully and find ways to express and handle their anger more effectively. When exploring with each of the women, what it was that they felt they were most angry at, several themes emerged which, through the process of the interviews and the weekend retreat, they connected to some of their strongest experiences of **abuse, injustices and loss** throughout their lives.

Marie identified that what triggered her anger most strongly at this point in her life was people in authority taking advantage of others, along with situations where she felt she was being manipulated or where people were not being honest with her. This, she connected strongly to the injustices she perceives in the world, particularly for women, through both her own experiences and those of other women she has known. She stated,

I'm angry at the injustices, the inequalities in life, the inability, as women, to have control over certain aspects of our lives, when we're abused and treated as objects, as hunks of meat.

She describes, through her process of recovery from childhood abuse, the intensity of anger she experienced, recognizing that "*the anger was paramount...so much of it was anger...*". When dealing with the rage she experienced as a result of the death of her friend, she allowed herself to feel the intensity of her anger by exploring and allowing what she describes as "*the deeper roots of my anger to surface and look at*". Through this

process, Marie discovered that she was angry, not only for her loss, but for the abuse that her friend had suffered throughout her life at the hands of people in authority. She writes of this anger, saying, "*I'm angry that she was finally getting to the good times, so much had been revealed - anger that the bastards, many of them still live. It's not fair. I know life's not fair but it sure pisses you off*". And on reflecting on her experience with this event in her life, she stated, "*(her) death was a catalyst but the big issue for me was the injustice*".

Margaret strongly identified her present issues of anger as being connected to her childhood experiences. She recognizes that what angers her most, presently, is when she feels she is not treated with respect, when she feels she is not being heard, and when she encounters abuse against women and children. She says,

I'm angry at women always having to prove themselves, being treated as if we're second class citizens, even by other women. It's accepted by society that men can abuse women and girls and get away with it.

Margaret recognized her discomfort with both her own and other people's anger as stemming from her childhood experiences of being silenced and made to feel responsible for other people's anger. Margaret clearly remembers her childhood experiences of being silenced by a punitive mother and a sexually abusive brother, but as she reflected on what has angered her the most in her life, she says,

The obvious was the abuse. But I think that it goes even deeper than that...I think that I was really angry that...no one in my life seemed to care who I was, or what I needed...I couldn't be me...I was never good enough for the world so I was always trying to be something I wasn't...and I think that one of the things over the years that I know has made me the angriest was when people,

when I felt I wasn't being respected or when I was being dismissed by people. And I think that would make me really angry, it's like...somehow...it made me feel like a child again, and I don't know whether...maybe that touched into the anger I felt as a child and never expressed...

As Margaret engaged in the process of the weekend retreat and in continuing to journal about her anger during the subsequent days, she encountered an intensity of anger associated with the emergence, through dreams and memories triggered, of a deeper awareness of her earlier childhood abuse. Through this process, she recognized that trust, which was so paramount for her in allowing her own or other people's anger, was tied closely to the loss of trust she experienced as a child, after being abused by her father. To this she writes, *"I lost my father when he crossed that line"*. This awareness enabled her to take more risk in allowing herself to feel her anger when she is in an environment of safety and with those she trusts. She says, *"Safety is the most important aspect. I need to feel safe, not just physically but emotionally and this is very important to my inner child"*. She also recognized a need to learn more about herself and her anger, saying, *"I think the more I learn about myself and I learn about my anger, the better able I will be to do anger effectively"*.

Deb was very aware throughout the process of the research that her anger in the present was closely tied to her experiences of abuse as a child. She describes that the two strongest triggers for her anger in the present are her children crying and situations where people do not follow through on their commitments to her. When people don't follow through, she says,

It triggers a deep thing of safety, of depending on things. if you depend on this, will it come true? or, the whole area, well it's just

something you've experienced most of your life, you know. Can you trust again?...and it comes full cycle, of everything that is connected with that and it isn't just the present stuff. It connects with deeper parts or back further, so then you can be aware that yes, situations have happened today and, yes, you deal with them, but you deal with two levels. I'm aware that I deal with them on two levels.

When her children cry, she says, "*It triggers my own pain*", describing that when she is feeling more vulnerable, she is not always able to provide her children what they need to stop the crying and when this happens, she says,

I can't always stop it. It tells me that it comes from a...I must have heard it before...it must be what I'm feeling about myself or something.

Deb recognized that so much of her anger was connected to the loss she experienced from the absence of nurturing and protection from her mother, in a family where she was being abused. She also identified a need to go beyond her usual pattern of intellectualizing her experiences from the past, to actually allowing herself to feel the feelings. To this she says,

I'm wondering if there's a block there and that...or also a way of realizing that I probably did more blocking than I realize I have done, even though that I say that I have a good memory...I have a memory of...I think I probably remember everybody who abused me. But I can't remember, I may not remember what it feels like, I mean I remember, I can remember being held, what it feels like to be held and stuff and be, you know, but I can't remember the feelings, you know, so its a big area shut down.

Deb's process throughout the retreat and during the days subsequent to the retreat, was one of retrieving memories of her childhood abuse and allowing herself to feel the emotions of these experiences. Though this was a difficult and painful process for her, she found that the experience of "*embracing the pain and anger*", allowed her to let go

of some of the guilt and shame that she had carried for so long in feeling responsible for the sexual abuse perpetrated against her. She was also able to immerse herself in the anger she had toward her mother for the loss of nurturing and protection that she experienced. In regards to this she writes,

I accepted that I wasn't ready to give up my anger as yet and to make peace with Mom. Before that can happen, I need to talk about that anger, express it, then I will give it up, then I can go and talk to Mom - for then, I would be ready to let go of my anger and allow my Mom that forgiveness.

During her later reflections on this experience, Deb says, "*Anger sometimes comes from a place of our own inner child (self) and this will determine how we deal with it...Sometimes we get stuck in that inner place*".

Jane was quite aware of how her present feelings of anger were connected to her earlier experiences of abuse, mainly by men in her life, and the fact that her parents were not supportive of her. She described several instances where her anger in the present was triggered by memories or awareness of these experiences. Seeing one of her abusers years after the abuse triggered an uncontrollable rage for her. She has severed relations with her brother because of her anger toward him as a result of his abuse of her as a child. She misdirects anger toward her partner as a result of all the violation she has experienced from other men in her life. Situations she encounters, even with strangers, where children are being neglected or abused or where women are experiencing spousal abuse, will trigger enough anger for her that she finds herself intervening or taking action of some sort on their behalf. She describes that, through her process of therapy, she has been dealing with the anger, on and off, for some time, saying now,

I sort of went through this before and I felt more at peace for awhile and now, it seems to have...like, I've reached a new level of it, like I'm digging deeper into stuff...I'm more aware now of myself and my feelings, how that impacts on how I act...I'm hoping to get out of it (the retreat), is that I do become more aware of what's in there and what, how I can use it.

As a result of her retreat experience, where she was able to explore her feelings of anger more deeply, Jane allowed herself to express some very strong feelings of anger, as well as the shame and loss that she was carrying with her and that she saw connected to that anger, particularly toward her abusive ex-husband. During her reflections later, she says this experience helped her by,

learning how to get in there and dig out that crap. Art therapy was enlightening to me. It really gets in there to the feelings. I'm more able now to separate the present from the past and the abuse. It doesn't impact on my every waking moment...I feel in my heart that I had no control over what happened to me as a child and I have no reason to feel guilty. I have given (him) the responsibility of it.

Vicky is aware that her anger at this point in her life is strongly triggered when she feels that she is not being acknowledged or heard, or when she experiences a betrayal of trust. She is aware that her anger is evoked most strongly when either of these issues are triggered within the context of her closer relationships.

The people that anger me most are not strangers, are people that I'm sharing a little of my life with. I think anger comes from the people, are the ones I love the most, it's a whole stirr-up of emotions which comes, its with people you trust.

She connects this anger with her experience as a child of being silenced, punished or ridiculed whenever she tried to express herself, and how she continues to experience this same response from people with whom she has the closest relationships.

I'm angry because people in my childhood or in my past didn't recognize the part they played in it...um...and I'm angry because some of those same people don't see that I'm a wonderful person with my own ideas and thoughts and, um, a lot of the family members feel that perhaps I...I've changed because I don't jump when they holler anymore. And, um...basically you can see anger has always been there...I don't want someone to laugh them (my feelings) off, just because they're happening in past days, making jokes about it...um for many years that happened in my life, when I was angry at something, I would joke about it and it was easier to laugh than it was to face the truth, and I never recognized that as being wrong, and now I've been recognizing that has been very disrespectful to me, that, um, whether my emotions at the time are anger or hurt or betrayal or whatever, I have a right to those feelings...

At the time of her participation in the research, Vicky was dealing with an issue within her relationship with her partner, where she felt as though her trust was again being betrayed. During the retreat, through her art therapy sessions, she identified how strongly the anger she felt about this situation was connected to her experiences of abuse as a child and the impact that had on her ability to experience intimacy in her adult relationships. During this process, she writes, *"I know that I need to reach my anger core and perhaps I have not done so. Perhaps I have and don't recognize it. Perhaps I'm not ready"*. She was aware of her *"fear of getting too close to it and asking for what you need...fear of loss, of being called insane"*. This awareness helped her to see how her anger was so closely related to other fears she carried with her and her need for trust in order to communicate her anger. Through this increased self-awareness, Vicky felt that she was gaining strength and power with her own voice through her anger and saw that she was, *"no longer willing to put myself last, or become small in the face of it (anger)...I will stay with this anger as long as I need to"*.

Theories of intervention which derive from phenomenological thought, such as gestalt theory and psychosynthesis, recognize the value in supporting people to engage in a process of deeper self-awareness, from which new insights can be gained regarding one's needs and what actions one can take to bring about desired changes and learn more authentic ways of being in the world. Gestalt theory recognizes that beliefs and habits in the present are influenced by residues from the past and that "living that is not based on the truth of oneself in the world leads to feelings of dread, guilt and anxiety" (Simkin & Yontef, 1989, p. 324). Gestalt therapy attempts, through dialogue, focused awareness and experimentation, to promote more insight and self-awareness, thus enabling people to make more meaningful choices for being in the world (Simkin & Yontef, 1989). Psychosynthesis aims to promote this same level of inner-awareness, through use of guided imagery, to bring forward one's experiences in the subconscious. Through the recognition, acceptance, coordination and integration of these experiences, one can gain a stronger sense of wholeness.

Each of the women in the group was able to utilize these counselling strategies during the weekend to gain more awareness of their anger and its needs. They were able to accept their anger as a rightful response to events in their lives and in so doing, became more able to integrate their feelings of anger as part of their lives, with a clearer understanding of the reasons for their anger, the underlying emotions attached to their anger, and what their anger needed. This allowed them to take bigger steps toward allowing it to come forward and be voiced within the context of their own experiences.

Jack describes women moving out of depression as a process of un-silencing the

self, through self-exploration and emergence of one's own voice. In the strengthening of "I", she proposes, women move away from depression and learn how to be in relationships on our own terms.

Here (in depression), a woman must do inner work, work whose reference is always relationships, with the unknown side of self, with inner urgings and tasks, with the real other. The healing possibilities arise out of a dialogue of inner questioning and attentiveness to the authentic self (rather than condemning and critical judgements directed at the 'I') (Jack, 1991, p. 192).

Greenspan, in recognizing anger as an integral part of women's process of reclaiming ourselves, stresses the necessity of therapists recognizing women's need to explore the roots of their anger and to "understand the rage inside our depression as part of our oppression" (Greenspan, 1995, p. 304).

Thomas Moore, in both Care of the Soul and Soul Mates proposes that the pathway to soul, which he describes as the more authentic way of being in the world, is to open to the often times darker parts of inner selves through which we gain insight and understanding of ourselves . He describes soul as,

A quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance... You take back what has been disowned. You work with what is rather than what you wish were there....Care of the soul means respecting its emotions and fantasies, however objectionable (Moore, 1992, p. 5 & 85).

Estes, through her eloquent style of storytelling, describes a woman's journey into understanding and taming rage. She describes a process of allowing ourselves the time to be with our anger for a period, and to pursue an understanding of it, through entering our unconscious, a process which she describes as "climbing the mountain". From here, she says, we can learn to make meaning of the experiences of our lives.

...if a woman was raised to have fewer positive expectations than others in the family, with harsh restraints on her freedom, deportment, language, and so forth, her normal anger is likely to escalate over issues, tones of voice, gestures, words, and other sensory triggers that remind her of the original events. We can come close to reconstructing the wounds of childhood by closely inspecting what adults lose their temper over...in climbing the mountain...the instinctual viewpoint that emanates from the wild unconscious...begins to be the only one that unerringly informs us about what to do next...about how to transform the hurt, negativism, and grudge-holding attributes of rage, all of which are warranted initially. (Estes, 1992, P. 354-355).

These women, in their search for ways to live more connected, whole and positive lives, have allowed themselves the experience of courageously exploring and seeking an understanding of the roots and origins of some of their anger. Through their engagement in the process promoted by this research, of self-reflection and group sharing, they entered the cycle of reflection-action-reflection, which helped to promote for each, a more critical consciousness regarding their anger and what they needed to do to move through anger. In allowing a deeper part of self to emerge, we can gain more self-acceptance and a clearer sense of self, as well as control over the ways in which we choose to handle our anger and that of others, and our needs in dealing with anger more effectively in our lives.

Women's Anger Needs

Perhaps the most significant finding which emerged from this inquiry into the meaning of anger in women's lives, was the identification of specific needs that women have if they are to allow the process of exploring their anger and learning how to deal more effectively with it, to unfold. For some, this recognition came long before they engaged in this research, though for each, new awarenesses and understandings emerged through the research process, to support and assist them in their ongoing journey into honouring their anger as a natural and healthy part of self. Though for some, certain needs were stronger than others, there were common themes which emerged which can provide useful guidelines for women in allowing their anger the life and the voice it requires, and for those who desire to support women on their journey into anger.

Safety, both **physically** and **emotionally**, stemming from the high prevalence of fear associated with their anger, was the most paramount need which women identified, in allowing themselves to open up to their anger, and to learn more effective ways of responding to anger in their lives. For some, safety meant being in an **environment** where they could safely express their anger, **without having to feel responsible** for making the another person angry or **fearing retaliation**. For others, it meant finding **safe ways to express their anger**, with a sense that they had **control over their anger**, rather than it controlling them. For others, safety meant having enough **trust** in another person that they could allow their anger a voice without fear of losing the relationship.

Margaret describes her need for safety as,

perhaps the most important aspect. I need to feel safe, not just physically, but emotionally (very important to my inner child) and spiritually as well...I have to feel a safety, so I have to feel that I'm not triggering the other person to continue to get angrier...then, a way to express it that is safe, not just safe for me but safe for other people as well.

Jane recognized her need for physical safety within her relationship with her partner. *"Just to be able to recognize that after what you've been through with men, the victimization stuff, and knowing that no matter what I say to him, he's never going to hit me"*. Deb was aware that the safest place for her to express her anger was at home with her family. *"I see it as I must feel safe at home to do it whereas I wouldn't feel safe with my friends, so it's a safe place to express it"*. Vicky was aware of her need to find safe ways to express her anger, so that she feels in control of it rather than being controlled by it. Marie recognized that, for the longest time, her husband, with whom she has a trusting and secure relationship, was the only person with whom she could ever acknowledge or express her anger.

The need to recognize, acknowledge, accept and give themselves permission to experience anger was also paramount. This was significant for most of the participants as they had all experienced a portion of their lives where they were either unaware that they had feelings of anger or were consciously stuffing them down in an attempt to avoid the discomfort they experienced when anger was expressed. Being able to identify the ways in which anger manifested itself in the body was an important component for some. Naming the emotion they were feeling as "anger" was another, as was recognizing that they had a right to their feelings of anger when they occurred. Marie states, after

struggling for many years to "get in touch with the anger...It's the acknowledgement of it (anger). Acknowledgement that it's there, that it has a right to be there, that it's okay, it's alright to feel anger..." Margaret saw the need for this acceptance and permission to come, not only from herself, but from others. She says,

My anger requires permission - I need to feel that it is okay to express my anger, that it's okay with me and others...and acceptance - don't try to talk me out of being angry. That is how I feel. I need you to accept that.

Vicky saw recognition of her anger before it got out of control as a key factor for her, "without going through all the negatives and smashing things around, so that the issue that causes this much pain or this much anger can be dealt with".

Allowing themselves to be with the anger for a period of time was another strongly identified need. Most of the women recognized that anger was an indication to them that something was not right in their lives. Allowing themselves to stay with the feelings of anger rather than stuffing them back down or avoiding them, trying to understand what it is that is triggering the anger, allowing other emotions attached to the anger to surface, determining what the anger needs at the time it is experienced, helped them to gain insight into ways that they could use their anger more effectively to solve problems or return to a more harmonious state.

Deb describes this need, when she says,

It's (anger) a signal , an opportunity for me to process things more deeply...I just walk with it and now other things that come up, what is it touching on, what are the feelings, what does it feel like?...What do I need, what am I not recognizing?

Marie describes this need to be with her anger as well, saying,

When the anger comes I stop and go...huh, I'm feeling angry. What's triggering it. So I look for what's pushing the buttons now whereas before I might react and go off on a tangent and not even know why I was angry. Now I try to look at what made those feelings come about and all that kind of stuff...and I need to ask, what can I do with this that is useful?

Jane says,

I need to be able to say, for an hour or so or whatever time I set aside, I will acknowledge this and write about it or deal with this or do that or however it is I want to do it, but for the rest of the time it won't be in my every waking moment.

The need to **do something with the anger** was also identified as paramount. Each of the women recognized an energy or a life to their anger, which needed to be expressed in some way, either physically, verbally or emotionally. Deb describes needing to state her anger out loud. She says,

Usually I just walk with it and I speak out loud with it. I think there is some benefit in stating outloud, stating what you're feeling out loud to the universe. It's like you're not keeping it inside...you're listening to yourself...you're able to put things more in place ...I need to keep working with it, yelling it out, just to release it...if I can verbalize it, I get to the emotions of it, not just the intellect.

Margaret recognizes a need to express her anger.

I found if I expressed it like that, um, and verbalized it, it would go away very quickly. I would become more rational. And I could think the situation through and my anger would dissipate and I wouldn't be left with the feeling that I had stuffed it down.

She also finds walking with it, digging in her flowerbeds and throwing rocks helpful in dissipating the energy of her anger. Marie identified a need to go to the ocean and throw rocks and has found writing about it helpful. Jane takes herself to her basement and

stacks wood for an hour or so when her anger is strong. However, she finds she needs to vent it as well and has difficulty doing this. *"I need a safe way to vent it and I don't know what that is"*.

The need to make **choices** regarding how they were going to handle their anger was also identified. The need for choice was closely connected to these women having a sense of control over their anger, rather than the anger controlling them. Making a choice to hold onto their anger as long as they felt they needed to was a significant insight that some of the women gained in exploring their anger more deeply throughout the research. Deb says, *"It's a decision to go into it...you have to know what the costs of it is, everyone around you has to know what the cost is, will they support you in it, will they understand?"* and *"in regards to my mother, I accepted that I wasn't ready to give up my anger as yet and to make peace with Mom"*. Choosing to remain with her anger was a strong realization for Vicky who recognized, during her retreat experience, that she needed to choose when she was ready to let her anger go, saying, *"I will stay with this anger as long as I need to...I don't need (him) to tell me not to be angry or how long I can be angry"*.

Recognizing that anger sometimes serves as a **protection** emerged as a common theme in women choosing to hold onto anger. Jane saw her anger as a way to separate herself from an abusive relationship, protecting both herself and her daughter from further physical assaults by her ex-husband and creating the emotional distance she needed in order to leave. Vicky recognized her anger as a way to protect her from her partner's mental and physical backlash, as she began to gain strength and voice her own needs

within the relationship. She saw her anger as giving her the strength to take action to protect herself and her family before her partner's violence became even more destructive.

Support and validation from others was again, a significant need identified by the women as they embarked on a process of opening up to their feelings of anger and allowing it to be expressed or used in a healthy way within their lives. Marie identifies her husband, whom she describes as supportive and understanding, as well as her support group, as offering her a place to safely talk about her anger. Deb recognizes that, since she has started to build healthier relationships, such as that with her husband and with friends, she is feeling more accepted and respected, and is more able to embrace her anger and work it through. She also recognizes a need to be supported to stay with her anger when she is first encountering it, so that she can feel it and more fully explore its meaning. Margaret recognized this need for support within her relationship with her partner.

Most of the women recognized the important role that both individual and group therapy played in their process of allowing anger into their lives. Seeing these as supportive and safe environments where they were validated as having a right to their anger or where, in encountering others expressing their anger, they were able to give themselves permission to do the same. Women's groups also provided a needed sense of safety. Being in a controlled environment with guidelines and rules around safety, confidentiality and non-judgement, provided the safe context needed to allow anger to be explored and expressed. Hearing others express anger at life's injustices, helped to

validate and normalize for these women, that anger was a natural response to many of their life experiences of oppression, abuse and victimization. Groups also provide a forum for women to focus solely on themselves, taking time out from their busy and demanding schedules and responsibilities for others. Marie describes how the forum of the weekend retreat, in providing safety, support, validation and a time out, has worked for her. She says,

You have to provide an environment which is safe and secure, where the focus is on you, where you feel safe with the others and you don't have to deal with the day-to-day life. This gives permission for the deeper roots of anger to surface and to look at. The group process reinforced the idea that deep anger and intense emotion is okay, but then it allowed us to take it out and look at it, work with it, and it was okay to be with the intensity of it. Others doing it validated our right to have that intensity.

Jack discusses the role that dialogue, in the context of a safe and supportive environment, can play in a woman's emergence of a more authentic self. Within the therapeutic dialogue, she says,

As both parties attend carefully to the depressed woman's murmurings of feelings long condemned and silenced, the imperceptible can be recognized and transformed into meaning by being considered and perhaps enacted with a safe connection (Jack, 1991, p. 204).

Jack considers safety as paramount for "a woman to consider the risk of acting on her own self-knowledge". She proposes that women's groups offer, "community support for a woman to form new interpretations and evaluations of interpersonal events...gaining strength and support from one another through identifying, sharing and reinterpreting (renaming) events together" (Jack, 1991, P. 204).

Utilizing the group process as a methodology within this research, my aim was to foster this safe and supportive environment, where women could begin to listen to and accept their own experiences of anger. The group provided a context where personal reflection and group sharing of the difficult and often dark emotion of anger could occur. Through the process of facilitating us to go further into our anger, it encouraged the cycle of reflection - action - reflection to continue and the adoption of a stronger sense of personal agency to emerge.

This need to **take action** with their anger was a strongly identified area in response to feelings of anger. For many, it was not enough to respond to anger within the context of their own lives. Releasing anger, moving beyond it, required that they find a way to give some of the responsibility for the origins of their anger, back to those they felt were responsible. An important aspect here, however, was knowing that they could confront others while still maintaining a sense of control over the way they expressed their anger, and thus, learning effective skills to manage and communicate anger became paramount. Jane frequently speaks out when she sees childhood abuse or neglect and has found that confronting one of her own abusers has allowed her to release some of her anger and the responsibility she has felt for the abuse. She has also identified a need to confront all of her abusers as a way to put these issues, which have so impeded her in her life, to rest. Marie identified turning her anger into action as a real theme and wrote about this need repeatedly in her journal, saying, "*Turning anger around, it can give you strength...Anger leads to action which leads to resolution*". She also, took steps to confront and discuss her anger over her friend's death with people whom she felt held

some of the responsibility.

For others, channelling the energy of their anger into the more political or social context of their lives was seen as a way to take action. Speaking out against abuse and other injustices in society or working to support and assist others in dealing with issues of abuse, became a way to use their anger constructively. For Margaret, this was an important part of her healing process. She writes,

Yes, I'm still angry about my past, however that anger is the motivating force that I have used to take the steps necessary to fight the abuse of this world. I think that is what Little Mar is trying to tell me, that I am her voice. I can be the voice of those who can't speak for themselves. I think she needs me to express her anger. She needs me to stand up for her because no one stood up for her then.

Margaret presently devotes considerable volunteer time to supporting other survivors of childhood abuse and to creating public awareness of the impact of abuse on people's lives. Marie is actively involved in supporting other people who have experienced childhood abuse. As a result of her reflections and insights on her own anger recently, she has been giving thought to a career path which would enable her to do this work in a more formalized way. Jane speaks out whenever she sees abuse and neglect of women and children, and has identified a desire to do work with women who are abused, if and when she reaches a place where she no longer feels that her anger is a debilitating force in her own life.

Turning anger into action which can serve to change oppressive conditions in the lives of women has been a basic premise in much of the feminist literature on women's anger. Greenspan discusses the need for women to go beyond just allowing themselves

to feel angry, to collectively taking action against social injustice.

We need to know how to mobilize and organize our anger collectively; to use it to fight for control of our bodies and reproductive lives, our family and sex lives, our paid-work lives, our psychic/emotional lives. For it is the institutionalized lack of control over these conditions that feeds our anger, no matter how personal it may appear. Without beginning to experience our anger as justified rage at certain specific conditions of subordination, we will never undertake the project of changing those conditions...and the anger of women as a group (no matter how in touch we are with it) will never be assuaged (Greenspan, 1993, p. 315).

Estes takes a similar stand, seeing anger as a natural response to women becoming more conscious of the social, political and cultural impact on their lives.

It is psychically sound for women to feel this anger. It is psychically sound for them to use this anger about injustice to invent ways to elicit useful change. It is not psychologically sound for them to neutralize their anger so they will not feel, so they will therefore not press for evolution and change (Estes, 1992, p. 367).

The need for self-care was recognized as an overlying theme in meeting our needs in regards to our anger. Self-care, for most, involved learning ways to nurture themselves, manage stress and maintain a sense of balance in their lives. It meant gaining a stronger sense of self, improving self-esteem and being in control of their lives. For Deb, this meant striving to maintain balance in her life so that she could maintain a healthy connection to her children, her husband, her friends and her work. She saw herself being more able to allow anger to be experienced if she was creating this balance. Marie identified a need to engage in activities which were soothing and nurturing, such as meditation, writing, and being by the ocean, as helping her to be with her anger in a more positive way. Jane identified that if she was managing the overall stress in her life, her anger did not become so large and uncontrollable. She says,

I am recognizing my limits and when it's time to take care of myself...using self-talk, deep breathing and working hard at more optimistic thoughts...I now feel better, more comfortable saying I'm angry, as long as I show it appropriately, as defined by my own standards...These past few months I can say "I'm angry" and not build it up to explosion...When managing stress overall, you can recognize it and express it and it's gone. Before, I would hold it.

Daniel Goleman cites research which supports the importance of managing stress as a way to minimize the more destructive forces of anger, stating that, "Stress of all sorts creates adrenocortical arousal, lowering the threshold for what provokes anger" (Goleman, 1995, p. 60). Estes also expounds on the importance of women learning to nurture and care for ourselves, in the process of understanding and taming rage. She speaks of the importance of using patience, of nurturing ourselves with spiritual food, whatever that may be for the individual, as well as seeking insight into anger's meaning. She says, "Regardless of the source of rage, something has to happen to recognize it, bless it, contain it and release it" (Estes, 1993, p. 364).

Humour was also recognized as an important variable in accepting anger and in dealing with it in healthier ways in our lives. Despite the anger and pain which surfaced throughout our weekend retreat, we had fun. Story-telling, humorous jokes and even laughter at ourselves and some of the experiences that had brought us all together, provided a necessary and safe outlet for the intense energy of anger. Several of the women brought with them the gift of humour, which prompted those of us who tended to be more serious, to take ourselves and the situation more lightly. We recognized that anger and humour can co-exist and humour can help to diffuse the intensity of anger. Deb, who has a wonderful sense of humour, recognized that, "*humour can be a way to*

choose when to be with the anger or not". Her experience has also taught her that "people handle anger, with humour, better".

Daniel Goleman discusses the benefits of laughter in helping us to problem-solve and think our way through to solutions more creatively. He proposes that laughter can promote mood changes which, when lifted to a more elated state, can trigger our memory of more positive events.

Laughing, like elation, seems to help people think more broadly and associate more freely, noticing relationships that might have eluded them otherwise - a mental skill important not just in creativity, but in recognizing complex relationships and foreseeing the consequences of a given decision (Goleman, 1995, p. 85).

Anger management programs, usually based on psycho-educational and cognitive-behavioral models of intervention, propose the use of many of these same interventions in learning to manage anger more effectively. Learning to identify body signals of anger escalating, using time-outs, deep breathing and other relaxation strategies, learning effective ways to communicate, seeking support, self-talk and challenging irrational beliefs are all ways in which anger can be managed to become less destructive. Research has been conducted into anger reduction through the use of both cognitive-behavioral and more process-oriented groups, finding that either approach produces similar results in anger reduction in controlled settings (Deffenbacher, et al, 1990).

However, the findings of this inquiry into women's anger suggest that, though learning skills to manage and deal more effectively with anger is paramount, the needs identified by these women speak to the specific issues and circumstances in the lives of women. The women in this research have learned that anger is an unacceptable emotion,

that anger is not safe, and that anger accumulates as a result of being suppressed and internalized. Through the development of a more critical consciousness in regards to anger, there was a recognition of the ways in which anger is so closely connected to experiences of self-denial and oppression within our lives. This consciousness is reflected in the particular needs which were identified in doing anger work. The need for support, safety, validation, choice, permission, and most significantly, understanding the origins, are paramount for women to engage in a process of honouring our anger as part of ourselves.

Emergence of Self

The healing properties of allowing anger to be embraced, explored and voiced by these women was an enlightening theme which emerged from the research process. Each woman believed that opening up to repressed anger and dealing with current anger in their lives was instrumental in their sense of **personal growth** and **inner harmony** and in helping them to feel more **whole** and **integrated**. They identified feeling more **empowered** with a newfound sense of **control over themselves** and **increased self-esteem**. They saw themselves experiencing life with **more spontaneity** and a greater sense of **freedom** and **fun**. They also recognized that anger is still and probably always will be part of their lives, but in learning how to deal more effectively with it, they saw it as being **less debilitating**, and more integrated into their lives. There was an understanding gained through the research, that, if emotions are truly integrated, then there is room for anger, love, peace and joy to coexist.

Marie describes her process of "*learning to develop the anger*" as helping her to see "*a lot of growth in myself as a human being*". She has learned to trust herself more and to believe that she can succeed in making different choices for herself than those that were made for her as a child. She says,

If we make friends with the anger it can be the greatest catalyst for change... I no longer feel like the phoney-baloney truck is coming. I feel quite confident. It's finally internal for me and it's really nice. I can go with my feelings now, I'm more honest with myself...It's nice to be getting out of survivor mode, being able to live without sticking my finger in the dam, so that you can live, enjoy life. It's like, wow, this is why some people look happy and calm. I have calmness and more freedom...I have more inner

peace, where before I had to be so busy. I enjoy being with myself. It's like neat, this is a really neat way to live.

Jane has noticed, since she has begun to have more control over her anger, that, *"its getting lighter. I feel freer with my children, more playful, more fun... It's almost like I've taken off the dark glasses and I can see more clearly. Things aren't so shadowy... I am more able to separate the past from the present now", and "doing anger in healthy ways, I feel better about myself. I don't have to apologize as much".*

Deb recognized that when she is avoiding her anger, she feels blocked and disconnected from herself and others, and that dealing with it helps her to feel more whole and integrated, as well as being more attuned and sensitive to others. She says,

It's obvious that you're in a place where you want to feel whole and recognize that these experiences are part of who you are and how do I live with them and not have them debilitate me...when not expressed, it's like a weight on my spirit, it's limiting, it's clogging in parts of my body and it's blocking energy... self-awareness leads to sensitivity to others, a need to support others.

She also sees doing her anger in healthier ways as contributing to her sense of inner harmony and balance, saying, *"We're not too much one way or another".*

Margaret recognizes that, in giving herself permission to be angry and in learning to express it in appropriate and safe ways, she no longer feels as responsible for others and she feels a greater sense of control over herself. To this she writes,

I find that if I express my anger in ways that I am comfortable with it helps me to "do" anger more often. It is very freeing to have control over how, where and at whom I express my anger. I feel that before, my anger controlled me. Either I was so controlled that it left no room for anger or I lacked all control and my anger took over...left me feeling very badly about myself. Doing anger in this new way isn't necessarily easier, however it does feel better

and is healthier for me.

Margaret identifies more strongly with a part of herself she describes as "a real Mary", one who can be "more spontaneous and fun and had ideas and she knew what she wanted and all sorts of things...and she couldn't be born or exist in the world until I learned to deal with anger...".

Vicky says that, though she realizes that she still has anger to deal with and that for her, it is a long process, she is gaining a sense of control over herself and is gaining strength and power with her voice through her anger. She says, "I am no longer willing to put myself last or to become small in the face of it". Upon reflection a few months after the retreat, she says, "I have made a decision to be less focused on my anger". She says that she is taking more responsibility for herself and her goals and directions in life as well as for her own self-care, and she is learning to face more of her fears.

Sheila, in her reflections over the weekend, writes, "When we're 'through' the pain, there is bright and calmness".

Estes uses metaphor in describing a woman's experience of encountering rage and learning how to tame it, speaking very closely to the experiences described by the five women who engaged, as participants, in this research. Telling the story of the Crescent Moon Bear, she refers to a woman's true nature as a loving, creative and caring soul who, due to circumstances of life and culture, has gathered a rage which, "untransformed, can become a constant mantra about how oppressed, hurt and tortured we are" (Estes, 1992, p. 353). The story tells of a woman's search for a way to transform her rage so that peace and love can once again become part of her life. She

seeks advice from the healer, a symbol for "our wisest self", who challenges her to "climb the mountain", exploring psychic territory never before approached, as a way to recognize, understand and release her illusions about life, all the while using patience and feeding her compassionate side with spiritual food, kindness and self-care, and honouring the "roar" of the rage as part of herself. The story tells of coming down from the mountain and carefully implementing what she has learned, through practice, into her daily life. In this way, Estes proposes, women can learn to come to terms with intense rage. However, the story also speaks of the cyclical nature of rage and how residue from the original rage will continue to surface from time to time, and how we must again "withdraw and take solitude" and "climb the mountain" to find our way through the rage.

Estes urges us to look at all emotions, even rage, as a teacher.

All emotion, even rage, carries knowledge, insight, what some call enlightenment. Our rage can, for a time become our teacher...a thing not to be rid of so fast, but rather something to climb the mountain for, something to personify, to learn from, deal with internally, then shape into something useful in the world as a result...The cycle of rage is like any other cycle; it rises, falls, dies and is released as new energy (Estes, 1992, p. 352).

The findings in this research support such a process for women. In learning to break free from the destructive pattern of suppressing and denying anger, and learning to embrace and understand our anger, women can begin to listen to the ways that anger speaks to us, and to use its energy to empower us to speak our own truth and to make choices which honour our own unique needs as individuals and as women.

Summary

The findings of this research provide us with some valuable insights into ways in which women experience anger, as well as the needs which women have if we are to allow our anger the life and voice which it has as a natural response to events and circumstances in our lives. It is my thesis that women's acceptance and integration of anger into our lives is a complex and dynamic process of exploring and understanding the origins of anger. Through exploring and experiencing the many layers of anger which have accumulated over a lifetime, women can learn to embrace our anger and use it to assist us in moving toward more authentic and self-assertive ways of being in the world. In order to engage in this process, women need a safe and supportive environment where our anger is validated and where we can be supported to allow the roots of our anger to surface and be understood, and where we can learn more effective ways of dealing with anger as it continues to be triggered in our day-to-day lives. As Sheila describes of her own experience of anger in her life,

I have uncovered it before, this anger, and thus its power lessened. It no longer pushes with such force as it did. No longer is the fuse so short nor the 'blast' so strong...I do not feel the grip that once squeezed my heart with rage. Its more a subtle whisper now, still present, but nudging, not jarring me to explore and act.

These women have shown us, through their own processes of courageously exploring the deeper roots of their anger, that when anger is embraced and given a healthy voice in our lives, it can help us to evolve to a place where it becomes a less and less debilitating or destructive force. Rather, anger can be experienced as a natural

response to events and can be integrated into our lives as one of a whole range of emotions which we experience. Part of this process is a recognition that there is a cyclical nature to anger, that anger never stops, that anger at past injustices will continue to be triggered by events in the present. However, the debilitating and all-consuming power of anger which has been internalized over years, can be diffused if we are able to engage in a process of understanding and releasing the layers of accumulated and repressed anger. This process can enable women to more clearly separate the past from the present and to embrace anger as it occurs, with a new-found sense of understanding and acceptance, with which transformative possibilities can occur. Acceptance of anger sets the stage for learning healthier ways to express and utilize the voice of anger to resolve issues and conflicts in our lives which, if left unattended to, can contribute to the continuous process of silencing women and furthering our oppression in a still male-dominated, patriarchal society.

CHAPTER 5

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

It was the intent of this research to describe and illuminate for the reader, how the emotion of anger is experienced and understood within the context of the subjective lives of the women participating. Though each woman's experience of anger was different, the identification of common and recurring themes which emerged from this inquiry, as well as the presentation of supportive literature, can help promote more insight into how anger is perceived, experienced and understood in women's lives. It is my thesis that women's acceptance and integration of anger involves a complex and dynamic process of exploring and understanding the origins of anger and recognizing the power of anger to be a positive and healing force in our lives. This research became a process, for those participating, of gaining a deeper personal and social awareness of how anger is manifested in our lives - its causes, its impact, its many dimensions and layers, its teachings, its needs, its life and its voice.

I approached the research with a belief, stemming from my own experience of anger, that women's anger is influenced by the social conditions in our society which continue to create situations of oppression for women and other marginalized groups. I also had a belief that anger, if embraced and allowed to be voiced, could serve to promote positive and healing changes in the lives of women. Further, I proposed that counselling strategies aimed at promoting a deeper awareness and understanding of

emotions, could assist women in gaining acceptance of our anger and more clarity and strength of self.

Though the focus of this research was to engage in a phenomenological inquiry into the meanings women attached to anger, and thus, to describe for the reader, the experiences of participants within their own lifeworld, I chose a participatory forum in which to engage in a deeper exploration. This decision was based on a belief that, in providing a forum where women could share with women, we would hear our common experiences of injustices as they manifest in our lives as a result of the inequality and power imbalances which still exist for women in our current social, political and economic structures. Within the context of safety, support and validation of our individual experiences, I believed that women would be more encouraged to engage in a deeper exploration of their own anger.

Drawing from a feminist approach to research, incorporating multiple methods, I anticipated that the research process would not only encourage deeper self-reflection, but would contribute to the emergence of a more critical consciousness with regard to the structural influences on women's anger, as well as a heightened awareness of ways anger could be mobilized to promote agency on the part of those participating. My experience, not only as the researcher, but as a participant in the research, was that these objectives were in fact achieved. Each of us has identified ways in which to turn anger into change-enhancing action, reflecting the unique place from which we stand. Whether it be through attending the weekend retreat to gain more understanding of our anger, or by voicing it through the many avenues of social action to eradicate violence against women and other

social injustices; whether it be through standing strong and saying no to personal violations, or giving ownership back to those responsible for past violations; whether it be through choosing to stay with anger as a way to protect oneself, or placing anger in a part of our lives where it is acknowledged, but woven into the emotional, social, physical, mental and spiritual tapestry that defines who we are as balanced individuals; whether it is turned into the voice of assertiveness and self-expression in our work, our play, our families and our social connections, or held closely as a way to journey our way through legal, economic and social backlash, we have all found agency in our process of honouring our anger.

Whether we as counsellors and therapists choose to use a forum such as the weekend retreat, a series of weekly group sessions, or the individual counselling relationship as a way to support women in their process of anger, it is my intent that some of the insights generated through this research will assist us in helping other women to reach a place where they can begin to dialogue about their anger, to embrace it and to honour the messages and teachings that anger can provide women in their individual and collective journeys into well-being and a more equal and just social structure.

The retreat forum served well in providing the space and time for women to engage in self-exploration, without this process being impeded by the demands and responsibilities of day-to-day life, where often women feel less validated in their anger. This forum provided a sense of safety and validation which allowed for the acceptance of anger and the fullness of it to emerge. Though the focus of the weekend was not to explore the social context which has contributed to women's experience of anger, the

common themes of oppression and abuse which were shared, provided a validation and common understanding amongst us, of how anger has come to be such a difficult emotion in our lives. The support and connection experienced by the women grew as the weekend progressed, and this, I believe further contributed to the sense of safety and validation which allowed for the deeper origins of anger to emerge. The counselling strategies and techniques which were employed during the weekend, further promoted this deeper exploration, where women could be encouraged, assisted and supported to engage in, and stay with, their own process of understanding their anger more fully.

An important component to the effectiveness of the retreat group forum was the pre-group screening process. Being able to determine ahead of time, the level of safety, both emotionally and physically, which we could anticipate amongst the women chosen as participants, gave us, the facilitators and, the five women participating, a level of confidence to engage in this process without fear that our anger would create unsafe situations to occur. Also, including in the guidelines, parameters for safety in regards to our anger, further contributed to this sense of safety. Recognizing that anger has the potential to become very large and destructive, these parameters included written guidelines that it was not okay to hurt ourselves, it was not okay to hurt others, and it was not okay to destroy property, to which each of the women agreed to comply. A further important component to the effectiveness of engaging in this type of personal reflection and group sharing process, was the availability of supports for the women after the retreat. This was explored in the pre-group screening portion of the interview and became a necessary criteria for participation. While the weekend forum allowed for the

deeper probing of anger to occur, it is important to recognize that this is a process which doesn't necessarily stop at the end of our time together. Each of the women continued to work with their anger and the insights they had gained through the weekend, for some time after the retreat, and were able to use supports to assist them with this process. This provided an added element of safety for them which further encouraged them to stay with their experiences until they were able to reach a place of understanding, and for some, resolution.

The element of trust became an important component in making this type of research feasible. Trust-building began at the point of the initial telephone interview, where parameters of confidentiality were discussed and where I began to use the facilitative counselling skills of empathy, respect, clarifying questions and self-disclosure to begin building trusting relationships. The process of building trust continued through the one-one interviews, where dialogue regarding anger continued to be fostered through empathy, respect, more self-disclosure and genuineness. Though the participants did not have the same opportunity to develop this same level of trust with one another prior to the weekend retreat, I believe that attention to issues of safety, as well as exploring personal needs when participating in groups, set a stage of confidence in the group process which was further developed at our pre-retreat meeting and through the development of group guidelines. The level of trust continued to build throughout the weekend through the remarkable level of support, respect, non-judgement and validation that emerged during the group sharing, and was further nurtured through the use of the Talking Stick and Talking Circle.

Self-disclosure on the part of myself as the researcher and facilitator, as well as for the co-facilitator, was integral to the process of trust building. As an interpretive and participatory researcher, I viewed the participants, not as objects of study, to be observed and recorded, but as subjects who were as involved in this inquiry as I was. It was therefore important for me to be present and part of the process, stating up front, my experiences and motivation for doing the research, and sharing of myself along the way. Recognizing self-disclosure as an important component of any counselling relationship, I have learned to set parameters for myself around the level of self-disclosure I engage in, believing that it should be done in the interest of fostering the therapeutic process and should in no way create a situation where a client has to take care of me. I attempted to maintain these parameters throughout the research, though at times during the retreat, this became quite challenging, as the intensity of emotions and the strength of our connectedness as a group unfolded.

Heshusius offers a helpful analysis of this experience of striving to maintain a balance of objectivity and subjectivity, while acknowledging that there are times when, as researchers, we lose this balance and become one with the process, a state which she refers to as "participatory consciousness". She states, "When one forgets self and becomes embedded in what one wants to understand, there is an affirmative quality of kinship that no longer allows for privileged status" (Heshusius, 1994, p. 19). I am aware that there were moments throughout our weekend together where I entered this state of participatory consciousness, where I felt the pain and anger of the other women and where my own anger at events in my life was deeply triggered, where I felt saddened and

responsible for facilitating us in reaching these difficult places, where I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the courageous sharing of these women, as a contribution to this research, where I became passionately involved in the content of discussions, where I felt the target of anger at times in the transference process that, we know as counsellors, occurs, and where, all the while, I experienced a growing kinship and closeness with these women, which comes from a place of knowing. Though I was able, through journaling, self-talk, debriefing with my co-facilitator, and later, my thesis supervisor, to care for myself with what emerged for me, I feel that this experience deepened my connection with the data which came forth, and helped me to understand and reflect the experiences of we, the participants, and our anger, more authentically.

Situating myself within this research, I am aware that, though my own experience has informed and shaped this inquiry, I have also been informed by this inquiry. Being a part of this process has triggered new insight, awareness and understandings about women's anger for me. Though the overall findings were consistent with my own beliefs about women's anger, I gained several new insights and understandings which have served as the basis for this thesis and which have deepened my respect for the emotion of anger, both my own and that of others.

Most significant, was the recognition of the dynamic process of anger for women. While I acknowledged, upon entering the research, that women who internalize or deny anger, need to be supported to explore their anger more fully, what I learned was that this is an ongoing process for women in which there are many layers and dimensions which we encounter as we are continuously confronted with new triggers which relate to

original experiences of oppression. While older, repressed anger can be brought to the surface and released, new experiences can continue to trigger a rage which, at times can be as intense and all-consuming as anger which has already been dealt with. This, I believe, is particularly true for women who must continually deal with the realities of injustice, abuse, and other forms of oppression which continue to be manifested in our current social structures. However, when we can learn to recognize our triggers and can develop an acceptance of our anger and a willingness to explore it more fully as it occurs, while at the same time developing skills to effectively allow anger the life and the voice that it has, then the potentially destructive and negative impact of anger can be prevented. In this way, women can learn to use anger to gain more self-understanding and to take whatever action deemed necessary to change oppressive situations and become personal agents of our own experience.

I have gained more awareness of this dynamic property of anger within my own personal experience as well. Throughout the process of this research, my own anger was brought forward several times as women shared their common experiences of abuse, injustice, oppression and loss, all of which have been part of my own life experience. I had, in the past, engaged in a process of exploring what I thought were the roots of my anger and had reached a place in my life where, in being more open to my anger, it was no longer as all-consuming. I had become aware of being more able to use my anger constructively to make important changes in my life and to voice my own experience more clearly. However, during this research, I became vaguely aware of an underlying anger within me, connected to an important relationship issue I was dealing with at the

time. For a time, I resisted allowing this anger to surface, fearing what I might encounter if I allowed myself to embrace it in its largeness, yet knowing that I had to. As I engaged in a process of art therapy, with the support of a counsellor/friend, my images began to speak to me strongly of an underlying rage which was trying to surface. As I began to let down my defenses and embrace the feelings, I encountered this rage, associated with an earlier traumatic loss in my life, as intensely as if I had been in that moment as a young child. In that moment I had a clear awareness that as that young child, I had never expressed this feeling. By allowing myself to be with this feeling and to express it through verbalizing, writing, and more image-making, I gained a new insight into my fear of loss associated with intimate relationships, and have found myself, since this experience, communicating more honestly and making healthier choices within my closer relationships. Weaving my own experience into those of the participants in this research, this dynamic process of anger has become clearer to me - that repressed anger lies deep and requires our openness to going into it, as it arises, again and again in our lives. And though we can clear it, given the right conditions, and, therefore, diffuse its intensity, it really never completely stops. We must therefore learn to integrate it into our lives and allow its voice when it needs to surface again.

Another valuable insight which I gained from this research experience was the recognition of my own discomfort with other people's anger. Being present with these women and supporting them through their anger has shown me that anger, when experienced within the parameters of safety, is simply an emotion like any other which, when acknowledged and safely expressed, need not be perceived as fearful or negative,

but rather as just simply what it is - anger. This, I believe is an important recognition for me, (or any of us) as professional counsellors, as we will undoubtedly be asked in our counselling work to "be with" people in their anger. We must, therefore, be comfortable with the intensity of anger, moving beyond the intellectualizing about, or dialoguing about anger, to actually supporting people to feel the emotion of anger and be with it in its largeness.

A further insight for me was a deeper understanding of the element of fear that women attach to anger and how this fear can serve to maintain the destructive pattern of internalizing anger. In a society where expressions of anger through violence and aggression is condoned for men, yet shamed for women, each of the participants had learned to fear both their own and other people's anger and the potential for destructiveness or loss which anger for them connotes. Fear can be as immobilizing and debilitating as internalized or inappropriately externalized anger, and the element of safety becomes paramount as women begin the journey into anger. Safety in this context implies non-violence, non-aggression and trusting relationships, where women do not have to fear loss in communicating our feelings openly and honestly. Unfortunately, these conditions are not always present in women's lives, as Vicky's experience with her partner's violent response when she attempted to communicate her anger, so clearly demonstrates. This raises an important issue which I believe, should be considered when supporting women to engage in the process of allowing anger to surface and be expressed. Recognizing that, although we have a personal responsibility to ensure that our anger is expressed in a safe and non-violent way, we still have no control over how another person will respond to

the more assertive and honest voice of anger. It is, therefore, necessary for women, and we as counsellors supporting women, to assess the propensity for violence within relationships and to support women in making responsible and safe choices about how, where, when, and with whom, to voice anger.

The women participating in this research, have exhibited, through their reflections on fear associated with their own and other people's anger, the impact that various manifestations of social constraint can have on the process, for women, of opening up to anger. Their experiences reflect our need to continue in our search for safe ways to own and voice our anger at the injustices which have, and continue, to prevail for women and other marginalized groups in our patriarchal culture. As we begin to develop a more critical consciousness and to own our anger at the many ways that women have been silenced, societal backlash continues to create barriers in this pursuit. Violent responses and an increase in the prevalence of violence against women, loss of relationships, ridicule and minimization, being called insane, and being labelled as "angry feminists", all speak to the impact that expressing anger has had on women's lives. To own one's anger, even in finding ways to safely express it, creates for women, the challenge of upsetting familiar, yet often unsatisfying or even self-destructive patterns in our lives. Acknowledging and owning our anger, speaking from a place of one's own truth, often means that we now have to speak out or to do something different. It may mean leaving an abusive relationship and the financial and familial security which the relationship provides for us and our children. It may mean seeking restitution through the pursuit of charges and experiencing the revictimization that often occurs for women who have been

battered, sexually assaulted or sexually abused as children. It may mean confronting an abuser as a way to give back the years of self-blame and responsibility that have further eaten away at her self-esteem. It may mean encountering one's anger again and again in the sensitivity we gain toward others as we begin to open to our own truths. It may mean letting go of fantasies and illusions about our families and our past, which have served to keep us locked in denial. It may mean having to make often difficult choices for our children, in seeking to provide safer and healthier environments in which they can grow. It may mean offering ourselves in endless hours of voluntarism on the social activist front, seeking forums in which to educate, and ways in which to work toward changing oppressive social structures. It most often means loss - of relationships and of illusionary hopes and dreams that have been shattered in coming to know one's truth.

The women in this research, during the data analysis stage of the research, identified another important issue related to safety. As a society, there is very little acceptance and tolerance for the emotion of anger, not only women's anger, but anger in general. Consequently, there is very little support for people to do anger work as part of their healing process. This only further perpetuates the suppression of anger and the debilitating and destructive forces that anger, unvoiced or conversely, unharnessed, has on our lives. Anger is most commonly associated with violence, and though as a society we have developed a tolerance and acceptance for violence and aggression, people still generally have a strong discomfort with one another's anger on an interpersonal level. If we are to evolve to a place where anger is viewed as an acceptable emotion, we need to take responsibility for our anger and, as Margaret so aptly stated during our data analysis

meeting, *"do anger without hurting the people around us and teach the world that its okay to express anger but its not okay to hurt others in the process"*. A further point of consideration here is the importance of teaching children, early in life, that anger is a normal and acceptable emotion, and to teach them ways to manage and express anger which are non-destructive. It is heartening to know that there are now programs designed to teach children effective anger skills at both the pre-school and elementary levels, with non-violence and healthy conflict resolution skills being stressed and taught throughout the academic life of our children. However, it is integral to this process that healthy anger be demonstrated in the home, where, as we know, the most formative role modelling occurs. It is incumbent upon us as parents, and particularly women who, statistically, still assume the greater parental responsibility, to gain a level of comfort with our own anger, so we can teach our children healthier patterns of dealing with anger than were taught to us.

That women choose to remain with their anger for a period of time, once it is allowed to emerge and take voice, is another valuable insight which can assist us in understanding women's anger. Anger sometimes serves as a protection, as a way to separate ourselves from inhibiting or abusive forces in our lives, and a way to mobilize us to change self-limiting relationship patterns. Anger can empower us to stand up, to speak out, to say "no" when we need to, and, as the women's movement has taught us, to challenge the status quo and envision ourselves into taking action. Anger is definitely something not to be rid of so fast.

The insights offered through the findings of this research have value in supporting

not only women in learning to develop healthier patterns of dealing with anger, but can also assist us in our work with men and their anger. Though men have traditionally demonstrated a greater comfort level with expressing anger, our society has tolerated and in many ways even promoted men's use of violence and aggression as a way to experience anger, while inhibiting the acceptance and expression of other emotions. Fear, sadness, grief, shame and loneliness, are deemed in our culture, as indicators of vulnerability, a condition which men are traditionally encouraged not to show. However, anger expressed through violence and aggression serves to isolate and disconnect men from meaningful relationships, as well as having other serious negative consequences in their lives. In this way, men, through the gender stereotyping and expectations imposed upon them as part of their psychological development, are as limited as women in their ability to be agents of their own experience.

Though anger management programs, highly prevalent within the counselling and human service arena, are effective in teaching men non-violent ways of managing and expressing anger, supporting men to engage in a process of exploring the deeper origins of anger can promote a greater self-awareness and understanding of underlying emotions and cognitions which contribute to their anger. In so doing, men, like women, can learn to embrace emotions and use them as teachers in their journeys toward healthier, more authentic ways of being in the world. This point has been made clearer to me recently as I have begun to do therapeutic work with male survivors of childhood abuse, many of whom have been incarcerated for violent behavior. A common theme which has been expressed to me by these men, has been the way in which events in the present trigger

memories of childhood abuse with which they associate a deep and uncontrollable rage, usually expressed in violence. Engaging in a process of more fully exploring these images and memories from the past and the underlying emotions and needs which they attach to these, men can be supported to bring forward repressed emotions and work with them toward a release and a resolution, so that they can more readily separate the past from the present and make healthier choices regarding ways they can get their needs met. Again, establishing a safe, trusting and respectful environment where men are supported and validated in their emotional experience is integral to this process.

This inquiry has prompted me to consider where further areas of research, of a qualitative nature, on the subject of anger, could be of benefit to the counselling field. While much empirical research has been conducted on the merits of cognitive-behavioral anger management programs in helping men to manage their anger more effectively and safely, I am proposing, as a result of this inquiry into the meaning and experience of women and anger, that the therapeutic community could benefit from further research, of a qualitative nature, into the meanings which men attach to their anger and the implications of cultural and social influences on their expressions of anger. A focus on what men identify most strongly as their needs in maintaining a healthy approach to anger and the underlying emotions attached to anger, can help us to do this anger work with men in a way which promotes more healing.

My literature search on the topic of women's anger has suggested to me that most of the research on anger has been empirical in nature and has focused on anger stimulation and response measures within more controlled research settings. Empirical

research has been valuable in helping us to understand the anatomy of anger, the triggers and the emotional, physiological, cognitive and behavioral responses to anger. Research of this nature has contributed to the development of ways in which anger can be controlled and managed. However, research of this nature lacks the richness of more subjective inquiries, based on people's own subjective experiences, as well as the implications of social context on our experience of anger. We might well benefit from a longitudinal and qualitative study of the benefits to women, or men, of engaging in a process such as the one presented in this research, over time, to determine whether participants are able to develop and maintain a healthy approach to anger. An inquiry into the impact of earlier anger interventions with children, throughout childhood and adolescence, and into their adult lives, would also provide useful information in the development of educational and social skills curriculums and programs. A further area of helpful research would be an inquiry into anger and adolescence, with a focus on the increasing prevalence of anger and aggression amongst adolescent girls. Since anger continues to be such a misunderstood and unacceptable emotion, with such negative and potentially destructive implications, both for individuals and collectively, within our social structures, the more insight and understanding we can gain into this highly prevalent part of our emotional framework, the better able we will be, as counsellors, as educators, as family and community members, and as individuals, to deal more effectively with the reality of anger in our lives.

A discussion is warranted here in regards to the fact that each of the women who participated in the research were survivors of childhood sexual, physical and emotional

abuse. Though I was initially concerned that this would in some way influence the course of the research and perhaps move the focus away from anger and onto abuse, this was, in fact, not the case. The women who responded to my call for participation did so because they identified strongly with anger as a mitigating factor which had affected or was presently affecting their ability to experience inner harmony and strength of self in their lives. Though histories of childhood abuse were common to all of them, the debilitating and, in some cases, empowering forces of anger, and a desire to understand our anger as a pathway to more self-awareness and personal growth, were the common threads which bound us together throughout this research process. As well, there was a common desire to share our insights with others, in anticipation of fostering more understanding and acceptance of anger for women, as a natural part of the human experience. Though earlier experiences of abuse emerged as part of the origins of anger, other issues were equally significant. Attached to the anger were feelings of loss, guilt and shame, fear and trust, all stemming from experiences of not being heard, not being protected, not being valued, being made to feel responsible for the dysfunctions of others, and feeling powerless, at times in our lives. These are the makings of anger for women, and though abuse is part of it, I hesitate to believe that in any sample of women, some form of abuse would not be present. However, though it is important to understand the conditions and causes in women's lives which create anger, what became as equally important in this research, were the insights generated regarding how women deal with anger and what we, as women need, in order to allow anger to be used as a constructive healing and transformative energy in our lives.

In doing research of this nature, it is important to acknowledge not only the commonalities of women's experience, but also the diversity, and not to view any one theory as monolithic. As this research has shown us, while there are similarities in women's experience, each woman's experience and process was different and has informed us, on its own, of the meaning that anger and the healing properties of anger, has had in her life. Deb speaks of more balance and more sensitivity to others, Vicky of feeling larger, stronger, clearer and less afraid. Jane speaks of things being less shadowy, of having more fun, being more playful, feeling freer. Margaret speaks of being more spontaneous, less rigid, more fun and more genuine in her relationships, less the people-pleaser, more of seeking the pleasures in life for herself. Marie speaks of more inner harmony, less fear, more calmness and comfort with herself, less need to seek comfort through food; Sheila speaks of new explorations within herself and of plans to do more women's anger work within her counselling practice; I speak of healthier relationships, clearer boundaries, a stronger sense of freedom, more laughter, fewer demands and expectations of others, more choices and a view of the world as open and available for whatever course I set. These are the things which speak of a woman's stronger self emerging, of turning her inner and outer energies into movement, action and soulfulness, to nurture and expand one's own soul and to nurture the souls of others - our children, our friends, our families, our communities - and to seek justice and artfulness in our experience of daily living.

This awareness speaks to me of our need to dialogue our way into our own truth, to deconstruct our pre-conceived beliefs and attitudes about anger, and to reconstruct

meanings and pathways which fit for us as individuals, rather than to theorize about what, how or why women, or men, are angry. We need to find our way through anger, which for each of us is a personal journey.

Deb shared with me, some new insights that her experience in this research brought forward, and which I feel speaks to why it is important that we find our way through anger. *"Holding onto anger protects us from living more honestly, from the pain and the joy of knowing completely who we are. It's easy to blame, to remain as victims, to say, I can't let go. But what purpose is it serving, but to keep us in a place of complacency"*.

ENDNOTES

1. Emmers, T. (1994) cites a study which analyzes descriptive terms of various emotions, from which emerged these five basic, core emotions.
2. An Anger and Emotions Management Program is part of the living Skills Programming Strategy with the Correctional Services of Canada. This program is an educational and cognitive-behavioral program consisting of 25 two-hour group sessions and is offered to offenders experiencing difficulty with anger and violent behavior.
3. Lather, P. (1991), in Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy in the Postmodern, expands upon the concept of feminist research as an empowering approach to generating knowledge, using a methodology which encourages self-understanding and self-determination, with research designs characterized by negotiation and reciprocity.
4. See Chapter 2, Literature Review for a further discussion of empirical studies on anger prevalence, expression and reduction.
5. Tavis is here quoting Harriet Goldhor-Lerner (1977), The Taboos Against Female Anger, Menniger Perspective, Winter, 1977, 5-11.
6. Gillian Walker, MSW, is Co-Director of the Gender and Violence Project of the Akerman Institute for Family Therapy in New York, N.Y. The Akerman Model of Intervention with couples experiencing violence bases much of its work on research conducted at the Stone Centre, Wellesley College, Massachusetts, in the areas of male and female psychological development and the psychoanalytic and neurobiological determinants of male violence against women in intimate relationships.
7. The Deluth Model of Intervention in situations of domestic violence is derived from feminist theory and recognizes power and control of men over women as a leading cause of male battering.
8. Hosick, S. (1993), in her thesis, Pathway to Soul: Prisoner's Perceptions of Change through Kairos Marathons, discusses the role that intense group interaction over a lengthy period, can play in breaking down defenses and becoming more open to one's own emotions.
9. This imagery was adapted from an anger imagery included in the Clinical Training Manual from the Mind/Body Institute, Harvard Medical School/Deaconess Hospital, October, 1995.
10. This excerpt was taken from a handout which I received at a weekend retreat where

the Talking Circle/Talking Stick format was used. My own experience with the Talking Circle on this and other occasions, was that it created a sense of reverence and respect amongst group members for the Circle as a space for the work we had come together to do. When holding the Talking Stick, I felt respected and valued for my own unique voice within the circle and a sense of spiritual connection with the process in which I was engaged.

11. The "Wholistic Plan of Self-Care" was adapted from a wellness exercise taken from a series of stress management group exercises in Structured Exercises in Wellness, Whole Person Associates, Deluth, Minnesota.

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APPENDIX A

July 17, 1996

Dear Resource Person;

As a graduate student in the MED Counselling program at the School of Education, Acadia University, I am currently engaged in research for my thesis on the subject of "Women and Anger: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Anger in Women's Lives". The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of women's experience of anger in their lives, the ways in which anger impacts on their lives and an understanding of what women need in order to experience anger as a positive, healing force in their lives.

Methods of data collection to be employed in this inquiry include individual, semi-structured interviews, followed by a group process in the form of a weekend retreat, where a sample of six women will engage in a deeper exploration of anger within the context of their own subjective lives. As researcher, I will employ my skills as a professional counsellor to facilitate with the research participants, a process of deeper self-exploration and awareness in regards to their anger, through dialogue and experiential exercises, in a collaborative approach to generating knowledge and meaning on the subject of women's anger. The weekend retreat will be partially co-facilitated by a second professional counsellor trained in the use of art therapy.

I am seeking a sample of women who are aware of anger as an issue currently impacting on their lives, and am therefore cognizant of the fact that their participation in the research could have therapeutic implications for them. I have therefore established as criteria for participation, that participants be engaged in a process of healing and have supports available to them upon completion of the research, in the form of professional counsellors and/or therapists, or peer counsellors or supports.

I am therefore contacting several resource people in the Annapolis Valley community as a way of securing a sample of women to participate in this research project. Should you be aware of clients who might be willing and able to participate in this project, and may personally benefit from participation, I am requesting that you consider discussing it with them and offer my name and contact number if they are interested.

The confidentiality of women who volunteer their participation in the project will be respected, though a signed participation agreement including a release of information to communicate with therapists or counsellors with whom they may be involved, should myself and the participant deem it necessary, will be illicit.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions or concerns regarding this research project.

Sincerely,

Christine Perry, B.A.; MED Counselling (in proviso)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

Demographic Information

Name, age, socio-cultural background, marital status, occupation?

Exploration of Anger Currently

What prompted you to want to explore participation in this inquiry into women's anger?

What makes you think that anger is an issue in your life presently?

What is your present experience of anger in your life? What are you angry about? How do you presently deal with anger? What happens when you feel angry? What do you see as the impact that anger has in your life? What does your anger need?

Can you briefly describe your family life, past and present? What are your earlier recollections of how you experienced anger, both yours and others, in your family?

Group Participation Screening Questions

Who are your present supports (therapist, friends, peer counsellors, family members)? When do you most need support? How do you access this support?

Can you talk about a time when you were in crisis? How do you usually handle crisis? Have you ever felt suicidal? Have you ever experienced yourself to be violent?

Are you currently using any prescription or non-prescription drugs? Is alcohol use a concern for you at this time?

Have you ever been involved in a group experience with other women? If so, can you describe?

If you were to participate in the proposed group as part of this research, what would you need in order to make it feel safe and comfortable for you to explore your anger more fully? (Describe proposed retreat and planned activities.) Are there any of these proposed activities with which you feel particularly uncomfortable?

Which would feel most comfortable to you, an outdoor retreat site where we would be camping in natural surroundings or a private, indoor space in a rural part of King's County?

Can you contribute a small amount of food to a potluck for the weekend?

Do you have specific transportation or childcare needs?

Which timeframes fit best for you?

(Explain confidentiality) Would you be willing to share your personal journal reflections with me as a source of data for the research?

Would you be willing to have non-identifying information presented in the thesis report in the form of your voice texted?

Can you be available for a followup group meeting approximately two weeks after the retreat to participate in the data analysis?

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

This thesis research, entitled "Women and Anger: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Anger in Women's Lives", is being conducted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Masters in Education Counselling Degree at Acadia University. The study seeks to more fully describe and understand women's experience of anger within the context of their own lives, through the participation of six women, participating in a semi-structured interview of approximately one and a half hours, followed by a weekend retreat. The results of this inquiry are intended to provide readers with more insight into the meaning and experience of women's anger and ways in which women's anger can be utilized as a healing force for change.

As a participant in this study, your confidentiality and anonymity will be assured, unless it is agreed upon by both yourself as a participant and myself as the researcher, that it is in your best interest to share any information forthcoming with your therapist or counsellor, or unless you share any information with me that may indicate that a child, yourself or another adult may be at risk of physical harm.

As a participant, it is important that you are aware of and agree to the following:

1. The interview session will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim to be used as part of the data for analysis. A copy of this transcript will be made available to you during the course of the research.
2. Personal journals, written during the course of the research, will be made available as part of the data for analysis.
3. A final group session, to be held approximately 2 weeks after the retreat, may be videotaped and observed by myself as researcher.
4. Verbatim text may be used from the transcripts, journals or videotaped observations and may become part of the text for the thesis report.
5. All effort will be made to ensure that any identifying information will be omitted from the text of the thesis report.
6. All journals and tapes will be seen or heard only by myself, as researcher and will be destroyed upon completion of this research project.
7. You will have an opportunity to read any direct quotations and the analysis of data,

as well as the final thesis report, to ensure that you have been quoted correctly and that only non-identifying material is presented in the thesis.

I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH AND UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO ALL OF THE CONDITIONS AS OUTLINED ABOVE.

(signature of participant)

(signature of researcher)

(date)

APPENDIX D

Guidelines for Dialoguing with the Image

(developed by Sheila Hosick)

Avoid placing your meaning onto someone else's image.

Avoid statements like: "This part looks like...", "I see a lot of confusion/joy/...", "You used red a lot, it seems like a lot of anger (red may be anger for you but not for someone else)...", Bears (or whatever the object) are said to mean..."

Instead...listen to the experience of the image-maker,

Ask gentle questions to clarify,

Observe only the observable...

...about the patterns in the image,

...or the colour intensity or balance

...or the movement of brushstrokes

...or the placement of the pieces in the image

...or the feelings the image-maker experienced

Allow the image-maker to respond to your observations.

The image-maker is the one who must find meaning in the image.

Phrase your questions in such a way as to have the image-maker describe the image. eg, Instead of, "It looks like the boxes are spinning"., ask, "What is happening with the boxes?"

Some sample questions...

Inspect the image, identifying shapes, movement of shapes:

...Look at the image from different angles. What do you notice?

...Would you trace around the image with your finger?

...What stands out for you? What catches your eye?

...What is happening in the centre of the picture?

...Can you say more about this part here (pointing to an area of the image)?

Identify feelings:

...What was the experience like for you?

...Were there surprises for you as you worked on your image?

...Were there some parts more difficult than others?

...What feelings do you have as you look at the image?

...How does the image change as you move around it? feelings?

...Can you talk a bit about the colours used?

Create meaning and reflect on the experience:

...Is there a message for you in your image?

...Is there something in your image that hits you as significant to your life?

...What would your image say to you? What would you say to your image?

...What would you give as a title to your image?

...What do you like/dislike about your creation?

...Is there anything you would change?

...Does one part of the image speak to another part?

APPENDIX E

Anger Imagery

Do a short progressive muscle relaxation.

Then, imagine yourself walking up a path toward a meadow. Walk into the meadow, and very slowly across it, noting things all the way across - the sound of birds, smell of flowers, feel of the grass against your legs, sight of flowers, sun, etc. At the other end of the meadow is a forest. After slow (5 minutes) walk across the meadow, start to walk into the forest. Near the edge is a cave. Stand at the edge of the cave. From the cave comes anger. Take some time to be with this anger for a time - look at it, what do you see?, listen to it, what do you hear?, touch it, how does it feel?, does it come to you with any particular odours or tastes?. Just be with the anger for a time and let yourself experience the fullness of it. Pause....

Now, you can sit in the meadow in a nice spot and you can start to talk to your anger. Ask it anything you want. You can give it a voice if you wish. Listen to what it is saying to you. Is there something anger is trying to tell you? Pause... Now you can trade places with the anger, if you wish. What does it feel like to be anger? What do you want to say, do, think? Does it look or feel different to you now? What does it feel like to be part of you? What is your body telling you? What is your heart telling you? What images do you see as you become your anger? What do you want to do, as anger? Can you embrace it? What does it feel like to take it as part of you to be with it, and to walk with it?...

Now, you can become yourself again, bringing anger along with you. The two of you can continue to sit in the sunshine in the meadow until you are finished talking. Then, the two of you stand up and walk together hand in hand toward the edge of the meadow, toward the cave. At the edge of the meadow, you stop and say goodbye, thanking anger for being with you for this time. You slowly turn around and walk back into the meadow, toward the path. When you are halfway across the meadow, you stop and turn around to look and see where anger went. You continue to walk across the meadow, noting all of your senses. Then, you get to the path and start to walk down it. Then, begin to become aware of the sounds in the room, etc...

APPENDIX F
WEEKEND RETREAT

AGENDA

Friday Evening

Forming the Circle
Offering to the Centrepiece
Smudging ceremony
Intro Talking Stick/Circle
Introduction of weekend retreat process
Revisit guidelines
Goals - Share something we bring and something we wish to take with us at the end of the weekend. (Pass Talking Stick)

Group Image-making - To introduce ourselves and what brings us this weekend
(Postponed until Saturday morning)

BREAK

Anger Inventory
Free Association Exercise: **Anger** - What comes up when you hear the word "Anger"?
think? feel? see? hear?
Discussion: Do any of these words more specifically speak to Women's experience?
Where does women's anger come from?
How is women's anger unique?
How has society defined anger for women? (anger as learned behavior)
What did we learn from our role models? (A..B Exercise)
Why is it important to talk about women's anger?

Closure: Where are we at? What do we need tonight?
Stand in Circle, hand holding, squeeze and pass it on, recite "The Thaw"
Discuss options for diffusing energy.

Journal writing

Saturday

Opening ritual (SOAR song)

Check in - Talking Stick

Introduction of Gestalt

- Tug of War
- Knotted towels
- Empty Chair
- Movement/Music
- Sculpting
- Psychodrama
- Body Sculpting (Portrayal of self in anger)

Introductory Image-making - To introduce ourselves and what we are bringing to the weekend

Break (Journal Writing)

Dialoguing with Images

LUNCH (walk, cycle, etc.)
(1.5 hours)

Circle

Check-in

Anger Imagery
& Image-making - Create a response to your experience with an image

Dialoguing with Images...
(Discuss timeframes)
Journal Writing

Evening Meal

Saturday Evening

Continued dialoguing with Images

Journal Writing (20 minutes)

Closure

Evening Leisure

Sunday Morning

Circle

Check-in

"Steel Magnolias" - clip

Wholistic model of self-care

- Personal Action Plans
- Journal Writing

Break

Making Meaning of our Experience

- Revisit interview questions
- flipchart

Closing Ritual

- Add to Intro Image (in the corner of each image), or in journals, an affirmative response to that person in a word or phrase
- Final journal writing
- Closing round and circle of energy

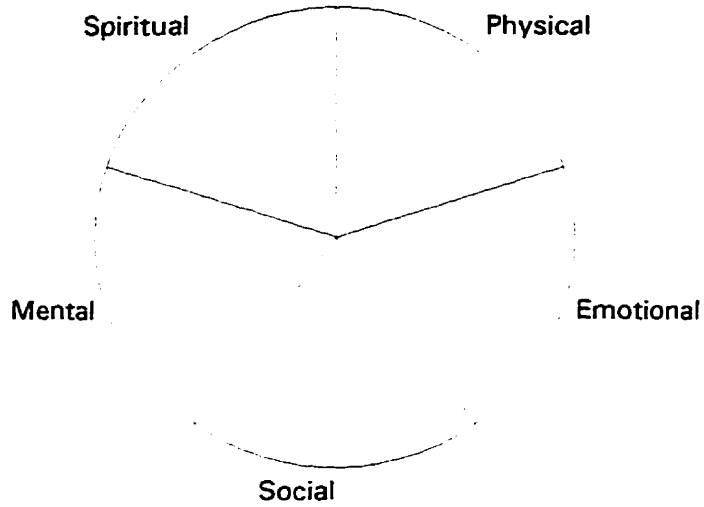
APPENDIX G

Group Guidelines

1. Confidentiality: What is shared within this group will remain here; it is okay to acknowledge and greet one another outside of the group; non-identifying sharing can occur outside of the group; our own experience of the weekend can be shared with another outside of the group.
2. Smoking will be kept outside of the house.
3. Let us know if you need a break.
4. Try to stay with the circle. If you have to leave, please tell us.
5. When experiencing anger, it is not okay to hurt ourselves; it is not okay to hurt someone else; it is not okay to destroy property.
6. Be open to the triggers and the process.
7. Respect the principles of the Talking Circle/Talking Stick.
8. Expressing emotion is okay and encouraged, including laughter and humour.

APPENDIX H

Personal Plan of Self Care



Today, I am making a commitment to myself to care for myself in the following ways:

Physically: I will _____

Emotionally: I will _____

Socially: I will _____

Mentally: I will _____

Spiritually: I will _____

APPENDIX I

Categories

- * anger at abuse
- * anger at feeling disrespected
- * anger at injustices
- * anger at feeling manipulated
- * anger at loss of nurturing and protection
- * anger at people not following through
- * self-destructive behavior
- impact on health
- * impact on relationships
- * fear of anger
- * controlled by anger
- * anger turned to hurt and sadness
- misdirected anger
- * accumulated anger/layers of anger
- * anger associated with violence
- * anger not permitted as a child
- anger blocked
- * stuffing/suppressing anger
- * shame/guilt/self-blame
- loss of control
- rage/explosion
- feeling responsible for other's anger
- * women don't get angry
- * unaware of anger and it's impact
- turning point
- * anger hardest emotion to deal with
- anger tied to issues of the past
- * power being taken away
- * withdrawal and isolation
- * anger needs safety
- * anger needs recognition, permission, validation, safety
- * anger needs action
- * anger needs self-care
- * anger needs to be understood
- * control over anger
- body awareness of anger
- anger protects
- * anger expression leads to emergence of self/feeling whole
- * other people's reactions to anger
- process to anger

APPENDIX J

Themes from Bracketing

- * stuffing anger
- * rage/explosion
- * Fear of anger
- controlled by anger
- control over anger
- * anger associated with sadness/loss/guilt
- unaware of anger until adult life
- * self-destruction
- * emergence of self/feeling whole
- * anger requires action
- present anger associated with past events
- * impact on health and relationships
- * anger associated with violence
- * layers/accumulation
- * anger needs recognition/permission/validation/safety/
healthy expression/action
- anger most prevalent/strongest/hardest emotion to deal with
- * turning point
- holding onto anger
- * choosing to let go
- * anger serves as protection
- * self-care

APPENDIX K

Themes and Sub-Themes

Suppression of Anger

- * Anger silenced during childhood
- * Unaware of anger until turning point in adult life
- * Anger avoided/anger misdirected
- * Withdrawal and isolation
- * Self-destructive behavior
- * Impact on health and relationships
- * Anger most prevalent and hardest emotion to deal with in healing process
- * Accumulated anger/layers
- * Anger turned to hurt and sadness
- * Being controlled by anger

Fear of Anger

- * Anger associated with violence
- * Fear of own and other's anger
- * Rage and explosiveness
- * Fear of losing control
- * Fear of other people's reactions
- * Fear of losing relationships

Exploring the Origins of Anger

- * Anger in present linked to past
- * Anger at abuse
- * Anger at silencing
- * Anger at disrespect
- * Anger at injustices
- * Anger at loss
- * Feeling responsible
- * Process of anger

Anger Needs

- * Recognition
- * Permission
- * Validation
- * Support
- * Safety
- * Expression
- * Physical Release
- * Choices

- * Control of self
- * Action
- * Self-care

Emergence of Self

- * Integration
- * Feeling whole
- * Self-esteem
- * More spontaneity
- * Inner harmony
- * Control over self
- * Empowerment