

**ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND VIOLENCE:
A STANDPOINT ANALYSIS**

by

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

In order to adequately respond to the needs of women who are struggling to cope with their own use of intimate violence, this research project sets out to explore the issue of women's intimate violence. Acknowledging the fact that violence is a significant issue within the Aboriginal community, particular attention has been directed to Aboriginal women who engage in violent behaviour. Taking a standpoint approach to the issue, three focus-group discussions and 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with Aboriginal women in order to get at how these women made sense of their own use of violence.

Situated in the context of the long history of racial oppression and discrimination faced by Aboriginal people, the legacy of residential boarding schools is discussed in terms of its effect upon the familial structure within Aboriginal communities. As a result of the government's failed attempt to assimilate Canada's Aboriginal people into the larger society, Aboriginal people, as a group, have been left to live in a state of despair. The women's stories of growing up in broken families are explored in depth, as is their long histories of living in an environment where alcohol, violence and poverty are the norm.

From their accounts of their lives, it is revealed that much of women's intimate

violence takes place in response to women's long histories of oppression and victimization both as a group trying to survive in a predominantly white society and as individuals trying to survive in a violent, and often poverty-stricken, environment. As a group, the women voice their need for programs and other resources in order to understand better the roots of their anger and aggression and to cope more effectively with their violent behaviour. Issues such as poverty, the women's lack of parenting skills, their need for better communication skills and their desire for stronger support systems are addressed. More significantly, the women's need for attention, understanding and voice is also revealed.

This research reveals that women who engage in intimate violence lead very complicated lives and that there are no easy or simple solutions to ending the violence, especially given the women's strong degree of mistrust in non-Aboriginal individuals and organizations. Nevertheless, by presenting these women's stories – their standpoint – this research offers insights for responding more appropriately to the needs of women who engage in violent behaviour.

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INTRODUCTION

Courtney: I used to beat him. Beat him up any way I could. I'd, ah, kick him. Slap him for no reason. Throw things at him. Ah, rip all his clothes off him. Hit him in the face. Do anything I could . . . He was so afraid of me. One time I went and destroyed my whole wall unit. And that's when I rammed into my wall, and I had two black eyes. My little sister hid in my bedroom. And I had a really heavy coffee table, and I flipped it over. And I had a wall unit that had twelve shelves on it. And I wiped out half of it of all my glasses. My little sister wouldn't come out of the bedroom . . . I guess I must have phoned the police. And they didn't believe that I did all that. That somebody my, my height, my weight could destroy everything that, that was destroyed. And my little sister told them, 'Yeah, my, she did everything.' [My boyfriend] never laid one hand on me. He hid in the bedroom.

Anne McGillivray and Brenda Comaskey (1999: xiv) define intimate violence as "any and all forms of maltreatment committed in relationships of intimacy, trust and dependence." Intimate violence may include physical, financial, sexual, psychological, emotional and/or spiritual acts of abuse committed between intimate partners, among family members and between any adult and child. At present, it appears that we are most familiar with men's intimate violence (acts of violence committed by men against their female partners). Nevertheless, being a woman of Aboriginal descent, and in keeping with my ties to the Aboriginal community, I am well aware of the reality of Aboriginal women's intimate violence.

Calling attention to violence by Aboriginal women is not to suggest that women's violence directed toward an intimate partner is something that takes place only within the Aboriginal community. Nevertheless, it is something that I have deemed to be apparent. Not only have I witnessed it, but I have directly experienced it. At one point in my life, I actually found myself struggling to cope with my own use of violence. Part of this struggle came from my own frustration and inability, as a woman, to openly discuss, let alone seek assistance to deal with, this problem. Even today, intimate violence on my part is a shameful experience that I have not yet come to terms with; it is not an issue that I even care to admit. As I am well aware, there are very few programs available to women who are seeking assistance in coping with their violent behaviour, especially from a perspective other than that of "victim."

Accordingly, in the summer of 1998, I set out to address the issue of women's intimate violence (in order to fulfill both my academic and personal endeavours). I wrote a term paper (Murdock, 1998) addressing the social resistance to acknowledging women's intimate violence. In the paper, I made the claim that rather than exert our efforts to seeking an answer to the polemical discussion between feminists and non-feminists as to whether women are more violent, less violent or equally violent as compared to men, it seemed fitting that we begin to invest our energy toward gaining a better understanding of the parameters surrounding women's intimate violence. For too long, women who engage in violent behaviour have been silenced, and an

inadequate understanding of women's violent behaviour has prevailed throughout Canadian society. Consequently, the typical reaction to those women who engage in violent behaviour has been to ostracize them rather than try to understand and address their needs.

In preparation for writing the term paper, I met with a few individuals who had experience working with women who had been convicted of violent offences. These individuals included a treatment officer for the community and youth corrections division of Probation Services; the director in charge of the Family Violence Program at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc., along with two treatment facilitators at the centre; and the Associate Chief Judge for the Provincial Court of Manitoba. All of these individuals confirmed that women's intimate violence is, in fact, a social reality. Nevertheless, they also confirmed that there was a resistance to acknowledge publicly women's intimate violence and the notion of women as aggressors and/or perpetrators of violence. As one treatment facilitator explained, to talk about women's intimate violence is "like a taboo . . . especially for those who are at the other end of the continuum at the feminist perspective . . . [because] it's very threatening for them, when we talk about that."

In the fall of 1999, I set out to explore the issue of women's intimate violence more systematically. Again, I met with Sharon Perrault, the director in charge of the Family Violence Program at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. in order to propose a

research project (as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Sociology). It was at this meeting that Ms Perrault informed me that she first recognized intimate violence by women, 13 years earlier, when she began working with Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. However, she also informed me that at the time, it was "politically incorrect" to discuss this issue, let alone direct attention to women's violence in terms of research, policies and programs. Ms Perrault advised me that at the present time, the only manner in which women's violence has been addressed at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. has been indirectly through other programs such as those that address parenting skills or surviving spousal abuse by men. Seeing a need and a desire to address the issue of women and anger straight on, Ms Perrault allowed me the opportunity to conduct my research project in conjunction with the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. Family Violence Program.

The overall aim of the research project was to make visible the standpoint of women who engage in intimate violence. The project is premised on the belief that we must openly address the issue of women's intimate violence in order that we may adequately respond to the needs of those women (myself included) who are seeking assistance in coping with their violent behaviour. By giving these women the space and authority they need to tell their stories, we also allow these women the voice they need to break the silence around women's intimate violence and, hence, to speak of the unspeakable. Moreover, we allow these women the opportunity to contribute to the

creation of a knowledge with which to understand and address this issue.

The research project set out to explore the issue of intimate violence from the standpoint of Aboriginal women who engage in violent behaviour. Specifically, the research was intended to address a number of questions: What forms does women's violence take? In what social contexts does the violence occur? What meanings do the women attach to their violent behaviour? How do they understand their own anger and aggression? Is their violence connected to their social location in terms of their race, class and/or gender position? What are the effects of the women's social location on their experiences with violence and on their motives to become violent? What structural arrangements within women's families produce the stress and conflict that lead to their violent behaviour? Is Aboriginal women's intimate violence related to the violence experienced by women-as-a-group, both in the home and in the wider society? Is it related to the systemic violence experienced by Aboriginal people? What are the complexities involved in women's decision to (or not to) seek support for their violent behaviour? What supports are available to women who engage in violence? What strategies or resources do the women think are needed in order to reduce the incidence of violence in their lives?

To explore the issue of women's intimate violence and provide answers to the questions posed, two qualitative research strategies were used in the project (see Appendix A). First, three focus-group discussions were conducted with women who

participate in the Family Violence Program offered at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. The focus-group discussions were designed to provide the participants with a forum in which to discuss and reflect upon their experiences and understandings of women's intimate violence, as well as their ideas for strategies to ameliorate it. Second, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with individual women to explore their own experiences with violence, their use of violence in intimate relationships, and their coping strategies and suggestions for responding to women who use violence in their relationships with intimate male partners.

The focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews were audio tape recorded and later transcribed. Although copies of the transcripts were not made available to the research participants for their own use, the twelve individual women who participated in the in-depth interviews were provided with the opportunity to view their own transcript of our interview. This opportunity to view their own transcript allowed the women to clarify, elaborate further or block out any aspect of our interview and, more importantly, it ensured my accountability to the women who volunteered to participate in the research project. These transcripts form the basis of the analysis which follows.

Chapter One draws attention to the issue of women's intimate violence. It includes a brief discussion on violence against women and women's use of violence. Stressing the point that women are capable of violent behaviour, I argue that we need to develop a better understanding of women's intimate violence, and that we should

develop this understanding from the standpoint of Aboriginal women who engage in violent behaviour against their intimate male partners. Further, I argue that only by listening to women's own accounts of their experiences relating to violence will it be possible to produce good quality knowledge that will contribute to theory development, future research and policies and programs with which to adequately respond to the needs of women who engage in violent behaviour. Included in this chapter is a profile of the women who participated in the research project.

Chapter Two looks at the social process of colonization and the legacy of residential boarding schools. I examine how residential boarding schools have had a long-term impact on Aboriginal people as a group, and I argue that it is within this historical context that we can begin to understand the issue of women's intimate violence. Five of the women's stories are introduced to support my argument that by being thrust into such a cold and uncaring environment of harsh punishment and rigorous daily routine, the long history of family breakdown among Aboriginal people became inevitable.

In Chapter Three, I focus attention on the familial structure within Aboriginal communities. I assert that the once-healthy workings of the Aboriginal family have been interrupted and fractured as a result of the government's effort to eliminate Aboriginal culture and re-shape Aboriginal people's identity. Thus, many Aboriginal families have been left in a "broken" state. To appreciate better the standpoint of the

women, eight of their stories relating to childhood and adolescent years are laid out.

Chapter Four picks up where Chapter Three left off. Because of the unhealthy nature of their childhoods, many of the women grew accustomed to living in an environment where violence was the norm. As adults, the women went on to experience violence at the hands of their intimate partner(s). Seven of the women's stories relating to their experiences with violence at the hands of their intimate partner(s) are told in this chapter.

The focus of Chapter Five is on women's intimate violence. I contend that the women have learned to take control over their situations and survive the stressful conditions under which they live by becoming aggressive themselves. In this regard, many of the women adopted the very skills they learned from childhood and from their violent partners as a means for coping with the stressful conditions of their lives. Nine of the women's stories are used to explore how they make sense of their own use of intimate violence.

Chapter Six is set up somewhat differently than the previous chapters. Rather than focussing on the stories of particular women, I use excerpts from my conversations with all of the women (including those women who participated in the focus-group discussions) to examine how we could begin to address the needs of women who engage in violent behaviour. Also included is a brief discussion of some of the barriers we face in confronting women's needs.

By approaching the issue of women's intimate violence from the standpoint of Aboriginal women who engage in violent behaviour, this research offers the potential to meet the needs of women facing domestic violence issues in their homes and in their lives. By listening to what women themselves have to say about their own experiences with violence, this work provides a basic map for understanding women's intimate violence in terms of how it develops and what the issues are for those involved. Above all, by taking a standpoint approach to women's intimate violence, this research offers the potential to highlight some of the general principles related to appropriate interventions for women's use of violence and, thus, to assist in the reconstruction of healthier, safer communities in which to live.

Chapter One
ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND VIOLENCE:
MAKING THE CASE FOR A STANDPOINT ANALYSIS

Samantha: My family knows how I am towards my husband. And they feel sorry for him. And they say I'm mean to him . . . I know I am mean to him . . . And my girlfriends, see, they have the same problem of beating up their boyfriends. I think there's more people out there. Like, there's more women out, especially Native women that, are like that. Like, a lot of women don't want to say anything about it . . . Unless a man will say something, then I don't think anything will be done about it. Or unless women start saying that they're doing this and that . . . I don't want to be classified as the violent person . . . I feel shitty. Like, I don't like what I'm doing. I don't like what I've become . . . I've become really violent. That's why, when we seen your, your paper in the laundry mat, we both looked at it. Me and my ex-husband. And he says, 'You need, you need to go into that research thing. And you're the one that needs to get some help.' (Little laugh)

Over the past two decades, the issue of men's violence against women has been front and center for the Canadian women's movement. Feminists have succeeded in transforming the issue from a private problem to one of public concern, and much attention has been devoted to the issue in terms of theory development, research and the provision of services for both female victims of violence and male batterers. The use of violence by women, however, has not received adequate consideration by feminists, particularly within the realm of intimate partner relationships. When women's violence has been the focus of attention, the common practice has been to either

minimize women's violent behaviour or deny its very existence. By neglecting to address this issue, we fall short of providing adequate support for those women who do engage in violent behaviour. In order to respond appropriately to the needs of women who engage in intimate violence, therefore, we need to focus our attention on developing an accurate understanding of women's intimate violence. What is more, I propose that we develop this understanding from the standpoint of women who engage in violent behaviour.

Violence Against Women and Women's Use of Violence

Since the early 1970s, feminists have made significant gains in their struggle to end men's violence against women. They have formed a national battered women's movement which has brought the problem of men's violence against women into the public and political consciousness. They have created rape crisis centres and battered-women's shelters which provide a safe environment for abused women and their children. Through pressure on the state to address the issue of men's violence against women, feminists have ensured the enforcement of laws which extend the rights of protection to abused women. In like manner, they have assisted the federal and provincial governments in the implementation of domestic violence initiatives designed to assist abused women and their children (Urrel, 1993: 154-6).

Due to the vast amount of attention given to the issue of men's violence against

women by feminists, sociologists and other researchers around the world are now paying particular attention to the various types of abuse that women experience, particularly within intimate relationships (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1993: 249). As a result of the myriad of surveys and qualitative studies with abused women and violent men that have been conducted over the past two decades, we now acknowledge the types and seriousness of the violence, its effects on the lives of abused women and their children, and the dynamics of violent relationships (Johnson, 1996: 133). More importantly, we now recognize that men's violence against women is widespread and pervasive. In Canada alone, it is estimated that 5.38 million women 18 years and over have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual assault since the age of 16 years (p. 51).

Nevertheless, while the feminist movement has succeeded in transforming the issue of men's violence against women from a personal problem to a public concern, the movement has not been without its detractors. Several critics have argued that violence actually claims victims of both sexes (Cook, 1997; Pearson, 1997; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). In particular, research which utilizes the Conflict Tactics Scale to measure men's and women's ways of handling interpersonal conflict in intimate relationships has concluded that "violence between husband and wife is far from a one way street" (Straus, 1978: 447-8). Murray Straus and his colleagues (1978: 448) found that there was only a slightly higher incidence of violent acts for husbands

than for wives (12.1 percent versus 11.6 percent, respectively), and that wives who engaged in violent acts did so somewhat more frequently than husbands (with median figures of 3.0 and 2.5, respectively) (see also Gelles, 1974; Steinmetz, 1977). Armed with such findings, some writers are now claiming that within the context of intimate relationships, "men and women are equals in violence" (LaFramboise, 1999: A1; Pearson, 1997).

The main response by feminist writers to these charges has been either to deny women's violence altogether or to assert that women are violent only in the context of self-defense or as a result of provocation (Berk, Loseke & Rauma, 1981; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; McLeod, 1984; Saunders, 1980). Nevertheless, Canadian crime statistics indicate that women's intimate violence is very much a reality. Statistics for 1996, for example, reveal that of 126,294 adults and youths charged with committing some form of assault, 15 percent (18,669) were female (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1996). Data available for 1997 on female inmates convicted of committing crimes against the person reveal that the victim was most often known to the offender. The largest proportion of known victims of female crimes against the person were those in "other" relationships such as boyfriend/girlfriend or acquaintance (26 percent). Spouses and ex-spouses made up 21 percent of victims (Finn, Trevethan, Carriere & Kowalski, 1999:7). While the proportion of females charged with crimes against the person is typically much smaller than that of males, these figures do suggest that

women are capable of violence, and a good portion of their violent behaviour involves physical acts of aggression against intimate partners.

Because their numbers are small and their crimes are generally considered to be less serious in comparison to men's, women who come into conflict with the law for violent offences have been marginalized or made invisible (Glick & Neto, 1982: 142). This invisibility has had a negative impact on theory development, research and service provision for women who engage in violence (Bonta, Pang & Wallace-Capretta, 1995: 277-8). In terms of theory development, theories of criminal behaviour have been largely based on observations of male offenders and men's criminality (Naffine, 1987). When theorists have attempted to explain women's offending, women have been typically held up to a male standard or measuring rod. Theorists either attempt to explain women's crime by the same constructs used to explain men's crime or they create fundamentally different explanations based on gender stereotypes of appropriate femininity. In this case, women who engage in violent behaviour are often pathologized or seen as "abnormal" (Bonta et al., 1995: 278).

In much the same way, violent women have been the subject of relatively few empirical studies. When women's use of violence has been the focus of attention, it typically has been discussed in terms of such infrequent phenomena as female serial killers or spousal murderers (Bonta et al., 1995: 279). Of the relatively few studies of violence by women other than killing, most have applied conventional research

methods and theoretical approaches to "measure" the violent acts themselves and see how these acts "measure up" to violent acts by men (Shaw, 1995: 124).

The neglect of women's violence has been especially evident in terms of the provision of services to women who engage in violent behaviour. From her study of women in Canadian correctional institutions, Margaret Shaw (1991) concluded that although the women in her study reported that the majority of programs were helpful, they were frustrated by the lack of access to some programs and the inability to choose when and which programs they preferred. So long as the issue of women's violence is neglected, the provision of adequate support and resources with which to respond to the needs of these women will remain unmet.

Although the simplistic notion that "men are violent and women are not" contains a grain of truth, this image misses the complexity and texture of the lives of women who might use violence against their intimate partners (Shaw & Dubois, 1995: 2), particularly within the context of less extreme circumstances than spousal killing. By neglecting to adequately address women's violent behaviour, women are denied agency, and their capacity for violence tends to be ignored. Certainly, it is invidious to treat women who engage in intimate violence as a "special case." At the same time, however, by permitting the fatal flaw of asserting that women are solely victims of violence, and that if they do engage in intimate violence it is only in the context of self-defense or provocation, feminists will only continue to undermine many of the aims

of the Canadian women's movement. By failing to acknowledge women's use of violence, society's polarized dichotomy of masculine and feminine gender role expectations is reinforced; all women become "passive victims" and all men become "aggressive villains." Surely, not all women are victims, and not all men are victimizers (Tong, 1989: 128). To hold to this view merely reproduces an essentialist and uni-dimensional understanding of women's and men's inherent "natures." By this account, women cannot be held fully accountable for their actions (Kirsta, 1997: 5).

Therefore, if we start from the premise that women are capable of violent behaviour and that some women do initiate physical aggression against their intimate partners, then we need to develop a better understanding of the issue of women's intimate violence. More than this, we need to hear from the women themselves in order to get at their understandings of their own violent behaviour and the circumstances or social contexts in which this violence occurs. Only by listening to women's own accounts of their experiences with violence will it be possible to identify their standpoint on this issue. Only by listening to women's stories as they tell them will it be possible to adequately address the nature of women's intimate violence, its sources and its remedies.

Developing a Standpoint Analysis

To address the issue of women's intimate violence, it is first necessary to locate a

standpoint from which to analyze or explore the issue. According to Maureen Cain (1990: 139), this involves a number of considerations: choosing a site from which to work; theoretically reflecting upon one's own experiences and connections with the issue under study; and being accountable to those individuals from whose standpoint one chooses to work. Developing a standpoint analysis, then, involves implementing a collaborative approach to the research which engages both the researcher and the researched in a joint enterprise. The researcher must become involved with the research participants in order to maximize the opportunity to reflect more accurately on their experiences (Gelsthorpe & Morris, 1990: 88).

Within this joint enterprise, it should not be assumed that the researcher and the research participants share the same views and opinions. As a matter of fact, we all have differing and often unique views about the world in which we live. We all think, speak, write, create and distribute knowledge from a specific location in society, from a particular standpoint or site (Cain, 1990: 131). Opinions between those occupying a particular standpoint can, do and should differ. In much the same way, we all maintain certain relationships throughout our lives. While our views and opinions may change over time, so too will our sites. It is within the intersection of these relationships where we produce knowledge. Since these relationships are historical and ever-changing (as are the sites in which we find ourselves), they condition and contour the way we think about the world; they also inform our identity. The knowledge that we

produce, therefore, is site-specific. Recognizing these differences in opinion and the connections with and between a particular standpoint is an essential aspect of working from this standpoint (p. 134-5). In this regard, if I want to know *about* women who engage in intimate violence, then I must move into a site that is connected *with* women who engage in violent behaviour. Only then will it be possible to generate knowledge with which to adequately speak about women who engage in intimate violence.

By this account, moving into a specific site in which to speak about women who engage in intimate violence involves much more than simply connecting with individuals who share this same site. It involves theoretical reflexivity; "thinking about oneself in terms of a theory and understanding theoretically the site in which one finds oneself" (Cain, 1990: 133). It means making connections, historically, geographically and culturally, with those whose site one chooses to occupy. In this case, in order that I may develop an adequate understanding of women's intimate violence, it is necessary that I first make connections with those women who engage in violent behaviour. This connection involves my having to theoretically reflect upon my own personal experiences and the configuration of relationships that have historically, geographically and culturally brought me to this particular site in the first place. Being a woman does not mean automatically that I may speak about women who engage in violent behaviour. I have to agree to speak as a woman who is involved, in some way or

another, with women's violence. Otherwise, I will accomplish nothing more than becoming caught up in women's relationships. Only by theoretically reflecting upon my own experiences with violence and my own historical, geographical and cultural connections with this violence will I be able to make knowledgeable statements and claims about women who engage in intimate violence (p. 132-3).

Another key aspect involved in developing a standpoint from which to analyze or explore any particular issue is that of accountability. The objective of standpoint analysis is to produce good quality knowledge for those individuals whose standpoint one shares. In the case of women's intimate violence, this means giving the women the space they need in which to express their own understanding (their standpoint) of their violent behaviour and the social contexts in which it occurs. Since standpoint analysis begins with the "experiential subject," this involves listening to – and hearing – what the women have to say about their day to day lives, their histories and their culture (Comack, 1999a). It also means producing knowledge about the women's standpoint (on the basis of what I think the women are trying to say to me) which will be of use to these individuals. While my own personal experiences may shape my values and beliefs pertaining to women's intimate violence, this does not mean that the subjectivity of the women studied will not be taken into account. To this extent, it is to these women who engage in intimate violence that I, as a researcher, remain primarily accountable (Cain, 1990: 136).

Although the production of good quality knowledge about women's intimate violence is possible by taking a standpoint approach to the issue, Elizabeth Comack (1999a: 296) points out that this knowledge will not account for the "total" lives of those women who engage in intimate violence. The knowledge that is produced will be partial for a number of reasons. At the forefront, the partiality of the knowledge produced from the women's stories will stem from the type and depth of information that I choose to elicit from the women. In terms of this research project, the information that I chose to gather focused on the women's childhood and adult experiences with alcohol, drugs and violence, as well as the coping and intervention strategies they use to deal with the impact of these experiences. While some of the women volunteered information related to additional issues, the knowledge that I produce is limited to the topics that I chose to include in the interview schedule.

Further, the partiality of the knowledge that is produced will also depend upon what the women are willing or able to disclose to me at the time of our meeting (Comack, 1999a: 296-7). For instance, when questioned on her adult experiences of intimate violence, one of the women who participated in the research project readily disclosed numerous accounts of being abused by her husband over the span of many years; there was little mention of any violence on her part (despite my efforts to elicit this information). A few weeks later, however, I received a telephone call from this woman. She explained to me that there were some things that she had neglected to

tell me regarding her own use of violence. At her request, we met a second time. It was then when this woman disclosed that she had engaged in many more incidents of violence toward her husband than she had originally led me to believe. As our second meeting neared to a close, I probed for further details on the circumstances leading up to her use of violence. For instance, she had recounted one occasion when, during a fit of anger, she had repeatedly banged a pot against a rock until the handle of the pot broke off. On further questioning, I discovered that this incident occurred in response to a violent whipping by her husband with a tree branch. Clearly, then, the knowledge created from the women's accounts is partial in the sense that it is dependent upon what stories the women choose to tell me, as well as how these women choose to tell their stories.

Much along these lines, the knowledge that I produce will be partial in the sense that it will be based upon what part of the women's stories I choose to re-tell. While the women did share many of their thoughts, perspectives, feelings and emotions with me, it is not possible to detail each and every experience that was shared. Therefore, while the analysis will reflect the main themes that emerged from the women's accounts, the reader will not have the benefit of knowing all that was said during our meetings.

Finally, the partiality of the knowledge produced will result from the limited amount of time that is allotted to my meetings with the women. Since "we can never

fully know even those with whom we spend a lifetime, how much can we expect to know from one encounter with a person" (Comack, 1999a: 297)? Despite the fact that the knowledge is partial, there is much we can learn from listening to these women's stories.

Aboriginal Women and Violence

Nowhere is the need for an analysis of women's violent behaviour more pressing than in the case of Aboriginal women. While violence is not an "Aboriginal problem," it certainly is a prevalent problem among Aboriginal people. People of Aboriginal descent are clearly over-represented in the Canadian criminal justice system. Although Aboriginal people comprised a mere two percent of the Canadian adult population in 1997-98, they accounted for 15 percent of admissions to provincial/territorial institutions and 17 percent of admissions to federal facilities (Finn et al., 1999: 9). This over-representation is even more blatant for women of Aboriginal descent. A recent study of the Winnipeg Police Incident Reports found that of a random sample of 501 women charged with violent offences between 1991 and 1995, 52 percent were of Aboriginal descent. Of those women charged with violence against their partners or ex-partners, 48 percent were of Aboriginal descent (Comack, Chopyk & Wood, 2000).

Aboriginal women are an especially disadvantaged group in society. Michelle Grossman (1992), for example, found that life experiences of Aboriginal women in

prison included particular hardships such as poverty, unemployment, abusive family situations, limited education, criminal victimization and racial prejudice. Carol LaPrairie (1993: 237-8) maintains that macro forces such as the colonization of Aboriginal people and the marginalization of Aboriginal society, in conjunction with modernization, relocation and the unification of small groups into larger sedentary communities, has dramatically altered traditional Aboriginal life. As a result, Aboriginal people's social relations have deteriorated, leading to heavy reliance upon the welfare state. LaPrairie further maintains that it is within this context that much of Aboriginal women's involvement with the Canadian criminal justice system must be understood.

Aboriginal women's conflict with the law is linked to the macro forces that have shaped Aboriginal relations in Canadian society (LaPrairie, 1993: 242). In this case, micro forces such as family stress, marital discord, unemployment, poverty and various types of physical and sexual abuse which lead to alcoholism and violence among Aboriginal women are more often than not the result of the long-standing oppression and marginalization of Aboriginal people in general (p. 243). On this note, LaPrairie has argued that the importance of the links between the victimization of Aboriginal women as children, youths and young women (in the form of sexual assaults and domestic violence) and their conflicts with the law cannot be over-emphasized.

Given that violence appears to be an especially pressing issue in the lives of

Aboriginal women, it seems fitting that we re-direct our attention to this particular group and explore the issue of intimate violence from the standpoint of Aboriginal women who engage in violent behaviour. A standpoint aims to define. In the case of this research, it aims to reveal knowledge created from women's point of view. Accordingly, by listening to women's own accounts of their experiences with violence, it may be possible to situate women's violent behaviour within their own social contexts and locations; their race, class, age and gender. It also may be possible to identify some of the problems, conflicts and dilemmas which connect with women's violent behaviour (Comack, 1996), as well as identify their nature and source. More specifically, by approaching the issue from the standpoint of Aboriginal women who engage in intimate violence, it may be possible to produce good quality knowledge that will contribute to theory development, future research and policies and programs with which to appropriately respond to the needs of women who engage in violent behaviour.

The Participants: A "Relatively Homogeneous Group"?

An important aspect of producing good quality knowledge about women who engage in intimate violence involves recognizing the fact that women have multiple realities. Rather than accept women who engage in intimate violence as universal women who share the same experiences, as a researcher, I must account for their diversity and

difference. According to Comack (1999a: 294-5), developing a “more complete” understanding of women’s lives involves acknowledging the different experiences that women encounter throughout their lives and the different ways in which women make sense of these experiences. While women may share a set of common experiences, they may not necessarily share the same experiences. It is in this sense that the women comprise only a “relatively” homogeneous group. In like manner, they may not share the same understanding regarding their common experiences. Take the issues of race, class and gender, for example.

Standpoint analysis was originally derived from the Marxist approach whereby the nature of women’s oppression is understood in the materialistic terms of men’s activities in a capitalist society. Women’s material life activity within the sexual division of labour provides the basis for an analysis of the ways in which women participate in and oppose their own oppression (Comack, 1999a: 291-2). Inspired by this Marxist analysis of social relations, standpoint feminists give voice to women’s oppression by taking account of their race, class and/or gender positions in society and how these social positions have affected their lives. While my aim is to locate these women in terms of their race, class and/or gender positions in society, not all women may see their oppression and the effects of their oppression in these terms.

Although women who engage in intimate violence may make up a “relatively homogeneous group” (Comack, 1999a: 295-6), the research must account for both

the sameness among and the difference between these women (myself included), and the analysis offered should represent my attempt to understand and make sense of the distinct lives of all those women who contributed their voice to the research (p. 300). So who are these individual women who had come together, as a “relatively homogeneous group,” to share their standpoint on the issue of women’s intimate violence?

The participants in the research project included 40 women who participated in the three focus-group discussions and 12 women who agreed to an in-depth interview with me.¹ All of the women who participated in the research project came to my attention as conscious and willing collaborators in the research.

All of the women who attended the focus-group discussions were over the age of 18 years, and they all had experienced violence within the context of an intimate partner relationship. Although I was unable to ascertain whether these experiences included every women’s own use of violence toward an intimate partner, I was able to confirm that all of these women had experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner.² Some of these women did, however, disclose that they had used violence

¹ Two of the women I interviewed also attended a focus-group discussion. While there was a total of 44 women in attendance at the focus-group discussions, four of these women each chose to attend two focus-group discussions.

² The focus-group discussions took place during the support group sessions that are offered at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. Family Violence Program for women who are facing family violence issues in their lives and in their homes. See Appendix A.

toward an intimate partner. One woman's experience included violence by an intimate female partner. All but four of the women who participated in the focus-group discussions were of Aboriginal descent; that is, they were "full-" or mixed-blood status (or registered) Indians, non-status (or non-registered) Indians or Métis.

As a group, the 12 women who participated in an in-depth interview ranged in age from 19 years to mid-40 years. Among these 12 women were two women who were in a mother-daughter relationship with each other. All but one of the 12 women identified themselves as being of Aboriginal descent,³ and eight of these 11 women, either directly themselves or indirectly through the past generations, shared an historical connection to residential boarding schools.

One woman who participated in the in-depth interviews was married and living with her husband; six women were living in a common-law relationship; and five women identified themselves as being recently separated and single. All but one woman had children, and they ranged in number from one to seven children who were between the ages of 6 years to early-20 years. Four of the 11 women with children did not have custody of their children. These children were either living with extended family members or they were living under the care of Child and Family Services.

³ The one woman who identified herself as "white" did have ties to the Aboriginal community.

In terms of their employment and education, four women were employed full-time, seven women were receiving social assistance and one woman was receiving band sponsorship while she attended university as a full-time student. Two of the seven women who were receiving social assistance were also attending a post-secondary educational institution. All but one woman had either quit school or had been expelled from school prior to reaching grade 12. Nevertheless, 10 of these 11 women who were unable to complete their high school education as an adolescent did continue their schooling with academic upgrading several years later, and six of these 10 women had either completed a post-secondary degree or were nearing the completion of a degree.

As children, all of the women shared the experience of growing up in a broken home. While familial separation usually involves a split between biological parents, three women had been separated from their biological parents who remained together. Two of these women were raised under the care of extended family members, and one woman was raised in a residential boarding school. Another four women grew up in the care of their biological mother; two women grew up in the care of their biological father; and two women were raised by both of their biological parents. For these last two women, separation between their parents did occur periodically, but it was never permanent. Only one woman was raised by both of her biological parents who never separated.

With regard to their experiences with violence, all 12 of the women I interviewed

had witnessed some form of violence as a child, and 11 of these women had directly experienced this violence. Six of these women were sexually assaulted as they were growing up. In all situations of sexual abuse, the sexual perpetrator was a member of the women's immediate family. For 11 of the 12 women whom had either witnessed or experienced violence as a child, alcohol typically (but not always) played a factor in this violence.

As adults, violence carried on into the women's intimate relationships. All 12 women had experienced violence at the hands of an intimate male partner. For 10 of these 12 women, this violence came from their first intimate partner. The other two women first experienced violence at the hands of their second intimate partner. Most notably, 10 of the 12 women met their first abusive partner prior to reaching the age of 18 years; two of these women were just 12 years of age when they met their abusive partners. The other two women were 20 years of age when they first encountered violence by a male intimate. In all instances, the abusive behaviour began when the women were between three weeks and a couple of months, at most, into their relationships, and all of these violent relationships continued for at least two years. Six women moved on to experience further violence at the hands of subsequent intimate partners, and three women are still involved with their first abusive partner. The three women who experienced violence at the hands of only one intimate partner remained with their abusive partner in excess of five years.

The violence that the women experienced at the hands of their intimate partners included being hit with objects, punched, whipped, stomped on, stabbed, chased, held hostage, publically humiliated, controlled, stolen from, cheated on, lied to, belittled and raped. In many, but definitely not all, incidents of abuse, alcohol and/or drugs played a factor in the violence that the women experienced.

In terms of the women's own use of violence, 11 of the 12 women I interviewed disclosed that they had used physical violence on an intimate partner. The one woman who did not report being physically violent toward an intimate partner did acknowledge that her own use of physical violence was directed toward individuals other than her intimate partner. The violence that the women directed toward their intimate partners included hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, stabbing, throwing objects, destroying property, belittling, scalding, slamming doors, pulling pranks and plotting ways with which to cause harm to their intimate partners.

In the following chapters, I will reveal the women's stories, as they told them to me. Their childhood and adult experiences related to the issue of intimate violence are laid out on the basis of how I understand them. While the names of the women behind these experiences are fictitious,⁴ their stories are very real.

⁴ My six year old niece provided me with assistance in selecting the fictitious names of the 12 women who participated in the research project. After providing my niece with a brief description of each of the 12 women, I asked her to guess the women's names. Accordingly, the 12 women were assigned a fictional name, on the basis of my niece's impression of them.

Chapter Two THE LEGACY OF RESIDENTIAL BOARDING SCHOOLS

Melissa: That was that government using the church to make us into white people. Assimilation. You know, trying to get rid of the Native people through the children. And the children grew up as white people. But it didn't work like that. (Little laugh)

In order to develop an adequate understanding of women's intimate violence, it is first necessary to understand where the root of this problem begins. Among Aboriginal people, this root runs deep, and it is buried in a long history dating back to the time when Aboriginal people first made contact with Europeans. Since that time, Aboriginal-white relations have been characterized by racial oppression whereby Europeans have assumed a position of dominance over Aboriginal people. It is to this racist history that we may credit the marginalized position of Aboriginal people in Canadian society and the hostility and conflict that has been established between these two groups. On the basis of systemic racism, Aboriginal people were subject to the social process of colonization within which they have been prevented from effectively participating in the social, economic and political structures of our society (see Bourgeault 1991; Comack 1999b; Monture-Angus 1999; Tobias 1990). What is more, through the use of missionaries, the health system and the education system, much of Aboriginal culture and the identity of Aboriginal people have been lost.

Having been estranged from their people and alienated from the culture that was historically imposed upon them, many Aboriginal people now find themselves in desperate living conditions characterized by high rates of poverty, unemployment, family violence, delinquency, substance abuse and suicide (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 1993; Comeau & Santin, 1990; Grossman, 1992; LaPrairie, 1993; Silver et al., 2000). At least three generations of Aboriginal people have been forced into a life of self-destructive violence (Comeau & Santin, 1990: 97). The importance of recognizing the links between the colonization of Aboriginal people, their marginal position in Canadian society, and the devastating emotional and psychological problems they struggle with on a daily basis cannot be over-emphasized. Accordingly, I argue that it is within this historical context that we can begin to understand the issue of women's intimate violence.

The Social Process of Colonization

The process of colonization involves weakening the resistance of, and creating a dependency among, a nation or a group in order that they may be controlled by a dominant nation or group (Frideres, 1993: 8). According to Gail Kellough (1980: 343), what distinguishes the colonizing group from the colonized group is a question of power. Prior to the colonial period in Canada, Aboriginal people possessed a high level of autonomy within which they held the initiative for all social, economic and political

aspects of their life. With a sense of trust, honesty and respect, they lived in harmony and shared a life that was characterized by spiritual beliefs, open communication and family togetherness. Aboriginal people functioned on the basis of caring and sharing, and a mutual interdependence initially existed between Aboriginal people and Europeans. Nevertheless, through the process of colonization, Aboriginal people lost their autonomy, and they began to take on certain characteristics of European society. It was when this balance of power shifted in favour of Europeans that the actual process of colonizing Canada's Aboriginal people began.

This process of colonization took place at two power levels. The first level involved a structural component that was concerned with the external factors of colonization (Kellough, 1980: 343). Through the implementation of various treaties, policies and parliamentary actions, the government converted its power into authority with which it was able to remove land rights and resources from Aboriginal people (Frideres, 1993: 4-6; McKenzie & Hudson, 1985: 130). Laws and legislation were passed in order to allow Europeans outright control over all aspects of Aboriginal life, including their income, living conditions, education and mobility (Dosman, 1972: 13). In exchange for their "special status," Aboriginal people were pushed onto desolate plots of land where economic development was extremely limited, Aboriginal ceremonies were severely restricted, and this once nomadic group was forced to abide by relentless rules and regulations that restricted their movement and controlled their

traditional way of life.

The second power level in the process of colonization involved the cultural and psychological components that were concerned with the internal factors of colonization (Kellough, 1980: 344). Through the use of missionaries, the health system and the education system, the government explained and legitimized its power and control over Aboriginal life (McKenzie & Hudson, 1985: 130). Ostensibly for their own "protection," Aboriginal people were to be assimilated into the dominant "white" society. At the same time, however, they were to be isolated from the dominant culture since they also required "protection" from the worst features of this society (Kellough, 1980: 346; Tobias, 1990).

An important strategy used in this colonization process was directed at Aboriginal children. By gaining control of Aboriginal children, the government believed that it would also gain control over the rest of Aboriginal society. Therefore, as part of the government's drastic effort to "protect" and assimilate Canada's Aboriginal people, Aboriginal children were taken from their parents. In reality, this meant that the children were forced into an unfamiliar environment whereby they were expected to live by values and customs that were foreign to them (Grant, 1996); they were deluded into believing that their language, religion and traditions were sinful; and they were forced to live under deplorable conditions. Through drastic measures (such as withholding food rations), all Aboriginal people were cajoled into believing that they must succumb

to the government's demands or die (Kellough, 1980: 364).

While the structural component of colonization was concerned with the decision-making process that affected the institutions and living conditions of Aboriginal people, the cultural component of colonization was concerned with convincing Aboriginal people that this power and authority which Europeans had over Aboriginal life was for their own good (Kellough, 1980: 344). Although both components of the colonization process have contributed to the marginalization and subordination of Aboriginal people in Canadian society, it is because of the cultural component of colonization that much of Aboriginal culture and tradition has been destroyed.

While some authors maintain that economic greed played a factor in the process of colonization (Frideres, 1993; Kellough, 1980), most will agree that racism was the underlying ideology behind this process. The belief that Aboriginal people are genetically and socially inferior to Europeans has been promoted throughout Canadian history. Volumes of historical government documents, news reports, pictures and paintings are laden with racist attitudes and discriminatory comments regarding Aboriginal people and their traditional way of life (see Carter, 1997; Dosman, 1972; Van Kirk, 1980). These reports and documents performed a valuable service to the government and dominant society in that they justified the notion that Aboriginal people were savage and uncivilized and, therefore, in desperate need of protection,

guidance and direction.

The Assimilation Plan

With an underlying (racist) belief that they held superiority over Aboriginal people, the government set in motion a policy whereby Aboriginal culture was to be eradicated, and Aboriginal people were to be "civilized" and forced to assimilate into the dominant "white" society. From the reports and letters that have been documented throughout Canadian history, it is fair to assume that the government believed that this policy of assimilation was being carried out (largely through the altruistic work of government agents) for Aboriginal people's own good. Quite possibly the most blatant act of racism in the history of Aboriginal-white relations, this assimilation plan provided church leaders with the authority to remove Aboriginal children from the "pagan" and "immoral" influences of their parents and their home communities and place them in a new environment in which these children could be more easily "civilized" and given a "proper" Christian upbringing (Comeau & Santin, 1990: 96; Horejsi, Craig & Pablo, 1992: 333). Every aspect of Aboriginal customs, language, religion and tradition was to be destroyed, using whatever means necessary. Almost invariably, physical punishment and severe psychological trauma was the chosen method of destruction. According to Pauline Comeau and Aldo Santin (1990: 96), it was this policy of forced assimilation that marked the start of one of the darkest periods in the history of

Aboriginal-white relations in Canada.

Throughout Canadian history, this assimilation plan has taken a number of forms. Medical facilities was one of them. Through the use of the health system, Aboriginal children were removed from their families and placed in foster homes or medical facilities. Usually on the pretense of medical problems, Aboriginal children were kept away from their families and communities for extended periods of time. Some children never did return home. Those children who did return to their home communities after a prolonged absence usually found themselves alienated from their families and unfamiliar with their cultural environment (McKenzie & Hudson, 1985: 130). One of the women who participated in the research project remembered this experience all too well.

Brenda's Story

Brenda is 41 years of age and a mother of four children. She had recently separated from her second long-term partner of approximately 10 years, after being married to him for just under one year. Brenda spent the majority of her life living on her home reserve. With a grade 10 education obtained through upgrading, Brenda has worked for much of her adult life as a home care attendant for the elderly. However, after suffering from a nervous breakdown, Brenda found herself collecting social assistance benefits.

Brenda explained her life as a violent one, and she claimed that she never really had a close relationship with anyone, except for her younger brother. Although Brenda's parents never separated from each other, Brenda was separated from her parents and her 10 siblings at a very young age.

Brenda recounted that after developing TB at the age of four, she, along with three of her siblings, was "shipped away" to a sanatorium for two years where she was raised by "nurses." While she was away at the sanatorium, Brenda did not receive visits from her family since financial resources were tight and the medical facility was located quite a distance from her home community. Although Brenda remembered being well-treated while she was at the sanatorium, she admitted that returning home to her Aboriginal community took some getting used to.

Brenda: [My mom] was always there. But I didn't know who she was. I thought it was the nurse 'cause I got used to living in that hospital . . . I called her nurse for the longest time. Yeah. 'Cause I wa-, I said, "those kids are fighting me," like, [my brother] and them. Like, but that was, they were just teasing or wanting to talk or something. And I didn't wanna, like, be bothered I guess. 'Cause I used to hide under the bed, I guess. I was so shy.

Brenda further recounted that her younger brother was also away at a medical facility (for reasons other than having TB) and he, too, spent an extended period of time away from his family, with no visits from their parents. Brenda remembered her brother's return home as a difficult one as he experienced a loss of his cultural identity.

According to Brenda, this created tension in his relationship with other members of the family and proved to be emotionally and psychologically upsetting to both herself and her younger brother.

Brenda: My [younger brother] was the baby. And he got spoiled because he went to the hospital for a while, hey. And, ah, he wanted to be treated, he was, the way he was in the white world, hey . . . That's why I feel sorry for him. But I mean it, yeah. 'Cause [my other brothers] used to get him in trouble. 'Cause he sort ah talked different when he come back from the hospital, being, like, in a white place for a while . . . They teased him and teased him until he, he was mad. He was fuckin' foaming at the mouth. And my dad gave him a licken. I felt so sorry. I was mad at those boys for a long time. (Crying)

Being away from their families and communities for extended periods of time, it is not surprising that many Aboriginal children lost some of their cultural attributes to the "white world." Crystal, another woman who participated in the research project, remembered how her mother lost her language as a result of spending a significant portion of her childhood in a hospital.

Crystal's Story

Crystal is a single mother of two children. She is in her mid-thirties, holds a grade eleven education obtained through upgrading, and is collecting social assistance benefits. At the time of our interview, Crystal was in the process of trying to end her

relationship with her abusive partner, with whom she had been involved since the age of 17 years. Crystal and two of her four siblings were raised in the city by her single mother.

Having left her abusive partner and her home reserve when Crystal was six years of age, Crystal's mother led a life that was characterized by alcohol and violence. Crystal believes that much of the violence she experienced throughout her own life may have some connection to her mother losing her language while she was away in a hospital as a child.

Crystal: She spoke, uhm, her Soto language when she left. And when she went back home, she lost that language. So she must have been in hospital for quite a long time to learn to speak English and lose her language. But while she was here, in the city, uhm, nurses treated her badly . . . And losing her language, and, and she had to, like, re-learn, you know, her language growing up, when she went back home. So, I, I think that, that played a part in her, uhm, her, the violence part. You know, never, didn't treat, didn't treat her very nicely. Maybe 'cause she was Native. I don't know. But, the treatment, she said that she got there was not very, a pleasant experience.

Since language is the key to the survival of a culture, the loss of language among Aboriginal children merely followed in line with the government's attempt to assimilate Aboriginal people into the dominant society. Like the health system, the education system was also used as a means with which to assist the government in fulfilling its assimilationist policies. Accordingly, residential boarding schools were

established for the sole purpose of eliminating Aboriginal culture and reshaping Aboriginal people's identity. While residential boarding schools proved to be yet another form of systemic racism directed toward Aboriginal people, they had the greatest impact on Aboriginal culture. In fact, the impact upon the lives of countless Aboriginal people and on Aboriginal culture was so devastating that the term "residential school syndrome" has been coined to describe the traumatic and adverse effects experienced by the survivors of the residential schooling era (Grant, 1996: 247).

Residential Boarding Schools

Dating as far back as the late-1800s, residential boarding schools were established with the intent of successfully assimilating Aboriginal people into the dominant "white" society. As an essential pre-requisite to realizing this plan, Aboriginal children were removed from the so-called prejudicial influences of their families and communities. For at least 10 months out of the year, the children were placed in residential boarding schools that were usually located a fair distance from their home communities. Some children stayed at the schools year round, and they did not return home for many years following their initial enrollment in these schools. Other children never returned home at all.

Because Aboriginal people were particularly prone to respiratory diseases, many Aboriginal children died while they were away at residential boarding schools (Van Kirk,

1980: 84). In her research on the residential schooling era, Agnes Grant (1996: 133) found that the death of Aboriginal children was not discussed by staff or students at residential boarding schools. In fact, many children who had died while away at the schools simply just disappeared, or they were quietly buried and forgotten. In most instances, it was months before the deceased children's families were notified of their death and, in many cases, this notification came only when the children did not return home at the expected time. Grant attributed Aboriginal parents' lack of awareness of the affairs that went on at residential boarding schools to the "Pass" system, whereby Aboriginal adults were not allowed to leave their home reserves without the written permission from the government.

On those rare occasions when parents could leave the reserve to visit their children, they had to contend with the controlled nature of the residential school environment. Because these visits were unnaturally structured and strictly supervised, they proved, in most instances, to be uncomfortable, short-lived and disappointing to both Aboriginal children and their families (Grant, 1996; Horejsi et al., 1992).

Traditionally, Aboriginal children were educated through home experiences, under the guidance of their parents and grandparents. Naturally, some parents did resist the removal of their children from their home communities. Aboriginal mothers, in particular, found the threat of losing their children to residential boarding schools an especially difficult experience (Van Kirk, 1980: 83). Nevertheless, in many situations,

Aboriginal children were forcibly snatched from their families (Grant, 1996: 23-4). Aboriginal people were aware of this violation of their rights as parents, but many were powerless to combat the combined forces of the government, its agents and the mainstream society (p. 225).

Residential boarding schools were characterized by harsh punishment and rigorous daily routines. While away at these schools, Aboriginal children were, first and foremost, stripped of their freedom and forbidden to speak their Native language and practice their traditional customs and beliefs. Their hair, which was an important cultural symbol, was cut short. Their clothes, which were uniquely decorated, were replaced with school uniforms (Horejsi et al., 1992: 333). In accordance with the government's attempt at forced assimilation, Aboriginal children were required to speak only English, and little patience was given to those children who arrived at residential boarding schools with little or no knowledge of the English language (Grant, 1996: 189). In essence, a new environment in which Aboriginal children could be properly "civilized" was created.

Inasmuch as speaking their Native language was seen as a threat to the residential school authorities, many children were unable to communicate until they learned to speak English (Grant, 1996: 191). This proved to be an especially difficult experience for these children since, in their own culture, language was their only means with which to acquire the necessary information they needed for their safety

and survival (p. 195-6). On the rare occasion, older children were assigned to younger children in order to bridge the gap between the two cultures but, in most instances, Aboriginal children were simply left to struggle by trial and error (p. 189).

While some of the staff were loving and caring, for the most part, harsh punishment and severe psychological trauma were commonplace at residential boarding schools (Grant, 1996: 221). Aboriginal children received the most severe punishments for running away, and they received the most frequent punishments for speaking their Native language (p. 189). The most common form of punishment was strapping; however, other sadistic forms of punishment such as being choked, having their heads shaved or being forced to eat regurgitated food have been reported (p. 226).

Melissa shared her own experiences of residential boarding school with me. Her story reinforces many of the experiences that have been documented in the literature on residential boarding schools (see Bull, 1991; Grant, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1988; Knockwood & Thomas, 1992; Willis, 1973).

Melissa's Story

Melissa is 44 years of age, and she has one child. On occasion, she resides in a common-law relationship with her second long-term partner. Melissa is employed full-time as an office administrator, and she currently holds a Bachelor of Arts degree that

she obtained upon returning to her studies after many years of marriage to her first husband. As a child, Melissa spent six years in a residential boarding school, along with her older sister.

Melissa remembered many positive experiences from her time in the residential boarding school, such as the "health food" she received and the time she spent learning to cook, clean, study and do crafts. However, Melissa explained to me that because she was away from home for so many years, she didn't really know her parents; that was "a big loss" to her. She elaborated that her main attachment as a child was to her older sister, who was the only one that she "sort of grew up with in the residence" and the only one that she "could really relate to." In accordance with the harsh punishment and rigorous daily routine that characterized residential boarding schools, Melissa remembered numerous incidents where physical punishment was used as a means of discipline. In many of these instances, punishment was an unnecessary course of action.

Melissa: Like, one time we, ah, there's a bunch of us girls. (Little laugh) We were folding up socks. And, ah, we were folding up these socks and somehow this, some socks got mixed up with the others. Like, with the colours. And I got mixed up and I learned that the nun got really mad and then, you know, just beat on your, like, they hit you on your bum or something. (Little laugh)

(With what? Bare hands or?)

No. They used something. Like a stick or something. That's what

they did. That one time I remember that happened 'cause I was right there, too.

Ridicule was also used as a means of discipline in residential boarding schools.

Melissa recalled another incident when a teacher responded with extreme measures to "encourage" her listening skills.

Melissa: Oh, one time, ah, I wouldn't really hear that teacher, hey. She was talking about, ah, she was handing something around and then she said, oh, I guess she said, she told, ah, the students not to write in those books. But I (little laugh), I didn't hear her. And also I really wanted to do that work, hey . . . And then after a while she says, 'Okay, who wrote in their books?' And then she went around. And then she closed the door for it. Do you know what she did? At the front there, she made us bare our bum. She hit us . . . like, as a punishment and to listen. And I should be listening.

Devaluation of Aboriginal culture was a particularly significant characteristic of the colonization process, and the success of the government's assimilation plan largely depended upon Aboriginal peoples' belief that their colonizers were the sole carrier of a valid culture (McKenzie & Hudson, 1985: 131).

Melissa: I remember there. That was the start of that thing, that, ah, Aboriginal stuff. And I didn't really know then. Like, they used to say that, ah, you know the, ah, the Indians were an alcoholic. They were dirty and all that stuff. Then when we'd go to the, to the reserve, they always told us, you know, walk in a straight line and just stay on the road and walk. Because, and don't touch anything. 'Cause they're dirty or something. (Little laugh) . . .

That's how they, they described Indians and called them, like, savages. And they made them savages and, ah, pig and stuff like that, hey. But they, I think they knew that they were, they were Christians anyways, too. They were already into Christianity. But they still talked like that.

When I questioned Melissa on her own experiences with racism in the residential boarding school, she confirmed that much of the physical punishment and psychological trauma that she experienced while at the school was, in fact, based upon racist and discriminatory assumptions regarding Aboriginal culture. Nevertheless, while she was attending the residence, Melissa did not recognize the actions of the nuns as racist or discriminatory in nature.

Melissa: I don't think that was racism at that time. I just thought as they were trying to teach me something, you know. (Little laugh) . . . They were trying to teach me to be a good person . . . to be a better person.

Clearly, residential boarding schools aided in the cultural aspect of colonization that was primarily concerned with deceiving Aboriginal people into believing that the authoritative actions of Europeans were carried out solely for the good of Aboriginal people. In this regard, deception often coincided with ridicule and physical punishment as a means of discipline. Melissa explained that the racist and discriminatory practices that were undertaken by the nuns in the residential boarding school were often disguised in the form of something positive. For instance, a merit system was used to

discourage Aboriginal practices and to keep Aboriginal children from speaking their Native language.

Melissa: The nuns used to give us little tokens. Worth five cents tokens. And if you catch somebody speak their language, you'd tell them, 'I caught you,' and they have to give you a token . . . And then at the end of the two weeks, they'd have a bazaar. And they, you use your tokens to buy stuff . . . If you don't have any tokens, you're in trouble. Or if you have maybe two token, you know. If you only have a little bit of token, you're in big trouble. That you're talking your language.

Melissa stated that the children who got "in trouble" were always punished. The type of punishment received usually included being hit, having to perform extra chores or having to "pray every night or something." Nevertheless, this punishment was not entirely successful in keeping Aboriginal children from practicing certain aspects of their culture. For instance, Grant (1996: 199) found that even though Aboriginal children were frequently punished for speaking their own language, this did not deter them from speaking in their Native tongue outside the confines of the school as they played or walked. In many instances, the children simply forgot that they were not allowed to speak their Native language. Sometimes, in order to escape punishment, Aboriginal children would simply refrain from speaking at all when the residential school staff were present.

Much along these same lines, Melissa reported that some children found a way

to speak in their own language without being punished for it. They devised a system whereby if a child said "this doesn't count" before speaking in her Native tongue, she would not have to pay a token to those children who were listening. Unfortunately, as Melissa explained, the children got so used to saying "this doesn't count" prior to speaking in their Native language that they continued to repeat this phrase even when they returned to their home community for a visit.

Like Brenda's experience of being away in a sanatorium, Melissa, too, experienced a loss of cultural identity from being away in a residential boarding school.

Melissa: As I grew up, like, I went home up north that one year in, in a reserve. And that was, that was a really different experience . . . You know, like, we don't really fit in. 'Cause, ah, we had some other teachings. Had trouble over there. Like, when we used to go home up north from the residence, like, we'd remember what that, what the teachers told us. That the Indians were dirty . . . It was kind of confusing.

Upon their return home from residential boarding schools, many Aboriginal children experienced confusion and frustration as they found themselves caught between two different cultures. Fitting into neither Aboriginal nor the more European traditions, they fell somewhere in between (Brizinski, 1993: 368). Much of this marginal lifestyle may be attributed to the loss of language and cultural beliefs that many Aboriginal children experienced while they were away from their home communities. Some of it may be attributed to the fact that many Aboriginal children were

encouraged to believe that their own people, and Aboriginal society as a whole, were ignorant, savage, untrustworthy and of inferior status. Of all the aims of the colonization process, there was none worse than the attempt to make Aboriginal people believe that they had no culture of their own or that what they did have was worthless and something of which to be ashamed (Kellough, 1980: 368).

Since the earliest days of their establishment, residential boarding schools had operated to promote this very belief. Although Melissa's experience of being in a residential boarding school did not include the more severe acts of discipline or the many forms of violence (physical, sexual, spiritual and psychological) that countless other Aboriginal people experienced as children in residential boarding schools, this is not to say that Melissa was not among those affected by the social process of colonization and the government's plan to assimilate Aboriginal people into the dominant "white" society.

Since they were never fully accepted into the "white world" as the government had planned, and because they had experienced alienation from their own people, many survivors of residential boarding schools were pushed to the margins of Canadian society where they often took on a life of despair. Worse yet, they passed their marginal positions and feelings of despair onto their children, their grandchildren and, in some instances, their great-grandchildren. Indeed, the devastation and despair caused by residential boarding schools has been widespread and long-lasting (Comeau

& Santin, 1990: 97), and the adverse impact of residential boarding schools on the lives of Canada's Aboriginal people as a whole has become unmistakably clear.

The Long-Term Impact of Residential Boarding Schools

Today, it is generally accepted that the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents is the single most important reason for many of the problems associated with Aboriginal people in Canada (Grant, 1996; Horejsi et al., 1992; McKenzie & Hudson, 1985). When Aboriginal children were taken away and placed in residential boarding schools, their language was suppressed. This suppression played an important part in the destruction of Aboriginal culture and in the difficulties experienced by many Aboriginal people as they left residential boarding schools. Further compounding their difficulties were the foreign child-rearing practices and harsh punishment, the isolation from the outside world, the loneliness, the failure to deal with death and grieving, the callous treatment by missionaries and other government-appointed teachers, and the feelings of helplessness that Aboriginal people experienced as children in residential boarding schools (Grant, 1996: 234). If anything, these experiences left many Aboriginal people in such a traumatic state that they often found themselves unable to resume and maintain healthy lives.

Although the English language was enforced at residential boarding schools, it was poorly taught. Consequently, when Aboriginal people returned to their home

communities after being away at residential boarding schools, many found themselves in an illiterate state, with no serviceable language at all (Grant, 1996: 200). The inadequate instruction in the English language, combined with the destruction of their own language, meant that many Aboriginal people found themselves lacking the empowerment which often comes with having literacy in one's first language (p. 207).

In addition to leaving a void in their lives, the intergenerational transmission of cultural teachings was also interrupted as a result of the suppression of their language (Grant, 1996: 260). Aboriginal children were denied their role models and, hence, they were denied the communication skills and teachings of their elders. Having been deprived of these teachings as children, many residential boarding school survivors were unable to effectively communicate with and pass on essential teachings to their descendants (p. 249). For instance, while they were away at residential boarding schools, Aboriginal children experienced a lack of sex education and family life skills. They were taught to abhor their bodies and think of them as evil. Very little information was provided to Aboriginal children about their bodily functions, and whatever information that was given out was usually clouded with shame and humiliation, threats and innuendos (p. 230). Consequently, talking about private matters such as sex education came to be thought of as taboo.

Some of the women who participated in the research project were descendants of residential boarding school survivors. They all revealed to me that, for the most part,

they had to learn about life on their own accord. If a situation arose where there was a need to address a private matter such as that relating to sex education or bodily functions, this matter was discussed at a bare minimum, if at all. In many instances, the effect of not fully talking about, and hence understanding, what exactly was going on proved to be emotionally distressing for these women.

Samantha's Story

Samantha, a single mother of seven children, is in her late 30s. She had recently separated from her second long-term partner, who was in the process of seeking a divorce. Samantha is completing her final year of university studies, and she is supplementing her part-time wages with social assistance benefits. Although Samantha never attended a residential boarding school, her mother had attended one as a child.

Samantha's own life has been characterized by violence and alcoholism. She explained that as a child growing up, basic life skills and sex education were not issues discussed by her mother. When issues relating to one's natural bodily functioning did arise, Samantha's mother explained them in very little detail, just as she had been taught while she was away at residential boarding school. The cultural shame and humiliation that was imposed upon Samantha's mother as a child is clearly evident in her way of thinking.

Samantha: The way my mom, like, you know when we started having our menstrual periods, she didn't tell us what was happening. Like, we were going to get menstrual periods later on. And then she tells us, like, we won't go and buy pads. I know she, she used to hit my sisters if they went and bought pads from the store. She said, 'Indians are not allowed to use those.' We're looking at her like she's crazy. So, we used to always sneak, sneakily buy them.

Removed from their homes, Aboriginal children were denied the maternal teachings of nurturing love and affection (Mandamin, 1994: 139). In the absence of nurturing, love, affection and empathy, many survivors of residential boarding schools - and their descendants - have developed an inability to express their feelings (Grant, 1996: 250). Just as the right to the passage of essential information has been disrupted through the last few generations of Aboriginal people, disclosures of love, trust and affection have often been absent in parent-child relationships.

Samantha: There was not affection there. Hmm hmm. Nothing at all. Just from my dad a bit. Like, it, it was, he would, didn't come right out and tell you, 'I loved you' or didn't, there was no hugging or anything like that. Like, you never knew it.

The cultural transmission of parent-child attachment behaviours was also disrupted as a result of residential boarding schools and the suppression of Aboriginal people's languages. This, in turn, resulted in a host of personal and family problems that have persisted over the generations. Aboriginal children were not taught the basics of healthy family functioning or proper parenting behaviours and, therefore, they were

unprepared to take on the parenting role when they had children of their own. New and dysfunctional familial behaviours such as severe physical punishment and neglect in child-rearing practices replaced traditional behaviours which rarely involved any form of physical discipline or violence (Horejsi et al., 1992; McKenzie & Hudson, 1985). Many Aboriginal people today can relate certain behaviours to the teachings that their parents and grandparents received while they were away in residential boarding schools. Quite often, these behaviours include characteristics of “being mean” and violent.

Samantha remembered her mother being “violent” and “cruel” to her and her six sisters while they were growing up. She attributed her childhood experiences to her mother’s attendance at a residential boarding school. The traumatic impact that residential boarding school had upon Samantha and her mother was clearly evident in her story.

Samantha: My mom was violent to us. She wasn’t violent to my dad. (Little laugh) Uhm, she would hit us with anything. She would hit us with, uhm, trees, cords, anything she can get her hands on. Uhm, I always remember she used to line us up to have a bath. And, and then, uhm, she’d put us all in a line. And she’d, we’d all strip. We’d all be waiting our turn. She’d have the water really hot where there’s steam coming out. And she’d scrub our, our knees and our elbows until they were really red and raw. And if you cried during that, she’d hit you on the head with the brush. But she had this wooden brush she’d use on, that she scrubbed the floors with. And she’d use it on us, too. So we never cried when we, when she washed us. She’d, uhm, wash all of us in turn, until

we were all done. And, uhm, in line. And then, we're, she used to make us haul water to do laundry. And she used to put, mark the, uhm, the pail where, uhm, the water level had to be. And if it was below level, she'd empty it, and make us go back and get water again. See, she was r-, she was cruel. (Crying)

One of the women in the focus-group discussion remembered similar experiences relating to her own mother's attendance at a residential boarding school as a child. During the course of our focus-group discussion, this woman told me how she had picked up some of her mother's lessons of residential boarding school and incorporated them into her own life, later passing these lessons onto her own daughter. She provides us with a clear illustration of how residential boarding schools have affected Aboriginal people over the past few generations.

Participant: My mom was in a residential school. I remember when I was young, she used to clean up all the time . . . And she used to be really mean . . . She used to pull my ear all the time. And when we had a bath, she'd scrub me with a scrub brush. You know, my elbows, my knees. And that hurt. And I knew there were signs of abuse when she was in there because the way, the way she was teaching us. And then I had my kid. I'd buy a brush . . . And I used to scrub his elbows and knees . . . It was a lesson with the learned behaviour. You know. And whatever she got from that residential school, she brought it back . . . and she put it in her own living.

Many Aboriginal people who have been affected, either directly or indirectly, through the generations by residential boarding schools have also developed

particularly strong feelings of anger, resentment and misunderstanding toward the current status of Aboriginal-white relations in Canada. In her documentary, Grant (1996: 258) found that many survivors of residential boarding schools harboured feelings of anger that were directed at their mothers for giving them up. Rationally, they may have understood that their parents had no choice but to give them up; emotionally, Grant found that they were merely responding to the age when the trauma had occurred. Just as residential boarding school survivors had passed on their teachings (or lack thereof) to their children and grandchildren, they had passed on these feelings of anger, resentment and misunderstanding.

For the longest time, Samantha could not make sense of her upbringing and the way her mother raised her and her sisters on the basis of harsh punishment and rigorous daily routine. It was not until she had attended university and learned of the residential schooling era that she was able to make some sense of her mother's child-rearing practices and behaviour. To no avail, she tried to explain her findings to her sisters. Samantha now recognizes how her mother's experience of residential boarding school had an impact upon her own life and on the lives of her sisters.

Samantha: My sisters hated my mom. They hate my mom for the longest time. They still don't like my mom. Then when I started to think about, uhm, things that I learned in university, like, I started talking to my sisters. I said, 'You know, you shouldn't hate her.' I said, 'Do you,' and 'That's got to do with the residential school. That's why she brought us up that way.' . . . I started asking my

mom about the residential school. Like, how it was, how she felt, and all that. And she's telling me, I said, 'I heard they used to hit your mom.' I told her that. And she said, 'We deserved it.' Like, she thinks she deserved to be beaten up . . . She says, 'You know what? What I really liked was,' uhm, she said they used to get prunes and oatmeal on Sundays. 'We were always guaranteed a meal. At least once, a meal a day.' She said, 'That's why I liked being there.' She said, 'I didn't mind.' . . . I try to tell them why mom is, mom is the way she was. (Little laugh) . . . They always stare at me. My sisters still don't kiss and hug and that.

At one point in her life, Samantha realized that because of her upbringing and her mother not being able to develop the appropriate family life and parenting skills necessary to carry on a healthy family of her own, she, too, had developed inadequate parenting skills which required drastic intervention and outreach support to change.

Samantha: When I first had my kids, I was, I was like my mom. I was mean. I did things that I, that, uhm, that she was doing to us. And then I, uhm, and I told myself, I don't want to be like my mom when, when I grow up and I have kids. And I started thinking about the way I was raising my kids. Exactly like my mom . . . One time my, my oldest son, I almost choked him. And I just got scared. Like, that scared me. I really came close to home . . . Then after that day, I swore I'd never hit my kids again . . . I really scared myself. I thought I killed him . . . And then I started thinking there has gotta be a better way to raise these kids. I was thinking I wanted to have them. I said, 'Well, why am I being so mean to them?' So I started going around . . . looking for some good parents and that . . . And then I started going to that group. And they started, I started learning how to be a parent . . . I started learning how to read to my kids and play with them with toys. Spending time with them. And then, I started getting them into hockey. Then, like, sports. Like, all that I didn't, I didn't learn how to do . . . That group really taught me a lot.

The religious teachings of all denominations of the churches continue to play a major role in the lives of many residential boarding school survivors and their descendants. However, not all Aboriginal people readily embrace the church. In point of fact, there are some Aboriginal people who possess a great deal of resentment toward the various churches and their religions, the Catholic church in particular (Grant, 1996: 258-9).

Ashley's Story

Ashley is 37 years of age. She has three children, and she is married to her third husband of five years. Ashley is a full-time university student and is nearing the completion of an undergraduate degree. Like Samantha, Ashley's mother is a survivor of a residential boarding school. Ashley's own life has been characterized by violence and alcoholism, and Ashley holds a lot of anger and resentment toward both her mother and the Catholic church for the way she and her four siblings were raised.

Ashley: My mother was in residential school. And the horrible stories that she told me. She actually told me they taught her how not to love. Now how to, how to deal with people. Uhm, to be ashamed of herself. She built up resentment and anger. She said she didn't know how to love us, you know, when we're small. And I found that hard to grasp. But then, the horror story she told me about those nuns . . . She's a developed Catholic . . . 'Til this day, I still can't understand. These people treated you so rotten, and you're still in their church! . . . It just amazes me. She's still in denial 'til this day.

Just as Ashley pointed out in her story, it is not uncommon for survivors of residential boarding schools to develop feelings of denial and conceal their school experiences. For many survivors, their experiences of residential boarding school are so devastating that they find themselves struggling with feelings of guilt and shame. As a coping mechanism, they may submit to a state of total denial in which their school experiences are rarely (if at all) talked about (Grant, 1996: 253).

Summary

Although the government's assimilation plan proved to be a dismal failure, there is very little doubt that residential boarding schools have had a great impact on the lives of Aboriginal people over the last few generations. Through the government's effort to eliminate Aboriginal culture and re-shape Aboriginal people's identity, many survivors of residential boarding schools have lost touch with their Native language, their religious beliefs, their traditional customs and their social norms (Horejsi et al., 1992: 334). As generations of Aboriginal people were ripped from the safety and security of their families and home communities and thrust into the cold, uncaring and unfamiliar environment of harsh punishment and rigorous daily routine, a long history of family breakdown was inevitable.

From their marginal positions in Canadian society, many Aboriginal people find themselves struggling to cope with the emotional, psychological and physically violent

dilemmas that plague their lives, just as they have plagued the lives of their ancestors. As they struggle with problems of unemployment, unhealthy relationships, violence and delinquency, many Aboriginal people find that their favoured coping mechanisms are of an unhealthy nature. These include such strategies as substance abuse, denial, avoidance and blaming others for their problems.

Just as it would be a mistake to assume that all survivors of residential boarding schools and their descendants have developed unhealthy relationships and inadequate family life and parenting skills, it is wrong to assume that nothing good came out of residential boarding schools. Like Melissa, Samantha and Ashley pointed out in their stories, some students, for their own reasons, enjoyed their time at residential boarding school, and they talk highly of their experiences. Grant (1996) found that many ex-students enjoyed their academic studies and the self-discipline they developed while at residential boarding school, and some of these students had gone on to lead very successful lives.

Although residential boarding school is not a pre-requisite for family breakdown to occur, the link between these two issues cannot be ignored. When we look at the women's families (which I will do in the next two chapters), a recurring theme seems to be the paradox that exists regarding the Aboriginal family. On the one hand, most of the women were raised in families that have caused enormous damage to their lives. On the other hand, in the absence of healthy families, the notion of family has become

so valuable to the women that they often find themselves trying to keep their families together at all costs, even if it is an unhealthy one. In paradox, it seems that because of what was lost as a result of residential boarding schools, the notion of family has become pivotal to the women.

With an historical context now in place, we can begin to understand better the issue of women's intimate violence.

**Chapter Three
THE BROKEN FAMILY:
EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AS CHILDREN**

Participant: I was, like, hardly ever with my mom . . . I was in a foster home since I was three. And then when she got married, she got us out . . . I just felt like I got taken away from my real parents. And I feel like, I was telling my worker, I was thinking about when I was young. I could remember getting taken away. Taken away from my mom and dad. Like, I thought it was my mom and dad. And I said, and, and I thought, and they put me with this mean, old woman. (Little laugh) That was a mean lady. And it was my mom. And I never, ever had any kind of really, like, we never even got to talk. And, to me, she wasn't even my mom. She just, someone who took me out of the foster home, and kept me with her, hey. And then when she didn't want me, she put me back in there, hey . . . But I guess she didn't have no parenting skills, and she didn't know how to give, ah, her kids any love . . . There's still no love and no conne-, no connection whatsoever.

The women I spoke with came from a variety of familial backgrounds. While some women were raised in two-parent families, other women were, for the most part, raised by a single parent. Others, still, spent a portion of their childhood under the care of extended family members or foster parents. While some women maintained an emotional bond with their parent(s) throughout their lives, other women failed to develop even the slightest sense of attachment to their parent(s). Although all of the women shared the unfortunate experience of growing up in an environment touched by substance abuse and/or violence, the extent and severity of these experiences

varied. Despite the diversity found in the women's familial backgrounds, striking similarities were evident in the women's personal histories. Specifically, all of the women's childhood families were, in one way or another, "broken" to some degree.

Aboriginal people have survived a long history of oppression. Unfortunately, their survival has not been without injury. Many Aboriginal people today find themselves living in a state of family breakdown as they struggle to cope with the stresses of unemployment, poverty, marital discord and physical and sexual abuse. In many instances, Aboriginal people have adopted unhealthy ways to survive the impact of their oppression. Turning to such coping mechanisms as substance abuse and violence has made it difficult for families to mend.

The familial structure within Aboriginal society has not always been the way it is today. As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, much of Aboriginal people's autonomy and independence has been lost to the social process of colonization and the era of residential boarding schools. Because of this history, the familial structure of Aboriginal communities has been violated, and the healthy workings of the family have been interrupted and fractured. Nevertheless, by understanding the familial structure and the workings of the Aboriginal family as "broken" rather than as "dysfunctional" or "abnormal," I believe that there is hope for undoing the damage done. By learning more about the women's childhoods, we can better appreciate their standpoint and, hence, develop a better understanding of the women's own use of

intimate violence.

Growing Up With Alcohol and Violence

A common theme running through the women's childhoods is experiences with alcoholism. Since it was first introduced by Europeans, alcohol has had a devastating impact on Aboriginal families. Many Aboriginal children are the products of two or more generations of alcoholic families and, thus, the pattern of troubled behaviour caused by alcohol has been passed from one generation to the next. Also passed through the generations has been the three "rules" for learning to live in an alcoholic family: don't let yourself feel, don't trust others, and don't talk about the problem (Horejsi, Craig & Pablo, 1992: 336-7).

Another common theme running through the women's histories is childhood experiences with violence. The violence that the women experienced throughout their childhood was either witnessed or experienced first hand. It took on many forms, including physical and sexual abuse, mental suffering, child abandonment and emotional neglect. Although alcohol and violence proved to be a toxic combination for most of the women who participated in the research project, these two themes did not always go hand-in-hand since alcohol was not a requirement in order for an incident of violence to take place. Nevertheless, in most incidents, alcohol did play a contributing factor in much of the violence that the women experienced throughout

their childhood.

Crystal's Story

As we learned in Chapter Two, Crystal comes from a broken home. Her parents separated when she was six years of age. Up until this time, Crystal lived on her home reserve. After her parents separated, Crystal moved to the city with her mother and two younger siblings. They left everything behind, including another brother and sister. According to Crystal, her mother "couldn't handle the whole family of kids." However, she did go on to have three more children later in her life. Upon arriving in the city with nothing more than "a couple of suitcases and a little bit of money," Crystal remembered staying "here and there" with a few of her mother's relatives for a while, until they found their own apartment.

With an alcoholic father and a mother who drank regularly, alcohol had always been a part of Crystal's childhood. However, Crystal remembered that it had its most profound effect on her life after her move to the city. Crystal's mother began to drink more heavily at this time.

Crystal: Uhm, my mother at the time, I remember her drinking . . . I remember the parties. Same thing over again. The parties. They were loud . . . I found them quite scary 'cause I remember grabbing my brothers and, my brother and my sister, and I remember hearing the fights. The fights scared the wits out of them because they didn't know what's happening . . . I don't

know who was fighting, but I remember the fights. All the time, up in, always these fights because I grabbed the kids. This is what I always did. I grabbed the kids and we, we hid. And I remember that time when we moved in. We hid underneath the bed. And I remember the police coming there . . . I remember lying underneath the bed with the kids and, uhm, the police lifting up the covers of the, ah, the sheets and, and flashing a light.

In addition to witnessing scary drinking parties, Crystal remembered being a witness to the violence that usually occurred in conjunction with her mother's party days. Crystal informed me that when her mother left the reserve, she had "quite a number of boyfriends, but they never stayed in the house." Crystal remembered one of her mother's partners in particular. She claimed that this partner was with her mother even before they had left the reserve, and when they had moved to the city, he followed them. Crystal described her mother's partner as "awful." She said he abused her mother in many ways: he physically battered her; he took advantage of her financially by coercing her to turn the "food money and maybe even the rent money" over to him; and he intimidated her to the point where she would do nothing more than hug and "console" Crystal and her brother after he had physically abused them.

Being a witness to the violence that was inflicted upon her family by this man was an especially distressing experience for Crystal. Even more alarming was having to witness the violence that her mother inflicted upon herself. One incident that has permanently scarred Crystal's memories is that which occurred when she was just

seven years of age.

Crystal: [My mother's boyfriend] abused her quite badly. Uhm, black eyes, uhm, he, I guess he must have been emotionally abusing her or something because, uhm, a lot of trouble can be . . . (Pause) (Crying) Uhm, then, a few times when I found my mother, she was trying to commit suicide and, uhm, tried to, uhm, hang herself and, uhm, trying to slash her wrist. And he didn't do nothing . . . She was in the kitchen one time we moved into the house and, uhm, he, uhm, they had an argument, and my mom went in the kitchen . . . I walked into the kitchen. She had a knife in her hand. And I saw blood all over the floor. And I saw her with a knife, and she was gashing the knife into her arm. And I freaked. I just freaked . . . I remember grabbing the phone and trying to get help. 'Cause he didn't do nothing . . . She was standing up, and she was doing that (cutting motion) to her, her, her arm and, and, uhm, after that I, I can't remember what happened. But, ah, a while later, I remember her, you know, being stitched up.

Another traumatic incident that has left a psychological scar on Crystal's memories occurred around the same time as her mother's suicide attempt. Here, Crystal witnessed the aftermath of a stabbing that took place at one of her mother's drinking parties. To this day, Crystal can still remember the smell of blood.

Crystal: A big party was going on downstairs, and we were upstairs. I had the kids with me . . . I heard the fights again. So, I gathered up all the kids. I made a makeshift pi-, ah, bed inside the closet, and kind of lied in, in the closet . . . And it suddenly just got really quiet . . . I told them I'm gonna go see what's, you know, what's going on . . . I said, 'Stay here.' I looked to the kids. And I went downstairs, and I looked. My mouth just fell open. I couldn't believe what I saw. The living room. I walked out into the hallway.

I seen traces of blood. Walked into the living room. The blood was everywhere on the floor. Everywhere. The floor was covered in it, in blood. I still remember it, uhm, smelling blood everywhere. And there was blood in the kitchen, on the floor, I guess. I don't know what happened there. But years later I was told there was a stabbing in my house. I don't know who, who stabbed who or, or who got stabbed, or if they lived or if they died or, I don't know . . . But years later I asked that question and, to someone, and someone told me it was a stabbing. And, uhm, I just remember that. You know, all these sad memories about my mom. Childhood was quite violent.

Crystal informed me that neither her mother, nor anyone else for that matter, tried to explain the circumstances surrounding the tragedy of this incident to her and her siblings. Instead, the incident was never really talked about again. In point of fact, Crystal grew up believing that it was hopeless to talk about issues that were troubling her. After a few attempts to take her own life, Crystal's mother eventually committed suicide, and Crystal grew to regret the fact that she was not able to talk to her mother before she had passed away.

Crystal: Growing up, there was so much stuff going on in, at our home. It's, it just felt like, why even bother talking about it? Or, or, or you know, don't. It was not important or something. We just felt not important. That's the feeling I get about it . . . [My mother] died before I can even, uhm, well, she committed suicide . . . And, uhm, if, you know, if it didn't happen, I would have asked those questions. Just to clear up, you know, a lot of stuff about my, my childhood.

Like most of the women who participated in the research project, Crystal never

really had any kind of emotional support systems as a child growing up. She felt uncomfortable talking about intimate details with her siblings; she avoided conversation with her mother; and she didn't really have many friends. Nevertheless, Crystal did remember a friendship that she formed around the time of the stabbing incident. While this friendship was short-lived, it made a lasting impression on Crystal's life.

Crystal: The school had a program. And, uhm, it was a summer program. I went there everyday. Every single day. It was, there was, like, crafts and there was, you know, swimming, and there was outings, and camping. You know, know everything a little kid could really enjoy. And that was about the time where I think I uhm, really enjoyed mys-, myself, without the, uhm, the stress at home . . . 'Cause as soon as that place opened, I was up and out. And when it finished, I was, you know, went home. Couldn't wait for the next day. And around that time, uhm, I, ah, grew to like, ah, ah, an older, ah, I guess she was a student . . . I formed a friend, a friendship with her. And, uhm, around, when she had to go back home, because she was a foreign exchange student or something like that, she said she was going home, and it was her last day. And, uhm, she, I didn't go, I didn't go to that, uhm, program that, that morning . . . But she came to the house. My place. And, uhm, I remember her leaning over my bed, saying goodbye. And. (Crying) It was awful. (Crying) (Pause) But that was a time I, ah, I was feeling, uhm, that was my only support as a kid. (Crying) Oh that was, I didn't have any, any kind of support around that time. After that.

Not having any kind of emotional support systems while she was growing up merely added to the stress Crystal experienced throughout her childhood. In addition

to the stress she experienced from home, Crystal experienced plenty of stress from school. Crystal remembered "many times" where she believed that she was treated differently because she was Aboriginal.

Crystal: Ah, in school, teachers treated me differently. Uhm, I once got accused for s-, ah, cheating because, ah, a piece of paper was underneath my desk. And I was doing my own paper. Uhm, I remember another incident in the school where we had to cross-country ski. And I was taking off my skis, and, and the gym teacher locked the door on me. Like, the gym door . . . I had to go all the way around to the front to, uhm, it made me feel, I don't know, I don't know, it just, put down in some sort of way, like. And verbal. I remember her, her looking at me. You know, me just, you know, just taking off my skis and, uhm, and, ah, I just, I don't know, just . . . It made me feel bad. And the, ah, I had a lot, ah, 'white' friends. And they all automatically assumed I was, you know, drank and I smoked.

Crystal informed me that her mother collected social assistance benefits as her only source of income and, therefore, their financial state was "very bad." There were many times when Crystal remembered having to go to school hungry. While there was a breakfast program being offered at her school, she explained that she often felt embarrassed and humiliated in some way when she did attend the program. Crystal maintained that her childhood was "not a very happy one."

Being the oldest child under her mother's care, Crystal often took on the responsibilities that her mother could not fulfill while she was drinking. This care giving role continued into her adult life, as Crystal maintained the role of care giver to her

siblings, her partner and, at times, her mother before she had passed away. Nevertheless, at the time of our interview, Crystal was in the process of trying to get out of this care giving role since worrying about the stresses going on in her siblings' lives created an enormous amount of stress in her own life.

Crystal: Lately I've been feeling, ah, stress because, uhm, even though I, I ha-, I have no, there's no violence or abuse going on in, in my home, and there hasn't been for quite a number of years, uhm, but I hear of it in, in my own family. And it finally, this trust is just becoming overwhelming now because I, I, I just, I'm not witnessing it, but I'm hearing of it from the people I love. And, uhm, just thinking about all those stuff, you know, through my life and, and it was just, trying to catch me, up on me.

Needless to say, it was not unusual for the women, as both children and adults, to perform this care giving role for their siblings and, in some cases, for their parents. In fact, many of these women continue to watch over and worry about their siblings and other members of their extended families. In many instances, this means adding more stress to their already stress-filled lives. In point of fact, one woman explained that she needed to build boundaries between herself and her family, in order that she maintain her own sanity.

Sarah: At this point, I have to build boundaries between my family . . . Sometimes I would go there and, ah, things would happen and would leave me very vulnerable and very upset. Uhm, seeing what I see. So I had to, ah, build boundaries around my family and keep my distance away from them. Yeah. For my own health

and my sanity. Because, ah, I was, ah, going there, and sometimes just devastated leaving there. You know. Just getting excited to see them but, ah, walking out of there just in tears sometimes . . . In order for me to keep my sanity, I had to do that . . . I have to put a stop to it because this is affecting my own family, and, and I can't do that to them . . . I can't put myself in that kind of situation anymore.

Samantha's Story

As you will recall from Chapter Two, Samantha's mother was a status (or registered) Indian. However, her father was not. Therefore, Samantha and her six sisters grew up in a "little white community" on the outskirts of the reserve. Being of Aboriginal descent, Samantha remembered her childhood in this community as one that was plagued with violent racism.⁵

Samantha: Like, even before we moved to that other little community, like, on the outskirts of the reserve, racism was bad there. I remember that. I remember it being so happy to go to kindergarten. I remember we had to ride on a school bus to go to school. On a 'white' school bus. And then, I remember those kids used to swear at us and that. And they got no sp-, bus driver never said anything. That's where I knew. That's where I started knowing racism. I said, 'What the heck's wrong with me?' 'Cause I remember all the kids, the 'white' kids used to s-, they used to

⁵ As children, many of the women who participated in the research project remembered being treated differently because they were of Aboriginal descent. In being treated differently by the non-Aboriginal children at school and within their home communities, these women remembered being teased and called derogatory names such as "dirty Indian" and "wagon-burner" on a regular basis; they remembered being physically picked on, ganged-up on and beaten; and they remembered having numerous things thrown at them such as sunflower seed shells and garbage.

say things to us all the time. They called us 'Indians,' 'squaws,' we smell and all this. And the bus driver never said anything . . . And we went to that other little community, and that was bad 'cause the, it was all 'white' community . . . Kids were just swearing at us left and right . . . And I had, oh, my God! They got things thrown at me, but I didn't give a shit . . . And we ran into a lot of fights in that little town for the first three years when we lived there . . . And they'd throw stones at us and things like that. And we'd be playing at the playground there or just walking along the road . . . You know they're gonna call us down 'cause there's no Indians there.

Adding to the childhood difficulties she experienced outside of her home were the difficulties she experienced within her home. Despite being raised by both of her biological parents, Samantha, too, came from a broken family. Both of Samantha's parents were alcoholics, and Samantha remembered many "hard times" as a result of her parents' addiction to alcohol.

Samantha: We barely had food, sometimes. Like, sometimes I remember being hungry. But they weren't, they, they weren't the kind to, went and bought, uhm, food and that before they started drinking. When they got paid, they went and started drinking right away. And forget about buying food.

In addition to neglecting to provide basic necessities to their children, Samantha's parents often left Samantha and her sisters alone while they were away drinking. Since they lived in an isolated area, her parents assumed that she and her sisters would not run into any danger. Other than the "boys coming around" when they

were older, they never did.

Samantha: They, uhm, never drank at home. But they would always leave us at home. Like, we were out in the bushes. Like, nobody never knew. Nobody never came to our house. Like, we were just left at home. (Little laugh)

Samantha and her sisters were always prepared for when their parents arrived home from their drinking escapades, as it was a usual occurrence for Samantha's parents to cap their night off with a violent episode. Although alcohol is not always a causal factor for violent behaviour, Samantha believes that alcohol did play a contributing role in the violence that she witnessed as a child.

Samantha: I remember my dad used to beat the shit out of my mom when they'd come home drunk. He really beat her up good. And we'd watch. And sometimes, we'd hide on him. My dad was really violent with my mom . . . I knew he would never hit us . . . It would be just my mom. And I, well, I remember my mom used to, 'cause she used to always cry and be scared of him. But I was never afraid of him. 'Cause I knew he wouldn't, he wouldn't touch his kids . . . My sisters were scared. I know that. And I remember we used to clean my mom up after my dad used to beat her up 'cause there'd be blood everywhere . . . We always had our shoes and that ready . . . We knew they were gonna fight when they were drunk. So, we always got, we always had our sweaters and our coats and our shoes ready. And we'd say, 'Oh no, they're gone again. They're drunk.' So we, we'd make sure every, all the little ones were s-, were dressed by the time they came in.

While Samantha may not have been afraid of her father, she did remember a

few times when her father did some really “scary things.”

Samantha: One time he came home. He was drunk. And he decided he was gonna kill my mom. He went and bought, he had, he used to keep his guns locked up in his truck. So he said he’s gonna go and get the guns . . . My mom just told us to get out and asked us if we were alright. And we said, ‘Yeah.’ And we all just took off. And my dad was firing the gun at us. And we’d hide in the wood. And I remember my mom crying there. And we just, so we just hid out all night.

It was not unusual for Samantha, her siblings and her mother to “hide out” for a whole weekend. In fact, hiding out with their mother became such a regular occurrence for Samantha and her siblings that they created their own make-shift shelter. They would escape to this shelter whenever they needed a place to retreat to until Samantha’s father sobered up and the threat of violence passed.

Samantha: There used to be this little grainery we, uhm, always used on weekends when they would drink. And we always left blankets and candles there. And we used to meet this other family from the reserve. The same thing would happen to that woman. So, we used to always sleep in that grainery. From Fridays to Sundays. People never knew we were there. Just that woman from the reserve knew we were there . . . And another woman stayed there ‘cause her husband used to beat the crap out of her, too. And her and her kids stayed there . . . We all had blankets and candles . . . My mom and this other family, we just all stayed in there on weekends . . . The men never knew we were there ‘cause they never followed . . . And we were safe there . . . He’d be sober when we went back. He’d be okay.

Ashley's Story

Ashley, who was introduced at the end Chapter Two, also came from a broken family. When she was seven years of age, her parents divorced. Leaving behind her father and an older brother, Ashley returned from the city to her home reserve with her mother and three of her four siblings. As she got older, Ashley grew to resent her father for the break-up of her family. She loved her father very much because he was good to her. However, Ashley described her father as a "womanizer." She explained that one day, he "got bored" with his responsibilities as a husband and father of five children, so he left the family and "went on his own." Ashley "never forgave him for that." While Ashley's best memories were from the years she spent growing up on the reserve, these memories were also her most violent.

Ashley recalled that when her father left, her mother was "completely lost." She suffered a nervous breakdown, and she started drinking alcohol. Worse yet, she met and remarried a man from the Middle East, who was 13 years younger than her mother and extremely violent. Soon afterward, alcohol and violence took over her family, and her parents' drinking began to affect her life. Being the oldest girl, Ashley was forced to take on the responsibility of caring for her siblings (and her mother) and holding her family together while her mother was drinking.

Ashley: By the time I was 10 years old, I was pretty well the mother. I would get up with the kids. Get them ready. Because they were

my younger ones . . . I was the one who pretty well took care of us. I would, ah, get up in the mornings after my s-, when my mom and my step-dad drank all night 'til God knows what time. And I'd get them ready. And, ah, I would also make the breakfast. Do the house cleaning because it was just disgusting in the house after they drank. There were empty beer bottles, whatnot.

Part of caring for her siblings involved taking on the role of protector. Sometimes, the safety of Ashley's siblings depended heavily upon her ability to think quickly under potentially dangerous situations.

Ashley: I would actually, literally take the beatings for them. Because they would get into trouble and, ah, I'd make, ah, I'd allow them to blame it on me. Because I was the oldest. I was the toughest. And I'd take the beatings. I didn't want to see them getting beat . . . I had to take care of my, ah, the youngest baby which is my half brother . . . There was one point where he wanted to hurt the baby. I had to hide him. Literally, in, uhm, dirty laundry so he wouldn't find him.

In addition to providing protection to her younger siblings, Ashley provided comfort during times of financial hardship. For instance, when there was no food in the house because her parents "drank up the money," Ashley relied on her creative abilities, and she baked bannock or whatever else she could throw together to feed her siblings. Ashley may have been able to avoid situations such as these, if only alcoholism had not characterized her broken family. In any case, her experiences with alcohol and witnessing the violence that was inflicted upon her family has had an

emotionally disturbing impact on Ashley's own life. Consequently, she maintains some degree of anger and resentment toward her mother and her step-father.

Ashley: Christmas time, I remember, uhm, my siblings being so upset, ah, because they drank up all the money. And all they got, I remember, I got was a hairbrush for Christmas because booze was too, too important to them. (Crying) Hmm. They had, well, I understand it now 'cause I've gone through it. But I never went to that point. My, my bout with alcohol was totally different. But I resented them. And I still carry a little bit of resentment 'til this day. I mean, I'm still working on it. And I still feel some anger towards them because they ripped me from a decent life. Anything better than, you know, they just, what upset me was they couldn't put the bottle down long enough to think about us. And my mom, he abused my mom so badly. I mean, he even stuck her hand in boiling water one time. And she'd still re-, no matter what he did to her, she remained with him . . . They're still together 'til this day.

Ashley not only witnessed the violence that was inflicted upon her family by her step-father; she experienced violence first hand. When I asked Ashley about her own experiences of violence as a child, she remembered an incident that occurred between herself and her mother, while her step-father was away in jail.⁶

Ashley: There was one time when he went to jail. I came home late . . . My mom was drunk. She called me a slut. Every name in the book. And I was not sleeping around. And, ah, she got on top of me, on the floor in the kitchen. Sat on my arms, and just started

⁶ Ashley's step-father had spent time in jail as a result of his involvement in an incident in which her uncle had two of his fingers chopped off with an axe.

pounding the, the crap out of my face. I couldn't feel my face after a point. I wouldn't cry. I just could feel something cold coming down my face. And when I got up, she says, 'Clean up your own blood.' So, I got up, washed my face, mopped up the blood all over the floor and splattered here and there. Got up the next morning. Started getting ready for school. She stopped me. 'Cause I was black and blue. I said, 'What?' I said, 'Are you embarrassed that I'm gonna go to school because you beat on me?' I said, 'Go ahead.' I said, 'You're sober now. You can beat on me again. If that's gonna make you feel better.' She wouldn't talk to me all that day. So, I didn't go to school. I waited two days. And then on the third day, I went to school . . . Everybody was just staring at me. 'Cause I was still badly bruised.

In addition to being physically abused by her mother, Ashley informed me that her step-father mentally, verbally and physically abused her on a regular basis. He belittled her and attacked her self-esteem and self-worth by repeatedly telling her that he did not like her and that she would never amount to anything in life. While Ashley denied that she was hurt by the physical abuse she suffered at the hands of her step-father, she did disclose that she suffered mentally as a result of the verbal attacks he inflicted upon her.

Ashley: I remember my dad got upset with me. And he broke a broom on my back. He hit me with it. I wouldn't cry. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of crying . . . He'd slap me around, whatever. It didn't hurt and I would not cry. And he told me straight to my face. I don't like you. You're the black sheep. I remember those words really well. And for a long time, I felt bad about it.

On occasion, Ashley's step-father would try to "sleep" with her and, one time,

she was forced to “literally, take a bat and go after him” in order to protect herself from her step-father’s sexual advances. The abusive behaviour that Ashley experienced at the hands of her step-father continued right up to the day that he “kicked” her out of the family home. She was just 15 years of age. Since Ashley was so committed to her role of protector over her siblings, being kicked out of the family home proved to be an emotionally agonizing experience for her. Even after Ashley left the family home, she felt responsible for the safety of her siblings.

Ashley: He beat on me for the last time. And I stuck up to him. That was the only time I ever went face to face with him. But I told, ‘Fine, I’ll leave.’ And I left. I had nowhere to go . . . The same night that I left, he beat on my sister, younger sister. Very, very badly . . . I got a phone call from my sister. And, uhm. (Pause) (Crying) I wasn’t there to protect her. So, she might have been raped. She doesn’t know ‘cause he punched her right out. And she woke up without her underwears and stuff. I felt guilt for a long time. (Little laugh) ‘Cause I thought he did it on purpose. Because of, I wasn’t the weak one. And he knew it . . . I mean, I took the beatings for as long as I could. But when I didn’t have the opportunity to stay there, yeah, I felt the guilt that I couldn’t protect them. I don’t know what else went on. Ah, my siblings are all screwed up. That, that (little laugh), that is a fact.

Clearly, Ashley felt guilty that she was not at the receiving end of the abuse that her sister experienced in her absence. As I pointed out earlier in Crystal’s story, most of the women who participated in the research project related similar feelings of responsibility for their siblings. They also related feelings of anger and resentment,

which was generally directed toward their mothers. Consistent with society's gender role expectations that women should love, nurture and protect their children, the women's feelings of anger and resentment tended to stem from the unhealthy conditions under which they were forced to grow up. While part of Ashley's anger and resentment toward her mother stemmed from her mother's inability to leave her abusive partner, another part came from her mother's unwillingness to quit drinking in order to take care of and protect her children.

Ashley: She was in denial. That was her favourite thing: denial. She used to, I used to tell her, 'You're such a weak, pathetic person.' Right to her face. I said, 'I don't ever want to be like you.' (Sigh) . . . She quit drinking, I'd say about almost ten years ago, because she had two strokes. She's diabetic now . . . It took that for her to stop drinking. And only that. Not the, not the violence, not the, the abuse to her children. Not the abuse from her husband. You know, all that didn't matter to her. It just matters that she might literally have another heart attack and not, like, you know, not be there. And it took that for her to quit drinking? I don't understand . . . I've gone through dealing with my mother and, ah, I understand more. I know that, who I am, why she did what she did. But why aren't you trying to correct, you know? I don't understand why she didn't try to correct it long ago. Other than to the point where she almost died because of her drinking. It wasn't because of the way she treated her kids. That wasn't her main issue. That wasn't her main issue about the violence in the family, or no food on the table. Like, what did it take, you know, t-, to get you to stop drinking? And yeah, I'm angry about that.

Martha's Story

Martha is in her late 20s. She is employed full time in the area of community services,

and she possesses a grade 10 education. Martha does not have any children, but she lives in a common-law relationship with her second long-term partner. She has been in this relationship for just over two years.

Martha grew up in the city. For the most part, she had lived under the care of both of her biological parents. However, due to her father's alcohol and gambling addictions, Martha's parents separated quite often. When her parents would separate, Martha, along with her younger brother and sister, would remain with their mother.

Martha described her childhood as "hectic." She claimed that her most difficult experience throughout her childhood was not having any money. Although her father was employed full time and her mother was collecting social assistance benefits, the finances were always tight. Martha remembered times when they "wouldn't have nothing to eat" except for maybe bread or oatmeal. She explained that a lot of the family income went to her father's addictions and carefree lifestyle.

Martha: My dad would go for weekends and, and not even come home . . . Sunday night, he'd bring a loaf of bread, thinking that's alright. You know?

Martha's lack of money as a child was particularly difficult for her to understand, especially in terms of wanting the things that other children were easily able to obtain.

Martha: All my friends were very well off. So it was very, uhm, it was just, like, it was hard. Like, kids are mean (Little laugh) . . . Everyone

always looked down on us. And called us whatever. 'Cause we lived in an apartment . . . It would be embarrassing. Like, you know. My friend's, like, 'Why is your phone cut off?' Like, 'Oh my, my mom, ah, forgot to pay the bill.' . . . Or meanwhile, our bill was like four hundred bucks. We can't even pay the bill . . . 'Why don't you have cable?' . . . 'Why don't you have, like, those kinds of jeans?' . . . That's too much for a kid to understand . . . They couldn't even afford to give us fifty cents to go and buy candy or anything like that.

Being the oldest child in her family, Martha was thrust in a position as confidant to her mother. This, too, proved to be a difficult experience for Martha to understand as a child and, as a result, she developed some feelings of resentment toward her father.

Martha: I'd just see too much that I didn't need to see as a kid . . . I was seven years old, and I was already fifteen . . . Like, my mom wouldn't ever hold things back from me. Like, she'd always tell me, you know, 'I don't know if we can make this payment.' . . . 'Oh, we can't make the rent.' Or, 'Three, three months behind in the rent.' Like, you know . . . Worrying with my mother and her seeing, watching her cry . . . And then seeing my dad come home with no money at all . . . And leave all the time. Like, leave my mom. Like, my mom had cancer. And my dad, he was, too much for him to handle. He left my mom . . . My dad cheating on my mother. Like, I knew all this stuff when I was, like, ten years old . . . I would hear, overhear her, too. Like, you know. My mom had a dis-, an STD from my dad . . . It was just crazy. And where's my dad? Like, you know. My dad's gone drinking with his girlfriend . . . I hate my dad sometimes. But I don't. You know? (Little laugh) A love-hate relationship.

Adding to the stress of not having any money and having to take on the role as

her mother's support system was the experience of violence. Although Martha's father did not physically abuse her mother, he was physically violent toward her brother. Martha's mother was both physically violent and mentally abusive toward her husband and her children. Martha claimed that her mother has a "very bad temper," and she remembered many incidents where she was hit by her mother "if something wasn't done right." She also remembered certain times throughout her childhood when her mother gave her the cold shoulder and ignored her if she was mad at her for some reason. Sometimes, this silent treatment lasted for days, and when it was going on, Martha's mother would often engage in somewhat childish behaviour.

Martha: If I didn't do something, my mom would ignore me for, like, ah, like, a week. She wouldn't talk to me. She'd, like, she would, my laun-, do laundry. She would pick my clothes out. Wouldn't do my laundry. Wouldn't do nothing. Make plates. Like, make for, for supper. Make everyone else a plate but me. I'd have to go and make my own plate. It was awful. Awful, awful . . . And she still does that to me. Like, she'll, if I go, don't borrow her money or something like that, she'll like hang up on me. And she won't t-, call me for a while. And I'll, I, I let her be.

Despite the abuse that Martha experienced at the hands of her mother, she developed a close relationship with her in terms of being able to communicate and openly discuss any issue that arose. Martha's mother also provided support and guidance to Martha's childhood friends.

Martha: My mom would give us conver-, like, talk to us about good and bad choices. Like, you know, drinking and driving and stuff. And she prefers us, like, if we were to go to the lake and have, we couldn't leave. We couldn't go and wander off. We'd have to stay there if we're gonna have a couple beers. And we'd stay there, and we can't go anywhere else. So, like, she approved of that. And we, we all drink very responsibly, like, right now.

Although her childhood was fraught with difficulties, Martha described her relationship with her mother as a good one. As I pointed out earlier, this was not the case for most of the other women who participated in the research project.

Courtney: My mom left when I was five . . . I loved my mother. She gave me birth. But, [my friend's mother] was more of my mom than my mom has ever been. My mother's dead. She just passed away. It was just two years ago. I just started a relationship with my mom.

Brandi: [My mom's] trying to play big mama now because she didn't before. That's what I told her. I said, 'Why?' I said, 'You should ah did it before.' I says, 'Why take my kids away?' when we went to court, hey. 'You had your chance, and you blew it,' I said. 'You threw us away like dogs.' I said, 'You didn't even try for us or try to smarten up.'

Jasmine: My mom holds a lot of anger against me . . . Well, I shouldn't ah did this. Well, I shouldn't ah did that. Well, it's, it's not gonna run with mom . . . She holds a lot against me . . . My mom's given up on me. Well, it's, like, she's there, and then she's not there. She's there, and then she's not there. Like, I can't have that kind of support. I need someone who's gonna be there with me when, even when I fall, help me get back up. Like, you know? Like, how many times I've fall, don't just leave me there.

The stories that I have presented thus far reflect the women's experiences of

growing up with alcohol and violence, both within the home and outside of the home. They illustrate the connection between these two themes, and they give rise to additional underlying themes that were characteristic of the women's childhood experiences. In particular, the care giving role that many of the women found themselves performing for their siblings was introduced, as was the role of protector whereby many of the women found themselves responsible for the safety of their siblings (and their parents) and for trying to hold their broken families together. The women's stories also offer insight into the discriminatory attitudes that the women faced as Aboriginal children growing up, and they illuminate the financial hardship and subsequent feelings of disappointment, embarrassment and humiliation that often characterize the experiences of children growing up in alcoholic families. All of these themes speak to the importance of strong support systems in children's lives.

The Silence Surrounding Abuse

In the midst of the alcohol and violence that permeated many of the women's childhoods and contributed to their broken families, the women were forced to contend with their experiences of abuse (and their aftermath). An important aspect in dealing with these experiences is the women's ability to name or define their experiences as abusive. According to Elizabeth Comack (1996: 56-7), this process of "naming" an incident as abusive involves having to reflect upon who is doing the

naming, and who or what is being named.

For instance, when I questioned the women on their childhood experiences of violence, Ashley was quick to tell me that her step-father was "very abusive," and she readily provided me with clear examples of how her step-father's abusive behaviour took on many forms, including mental, verbal, physical and sexual abuse. On the other hand, while Samantha did reveal abusive behaviour on the part of her father toward her mother, she did not consider herself to be abused by her father. For Samantha, naming an incident as abusive depended upon whether or not she directly experienced physical violence.

As you may recall from the previous chapter, Samantha described her mother as "cruel" and "violent" because she was physically violent toward Samantha and her siblings. To Samantha, her mother was abusive. Despite the fact that Samantha was forced to witness the violent attacks on her mother by her father, or despite being left alone for extended periods of time and having to be prepared to run and hide upon her parents' return from their drinking escapades, Samantha did not consider herself to be abused by her father. Personally, for the simple fact that Samantha was neglectfully left alone to care for herself and her siblings at a young age, I would define Samantha's childhood as one which is characterized by abuse.

Another important aspect in dealing with their experiences of abuse is the process of "silencing." Comack (1996: 57) defines silencing as "the difficulty women

have in finding the language to speak about what has happened to them.” In this regard, the process of naming an incident as abusive is also dependent upon the women’s ability to talk about their abusive experiences. At the institutional level, social censoring such as victim-blaming may prevent women from speaking about their experiences of abuse. At the personal level, social censoring such as threats made by an abuser may also prevent women from speaking the truth (p. 58). For instance, while Martha was able to name her childhood experiences as abusive, she informed me that she was forced to remain silent about her experiences. In this regard, Martha explained that she “lied so bad” to cover up the abuse she experienced as a child, because she did not want her and her siblings “to be taken away from home.” This behaviour was a common response taken by most of the women to their childhood experiences of abuse.

Accordingly, while it is important for the women to name their experiences as abusive, it is equally important for the women to be able to talk about their experiences in order that they may effectively deal with them (Comack, 1996: 59).

Brenda’s Story

As we learned in Chapter Two, Brenda spent two years of her childhood (from ages four to six) in a TB sanatorium. For most of her childhood, however, she lived with her 10 siblings and her biological parents in a very small house on her home reserve.

While her mother did not drink alcohol, her father drank regularly. Brenda described her childhood as extremely violent. She witnessed many physical fights between her siblings and within her home community. Much of the violence that she witnessed centred around drinking alcohol.

Although she did not describe her father as a violent man, Brenda did remember that he was very strict. While he was never violent toward her mother, he would regularly discipline her brothers with physical punishment.⁷ In addition to witnessing a great deal of physical violence as a child, Brenda experienced it first hand. In fact, she always ran into conflict with her siblings. Brenda remembered that when she was 12 years old, her brother broke her nose.

Brenda: One time he punched me in the nose. He broke my nose because I was swearing at him. I swore back at him. He was swearing at me. And he punched me out. And I fucked off from him and hid in the car. I knew if he wanted to get at, at me, he'd have to smash something. And he'd get into trouble himself. So, I just locked myself in the car, and I swore at him from there.

Like so many of the other women, Brenda had to take on the care giving responsibilities of her siblings. She, along with her two sisters, cooked and cleaned and washed their clothes. Brenda explained that her parents were "always gone." When

⁷ With reference to "naming" an incident as abusive, Brenda defined the physical violence that her father inflicted upon her brothers as necessary "discipline." She did not consider her father (or her siblings) to be abusive.

they were home, they were “always busy.” Accordingly, Brenda received very little affection and plenty of emotional neglect from her parents. She had an especially poor relationship with her mother (as did many of the other women who participated in the research project), and she claimed that they never really talked about anything. The lack of communication between Brenda and her mother proved to be extremely traumatic as she grew into adulthood.

Much of Brenda’s life skills were taught to her by her older sisters. Although Brenda did not engage in intimate conversations with her sisters, she expressed to me how grateful she was for her sisters’ help as she was growing up.

Brenda: I was never told things, hey. Even, but, like that one day when I started my periods ‘cause they gave me, [my older sister] gave me rags to use. To clean up. You know, dry them. Use them again. We didn’t have pads. We’re Indians. I didn’t even learn it in school ‘cause I was, I didn’t even go to school after a while . . . I didn’t know nothing.

When she was 13 years old, Brenda was raped while at a community dance. Although “everybody knew what happened,” nobody talked to Brenda about the rape, and nobody tried to ease the emotional turmoil that she experienced as a result of the rape. Consequently, Brenda was left to deal with the trauma of the rape alone, in silence.

Brenda: I was happy until I got raped when I was thirteen. That was it. I

was never happy after that . . . I was a young girl. I was thirteen for fuck sakes. And that's the l-, the first time I got lettened out to go to a dance, hey. And then [my cousins] said they'd watch me. Like, 'cause I never drank beer before . . . But after they got drunk, they couldn't even watch themselves . . . Those cops were talking awful to me when they were asking me questions . . . Like, they said, 'Did you put, did he put his thing in you?' And I says, 'Well, yeah.' You know? And then, ah, and then he says, 'Well, did you like it?' And I says, 'Ah, fuck off!' And they just went out of there. You know. Fuck. That was my first fuckin' time. How could they say that? You know? . . . [My mother] never even talked to me. Like, after I got raped and all that, hey. Nobody never talked to me.⁵

When Brenda was around 18 years old, she became pregnant with her first-born child. Brenda described the father of this child as someone who was "just a friend." She recalled how her pregnancy "just happened" after she and her friend had shared just one night of intimacy together.

Brenda: I got pregnant right away 'cause I was gonna try go to the clinic and get birth control. And I was already fuckin' pregnant . . . He was my friend. (Laugh) I sort of slept with my friend, and I got pregnant.

Similar to her experience of being raped, Brenda found herself dealing with her first pregnancy alone and in silence. Nevertheless, she remembered how her sisters, once again, helped her out, immediately following the birth of her first child.

⁵ A criminal investigation of the sexual assault upon Brenda was never undertaken by legal officials, and criminal charges were never laid against the assailant in Brenda's rape.

Brenda: I took myself to the hospital for hell sakes when I was having [my daughter]. Yeah, I drove myself up. (Little laugh) . . . [My parents] didn't even know I was pregnant . . . And when [my older sister] told them that 'Brenda had a little girl,' then they said, 'Brenda who?' And then they, and then they said, 'Like, Brenda. Our Brenda.' And they said, 'Phew!' (Pause) (Crying) I was glad my sisters were there that time.

Despite living under the same roof, Brenda's parents were unaware of her pregnancy until her baby was born. I asked Brenda what her mother did when she came home with her newborn baby.

Brenda: Nothing. She had to accept it. She talked to me. But she said, 'Ahh!' And then [my parents] both said to me, 'We don't want to see you like that again.' Like, pregnant, hey. With another kid.

Primarily because she was forced to silently struggle, on her own accord, through the aftermath of being raped, Brenda experienced a great deal of emotional pain and mental suffering as she grew into adulthood. Her hushed pregnancy merely added to the devastating and long-term effect that the rape had upon her life. (Unsurprisingly, tragedy struck again, six months after her first child was born.

Brenda: I lost [my baby] at one time, for six months . . . I sort of had a nervous breakdown. But, I think it was that, that thing, that postpartum thing that women go through. And I tried to kill myself and [my baby]. And they charged me for it. I had to go to court and everything. But, I didn't mean it, you know. But, I wasn't thinking right at the time. And, you know. (Crying) . . . I gave her a bottle . . . A baby bottle with what I put in there. I put

a bunch of, I don't know, Tylenol or something . . . I must have been getting sleepy, I guess. 'Cause I took some pills . . . 'Cause I didn't wanna live in this sickening world. (Crying) I didn't want to leave her. Why does everybody have to try to take her? But, I knew I was doing wrong . . . I didn't want to share her and, and that's what I did.⁹

Perhaps this traumatic experience may have been avoided if only Brenda had a stronger support system as a child and adolescent; had the rape she experienced in adolescence been dealt with more effectively, her suicide attempt and the attempted infanticide may not have taken place. While Brenda was able to name the rape she experienced as a sexual violation against her, she was not able to effectively deal with the tragedy of this experience due to the silencing that took place around this incident. Despite the fact that Brenda possessed enough strength to come forward and report the rape, she found herself in a position whereby she was unable to speak about this devastating experience. The police attitude as they questioned Brenda about the rape merely reinforced the notion of how social censoring in the form of victim-blaming may prevent women from speaking about their experiences of abuse.

While all forms of violence and abuse are serious, and they all may have a profound and long-lasting effect on children, there is none so devastating to an

⁹ Brenda faced numerous charges involving this incident. Her child was not seriously injured as a result of this incident. After a brief stay in a psychiatric hospital, Brenda obtained a criminal lawyer to act on her behalf, and all of the charges that were laid against her as a result of this incident were eventually dropped. Although Brenda lost custody of her child immediately following this incident, she regained custody by the time her child "learnt to use a washroom."

individual as child sexual abuse.

Courtney's Story

Courtney is 42 years old, and she has two adult daughters who are now living on their own. She possesses a grade nine education that was obtained through academic upgrading. Courtney currently resides on social assistance benefits with her common-law partner. She has been struggling to overcome her addictions to prescription drugs and alcohol since she was in her early teens, and she is in the midst of a court battle to regain custody of her three-year-old granddaughter.¹⁰

Courtney, who has always lived in the city, comes from a broken family. After having an extramarital affair on her father (who is now deceased), Courtney's mother (who is also deceased) left home and never returned. Courtney was just five years old at the time. She and her six sisters were left in the care of her father. When Courtney's mother left, her father began drinking alcohol excessively. Courtney remembered how miserable her father was when he was drinking.

Courtney: My father would take us for rides. If you want to call them rides. You know, drinking while he was driving, and just making it very

¹⁰ As a result of a teenage pregnancy, Courtney's daughter, Jasmine (who I will introduce in the next section of this chapter), had a daughter of her own. Due to the violence between herself and her partner, Jasmine lost custody of her daughter six months after she was born. While Courtney did gain custody of her granddaughter, this custody was soon revoked due to her on-going battle with alcoholism.

miserable. We wouldn't say it was fun . . . Calling us down and just being his miserable old self from drinking.

Her father's drinking was nothing new to Courtney. She explained that her mother was a "drunk," and her father "used to have to go drag her out of bars." Courtney described her mother as being "uncaring," and she remembered how she used to abuse her and her sisters.

Courtney: I can remember my mom going after [my sister] with a gr-, garden hose. I remember that. And then we all got beaten up for that . . . And when I cut my foot when I was five years old, my mom took me to the hospital. Then she made me do dishes after. I hated it. But, I had to do what she said. I had no choice. She was my mom, and you listen.

Despite the abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother, Courtney resented her mother for leaving, and she held a lot a anger toward her mother's new family.

Courtney: My mom wouldn't have nothing to do with us. You know. It was always him or my brother. My mom had a son by another man when she did leave my dad. I'll let you know that. And, uhm, my brother and him were the most important things in her life. You know. Not us . . . She never raised us. She raised him. So probably, if I see my step-father or him, I'd probably be very violent towards them.

Part of Courtney's anger and resentment came from her notion that her mother abandoned her and her sisters. Although she was the second youngest child in her

family, Courtney felt that she was more or less forced to take on the familial role that her mother left behind.

Courtney: I always would worry about my dad 'cause I know my dad drank. And, okay, if anything happens to my dad, who's gonna watch us? Who we gonna have? My mom's not here no more. So, I used to lie awake at night. As soon as I know my dad walked in the back door, I'd feel better. I wasn't crying no more 'cause I know he was home.

Courtney's responsibilities in carrying out her mother's familial role included everything from worrying about her father while he was away drinking to fulfilling her mother's sexual obligations to him. To the best of Courtney's knowledge, she was the only one of her six sisters to experience sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Courtney believed that her father "chose" her because she was the one who looked most like her mother. Although Courtney's father was also having sexual relations with the 16 year old babysitter, Courtney believed that in her father's eyes, she was the perfect replacement for her mother.

Courtney: [The babysitter] was sleeping with my father, also . . . My dad probably would force it on her. I know how my father works. Very intimidating . . . If she wasn't in my dad's bed, my dad was in my bed . . . I would pretend I was sleeping. And then, but, I knew, you know, I mean I would wake up with my panties down to my ankles and having these things. Remembering these things the day, the next day. Uh, ah, you know, I'm not, no way, there, he was there.

Courtney also believed that her sisters were aware of the sexual abuse that she experienced at the hands of her father, although nobody really talked about it. As a matter of self-protection, it is possible that Courtney's sisters did not care to discuss this terrifying ordeal out of fear that the sexual abuse may just as likely be inflicted upon them or out of guilt that they never did anything to protest the abuse.

Courtney: My dad never bothered [my sister]. But, I still think my little sister knows what my dad was doing 'cause she was, ah, we, ah, me and her always slept together. And I don't know how [she] coulda slept through that. But, I think [she] has blocked it . . . She doesn't want to remember.

Although Courtney left home at 15 years of age in order to escape her father's sexual advances, the abuse continued right up until her sister caught him making sexual advances toward Courtney. She was 22 years of age at the time. Courtney also remembered a fearful experience she encountered at the age of 19 years.

Courtney: I couldn't handle what he was doing to me . . . When I would go back home, he'd still do it. And, uhm, even when I was pregnant. (Uhm hmm. I hid down, I, down my sister's stairs when I was pregnant with [my oldest daughter] . . . I was watching her kids. And I know what he come looking for. He was calling me. And I was just praying to God, 'Please don't let him open the basement door. Please don't let him open the basement door.'

I asked Courtney if she ever told anyone about the sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of her father. She told me that when she was sixteen years

old, she did tell her first boyfriend what her father was doing to her. While her boyfriend did provide her with an "understanding" shoulder to cry on, the fact of the matter was that he merely used Courtney's detailed disclosures to fulfill his own sexual perversions. Inconceivably, Courtney's boyfriend would reenact her father's sexual yearnings for her.

Courtney: That's why I think he did a lot of things that he did. He used to force sex. Make me do things.

Perhaps the sexual abuse that Courtney experienced continued for as long as it did because Courtney did not want to betray her father by letting his "secret" out into the open. Perhaps she did not want to appear disloyal to her family and risk placing her broken home in further jeopardy by getting her father (or herself) into trouble. In any case, Courtney was coerced into believing that there was nothing wrong with showing a little affection toward her father, regardless of how uncomfortable the experience made her feel. Clearly, her father's coercive technique was aimed solely at inducing compliance to his offensive behaviour.

Courtney: My father told me that the only reason why he did it is because that's how men show that they love you . . . You do what a man says. Always. No matter what they want you to do. You do it, and they will always love you. No matter what it is . . . With a man, you let a man do whatever he has to do to you. Because that means he loves you. That means either he beats you. You give him sex no matter how he wants it. You obey what he does. You

do what he says. That's why he said that the only reason why he's done all these things to me is because he loves me. It's not true . . . It's not true at all.

With regard to the silence surrounding her abuse, Courtney's father did threaten her into keeping quiet about the sexual abuse he inflicted upon her. Because he appeared to be very intimidating to Courtney, she believed for the longest time that he was capable of carrying out his threats, just as she had believed that violence at the hands of men is a sign of love.

Courtney: I told him he was a pig. He was a pervert. You know, I hated him for what he's done to me . . . He said I could never prove anything . . . He said I was nothing but a little slut and a little whore. And he said he could do it all over again, and if he ever got another chance, he will. And he would keep on doing it, too. (Pause) You know?

When the sexual abuse did come out into the open, Courtney faced the most typical reactions to disclosures of abuse: denial, avoidance and blaming the victim. All of these reactions may have been a means for her sisters to avoid the painful memories that could surface, were they to acknowledge the sexual abuse that was going on. These reactions also may have prevented any feelings of guilt and shame that may result from not doing anything to intervene or protest the ongoing abuse.

Courtney: When it all come out into focus though, my whole family blamed everything on me. They said, 'Well, look at the way you used to

walk around.' What was I supposed to do? We had to wear the nighties and everything that we had . . . When it all came out, it was like they were all against me.

In addition to the sexual abuse, Courtney also experienced physical violence at the hands of her father, her sisters, her brothers-in-law and her step-mother/babysitter. It is understandable, then, why Courtney's childhood memories were all negative ones.

Courtney: I don't remember my life very much as a child. I, I really don't. I can remember little things . . . I could remember when I cut my foot. Uhm, I remember my mom with the garden hose. I don't remember no Christmases. We had beautiful Christmases apparently. With my grandparents and my mom and dad . . . The only Christmases I remember is my dad used to give us five bucks. And we'd go buy him a present, and he'd give us maybe five dollars and that's all we would get. I never even had a Barbie doll. I didn't know what a doll looked like.

While Courtney suffered financially as a child, she also suffered psychologically as a result of being emotionally (and physically) neglected while she was growing up. The stresses from home merely compounded the stress she experienced at school. Courtney's academic experiences were shared by most of the other women who participated in the research project.

Courtney: We weren't well dressed. Uhm, ah, didn't know how to comb my hair properly. But as you get older, you learn. And, but this is when I was younger . . . I was always teased, made fun of . . . It was very hard to make friends. I mostly stuck with myself. A loner.

Courtney's father did not help the situation Courtney faced at school. In fact, he may have made matters worse by deluding Courtney into believing that she was "stupid."

Courtney: I never did well in school. Uhm, I was too afraid to ask questions 'cause I used to get beat up a lot. And, uhm, ah, as they just pass me from grade. And I was supposed to be put in modified when I was grade two. But my father told them, 'No.' Why should they put me in a stupid class when I was stupid already. So, just leave me the way I am. And that's how they put me. I should never have went. They put me in modified when I was in grade five. Five and six. I got to grade seven. That was it.

Courtney quit school in grade seven. Her father even "signed the papers" allowing her to drop out of school at the age of fourteen years. I asked Courtney why she quit school.

Courtney: 'Cause I didn't know anything I was doing. Ah, I didn't understand it. A fear of, uhm, going home. Nobody being there. And, uhm, afraid to ask. Afraid that I'm gonna look stupid 'cause I was already told that I was stupid . . . Basically, if I was supposed to go to school, I would go over to my neighbour's across the thing 'cause I was too afraid to go myself. Ah, 'cause I knew I was gonna look stupid or be called a dummy or be made fun of. I was always with, been made fun of in school. Always. And, uhm, so it was just, you know, going from there then going home, getting beatings on weekends.

Her reasons for quitting school were voiced by other women who participated in the research project. Some of the women said that they quit school in order to

financially assist their families or to help out with care giving responsibilities around the home.

The abuse that Courtney experienced both at home and while away from home had a tremendous impact upon her life. Courtney continued to wet her bed until she was 16 years of age. She developed an extremely low sense of self-esteem and self-confidence and, as a result, she experienced difficulty in reaching even the smallest of her goals and aspirations. Having little sense of belonging and self-worth, Courtney believed that she was unworthy of receiving the love and attention she so desired.

As she struggled to cope with the psychological scars of her abusive childhood, Courtney was not able to establish healthy relationships with her own daughters when she got older and, hence, her daughters moved on to experience broken families of their own. Trust (or lack thereof) played a key factor in Courtney's unhealthy relationships with her daughters. In this case, Courtney learned not to trust others and to expect little of them. She developed such a sense of distrust and insecurity as a result of the abuse she experienced as a child that she couldn't even trust herself to be alone with her own children for fear that she would repeat the sexual abuse that her father inflicted upon her as a child.

Courtney: One time, I was so afraid. My daughter was, uhm, lying in the living room on the couch . . . I went up to her, and I was standing there, and all of a sudden I'm starting to think, 'I can't go near her' . . . And then I went in the bathroom, and I started

pulling my hair. Just thinking, 'No, I'm not gonna hurt her. I would never hurt her.' I've never hurt my kids like that. But, that's all I could think of . . . If I could go near her, she's gonna wake up. She's gonna see me there. She's gonna think I'm gonna do something to her like my dad was doing.

All types of abuse are significant for the person who experiences it. However, the significance of the abuse lies not only in what had occurred, but also in what kind of impact the abuse has had on the individual and on his or her life (Gil, 1983: 19). Like Brenda, Courtney was not able to effectively deal with the tragedy of her childhood experiences due to the silencing surrounding the abuse. While she was able to name her father's sexual assaults as a sexual violation, her sisters were not. Moreover, the threats made against her by her father and her boyfriend's response to her disclosures of abuse merely reinforced Courtney's conviction to remain silent.

As children, the women who participated in the research project suffered through many years of abuse. The abuse took on many forms, from physical violence to emotional neglect to sexual assault, and it often took place in combination with alcoholism. In addition to the alcoholism and violence they experienced within the home, the women were further tormented by the dilemmas that they faced outside of the home. Many of the women were left feeling violated, betrayed, exploited and unjustly treated; as I pointed out earlier, most of the women were left feeling angry and resentful for the fact that they were denied a "decent" childhood. In order to ease their

insecurities and protect themselves from further pain and discomfort, the women developed a variety of survival skills with which to cope with their childhood experiences relating to violence.

Developing Survival Skills

According to Comack (1996: 59), the resources that are available to children who are struggling to cope with abuse are extremely limited. What is more, their physical size, their dependency on adults and their limited knowledge and awareness of what may be happening to them also limit their options for dealing with abuse, especially if they are being abused by an individual in a position of trust or authority (such as a parent). This being the case, the women, as children, did whatever it took to survive the abuse they were experiencing.

In an attempt to take control of their unfortunate situations, the women developed survival skills. These survival skills operated as a means of safety and self-protection. One way that the women learned to protect themselves was through avoidance. Recall that Crystal avoided the terrible situation that was going on in her family by staying away from home as much as was possible.

Crystal: It was a summer program. I went there everyday. Every single day . . . I think I, uhm, really enjoyed mys-, myself, without the, uhm, the stress at home . . . 'Cause as soon as that place opened, I was up and out. And when it finished, I was, you know,

went home. Couldn't wait for the next day.

Ashley, too, avoided the stressful conditions of her home by immersing herself in her academic studies. Unfortunately, this method of coping with the abuse she experienced as a child was cut short by the very circumstances from which she was running.

Ashley: I did well in school because, ah, the stuff that I was facing at home. I grew into myself in my, ah, educational . . . I felt, uhm, it was a way to escape from the home life that I had. But I got to go to [a trade school] in grade ten, but couldn't finish it because my step-father threw me out. I had nowhere to go.

Some women coped with the anguish of their unfortunate situations by getting high on marijuana or by engaging in substance abuse. Gasoline sniffing, for instance, was practiced by some of the women, as children, because it had a hallucinating effect and, thus, provided "a little escape." Samantha was addicted to sniffing gasoline by the time she reached the age of 16 years.

Courtney also engaged in substance abuse at an early age. However, despite the fact that she began drinking alcohol as a way to escape the abuse that was inflicted upon her by her father, Courtney's bouts with alcohol often took place in the presence of her father. Given the nature of the abuse that Courtney experienced at the hands of this man, these circumstances are not that contradictory. While Courtney may have

viewed her use of alcohol as an escape, her father may have perceived their social encounters as an opportunity to induce Courtney's compliance to his offensive behaviour.

Courtney: I used to get beat severely . . . That's why half the time I ran away. [My father] would be there to phone the police . . . I was smoking since I was eight and drinking since I was eleven. But by the time I hit thirteen, [my father] let, he would sit and drink with me. He would give me the alcohol. And all my friends . . . I used to roam the streets a lot and all that stuff. You know, drinking. And never get into trouble with the law though or anything like that. But drinking and pills and stuff like that.

Other women escaped their home life by "hanging out" with their friends or by running away from home altogether.

Jasmine's Story

Jasmine, in her early 20s, is Courtney's daughter. She is living with her first and only intimate partner whom she met when she was 12 years of age. Jasmine has a grade nine education, and she is collecting social assistance benefits. Jasmine and her partner have a three year old daughter. Due to the on-going violence within her relationship with her partner, Jasmine's daughter is in the care of Child and Family Services. At one time, Jasmine's daughter was living in the care of her grandmother, Courtney. However, as I mentioned earlier, Courtney lost custody of Jasmine's

daughter due to her struggle with alcoholism. Like Courtney, Jasmine is in the midst of a custody battle for her daughter. At the time of our interview, Child and Family Services was going for permanent custody of Jasmine's daughter.

Jasmine grew up with an alcoholic mother and her older sister. She did not know anything about her biological father except that he was "a drug addict or an alcoholic, and he's a very violent person." Occasionally, her mother's partners would stay in their home. Jasmine knew one of her mother's partners as "dad," although he was not her biological father. When she was five years old, her "dad" committed suicide. Jasmine described her childhood as a difficult one. Basically, she was raised by her sister.

Jasmine: It was hard with my mom growing up, 'cause my mom was somewhat physical towards me and my sister, and a lot of the drinking, and a lot of pills . . . I had my sister. Like, that's the only person I had. I didn't, well, my mom was there, but not mentally. She was, like, out partying all the time and stuff and, like, I really liked it with my mom. I wanted to be with my mom all the time. Just like any little girl does, you know? But, then she started getting abusive, and her relationships were abusive . . . See, with me, it was hard for me to concentrate [in school] because I was always worried about my mom. What's going on with mom? What's mom doing at home? . . . And seeing my mom being abused. Over and over again. Like, not just physically abused, but by being abused by the alcohol. Abused by the drugs. Like, and I would think about it everyday . . . Grade four or five . . . I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be home looking after my mom. Making sure my mom was okay.

The difficulty Jasmine experienced throughout her childhood may be attributed to the fact that she grew up in a broken family. She experienced the impact of her mother's addictions to prescription drugs and alcohol; she was physically abused and emotionally neglected as a child; and, although she was raised by her sister, she more or less took on the role of protector over her mother. Worse yet, just like her mother, Jasmine was sexually assaulted on a number of occasions throughout her childhood and into her adolescent years. And, just like her mother, Jasmine experienced the silencing around abuse.

Jasmine: I was molested at the age of five by my cousin . . . I was sexually assaulted at fourteen. Before I went into foster care.

(By a boyfriend?)

No. Just a friend . . . And then again, I was sexually assaulted by my mom's boyfriend. So, well, all of the problems started between me and my mom again because my mom didn't believe me. And all that stuff, and that was fine. Like, you know?

I asked Jasmine why she thought her mother didn't believe her. She informed me that her mother's partner had assaulted her mother, too.

Jasmine: The fear. Because he did it to her, too. Or she didn't tell me, but he, and she didn't want him to leave. But he could hurt me. That, like, I don't blame my mom. But, if only she would, ah, said something. Then it could of prevented it from happening to me. Like, I can't blame her for him. It's, like, I can't blame her for his sick mind. But, just that little bit of blame because she always

taught me to tell someone. And she didn't tell . . . He did it to her. And she didn't believe me. And it's, like, why would I lie?

Recall that Jasmine's mother, Courtney, developed a strong need and desire for love and attention as a result of the abuse she suffered at the hands of Jasmine's grandfather. Consequently, she put her own needs ahead of her daughter's need for safety, security and protection. Although Jasmine resented her mother for her negligent behaviour, she did try to understand where her mother was coming from. Jasmine's mother did try to improve the familial circumstances at home. Nevertheless, it was still too much for Jasmine to handle, so she looked to escape the stressful conditions under which she lived.

Jasmine: My mom quit drinking for four years. It was, it was good for years. But then, I got into the trouble. As a teenager, I was running away from home, and drinking with my friends. Uhm, I was in, I was placed in foster care at the age of fourteen. 'Cause my mom couldn't handle me no more.

Jasmine survived her childhood and adolescent years by "hanging out" and "having fun" with her friends. In this regard, she was able to obtain the acceptance and security she needed, as well as the closeness and attention she lacked at home.

Jasmine: I was about thirteen, and I ran away from home . . . I didn't want to be at home 'cause I was drinking with my friends, and I was just getting in bars, and I wanted to have fun . . . I ran away, I stole a van, got caught, got charged. Then the charge got stayed

. . . But no matter how many times I ran away, [my foster parents] would never turn me away.

Like Jasmine, Juliette survived the effects of her childhood experiences by hanging out with her friends, drinking alcohol, popping pills and running away. She also engaged in gang activity.

Juliette's Story

Juliette is in her early 20s. She possesses a grade 12 education, and she is employed full time in the area of youth programming (a job that she obtained as result of being an ex-gang member). Juliette has two children, both of whom live with her ex-partner's mother. Although her ex-partner is serving time in jail, he has temporary custody of Juliette's children. For the last five years, Juliette has been fighting for custody of her children. She originally lost her children when she was accused of abandoning them. In reality, she had no choice but to leave her children behind with her ex-partner in order to escape their violent relationship. Juliette is now single.

Juliette described her childhood as one where she was raised by "one alcoholic family and one really, really good family." For the first part of her childhood, Juliette was raised in the city with her Christian godparents. Although her godparents had three children of their own, their children were grown and living away from home. Juliette explained that her life with her godparents was very good. As an only child in this

home, she was always fed, clothed and kept clean. She was provided an endless supply of love and plenty of attention. She did not have any experiences with alcohol, violence or abuse of any kind while she was living with her godparents. Nevertheless, when Juliette turned 10 years of age, her biological parents "wanted her back." Accordingly, Juliette left the safety and security of her godparents' home, and she moved to her biological parents' home on the reserve.

When she moved "back home" as a child, Juliette experienced a big change in her upbringing. All of a sudden, Juliette was no longer being raised as an only child. She had six sisters and six brothers. In terms of age, Juliette was "right in the middle." She was thrust into the midst of a broken family that was plagued with poverty, alcoholism and violence. As her parents partied "every week, Saturdays straight through Sunday," she was forced to take on the care giving responsibilities for her three-year-old brother. These responsibilities included having to cook and clean the house, "hide out" with her brother when violent parties were taking place and tend to her brother's needs when her parents were absent. Sometimes, Juliette's parents would be gone for long periods of time, and her father would be away from home for "weeks at a time" when he was on a drinking binge. Like many of the other women, Juliette did not have a good relationship with her mother.

Juliette: It was just really, totally opposite . . . I didn't like it. I just, we didn't get along right away. Like, we argued. I, she got mad at

me. She drank too much. That's why I argued with her. Because she drank too much. And I had a little brother that I didn't know. And I just met him, whatever. And then I started raising him.

Juliette's relationship with her father was not very close, either. She explained that they did, however, get to know each as a result of her father's drinking habit.

Juliette: Me and my dad just started communicating, like, when I was eighteen, I guess. Like, we hung around and everything when I was fourteen. Like, I drove him . . . I used to drive my dad around when he drank, hey. And that's the way, how we were. Like, with, that's the way that we bonded, I guess.

As a child, Juliette witnessed many incidents of violence where her father would physically beat her mother.

Juliette: My dad used to hit my mom lots in front of me . . . I just couldn't stand it. Like, oh. He's just, he'd, made all of us sit in front, like, sit there in the livingroom while he was hitting my mom. And I just, oh, I couldn't stand it 'cause my little brother saw that. And, like, he was only, he wasn't even in school yet. And he had to see that. And it was, pissed me right off.

Juliette also experienced her father's physical violence and mental abuse first hand.

Juliette: He used to give me lickens, like, just 'cause he felt like it. Just to let anger out. He used to hit me and beat me and. And I had to sit there, and I couldn't cry. I wasn't allowed to cry. For, if I cried, I'd just get hit more. And, and he used to ask me, like, 'Who's

the boss? Who's the boss?' And if I didn't say, answer right away, he'd get mad. He'd, like, he just, he was really violent when he was drunk.

As a means of coping with and surviving her broken home life, Juliette sought comfort in a gang. Here, she found the attention, acceptance, power and security that she failed to receive from her broken family. Although Juliette is no longer a member of a gang, she did find what she was looking for from the gang as an adolescent.

Juliette: I was the leader. I was, like, the person they phoned . . . I formed the gang . . . I was considered the leader for the chicks . . . I wanted the attention. I wanted the, 'cause I never got attention from my mom and dad. Never. Now I get it . . . It's just, I, I wanted the attention. I wanted the name that I, that I have now. And thank God that I wanted that name. And I, that's the way I made my name. I wanted to be, yeah, I wanted to be somebody. Like, I, and I thought that was the way. But, I got out of it. And it was real cool. Like, because, I just initiated somebody to be the leader, hey. Like, I just, just like that. I was, like, 'Well, you're next on the list, girl. You're gonna have to run the get-along gang.' (Laugh) Just, like, okay, whatever. And I beat her up first and gave her a licken, whatever. I shaved her. And I gave her a tattoo.

Juliette did whatever she could to escape the upsetting circumstances of her broken family. When she was unable to escape the violence and abuse that she experienced at home, she made every effort to escape the pain being caused by this abuse. Specifically, Juliette escaped from her pain through dissociation. Just as Courtney would pretend to be asleep while her father sexually abused her, Juliette

distanced herself from her emotions by taking prescription pills.

Juliette: I started that when I was eleven . . . Nerve pills. I got, I had Valiums. I always took Valiums. I just took, uhm, ah, bennies. They call them bennies . . . My friends, too. They always had pills. Like, those that you could get high on. And, we just had, ah, pill, a pill party . . . Dilottas. I took lots of those, Dilottas.

During her adolescence, Juliette overdosed on prescription pills five times.

However, she explained that this was not an intentional act on her part.

Juliette: I overdosed. I didn't mean to. Like, I didn't want to kill myself or anything. It's just that, that high that, I've always wanted it. Like, I always had to have it. And I used to just eat them like candies. That's how they were to me. I'm, like, oh, I was just, that feeling. I always wanted that feeling. But then, after the fifth time I overdosed, I thought, 'Holy shit. I'm not gonna get anywhere if I keep doing this.' So, I just quit . . . I was sixteen when I quit, I think.

When she found herself at the point where she could no longer withstand the alcoholism and violence she experienced within her broken family, like many of the other women in the research project, Juliette ran away from home.

Juliette: I left home. The reason why I left home was because my mom and dad, they always called me a 'bitch.' They always called me 'useless.' They always put me down. Like, they literally put me down all the time, and I couldn't stand it anymore, hey . . . I jumped in the van, and I was gone for two years.

Although some of the survival skills developed by the women were effective in that they allowed the women to relieve themselves of some of their stresses from home, their means of self-protection often led to further problems later in life.

Juliette: I was twelve when I, I ran away. I ran away for two years, and then I ended up, that conceiving my baby about that time. And then my son was born . . . I didn't know how to break it to [my parents], but I broke it to them. I was, like, 'Oh, this is my son' . . . I was fourteen. And I got pregnant about six months after my son was born, again.

While Juliette faced the problems associated with two teenage pregnancies, other women merely compounded their stresses from childhood by running right into the arms of a violent partner. It was not at all unusual for the women who participated in the research project to run to abusive men while they were still in their adolescent years.

Summary

Listening to the women's stories, it is evident that the familial structure within Aboriginal society has been fractured. Standing in the way of mending these broken families is the on-going struggle with the alcoholism and violence that often characterizes many Aboriginal families. As children, the women who participated in the research project found themselves in the midst of turmoil as they struggled to hold

their families together. Since they were often forced to struggle through their turmoil in silence, many of the women found that their only means of coping with the dilemmas surrounding their broken families was to adopt the survival skills with which they were most familiar. This being the case, they merely carried the unhealthy coping strategies of their parents forward into their own lives.

Childhood experiences relating to violence have had a devastating impact upon the women's adolescent and adult lives. Nevertheless, this is not to say that all of the women's childhood experiences were negative. As I explained in Chapter One, the knowledge that I produce is partial in the sense that it is dependent upon what portion of the women's stories I choose to re-tell. In this regard, although Brenda did not experience the love and attention she needed as a child, she did remember many happy times.

Brenda: We had lots and lots of fun on swings and j- jackstones. You know? Just things outside. Hopscotch. We had so much fun. But they always did, we always did the work, too. You know? That we're supposed to do in the house . . . I remember my mom and dad. My mom was always cooking supper for my dad. We'd wait for my dad to come home. We'd always be glad to see him. He'd always have a little brown bag of candies he'd get from the store, hey. Think, we were just happy with one or two candies. But, that's all we waited for, hey. (Delighted laugh) It was so nice.

In like manner, although Ashley grew up being terrorized by her step-father and her mother's drinking habit, she remembered many happy times that she spent with

her childhood friends.

Ashley: I always had good friendships. And, ah, most of my friends saw what was going on. And I even, sure they felt for me. But we were, they're, back then, my friends were my safety net . . . I had a best friend . . . Until this day, I've never forgotten her . . . I had, uhm, a so-called boyfriend when I was fourteen. And, ah, I still think of him . . . He would stay out all night with me because my step-dad would kick the whole family out. It didn't matter who, was in the middle of the night. All night, we'd stay up. Winter, summer, spring or fall. He'd sit with us. And I remember little things about him. (Crying) (Pause) (Sigh) Oh no.

Generally speaking, however, all of the women who participated in the research project had either witnessed or experienced some form of violence as a child. Each, in turn, went on to experience violence at the hands of an intimate male partner. As the women developed the necessary survival skills to cope with their violent childhood experiences, they also developed a need to remain within an environment which was familiar. Feeling most comfortable within a violent situation, many of the women went on to unconsciously repeat their painful pasts from childhood, and they found themselves re-victimized as adults.

**Chapter Four
THE VIOLENT PARTNER(S):
EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AS ADULTS**

Carol: He was getting violent with me . . . He was nice at first. And, and a gentleman. And then, he was smart . . . He was gonna take care of me . . . He was ten years older than I was . . . Little push here, and a little, ah, tap there. And the next thing you know, a slap in the face, and sort of a punch. The next thing you know, it's a kick, and it's, you know, it's, you know, a full beating. The next thing you know, it's, try get away from him, and he comes and hunts me down, drags me back home. No one does a thing . . . Gets me home, gives me a beating. And it's, 'Gonna try it again, you're gonna get a wicked beating.' You know? So, not even allowed outside the door without him. So, finally, one day, I had enough . . . I had bought a knife that day, and I took it out, and I stabbed him . . . It was all calculated.

With little experience in loving and being loved in a safe way, many women who are abused as children will enter into intimate relationships where their partners eventually beat them, mistreat them and emotionally abuse them. Because they received inconsistent love and affection (or none at all) and negligent care as children, they often grow into adulthood believing that abuse is a sign of love. Moreover, they often believe that violent behaviour is better than no intimate contact at all. Accordingly, many women who are abused as children find themselves repeating their childhood experiences of violence and, thus, they are re-victimized as adults (Gil, 1983: 43-5).

I found that this was the case for many of the women who participated in the

research project. Living in an environment that was characterized by alcoholism and violence was seen, by these women, as an ordinary way of life. As I pointed out in the preceding chapter, many of the women were aware of the unhealthy nature of their childhood environments. However, due to the silence surrounding the violence they experienced as children, these women grew accustomed to living in an environment where violence was the norm. According to Anne McGillivray and Brenda Comaskey (1999: 10), "challenging the norm is frightening, and escape may mean the abandonment of everyday life." In this regard, the women carried their childhood experiences into their adult lives, where they invariably found themselves confronting even more violence.

As adults, the women went on to experience violence at the hands of their intimate partner(s). The violence they experienced took on many forms, and it was often characterized by such themes as sexual jealousy, forcible confinement, and extreme possessiveness and control. Nevertheless, by utilizing the coping strategies that they developed as children, the women continued to survive.

Sexual Jealousy

A significant theme that emerged from the women's adult experiences of violence was the sexual jealousy they experienced on the part of their intimate partners. Typically, this sexual jealousy was rooted in their partner's own feelings of insecurity and mistrust.

Trust is a basic component in all human relationships. According to Eliana Gil (1983: 32), trust is a major issue for all individuals who were abused as children. Due to their childhood experiences of abuse, these individuals often develop difficulty in trusting their own reactions, thoughts, feelings and perceptions. They often feel vulnerable and in need of guarding themselves from further harm and insult. The absence of trust in intimate relationships, therefore, may give rise to feelings of insecurity which, in turn, may give rise to offensive behaviours such as the need to become possessive and controlling. Many of the women revealed to me that their violent partners had been, themselves, abused as children. Consequently, with a lack of trust and a wealth of insecurity in their own abilities to maintain their intimate relationships with the women, the women's intimate partners generally took on many of these offensive behaviours.

Lenore Walker (1979: 114) maintains that sexual jealousy is almost always present within a violent intimate relationship. Hence, it is a usual occurrence for the aggressor in these relationships to accuse their intimate partners of having sexual relations with other individuals. I found that the women who participated in the research project add support to Walker's assertion. In point of fact, many of the women informed me that throughout the course of their violent relationships, their partners consistently made irrational accusations of infidelity against them. They were regularly accused of dressing too provocatively, wearing too much make-up and behaving too flirtatiously. In an effort to control their seemingly wrongful behaviour,

many of the women were isolated by their partners from other individuals, particularly their friends and family members. When the women were in the presence of others, they were closely monitored.

Brandi's Story

Brandi is a single woman in her early 30s. She is collecting social assistance benefits, and she is attending school for the purpose of academic upgrading. Brandi originally quit school in grade six. She has four children ranging in age from six to 16 years. However, all of her children are living under the care of extended family members. Brandi is seeking to re-gain custody of her two youngest children who are living under the care of her mother. Brandi has been struggling to overcome her addictions to alcohol, drugs and sniffing solvents since she was in her early teen years.

Brandi explained that as a child, she "grew up fast." Like the women whose stories were heard in Chapter Three, Brandi comes from a broken family. Both of her parents were violent alcoholics. Sometime before she reached the age of nine years old, Brandi's mother left her father to go off "drinking somewhere." Therefore, she was "raised" by her father and her step-mother. In addition to witnessing drinking parties and extreme violence between her father and his girlfriends, Brandi suffered a great deal of severe physical child abuse (such as being whipped with a belt) at the hands of

her parents. She was sexually abused, repeatedly, while she "was just a little girl."¹¹ Similar to the childhood experiences of the other women who participated in the research project, Brandi was often abandoned and left in a position of care giver and protector over her 10 younger siblings (including a newborn baby) long before she was even ready to care for herself.¹²

Brandi explained that she "never had a childhood," and she believed that her "teenage years were taken" away from her. She went right from caring for her siblings to having her own children. She was placed in foster care at the age of 11 years. She then began running away and "running around," and she gave birth to her first child at the age of 14 years. When she was 15 years old, she started dating a drug dealer. She soon became a "junkie," and she used to "boost" in order to support her alcohol and drug addictions. What is more, while Brandi was running to escape the effects of growing up in a broken family, she repeatedly ran right into the arms of violent men.

I asked Brandi about her experiences with intimate violence. Although she did not remember exactly when her first incident of intimate violence took place, she

¹¹ Brandi was sexually molested by her father; she was sexually assaulted by her "grandma's daughter's boyfriend"; and she was coerced into kissing her father's drinking buddies in exchange for money (a dollar for each kiss).

¹² Brandi was frequently left in potentially dangerous situations. Nevertheless, she explained that she "knew already how to handle a gun at nine years old." One evening, she was left alone on the farm with her younger siblings. Her father and her step-mother were away drinking. When an intruder broke into their home, Brandi fended him off with a loaded shot gun.

clearly remembered "real violence" that she experienced at the hands of her second long-term partner with whom she lived for about "three, four years." Brandi remembered when he started abusing her. At the time, she was around the age of 20 or 21 years.

Brandi: He was about eighteen. He was very violent. I didn't know at first, hey. I had my little girl, hey. She was five, six at the time. (Pause) And then when he started hitting me, and I took it, I took it for so many years. I didn't even fight back. But my uncles used to punch him out all the time for fighting me 'cause my black eye would heal. After a couple of weeks, I'd have another black eye. You know? I got scars on me, on my face 'cause of him. I chose him over my daughter. (Crying)

Although they are not together today (he is sitting in jail), Brandi is still very hurt by the damage that was inflicted upon her and her life as a result of her intimate relationship with this man.

Brandi: I let my daughter go to her other side of the family . . . Just, he was beating me, me so much. He was the only one there. I'd take it out on her. And then, one day I couldn't take it, hey. I just called my worker and said, 'Come pick her up' . . . And they did . . . They sent her to, to up north, to her other family. And I couldn't. (Crying) Like, just that I couldn't get rid of this guy. I still can't. He still abuses me by going with my friends and my family. (Crying) And it still hurts.

Brandi experienced all forms of abuse at the hands of her intimate partner, including physical and sexual abuse, financial control, emotional and public

humiliation, verbal abuse and social isolation. She informed me that alcohol did not always play a factor in the violence she experienced, and much of her partner's violent behaviour was rooted in his own insecurities with himself. Brandi remembered that her partner was very possessive, oppressive and controlling. Above all, he suffered from a case of extreme sexual jealousy. For instance, when they were out walking, Brandi was not "allowed" to look across the street because her partner would suspect that she was looking at another man. Walking with her head down did nothing for Brandi's self-confidence.

Brandi: He didn't even have to be drunk or anything. Fuck, he was so jealous, man. Insecure. Like, I'd, like, you know, you like to see who's all around. Like, I'd kind, like, across the street, I'd see somebody walking, and I look to see who it was. And I'd get slapped, hey. I just started crying.

Brandi's partner was so insecure with himself and so afraid that he would lose Brandi that he monitored and restricted every aspect of her life activities. Brandi's partner often used physical violence as a means of repressing Brandi's behaviour. She recalled how she was not allowed to wear make-up or dress up when they were going out.

Brandi: One time, I was getting, we're waiting for him, he was getting ready to go out. And so I put on a nice outfit. And I was curling my hair. I put my make-up on . . . He says, 'Where you going?' I said, 'I'm going out with you. We're, we're going out.' He said,

'Yeah, right.' I'm ready. Then he takes a cloth. He grabbed a face cloth. And he went and wet it. And he sat me on his knee, and wiped my face so hard, man. He wiped that make-up off, man. I was just about crying, hey. And I went to look in the mirror, my face was red for a couple hours. That's how hard he was rubbing my face. All that make-up, off.

(Using a two-way dead bolt that required a key to be opened, Brandi's partner used to lock her in their apartment when he went out.

Brandi: He used to let, lock me in the dead bol-, the dead bolt locks in our apartment. I'd want to jump 'cause I want to get out, hey. He used to lock me in there . . . And then one time I was gonna jump out, hey. Who comes around the corner down there? The cops. They said, 'Brandi?' And they were starting to know me, hey. And they said, 'Brandi. What are you doing?' I said, 'What does it look like I'm doing? I'm gonna jump.' 'For what?' 'Well, [my boyfriend] locked me in here. I can't fuckin' get out,' I said. (Laugh) And then, there comes [my boyfriend] around the corner. 'She's just lying. I went to the store.' And they fuckin' believed him, those assholes. And I says, 'Fuck.' I was just mad.

Brandi did not simply acquiesce to this abusive treatment. She found ways to resist her partner's controlling behaviours, although not without cost.

Brandi: One time, I come home drunk. And they just came home from boosting. He had a bunch of stuff in a bag, hey. And fuck him. He passed out. So, I took off with his goods. Took off with the key, and I locked him in . . . I went to my uncle's, and I sold it all. And I drank with my uncle and them. We drank and, and everything, hey. And then, and then I won . . . He took the screws out, hey. And he caught me, hey. And then, he gave me a good licken.

Despite the beating she received on this occasion, Brandi believed she came out on top; she “won.” She remembered a time, however, when she was not so fortunate. Brandi had found a way to escape her confinement, but was caught by her partner in the process of climbing back in through a window of their apartment.

Brandi: I used to sniff up before, hey . . . A guy used to live a few blocks down . . . He was a sniffer . . . I took off to that guy’s house. Just to have a few rags. I wanted to get high. Then I go back . . . The way to get in is through that window up there. So, I’m climbing up, hey. And I could hear somebody. ‘What are you doing?’ Oh fuck. My heart just started pounding . . . He caught me . . . He says, ‘Where in the fuck did you come from?’ . . . I said I was getting high, hey . . . All of a sudden, [he] throws me down on the cement. And he started stomping on me. And he’s six foot three, and a big guy, hey. Started stomping on me, and I’m just screaming, hey . . . I can’t remember how many times I got a lick there, but anyways . . . He grabbed me by the hair . . . He banged me right against the stucco wall. And I bled, like, a fresh scar there. He cut me up with my key. Then he made a big branch off a tree, and he started hitting me with it, hey. And I was just screaming . . . The whole street could hear me screaming my head off, hey . . . I think he’s gonna kill me . . . I’m just scared, hey. ‘Fuck,’ I says . . . He thinks I’m fucking crazy to stand there. He’s got, you got to be kidding . . . I went running with one shoe. I was running all over the glass . . . He was right behind me. And then I just kept running fast. I ran to my auntie’s. Just banging on the door, hey. And then I couldn’t open the door. And she’s, her eyeballs just went big . . . ‘Holy fuck,’ she says. ‘You need an ambulance’ . . . I had bruised ribs. I couldn’t even do nothing. They all had to take care of me. So, I had to stay at my mom’s for a couple weeks. She had to feed me.

In spite of the trauma of this devastating incident, Brandi returned to her violent

partner, and he continued to abuse her. He controlled her actions and social activities, and he kept her socially isolated to the point where he limited her contact with what few friends she had and with members of her own family. Brandi remembered one incident in particular that took place at a drinking party. Her partner started fighting with her because she wanted to telephone her auntie.

Brandi: I guess, ah, was a drinking party there, hey. We were drinking there. And he came and get me. At my, my auntie's. And I was gonna phone my auntie . . . Then I used the phone. I was talking to my auntie, hey. He unplugged the phone on me. I started fighting him. We were in the kitchen. He grabbed a cast iron frying pan. He hit it over my, hit it over my head. And I wouldn't go down, hey. Was still standing there. So, he grabbed a knife. And he stabbed me in the back. And I just, 'Oh.' I felt it, and I just fell, hey. And my sister just looked, hey. And just grabbed me. Was just holding me. And blood was spraying out, hey. And then, ah, she was just crying, hey. And I was just scared, hey. Because before that, he had that knife. Like, he had me like this. (Motioning a knife being held at her throat) And he had that knife right there. Like, he wanted to slice my throat. And I was just praying to God he wouldn't do it, hey. And then, ah, all of a sudden, I, (sighs) fuck. He's crazy, man.

Brandi's partner also sexually abused her by coercing her to engage in sexual intercourse with him and by forcing her to engage in sexual activities that she protested (such as swallowing his semen). Brandi recalled an incident where her partner forced her to have sexual intercourse with him, even though her ribs were severely bruised from a previous beating he had inflicted upon her.

Brandi: One time he gave me a good lick. And then, he took me down to his sister's place. And, and he made me have sex with him. And he made me swallow his cum. And I was in, my ribs were just bruised, hey. And then, I snuck away from him, hey. I, his arms were out. And we're sleeping on the basement floor, hey. I moved his arm, hey. And I got up. And I'm, got dressed, hey. Looking around. I only have one shoe again, hey. I'm looking, hey. I says, 'Oh, fuck the shoe,' I says. I got up. I was walking towards the door. He's passed out. I was, like, I went for, those people heard me screaming, hey. The night before. 'Cause they always did, hear me screaming. He would hit me anyway. Psycho.

Brandi's escape from the violent relationship was facilitated when her partner was sent away to jail. Nevertheless, despite her opinion that "he's a fuckin' asshole. That's what he is," Brandi has pondered the idea of returning to her partner when he gets out of jail.

Brandi: He was in jail for beating me up. When we'd, he'd come out, we'd get back together again . . . Yeah. I still have dreams, and I'm wondering what the fuck for. Yet, I've been through so much. I don't need someone like that. It won't, it won't work 'cause I'll, I'll end up doing something . . . Maybe it's best he left because I was tired of getting beaten up. I know myself, I woulda killed him someday. Honest to God.

While Brandi is concerned that she may end up harming her partner if she were to get back together with him, she has apparently overlooked the fact that her partner may end up seriously (or fatally) injuring her first.

Notwithstanding the potential danger that exists within a violent relationship, it

is not unusual for an abused woman to remain with her violent partner for an extended period of time. To counter the assumption that abused women stay in violent relationships because they must get some pleasure out of being beaten, Walker (1979: 49-50) maintains that some abused women will remain as a result of "learned helplessness." Walker asserts that after experiencing repeated battering at the hands of their violent partner, abused women lose their motivation to escape to the situation. They become passive victims with a sense of hopelessness to the fact that their relationship will never improve. Without any sense of power to change, abused women develop a psychological paralysis that prevents them from leaving their violent partners.

We learn from Brandi's story, however, that women who find themselves in violent relationships are far from passive victims; they actively find ways to cope with, resist and survive the abuse (see Comack, 1996). Indeed, from my interviews with the women, I have found that there are good reasons why abused women will remain in their relationships with their violent partners. Specifically, in many instances, violent men will thwart any attempt that the women make to leave them. This being the case, rather than wondering why a woman stays in her violent relationship, we should be questioning why her partner does not let her leave?

Forcible Confinement and Control

Underlying the theme of sexual jealousy are the concepts of forcible confinement and control. Like Brandi, many of the women reported that their adult experiences with violence include being forcibly confined and controlled as a result of their partners' own insecurities and lack of trust in them. Ironically, in some instances, the women were forcibly confined in order to reduce their partners' risk of jeopardizing the security of their intimate relationships with the women. In other instances, the women were confined as a means of silencing them.

Crystal's Story

Crystal was in the midst of drinking, partying and rebelling from her broken family situation when she met her first and only long-term partner. Although he was her "elementary crush," they did not begin dating until Crystal was 17 years old. Her partner's violent behaviour began just three weeks into their relationship. It started off with him trying to control her activities and her social relationships. At first, Crystal typically thought, "Oh, he must like me or something." However, her partner's control quickly turned to possessiveness and oppressive behaviour whereby he affected all aspects of Crystal's life. When she returned to school for upgrading, for instance, her academic endeavours were cut short due to her partner's possessiveness, insecurity and accusations of infidelity. He feared that Crystal would become physically attracted

to someone else, and then she would leave him.

Crystal: When I was trying to get my, ah, grade nine, no grade ten . . . Uhm, it was my relationship. He, ah, put, putting those power struggles in there and that. He would want the best for me, you know, and that kind of thing . . . He got, got more, I don't know, controlling. And I wasn't in, I wasn't in any kind of, ah, what do you call it? Uhm, violence training that I kind of, like, fell for it, I guess. For his verbal tactics on, on me. It was about school. It was about me. 'Oh, you'll meet someone.' 'You're gonna sleep with this person.' 'You're, you know, you're after this teacher,' or whatever. You know? It was that.

In addition to possessing feelings of sexual jealousy, Crystal's partner would sexually force himself on Crystal after an argument. He would threaten to cause harm to Crystal by telling her that he would get his friends to break into her house and rape her. He even threatened to tell lies to Crystal's children so she would look bad in their eyes. Crystal also remembered how her partner would abuse her financially.

Crystal: He always stole from me. And I, that's one reason why I don't, like, like him in my house. 'Cause he will steal from me. Right underneath my nose, he will steal from me. And no, it could be anything little. You know. He'll walk away with it. Without a conscience, you know . . . He walked away with some of my medication I needed . . . I couldn't believe it. You know. What he does. (Sigh)

Feeling frustrated and betrayed, Crystal made many attempts to leave her violent partner. Nevertheless, her partner's usual response was to deter her efforts to

end their relationship. She remembered one incident where her partner forcibly confined her in her own home.

Crystal: He held me hostage in my house . . . For about two days . . . Around that time, I was making a plan to, to leave. Like, escape from, you know, what was happening at home . . . We couldn't leave the house. He had all the doors and windows locked up. And, ah, if I went to the bathroom, he was outside the bathroom asking and listening. See if I was gonna jump through the window . . . While I had a little time to myself, I, I would run, grab two piece, pieces of clothing, three pieces of clothing, stash it in the closet. In a bag. And I did that, you know, consistently . . . I noticed, too, he was running out of smokes. And I thought, okay. He's gonna have, ah, he's gonna want smokes. He's gonna go in the store. He's gonna go buy it. That's my time . . . I told my daughter, sleep with your clothes on. Don't take them off. And she slept with her clothes on . . . He came in the room and he seen her in bed. And she had the blankets up to her neck . . . And then he left for cigarettes . . . We ran out the back door. And I ran to the shelter. Straight away. And it was scary. It was really scary because we're running down back alleys, and down streets.

As was the situation with Brandi, while Crystal did get away from her partner (as she had many times before), her relationship was far from over. She explained her frustration to me.

Crystal: He caught me in a vulnerable situation. And all the feelings came out. Feeling that way, vulnerable. And he tried to come back. And then, he kind of barged his way into my life . . . I guess he had power over me . . . I didn't want to, you know, cause trouble for my neighbours . . . I wanted him to leave . . . He was abusing me . . . And he's trying to come back into my life . . . It's not me going back. It's him coming to me all the time . . . He didn't want

to leave me alone. It's, like, it just felt like every time he came around, uhm, he would bring all his old problems back.

Even more frustrating and emotionally draining for Crystal was having to listen to her partner's empty promises that he would "change," if only she would give him another chance to prove it.

Crystal: Well, I'm going to church, I'm, you know, this and that and, you know, he'd make the, all these little, I'm a changed man. And so, I was, I wouldn't believe it, but I just, like, I don't know . . . Because he was my first love . . . It made me feel really low . . . Even today. Uhm, still calls my place. And then, you know, still wanting to have something in the relationship . . . I feel angry because he doesn't get a clue that I don't want it . . . About two weeks ago, I just felt so angry with him . . . He put me through hell. And he acts like, you know, it was nothing . . . It just really bugs me when he calls. And then he says 'I love you' at the end of the conversation. It was, like, I don't even want to hear, you know?

Apparently, Crystal was caught between her love and affection for her partner and her desire to relieve herself of the difficult and stressful conditions of their intimate relationship. These conflicting feelings are understandable, considering the fact that this man was Crystal's first intimate partner. As I mentioned earlier (in Chapter Two), at the time of our interview, Crystal was still trying to sever all ties with her "elementary crush."

Sarah's Story

Sarah is in her late 30s, and she is employed full time. She has a grade 12 education which was obtained through academic upgrading, as well as a university degree. Originally, Sarah quit school in grade seven in order to assist in the care giving responsibilities of her younger brothers and sisters. Sarah is in a common-law relationship with her third long-term partner, and she has four children. Her youngest child is 14 years of age. Sarah has battled alcoholism in the past. However, she has been sober for just under 20 years.

Sarah grew up in the city. Like the other women who participated in the research project, Sarah comes from a broken family. Both of Sarah's parents were alcoholics. On account of their alcoholism, Sarah and her five siblings spent time in and out of different foster homes while they were growing up. Although there "wasn't a lot of fighting" in her home as a child, Sarah was raped by her mother's boyfriend when she was 12 years old. While Sarah was able to name her rape as a sexual violation against her, she suffered through the aftermath of the rape in silence. At the time of her rape, she really didn't have anybody to talk to because she was more or less by herself. Sarah explained that her abuser "took something away" from her, and this "sort of put her life on hold."

When Sarah was around 16 years of age, she entered into her first long-term intimate relationship with a man who was older than her by 10 years. Soon after she

began her relationship, "it was all downhill." Unknown to Sarah, her new partner already had children, and he was facing jail time for assaulting the woman he was with prior to being with Sarah. Repeating his cycle of abuse, Sarah's new partner physically beat her and psychologically terrorized her. Sarah readily recalled many incidents of abuse that she suffered at the hands of her intimate partner.

Sarah: He threw a knife at me and it got stuck in my arm. That was the first incident that happened, and he was all apologizing and, and everything . . . When I was carrying [my daughter], he tried to, ah, cut my stomach open. And his mom came between me and him. He didn't want me to have that child. So, ah, and he hit his mom 'cause she tried to protect me . . . He sexually abused my daughters. And, ah, that had a big toll on me 'cause I never knew about it. I found out through, ah, someone else.

On account of his own fears and insecurities, Sarah's partner repeatedly accused her of cheating on him. Moreover, he had such a lack of trust in Sarah that he refused to accept the fact that Sarah's daughters were his daughters, too. This frustrated Sarah since, as she recalled, she was never allowed to be alone.

Sarah: He never believed that those girls were his. And, yet, I couldn't even go to the store by myself without his family. No matter where I went, there was always somebody with me. His family members. . . I was never able to be alone by myself.

The physical abuse that Sarah experienced at the hands of her intimate partner may be seen as a coercive technique for control. Through the means of physical injury,

Sarah's partner was able to restrict her activities and contacts and, hence, keep her socially isolated.

Sarah: My nephew passed away. And he wouldn't even let me go to his funeral. Because the day before, he, ah, tried to slice my throat open. But he, ah, I put my chin down, and my chin was wide open. And he didn't want my family to see that I had that, that he did that to me. So that's why he wouldn't let me go to my nephew's funeral. My nephew was three months old. (Pause)

When I asked Sarah if alcohol played a contributing factor to the abuse she experienced from her intimate partner, she informed me that after a while, "alcohol didn't even have to be involved." Sarah explained why she remained in this violent relationship for five years.

Sarah: You might as well say I was young and foolish. I didn't know the difference, like, you know, I cared for this person . . . I know I cared for him. I know that. I had two children from him . . . Oh, he'll change 'cause he convinced me he would. I wanted to believe it. I have to.

Like Brandi and Crystal, Sarah still had some hope that her violent relationship with her intimate partner would improve. Although she did, at times, give up hope in the relationship, her family did not. Usually, they would assist Sarah's partner in locating Sarah when she did attempt to leave the relationship.

Sarah: Other people would help him find me. Even my own family

members and I wa-, that left me really devastated for many years . . . He would cry to them, like, you know. And make them feel sorry for him. And they'd find me. And then the same thing would happen . . . I was very angry because of that . . . They didn't like the way he treated me, yet they'd help him find me to go back into a relationship where I was getting stabbed, you know. And really severely beaten up where I couldn't even walk.

Much like Brandi's situation, Sarah was eventually able to put an end to the five year reign of terror that she experienced at the hands of her intimate partner.

Sarah: I left . . . I was lucky . . . It made me really look at life . . . He had us all on the floor. He was gonna kill my two daughters and me. I was already standing there pouring with blood. He stabbed me . . . And the cops came there . . . They just took him because they were looking for him. And that was the best thing that could ever happen to me. 'Cause that's when I had the chance to, ah, take off.

In retrospect, Sarah considered herself to be "lucky" because she was able to get away from her violent partner, and she was strong enough never to enter into another violent relationship. Ashley (whose story was heard in Chapters Two and Three), too, shared Sarah's experience. Contrary to her own expectations, she felt very relieved when she ended her drastically violent relationship with her first husband, who she met when she was 17 years old.

Ashley: I hated him by that time. There was no love because of all, all the beatings I took from him. His drinking. And not enough money. I was sick of it. The, I, I, he actually taught me to hate him . . . I

found out he was having an affair with one girl . . . So the following day after that, I went to the lawyer's. I applied for legal separation . . . I wanted some peace. Some quiet in my life. I didn't want my daughters growing, going through this crap. I literally had him thrown out. Yeah. And you know what? It was, that was the most peaceful time in my life . . . I remember the first day he was out, I finally got a, I know it sounds weird, but I got a welfare cheque that time. And, ah, I went shopping. Bought the kids some clothes. Something he didn't do. The house was, my apartment was clean. I had the girls already bathed, fed and in bed. And it was snowing . . . I just (sighs) made myself a cup of herbal tea, and I sat there. I have never felt so wonderful in my life. I felt like I got a load off my back . . . The beatings, the cheating. The, the everything. It was, I had it.

After her relationship with her violent partner ended, Ashley possessed enough self-confidence and self-worth to avoid ever entering into another violent relationship. On the flip side, as an after effect of growing up in and maintaining their own broken family, some women developed either immediate or subsequent feelings of fear and anxiety. They had been taught not to trust and to expect little of others. Therefore, they do not possess the strength and security to develop healthy relationships and avoid intimate violence.

Leaving the Violent Relationship

While many abused women may consider the possibility of getting out of their violent relationships, they also consider the added stress and anxiety that may be brought upon themselves as a result of this decision to leave. Even though some women are

educated, employed and financially independent of their violent partners, they will remain with their partners for a variety of reasons. They may fear being poor or being left alone; they may be concerned with the possibility of losing friends or having to change their children's school; they may feel ashamed or embarrassed to admit or disclose that their relationship has failed, especially in the eyes of friends and family members; they may be afraid of repercussion; or, worse yet, they may be forced to leave their children behind, as Juliette (who was introduced in Chapter Three) was forced to do in order to escape her violent relationship with her children's father.¹³ Sometimes, women are pressured into remaining in their violent relationships, despite the dangerous conditions that are being placed upon their lives.

Melissa's Story

Recall from Chapter Two that Melissa grew up in a residential boarding school. She never really knew her parents because they held political positions in their reserve community and, therefore, they had to travel a lot. Whenever she came home from the residential boarding school, Melissa lived with her grandparents. While she had a close relationship with her grandfather, she described her grandmother as "a really strict lady" who used to "scream her head off." As a child, Melissa never had any

¹³ Juliette escaped from her violent partner after running from their home with nothing more than the clothes on her back. She, too, was forcibly confined by her violent partner.

experiences with alcohol or violence at home, other than witnessing her grandmother yelling at her parents.¹⁴ Melissa lost her father when she was 12 years old. Looking at her life experiences, she explained that “probably that played a large role in stuff.”

When she was 17 years old, Melissa met her first long-term partner, who soon became her husband. Melissa remembered the circumstances surrounding her arranged marriage.

Melissa: We go home every summer, hey . . . So that one summer, I stayed home . . . Everybody was preparing around me. I know they're just preparing this marriage. This wedding. And, ah, I was seventeen . . . I was going out with this guy all summer. Oh, but I kind of had my doubts about him. You know, because every time I see him, he's always drunk. You know. But I would go with him every single day. He was eighteen . . . His family. They're very demanding, I guess . . . At that time, I didn't really believe in marriage (little laugh) . . . I just went along with everything . . . The day after I got married to, that's, everything just, everything just came down on me. Like, when I sleep and I wake up, I wake up really sad, you know. And I was sad. I wanted to cry . . . I made a big mistake. I wasn't happy 'cause I wanted to continue with my education. And that's what was always instilled in me. You know. To finish . . . I wanted to, and then I couldn't.

Melissa's arranged marriage was devastating for her. In addition to not being able to complete her basic education (she finished grade 11), Melissa began to

¹⁴ Recall that although Melissa didn't really experience any violence at home as a child, she did experience physical punishment and psychological trauma while she was away at residential boarding school. See "Melissa's Story" in Chapter Two.

experience violence within her home. Her eyes and ears were no longer protected, as they were when she was a child. She was now on her own, as an adult. She witnessed severe bouts of intimate violence between her older siblings and their partners. She witnessed violence within her reserve community. Moreover, she experienced violence at the hands of her new husband. Melissa recalled how her partner never showed any signs of violence prior to their wedding day.

Melissa: He was so nice. Oh, and it wasn't 'til after he was married, hey. That's when he showed his real self . . . He's really verbally abusive. He was calling me down. (Pause) I, like, one time he told me, 'I know why I married you. 'Cause I felt sorry for you,' and 'you're so ugly and nobody else will marry you' . . . He would, ah, talk to me like that. And it just got worse and worse and worse after that. Like, I was walking on eggs for a long time.

In addition to verbal abuse, Melissa experienced physical violence at the hands of her intimate partner. The beatings she experienced became so frequent and so traumatic that she grew to remember even the smallest of details, such as how the beatings sounded.

Melissa: One time, he, uhm, I was getting up. I forget what happened. I was just in bed. Then all of a sudden he got really angry. And then he grabbed his strap and [he] started hitting me. I mean his belt . . . I barely made it to the couch. The sound of that.

Melissa explained that alcohol did not always play a factor in the violence she

experienced at the hands of her intimate partner. She remembered how he used to publically humiliate and ridicule her.

Melissa: We had his nephew visiting. And I don't know what happened. He started ridiculing, and then I, ah, I, I went outside and he just came running after me. And the people went out and there was people around, hey. He kept running after me . . . I didn't care if anybody saw him grabbing my hair. Just dragging me back . . . Even his nephew . . . [His nephew] started talking like him, doing that to me, or, I don't know, put me down to my place or something. (Little laugh) . . . Like, this one time, you know, his buddies were at my place . . . He tore off all my clothes in front of them. I just felt really, like, dirty and all that.

If anything, this form of abuse was an ultimate means of control. Naked and helpless, Melissa was "stripped" of her self-confidence, and she was removed of what little self-dignity and self-esteem she had. The social ridicule that Melissa experienced was also in the form of her partner's infidelity. She told me that the whole reserve knew about her husband's extra-marital affairs. She explained how she lost her self-respect.

Melissa: After four, four months we got married, he had an affair . . . I got really upset about it and everything. And then, ah, and he just continued that affair with that lady. An older lady. Then I went to [her] place . . . I'd sit there . . . It took all your respect . . . And I took a lot of abuse from his girlfriends . . . I'd go to the bars. I'd say, 'Okay, come on. We have to go home' . . . I remember this one girlfriend take his, uhm, 'I don't care if he's your husband. He's with me right now. Hah.' You know. 'F off.' . . . And then another time, he wasn't even trying to help me . . . The counselor comes to me and says, you know, 'I want to take you out of here. You're going to get in trouble. I'm getting kind of

scared.' You know, 'Something will happen.' So, they took me out from there.

It was not unusual for the women who participated in the research project to experience their partner's infidelity. In fact, all but one woman disclosed that their violent partners had cheated on them, at least once, throughout the course of their intimate relationship. Ironically, all of the women confirmed that their partners would regularly accuse *them* of cheating. Of all these women, only one affirmed that she did cheat on her partner, once. In most instances, the act of cheating never even entered the minds of the women. They were either too afraid of retribution if they cheated, or else they were simply not interested in being with anyone other than the partner they were with.

Despite the fact that the community knew about the violence that was going on, nobody did anything about it. Melissa explained that even her own mother knew that she was being abused by her husband, but she did not acknowledge it.

Melissa: My mom was talking to me. She told me, 'You know, I knew the abuse you were going through. 'Cause people saw you. And they'd come and tell me.' Because I never told her. I never wanted to tell her. I didn't want her to be bothered with it . . . Yeah. But she told me after we separated. She told me, 'I knew something was wrong. But you never told us.' You're not supposed to do that over there. You're not supposed to go running home to your parents with your problems.

Even Melissa's extended family encouraged her to remain at her husband's side, despite the potential danger this imposed upon her safety.

Melissa: We used to stay at his parent's place . . . One time, he came home, and he really beat me up. I had a lot of blood on my, on my nightgown, too. He pulled me up and dragged me to his parents' bedroom, and then he says, 'Okay, look at her now. Look what I did to her. I did that to her.' 'Cause his parents, his dad used to beat his mom a lot. And then right away my mother-in-law grabbed me. And she went into the bathroom, and she, she gave me something to change with. So I changed and she wiped me and she says, 'Okay, go back to bed.' You know. And on another time, he did that. I came to her house again. 'Cause I didn't want to, have anywhere to go. And then she says, 'It's okay. Change.' And I had a big bruise here and then she fixed me up. And then she told me, 'Don't tell anybody. Don't tell anybody what's happening.' And she told me not to tell anybody. That's why I was there for so many years . . . I was married to him for thirteen years . . . That's why I was in that. I kind of thought that was, you know, real. (Little laugh) A way of when a woman's role there. The violence. To take all the stuff . . . The physical abuse. You know, and the mental abuse. And the woman's supposed to be the one to stay at home. Take care of the children. Take care of the house. Take care of the man . . . And to see my mother-in-law do that to me, you know, 'Don't say anything. Just go back to what you were doing. Don't say anything' . . . I just quit trying . . . I'd feel like I, I wasn't worth anything.

The community also reinforced the notion that a woman's place is beside her husband.

Melissa: One time, he almost broke my back. I'm kind of scared to fall down now . . . He really beat me up . . . That's where I used to

have to hoist myself to stand up and then to sit down. That's how bad it was . . . I told that driver, I want to go to my mom's, and he said, 'No. You're going to go to your in-law's . . . I'm not taking you to your mom's when you're married. You're supposed to be at your in-laws.' But, eventually I just left. I just went to stay at my mom's 'cause I couldn't stand it.

Melissa explained to me that in the north (on the reserve), when something goes wrong (like intimate violence), the reserve residents will blame the woman, hence, the silence surrounding their abuse.

Melissa: The woman is the leader in the community. Even if she is not the Chief, she is the one who runs the community. Even if it is not visible, this is the underlying assumption. It is the rule of the woman in reserves.

Melissa remembered one time when she lied to her doctor in order to cover up the abuse that she experienced at the hands of her partner.

Melissa: There's one time, too. There's two marks here. Right here. (Pointing to her arm) It's still kind of tender. What he did was he, uhm, the stove was still hot, and he went like that. (Motioning how her partner burnt her arm on the stove) . . . And, ah, when I went to see the doctor, he says to me, 'What happened?' (Little laugh) 'I was, I went on top of the cupboard and I fell down.' (Little laugh)

Paradoxically, when men engage in intimate violence toward women, women "have to take it." The notion of women having to keep a marriage and the family

together, at all costs, is upheld within the Aboriginal community. For an Aboriginal woman, part of holding a marriage together is being able to adequately perform her wifely duties. Melissa remembered a time when her partner had broken her arm. Despite the enormous pain she was suffering, her partner forced her to go to the income tax office to sign their tax return before he would take her to the hospital. Melissa recalled that she could not put on her jacket due to the pain and swelling in her broken arm. She also recalled that this incident took place in the middle of winter.

Melissa: I was lying down. I was, then he started in on me. He just kicked me and everything . . . In the morning, oh boy [my arm] hurt. It was really painful. And then in the morning, I had to go and sign this, ah, income tax form 'cause, ah, we needed some money. I told him we have to go to the hospital. Then he says, 'Come on, put your jacket on.' But he won't put my, ah, sleeve in there. It was wide open. He made me put those (little laugh), he made me go to the income tax office to sign the paper before he took me to a hospital. (Little laugh) And then when I got there, to the hospital, the doctor checked my arm. And then he told me, 'Melissa, your arm's broken.' And I said, 'No, it isn't.' I was scared for it to be broken, you know. 'Cause I won't, I'd be kind of, like, disabled . . . I was scared f-, 'cause of him, too. You know. To help him and, ah, take care of him. Stuff like that.

In her story, Melissa demonstrates how she took on the role of caring for her partner. In most cases, the women, as adults, felt responsible for the care of their partners. As I pointed out in the preceding chapter, this role is one which was learned throughout their childhood when they were caring for their siblings (and their parents)

in an attempt to hold their broken families together.

In addition to feeling responsible for the care of their partners, many of the women felt the need to rescue their partners from the pain they were suffering as a result of the abuse that they, themselves, had experienced when they were children. Melissa disclosed to me that her partner had been abused as a child, and she had only found this out after their marriage had broken up. Like Brandi, Melissa still thinks about starting over with her ex-partner.

Melissa: Sometimes, like, I dream about it. Like, dream about him, about being together again, and maybe starting over again . . . I tell myself it wasn't only his fault. Like, I was at fault too. You know. If I had known. If I had taken time to understand him, you know. 'Cause he was at the residential school, too. And he was abused by his father. I found that out later. Way later on, too, when our marriage was broke up. And, ah, my, my mom told me, finally. About, not long ago. She told me that he was sexually abused by his dad . . . Maybe I would have listened to him. Maybe I could have helped him. You know, instead of turning into one who's violent.

Seemingly, Melissa believes that if she knew about her partner's abuse as a child, while they were still together, she could have been able to save their marriage. Thus, in accordance with her wifely expectations to nurture and stand by her man, she partially blames herself for the breakup of her marriage.

Samantha's Story

Samantha explained that when she was 12 years old, her mother decided that she was "gonna dump her off" at her auntie's place. So, she brought "a big box of stuff" and "threw [Samantha] off there." While she was living at her auntie's residence, Samantha met her first common-law partner, who was also living under her auntie's care. Although they did not become intimate until they were older, Samantha and her partner remained in an intimate relationship for twelve years.

As was the case for many of the women, soon after they began their relationship, Samantha's partner started to become violently abusive toward her. Samantha attributed much of her partner's violent behaviour to his use of alcohol. She explained that her partner started drinking when he was fourteen years of age. By the time they started dating, he was drinking quite heavily. When he'd come home from drinking, he would beat her up. If her auntie and uncle were home, they would intervene and stop the beatings. Nevertheless, Samantha took many beatings while she was with her violent partner.

Samantha: [He] started getting really abusive . . . And then, alcohol abuse. And he started really drinking lots. And then, he'd come home and beat me up when I was in the, some-, sometimes they weren't home. But if they were home, sh-, they would stop it right away. With them, that, my uncle would come and bang on the door. He'd say, 'What are you doing in there?' He says, 'Don't you, don't even hit her.' . . . 'Get out of there,' he says. 'You're not going into the room,' he said, 'if you're gonna beat her.'

Said, 'She's not her-, she's not here for that.' So, they would always intervene. And, ah, my auntie and uncle.

In time, the beatings occurred more frequently, and they increased in severity. Although Samantha did attempt to leave her violent partner on numerous occasions, she usually ended up going back to him. Although her father could not understand why she would return to her violent partner, Samantha recalled how supportive her father was to her in whatever decision she chose to make.

Samantha: The other times that I tried to leave him, I'd go to my dad. (Crying) I'd be up in the night. I'd be crying . . . And then my dad would wake up. And he'd say, (pause) (crying) he would, he would like, make fun of me. He'd say, 'My foolish girl.' He says, 'How come you're crying?' (Crying) He says, 'And he's so mean to you.' And he'd tell me, 'Don't cry,' he says. 'I'll take you home in the morning.' So he would, he'd say, 'Come on. We'll have some tea. Wake up and make me tea.' 'Cause he'd take me home.

After this particular incident, Samantha explained that her father would come and check up on her every Sunday. When he would come, he would ask Samantha if she was ready to leave her violent relationship. When she informed him that she was not, he would patiently return home until the next weekend when he would, again, come to see if Samantha was ready to leave the violent relationship.

Samantha: He started doing that. That's when he'd st-, he'd come every Sunday. Come and check up on me. But my mom never came.

It was always my dad. And I always think, like, I always think it's so funny how he used to, like, beat, beat the shit out of my mom. And, yet, I, when something would happen to me, like, he really got hurt. Like, he really backed me up. I was thinking, that's, that's weird.

Rather than leave her violent relationship, Samantha adopted the survival skills that she learned throughout her childhood. She explained that she, too, began to drink alcohol as a means to numb the pain and mental suffering that she experienced as a result of her partner's abusive behaviour.

Samantha: I didn't drink until the last year when I lived with them. (Little laugh) . . . 'Cause the beatings were getting so bad . . . I knew I was gonna get a licken. So, I was thinking, 'Well, if I'm drunk, it's not gonna hurt as much.' So, I started drinking more and more, just to numb the pain. Then, I started getting violent when I was drunk . . . I would, started fighting him back . . . I started not giving a shit about anything. I just started drinking, like, heavy.

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, when she was younger, Samantha used to be addicted to sniffing gasoline. This was her way of surviving the stressful conditions under which she lived, as a child growing up in a broken family. Samantha remembered how she almost went back to sniffing as an adult in order to take control of her violent situation and cope with the abuse that she experienced at the hands of her intimate partner.

Samantha: Well, I was addicted to, uhm, gas. I was a sniffer at one time. I

was really addicted to that when I was, uhm, maybe sixteen . . . It's the only, the cheap high. (Little laugh) . . . So, I could see why people are addicted to that. Really addictive. 'Cause I almost went back to that when I was twenty two . . . I did that for a long time.

As another means to gain control over her situation, Samantha began to contemplate more aggressive action. She explained that one day, she decided that she was not going to take any more abuse from her violent partner.

Samantha: I wanted to shoot him . . . I waited one day. Ah, 'cause I knew he was out drinking. And, ah, he, I knew he was gonna come and beat me up. And I had the kids at home . . . And they were sleeping . . . I was sitting there. And I was thinking, well, I'll give, bar is closed. He's gonna be coming here soon. And I was thinking, I don't give a shit who he's with this time. I know exactly what they're coming, I said, if he kicks the door down this time, I'll kill him. (Pause) And he, he c-, did come. I loaded the gun I stayed up with. (Pause) (Crying) But he, uhm, he couldn't get the door open. Then he, he decided to leave, and I was thinking, this is crazy. So, I wanted, I'd only end up shooting him. I might end up going to jail. So, I said, 'I don't wanna disappear. Don't mess up. It's not worth it.'

Although she was not sure whether she was emotionally strong enough to follow through with her intentions, it was at this point that Samantha knew she was ready to leave her violent partner. Consistent with the gender role expectations among Aboriginal people that women should remain with their partners under any circumstances, Samantha's mother was not so keen to this idea.

Samantha: So, I just, when my dad came that Sunday . . . I just told him I was ready to leave. And then, he says, 'Everything that's yours,' he says, 'you can come back and pick it up.' And I says, 'Okay then.' So he says, 'Don't worry about the tickets.' He says, 'I'll buy bus tickets for you and the boys.' So he took me home. And we were waiting for the bus. He was all happy. Then my ex came. He noticed all my clothes. And all the kids' clothes were missing. And he tried to come and say, uhm, he started crying now that, come back, and all this. Then my mom came out. And my mom said, 'Go and get your stuff. You're going back.' And I said, 'I'm not going back.' And she just, 'Crying for you, he loves you,' and all this. And I, she said, and, uhm, 'You made your bed there, now lay in it.' I said, 'No way.' Then my dad came out. And my dad says, uhm, he said, 'What the hell you saying to her?' He said, 'Leave her alone.' He said, 'She's decided she's leaving.' He said, 'I'm putting her on the bus.' Said, 'She's going to a women's shelter now.' And he told, he told my common-law, he said, 'You gotta leave.' Said 'Because my daughter has decided she's leaving you now.' And then my dad said, 'You had your chance. How many chances did she give you?' He says 'If, I'm tired of her always being beaten up for nothing.' Then he, he finally got in the car. And he left. And he was yelling at my mom, after. And he says, 'Why the hell did you try and make her go back there when you know it's not right for her?' And then he just, 'Get your stuff,' he says. 'I'm gonna go put y-,,' he said, 'I'll take you down to the,' and it was just down the hill, that, he says, 'Get your stuff. Get in the car.' He said, 'I'm gonna go put you on the bus.' So, and that was it. And he said, 'And no matter what, try and be strong.' He said, 'And stay at the shelter.' And he says, 'No matter how lonely you get.' So I just, I stayed there. And I kept thinking about my dad. And he said, 'You'll be lonely. You'll be crying.' He says, 'But stick it out.' I says, 'I will.'

Samantha was grateful for her father's patience and support. Even though she went on to experience subsequent violent relationships with intimate partners, she was able to end this intimate relationship before the violence reached its extreme. Some

women are not as fortunate as Samantha.

Grasping for Control

Comack (1996: 59) maintains that "all abusive relationships ultimately boil down to issues of power and control." She further claims that by focusing on resisting and coping strategies, we can uncover some of the ways in which women attempt to take control of their difficult situations. As adults, the women who participated in the research project managed the stress of their violent relationships in a variety of ways. In many cases, the women merely adopted the survival skills for self-protection that they learned throughout their childhood. For instance, one of the women who participated in the focus-group discussions would run away to escape the stress she experienced in living with her violent partner, a lesson she learned from her mother.

Participant: I end up taking off. And I always take off. You know? Like, there's no sense talking 'cause he doesn't listen to me anyways . . . So, I just take off. It feels better for me when I take off . . . [My mom] used to run away all the time. Take off on my dad because he used to beat her up all the time. So, she'd take off. And I guess that's probably where I learned it from. 'Cause when we get into arguments or argue, I just up and go. I always go. And I never knew why I used to do that. But, like, I know that it was because mom used to do this. We'd see it all the time.

As another example, Sarah engaged in drinking alcohol as a way to deal with the hurt and anger that she experienced from being abused by her intimate partner.

Drinking was also her means with which to regain control over the stressful position in which she found herself.

Sarah: I was really angry, hey. So I took it out on other people. I shouldn't have . . . Like, I just went absolutely crazy for six months. I drank just about every day. And just, like, because of the feelings. The way I got abused.

Apparently, drinking was a means of self-protection that Sarah learned as a child by watching her own parents drink. Courtney also carried the survival skills that she learned as a child into her adult life.

Courtney's Story

As Courtney struggled with the psychological scars of her childhood, she went on to experience one violent relationship after another. Her first experience of intimate violence took place when she was just 16 years of age, and they continued from there. The violence that Courtney experienced at the hands of her intimate partners included everything from verbal abuse to physical violence to sexual assault. Compounding her experiences with intimate violence was the violence she experienced, as an adult, outside of her intimate relationships. In addition to witnessing and experiencing violence at the hands of her friends and extended family members, Courtney was raped by a stranger while she was walking down the street. Both her childhood and

adult experiences with alcohol and violence have had a terrible effect upon Courtney's life.

Courtney: I've had jobs. I worked at a job, but I, I get so paranoid that I think I hear people talking about me. Like, I'm, I'm not schizophrenic or nothing, but I'm so afraid that they're gonna find out what's happened to me, who I am. I'm this ugly person. I'm this bad person. I'm a violent person. You know, it, and I think I hear all these people talking about me. And I, I think I hear them calling my name. So, when I went to work, I would stay by myself. I would associate with nobody.

As a child, Courtney "used to roam the streets a lot," drinking alcohol and taking pills. As an adult, she carried on these survival skills that she developed as a child. For her, drinking and taking pills were simply a means with which she was able to dissociate her emotions from her body and, hence, bear the pain she was suffering. I asked Courtney what the use of alcohol and pills did for her.

Courtney: They would take everything away. And they would still make me violent, too . . . And then, I wasn't afraid of nothing . . . I'm never afraid when I was drinking.

Like Sarah, Samantha and Courtney, Carol engaged in substance abuse as a way to cope with the stress in her life.

Carol's Story

Carol is in her mid-30s. She has a grade 11 education, and she is collecting social assistance benefits. For the past three years, Carol has been living, on and off, with her fourth, long-term intimate partner. Carol has seven children ranging in age from 16 months to 17 years. All of Carol's children are living under the care of Child and Family Services. Carol had been struggling to overcome an alcohol addiction since she was in her adolescent years.

Like the other women in the research project, Carol comes from a broken family. For the most part, she grew up in the city. However, due to her father's alcoholism, her parents separated quite often while she was growing up. Whenever they separated, Carol and her three siblings were also separated from each other, and they were sent to live on the reserve with one of their two sets of grandparents. As a child, Carol witnessed and experienced violence at the hands of her father, and she was often left feeling "scared, scared, scared. And unsure and alone and lonely."

Adding to the turmoil she experienced at home, Carol was continuously picked on while away at school. She did not have many friendships as a child growing up, and she did not have any form of support system. Therefore, due to the "constant stress" of the violence that she experienced as a child, both at home and while at school, Carol began to run away when she was 15 years old. Carol would return home for a couple weeks at a time, but it "wouldn't work out," so she would "end up leaving."

Carol left home for good by the time she was 17 years old.

Carol's experiences throughout her childhood had a tremendous impact upon her life. Like many of the other women who participated in the research project, Carol ran right into the arms of a violent man (at the age of 15 years), and she continued to run to violent men, one agonizing relationship after another. The violence that Carol experienced at the hands of her violent partners began early into their relationships, and they continued for extended periods of time. Carol experienced physical abuse, sexual assault, sexual jealousy, possessive and oppressive control, financial deprivation, verbal criticism, public humiliation and familial discord. She developed strong feelings of anxiety, loneliness, mistrust and powerlessness in response to the abuse she repeatedly experienced from her intimate partners. Drinking alcohol and taking street drugs became her means of coping with the abuse. Almost inevitably, Carol's frustration turned to anger.

Carol: I went in the bedroom, got the knife, came out, and was aiming for right in his chest. But he moved, and I got him in the arm. Stabbed, or whatever . . . Like, I just had enough. Because, ah, you embarrassed me. Like, here's my friends. All coming over. And he won't even let me go to the vendor with them. You know? He wouldn't let me out of his sight . . . But, he gave me a wicked beating after that. 'Cause I passed out . . . His arm was never the same after that . . . It was an outburst. It was, it was, like, he left me no choice . . . I was fed up. And I was angry. And he was acting too much like my father.

No criminal charges were laid against Carol for the stabbing incident, since her partner did not report it to the police. Carol was eventually able to escape from her violent partner, with the assistance of her mother. Although she never returned to this intimate partner, she did repeat the pattern of becoming involved in intimate relationships with violent men.

Summary

Through their stories, the women have illustrated how their childhood experiences relating to alcohol and violence have become an ordinary part of their lives. Although many of the women sought to avoid the painful circumstances of their childhoods, they inevitably adopted their experiences into their own living. Consequently, it was not unusual for the women who participated in the research project to unconsciously seek out comfort and safety in the very environments which they found themselves struggling to avoid as children.

Often while still in their adolescent years, the women became involved with violent men. Typically, the violence began early into their relationships, and it lasted for several years. More often than not, the women experienced violence at the hands of more than one intimate partner. Some women found comfort in their violent partners because their relationships represented the environment in which they were most familiar. In point of fact, many of the women grew to believe that abuse was a

sign of love. Melissa, for instance, recalled how she expected her new partner to behave in the same violent manner as her husband had behaved.

Melissa: He never hit me, and he's not the, he's very good to me. He's not abusive verbally and anything. And, ah, one time I told him that, 'Don't you love me?' And he says, 'Why?' 'How come you never hit me?' And I associated love with hit . . . That's probably why I stayed there so long.

One of the women from the focus-group discussions remembered a similar experience in which she ended an intimate relationship with one of her partners because he was not physically violent toward her.

Participant: When I finally did meet somebody, he turned out to be an asshole, too, right. But I put up with it . . . Stand your right and, you know, just be assertive . . . And when we were yelling, I'd say, 'How come you never fight me?' Like, 'How come you never punch me out?' And I'd say, 'I wanna fight, too.' Oh, I'm serious 'cause I always seen it in the, I've always seen it growing up. And now, I've got this guy that doesn't hit me. You know. Doesn't do anything to me. And then, I, I could become, he even picks me up when I'm at a party or whatever. And he brings me home to the group home or whatever. And then I, I told him one time, I said, 'Oh, I'm breaking up with you.' He goes, 'Why?' I said, 'Because there's this, you don't even, I don't think you love me.' And he goes, 'What do you mean?' 'Well, you don't hit me.' You know? 'You don't push me around. You don't boss me around.' You know. 'I'm not used to this.' You know. So I, I figured, I, to myself, I figured that he didn't love me . . . So, I got rid of him.

While at first the women found comfort in their violent relationships, within a

short period of time they soon learned that their new partners carried with them the same characteristics which they sought to avoid. Nevertheless, through victim-blaming and social censuring (in the form of what is often expected of women in terms of their gender roles), the women were pressured to remain silent about the abuse they experienced as adults. Accordingly, the women were forced to cope by continuing to employ the survival skills they learned as children. Many women developed new means of coping with the stressful conditions under which they lived, and these new means of coping often involved adopting the very skills they learned from their violent partners. In this case, the women learned to take control over their situations and survive by becoming aggressive themselves.

Adding to the historical context that was laid out in the preceding chapters, we now have some insight into the personal histories of the women who participated in the research project. Moreover, we have a better recognition of the standpoint from which these women are speaking. It is in this context that we may now direct our attention to defining women's intimate violence.

Chapter Five DEFINING WOMEN'S INTIMATE VIOLENCE

Ashley: People who end up doing things physically should have to take the consequences. Regardless whether they're female. Regardless whether they're male. It happens to the both sexes. Until women stop being treated all the time as victims, then the truth is gonna come out. Do you know what I'm saying? It's not, women are not always the victims here. And that's what society sees women as. You, you know, a helpless little, little fragile things. We are not fragile. And we're not little. And yes, we can hit just as well as anybody else. And it's not only to their spouses or to the opposite sex.

As I explained in Chapter One, women's intimate violence is a relatively new concept that has been, for the most part, inadequately defined and, hence, often misunderstood. With a limited amount of literature on the issue, women's intimate violence typically has been defined in terms of women's victimization at the hands of men. When women have not been defined as victims, they have been cast as aggressive, deceitful and conniving individuals who perpetrate violence and often get away with murder (see Pearson, 1998). While many women who engage in intimate violence have experienced various forms of abuse as children and/or adults, I maintain that women's intimate violence should not be understood solely in terms of their victimization.

Women are capable of intimate violence, and they do, under certain circumstances, initiate physical acts of aggression against their intimate partners. From the women I interviewed, I have learned that women's intimate violence runs the gamut from subtle insults to youthful pranks to intense brutality. It may take the form of slamming doors or throwing objects, punching and kicking, destroying property, verbal belittling or even stabbing. It is not always used in self-defense or as a result of provocation, and alcohol is sometimes, but not always, a factor in women's use of intimate violence. Similarly, although their partner's infidelity (or suspected infidelity) often plays a contributing factor in women's use of intimate violence, it is not always a requirement in order for an incident of violence to take place.

The women I interviewed attach a variety of meanings to their violent behaviour. While some women understand their use of intimate violence as a means of self-protection and survival, other women define it as a response to being disrespected and mistrusted. Others, still, define their violence as a way to regain order and control over the stressful situations in their lives. In any case, although they do not generally view themselves as victims, most of the women who participated in the research project do attribute their own use of intimate violence to their past experiences relating to violence, and they maintain that their own use of violent behaviour began only after they were either "fed up" with being mistreated or they "couldn't take it no more."

Self-protection and Survival

One of the ways in which the women made sense of their violent behaviour was to view it in terms of self-protection and survival. Having grown up in an environment where alcohol and violence was the norm, many of the women who participated in the research project had learned both the roles of victim and aggressor within a violent relationship.

Participant: You see more and more aggression in girls than you've ever seen. I think it stems from, uhm, children growing up in an environment, ah, seeing and hearing what parents do. And learning from that. It's a part, it's normal. You know. It's, you know, they're seeing, you know, their, their dad beat up their mom. Or they've seen their mom throwing whatever they can grab to throw back at the dad . . . Kids are gonna think that that's part, that's normal. You know?

For a long time, the women remained submissive to the violence they experienced both as children and adults. As the violence in their lives intensified, so too did the women's need to defend themselves against further harm and injustice.

Participant: They're standing up for who they are. And, you know, it, you know, girl power. All that kind of stuff. Uhm, but if they're coming from homes that are already dysfunctional, uhm, and don't have the proper education . . . They think that they're doing the right thing. They think that they're standing up and, and doing what they should be, you know?

As a means of self-protection and survival, many of the women came to the

understanding that they were left with no choice but to become aggressive themselves.

Juliette's Story

Recall from Chapter Three that Juliette was sent to live with her biological family at the age of 10 years. Finding herself in the midst of a broken family plagued by poverty, alcohol and violence, she soon learned that in order to survive, she would have to become tough and develop a strong offence. Juliette remembered a conversation she had with her Godmother shortly before returning to her biological family:

Juliette: My Godmother, she told me, like, 'Try to be strong,' you know. 'You're gonna be living with your mom' and, you know, 'You're gonna be,' you know, 'You're gonna be lonely for us,' and whatever. 'But don't let nobody bring you down,' and stuff like that . . . My definition of it, 'don't bring me down' was, like, if somebody's gonna mess with me, then I'm gonna have to hurt them, whatever. And that's the way I thought about it. That's the way I was, like, oh, I stand my ground. I'm not gonna let nobody push me around. That's all. 'Cause I didn't, like, my brothers and sisters, like, they never backed me up or anything. For anything. So, I was literally always my, by myself.

One of Juliette's survival strategies was to "make a name" for herself as leader of a gang. This involved taking on the role of aggressor. In many instances, Juliette would initiate violent attacks on other individuals and, more often than not, she would explode at the slightest provocation. Throughout the latter part of her youth, Juliette often found herself picking fights with other individuals.

Juliette: I was, like, really mean and people were intimidated. And they, I had, I had a name for myself. Like, I still have a name for myself out there . . . If I didn't like somebody, like, there was this one girl, okay . . . This one girl that liked my brother. And I didn't like her 'cause she is a snobby old cunt. And I said, one day, I just wanted to hurt her so bad. So, I saw her one day . . . I saw her waiting for the bus . . . I went up to her. And I was, like, 'So, you like my brother, hey?' And she's, like, 'Yeah. I like your brother.' I said, 'Well, do you know I don't like you?' And she goes, 'Well, I don't like you either.' And I said, 'Well, that's good.' And I started giving her a licken right there.

Juliette remembered one girl in particular who she would regularly pick on and beat up while in school.

Juliette: I beat her up everyday. (Little laugh) I beat her up for her lunch money. I beat her up for her jacket. I beat her up for her shoes. I beat her up for almost anything 'cause I didn't like her. I just didn't like her. I didn't like the way she looked. I didn't like the way she smiled. I didn't like the way she dressed . . . I beat her up for lots of things . . . I was just really judgmental about people. Like, I never ever really got to know anybody but my friends . . . When I met somebody else new, I'd just look at them, and I'm, like, 'I don't like her.' That's just the way I used to be.

Juliette explained that her violent behaviour began partly in response to being treated differently because she is Aboriginal.

Juliette: I was a straight 'A' student . . . But, I was just really mean. Like, I'd beat up a 'white' boy in my class in front of my teacher with a chalk brush. (Little laugh) Well, he called me an 'Indian wench.' (Little laugh) So, I got mad, and I said, 'You want to see an Indian wench?' And I just started hitting him with that chalk

brush . . . That's when I started seeing the light, the way it was, to me . . . If somebody looks at me, and I don't like the way they look at me, I'm, like, what? You never saw an Indian wearing, you know, whatever, like, my shoes. And they're, like, 'There's that Indian wearing poor shoes,' whatever. I don't know. I just see things like that. And, and like, when I drive, whatever, and if somebody looks at me, and we're parked there or whatever, I'm like, 'What? You never seen an Indian driving before?' And like, I don't know. It's just. It's probably a little bit of racism in there, too, I guess. (Little laugh)

Like many of the other women, Juliette carried a lot of anger inside herself, and she attributed her own use of violence to her childhood experiences relating to alcohol and violence.

Juliette: I have a lot of anger in my, in me right now. Like, still today, I have lots of anger, and I have lots of hatred. And I just, that's how I let it out. I just let it out. It just, I just build it up. And when somebody pisses me off, that's when it will come out.

As an adult, Juliette continued to fight with other individuals who she claimed had "pissed [her] off." For instance, Juliette remembered a time when she beat up her sister's partner because he interrupted their "girls' night out."¹⁵

Juliette: Me and my sister, we always have girls' night out. Like, me and

¹⁵ Juliette maintained that she was never really close with any of her siblings, except for her younger brother. She did, however, have a best friend with whom she grew up. Juliette explained that she and her best friend "adopted one another as sisters." When she refers to her sister, she is, in reality, referring to her best friend.

my sister and my friends. We always had girls' night out, hey. And we were, like, 'No boyfriends. No boyfriends whatsoever tonight.' And they're, like, 'Yeah. Okay. Right on.' And all of a sudden my sister's boyfriend comes walking along, and he's, like, trying to stay with my sister. And I'm, like, 'What did I say? I said no boyfriends, man.' And she looked at me. It's, like, 'I know.' And then she tried telling him. My s-, 'This is just us, us girls tonight. We don't want no guys around,' or whatever. And he started getting mad at her, hey. And he, he just said, 'Fuck!' And he went, he, he slammed his beer down like that (motioning slamming a beer bottle on the table), and it busted. And everybody got glass on them, all over the place. And I, I looked at him. I said, 'You're fuckin' dead.' I said, 'You're dead.' I pointed at him . . . I grabbed him. I picked him up . . . I started dragging him outside. And I gave him a licken outside. And I kicked him in the head and everything. Like, he was down on the ground. And he's, like, getting his breath. And I kicked him in the face. And I just, (sigh) I, I gave him a fat lip, black eye, everything. The works. (Little laugh) Like, I, ah, I bruised two of his ribs. And I just told him. I said, 'You want to fuckin' do that in front of my sister again?' I said, 'You want to fuckin' threaten her like that?' I said, 'Don't you ever treat her like that again.'

Juliette remembered another incident where she beat up her own partner. They were six months into their relationship, and they were out at a party. Juliette's partner became jealous when he observed Juliette laughing with another man. He kicked her in the face, and she quickly reacted with violence.

Juliette: He got mad at me for talking to this one guy. And, and, like, he's not even attractive. Like, I wasn't even attracted to him or anything. And then he got mad about that. 'Cause we were laughing. And then he kicked me in the face. And, oh, I just blew up right there . . . I had a few boyfriends that did that to me though. There was about five of them . . . [My last boyfriend] hit

me once. And, oh, that was the last time he ever hit me . . . I hit him back. I was, like, I'm not gonna sit here and let you hit me. So, I hit him back. And then that's when I bit him . . . With [my first boyfriend], I just sat there and, like, took it, hey. 'Cause I was so in love with him. Like, I thought I was in love with him . . . But then with the others, like, after I found out that I could, ah, beat up [my first boyfriend], that's when I started, 'Oh, fuck. I can beat up a guy.' Then that's when it started. Like, I started beating up, like, if I ever got hit, I always fought right, fought back . . . When somebody hits me, I'm gonna hit back. I'm not gonna sit there anyway and say, 'Yeah. It's alright.'

In addition to being physically violent to her partners, Juliette would be verbally abusive.

Juliette: I was really mean when I was, when I put down people, I put them down. Flutter them . . . I used to call [my partner], say, 'You're just no good for nothing,' and stuff like that. 'You're an asshole.' . . . Like, 'I could find somebody better than you.' Like, I literally hurt him really bad just by saying things that I said to him . . . I think that's one thing that hurts the most. If he, if he hits your emotions like that. But he can't hurt mine because, I mean, you did that to me, so I did that to you. Like, 'You're not the only guy out there.' But he tried to make me feel that nobody wanted me. And he just about did it . . . Every time he calls me a name, I hurt him. Like, I literally hurt him . . . My mom and them used to call me a bitch. I don't need to hear it from my boyfriends. I heard it from my, the people that are supposed to love me . . . It just hurts to hear somebody calling me that.

Juliette disclosed that when she engages in violent behaviour, she sees herself as both a victim and a perpetrator of violence.

Juliette: I was a victim because I was always getting beaten from my boyfriends, from my mom, from my dad. And I don't know, perpetrator because I, I went out and looked for it. I went out, and I hunted. Just, like, I was hunting for it. Just to give somebody a licken. That's just the way I was, I guess . . . I went out, and I looked for somebody to shit on . . . I won't go looking for it anymore like I used to. I used to get a kick out of it.

Juliette no longer goes out looking for violence to happen. However, when I asked her about how her own use of violence has affected her life, she expressed that it was a positive experience. She claimed that she would not have "the name" that she has today if it was not for her own use of violence. Nobody pushes her around, and nobody walks on her. Her friends and siblings still telephone her whenever they need someone to "fight their battles for them because they know [she] can do it."

Juliette was the exception when it came to the women's use of violence. For the other women, their use of violence was a negative experience in their lives. While Juliette did go out "hunting" for someone with whom to fight, the other women rarely "looked for trouble." Nevertheless, for some women, it appeared that trouble was never hard to find.

Brenda's Story

Violence has always been a part of Brenda's life, and Brenda has engaged in many fights, particularly throughout her adult years. Her fights have taken place within her

intimate relationships and with other individuals in her community. They often occur "all of a sudden" when there is "just something nice happening," and they usually have "nothing to do with alcohol. It's just fighting." Brenda stressed that she never looks for trouble, nor does she ever initiate her violent encounters.

Brenda: I try to take care of myself all the time . . . That's what I have to do . . . There's lots of times I fought. Jeez. But I never started it, you know. They start it . . . I don't go looking for it. So, I don't, I'm not a trouble maker. I don't go looking for trouble . . . I never look for trouble. It just happens . . . I am just looking out for myself.

Brenda explained that she will engage in violence only after someone "touches her first" or "says something awful" to her and she gets "mad for them saying that." The way Brenda made sense of her violence was to see it as a way "to make things right." For Brenda, violence means that she's "gotta speak up for herself." She remembered one incident in particular where she fought a guy who was calling down her friend.

Brenda: There was one time I remember fighting a guy. It was none of my business. He was calling my friend down. I just went for a ride with her. And she might be a slut and all that. He was calling her every name in the book, you know. You name it. And she wasn't doing nothing. She just sat there taking it all . . . I was sitting in the front. And he was still doing that. And I just, I couldn't take it anymore. I just turned around and ploughed him in the face, hey. And then we both went at it. He was a big guy. But, like, fat, you know. And I remember just using everything. And my feet.

I was upside down and everything. And I wouldn't let him hit me.

In terms of intimate violence, Brenda remembered many times when she engaged in violent behaviour toward her intimate partners.¹⁶ Most notable were her experiences of violence with her first long-term partner. She claimed that although they had plenty of good times together, there were many bad times, too.

Brenda: We had, ah, bad times and we fought. Awful, awful. Like, (sigh) one time, I don't know what happened, but I remember throwing boiling water. I just finished making tea for him to, when he came home after work. And I threw that cup of tea in his face. It was boiling hot. He just laughed. We didn't even fight. He just laughed. And he says, 'Holy fuck! That was hot.' And I said, 'I know that. I just made it.' But, well, things like that . . . We had a nice, good times, you know. But it's just that we fought a lot.

While Brenda experienced violence at the hands of her first partner, she claimed that she would be alright as long as she never let her partner get a hold of her. Brenda theorized that this was her best defence with which to handle herself when she fought with her partner.

Brenda: I'd fight like a guy . . . Like, the way we fought. And I, I, as long as he didn't get a hold of me, I could, like, handle him. You know how it is . . . I would make sure he would stay down, hey. You

¹⁶ Brenda had two long-term partners throughout her adult years. Her first partner is now deceased. He passed away following a sudden illness. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Brenda has been involved with her second long-term partner, on and off, for the past 10 years.

know, hit him with something . . . When I fight, I just go between the legs . . . Kicking them between the legs, hard. And they go down. And then you just hold them down. They can't do nothing. You just step on them . . . That's how you have to fight them.

Brenda remembered another incident when she was violent toward her intimate partner. Brenda became angry when her partner decided to call her names. I asked her why she felt anger at being called these certain names. Like the other women, Brenda reasoned, "because I'm not. They aren't true."

Brenda: [My partner] called me every name in the book. And he said no man will ever want me. But he's wrong . . . He called me a whore and a cunt . . . I punched him in the nose for it. He was driving the van. I didn't even think of it. That, just the blood shot out. And he just about started crying. But he just fucked off 'cause I was, I was gonna fight him. 'Cause he called me that . . . I just fuckin' laughed at him . . . I know what a whore is, and I know what a cunt is. And I'm neither one.

Another woman from one of the focus-group discussions shared Brenda's anger in being called names by her intimate partner.

Participant: It's degrading . . . It makes me mad and then I start calling him back, whatever. And then if he pushes it, ah, then I start hitting . . . It's, like, if you're gonna call me a name, call me something truthful. You know? Don't sit there and call me something that I'm not. And it just infuriates me that somebody will call me those kinds of names. . . You hear it long enough, you just want to reach out and, you know, kind of strangle or, you know, slap the, you know. 'I'm not this. Why are you calling me this?'

In addition to protecting herself from both physical and psychological harm, Brenda explained that she would engage in violent behaviour if it meant protecting her children.

Brenda: He hit my baby once . . . I could of killed him, you know. I could j-, he's got long hair. I could, ah, just grabbed him and throw him down, you know. And I could, ah, did something 'cause there was knives around me, here and there, you know . . . But I just told him, 'Don't you ever hit her like that again. If I ever know you're hitting her like that,' you know, 'I'm gonna do something to you.' I'll probably fuckin' kill him.

While Brenda claimed that she does not intentionally set out to hurt other individuals, she has found herself involved in numerous incidents of violence. Like Juliette, Brenda's siblings still call upon her for "back up" when they find themselves involved in troubled situations. Brenda explained that her own use of violence has had a negative effect on her life in that she has been labelled as "going crazy," and she has been somewhat ostracized within her community because of her violent behaviour. One of the women who participated in the focus-group discussions explained this aspect of how women who engage in violent behaviour are generally treated differently by both men and women in society.

Participant: Women are, you know, perceived to be the nurturers and, and all that kind of stuff. So, they're looking at a woman who, who, who's violent as, (pause) as, (pause) they have a really poor judgement on her. You know. She's, you know, either had the

drug problem or she's had an alcohol problem or, you know, she's just uneducated and there's something wrong with them. A loose cannon. Because women aren't supposed to lose control. Women are the ones that are supposed to be the caregivers. The ones who, that'll talk somebody through every step. So, when she becomes violent, (pause) it's not part of her, uhm, look at, uhm, role . . . I think they're ostracized. I think they're uhm, uhm, (pause) whispered about. I think that people generally just don't want to socialize. They don't want the time of day. You know. They're marked. They're diseased or something. You know? I think that's what people first, that's what they do . . . Even women judge them.

For Brenda, this attitude is "sickening" because she maintains that a lot of women's intimate violence only comes about as a result of the "things that happen to them with their partners." Courtney offered support to Brenda's claim by explaining that "women are just lashing out for what's happened to them in their life."

Courtney: Women are not supposed to be violent . . . This is the year 2000. And now that women are fighting back, we're looked at as, ah, as the bad people because, because women are now fighting back. I don't believe that. If they only knew half of what women have been through.

Melissa's Story

I asked Melissa about her own experiences with violence. She explained that as a child and adolescent, she never really engaged in violent behaviour. However, there was one incident where she clearly remembered acting out violently. Like Juliette, Melissa's violent behaviour began in response to her experiences with racism. She remembered

an incident that took place on a city transit bus when she was a teenager.

Melissa: This one time, it always sticks, sticks to me about the, there were three of us girls. We just got on a bus . . . We were sitting way on the bus. Uhm, suddenly, it kept, ah, you know, just, ah, you know, those little, ah, sunflower seeds? With the shells? I noticed them falling. And then, we were looking around to see who's doing that . . . And then that girl said, and then she was, ah, you know, using all those racial words and everything . . . And then, ah, when she got off (little laugh), we got off, too. And then, we'd cornered her. (Laugh) . . . The three of us girls. We were just taunting her . . . I remember that because that was the first time I really, you know, tried to do something about this . . . That's the first time. I, like, I used to take it before.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Melissa entered into an arranged marriage at the age of 17 years. This relationship was characterized by psychological and physical abuse. For the longest time, Melissa passively took her partner's abuse. However, she eventually came to a point in her life where she felt that she could no longer sit back and continue to be abused by her partner. Feeling that she had no choice in the matter, Melissa "learned to fight back." She remembered how she intentionally set out to hurt her partner, both physically and psychologically.

Melissa: I learned to fight back. I had, I had it all. I had enough of it. I wanted to hurt him. I started going out with other guys. I started drinking. I started being, ah, abusive myself.

One of the participants from the focus-group discussions also remembered how

she set out to hurt her intimate partner after being abused by him for many years.

Participant: In my relationship, through his abuse, uhm, when I would, when I would be able to get out of the house, uhm, I would be, ah, a complete social butterfly, in all the wrong ways. You know. It would just be, it would, I would be so angry at him, that I would want to talk to each and every man that was around, and, and know that, oh, he's watching me. And I'm, I'm doing it to make him feel, to make him hurt. I'm doing it to make him hurt. Even though, you know, of course, you're gonna face the consequences once you're outside. (Little laugh) . . . You play on their insecurities. You know, like, they, they already, you know, have these issues, so you're, and you know what they are. So, you just play on those insecurities.

This woman further remembered that when she finally left her violent partner after 12 devastating years, she found herself behaving very much like him. Similar to many of the other women who participated in the research project, she explained that she picked up on her partner's abusive behaviour and carried this behaviour into her own living.

Participant: When I was in my relationship, it was violent. Uhm, and when I finally left that, that relationship, uhm, I found myself using the same technique that their dad would use toward me. Uhm, I would find myself using those same things towards [my daughters]. So, mine was a learned, learned behaviour . . . It would just get rockier and rockier and rockier. And it would get more violent. Whether it was physical or verbal . . . You're angry. And you're, you're revengeful. You're, you know, more or less, you wanna be able to do what he's doing.

Melissa remembered the incident that marked the turning point in her life. Her partner frequently engaged in adulterous relationships with other women. On this one occasion, Melissa confronted him on his adulterous behaviour.

Melissa: One time, he, we were standing there and his girlfriend was on the phone . . . I told him, 'I don't want her phoning here anymore.' You know? 'I don't want you doing this.' . . . 'We're supposed to be a couple.' You know. 'Not alright what you're doing.' And then, I was standing there by the window and then, all of a sudden, he threw this, a coffee table. He threw it at me. Ha. But I was blocking the window so I wouldn't smash the window. 'Cause that wasn't even our house. We were just keeping somebody's home . . . Then after that, ah, he fell asleep . . . Then I ran into the closet and I grabbed a rifle. But I wasn't thinking of using the rifle as a, to shoot with. I was just thinking of using that, the blunt end. To hit him . . . I knew I wanted to fend for myself against him . . . But you knew there was something stronger than him. You know. I knew there was a thing more powerful than him . . . Then I thought, I went for a walk, and I came home. [My brother-in-law] saw me. And then he, like, 'Don't do that. You shouldn't do that.' . . . He packed it away for me. But, you know, at that time, I thought to myself, you know, I'm starting to fend for myself. I have to start . . . After that, too, like, with knives, too. I started thinking that way. Like, to have a knife for protection.

The fact that Melissa felt the need to grab the gun because it represented power is a clear indication of the power imbalance that existed between Melissa and her husband. Melissa remembered another incident where she felt the need to use a weapon in order to "even the score." Again, this incident centred around her husband's adulterous behaviour. Melissa recalled that she and her husband were at a

drinking party. She had gone to bed, but after some time, she had gotten up for a drink. She caught her husband and another woman intimately involved with one another. Although Melissa's husband was drinking at the time, Melissa was not.

Melissa: We were at this, his sister's place. And I was there. And he was there. And this, this girl. And then, ah, I got kind of mad at them. And they just tell me they're friends. But, I got up, and then I went to have, to the kitchen. And there was a big wine bottle. And I grabbed that wine bottle and just hit him on the head. And it just smashed. And then there was just blood. You know . . . I was just so sick of (little laugh), oh, I guess, everything 'cause, you know, ah, 'I'm sorry I didn't,' and, ah, 'shouldn't be doing that.' You know. Just, running around . . . And this one's kind of, yet, she was sitting on him . . . But, I seen that before, hey. But, just so fed up with it.

Melissa explained her own use of intimate violence as a form of self-protection. Even though her violent behaviour did not always take place in direct response to the physical violence that she experienced at the hands of her partner, Melissa – like Brenda – viewed her own use of violence as a means of defending not only her physical safety, but also her psychological well-being.

Melissa: Protection. I wanted to protect myself. 'Cause of all the stuff I got from him. You know, beating me up and, and, ah, hitting me and a lot of stuff. A lot of stuff he did to me. Just talking about it, you know, some things creep up, you know, and, like, this one time, you know, his buddies were at my place . . . He tore off all my clothes in front of them . . . Stuff like that. But everything, it gets to a point where you don't want to take any of that anymore . . . It's not so much the anger. It's more self-defense. You know,

when he gets mad at me, and I get mad at myself. It's more, like, to get him off me. By the way he talks. And the way he acts. And the way he is . . . He would just start being mean. And he, like, he just swears at me and stuff like that . . . I just think, ah, it's more when he starts getting really angry. And then, I have to try and do something to defend myself.

I asked Melissa if she thought of herself as a victim or a perpetrator when she engaged in violence. Even though the majority of her violence was used in response to her partner's offensive behaviour, she does not view herself simply as a victim.

Melissa: I'm just so tired of seeing myself as a victim in all this. And I don't want to be a victim anymore. I still see myself as a victim, but I don't. Like, I, there's sometimes when I think about my school. Like, sometimes I want that, too. That life . . . At first, I'm, ah, just thinking of myself as a victim. You know. Somebody who is trying to help themselves. You know. But then, after a while, I start thinking about it. You know, how, how am I using this stuff, you know. It's as if I'm trying to hurt somebody 'cause, you know, I'm trying to get rid of somebody, somehow. I don't really see myself as a victim. I just, right now? I just think of myself as, ah, somebody who's trying to protect herself. Somebody who's trying to fight back.

Ashley, too, objected to the word, "victim."

Ashley: Now that's the word that has to go away . . . You can't say victim, one victim . . . Take the same blame. Because it does take two to, to come to that point. That's where I'm saying they have to work it out. Because that word I hate. Victim. Everybody's capable of doing something. They're both doing it. They should be both responsible to work it out.

Like many of the other women, Melissa explained that she was afraid of her own capacity for violence. Primarily for this reason, Melissa decided that the best thing for her would be to end her relationship with her husband.

Melissa: Sometimes, I think maybe sometime I might grab something, some rock item. You know, like, maybe a knife or something. And I'm kind, kind of scared to, you know . . . That's where I got kind of scared. Like, what if, what if I killed him? . . . I just got to a point where I don't want to hurt him . . . I was scared for my own, you don't want to be, I don't want to be responsible if something happens to him.

Recall from Chapter Four that Melissa has thought about rekindling her relationship with her violent partner. However, the one thing that keeps her from doing this is fear. She is afraid of her own potential to seriously harm her ex-husband.

Melissa: Now I'm kind of scared to, to go back to him because I start the violence. Because I know now, I'm not just gonna, I'm not gonna take this, take it. And, ah, if I have to do something, I would. (Little laugh) And, ah, that's the feeling I have now.

Melissa's own use of intimate violence has created some degree of distress for herself and her family. She is particularly distraught over the impact her use of violence has had upon her daughter.

Melissa: I'm not violent with [my new partner]. But I remember one time, I got really verbally abusive. I'd scream at him. And loud. I went to visit him up north, and this lady kept phoning. I told him, you

know, I, I was just screaming my head off at him. I just started yelling at him. And, ah, I was just so angry. The first time he seen me like that, hey. I said, you know, 'I came to visit you and this lady keeps phoning. And you keep telling me you don't even know who's doing that. But I know you do, or this wouldn't be happening.' . . . I just threw questions to him, and I was yelling at him. And I was very angry at him. But, I didn't think of, you know, hitting him or, you know . . . I just call him names, like, he is being a coward and stuff like that . . . I was just screaming at him . . . I could tell he was kind of shocked, too . . . I was doing that in front of [my daughter]. And then I got really, I just broke down. After, I said to her, 'Sorry. I d-, I never wanted to make a, to witness something like that.' You know. And then, ah, my little girl, she's crying away. And she says to me, 'Don't ever talk to daddy like that.' Like, she kept saying to me, 'I hate you! I hate you for being mean to dad.' And, 'You hurt his feelings.' (Little laugh) So, I went and, I never meant to do that in front of her. It was just so hard that time.

Melissa is aware of her own capacity for violence. Regardless, she knows that this type of behaviour is not right.

Melissa: Even if it's just for self-defense, you know, it's just, it's still not right. The, to use it as that or to reason it out like that. You know. I mean, uhm, if I'm gonna say that, you know, I'm gonna fight back 'cause, or I'm gonna hurt this person because that person's hurting me, you know, or maybe, maybe I'm gonna really hurt him really bad, you know, physically or something . . . I don't think that's the right, I don't know how to put it. I don't think it's right to, the way I'm thinking. And that, that's where I think I have something, and I'm gonna be needing help. You know, 'cause of the violence. The violence part of, inside me. And that I haven't really dealt with but, I just, uhm, if I wanted to do something to this person, just, say, if a person comes, you know, to frighten me or, or, you know. Like, to think I wanna, things I wanna, I wanna do something to that person. You know? Control the

violence, like.

Ashley shares Melissa's feelings.

Ashley: Women have to defend themselves, to a point. Okay. But that still does not give them the right, and even for myself, to slap somebody. It does not because we can have control over our anger . . . Because it's not worth it.

While women like Melissa, Brenda and Juliette may view their own use of violence as a means of self-protection and survival, some women define it in terms of their own feelings of disrespect and mistrust.

Disrespect and Mistrust

Thus far, we have learned that the women who participated in the research project have experienced a great deal of abuse at the hands of their intimate partners. Not only is this type of behaviour physically offensive, it is also psychologically damaging. While it is often seen as a means with which to gain power and control over the women, this type of violence may also be seen as the ultimate form of disrespect. In response, some women have resorted to their own use of intimate violence.

Carol's Story

Like Juliette, Carol carries a lot of anger inside herself, and she often engages in violent

behaviour as a result of this anger. Carol attributes much of her violent behaviour to her childhood experiences relating to violence. When I asked Carol about her own use of violence, she clearly remembered that her first outburst of anger occurred when she was in grade six.

Carol: I'd be angry a lot. Angry over things that were going on in life. The unfairness of things that I've seen and I, that I thought were wrong. That I knew were wrong. Such as the way children treated, treated other children . . . And, ah, because I was Aboriginal . . . Always looked at differently . . . Grade six was the first outburst of anger that I remember that was violent . . . I threatened the whole classroom that I would kill them. I would bring a knife to school and kill them if they teased me anymore. That's how angry I got . . . I only had two friends in the classroom . . . And so, I hung out with them. So, this one time, this was, like, uhm, in the middle of the school year by then. And a lot of times I was teased already and kicked and stuff like that. And I wouldn't do anything. So, this one day, my girlfriend, one of the two girls that were my friends, she kicks me in front of the classroom and laughs. The teacher's not there. I picked up the chair from the desk, and I threw it at her. And she caught it. And everybody just, like, they were laughing when she wa-, that, you know, when she kicked me. And she was, she made fun of me. But, like, I said, I thought, 'That's it.' And I could, I just snapped. And I grabbed a chair, and I threw it at her. And then I said, 'Don't you ever fuck around with me again.' And then I pointed at the, the whole classroom. 'Any of yous ever fuckin' tease me again, I'll bring a knife to school, and I'll fuckin' kill you.' And, like, I didn't swear. I didn't do, before that, like, ooh. (Pause) (Crying) And, ah, that's when it started . . . It was betrayal. It was, like, being laughed at. It was, I hated it. 'Cause they would laugh at me a lot. You know, when I was hurt or all that stuff . . . She was supposed to be my friend. And she did it in front of all these people that always teased me. I was left out.

After this incident, Carol maintained that she never really engaged in violent behaviour again, until she met her first partner at the age of 15 years. Although this partner was never violent toward Carol, she was violent toward him.

Carol: I'd punch him and kick him and hit him. He would just try to s-, stop my punches. Try to hold me . . . I'd be scared of losing him . . . I was unsure. And I was all, and sometimes, I'd think that he's making fun of me and, him and his friends, or whatever, people. But we smoked a lot of weed then. So, a lot of things that were said, I didn't hear. So, I'm not sure if that was a fact or not.

Much like Brenda, Carol claimed that she would never go out looking for a fight, but she would often end up in them. She explained that much of her fighting took place in response to her own feelings of insecurity, mistrust and sexual jealousy.

Carol: I'd fight women. I'd fight, yeah. Jealousy, drunkenness, uhm, stupid . . . I didn't like fighting, so I didn't really pick fights, but I'd end up in them . . . [My first partner] was extremely handsome. And we're young. And, and yeah. I, I found out a few times that he was fooling around here and there . . . And then he'd confuse me by saying he, he, by lying. Denying it. So, I'd be more violent.

With the exception of her first intimate partner, Carol has experienced a tremendous amount violence at the hands of numerous men. She has been beaten up, forcibly confined, publically humiliated, socially isolated and threatened with death by her partners. She remembered how her second partner would beat her severely,

and he often left her feeling embarrassed and ashamed.

Carol: He'd keep me isolated. He'd humiliate me. He'd spit on me. He'd h-, hit me and, and he, he didn't care where, in public. He, he'd kick me so I'd, on my knees. I'd be scared and, and wonder why he's acting that way when I'm trying so hard (sigh) to be good to him . . . I would say, 'Fine. You fuckin' asshole.' And stuff like that. He'd be physical, so then after a while, I'd stop saying those things or get beat.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Carol ended up stabbing her second partner in retaliation for the shame and embarrassment that he caused her. Up until this time, Carol had not reacted violently to her partner's abuse. However, from this relationship onward, Carol vowed that she would no longer sit back and allow herself to be beaten or abused by another man. She remembered that her next partner tried to push her around a few times, but she quickly made him aware of the fact that she was unwilling to put up with this type of behaviour.

Carol: He did push me a few times . . . I'd fight him, and make it harder for good. Ah, I'd tried, uhm, I'd punched him up the nose. Like, that one, he was yelling. He was standing, yelling at me. And, 'Who the fuck is he?' You know? And I was told I was lucky I didn't send the bone up to his brain. But I was purposely trying to harm him.

Carol explained that she grew up watching her father continually disrespecting her mother by physically abusing her, calling her down and yelling at her. The yelling

is what bothered Carol the most about her father's offensive behaviour because he would often yell at Carol and then laugh at her when she cried in response to her hurt emotions. Understandably, then, much of Carol's violent behaviour took place in response to being disrespected by her partners.

Carol: Well, being, uhm, feeling like I was a prisoner. Ah, they'd, they'd almost, ah, ah, start behaving like they, ah, they owned me. They didn't want me to, ah, go out . . . They wouldn't want me to got out with my friends. And, ah, or they'd start accusing me, ah, s-, you know, sleeping around. Or they would sleep around . . . I would trust them. And I would, ah, (pause) I would think I would be helping them . . . All of them have been criminals. So, right there, ah, I guess there was no trust right there . . . It would turn into, ah, me being easily talked into things. Situations that I wouldn't wanna, that I didn't, wasn't comfortable in. And I would go along with it, even though I'd be angry inside about it. But I'd think, well, this thing, it really means a lot to them, so I'll do it. And I'd go ahead and end up being very resentful about it later. And it would just keep building up and building up. Because I was always thinking about the partner and putting my feelings aside . . . They've gotten to know me and, and, and the life I had lived before them. So then, they'd throw that in my face and stuff. And so, I'd be angry about that. And then, it would be, after hearing that over and over again, sometimes not even twice, (little laugh) I'd, I'd, I'd flip out . . . I'd just throw things . . . I'd go after them physically. I'd be so frustrated. Uhm, or I would, ah, take off. I'd be, I'd, but then I'd go and abuse myself by going out and drinking and, and getting into trouble and, and doing things that I think will hurt the other, the person . . . But instead, it was really hurting me . . . They don't even care. You know. I, and I wasted my time doing this. And I wasted my whole time with this person. So, like, stuff like that would get me.

When I asked Carol if she would provide me with some examples of the type of

violence that she would use against her intimate partners, she disclosed that her use of intimate violence included everything from little pranks such as "spiking their drinks with dish soap or something like that" to severe physical aggression such as the "calculated" stabbing of her second partner. Carol recalled that she used to "practice" the aggressive techniques that she planned to use on her husband.¹⁷

Carol: I'd practice, uhm, on the bed with a baseball bat. Pretending he's on the bed. And I would just go nuts on the bed. And I would think of ways to doing him in. To kill him . . . Like, there was no way out unless I went through this person. And that, that person had to be dead or, like, completely, well, mostly dead in order for me to be free. That's awful, that feeling. That feeling of wanting somebody just gone.

Carol remembered an incident where she knew that she had to get out of her violent relationship with her husband. She claimed that she "got so violent" in this relationship that if she did not end it soon after this incident had occurred, "there would be a dead person in the morning, and it wasn't gonna be [her]."

Carol: It was just getting too much. Like, one of us were gonna, like, we're gonna kill each other. And, like, he had, ah, registered guns. We had about seven, eight guns in the home . . . He always had them beside him. And he was obsessed by them

¹⁷ Sometime around her mid-20s, Carol met and married one of her violent partners. They were involved in an intimate relationship for approximately five and a half years, four of which they were legally married. Carol expressed that she experienced a great deal of mutual violence while she was involved in this intimate relationship.

. . . This one incident, he started loading the gun 'cause I was gonna phone my mother . . . We're coming back from out of town . . . And he was arguing . . . We stopped at a gas station. And I got out of the truck. And I went to the phone booth. And then he, he picked up the gun, and he started loading it. And he says, 'Go ahead. Phone your mom. Phone, phone the cops. I don't give a shit.' And I went, 'Fuck you,' I says, hey. And I, fuck, I opened the door. The driver's door. And I hit him. And he, he grabbed me and my glasses . . . So he shut the door, right. And, and continued to load the gun. So, I went running around to the other side of the truck, jumped in, and here's, here he is, sitting there on his arse. So, I jumped in, and I go like that. And he's got the gun like this, right. So that we're like this. (Motioning two people struggling over a gun) I'm, I'm having my hand over his. And he's got the gun loaded. And, like, we're going like this, hey. And, 'You fuckin' let go of the gun.' 'No, you fuckin' let go of the gun.' Like, I didn't care. I was so, I was so angry. And if it went off, I was hoping it would hit him. But that was, that was the point. That was, helped a lot of my, like, I did not care if I, I wanted that gun to go off. I was so angry. And, uhm, we both let go after, (little laugh) after a while. And, ah, unloaded the gun and put it away and that and came back to the city . . . No one knew that that was going on . . . They had no idea.

I asked Carol if she thought of her own use of intimate violence as a form of self-defense against the violence that she experienced at the hands of her intimate partners. Like many of the other women, she explained that her violent behaviour was more like a response to being "fed up" with her intimate partners' lack of respect for her. In many instances, the disrespect she experienced from her intimate partners merely reminded Carol of her father's own abusive behaviour.

Carol: It would be more like fed up. And then self-defense . . . Just

saying, 'Fuck. This is bull shit I'm in again.' . . . He was acting like he would love me. But then, he was going and seeing his ex-girlfriend . . . Using my phone to phone her long distance . . . He said it was o-, you know, there's nothing wrong with, you know, me talking to her. And I believed him. Because I was, I didn't know . . . I would believe these men . . . He'd go out, and I, home, whatever . . . I feel like I'm gonna snap. Ah, I feel betrayed and hurt. And I feel like, I would, like, I won't put up with what my mom put up with. Forget it . . . I've had enough. And, ah, (pause) feeling scared . . . I want to be heard. I want to be believed in. I want to be understood . . . It would be, ah, them not paying attention to me or, like, not hearing what I'm saying. And them jumping to, ah, assumptions or conclusions. And, ah, or just, just totally shutting me off. And, and just going by, uhm, my actions, I guess, more than listening to me . . . I'm also angry at the fact that they didn't see, ah, they were too stupid to see or too, they didn't take the time to s-, you know, to get to know who I really was. Who I really am.

Like Carol, one of the women from the focus-group discussions also maintained that her use of intimate violence occurs in response to being overlooked.

Participant: We need communication. If there's no communication between the two of us, we don't know how to talk. Like, he thinks he knows . . . That's where I, I, I feel, act out sometimes in violence. And I don't mean to, but it just happens. And then I feel, like, you feel mistreated with resentment, and fuck . . . He's not listening, and, and he interprets everything wrong. Everything I say is wrong. Like, he's always right, and the rest is wrong . . . He's not listening . . . He just makes me wanna hit him. (Little laugh) Because I don't, like, he thinks, I'm talking, but he won't listen to me . . . And it upsets me even more . . . And I wanna do something really bad to him. Like, I'm, I'm already plotting it already to do something bad to him. Just waiting for the opportunity to, ah, to get him. Like, in, almost acting out or when he's not looking. You know? . . . It's a thing where I wanna,

I wanna get him back.

It is evident that much of the Carol's violent behaviour occurs in response to being treated disrespectfully and, hence, feeling hurt and betrayed. It is also evident that Carol possesses some degree of mistrust in other individuals, particularly her intimate partners. Underlying her feelings of disrespect and mistrust is Carol's sense of sexual jealousy. Brandi's story provides another illustration of this aspect of women's intimate violence.

Brandi's Story

Brandi's life has always been characterized by violence. Although she did get involved in the occasional fight with her siblings, her cousins and her classmates while she was growing up, she explained that she didn't really begin to fight until she reached her late-teens or early-20s. As Brandi recalled, one of the first incidents in which she decided to "fight back" happened at Christmas time. Brandi was partying along with her cousin, and they decided to check out a house party.

Brandi: I prettied up myself and everything. I was dressed in red and everything . . . I was drinking and sniffing and smoking and shooting up. And there was about twenty people there, twenty-five laying around the big table. Had their own beer . . . We're sitting there and drinking, hey . . . All of a sudden this woman comes out of the bedroom. She says, "What the fuck you doing here?" I just put my head down . . . I didn't use to fight back, hey.

I just put my head down . . . All of a sudden, she grabbed me, and I was under the table. (Little laugh) And she's on top of me. And she's punching me out in my cousin's house, hey. He says, 'Brandi.' He says, 'Don't let her do that to you. Fight her back.' So, I threw her off, and I got up. And I says, 'You wanna fight?' She goes, ah, (little laugh) 'Yeah.' So I took, I said, 'Okay.' So, I took off my jacket. I put up my dukes, hey. She put up hers fast . . . I caught her off guard . . . I put my dukes up fast. I punched her really fast in the face, hey. See, if she grabbed a beer bottle, she cracked it, hey. So, I remember, that's how I got my teeth knocked out . . . By a beer bottle. By my cousin . . . I just grabbed it faster than her. So fast. Cracked it. And I went for her face and her arms. And she, so I was just looking as she's bleeding all over, bleeding all over them, too. And all over the place . . . On the arm and the neck. And I was standing there. And they said, 'Brandi.' . . . Like, they were telling me, 'Leave. The cops are gonna come. Go Brandi.' So, I went to my friend's . . . My friend cleaned me up and everything, hey.

While no charges were laid on this occasion, Brandi faced criminal charges a few years later after another encounter with the same woman.

Brandi: She was just steady trying to fight all that day. And then, fuck, I went in the kitchen, and I hid a knife, hey, already. And then, I put it in my pocket . . . I said, 'Do you want to fight?' She goes, 'Yeah, I wanna fight.' So, she went and put up her dukes. So, I grabbed the knife and went whew (motioning slashing action), hey. (Little laugh) I was gonna cut her in the neck, hey. But she backed off . . . I started plunging on her head three times . . . But, I only got her in the eye. But, that was good enough. There's something wrong with her eye or something, hey. Anyways, I did something . . . I was out of control. And I noticed my hand, hey. Going for the fourth time. And I was thinking, 'Fuck. I'm gonna kill her. I'm gonna kill her.' I guess I stopped. I holded my hand. It was just shaking, but I could even go more and more. And I still had, I had a tight grip on it, hey. And I just

looked, hey . . . And so, try and take off, hey. With the knife, too, hey. Her boyfriend grabs me when I was just running out the door. He grabs my hands, and he drags me back in. And I said, 'No.' I said, I was yelling. I said, 'Let me go.' He wouldn't let me go. I charged for the door . . . I couldn't believe it where I got my strength from. I dragged him. We're out the door. And then I threw myself on the ground. And then he, and he tried to pick me up again. And then, the, the guy I was dating was in the next suite over. And they heard me yelling, hey. And then he comes running out. And he says, 'Hey.' He says, 'Fuckin' leave her alone.' Fuck, I didn't know what to think. What's going, everything was going through my head, hey. So, that guy went running back in . . . I didn't even think. I just left that knife there. And I went, I went running, hey. And I was thinking, 'Aah, fuck.' I said, 'The knife!' And I went running back, and I could see where that guy came out. When I left, he picked up the knife and brought it back inside the house. And I'm looking all over for the knife, hey, because I was gonna get rid of it. I said, 'Where, aah fuck,' I said. And I'm thinking, 'Holy fuck, I stabbed her three times.' . . . I went running down to the next street. And I seen someone standing outside. I said, 'Hey.' I said, 'Could I use your phone?' I said, 'I need to phone an ambulance.' I said, 'I need to phone the cops.' I said, 'Please.' So, well, I got off. I phoned the ambulance. And I sent them there. I told them what happened. And I phoned the cops . . . That's how I got off.¹⁸

Recall from the previous chapter that Brandi experienced an enormous amount of severe physical aggression at the hands of her second long-term partner. While

¹⁸ As a result of this incident, Brandi was originally charged with attempted murder. The charge was later dropped to aggravated assault and assault with a weapon. Brandi entered into a plea bargain at her preliminary hearing. She was sentenced to nine months in jail, and she served five months out of this nine month sentence. Brandi claimed that this was the first time she had ever gone to jail. Brandi later spent time in jail, again, for beating up a "pastor." She claimed that she had put her trust in him as her friend and support, but he turned out to be a "pervert" who had broken her trust by sexually exploiting her.

power and control were significant factors in this intimate relationship, so, too, were the issues of sexual jealousy and mistrust. As I had already explained, Brandi's partner was very possessive, oppressive and controlling, and he suffered from an extreme case of sexual jealousy. Nevertheless, Brandi managed to "handle herself"; she was anything but a passive victim in this relationship. Brandi remembered one time when her partner stayed away from home all weekend. When he returned, he tried to accuse her of "running around."

Brandi: He came home and he said, tried to say I went running around and everything . . . I was trying to eat. I was hungry. I had Kraft Dinner, and I was eating with a fork, hey. I just stopped, hey . . . I just looked at him. And I said, 'Who're you talkin' to?' I said. And I said, 'Leave me alone.' I said, 'I'm trying to eat.' . . . I guess he didn't. He did it again. And so, I got mad. I reached over, I grabbed my fork. I reached over, and I stabbed him in the arm with the fork . . . He says, 'Ahh! You bitch!' And he takes that fork out of his arm. And I took it from him. And I went and washed it off. And I started eating, hey. He didn't fight me. He just looked at me. Surprised he didn't.

Brandi explained that she would often get angry and act out violently when her intimate partner would not come home when he was expected.

Brandi: At times, I'd get mad. One time, I was waiting all weekend at home. And then, I'd find him at his sister's. And a bunch of young girls there. And his mom is sitting there, her brother, and they're drinking. I walked in, hey. And I looked around, hey. I said, 'This is where you are.' I said, 'Don't you know when to fuckin' come home?' I said, 'Fuck. I'm waiting for you to come

home.' I went on. I just gave him a dirty old smack, hey.

Like many of the other women, Brandi's feelings of sexual jealousy and the mistrust she had in her violent partner played a contributing factor in her own use of intimate violence. She recalled her violent response to her 14-year-old sister's disclosure that she was having an affair with Brandi's partner. Brandi was around 21 years old at the time.

Brandi: I hit him with a beer bottle, hey. (Little laugh) 'Cause, ah, my little sister's trying to come in the bar, and she's fourteen . . . We're sitting there . . . I was five months pregnant, hey. And then, they're both sitting there. And he'd say, 'I got something to tell you, Brandi,' my sister is saying. I said, 'What?' I said, I say, 'You're not even fuckin' supposed to be in here,' I said. I was mad . . . And he says, 'Oh. Me and [your little sister] were together.' . . . He used to sleep around with my family, my friends . . . I was sitting there, hey. I got mad. I just stalked under her. She went flying. All you could see is the four legs of the chair. And I grabbed a beer bottle and smashed it over his head. Then they grabbed me. They were going to throw me out. So, I grabbed her by the hair, hey. And I said, 'Well, she's coming with me.' So, I was dragging her by the hair. Then I gave her a licken in the lobby . . . And then, while I was giving her a licken in the lobby, get this. (Sigh) He's busy giving his phone number out to this other girl! I caught him. I said, 'Holy fuck!' I said, 'Don't you ever quit?' I, he had a trench coat on. (Little laugh) I got so mad, I grabbed him by the trench coat . . . I threw him over the chairs, hey . . . I told that girl, she was gonna put it in her pocket. And I said, 'Fuckin' give me that, ah, give me that number,' I said. 'You're not fuckin' phoning my old man,' I said, hey. (Little laugh) And then I was pregnant. I was tired. And he wanted to run around. I says, 'Come home.' 'Come home,' I says. And finally he decided to come be with me, hey. Because I didn't wanna, I

wouldn't give up, hey. I said, 'I want you to come home.' And finally we went home.

Brandi revealed that she was also violent toward another one of her intimate partners. Although she claimed that she did not know why she was violent toward this last partner, she maintained that her violence did have something to do with her being involved in her violent relationship with her second long-term partner.

Brandi: I used to fight him. That's how I know I was getting violent . . . He wouldn't even do nothing. Fuck, I just, I just look at him, hey. And just fuckin' fight him . . . I hit him with a can opener one time. And he was bleeding right here . . . I don't know why I was violent to him . . . I know it had something to do with being with [my second partner]. Then I turned around and started to be abusive on, toward [my next partner] . . . I, like, became violent . . . [My second partner] said, 'Well, I'm scared.' I said, 'Scared of what?' 'I'm scared of what you might do to me.' . . . 'Cause I started fighting back after so many years of taking it. Like, I wouldn't do nothing, hey. I finally fought back. And then, he was scared I'd do something to him . . . I was tired of it. I used to, even girls used to punch me out. I didn't used to do nothing. Just stand there. But now, I don't take it. It's different.

One time, this last partner had spent the night at Brandi's place. In the morning, Brandi had gone to school, and she had left her apartment keys with her partner so that he could lock her door when he left. Brandi informed me that her partner was supposed to meet her at the school in order to return her keys to her. While he did show up at her school later that day, Brandi discovered that he was with

another woman. Despite her partner's claim that this woman was his niece, Brandi was furious. She yelled at her partner for being with another woman, and she tried to physically attack the woman. Nevertheless, Brandi's partner stepped between the two women and put an end to this incident.

Brandi told me about another incident that happened with her last partner and this same woman. This time, she was so overcome by her own feelings of sexual jealousy that she felt the need to forcibly confine her partner to her apartment.

Brandi: I used to leave him at my place when we, I used to go to school. And I guess one, one day, he, he let someone come in . . . One day, ah, at night, someone was ringing the doorbell . . . I said, 'Who is it?' . . . 'Fuckin' stay here,' I said. I went running downstairs, and a young girl was ringing the doorbell . . . I got mad, hey. This is where I got scared 'cause I'm bad for knives. I got started on a knife rack, hey. And I got, this is where I got scared, hey. So, I know that, uhm, I'm still capable. And fuck, I got, he's putting on his socks. He was gonna go out . . . And I says, 'Fuckin' go see that girl,' I says. 'I remember her. She even came to my school.' . . . Fuck. He's putting on his socks. And I just grabbed his socks, hey. And I says, and I just pushed him down, hey . . . He got up. He's trying to get his socks . . . I said, 'Where you going?' He said, 'I'm gonna go out with them.' And I said, I says, 'Fuck.' And I went running. I went walking to the kitchen, and I grabbed the biggest knife in the rack, hey. I said, 'Listen here.' . . . I was pointing it at him, hey. I said, 'You're not fucking going anywhere.' I said, 'You just want to go see that chick, right?' . . . He was sitting on the love seat, and I was sitting on my bed, hey. I said, 'You're not fuckin' going anywhere.' So, I put that knife down right beside me, hey. And I was watching TV. And I said, 'I mean it.' I said, 'I'll fuckin' kill you if you go out there.' I said, 'You go and see her.' I remember, he stayed all night. The next day, I let him go . . . He still comes back to me.

Stupid hey?

For the most part, Brandi attributed her violent behaviour to her own feelings of sexual jealousy over “boyfriends and stuff.” I asked her whether she thought her sexual jealousy had something to do with her being insecure about her intimate relationships. I wanted to know if she was afraid of losing her intimate partners. She informed me that she “couldn’t care less” whether her partners left her or not. It seems that Brandi’s sexual jealousy had more to do with her being disrespected by her partners than it did with her fear of losing them to other women.

Brandi: I’d fight because I was jealous of a woman or someone who made me jealous of one of my boyfriends. That’s the only reason . . . Cheating, jealousy . . . It’s only when they fight me or when I get jealous . . . There’s a lot of jealousy in my veins. There’s a lot of jealousy. Christ. And I’d say, start seeing that now. See that now in myself, hey. It, that’s all connected. Just tick (snaps fingers) me off right there . . . I don’t know why. (Crying) I don’t like to share. I just, just get mad, hey. And that’s what happens to me . . . So many times, man. But, I don’t know. Maybe it’s because I was brought up. I seen my dad beating, beating all these, beating their, his spouse. Maybe that’s why I do it . . . I’m not sure.

One of the women in the focus-group discussion shared Brandi’s explanation of her own use of intimate violence.

Participant: That put me in many situations, being jealous. You know. Where it’s sitting right in front of you and, and it’s happening. And

(pause) I don't even think jealous is the word. I think it's just disrespect. You know. Where, you know, you're sitting there and, but it brings out the anger in you. Where you don't care what you're doing. And you'll hit whomever you want to hit. You know. Especially whoever's there in front of you doing the stuff. You know? Jealousy plays a big role.

Brandi also informed me that her use of violence may be attributed to "alcohol and stuff," such as when "there's a big fight at the odd party," and she is persuaded to "jump in." She explained that "that's where the fighting got bad." Brandi maintained that when she is either sober or straight, she "just argues."

Brandi: If I was in my right state of mind . . . I won't hit anybody. But if I'm, like, intoxicated or drunk, there's always gonna be fighting around. But if I'm sober, I don't do it 'cause I know where it gets me . . . I try and stay away from fights because, lately, every time I drink I get into a fight. Honestly . . . My family didn't want to drink with me . . . There's a time I walked in, hey . . . Everybody walked out. (Little laugh) And I was thinking, 'Where's everybody going?' 'We're not fuckin' drinking with you. You're too rowdy.' And I was thinking, 'Oh, fuck.' So, I end up drinking alone.

As you may recall from Chapter Three, many of the women harboured ill-feelings toward their mothers and maintained poor relationships with them because of their own childhood experiences relating to alcohol and violence. Brandi was among these women. She expressed to me that she regretted the fact that she was never able to stand up to her mother, until just a few years ago.

Brandi: I used to be shy, but I'm not no more. I used to be, I didn't use to say anything . . . I used to let my mom tell me, tell me this and that. And now, I tell her, hey . . . I just tell her straight, now, hey. Like, 'cause she, she did so much to me, and I just, now, I'll just sit there and just tell her straight . . . Now, I talk back to her. Like, before I didn't use to, and she used to say things . . . I didn't even do anything before, hey. I even named my little girl what she wanted me to name her. I even signed the papers for me to get my tubes tied. I couldn't say anything. Like, I was too vulnerable or anything, to say anything. Like, having babies. See, they were, if I felt now the way I did before I had that baby, I would say, 'No fuckin' way.' I'd say, 'I'm not signing no papers.' I woulda said that then. So, I wish I was that way then. Talk the way I am now. Then I could have a baby.

While Brandi contends that there is a positive side to her aggressive behaviour, overall, she is sorry that she has chosen this violent route rather than a more calm approach to dealing with the stresses in her life. She remembered when she began to think about her need to change her violent ways. She was sitting, alone, in her jail cell.

Brandi: You know what? This last time when I went to the, jail, got out. I went to jail and got my own room. I was thinking in jail, hey. My whole cell. Looking, and I was looking at the bars in the window. And I was thinking, fuck. I don't want to be here the rest of my life. I want a husband to sleep with. I don't want to sleep alone for the rest of my life. I want to see my kids grow up . . . I don't want me to live the relationships I've been in. And I don't want [my new boyfriend] to know what relationships I've been in either. I don't want us to live, to, to have that kind of relationship. I want us to have a full, nice relationship because, without violence . . . I know what [violence] takes away . . . I'm verbally abusive. I admit that. (Sigh) But to hit somebody. Like, to go to jail for, I won't do it. But defend myself or someone's saying something when I'm, when I'm gone out, I'll defend myself. I'll do

something.

Like Brandi, some of the other women have turned to violence as a means of coping with the stressful conditions relating to the violence they experience in their intimate relationships. Whereas these women may employ physical aggression in response to being disrespected and mistreated by their intimate partners, other women, like Crystal and Martha, engage in violent behaviour as a means to regain order and control over the other stresses that are present in their lives.

Regaining Order and Control

Up to this point, we have learned that the women's past experiences with prejudice, racism, alcohol and violence have all contributed to their use of violent behaviour within their intimate relationships. The focus of this chapter, so far, has been on the stressful conditions under which the women live with their violent partners. Some women, however, maintain that the stresses in their lives entail much more than having to deal with violence at the hands of their intimate partners.

While all of the women have experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner, not all of the women remain in violent relationships. For some of the women, their current partners have either put a stop to their violent behaviour or they were never violent to begin with. This being the case, some women revealed that their use

of intimate violence has very little, if anything, to do with violence at the hands of their intimate partners. Instead, these women make sense of their violent behaviour by seeing it in terms of trying to regain some kind of order and control over the other chaotic situations that exist in their lives. In their attempt to “make things right,” these women will often displace their anger and frustration, and they will unintentionally aggress against their intimate partners. Thus, rather than explaining their violent behaviour in terms of “fighting back,” some of the women define their use of intimate violence in terms of “releasing tension.”

Crystal's Story

Recall from the previous chapters that Crystal has witnessed plenty of violence as a child, and she has experienced many years of abuse at the hands of her long-term intimate partner. Although Crystal is still with her partner on and off (as she has been since she was in her late-teens), Crystal informed me that her partner's violence is not really an issue in their relationship anymore. For the most part, Crystal's partner is no longer violent toward her. However, Crystal does, on occasion, employ physical aggression toward her intimate partner. She remembered one incident, in particular, that “blew [her] away.” Crystal was in the midst of an argument with her partner, and her partner decided to end their argument by walking out the door.

Crystal: I remember him leaving and walking out the door. I remember, uhm, grabbing, I felt so angry. I, I grabbed a, I grabbed a knife, and I just had, I just felt all this anger inside of me. And I grabbed a knife, and, and I just kind of jabbed it into a piece of wood. And I was, like, ah, you know, it was, just let out that anger. And I just got, you know, just blew me away 'cause I grabbed a knife. He was already gone . . . He bothers me . . . It was mostly him doing things to me. But, I guess after time, it, I started to, you know, going back to him. Going back at him. And I started fighting back. I couldn't take it anymore. I, ah, started kicking him, and, and, the kicking turned to punching . . . I was, like, 'What am I doing?' You know . . . I just felt really alone.

Much like many of the other women, Crystal would get violent with her partner when she suspected that he was cheating on her. Nevertheless, although she recognized that her feelings of sexual jealousy and the mistrust that she had in her partner did have something to do with her anger over the situation, she could not understand why she was hitting her partner, especially since his violent behaviour had ceased to exist for quite some time.

Crystal: I suspected all the time, uhm, he was with someone. But always, always denied it. Always. And, I mean, the signs were there . . . He would come over to the house. Like, our apartment. Stay for a day, maybe two. If I was lucky around that time, three days. But it was usually about two days. And he, he was gone . . . I just figured, you know, there's someone else. But I didn't, you know, always denied it though. It put, made me feel, I guess, low. It made me feel really low . . . I wasn't feeling any kind of anger around that time. But later on, the anger did come out because of that . . . Like, years later, when I started, uhm, hitting him and punching him and, uhm, I would say, you know, 'Why did you, you're gonna leave me this time' . . . I'd be so angry, I'd flip .

. . [He'd], you know, blocking my kicks or blocking my punches. [He] didn't fight back . . . Sometimes, he was, like, cry. And sometimes he'd j-, you know, say things, like, 'Oh. You're cruel.' You know. 'You're a cold person. You're cold. Ah, unloving.' . . . It was, like, 'Why? Why is this happening?' You know? And I couldn't understand why it was happening.

Looking back on the situation, I asked Crystal if she now knew why she would engage in intimate violence against her partner. Crystal informed me that, at first, her violent behaviour occurred in response to how her partner mistreated and disrespected her by physically and emotionally abusing her. Later in their relationship, however, Crystal expressed that her violent behaviour had more to do with the stresses that were going on in her life at the time. In her eyes, her partner was no help to her at all. She felt that, in many instances, her partner only made matters worse by adding to the daily stresses with which she was dealing. Whereas she would have appreciated a little understanding and support from her partner, she felt that he was not living up to his gender role expectations to be a good provider for the family. She felt that he was manipulating their stressful situation to his own advantage. For this, Crystal felt angry.

Crystal: It felt like he was sort of, like, manipulating the situation . . . It felt like, you know, he was using a lot of situations to his advantage . . . Like, one thing, I just, ah, I couldn't stand was, you know, him sitting there like he didn't, like never had a job. And I'd see him sitting on the couch. And he'd be, have his feet up, and a cigarette in his hand and, and I just felt so angry. You know. I just, oh, just felt angry towards him. Just seeing him sit there. Just, you know, and enjoying himself. And, and other things

would make me angry. Like, my daughter would have, would start having certain problems. Like, you know, in her life. And I automatically think about the childhood that she had, and, and I'd be angry. It's like, 'Why couldn't you be a good provider?' And then I felt angry . . . I just felt trapped in a situation.

Crystal later enlightened me to the fact that some women will engage in violent behaviour toward their intimate partners as a result of the stresses they are dealing with in their daily lives.¹⁹ She explained that some women may not know how to positively deal with the anger and frustration that comes out of having to cook, clean, shop, do laundry and raise children on a limited budget, all the while trying to maintain employment or complete an education. Rather than taking their anger out on the children or the family pet, some women may direct their anger and aggression toward their intimate partners. In this case, Crystal explained, some men may find themselves at the receiving end of women's intimate violence. At the time of our interview, however, Crystal understood her use of intimate violence more in terms of her partner "overstepping her boundaries."

Crystal: It felt bad for me . . . I felt, uhm, like I, I have to do something . . . It's more like boundaries for me. Uhm, overstepping my

¹⁹ After our interview, Crystal kept regular contact with me. She would telephone me to see how I was doing, both personally and with regard to the research project. Like Brandi, Crystal is anxiously awaiting a copy of the final report. I am extremely grateful for the emotional support and inspiration that these two women, in particular, have given me throughout the duration of this research project.

boundaries, and I just felt I have to do something. But I, if only I can explain it . . . It comes out in stressful ways. That it could, like, for me, stress, like with stress I've been having, uhm, I don't know if it deals with my past, my childhood, but, and I've been, I had a lot of, uhm, anxiety attacks. And, ah, it, it's affecting my life. And I wanted, I want to deal with it. And it's, it's not, it's not a good way 'cause it feels like I'm just trying to stuff it. And I don't want to stuff it. I want to bring it out. So, uhm, that's the only way I can explain it. Uhm, trying to work on it. And, uhm, deal with it. You know. And that's all I can think about that. It's, ah, my anger.

Like the other women, Crystal expressed some concern over her use of intimate violence. She was disappointed in herself because she felt that while she was in the midst of trying to gain some kind of order and control over a stressful situation, she had overstepped her own boundaries in terms of losing control herself.

Crystal: I felt humiliated . . . I'd overstepped my own boundaries. You know, I just, I, I was the one who was doing the, and I was the one who was hitting. And it made me feel just low . . . It didn't make me feel any, you know, really good. And oh, yeah, he did, you know, he was, you know, this and that. But no. It felt, it felt awful . . . It just, just brought me right down . . . I would kick him, and I'd punch him. And I'd, and I'd go for his weak spots. And one time I, he was on the floor. He was in pain. And I just, like, oh, I can't, you know, I was thinking of myself. How could I let myself go this far? I was thinking, 'What am I doing? What if I, you know, hurt him seriously, seriously bad?' And at that point, I thought I don't care. But then, I thought back to why. And yes, I do care because I don't want to end up being charged, you know? . . . I always thought, too, 'Oh, I'm just an abused woman.' You know. But then, I'm doing, I'm doing that. You know. I was doing the punching. I was doing the hitting. I had all this anger . . . And it would come out in punches and sometimes

kicking. Building up or, it's not being resolved. You know? . . . I knew I'd have to stop. I knew I had to . . . It affected me in a way where it brought down my self-esteem. It didn't make me feel very good. Uhm, it brings other stresses, I think.

One of the women from the focus-group discussions also explained her own use of intimate violence in terms of losing control over a stressful situation. She further claimed that this aspect of her violent behaviour merely placed her in a "catch-22" situation.

Participant: I think it's losing control. You know. When I'm angry or feeling aggressive, I get more angrier 'cause I know that I'm losing the control that, you know, you don't want to lose. And, you know, nobody ever wants to lose control. But, you lose that. Especially, you know, when you become very angry and you're, you're, you're doubling it because you're, you're having that lack of control. That, you know, there's no controlling it. That's what being angry, that's what it means to me. I just feel out of control . . . It's to feel out of control. To me, that, it, it's, that's the worst 'cause you're, you're losing, (pause) and there's nothing to, it, and it makes, it makes you angry when you lost the con-, you know, back and forth. Like a catch-22. You know?

Martha, too, felt the added stress of losing control while she was trying to maintain some kind of order in dealing with her life stresses.

Martha's Story

Martha claimed that the first of her two intimate partners was not violent with Martha

at all. On the contrary, Martha disclosed that she was quite violent toward him, especially when she felt that he was not living up to his gender role expectations of how a man should behave.

Martha: I only had two boyfriends. And my first boyfriend, I was m-, I punched him in the face, and I chipped his tooth. Punched him s-, would hit him in the head for, like, no reason. I would, like, I was very verbally abusive to him. Like, every, like, totally. He'd feel good about himself, and I'd totally bash him. Like, I'd go and, you know, like, 'Why are you wearing that? It's so gross.' Like, you know, I'd be just so mean to him. Like, and I'd feel so bad for the guy . . . I totally just went after him a couple times. It could have been anytime . . . He never really had a backbone. And I hated that . . . I'd hit him in the head if he said something . . . He wasn't, ah, abusive or verbally abusive or anything like that. He just was, just didn't have no backbone. And I hated it.
(Little laugh)

While her second long-term partner did engage in the occasional bout of violence toward Martha, his violent behaviour has taken on relatively minor forms such as "flipping the bed on [her]" while she is still in it or "ripping the shower curtain down on [her] head." Martha stated that her partner's violent behaviour usually centres around his inability to handle his alcohol when he drinks and, hence, he becomes "a crazy." When he is not drinking, Martha maintained that her partner is "a sweetheart." Martha disclosed that when her partner is drinking and she is not, she will verbally "pick on him."

Martha: When I see him drunk, I, I pick at him. And I'll, like, 'Oh. There's the drunk I know.' And he, and that's just, makes him mad, hey . . . But I don't hold back. I'm, like, 'Why should I hold back?' So, 'Screw you.' Like, you know. 'Learn how to drink. Learn how to slow yourself, slow down.'

Martha explained that her partner will stay up all night when he drinks, and he will often pester her while she is trying to get some sleep before she has to go to work in the morning. Martha remembered one incident, in particular, where she "just had enough" of her partner's bothersome behaviour, and she lashed out at him.

Martha: He started drinking . . . And, I went to bed. And he kept me up all night. All night. And he wasn't, he was, like, uhm, like, he was very, like verbally, like crazy . . . Bugging and all that stuff. And I finally grabbed him, and I, he was sitting, and I grabbed him by the neck, and I was choking him. And I just had enough. Like, to leave me alone. Like, 'Get away from me.' You know? . . . He kept me up the whole night 'til, like, six o'clock in the morning. And I was, I was mad.

I asked Martha if she would give me some indication of the type of violence she used against her intimate partner. She told me that her violent behaviour rarely involves the use of a weapon or alcohol. While it usually takes the form of punching, slapping, pushing or throwing objects, her violence is not really directed at her intimate partner, per se. Although she claimed that her use of intimate violence "just happens," Martha also explained that she will become violent when her partner has "stepped over [her] boundary" such as the time when he "should have just went to bed and shut up."

Martha: I throw things at him. Just anything I really can get my hands on, I'd throw . . . Like, the latest incident was I ripped all my clothes. Like, three hundred dollars worth of clothes I just bought. And I ripped them all up. I was just so mad. I just, like, 'Aaah!' . . . He's, like, you know, 'You're wearing that shirt?' Like, you know. And I just thought, 'Yeah. You're making comments about what I'm wearing?' And I went to my room. And I just started throwing things. And I said, 'Okay. Fine. I'm gonna rip up my clothes.' And I ripped up all my clothes . . . I'm just a big looney . . . I don't have to be drinking at all, like, to freak out . . . I take temper tantrums. I literally do. I'll throw myself on the bed. And I'll do the fish up on the bed. And I'll throw books. Like, I have a big shelf, like, full of books and magazines. I'll whip them. Like, you know. (Little laugh) And then, he comes in. He's, like, 'Holy.' . . . And he'll leave me alone . . . 'Cause he might come out with a black eye. You know. I'll come out when I'm ready . . . And it was all because he didn't clean the house. He went fishing.

As was the case with Crystal, Martha felt that her partner was only making matters worse by adding further stress to her life.

Martha: My job is very stressful. And I just come home, like, I'd leave here and, oh, I would come home . . . the house is all crazy. And just, makes me mad. And I freak. You know. Throw things . . . He didn't clean the house. And I'm, like, I work all day. I put the food on the table. I'm the one that brings all the money in. And you can't even pick up your dishes and whatever? You know. And then, so I flipped out . . . If there's things not done right. If things aren't on schedule. If things are on, like, if they're, ah, out of place. I get depressed when my house is dirty. And I, when my laundry is piled up to my fricken head. You know, like. (Little laugh) I just get discouraged and I, like, no help. And I just, like, 'God dammit.' Like, you know. 'Help me a bit here.' You know. And I just can't take it . . . My head's, like, blown off. And steam is coming out of my ears and everything like that. And I'm so mad . . . It's just awful. It's such an amazing thing that happens.

Like, you know, I, I'll cry and I'll, like, pull my hair and imagine that it's, and my mom's like that too. Like, I get it, but from my mother, I think. 'Cause, like, things aren't done right. Like, you know, freak out, too. Like, she'd lock herself in the bedroom. And, like, I kick the door, hey. I kick the door. And, you know, slam it a couple times. And kick the door. And my mom did that. And she'd pull her hair. And I'd pull my hair. I'm, like, hmm, you know. And I don't know. I, I'm totally like my mother . . . I'd see her do that. And I'd seen her do that lots when things weren't done right . . . She'd get pissed off if someone didn't do it right.

While women's intimate violence may take place at any time, within any environment and across all social classes, one of the women from the focus-group discussions believed that it did take place more often in an environment where poverty existed. I asked the question, "What kind of environment do you think that [women's intimate violence] happens it?"

Participant: In any environment. Whether it's poverty stricken or wealth. But, if you're going on, I mean, you know, let's face it. Poverty is gonna be, you're gonna have more women fighting back and being aggressive and being violent in a, in a more poverty stricken environment. Where, 'cause poverty stricken, what are you, you know, what do you have? You, you know. You don't have really anything. Materialistic, of course . . . You feel like you've got nothing.

Martha described herself as being "very particular" about the way she likes things to be done. Like her mother, Martha would get angry if she felt that things were not "done right." Even when her partner did provide her with some help around the

house, Martha would easily become upset because her partner did not do things the way she would have done them. More often than not, Martha would find herself re-doing her partner's completed tasks because they were not done "her way." In this case, having to re-do these tasks merely meant having to work even harder to get something done that would have taken less time to do, had it been "done right" in the first place. Accordingly, while her partner would offer to help Martha with the required household tasks, she found that she would often refuse his offer to help because this meant added stress to her life. Ironically, while Martha did express her need for help around the house, there were only certain "little things" with which she was willing to allow her partner to do.

Martha: Like, 'Don't even bother doing that. I'll do that.' Like, you know. 'Just pick up this and pick up that and forget it.' You know? . . . Like, the little things. Like, if he doesn't do the, like, if he, he puts the ashtrays in before the glasses. (Little laugh) 'No. You can't do that.' I'd drain everything. And I'm, put it all aside. 'Ashtrays go last.' (Little laugh) 'And don't dry.' Like, but, 'You use the drying cloth with, you know.' And 'Don't dry the ashtrays. Let them drip dry so you don't make the, the drying towel, you know.' 'You'll have to use a fresh one.' You know. And it's bad . . . Like, I'll put away things and that stuff. Like, he'll, he'll put the cloth a certain way, and I'll fix it. So, you know. The, the soap will be like that way. I have to have it that way. You know. (Little laugh) But he just leaves me alone. He lets me do that.

I asked Martha how she makes sense of her violent behaviour. She defined it in terms of fighting to regain control over an out-of-control situation.

Martha: I get overwhelmed. And I don't know how to handle it . . . I feel very out of control. And very scared of what I can do. Like, you know. Like, I can go and, and throw books and rip all my clothes up and punch my boyfriend in the eye and stuff like that. Like, you know. What else can I do when it's a little, another level up? Like, you know. Like, I just, out of control. And what else is gonna happen?

Despite the fact that she feels scared of what else she may be capable of doing in terms of her violent behaviour, Martha maintained that after an episode of violence, she feels "refreshed" because a "big stress" has been lifted from her shoulders.

Martha: I feel good. I feel really good. I feel a stress is, I feel very refreshed . . . Weird, hey? Like, I'll, I'll just lay there, and I'll just, like, I feel just, I, it's off my shoulders and that stuff . . . It's just 'cause you're, when I freak out, I, I do everything. I go cry. Do the crying and whatever. And, and the fish. And the, I'll, (little laugh) if it doesn't, I'll feel so much better just 'cause it's, just crying's so good for you . . . I cry on a regular basis.

Even though Martha feels "a little better" after she releases the tension which has been building, she maintained that, like the other women, she feels ashamed and embarrassed about her violent behaviour. She also feels frustrated because she has many questions to which she would like answers.

Martha: Why am I doing this? Like, why? Why can't I just be like, you know, talk about it first or whatever? And why do I have to have everything perfect? Why do I have to, you know? Why am I so stressed out when I come home? Just all these questions, and you know? How can I, how can I be a little bit better? Like, you

know, how can I control myself a little bit better? So, and I feel, it makes me upset.

Despite her frustration, Martha maintains that she is unable to talk about her own use of intimate violence. Specifically, she feels that no one could be bothered to listen to her without casting judgement in her direction. As was pointed out earlier in Brenda's story, this may have something to do with the fact that women's intimate violence remains an issue that is not yet widely accepted within society.

Struggling With Their Own Violence

While many of the women have been able to make some sense of their violent behaviour in terms of where it is coming from and what it means to them to be angry and aggressive, this does not necessarily mean that the women have been able to successfully deal with their intimate violence. As virtually all aspects of their lives have been touched by their own use of violent behaviour, many women find themselves at a loss when it comes to managing their anger and aggression, particularly when their support systems are limited, at best.

Samantha's Story

Like Juliette and Melissa, Samantha remembers that her violent behaviour began as a child, in response to the racism she experienced at school by both her classmates

and the school staff.

Samantha: It started in elementary school. Uhm, in that first little town . . . The kids there used to call all the Indian kids down. And us Indian kids, uhm, started beating up the white kids in school. Like, we got together, and we would beat up certain kids that were pick, that were, we were told were calling, like, this Native person down. Like, we went after the, certain kids there and beat the heck out of them . . . I remember that happening three times. And the third time after that, we said we won't, we won't fight them anymore because the boys are always getting strapped for it . . . We would just get them in a circle, and we'd put them on the ground, and we just kick them and punch them. And we'd, uhm, we'd never stop until an, an adult came and broke up the fight. I must have been about ten.

Recall from the previous chapter that Samantha experienced a great deal of abuse at the hands of her first long-term partner. Throughout the duration of this 12-year relationship, Samantha passively took her partner's abuse. Although Samantha claimed that she learned to fight from all the years of abuse at the hands of her first partner, she did not really engage in her own use of intimate violence until she was well into her 13-year marriage to a subsequent partner. Samantha remembered the incident in which she was left with no choice but to start "fighting back" in order to survive.

Samantha: This one time, he says, 'We'll, lets go for a ride.' So, we go for a ride. And we were out drinking . . . First, he tells me we're going to the store . . . He takes me way out on the outskirts . . . This is in the winter time . . . I wasn't really, really drunk. But, I knew he

had quite a bit . . . I said, 'Why the hell are we going out here?' He said, 'We're going for a ride.' And I says, 'Okay.' And I didn't want to argue with him 'cause I know how he is when he's drunk. So, we go out there. And then, he stops the van. Like, we're way in the middle of nowhere. And he starts swearing at me. He's starting to call me down. 'You fuckin' bitch. You're always fuckin' running around.' . . . I said, 'Why you always accusing me of that?' I said, 'You. Maybe you're running around.' . . . He says, 'Fuck you.' Then he grabs me and starts beating me up there. And he throws me out of the van. He said, 'I'll fuckin' leave you out here and let you fuckin' freeze.' And he's kicking me around. And I'm saying, 'Oh, fuck. What am I gonna do?' So we, we're fighting. Like, the door's, like, the van door's open at the back and the st-, the front door's open. And we're fighting outside. And I was thinking, 'Oh, shit.' And I'm already bleeding. So, I said, 'I gotta get back in the van. And I don't give a shit if I lock him out.' But he's got the keys. (Little laugh) So, we're fighting. And he gets back in the van. And I wouldn't open, you know, my side. So, he's hitting me in the, in the front . . . It was really cold out that time. Then I, and I said, 'Fuck this. I'm gonna beat the shit out of him.' . . . I just grabbed him, and I started banging his head on the dash. And I told him, 'Give me the fuckin' keys.' . . . I got the keys from him. And I started up the van. And we came back to the city. And he was hitting me while I was driving. And I told him, 'You son of a bitch.' I says, 'You're not gonna fuckin' kill me out here. I have kids at home.' . . . I wouldn't give up. And he was pushing me. He kept hitting me. And pulling that steering wheel. And I was thinking, 'Fuckin' bastard.' I said, 'You want to kill us?' I said, 'I'll fuckin' kill you before you ever kill me.' And I'd slam on the, like, I'd go real close to the cars. And I'd slam on the brakes. And he'd fly in the front and hit the thing. I said, 'You want to fuckin' die?' . . . I kept doing that all the way to the city . . . He'd always fly into the front . . . I was really mad. Then finally, I, we got back close to home. I said, 'here's your fuckin' keys to your van.' And I just walked away. And I was crying. I said, 'Maybe next time, I'll kill you. You son of a bitch.' After that, he really cut down on the hitting. I told him, 'I'll start hitting you back.' I said, 'I'm not gonna take no crap from you anymore.' Then, I started hitting him back.

Samantha disclosed that her violent behaviour included everything from throwing cups and glasses to stabbing her partner. Alcohol frequently played a role in her use of intimate violence, and her violent behaviour either began with an argument or came in response to her partner calling her down.

Samantha: It bothered me a lot. Like, when he, we, when he used to say things. Like, I was getting old and all this, all this crap . . . Oh, he'd call me a bitch, a slut, uhm, call me easy. He would say, uhm, yeah, she, uhm, sometimes he likes to make, especially mark his, 'Yeah, your mother doesn't need, uhm, have a fuckin' dollar in her pocket to go to the bar and get drunk. She said anybody will buy her beer.' . . . He always calls me names.

Like Brenda who would get her partner down and not allow him to get up or Crystal who would "go for the weak spots," Samantha theorized her best defence: to make up for her lack of physical strength in comparison to her partner, she always "fought in the bathroom."

Samantha: I always fought him in the bathroom. I only did that. Yeah. I always fought him in the bathroom 'cause I knew he was easy in the bathroom. (Little laugh) Like, I, like, in the, the bathroom is small. And I know if I grabbed him, and I, and I got him in the bathtub, there's no way he's gonna have a chance to get up in the bathtub. So, I always fought him in the bathtub . . . And he never had a bath. Like, he would always be using the washroom, and I'd come behind him. And we'd start arguing. Then, I was thinking, you, you asshole. And I would just, I would ju-, just grab him and throw him in the tub. And I wouldn't give him the chance to get up. And I'd just give him a licken in the bathtub.

Much like Samantha, Jasmine would wait for her best opportunity to physically take on her intimate partner.

Jasmine: He'd be carrying a TV or something, and I'd jump him . . . I wait 'til he's holding some things 'cause, like, this one time, he was holding the TV and it wasn't ours. So, I went and punched him right in the face. Like, right square in the face. And then, I went, and then, I'd fire him. But, I knew he wouldn't just drop the TV and come and get me. But, if he wasn't holding that TV, I would've gotten it bad. But see, with me, if I hit [my boyfriend], I get it twice as hard 'cause this guy's, like, six foot, a hundred and something pounds, you know. He's a big boy . . . Like, his size is twice the size of my fists. So, it would hurt me a lot more than my fist would hurt him.

Samantha's feelings of sexual jealousy, disrespect and mistrust also contributed to her use of intimate violence.²⁰

Samantha: I guess when I thought about him and with that other woman, I would hit him. Like, sometimes, we didn't ar-, like, like, we w-, we didn't argue like that. Like, it would, it would bother me . . . What I notice when I fight him, that's when, usually when I see him with somebody else. 'Cause it's not the only person I've seen him with . . . Like, he likes to pretend, uhm, like, he says to me he's gonna be going here and he's gonna go home and all this. Then I happen to go some place down the street with the kids, then I see him with somebody else, holding hands. And I was saying, 'You don't even have the decency to tell me.' . . . Then that's when I get, yeah. That's when I get mad. And then, uhm,

²⁰ As a result of his extramarital affair with one of his co-workers, Samantha informed her partner that he "needed to move on." He "didn't fight it," and he willingly moved out with the intention of marrying this other woman upon receiving a divorce from Samantha.

that's when I'll fight him.

Samantha remembered a conversation that she had with her partner regarding his extramarital affair and the woman with whom he had cheated.

Samantha: I said, 'All this fooling around that you did.' I says, 'You know what?' I said, 'I will never let you end up with that woman.' And he says, 'Don't talk like that. You scare me.' And I says, 'Well, I'm, I'm dead serious.' I says, 'You know what? I'll end up killing her.' I said, 'I won't kill you.' I said, 'I'll kill her.' I said, 'Because that's what,' I said, 'That's when we started having our problems in our marriage.' I said, 'Because of her.' And he says, 'Don't talk like that.' He says, "Cause I know how you are . . . I know you have nothing to live for.' And I says, 'I have my kids . . . That's what I live for.' . . . I think he's worried about that. And I think, kind of think that he did leave that girl alone because he's scared of that . . . My husband says, 'I know you fight . . . I know you know how that girl looks. But I know if you wanted to, you can, you would find her.' . . . That's what I always think. Sometimes that scares me because I can ha-, like, I, I, uhm, I guess in a way, I hold my future. Like, which way I want to go . . . That's where I think I need help, like, to deal with my, to deal with my, learn that.

Samantha realized that her own use of intimate violence "was getting bad" when she saw how it was affecting her children.

Samantha: We started arguing in front of the kids. And I would start hitting him in front of the kids. And that's, and then I thought to myself, I always told myself I wouldn't hit, fight in front of my kids. 'Cause I didn't want to scare them. So, and then after, that's when, too, I decided to separate from him. 'Cause I started noticing myself hit, uhm, just going after him when I was, I think that had to do

with, uhm, him fooling around. I started just going after him any time. And fighting him any time. Then, the kids were around sometimes. And they would, they would see us fighting. And my little, and I knew my little boys were scared . . . Then my little boy says, 'Mom, you're gonna, you're gonna hurt him one of these days, you know.' And I says, 'Yeah. I know I'm gonna hurt him.' Then I started thinking about, and the, about them. So then, I, after that, I was thinking, like, I can't fight him in front of the kids. And then I told, that's what I told him. I says, 'We need to be apart from one another because it's affect, and, like, I said, 'I'm scaring them.' And the boys used to say that to him. He says, 'Holy shit. Mom can give you a good licken now.' And then [my older son] says, 'Well, she learned that from our dad, you know.' He said, 'That's where she picks that up from.'

Samantha expressed her concern that her daughter has picked up on her violent behaviour. She explained that her daughter is now struggling with her own use of violence. For this, she blames herself. She maintains that her daughter learned to be violent from watching her engage in violence.

Samantha: She seen how I treated [my husband]. And she's treating her boyfriend like that . . . She's only fifteen, going on sixteen . . . I told her, 'When I was your age and with my first boyfriend,' I says, you know, 'I was in love.' I said, 'None of this swearing business. Being mean.' I said, 'You're so different from when I was with my first boyfriend.' I said, 'I notice you're violent.' I said, you're mother-in-law knows you're violent.' . . . And I said, 'And she's wondering where your violence is coming from.' I said, 'It's coming from me. 'Cause you've seen me do that.'

Samantha is both ashamed of and disappointed in herself because she feels that she has turned into "such a wicked person." She remembered an incident that

happened where her girlfriends were beating up another girl. She “stood watch” and ensured that nobody would stop the beating that was being inflicted upon this girl.

Samantha: The girls that I know, they're wicked. And uhm, I was thinking, I just stood there and I watched them. And I'm thinking to myself, that's saying something a lot about me, too. When I let, when I let my girls fight these other girls. And I don't stop them. If somebody tries to get in there, stop them. I don't let them. I told them, 'No, just leave them.' And I was thinking, jeez. I've turned into such a wicked person . . . Some people wanted to stop it. And I wouldn't let them. And I was thinking, that's when I started really thinking that, uhm, now I don't really care. I started not to care. Like, I was thinking that, uhm, it doesn't, ah, really bother me. It used to bother me before. But now, it's not starting to bother me . . . I guess I'm worried because, uhm, uhm, it doesn't bother me that it's, that it's happening. And I know that it's wrong.

Ashley, too, expressed that she is not proud of her violent behaviour. Her own use of violence has caused some stress in her life as well.

Ashley: I was buttering (little laugh) something with a butter knife. And he was just on my case. I don't know about what it was . . . I didn't even think about it at the, the butter knife. I took the knife, and I threw it. It phew (replicating sound of knife flying through the air), right, but I aimed for the side of his head. And it stuck on the wall . . . Do you think I was proud of that? No. It, I, and no. I didn't want to tell anybody what I was capable, you know. I know I wouldn't have killed him. I wouldn't go to that point. I know that I just wouldn't do that. My anger wouldn't put me to that point of harming a person that way. But, I knew when I was aiming at the side of his head. I was making a point. And no, I'm not proud of it. But, yeah. I'm capable of doing certain things, too. And I'm, and the thing is, I'm not, I'm not pleased with

myself about it. How much anger is built up in me.

For the most part, Samantha attributes her violent behaviour to the devastating extramarital affair in which her ex-partner had engaged. Among other things, Samantha feels very hurt and betrayed by her partner's actions, and she expressed that a lot of her anger comes from the circumstances surrounding her separation from her partner.

Samantha: He talked a lot about, uhm, divorcing me and telling me I was old. That this woman was young and everything. Like, she was gonna have, like, I knew that, I got my tubes tied. And he says, 'Well, you can't have kids anymore. And she can have kids. I wanna have kids with her. We're gonna get married.' And I told him, 'I hope you're happy.' (Little laugh) Yeah. And I says, uhm, I says, 'You know what?' I said, 'That woman took you from me.' I said, 'Good luck to her.' I said, 'When you get tired or her or she gets tired of you since you're older than her,' I told him, I said, 'And she's still young.' She was only twenty two. I said, 'She'll probably leave you.' (Little laugh) And I said, 'Good luck.' I says, uhm, I says, 'I don't care anymore.' I said, 'Go and do whatever you have to do.' . . . And I knew that was what was making me angry . . . Anger, like, from the past. And that's what scares me. I don't trust myself. I know if I can, I know if I'm angry enough, I can kill. And that's what scares me . . . I never used to fight. I know that. So, I learnt that . . . I learnt how to fight. And I was thinking if I never learned that, maybe I wouldn't be, wouldn't do what I'm doing.

Given her concern over her own use of violent behaviour, I asked Samantha how she copes with her anger and aggression.

Samantha: I used to handle myself better. I used to cry. I'd just break down and cry. And I was okay. But now, now, I don't find that I don't cr-, like, I'm not crying. I just know how to strike out. And that's, I feel, I feel shitty. Like, I don't like what I'm doing. I don't like what I've become. I tell myself that I won't do it again. I don't tell anybody anything . . . And then, sometimes, when I'm angry, I go and drink . . . I still drink now. But, uhm, I have more control over my drinking than before. I can go without a drink. And then, there's other times I get, I get really depressed. Then I start drinking again. But it's, it's still off and on. But it's not like I'm gone. Like, before, I used to be gone for a whole week, and I'd go home. And nobody knew where I was . . . It makes me forget about this.

Like Samantha, Courtney finds herself struggling to cope with her own use of intimate violence. In her struggle, she, too, has turned to alcohol.

Courtney's Story

As you may recall from Chapters Three and Four, Courtney witnessed a tremendous amount of violence as a child, and she experienced many years of sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Accordingly, Courtney attributed her use of intimate violence to the violence she experienced while she was growing up.

Courtney: My own violence, I believe, stems from when, yeah, when I was younger. I grew up with it. Uhm, especially with my father. The way I see it is more with my father . . . I think it came, stemmed from my father. And all the violence I seen at home. And my brother-in-law beating up my sisters. Ah, watching him try to shoot them. It, it was terrible. You know, I, I watched my sister. I used to look after her kids. I watched her beat him up, her one

year old son . . . At a year old, throw him from wall to wall cause he couldn't answer her properly or talk properly. She used to beat her two kids. I was about ten. And then my brother-in-law, her husband, used to come in, and they used to fight. And he came in there with a gun one time. And I was hiding underneath the bed, and he was shooting the gun in the house. So violence, I used to watch my brother-in-law rap the cord, at my house, around my dad's neck. Try to kill my dad. Smash all our windows. So, there's been violence all my life.

Courtney recalled that her intimate partners were also violent toward her. She described her first long-term partner as being "very abusive."

Courtney: He's the one that, ah, cut me here. All the scars I have on my face. Uhm, he put me in the hospital when I was, ah, six months pregnant with [my daughter]. He used to beat me up all the time just because . . . He didn't seem like that until I got pregnant . . . I was never allowed to go anywhere. I couldn't wear make-up. I couldn't go out. I couldn't, ah, talk to anybody. You know. I couldn't do nothing . . . Friends? No. Nobody.

While much of the violence Courtney experienced was at the hands of other individuals, Courtney did engage violent behaviour herself, both as a child and as an adult. She remembered that her own use of intimate violence began when she was around 16 years old, and she claimed that, at first, it often took place in response to violence at the hands of her partners.

Courtney: I was violent. I used to pick a lot of fights with a lot of girls . . . I was in a relationship when I was just turning sixteen . . . We used to fight all the time . . . We were very, very violent towards each

other . . . When he was violent with me, I would destroy his papers. Do anything . . . I would wait until I could get the opportunity to get for what they done to me . . . Like, you know, ha, ha, I can do this to you and you can't do this to me. It's my turn. You guys hurt me long enough. And you're never gonna hurt me again.

Courtney further maintained that, now, a lot of her violence occurs when her intimate partners say something to her that she does not want to hear. She expressed that anything can trigger her violence, especially when she is under the influence of alcohol.

Courtney: Most of the times, it was the alcohol . . . Something would just trigger, anything would trigger it off . . . A smell can trigger off a memory for me and set me off. Watching TV. And I'll throw something. TV triggers me off. Now, the TV didn't mean to do that. No. And I didn't mean it. But it was just the memory . . . You could say one thing to me and, uhm, I would think verbally. 'Right now, all's I do is, with [my current partner] here, now, it, the drinking.' But I'm verbally, I'm very verbally abusive . . . I call him a fuckin' asshole and he's a dummy. He's a prick. Ah, he's no good. He's worthless. He's just another piece of, ah, I don't know how you could say it . . . I push him around . . . But he wouldn't hit me . . . But I wouldn't get, like, really violent. But mostly verbally and emotionally . . . I would destroy my stuff more, but just that anger. You know? And he didn't have to do anything but just say one thing that would trigger something off . . . He would tell me that, uhm, ah, I was letting my kids control my life. That was it. He was right. His, he was right . . . And it would start. I would start. And I would start pushing him around. And he'd just keep backing away. Backing away. But the last time, I think I really did hurt him. His, I think I'm responsible for part of his last operation. Why he had to have it this time. Because I really flipped on him. And he was picking me up, trying

to just get away from me. And I was grabbing and pulling his hair. I was slapping. And I told him he was a pig, and he was like every other man you can think of. You can't hurt me, and you can't do this to me, and I can to this all I want 'cause you deserve it for every man that's ever touched me . . . I'm, it, in so enraged. It's just, I don't know what I feel . . . He didn't do anything.

Courtney sees connections between the men in her life and the feelings she holds about her father.

Courtney: He's more like my father. These are the way all these men have been. It seems like they're my father. And they're always telling me what to do. How to do it. What, what, and what, when I can do it and when I can't . . . And since I haven't dealt with my past, I see traits of my father in them. And to this day, even though my father is dead, I love my father, I will always love him. But, I have to let the anger and everything come out, that I'm not allowing to come out, to get myself better . . . I mean, I have fights with my kids now. And they're nineteen and twenty one . . . It's got to stop.

Courtney also spoke about her need for affection.

Courtney: All's I wanted was a hug . . . I don't even know what love is in a relationship . . . With [my current partner], in the beginning, it was, I liked the attention because of mostly 'cause I was drinking . . . I just wanted to be held. Not to be touched in any other way. No sexual. No nothing. But just a hug . . . But now, he doesn't even come near me . . . All's I want, I don't want nothing from him . . . I'll cry for my mom. And I'll say, 'Mom, please be here. Help me mom. I need a hug. 'Cause I can't get it nowhere else.' You know. And to this day, even though my kids, we fight, we kiss each other on the street good-bye. And hug each other . . . But that's different. You know, than from being with your partner.

You know. And right now, I feel not wanted. Ah, the only time he wants me is because, ah, we can't have sex. I've had maybe sexual intercourse with [my current partner] maybe four times in the thirteen, fourteen months I've been with him. 'Cause of his hernias. So I satisfy him. Even though I don't want to. But I do if that's the only way I'm gonna get a hug. But, I don't know what I done wrong. And maybe that's what's making me so angry 'cause, 'What have I done wrong?' Just a hug. You know? Or just to say, 'Courtney, I love you.' Or, 'I appreciate it that you clean the house.' You know, 'cause I, I do everything . . . Like, the sex wise, I, I don't care about. That I, that's not what I want. (Pause) You know? I just, I just want him to hold me. And tell me everything's gonna be okay, and my life will change. But I don't even get that. You know? I'm just a miserable, mean old bitch.

Courtney disclosed that her own use of violence has destroyed her life. With this, she finds herself struggling to cope with her own anger and aggression.

Courtney: It's destroyed my life. I'm trying to re-build it. And I'm 42 years old. You know. And at the age of 42, it's very hard to re-build your life when you lived in a fantasy world for how many years. You raised your kids in a fantasy world. In a violent world.

While Courtney has turned to drinking alcohol and taking prescription pills as a means of coping with her violent behaviour, she has also made many attempts at suicide. After showing me the many slash marks running from her wrists to mid-way up her forearms, Courtney expressed how she is tired of all the violence in her life. Mistakenly, she believes that the only way that she could end the violence she is living with would be to take her own life. On this note, Courtney recalled an incident where

she tried to kill herself by running in front of a moving police car.

Courtney: I don't want to hurt nobody . . . I mean, I tried to kill myself. I ran in front of a cop car, and they hit me. This is just, ah, last year. 'Cause I didn't want to live anymore. I didn't like myself anymore. Well, they just took me to the hospital and, ah, they didn't hurt me. Like, you know, 'cause they weren't going that fast. But, I was all stoned, drunk. I didn't care anymore. You know. I had enough. Giving up. I was tired of the fighting. I didn't want to fight no more. I didn't want to hit no more. Uhm, I didn't want my dad controlling me no more. You know. I wanted it to end. I didn't want my kids, I gave them, you know, enough pain. They grew up with enough pain. And now, they're the same way.

For now, Courtney explained that she will continue to live in her violent world because this is the one in which she is most familiar. Despite the danger of this "fantasy world," Courtney finds safety in her violent environment.

Courtney: I was on psych wards a few times. I'm not proud of it. But we live in this world where you're scared to open up new doors. You're scared to find out what it's like with the real world because your fantasy world, you live that all your life. And that is safer for you than going out there and finding something different and all new, where you don't know if you're gonna be hurt or safe. But to me, in my fantasy world, the way I live my life, that was safe. Which really wasn't. The way I was living. Like, I got, I got so many fears, you know, of everything. You know, and you wouldn't think a person that's violent would have any fears. I've been raped walking down the street. I've had things done to me by my brother-in-laws. Ah, with uncles. Lots of things. And I guess we just, everything all together. You know, and I think when it began, I don't know if it began when my dad started doing what he did. I think it began when my mom up, left.

One woman in the focus-group discussions clearly illustrated women's need to find better ways of coping with their violent behaviour. She, too, turned to alcohol in order to cope with her own use of violence. However, in her case, she sought out the mellow hang-over that comes with drinking alcohol, rather than the disassociating high that one gets while under the influence of alcohol.

Participant: I wanted to drink. And I get very aggressive when I drink . . . I get really, really angry. And then, I stay like that for about (little laugh) four or five days. And then, when I'm, when I'm so tired and, and then hung over, then the anger feels like it's gone. And then I, I'm so weak I can't get angry. So, I feel like I've, I'm under control . . . It's the hangover that makes me feel like I'm in control. Like, I'm hung over. I don't want to do anything. I don't wanna, like, I just wanna be passive. You know. I just, you know, and people can wanna throw things and yell at me and scream at me. You know. It doesn't do any, it doesn't do nothing to me. Like, it just goes in one ear and out the other. And I wish I could have that control when he, when he says something to me. And it, and it doesn't make me feel so, so angry. But when, when I got a hangover, I just think about myself. You know, how I, how I'm feeling right now. And, and when he gets, gets me mad or whatever, it doesn't bother me anymore because of, I'm still like, I'm still kind of drunk. But then, I'm still kind of, I'm hung over . . . I'm just mellowing out right now. And I'm just getting ready to be, like, ah, feel, feel better about myself. And then, it starts over again. You know? . . . I'm not gonna stand up and yell back at him. And he'll leave me alone because he knows I'm, I've got a hangover. (Little laugh) . . . Like, that's how I, just to vent my anger by drinking. And just going on and on and just hurting my body. Like, it's really hurt, basically hurting my body. I just, I'm just hurting myself. Like, it's not, not in the sense of committing suicide or cutting myself up or anything like that. But, I guess, that's just as bad as cutting yourself up. Abusing yourself with alcohol. Because, or drugs or whatever. Because it's really hard

to cope with your anger. Anyway. That's how I used to do it.

Like Samantha and Courtney, Brandi and Carol also turn to alcohol as a means of coping with their violent behaviour. Other women have developed other ways to deal with their violence. Juliette, for instance, punches a punching bag in order to exert the greatest amount of energy into an activity other than lashing out at her intimate partner. In like manner, Crystal sweeps her carpet rather than vacuums it because she feels this is a good way to let her anger and frustration out. Unfortunately, these means of coping with their violent behaviour are often erratic, and they do not always work to relieve the women of their anger and aggression. In some cases, such as with Martha who locks herself in her room and throws books, they merely lead to further frustration and, hence, often intensify the stressful conditions of their lives.

Summary

To develop a "more complete" understanding of women's intimate violence, I sought to hear from the women themselves in terms of how they make sense of their violent behaviour and the circumstances or social contexts in which this violence occurs. In doing so, it quickly became evident that while the women do share similar experiences, they do not necessarily share the same experiences. Moreover, they do not share the same understanding regarding their common experiences. Once again, then, I must

stress the fact that the stories told here are only a selected portion of my conversations with the women. While their stories are partial – as is the knowledge that I have produced regarding women’s anger and aggression – they do provide us with important insights about women’s intimate violence.

Through my interviews with the women, we now know that much of women’s intimate violence occurs in response to the women’s long histories of racial oppression and discrimination and their subsequent victimization both as children growing up in broken families and as adults living in violent relationships. Nevertheless, although the women’s histories of victimization do play a role in their own use of violence, this is not to say that the women define their violence solely in these terms. For the most part, the women I interviewed are well aware of their own capacity for violence, and they hold themselves accountable for their anger and aggressive behaviour. How the women made sense of their intimate violence largely depended upon the circumstances and social contexts in which they found themselves.

For instance, some women explained their intimate violence as a form of self-protection and survival. In this case, the women’s violence often took place in response to violence at the hands of other individuals. Whether the violence they experienced was physical, sexual or verbal in nature, most of the women reached a point in their lives where they had just “had enough,” and they developed a defensive stance with which to physically and psychologically survive. This defensive stance usually took the

form of aggressive behaviour, and it often involved particular tactics (such as only fighting in the bath tub) with which the women were able to ensure their own self-protection.

Some women explained their use of intimate violence as a response to feeling disrespected, hurt and betrayed by their intimate partners' offensive behaviour. Their violence was seen as a call for attention, whereby the women simply wanted to be listened to, heard, believed in and understood. In many instances, feelings of sexual jealousy and mistrust on the part of the women also came into play here. Regardless, most of the women explained their sexual jealousy in terms of being disrespected and maltreated rather than in terms of feeling insecure about their intimate relationships.

The women's intimate violence was also understood as a way for the women to regain order and control in their stress-filled lives. In this case, some of the women pointed out that their own use of violence was not usually used in response to violence at the hands of their intimate partners. In fact, in many instances, the women's partners were not violent at all when an episode of violence would take place. However, some women did feel as though their partners could be doing more to help reduce the stresses in their lives and, thus, they merely became further frustrated within their intimate relationships. More often than not, their frustration turned to anger.

While the stresses in the women's lives may not have anything to do with their intimate partners directly, some of the women explained that they will employ

displaced anger and aggressive behaviour toward their intimate partners as a means of "releasing tension." In this case, the women's partners do not have to be violent toward the women in order to find themselves at the receiving end of the women's intimate violence. As illustrated in Martha's story, some partners merely need to be present when the women are feeling the pressure and frustration of their stressful lives.

Despite the circumstances or social contexts in which their violence occurs, most of the women who participated in the research project expressed a general concern for their own anger and aggression. In many instances, the women's violence has had a devastating effect upon the women's lives. Unfortunately, by not really knowing how to effectively cope with their own anger and aggression, many of the women find themselves struggling with their own use of violence.

Given that we now have a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding women's use of intimate violence, it seems appropriate that we turn our attention to what the women want and need in terms of resources, and what exactly is available to women who are struggling with their own violence.

Chapter Six MEETING WOMEN'S NEEDS

Participant: You shouldn't be violent. I, I think we all know that . . . We don't need somebody telling us that we're not supposed to be violent . . . So, what do we do about it? Where's our resources? Where's our help? Help us. You don't want us to be violent? We can't just stop.

Women's intimate violence is a complicated problem for which there are no easy solutions. Contributing to its complicated nature is the social resistance to publically acknowledge that women can be aggressors of violence within an intimate relationship. Society's gender role expectations that men should be tough and aggressive and women should be docile and dainty encourage both men and women to remain silent about the issue. When the issue does arise, the circumstances surrounding women's intimate violence have often been minimized, distorted or denied altogether. From my interviews with the women, this seemed to be the case.

Most of the women I interviewed expressed a general concern for their use of violence and their capacity to seriously harm their intimate partners. Although they recognized that they were in need of immediate assistance in dealing with their violent behaviour, these women also related that their intimate violence was one issue with which they felt constrained to remain silent. In those situations where the women did

reach out for help in dealing with their anger and aggression, they soon came to the realization that readily available programs and resources designed to meet their needs were extremely limited, and the focus of these resources were not always directed specifically at women's use of violence. With feelings of shame and embarrassment, many of the women hid their violence from individuals outside of their intimate relationships, and they quietly struggled with their violent behaviour. Evidently, this general unwillingness to address the issue of women's intimate violence has only further complicated the problem for many women living with their own anger and aggression.

Acknowledging the Issues

Meeting the needs of women who engage in violent behaviour involves much more than simply zeroing in on women's victimization at the hands of male intimates. In speaking with the women who participated in the research project, I soon realized that there are many other issues that come into play when we attempt to understand women's intimate violence and, hence, provide the resources necessary to help women gain some control over their violent behaviour. Poverty, for instance, is one such issue that factors in women's use of intimate violence.

Poverty places a great deal of stress on many women, and it often gives rise to feelings of hopelessness and frustration. Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted with the

daily grind of the poverty-related stresses in their lives, some of the women developed strong feelings of hostility.

Brenda: I was gonna go to jail. I didn't really care. But I didn't have no money. I still don't have no money. Fuckin' broke. I'm gonna be on welfare.

Ashley: People living under the poverty line, so to speak, okay, are just making it. Money is an issue in most relationships whether people want to accept it or not . . . They should be taken into consideration because of their financial situation. Because that's where a lot of problems come in . . . They have a hard time finding jobs, or going to school . . . I don't think people realize, money sometimes is, is the big issue . . . Other factors come into play, like I said. But a lot of it is financial.

Along with poverty-related stresses comes the problems associated with alcohol and other substance abuses. As I pointed out in Chapters Three and Four, alcohol and substance abuse have often been used as a way for the women to dissociate themselves from the reality of their stress-filled lives. Unfortunately, the use of such drugs merely adds to the women's problems, and it keeps the vicious cycle of violence intact.

Participant: That's how I used to do it. Just use alcohol to deal, to, and sometimes, like, a couple of times, it really got me in trouble . . . I, ah, dislocated a security guard's neck . . . I don't like people bugging me when I, I'm in that angered state. So, I guess I lashed out . . . I lashed out again, I guess, when I was drunk and took a knife and stabbed my partner . . . I couldn't believe I did that, you know. 'Cause I was so angry when I went out that

night to go and drink.

The preceding chapters also reveal that a lack of parenting skills and the subsequent problems many women encounter in trying to raise their children in a healthy manner also play into women's use of intimate violence, especially when these parenting issues are combined with the stresses of living within a poverty-stricken environment. Recall from Chapter Two that Samantha had developed inadequate parenting skills as a result of growing up in her broken family, and she almost choked her son to death. The women's problems are further compounded when they are raising their children on their own, as single parents.

Participant: With single parenting, I mean, that, you're doing that all on your own. You know. So, that's, that's, you know, you're double loading your task there and, you know, it's, it's, ah, they need way more parenting programs. Parenting skill programs.

As I pointed out in Chapter Two, many of the women do not possess the parenting skills required to raise healthy children. Being ill-prepared to take on the role of parent, these women – especially those who find themselves in single-parent situations – place their children at risk of abuse and neglect. Unless these problems are addressed, each new generation of broken families is merely replicated. Remember from Chapter Three that Courtney, for instance, was raised by her single father, and she experienced a great deal of abuse and neglect as a child growing up. By not

developing the parenting skills required to raise healthy children of her own, Courtney's daughter, Jasmine, also went on to experience the stresses of having to raise a child when she was ill-prepared to do so. Consequently, Jasmine, like many of the other women who participated in the research project, became involved with Child and Family Services. At the start of our interview, Jasmine expressed her frustration in having to deal with this child protection agency.

Jasmine: CFS got involved when [my daughter] was born because of my lack of parenting skills. I just had a baby in the hospital, and I have a lack of parenting skills. How can that be? Because of my mom's depression. And because of the way I was raised by my mom . . . I'm sorry. I'm just so mad . . . We were trying to get on social assistance. And that's why they took her. Because I wasn't supposed to be with him . . . I can't work because I have visits with my daughter that I have to commit to . . . And meanwhile, 'You don't make this amount to see your daughter. You don't do this to see your daughter.' . . . I've got so mad over the phone with, with the supervisors and I told them, I said, 'Well, all's I want is my fuckin' daughter back.' You know? He's, like, 'Well, I don't appreciate you referring your daughter as to a fuckin' child.' And, like, I didn't mean it like that. I'm, like, I've been screwed around by these people so much it's not even funny.

Jasmine explained that much of the violence between herself and her partner may be attributed to her involvement with Child and Family Services. In a "catch-22" sort of way, Jasmine explained that she is having difficulty in regaining custody of her daughter because of the violence in her life, yet her involvement with Child and Family Services is merely fueling much of her anger and frustration.

Jasmine: Well, now, see, like, me and [my boyfriend], like, we, we've been very violent toward each other . . . I think it depends on the lifestyle that you had, too, growing up because that's all I saw was violence. That's the only way I knew to get my anger out. I wanted to hit back . . . And I can understand all, having [my daughter] in that kind of environment. But, I don't think it would be that way if we had our daughter because that's where all the problems are . . . Like, the way things are right now, like, they're very, very hard for me because I, I, like, I know [my daughter]. I see her all the time. And he doesn't see her . . . It's been rough. And it's hard with [my boyfriend] because he doesn't know her. And I can't talk to him about her . . . I want him to know what I know about her . . . But, I can't help not telling him about her and how she's doing . . . Why it's so hard is because they're trying to make me choose. Like, and it's not that I don't want to be with my baby. Like, I'm cut. I've, I'd give anything for my baby to come home. But, I don't want to have to grow up saying, you know, I had to leave your father because I wouldn't have been able to get you back . . . He's my first love. Like, I was, I've been with this guy since I was fifteen. I'm gonna be twenty. So, it's not like I can say, 'Okay. Get out.' You know, 'Leave.' We do have a lot of arguments. But it's because of there's so much anger and that we can't have our baby . . . Almost, like, two years I've been fighting.

Carol, too, expressed her frustration with losing her children to Child and Family Services, and she also explained that much of her anger and aggression may be attributed to the fact that she does not have custody of her children.

Carol: Yesterday I felt like doing someone in. An ex-partner. Because he's keeping the children away from me. And he has no right. He abandoned them for three years . . . And he has them now. And, ah, and he's not letting me see them, ah, on a regular basis like he's promised . . . I don't know how he did it. He got a divorce. Our, our divorce, and full custody of the children . . . It's totally

unfair . . . All the years that he didn't, wasn't there for the children. Fuckin' asshole.

Recall from Chapter Three that, as adults, many of the women still feel obligated to carry on their care-giving responsibilities over members of their extended families. As was the case for Crystal and Sarah, having to deal with the problems experienced by their parents and siblings appeared to intensify the women's anger and frustration. Other issues that seemed to play into the women's use of intimate violence included general problems related to their intimate relationships.

Jasmine: When there's no physical abuse, [my boyfriend], like, he would take off for weeks at a time. Not call me so that, that, for me, is emotional abuse because I'm sitting there waiting for him to come home. Like, or even phone. Wondering who he's with.

Martha: He's no fricken angel. Like, you know. At all. And he'll, he'll do this. He'll freak out on me and that stuff. He'll bring up my past . . . Saying, like, I'm a big slut or whatever . . . He brings it up every time he's been drinking. And I say to him, 'Why don't you bring that up to me when you're sober, and we can talk about it.' You know. Talk about it in, without me walking on fricken egg shells . . . And then he'll start doing whatever he does . . . And then, where I, I'll go and, you know, freak out and then, like, you know, 'Oh my God. What, why am I doing this to him?' You know?

Jasmine: My mother doesn't like [my boyfriend]. No respect between [my boyfriend] and my mom. Like, I, I fight with my mom because of [my boyfriend]. I've got an attitude because of my mom. And I'm stuck in the middle of a big jigsaw puzzle right now.

When problems within their relationships do arise between the women and their intimate partners, I learned that most of the women were unable to discuss these problems with their partners. For the most part, just as Carol had explained in the preceding chapter, there appeared to be a lack of communication skills necessary to address their troubled situations.

Participant: He's not listening, and, and he interprets everything wrong. Everything I say is wrong. Like, he's always right, and the rest is wrong . . . He's not listening.

Ashley: When I'm angry, I think it's because somebody's not listening to what I'm saying . . . They're filtering it the way they want to hear it, and that upsets me because I can sit there and try to explain. And they know what I'm trying to explain. But they want, they want to understand it the way they want, in order to, to be liked. That's what makes me angry . . . Even though I know I'm being heard, even, and they're not listening. That's frustrating . . . They don't have to, to say I'm right or wrong. They're entitled to their da-, own damn opinion. But, just listen to me out. Let me finish, and don't try to finish the sentence for me. I've got a mind of my own. I can talk.

Martha: When I'd be mad is, he would, what would happen is, ah, we'd get into an argument. I'd run in my bedroom. And that's where I threw my books and threw everything, right? I didn't want to be alone. I wanted him to come and talk . . . 'Cause the more I leave it, the more it festers, the more I get pissed off. And the more I, like, like, you know, and I freak out. Like, you know. I just slap him . . . Like, I wanted him to come after me. And, like, you know, we'll talk. Like, you know. And, like, then he can, like, you know, do whatever I want him to do and, and that . . . I also wanted him to come and, and, like, then we can, I don't know. It's just, it's weird. I wanted him to do that . . . He'd leave me alone . . . And leave me alone for hours. (Little laugh) Like, you

know. I'm, like, 'Come in. Come and see me.' Like, you know. 'Come and talk.' And he would just leave it.

One important finding from my interviews with the women was the fact that while many of the women were unable to discuss the problems they encountered in their relationships with their intimate partners, they claimed that their partners were, in most instances, their only means of psychological and emotional support.

Melissa: I talk to my, ah, partner. And I talk to him about, about stuff. Running up my phone bill, too. (Little laugh) I talk to him 'cause my, I'm with my little girl, hey. And sometimes, I'm scared of hitting her if I'm gonna get mad. So, I'd call my partner. And just work it out like that. And a lot of these things that I have to cope with, my little girl's there. Like, during the day, I am under a lot of stress from work, hey . . . But at night, it's my little girl and me. You know. That's how I cope with stuff.

Carol: I only have my partner right now. I talk. I talk about it. And that's the only way I can deal with it right now. He's the only one to talk about it.

Other than their intimate partners, many of the women disclosed that they had no emotional support systems whatsoever.

Brandi: I was ready to, ah, accept it, hey . . . I told my mom and my boyfriend that I want to go in there for my violence so I can deal with it 'cause I don't want to come back here [to jail] . . . I did some solid thinking in there, this last time . . . And everybody's saying, 'Well, you won't go. You won't go.' I said, 'Fuck.' I still went.

With their intimate partners being their only means of psychological and emotional support, many of the women found that their problems were further compounded by the simple fact that their partners were not very understanding to their emotional needs. However, as I pointed out in Chapter Four, it should be noted that many of the women disclosed that their intimate partners had come from broken families themselves and, thus, they were struggling with their own issues relating to violence.

Jasmine: What makes our relationship so hard, too, is because we both had somewhat the same lifestyle. So, we both have so much anger from being young and issues and we're just, it's, like, not being dealt with . . . I'm so tired of, of being hurt. And I don't know how to hurt anybody else, except using violence . . . I don't know how to make them see that I'm actually hurting . . . I hit them, they'll actually know why I, I feel that inside, not physically, but I prove that emotionally . . . He doesn't like seeing me cry. And he calls me, 'Oh, you're whining.' And this and that. And then, I start to get mad, and I want to hit because I'm not whining. I'm hurting, and I want him to see that I'm hurting. And I didn't know how to do it any other way. That if I hit him, he'll feel my pain, just differently, you know? . . . I feel if you're not gonna listen to me, violence is the only way to get you to listen to me because if I'm hitting you, you know, I'm there, right? . . . It's a way of hurting people. Listen. A bunch of hurting 'cause they won't listen to me and understand me. So, I show that if I hurt them, they'll understand me.

Most of the women expressed some degree of concern for their use of intimate violence. In addition to feeling scared that they may some day seriously harm their

intimate partners, the women felt ashamed, embarrassed and strongly driven to hide their violent behaviour. More than this, they often felt the need to run from their problems rather than confront them straight-on.

Ashley: It's not socially acceptable. But I think a lot of people who don't know how to control it need to be taught how to control it. Do you know what I'm saying? You need, they need somebody to talk to. To tell them how to, how to go about not do-, you know, like, not flipping out . . . There is a way to change your life. It's not impossible.

Martha: I don't want my name brought up nowhere. I just don't. I don't, like, like, I, I know how [my co-workers] are . . . I don't want them talking, 'Oh. Martha's in a violent relationship.' . . . That's why I won't say anything. 'Cause of, oh yeah, and I'm ashamed and that stuff. And I don't want, really want no one to know that . . . You gotta understand that I don't want to do some things, sometimes . . . I didn't want no one to say to me, 'You need help.' . . . I can't be abusive, like, where I work, you know. Look where I work. I couldn't do that. And, and I just couldn't, I was ashamed. And I just didn't want it. And, and finally, I just had to go [for counselling]. But I'd often, would leave a lot of things out because I just didn't want to be bothered.

Jasmine: For me, I find it hard to stand in a group of people and say, 'Hey, I beat my boyfriend.' You know? . . . But I find once I get there, it's easier as you go along and do the right thing instead of working against it . . . If there's more women out there saying, you know, help me with my problem so I don't hurt my boyfriend, maybe it won't be so bad . . . I know of other ways. But, the violence gets too high up there, or it's, like, it's the most powerful thing. It's the most easiest thing to just hit.

This is not to say that the women did not seek out professional assistance in

dealing with their own anger and aggression. Some of the women did express their belief that they could put an end to their violent behaviour, providing they received the necessary resources to help them along the way.

Participant: I wanna catch myself. Like, you know, I didn't mean to do this. Like, I really think I, I didn't mean to do it, but I guess, subconsciously, I did mean to do it.

Samantha: I don't like to be angry, and I don't like to be aggressive. And, (pause) my s-, I'm, I seeked therapy when I started knowing that I was losing control of my, myself and my anger . . . I should learn to control myself. And I, and I don't control myself . . . I was thinking that I could have more control . . . Everybody has, uhm, control over what they do. But I don't do the right thing . . . I know what my mom did wrong with me. I don't know how to do things. I need help. I need parenting skills . . . When I seen my parents, their relationships, I said that wasn't a healthy, a healthy one.

Brenda: I don't mean to hurt others, like, my, my, what I do or what I say 'cause sometimes it's just done in anger. You know what I mean? That, it comes from anger, I guess. You gotta, like, people gotta control their anger. Like, learn to control their anger or talk to somebody or some fuckin' thing. I don't know.

Unfortunately, although the women did recognize their need to gain some positive control over their violent behaviour, they also realized that there were a number of barriers with which they would have to contend before they were able to effectively meet their needs in terms of coping with their own use of intimate violence. Having acknowledged some of the issues underlying women's intimate violence, we

may now turn our attention to the programs and resources that are available to assist women in dealing with their own anger and aggression.

Confronting the Barriers

When I questioned what is available for women who are trying to cope with their own use of intimate violence, a common response among the women was that there is virtually nothing available in terms of programming for these women.

Juliette: There's nothing. Like, I, I even know there's nothing out there because I have a list of organizations . . . And there's nothing out there like that . . . There's things out there, like, where you can get counselled. But, you know, sometimes that's not good enough. That's not good enough 'cause they still have that anger. It's not gonna just disappear.

Crystal: I don't think there's much out there . . . I haven't heard of anything about it . . . It would be nice if there was, you know, if there was places, some that's open, and you can go there, you know. And something you can hear about . . . There's nothing.

Some women did disclose that they had heard of a few programs that were available to women who were struggling with the violence in their lives, but they claimed that these programs were extremely limited and often unconventional. In this regard, the women claimed that, in many situations, they had to address their own anger and aggression through programming other than that which was specific to their needs.

Crystal: For my anger and aggression, I didn't, I did, I didn't really go through anything for it. But I did have to deal a li-, a little tiny portion of it in, in my, uhm, you know, my little counselling through, ah, the years I was with my partner. But not total focus on it 'cause it wasn't really looked at, I guess. It was overlooked.

Brandi: There's family violence courses. Stuff like that, hey. They just have to want to do it. There is hope out there . . . If you look for it, it's out there. You gotta want to have to do it.

In terms of their own use of violence being overlooked, I asked Brandi about the type of programming she received in dealing with her own anger and aggression. Similar to some of the other women, she explained that she primarily dealt with her violent behaviour through programs designed to address alcohol abuse and other problems associated with substance addictions.

Brandi: They asked who, why I come here. 'For your addiction?' I says, 'No.' I said, 'For my anger.' I sa-, 'Cause I was always jealous and, ah, I wanted to deal with it.' . . . They got me crying and crying . . . But you know what? I'm happy they did that to me . . . It was, like, really hard when I went in there. Four months later, it was easy . . . I won't hit anybody. But if I'm, like, intoxicated or drunk, there's always gonna be fighting around. But if I'm sober, I don't do it 'cause I know where it gets me . . . Now, I think about it. Nobody's worth it. Nobody's worth going to jail for.

Although Brandi claimed that going to a treatment facility in order to deal with her violent behaviour did have a positive effect upon her life, she remembered a time when she did not really fit in with the other women in the treatment facility and, hence,

she was unanimously "kicked out" of her treatment program. Consequently, Brandi explained that upon her return to this treatment facility, she made sure to monitor her own behaviour in order to not frighten anyone by expressing her own anger and frustration.

Brandi: I was [at a treatment facility] for six months. I was there twice. First time, I wa-, first time, I was kicked out after three weeks 'cause all the women in, ah, that were, slept in, we shared a room. They're all scared of me. And they all had a meeting one day, hey. Like, what to talk with and that. So they said, third time I went there, I knew not to try and scare anybody. Like, talk, like, me, not to really, me, mean and any attention to be mean to anybody. But, my tone of voice or anything.

Carol, too, shared Brandi's experience of not really having an appropriate place to turn when she was in desperate need of assistance in dealing with her own anger and aggressive behaviour. In this case, she was actually turned away from receiving help from an organization that is specifically designed to assist women and children.

Carol: I called CFS and I told them if they didn't come and get me and my kids out that day, that night, that there would be a dead person in the morning, and it wasn't gonna be me. So they go, 'Well, it sounds to us like you have the problem.' So, and I says, 'Okay, fine.' I said, 'You know, ah, you don't know the situation. Uhm, he won't let me and my children leave.' And whatever. And I just, that was the end of that . . . They turned me away . . . They said, like, 'We can't help you.'

Some women claimed that they were unaware that there was even any help

available to them. Like Carol, many of these women felt that they had no where to turn in terms of positively dealing with their anger and aggression.

Brenda: What can they do if it's not there? . . . I didn't even know about this fuckin' shit. I, I knew there was, like, men have, being abusers. I know a lot of fuckin' abusers . . . Like, it could be there. Services could be there. It's there for men. They can do it for a woman, I guess (sigh). Well, same as men. What the hell is the difference? I, like, I mean there's a difference, but are we supposed to be treated different or what? Than men? . . . It's the same thing. I don't know what's the difference . . . Whatever they have for men. That's what I'm saying. They, they got anger. They, they need management, too.

This lack of awareness that the women experienced with regard to programming and resources may be the result of society's reluctance to publically acknowledge women's intimate violence. Some of the women expressed a general concern with this reluctance, since it often influenced the labeling of women as being "sick" or "crazy" in some sort of way.

Jasmine: For me, I am very proud of myself. I've come a long way because of the, the family that I've had. The abuse that I've had. I've never turned to drugs for a get-away, you know. Like, I'm on anti-depressants. But, that's 'cause I'm not, I have so much going on, I can't focus properly on my own. So, I need some type of help, and therapy isn't helping nobody that I need the help.

Brandi: They try to say something was wrong with me. Try to say I was crazy . . . I ended up to go to the psych health centre to talk to two psychiatrists. Know what they told me? I said, 'So. Am I crazy?' . . . And he goes, 'Oh no, Brandi. You're not crazy. Don't

have to worry,' He says, 'You know what you need?' . . . He says, 'Okay. I advise you to take anger management.' That's all he told me. He said, 'You're not crazy. Just got a lot of anger in you.'

Courtney: I just think they need a lot more than what they have . . . And not always sticking them in the psych wards thinking they're crazy. You know. And popping them, giving them pills. 'Well, here. Take this.' They say, 'Oh. Okay.' My psychiatrist is doing that. She's, she's giving me pills for, 'cause she thinks that I was sick, schizo. I took this medication for one week. I could, I threw it down the toilet . . . Women, uhm, are afraid to open up to doctors. I am . . . Now, you go into a doctor's office, 'Okay. This is what you got. Good bye.' Or, 'Here's a prescription for Valium. Good bye.' No nothing. The hospitals, the same thing. I don't know. It just, there's just not enough. Not enough of anything for women.

I asked Courtney how she felt about her psychiatrist thinking that she was crazy.

Courtney explained that she feels frustrated by the fact that while her psychiatrist may be listening to her, she is not hearing what she is saying. Nor is she taking the sufficient time required to really understand the circumstances surrounding her complicated life.

Courtney: She's not listening . . . I like [my psychiatrist], but I think there is something, that she has some kind of a health thing that she doesn't remember half the things that she says. She doesn't remember half the things she writes down. Uhm, she always thinks one of my kids are in [another city]. Uhm, she's the one that referred me to stay at the [rehabilitation centre] to work on my alcohol and that. But she doesn't remember that.

Further compounding Courtney's frustration is the fact that she has involuntarily

gone through one psychiatrist after another in her attempt to effectively deal with the violence in her life.

Courtney: I've been through psychiatrists and psychiatrists and psychiatrists. And they have to stop using the, how would you call it? I know this is how the beginners learn. But one time, I went through six psychiatrists because, well, this psychiatrist was only on this training for this long. Then you go to the next psychiatrist. And it's all, that's, same thing all over again. And the next psychiatrist. And it's all the, the same thing again . . . Like, explain your whole situation again . . . And that still has not changed.

Like Courtney, Juliette expressed her dislike for those professionals who falsely claim that they share some understanding of the problems encountered by women who are struggling with violence in their lives.

Juliette: There's a lot of different reasons why I am, I'm like this . . . There could be a lot of reasons. I know that. Like, it's just, like, I used to see this counsellor, hey. But, she didn't help. (Little laugh) She was wondering what to do. Like, what a waste of time, man. She was a waste of time. Because I knew I had a problem. I knew what my problem was, and I pinpointed my problem . . . Sometimes, I just, sometimes, I think that they're just in it for their job. They're not really there to help you out or anything. I noticed that in a lot of people . . . Just, that's the way I think of it though. Some, some people, like, they're just in it because, the money, and it's good. Not because they care or because they want to make a difference. We need more people, understanding people anyways . . . Because that's the only way it's gonna work . . . If you, you actually had the experience and you know what you're doing . . . People that have been through it. And, and, ah, experienced . . . That's when you know that people actually care.

Is when they're, when they ha-, experienced it already . . . People that try talk to you about your kids, and they, they try say, 'Oh. But I understand. I understand.' Like, people always talk to me about my kids, hey. Because they, I miss them to death. Like, I think about them all the time. And I cry for them all the time. and, and they always, they, they come up to me. And they're, they don't even have kids. And they're, like, 'Oh, I know how you feel. I, I understand how you feel.' And I'm, like, 'No you don't. You don't know how it, how it feels for a m-, to have a mother get her kids taken away from her.' And they just shut up right away 'cause they know I'm right. That's what I don't like about people when they do that. Like, holy. I hate hypocrites . . . Like, Oh. Piss me off!

For similar reasons as Juliette, Martha has little confidence that anything beneficial will come from counselling sessions pertaining to her violent behaviour.

Martha: Going to that counselling, I've been there twice. And it feels like I've said my, I said my whole life story, like, you know, in two hours. And now, 'What are you gonna do for me now?' Like, you know. And there's nothing there for me. Like, she, we analyze my, we pick at my, my childhood. I want to know what's, what's wrong. You know. I want to know how I can cope with myself. I don't want to read a book. I want to learn. I want to talk. And you know, and that stuff.

Much along these lines of non-confidence, a significant theme consistent among the women's stories was their general lack of trust in non-Aboriginal people and organizations. This should not be surprising, since the women's experiences with racism, hostility and conflict were consistent themes characterizing their lives. Nevertheless, much of this mistrust in white professionals appeared to be associated

with the discriminatory practices that the women claimed they experienced at the hands of police officials.

Crystal: When I would phone the police on my ex-partner, the police just, like, look at the, my situation, and they, oh, you know, he did this and I, and I explain, you know, he did this and he did that, you know . . . Like, the door could be split in two . . . And I'm, like, pointing out, you know, just other things he did. And the police went out to look at me, I was, like, 'Okay. What did you do?' I'm, like, you know, 'Well, what did I do? Nothing!' You know. And, and all he got was, you know, sent home to his mother's place. That's what he got for destroying my house. And it, it just felt like, you know, being Native . . . Me being Native . . . They just didn't deal with it properly. That's just what I think about it . . . 'Oh. She was just Native and, uhm, you know she probably, you know, likes to take it from him or whatever.

Samantha: [The] police department's really racist toward me. They just hate me with a passion 'cause of my kids. 'Cause they're teenagers now . . . Like, they swear at me and all that. Like, 'You fuckin' Indian. You guys are just nothing but social recipients. Social assistance recipients,' they tell us.

Ashley: Honestly, all the dealings I had with, with the police have been negative because I'm seen as, ah, different. And I'm treated differently. I'm not treated with respect. They assume they, they've got me figured out.

Another barrier which presents the women with some frustration in adequately dealing with their use of intimate violence appears to be the overwhelmingly long waiting lists that are in place in order to get into the handful of programs and resources that are available to women.

Sarah: I know it from experience, too, when I try to get help. Like, you know. You got to wait six months. I says, 'But I need help now. What am I supposed to do?' Like, you know. And some women get frustrated . . . It's no good for them because they can't get in . . . But there's not that much out there where they can just go in like that and be able to see someone and, you know. They need more.

Courtney: There's too many waiting lists. Too many. You, waiting lists, I think, is sad because one woman could be dead by the time she gets on that, by the time her name comes up . . . There's too many cutbacks. It stinks. It's just, the waiting lists, no, are, are just far too long . . . What do you have to do? Go kill somebody in order to get there? Is that what it, it has to lead to?

Adding to the women's frustration of having to wait to get into the necessary programs with which to meet their needs is the limited stretch of time that most programs run. Overall, the women expressed that the programs which are available to women struggling to cope with their violent behaviour are far too short in duration to be of any real benefit to them.

Courtney: I go to anger management. But they need more. Eleven cla-, ten classes is not enough. Once a week . . . They don't have a lot of resources for women. I don't think so.

Brandi: I've been to twelve programs. I've been to, ah, anger management. You know what? Still, there's not enough for all the anger to come out.

With some idea of the issues involved in women's intimate violence and the barriers that we need to confront in order to effectively meet the needs of women who

engage in violent behaviour, it seems appropriate that we now determine where the women see a need for further resources.

Addressing the Need for Further Resources

When I questioned the women as to what type of resources they would like to see in terms of meeting their needs in dealing with their use of intimate violence, the complexities involved with this issue quickly became evident. Due in part to the fact that some of the women had never really sought out professional help in dealing specifically with their own violence, a few of the women were at a loss when it came to determining what exactly they wanted to see in terms of resources.

Juliette: I wish I had the answer for that. I don't even have an answer for that. I don't know.

Brandi: (Sigh) I don't know. I'm no-, I'm not gonna tell you anything 'cause I don't know.

Jasmine: Would I like to see? Hmm. See, it's hard 'cause I've never really heard of any. Something though, like, I can't really think of it right now, but something to let the women know that it's not just the men who are abusers, you know. I would, like, I'd go, I'd go to programs, like, that to help myself with my abuse towards [my boyfriend] so I could make myself learn this so I don't have to hit him. So, not have to, but so I don't have the need to hit him or want to hit him. I'd just walk away or do something else. Instead of just, well, he made me mad. I gotta hit him.

For the most part, however, the women were quick to tell me what they wanted

to see in terms of programs and services, and they disclosed many reasonable suggestions to meeting the needs of women who engage in violence. First and foremost, the women wanted to see some form of education and public awareness to let other women (and their intimate partners) know that they are not alone in their struggle with intimate violence.

Martha: There's not that much programs. And it's so quiet. No one knows about that. No one knows about how, you know, this woman went and beat the shit out of her, her partner. And you know, put him in the hospital. No one, you don't hear about that stuff at all . . . For me, is when I talk to you. It, like, you know, you said, 'I was violent to my partner.' I'm, like, 'Okay.' That sort of made me a little reassurance . . . I wasn't thinking I'm the only one that's violent. Like, I wasn't thinking that way. But, I was thinking, you know, none of my friends are really violent towards their partner . . . There's nothing out there.

Like Martha, most of the women disclosed that they felt like they were "the only one" who had ever been violent toward their intimate partners. Even in terms of the research project, most of the women expressed that they were anxious to get in touch with me because they had never come across any type of material that specifically set out to address the issue of women's intimate violence. Many of the women disclosed that at the time when they first contacted me, they were experiencing overwhelming feelings of frustration and confusion as to how they should be dealing with their violent behaviour.

Carol: As soon as I seen your ad, I, I took your number because I thought t-, this is right on. And this is me. This is, like, I don't want to be sick like this. I don't want to end up murdering whoever I'm with because, because I'm angry, fed up or frustrated . . . It's great. I just loved when, as soon as I seen it. I w-, it's important because there are a lot of, I know that, that men that I wa-, I was with ended up and were tormented. Like me.

In addition to spreading an awareness that they are not alone in their struggle with intimate violence, Melissa explained that she would like to see some type of education and awareness on her home reserve with regard to women's intimate violence in order that the stigma attached to those women who engage in violent behaviour be reduced or possibly even abolished. As illustrated in Brenda's story from Chapter Five, Melissa explained that individuals living on her home reserve often find themselves being labelled as a result of seeking assistance in dealing with their problems. For this reason, although Melissa felt there was a need for some type of programming available to women on the reserve who are struggling with their own use of violence, she was cautious about starting up these resources.

Just as Melissa had explained in Chapter Four, the politics on her home reserve are extremely intense. To illustrate, she informed me that certain members within her community had started up a similar group for women who were separated. A couple of elders who were separated were also in the group, offering good advice. While the group was appreciated as a beneficial program to those women who were struggling

with their separation from their husbands (most of them being violent partners), Melissa explained that the group was seen as an insult to those men who the women in the group had left, and other community members were quick to ridicule the very existence of the group.²¹ Those women in attendance at this group soon became labelled and ridiculed throughout the community. Consequently, it was not long before the group had dispersed.

Melissa explained that even groups for solvent abusers have failed in the past because these groups quickly became labelled to the point where those individuals who were seeking assistance with their problems soon became ostracized within the community. In point of fact, Melissa commented that although she would like to see a program on her home reserve for women dealing with their violent behaviour, she does not believe that this would be possible, since she felt that the women would eventually end up being labelled as “going crazy” or as “being crazy in the mind.”

Melissa: I would like to see more support, especially in the reserves. Because usually people out here, you see ladies out here from up north. What are they doing here? 'Cause they're separated, and they're not accepted up north. And they end up coming here. Go on welfare here, or I have a lot of students. I have a lot of applicants who are separated . . . They're already labelled, hey.

²¹ Recall from Chapter Four that within the Aboriginal community, the notion of keeping the family together at all costs is strongly reinforced. Therefore, many women are encouraged to remain with their marital partners, despite the fact that they may be experiencing abuse at the hands of these men.

[The agency] who looks after that, kind of puts it aside. Puts the application aside 'cause they're separated. And I would really like to see more support why. You know, why, why is this happening, you know? I would really want to see more support for women who end up, ah, being labelled as a bad person because they're standing up for themselves . . . A place where they, where they can go or just, I don't really, it's more like, ah, there's not really no one.

One of the women from the focus-group discussions offered an excellent suggestion. Educational material pertaining to the issue of women's intimate violence should be posted in those areas where they would reach women who are dealing with their anger and aggression and the underlying issues related to their use of violence. She claimed that at the present time, she is not really aware of any advertisements for programs that are being offered to women who are struggling with their aggressive behaviour.

Participant: I think there could be a whole lot more anger management programs out there, number one. Like, a lot of them, a lot of women are, well, not all of them, but I mean, like, they come from a low income family. And, like, all my life, I've been on, on social assistance. And when we go into the, go into the welfare office, and they have a big bulletin board . . . Like, some women don't have no resources. They don't know where to go . . . Sometimes they're so emotionally distraught, like, you know. They don't know what's, what's going on. And they would be sitting at the welfare office and, you know, there's boards up there. They should use that to show where, where women can go and stuff. You know. Like, visit the supermarket. Maybe you'd, big bulletin board. They go looking. Usually they're there for coupons or whatever. And that's where they should have it . . .

Somewhere where they're, they're always at. Like, there's no, there's no escaping going to the grocery store, the laundry mat. You know, stuff like that . . . There's stuff up there that they can read . . . They can read these different places where they can go . . . There's not enough out there. If you look on those bulletin boards, you don't see that stuff. Nothing.

Like many of the other women, Martha believed that public awareness to open up the issue of women's intimate violence would be a good idea, since it would help not only women, but also men who are also dealing with the stresses involved in women's intimate violence.

Martha: That'll also help men, too, if they are getting the beats from their wives and that stuff, and they are, like, you know, like, say, like, stuck. You know. They can, you know, can get help for that, too . . . I think women can do just as much damage as a man . . . [There's] not even a shelter in here for that . . . For men that are victims . . . [My partner's] cousin, he actually committed suicide. He killed himself. Like, he just couldn't get out. It was just a never-ending thing. She would beat the shit out of him. He'd leave. Then sh-, he'd go back. She'd beat the shit out of her kid and pr-, and herself. She'd beat herself up. And then charged him. That was her evidence, right? Then, he had just enough. He was getting charged again. He was probably going to jail. So, he killed himself. He hung himself.

In her suggestion for public awareness, Martha also recommended that there be programs and services set up for men who are involved with women who engage in intimate violence. In this case, Martha suggested that there be shelters established to assist men during certain periods of difficulty in their intimate relationships. As she

pointed out, men too are sometimes faced with limited options in leaving their violent relationships.

In much the same way as there could be shelters set up for men who are coping with women's intimate violence, Brandi suggested that there be halfway houses set up for women who are making the transition from a correctional institution to the larger society.

Brandi: Do you notice they have more halfway houses for men than they do for women? They should have places for a woman 'cause women do turn to violence when they can't take, c-, don't take it no more. Can't take it no more.

Some of the other women who participated in the research project also expressed some concern for the men who are involved with women who engage in intimate violence. In this regard, they suggested that part of addressing women's needs also involves meeting the needs of their male intimates as well.

Jasmine: There's meetings for women who get abused. But, what about the men? What about the victims that are being abused? Like, because a lot of, a lot of men are scared to say, you know, my girlfriend beats me . . . I don't think there'd be half as much abuse in this world as there is because it needs to work both ways. Not only the one way.

Samantha: Maybe you do need one other, one other part to this. It would be nice to, uhm, for the man to, to speak. (Little laugh) to get the other view of, uhm, women's violence. It would be nice to hear what men have to, yeah, what they say about it too. To see what,

what would help them if they were living in that . . . If it would be just the woman that would get counselling, or if it would be a man and a woman take it together in a relationship to help the both of them deal with it . . . I think it would be helpful if it was both . . . Another thing. It would have to be small. Not a big group if it was coupled. But that would be hard to deal with all those issues.

Like Samantha recommended, some of the women felt that there should be groups open to women who engage in violent behaviour. As we learned from the previous chapter, some women simply want to talk and express their feelings pertaining to their use of violence. This being the case, a common suggestion made by the women was that there be some kind of "drop-in" group available to women who simply want to "vent" their anger and frustration with other women who may share similar experiences with them.

Participant: I think if you had, ah, a drop-in centre where women can go there and vent, I think, I think that would be it. A successful, a success in itself. Because once, you know, when you get together and talk, and you vent, you always feel better when you walk out. You know. You're always feeling like there's, you know . . . Women generally feel alone . . . Even though there's millions of us out there that are going through the same thing, but we always feel alone that they're the only one. And we have to hide things and, you know, not tell anybody. And I think if you got something like that together, and women were able to walk in there and not feel judged, and not feel, uhm, ridiculed and all that kind of stuff.

Carol: There needs to be a support group or a place they can phone and talk to someone about it. And (pause) that's all they need

. . . Like, a place like that, where you can go and talk. Take individual counselling.

Martha: I think groups would be great. And talking, yeah. And, 'Oh really? That happened to you, too?' And you know. And we can, and someone can really, 'Well, you know why that happens when you do that?' You know, 'It's whatever.' You know. Have it more of an understanding and answer. That's what we need. An answer. Answer to little, those little things. Those, why, you know, why am I running to my room and I want him to come, come behind me and, and you know, and comfort me and that stuff? But then I, I've turned around and I, I'll slap him in the, in the head or whatever. You know? You know, that, Why do we do that? You know, and whatever. It could be a positive thing that I look and maybe crack up laughing about that . . . And then, you know, show our children good, positive, like, being positive role models and that stuff. And you know? What I saw, like, my role model, my mother ripping her hair out. You know. Now that's not, ah, a positive thing . . . I guess that's where we could probably eliminate the violence . . . Like they, their time-outs, or relaxation. And you know, why do we, why do men batter or why, whatever. And you know, culture of origin. That, 'Oh this would happen over the weekend,' and you know, 'I caught myself.' . . . Let's talk and comfort. Like, you know. And, and then have, and then there again, have understanding. Like, understand, 'Okay. Why?' You know. Whatever.

In addition having group counseling available for women who engage in violent behaviour, some of the women suggested the possibility of having couples' counseling for the women and their intimate partners.

Ashley: I think there should be programs out there that, that has a place for both men and women to go to. Husband and wife. I really do believe it because you know what? Fine and dandy that it, I would not want to, if I had a bad situation like that, I want to deal with

it. Therefore, I want to deal with it with my husband or spouse or whoever . . . Like, what's most comfortable for the woman? You know. Maybe she just does, wants to get a little bit of counselling on her own. Or maybe she wants her spouse there. Or maybe she does want extended family. But that should be given choices . . . Both sexes, or whatever you want to call them, need help. It's not just one person . . . Teach them how to do other things, other than hit or, ah, verbally abuse each other. Teach them how to talk to each other without getting defensive. Without flipping out on each other. Uhm, some support programs, just not only for, ah, people involved. Their children. I mean, their children have to see a lot of this. There should be some support programs for the children to, you know, to make them understand why this is going on . . . But a lot more has to be done. And the men have to take part in it because you don't exclude, because they're both together . . . I don't want to deal with it on my own. I want my partner there because that's part of what's happening.

As it was suggested, with couples' counseling, the women and their intimate partners may be able to come to terms with some of the problems which exist within their intimate relationships. For instance, since it was revealed that some women experienced a lack of communication skills and, hence, had some difficulty in talking out their issues of concern with their intimate partners, through couples' counseling, the women and their partners could learn conflict resolution skills and other new techniques on how to communicate with each other in a more effective manner.

Nevertheless, although there appears to be a positive side to the women obtaining couples' counseling with their intimate partners, Jasmine pointed out that there is also a negative side to this type of counseling. Specifically, she revealed that

although she and her partner had gone through counseling together in the past, the problems within their relationship did not appear to significantly improve following their counseling sessions. The fact of the matter is that the stress in Jasmine's relationship with her partner seemed to intensify after her partner used their counseling sessions as an opportunity to further control and berate Jasmine.

Jasmine: We went to counselling before. We went once . . . I've let it out in therapy what bugged me . . . And [my boyfriend] used to throw that right in my face a lot. 'You deserved it. Oh, you didn't do this. Oh, you did that.' And now, it doesn't bother me as much because I don't expect anybody to believe me, because nobody else was there by me. But to have a support, it feels good. But to have it thrown in my face, by someone who's supposed to love you and be there for you is just down-right mean . . . It feels different when there's someone there helping you talk. Because, he had no choice but to sit there and listen to me, and listen to what I have to say. 'Cause, like, when he's talking, I can't talk. I have to wait 'til he's done. I can't cut him off . . . 'You don't cut me off.' He'll raise his voice. And it's, like, when I'm talking, he'd be talking whenever he wants to. So, there was a lot of control there.

In addition to directing attention to who should be involved in the women's programming, the women strongly advised that particular attention be directed toward who should be running the programs that are available to women who engage in violent behaviour. In this regard, the women strongly believed that the programs and resources that are available to those women who are trying to cope with their own anger and aggression should be run solely by individuals who share similar personal

histories with the women.

Participant: Another thing that's really important is if you're gonna get these programs up and going, it's who's running the program? . . . I mean, if it's somebody that's, you know, you don't want someone that's just walking off in there, you know, who is, you know, just a high school teacher, and then coming in training, you know, anger management courses or programs. What do they know that you don't know?

Courtney: They should be with somebody that has been through what they've been through. That really understands . . . When I used to go to the clinic, the groups that they had, that co-ordinators that did that incest thing, they've been through it. Who else is gonna, who else is gonna understand? How, how can somebody understand if they've never been through it?

In terms of possessing some understanding of the women's personal experiences pertaining to their intimate violence, most of the women expressed a strong desire to have their needs met by individuals belonging to the Aboriginal community. As I mentioned earlier, due to the long history of hostility and conflict between members of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, many Aboriginal people possess a strong degree of mistrust in non-Aboriginal individuals and organizations.

Jasmine: I would like someone Aboriginal though because it's easier to work with Aboriginal people because they stand up for your rights, too.

Samantha: I don't need help from, uhm, white people. I want to go to

Aboriginal people and tell them 'cause they're more understanding and know where I'm coming from. I can't go and tell them, to somebody that's white, and tell them all this and that. I don't trust them. But I'll talk to Aboriginal people. I'll talk to Aboriginal counsellors . . . I wouldn't talk to anybody that's, that's white about it . . . I'd be afraid, too, to talk to somebody white like that because they might think that I'm doing it to my kids if I can do it to my husband. And that's where I draw the line . . . I'll just keep to myself . . . When I told you I went and seen that therapist, I didn't just go to any therapist. It had to be somebody that was Aboriginal. I seeked somebody that was Aboriginal . . . And well educated. And somebody that wouldn't judge me. Like, judge my actions without understanding where I'm coming from . . . I'm not gonna talk to anybody white . . . I can't tell a white person what I'm doing though 'cause they don't understand me. But a Native person, I'll tell them. They know why, everything about how we are and all that. Alcoholism. A white person will not understand where you're coming from with that. So that's, that's the kind of person that I might, that I would accept help from. Not anybody that doesn't know where I come from. Who doesn't know what it means to be hungry or to live with an alcoholic when they come home. But they have this, uhm, this little, this little world that fam-, all families are raised the same. They're not.

Ashley:

I may not, I don't feel like I actually fit in. Don't get me wr-, ah, wrong 'cause I am Metis, too. I'm Bill, ah, I guess they call it Bill C-31. It took the government to tell me I'm Indian, even though I have been Indian all my life. Uhm, but I feel more comfortable with the Aboriginal people than I do with white people. I, I find them very, I'm not racist. Don't get me wrong. 'Cause I grew up around white people. They can be very back stabbing at times. They want something from you most of the time. And they pretend who they really aren't. And I don't like that. If anything, I, ah, I look for in a person is sincerity. And I don't find that. I'm not trying to be racist, but I don't find that with white people. I just don't find that. Their qualities just turn me right off a lot of times.

To recap what the women would like to see in terms of resources thus far, the women have identified their desire for culturally-specific programming which addresses their problems associated with their use of intimate violence. The programming should be run by members of the Aboriginal community who share similar personal histories and experiences of violence with the women. Support and involvement of the women's families is encouraged to take place in order that the women, their intimate partners and their children may heal, as a family unit, from the effects of violence in their lives. While individual counseling has been suggested as a means with which the women may come to terms with their violent behaviour, this type of programming might prove to be beneficial for those women who are seeking assistance in dealing with their anger and aggression, alongside their intimate partners. A long-running drop-in group without waiting lists is also strongly desired, since many women simply want to talk, "vent" their frustrations and come to a better understanding of their intimate violence with other women who share similar experiences with them.

In terms of what the agenda for the groups should entail, the women expressed that while the program topics should follow some type of set structure, the topics of discussion should not be rigidly set in stone. In this regard, while the women's groups should follow some type of organized plan, the women should also be free to discuss any issues with which they may be struggling, despite its diversion from the proposed agenda.

When I questioned the women as to what the program topics for women who are trying to manage their violent behaviour should entail, most of the women offered suggestions that were consistent with the issues that they acknowledged as relating to their use of intimate violence. On this note, the women suggested that the type of programming available should be directed specifically at women's use of intimate violence rather than at their victimization. However, as with the underlying issues pertaining to women's intimate violence, this is not to say that women's past victimization should be ignored. Accordingly, the women expressed that they would like to see programming which covers all aspects of women's intimate violence.

Participant: Women need to have some kind of programs, you know, more than the programs that are, that are available now. You know, on self-esteem issues and self-worth issues. And, and you know, getting right to the point of violence. You know. Offering those kinds of programs. Like, coming straight. Why? You know. And finding out why. Not kind of circling around it and, you know, heading into an altogether new issue.

Many of the women felt the need to address the root of women's anger and aggression.

Sarah: I think it should be everything. Because it doesn't start off with just one thing. You got to deal, like, with all of it. Where it stems from and how to deal with it. Like, in ways they can put, where they can put their anger and, like, you know, deal with it. Not just focus on the one thing because it stems from a lot. And there's a lot, ah, a lot of, ah, issues pertaining to it. And I think, ah,

having programs, like, that are, they should not just deal with the anger 'cause you're, you're dealing where it comes from. You know. And other things that arise with it.

Samantha: How to deal with your anger. Like, what to do when you're angry . . . And what's the source of my anger 'cause it seems like it's all over the place . . . I think that we need, uhm, uhm, groups. We need to go to different groups on how to, uhm, to talk about it. To deal with it. Sometimes I think it helps to talk about the, to talk to somebody else that's, uhm, going through the same thing as you. And try and get you to understand. And to teach you how, too.

Ashley: There should be people out there that can help them with their anger management. And a lot of it comes from, say, uhm, the economic factor that they're with, that they're in right now. Say, a lot of people, you know, who are having a hard time making ends meet. Financial problems do occur and start these problems . . . And the, ah, substance, alcohol, whatever abuse you're talking about. That come into play. You know. Uhm, but programs that will be specific, specific to that need. Like, I know for a fact, ah, a lot of women have certain substance abuses. Well, you got to deal with the substance abuse first. And then, you know, that could help them along, once they're, you know, sobered up a little bit . . . Every situation is different. But when it comes to also substance abuse, that's a big fricken part of that. And they need help with their abuse first. Their substance abuse.

In addition to programs designed to help women cope with their intimate violence and the underlying stresses that play into their violent behaviour, it was suggested that the women be provided further programming aimed at reducing some of these underlying stresses. Employment training, for instance, was one suggestion that was made to assist women in reducing some of the stress in their lives.

Ashley: If there were more programs there . . . Getting that, that extra help to get, to get somewhere in life. There should be more help in helping these women get the funding. Or get some type of job training. Or get a decent job in order to help their spouse. That, that's including men. You know, if they could be helped to, into that certain direction.

Nevertheless, in my own opinion, just as there is currently a multitude of culturally-specific resources available to the Aboriginal community, I believe that there are many resources currently available to women in need of educational upgrading, employment and employment preparation. Therefore, maybe the focus should be more along the lines of opening up an awareness and educating or informing the women as to what exactly is available for them in terms of financial programming and how they could become connected with these resources rather than having to create additional resources to meet the needs of women in these areas of education, employment, housing and daycare options. Regardless, as it was pointed out by one of the women in the focus-group discussions, before we consider moving into the areas of employment and education training, it might be a good idea for the women to first meet their personal needs and get their personal lives under some type of order and control.

Participant: You see job training, and this and that. But you won't, how can a woman go into a job, job training program, any kind of training program, when she has all these other issues to deal with? She can't. She'll, won't, she won't succeed . . . You look at women

that are, that are violent or, or have come out of abusive relationships or are in them, you know. And they want to re-enter into something. And they go to do it. And they're emotionally unstable. They're not gonna last . . . Without, ah, first taking care of themselves, their own business at home.

Although there are many culturally-specific programs available to individuals within the Aboriginal community, there are very limited options available to Aboriginal women who engage in violent behaviour. From my interviews with the women, however, we now have some insight into how we can better meet the needs of these women who are struggling with their own use of intimate violence.

Summary

We have learned from the women's own accounts of the circumstances surrounding their use of intimate violence that there are many underlying issues involved in women's anger and aggression. This being the case, there are many factors to consider when meeting the needs of women who engage in violent behaviour. Issues such as poverty, alcoholism, substance abuse and lack of parenting skills are often products of the broken family. Therefore, they must be taken into consideration when we are looking to address the issue of women's intimate violence. Similarly, feelings of shame and embarrassment, low self-esteem and low self-confidence and other psychological problems resulting from the prejudice and discrimination experienced

by Aboriginal people in society intensify enormously the complexities involved in women's intimate violence. In meeting the needs of women who engage in violence, then, it is essential that we consider how the social problems and cultural factors associated with Aboriginal women's use of violent behaviour influences their response to seeking help with their problems.

Having heard from the women as to what they would like to see in terms of resources for women who are struggling with their own use of violent behaviour, we can confirm that the women are, first and foremost, in need of culturally-relevant and appropriate programming which allows for the women to be treated with some degree of sensitivity and understanding with regard to their personal histories. It is essential that the programming they receive be provided only by those individuals who have empathy and experience with which to accurately address the women's fears associated with their anger and aggression. These individuals also should be aware of the cultural differences that play into Aboriginal women's use of intimate violence, and they should be alert to the personal histories that have shaped the women's attitudes toward the larger white society and the individuals within this society.

Meeting the needs of women who engage in violent behaviour also involves providing education and awareness to the issue so as to reduce the social resistance to accept the issue of women's intimate violence and the stigma that is often attached to women who use intimate violence. What is more, this education and awareness

would allow the women to see that they are not alone in their struggle to overcome their violent behaviour, and it would send the message that while it may not be acceptable to engage in violence, it is permissible to obtain help in dealing with this problem.

Although some of the women were at a loss when it came to defining how they made sense of their violent behaviour and what they wanted to see in terms of meeting their needs, through our conversations, we now have a better understanding of the underlying issues associated with women's intimate violence, the barriers with which the women are faced in terms of seeking help for their anger and aggression and, more importantly, where the women's need for further resources lies.

CONCLUSION

Jasmine: Sometimes I cry a lot . . . It's hard just to stop crying and suck it all back in because if I just keep it all away and, I'm a ticking time bomb . . . And I get really, even more mad . . . I used to mutilate myself. And I get so depressed because I could have used other ways and I don't think these ways. And, like, when, when I've gotten to, my anger's gotten to the point that it's gonna come out, I can't pull it back in and say, 'Okay. Where did it start?' I don't notice that until after my problem. Then, after I freak out and do what I did or abuse [my boyfriend] or whatever, then I can go, 'Okay. Now what? What did I do wrong? Did I do something wrong?' And I should be doing that before I get physical. Before I get violent. I should be brainstorming what I can do instead of the violence. What, I kind of walk away or go for a coffee or other things to do instead of hurting physically, emotionally, any kind of abuse . . . If I move, I notice him jumping. And I don't think, I don't want him to be scared of me . . . I am a violent person . . . I do have my issues . . . And I never will be perfect. But I can get better.

This research project emerged from my own need to find adequate programming available to women who are seeking assistance in coping with their violent behaviour, especially from a perspective other than that of "victim." I call attention to this "victim" label because I strongly believe that if we continue to focus our attention solely on women's victimization at the hands of men, we only end up dancing around the real issues underlying women's intimate violence and, hence, preventing any real chance of ending or reducing the violence in women's lives.

In order to respond to the needs of those women who are struggling with their own use of intimate violence, I believed that my best option would be to hear from those women who engage in violent behaviour. By taking a standpoint approach to the issue, I listened to women's own accounts of their experiences relating to violence with the intent of producing knowledge that could contribute to theory development, future research and policies and programs aimed at meeting women's needs. Because violence appears to be an especially pressing issue in the lives of Aboriginal women, I explored the issue of women's intimate violence from Aboriginal women's point of view. In doing so, it became possible for me to situate women's violent behaviour within the social contexts of their race, class, age and gender. It also became possible for me to identify the nature and source of women's intimate violence and some of the problems connected with this violence.

In speaking with the women who voluntarily participated in the research project, I was able to pose those questions that I initially set out to address and, in the process, developed a better understanding of women's intimate violence. From my conversations with the women, we can confirm that women's intimate violence takes a variety of forms, from subtle insults to intense brutality. It may occur at any time, in any social location. Although women's intimate violence does not always take place in self-defense or as a result of provocation, it does tend to occur in response to being mistreated and disrespected, particularly by an intimate partner.

The women attach a variety of meanings to their violent behaviour. While some women employ violence as a means of survival within their violent relationships, other women engage in violent behaviour as a means of protecting themselves and their children from physical and psychological harm. In the later case, their violence is used as a means with which to “fight back” or “make things right.” Some women also view their violence as a way to regain control over distressing situations. Accordingly, these women understand their own use of violence in terms of “releasing tension.” In any case, from my interviews with the women, we now know that some women will engage in violent behaviour only after they become either “fed up” or they “couldn’t take it anymore.”

We have learned that Aboriginal people have survived a long history of racial oppression at the hands of non-Aboriginal individuals in society. This mistreatment has led to longstanding conflict between Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal population, and it has invoked strong feelings of mistrust among Aboriginal people toward those individuals in the larger society. Adding to these feelings of mistrust among Aboriginal people are the marginal positions they maintain in Canadian society and the subsequent dilemmas that have plagued their lives. Growing up within the confines of the broken family, many Aboriginal women have attributed much of their violent behaviour to the stresses they experienced (and continue to experience) within their families. For instance, most of the women related that they possess strong

feelings of resentment toward their mothers, and much of this resentment lies in the fact that many women hold their mothers responsible for the unhealthy environments in which they grew up.

Nevertheless, living in an environment plagued by poverty, alcoholism, substance abuses and violence, many of the women have accepted their experiences of violence as a normal way of life. Although some women did not recognize a need for help in dealing with their own anger and aggression, most women did realize that the violence in their lives was creating an enormous amount of turmoil for themselves and their families. With few, if any, support systems in place, the women acknowledged that they were in need of professional help with which to cope with their violent behaviour. Unfortunately, in seeking out help to deal with their own use of violence, the women encountered barriers. For example, on account of their strong degree of mistrust in "white people," some of the women were hesitant to reach out for help for fear that they would be misjudged and misunderstood. When the women did reach out for professional help, they soon discovered that there were not many programs available to meet their needs. Any programs that were available were short in duration, difficult to get into and not specific to their needs.

Accordingly, the women voiced their need for further programs and resources that were directed toward addressing the sources of their anger and aggression and the ways to gain control over their violent behaviour. While their victimization at the

hands of men is a factor in their own use of violence, the women also addressed the need to focus some attention on underlying issues such as the poverty, alcoholism, substance abuse and the childhood-related dilemmas that have figured prominently in their use of violence.

In speaking with Aboriginal women on the issue of women's intimate violence, not only do we learn where women's violence stems from, but we also know what women need in terms of programs and other resources aimed at helping them to cope with their violent behaviour. Still, there are questions that remain to be addressed. For one, what it is that pushes some women to cross the line and act out with physical aggression while other women who share similar personal histories with these women refrain from engaging in violent behaviour altogether?

For another, why is sexual jealousy such a significant factor in women's intimate violence? We know that, for the most part, sexual jealousy is rooted in the women's own feelings of disrespect and mistrust in their intimate partners, but why do some women hold such insecure feelings about their intimate partners while other women do not? What exactly is this insecurity and, hence, this sexual jealousy, all about? Why do some women feel so hurt, betrayed and angered at the very thought of their partners cheating on them, while other women could care less?

In like manner, we now know that many women who have lived a life of alcohol and violence often become involved with violent partners because this is the type of

environment with which they are most familiar. However, why is it that some women who experience violence at the hands of their male partners possess the strength to leave their violent partners after just one or two episodes of violence while other women remain in these violent relationships for years on end? Also, why is it that some women who experience violence at the hands of a male intimate will never repeat the mistake of entering into another violent relationship while other women repeatedly go from one violent relationship to another? There are barriers for women attempting to leave their violent relationships. We need to know more about these barriers and why they apply to some women and not others. Taking the issues of education and income into account, for instance, we can see that some women who do "choose" to remain in their violent relationships are very well educated and often financially secure. So, what is it that persuades some women to remain in their violent relationships and, hence, become aggressive themselves rather than leave these dangerous situations altogether?

Finally, it would be useful to know what the men involved with women who engage in violent behaviour have to say about their partners' use of intimate violence. Just as Samantha had expressed to me, "it would be interesting to hear the men's perspective on this issue."

Without doubt, there is much more work to be done in terms of putting a stop to violence within intimate relationships. For now, however, having called attention to

the issue of women's intimate violence, I believe we are in a good position to develop more programs for women who are seeking assistance in coping with their own use of violent behaviour.

Appendix A THE RESEARCH PROCESS

I first began to question the issue of women's intimate violence in the fall of 1996. However, as I mentioned earlier in the introductory section of the thesis, it was not until the summer of 1998 that I set out to address this issue. My purpose behind the research project was twofold: at the academic level, my objective was to add an adequate understanding of women's intimate violence to the limited amount of literature available on the subject. At the personal level, my aim was to address some of the issues that I have been struggling to understand about my own life circumstances. While I believe that I was able to successfully meet both my academic and personal endeavours in carrying out the research project, it goes without saying that the research project proved to be a lengthy process.²² On this note, I have decided to include a detailed summary of all the phases involved in carrying out the research process. Following this appendix are copies of the relevant documents that were utilized up to and throughout the data collection phase of the research project.

²² The amount of time that I devoted to the research project, each week, often varied. Depending upon my other employment obligations, personal commitments or unexpected setbacks that arose throughout the course of the research project, either my time was limited to as little as 10 hours during some weeks, or it was exhausted in excess of 45 hours during other weeks.

Locale for Data Collection

The research project was carried out in conjunction with the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. Family Violence Program.²³ Established in 1984 and later affiliated with RESOLVE, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. (Ma Mawi) is an Aboriginal organization committed to gaining knowledge and experience in order to support community change. In this regard, Ma Mawi has initiated a number of projects directed at building positive change within the Aboriginal community. One such project is the Family Violence Program (FVP).

The FVP is dedicated to helping families heal from the effects of violence and, more specifically, to eliminating violence within Aboriginal families. The goals of the FVP are to provide support and resources which strengthen and empower families within the Aboriginal community, to create a safe and supportive environment in which to assist families in healing from the effects of violence, and to continue to deliver and develop culturally-appropriate services to Aboriginal families. The services offered by the FVP at Ma Mawi include individual counselling, group treatment and support, advocacy, referral resources and spiritual healing practices for women, children and men. A unique aspect of the FVP is its cultural component which reintroduces many of its clients to the often forgotten aspects of Aboriginal culture, including the smudge

²³ See Appendix B. The research was also affiliated with RESOLVE (Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse).

ceremony, medicine wheel, sweat lodge teachings, feasts, moon ceremony, talking circle and pipe ceremony.

Given its mandate and supportive environment, the Ma Mawi FVP offered an appropriate site for conducting research on a sensitive topic like women's intimate violence. Permission to conduct the research was granted by Sharon Perrault, the Family Violence Program Team Leader and Central Site Manager.²⁴ In addition to providing me with advice, support and guidance throughout the initial development and data collection phases of the research project, Ms Perrault, on behalf of the Ma Mawi FVP, also provided office space where I was able to meet with the women. What is more, Ms Perrault ensured that both immediate and follow-up attention was directed to those women who required individual counselling and other support services following their participation in the research project.

Research Strategies

The Ma Mawi FVP currently offers support groups to women facing family violence issues in their lives and in their homes. The groups, which involve both open- and closed-group discussions, are directed toward providing education and support

²⁴ Ms Perrault is no longer employed with the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. Family Violence Program. During the final writing phase of the research project, Ms Perrault had accepted employment with another organization. Ms Perrault had dedicated over 14 years of community service expertise to the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. Family Violence Program.

services to women in order that they may develop an awareness of family violence related issues and heal from the effects of violence. Generally, these groups consist of anywhere from four to 15 women who regularly attend each group, in addition to one or two treatment facilitators. These support groups were used as a way for me to make initial contact with prospective research participants. The data for the research project were collected via a series of focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews.

Focus-Group Discussions

As an initial step in the data collection phase of the research project, I attended three sessions of the support groups offered by the Ma Mawi FVP in order to conduct a total of three focus-group discussions. Group facilitators were apprised of the nature of the research project in advance of my attendance. They, in turn, advised the women in the support groups of the dates on which I was to attend each group and of the purpose of my visit. Since the support groups have an informal atmosphere in which women may enter and leave the program at any time, only those women who were interested in participating in the research project attended on the specified days. The women who were previously absent and did not receive advance notice of my attendance were given the choice of either leaving or participating in the focus-group discussion. The three focus-group discussions took place on January 25th, 26th and 27th, 2000.

Based on the attendance at previous support groups, each focus-group

discussion was expected to include anywhere from four to 15 women who were over the age of 18 years and who had experienced violence within the context of an intimate partner relationship. It was also expected that one or two treatment facilitators would be present to offer support to the women during each of the focus-group discussions.

As it turned out, the first focus-group discussion (which took place on the evening of January 25, 2000) included a total of 13 women, two of whom were treatment facilitators. While the number of women in attendance was as expected, such a large turnout presented me with some unforeseen difficulties. For one, due to the large size of the group, my audio tape recorder was unable to pick up what was being said by the women at the far ends of the oval shape in which we sat. Worse yet was my inability to hear, let alone pick up, the voices of those women who were extremely soft spoken.

The second focus-group discussion (which took place on the evening of January 26, 2000) included an astonishing total of 26 women, two of whom were treatment facilitators. This total had dropped down to 23 women by the end of the focus-group discussion since, for reasons unknown, three women walked out of the discussion prior to its conclusion. Regardless, this turnout proved to be even more troublesome than the one previous to it. Although I possessed a better quality microphone for this second focus-group discussion, I still was unable to hear and pick up all the women who participated in the discussion. Moreover, with such a large group

as this, I realized that not all of the women were given the adequate space they needed to participate fully in the research project.

The third focus-group discussion (which took place on the afternoon of January 27, 2000) included a total of five women, one of whom was a treatment facilitator. Due to the small size of this group, all aspects of this focus-group discussion proved to be a success. The conversation that took place among the women flowed consistently, from start to finish; all of the women who participated in the discussion were given the opportunity to contribute to the research; and, all of the women's voices were heard and picked up by the audio tape recorder. Needless to say, the transcript for this discussion was the only completed transcript of the three focus-group discussions.

After devoting an enormous amount of time and effort to the task of trying to accurately transcribe the audio tapes of the three focus-group discussions, the transcripts for the first two discussions were later discarded as they were, for the most part, deemed inaudible. Nevertheless, although I was unable to obtain completed transcripts of all three focus-group discussions as I had hoped, I was satisfied enough in knowing that I had opened up an awareness to the fact that women are capable of using violence within the context of an intimate partner relationship and that this is an issue that we must explore further in order to address the needs of those women who do engage in violent behaviour.

At the outset of each focus-group discussion, I informed the women as to who

I was and the purpose of my research. I explained what I had hoped to gain by doing the research, how I intended to collect information for the research project, and what I intended to do with the information once it was collected. I also informed the women that their participation in the research project was completely voluntary and that they were not obligated to respond to any question if they so chose. I explained to the women that there would be no prejudice or consequences for their decision not to respond to any questions asked of them, and I advised them that they may withdraw from the research project at any time they so desired, without the risk of adverse consequences for this decision to withdraw.

In terms of anonymity and confidentiality, the women were advised that an audio recording device was to be used during the collection of data but, with the exception of any disclosures on child abuse, elderly abuse or any other type of abuse toward individuals in vulnerable positions, the information collected would remain strictly confidential and all the results of the research project would remain anonymous. That is, I explained that it would not be possible for someone to identify them in the thesis.

That being said, I gave the women the option of leaving or continuing on with the focus-group discussion. With the exception of the three women who left midway through the second focus-group discussion, all of the women chose to participate in the research project. Prior to beginning the focus-group discussion, the women were

asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix C) acknowledging our discussion thus far and confirming their voluntary agreement to participate in the research project. Any questions that were asked of me were answered at this time. All the women who participated in the research project were provided a copy of their signed consent form.

The focus-group discussions were organized around three issues (see Appendix C and Appendix D). The first pertained to the range of women's experiences of intimate violence and how women understand their own anger and aggression. The second issue related to the gendered constructions and expectations that shape the definitions of and responses to women's intimate violence. The third issue involved an exploration of the approaches these women believe should be taken in order to prevent or intervene in reducing women's violent behaviour within the context of intimate partner relationships. Each focus-group discussion took about two hours in duration to complete.

In addition to providing women with a forum in which to discuss and reflect upon the issue of women's intimate violence, the focus-group discussions were also intended to provide a mechanism for inviting women to participate in a one-to-one interview with me on the subject of women's intimate violence. At the end of each focus-group discussion, participants were given an information sheet calling for further research participants (see Appendix E). I also utilized a snowball sampling technique

in which I asked the women to advise anyone else who might be interested in participating in the research to contact me by telephone to arrange for an interview. Additional copies of the information sheet were then posted throughout the Ma Mawi FVP office. They were also made available in the reception area and in the meeting rooms.

In-depth Interviews

After the three focus-group discussions had ended, I awaited the telephone calls that I anticipated to receive from women who might be willing to share their experiences of violence with me. I had hoped that between 10 and 12 women from the focus-group discussions would be willing to participate in the in-depth interviews. Much to my disappointment, I only secured two in-depth interviews from the three focus-group discussions that I had conducted. Regardless, while it did take some time and effort to secure the rest of my desired interviews with the women, I was pleased with the end result: twelve women responded to my call for research participants.

The first in-depth interview took place on February 2, 2000, and it was not until June 14, 2000 that I completed my final in-depth interview. Three weeks after I conducted my first interview, I came to the realization that I was not going to receive the response to my invitational call for research participants that I had hoped for, unless I opened up my notification area.

Accordingly, upon receiving the necessary approval and consent from my academic advisor, as well as from Ms Perrault at the Ma Mawi FVP, I widened my posting area. Information sheets calling for research participants were posted in grocery stores, at various businesses and on community bulletin boards. In addition, I talked with different community service organizations and requested that they post my information sheet and have extra copies available for handout to their clients. Luckily enough, all the businesses and organizations that I talked to were very helpful and cooperative in my effort to secure potential research participants.

In the end, opening up the notification area proved to be a positive move on my part. While only two women who participated in the research project did so as a result of their attendance at one of the focus-group discussions, another two women came to my attention by way of the snowball sampling technique. The other eight women who participated in the research project came to my attention by means other than that of the Ma Mawi FVP. These means included the laundry mat, the university campus, the grocery store, the lobby of an inner-city Aboriginal office building, the reception area of a walk-in clinic and other resource service organizations.

Once my initial contact with the women was made and I had received verbal confirmation that the women were willing to share their experiences of violence with me, a suitable time and place was arranged in which to carry out our interview. Financial incentives or any other form of inducements were not used to secure the

research participants at any time during the research project.

Due to the sensitivity of the issue at hand and the disturbing emotions this issue was likely to trigger, I intended to conduct all the in-depth interviews in a private atmosphere at the *Ma Mawi FVP* office so that a treatment facilitator could be readily available should the need arise. However, for their own personal reasons, three of the women requested that our interview be conducted in their own homes, and one woman wished to be interviewed in the office where she worked. This interview took place outside of her office hours.

Each in-depth interview took anywhere from one to two hours to complete. One interview was done in two parts on two different dates, and one other interview included a supplemental interview after one of the women later telephoned me and requested that she be re-interviewed on the segment involving her own use of violence. This woman later told me that she neglected to tell me certain aspects of her own use of violence, and she now wanted to share her experiences with me.

Prior to the start of each interview, the women were once again informed of the nature of the research, the use of an audio recording device and the guidelines for anonymity and confidentiality. All of these issues were also briefly discussed during our initial telephone conversation. The research participants were then asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix C) acknowledging their understanding of and their voluntary participation in the research project, and they were then given a copy

of their signed consent form. Once the details of the research project had been discussed and clarified, I proceeded with the interview questions.

The in-depth interviews took the form of a semi-standardized series of open-ended questions pertaining to the issue of women's intimate violence (see Appendix F). These questions related to: the women's demographic profile; the structural arrangements within their families; their involvement with the criminal justice system; their personal experiences with alcohol, drugs and violence; their opinions on the gendered constructions and expectations that shape the definitions of and responses to women's intimate violence; and their critique of the existing services available to women who engage in violent behaviour.

At the close of each interview, the women were asked to provide me with a future contact telephone number, should it be necessary to clarify any of the information provided in our interview. Although the women were not obligated to provide me with any contact information whatsoever, each of the 12 women who participated in the interview phase of the research project willingly provided me with her first name, a contact telephone number and an address at which to deliver a copy of the thesis. The women were then informed as to when and where they could view a copy of their interview transcript, and immediate arrangements were made for counselling and other support services to be provided to the women if they felt this was necessary. Five of the women requested immediate referral to a treatment facilitator

or to a support group. These were promptly provided to them.

Data Management and Analysis

The data management phase of the research began at the outset of the research project with my keeping a field notes journal. Like a diary, this on-going record of the research project contained my own personal account of all aspects of the research project from its initial development through to the completion of the thesis. The entries that I made in my field notes journal included my own personal thoughts and ideas, notes from meetings, reading notes and comments, miscellaneous statements, troublesome setbacks, successful breakthroughs and expressions of my emotional experiences. As well, it contained reflective notes and comments regarding my own experiences that I encountered while carrying out the research project. In total, I accumulated 17 field notes journals throughout the course of the research project.²⁵

In addition to the field notes journals, I accumulated and maintained an identify file and several original document files. The identity file consisted of 12 identity cards, one for each woman who participated in the research project. In keeping with the ethical guidelines of anonymity and confidentiality, the identify file was stored in a secure place, away from all other data files pertaining to the research project. The

²⁵ Each field notes journal consisted of one 72 page Hilroy exercise book.

identity file contained the only means of identifying the 12 women who participated in the research project. Nowhere on the audio tapes or on the transcripts of our interviews were there any names, dates, locations, relationships or any other identifying characteristics or situations which would reveal the identity of the women who participated in the research project.

In this regard, each research participant was assigned a number that was used to label the audio tapes recorded (ie. private interview #1, private interview #2, etc.). The audio tapes were later stored in a box, along with the original document files. The assigned number was also used to label each interview transcript, which included the assigned participant number rather than the women's names.

The original document files contained all the original copies of the forms used throughout the research project and all the original signed consent forms and typed interview transcripts. Since a separate file was used for all the signed consent forms, and for each focus-group discussion and in-depth interview conducted, it was not possible to link the signed consent forms with what was said by the women who participated in the research project.

Photocopies of each of the original interview transcripts were made, and these photocopied transcripts were then spiral bound for easy manageability. Since the original documents were to remain clean and in their original form, the spiral bound transcripts were used as the working copies with which I was able to analyze the data

that I collected. In total, the 13 completed transcripts (which included the transcripts for one focus-group discussion and 12 in-depth interviews) comprised 1237 pages of data for analysis.

Although I intended to begin the data analysis phase of the research project soon after I conducted the first focus-group discussion on January 25, 2000, it was not until March 3, 2000 that I was able to begin this phase of the research project. My greatest setback in time resulted from my own lack of access to the technological equipment that I, as a university student, had assumed would be readily available for my own personal use.²⁶ Specifically, with limited access to a transcribing machine and a computer with which to type and easily edit documents, transcribing the audio tapes that I had accumulated proved to be a time-consuming process (as did the writing phase of the research project). In this regard, the first few transcripts were initially written out by hand on hundreds of pages of loose leaf while I played and stopped the audio tapes on a hand-held cassette recorder. The handwritten transcripts were later typed out whenever I had gained suitable access to a computer. After countless hours were spent transcribing the audio tapes, all the transcripts of the focus-group

²⁶ I neglected to acknowledge the fact that while there is a wide variety of technological services and equipment available to all university students, the quantity of equipment that is available to students is limited. In this regard, I should have made prior arrangements to be placed on a waiting list for the required equipment, and I should have accounted for the limited amount of borrowing time that is allotted to each student who wishes to borrow equipment from the university.

discussions and in-depth interviews were finalized, to the best of my ability, and ready for analysis by August 29, 2000.

In transcribing the audio tapes, I made sure to type out not only what was being said by the women, but also how they said what they had to say. Since a conversation can be easily distorted when it is written on paper, I made sure to include all of the "uhms, " "ahs," pauses, emotional reactions and false starts that were present in my conversations with the women. I wanted to capture the true feelings reflected in the women's voices during our conversations, and I wanted to privilege the richness of the women's experiences. I believe that this was the most appropriate manner in which I was able to get at the true meanings and insights encoded in the women's stories.

Once the transcripts of the 12 in-depth interviews were typed and printed, I re-contacted those women who had requested to review their transcript before I begin my analysis of their transcript. Upon re-contacting the women, I made arrangements to meet and go over the transcript of our interview with them. Six of the 12 women that I interviewed wanted to review their interview transcript. In some cases, I read the transcript aloud to the women while they followed along as I read the text. In other instances, the women went through their transcript in their own time, and they returned the transcript to me when they were finished reviewing it. While all the women who reviewed their transcript were encouraged to make any corrections, elaborations or deletions to the transcript that they felt were necessary, only one woman chose to

delete certain aspects of our interview.

With the focus-group discussion and in-depth interview transcripts now ready for analysis, I began the process of reading through the transcripts while at the same time listening to the audio tapes of the interviews. This step in the analysis phase of the research project was carried out in order to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts in capturing not only what the women were saying, but also how and in what context they were saying it. More so, this step in the analysis took me back to the interviews and allowed me to immerse myself in the data in order that I could obtain a better overall understanding of the women's experiences surrounding the issue of intimate violence.

As I listened to the audio tapes and followed along in the transcript texts, I identified the conversation topics in the right hand margin of the working transcript pages. This allowed for an easier recollection of themes and incidents later on in the analysis and writing phases of the research project. In the left hand margin of the transcript pages, I recorded the question numbers to which the topic of discussion referred.

With the conversation topics and question numbers now recorded, I devised a quick reference flowchart which included the interview question numbers, the interview transcript numbers and the transcript page numbers relevant to each question asked of each research participant. Keeping in mind that my access to the use of a computer was, for the most part, limited at best, this quick reference flowchart also proved to be

quite useful in locating specific data that I required access to during the analysis and writing phases of the research project.

At this point in the analysis phase of the research project, I took some time out to write a brief summary of my in-depth interviews with each of the 12 women. Using two handwritten pages for each of the women, I summarized the women's stories in an exercise book. The summaries included: the women's demographic profile; their childhood and teenage experiences; their adult experiences surrounding the issues of drugs, alcohol and violence; and their views on current and future policies and service programs. While helping to organize the data, these summaries also allowed me quick reminders and references as to who the 12 women were and what each woman had experienced throughout her life.

Toward the end of the analysis and writing phases of the research project, I constructed another set of summaries for each of the 12 women who participated in the research project. These summaries were more detailed than the overall summaries that I had constructed earlier, and they focused specifically on the women's use of violence. These detailed summaries proved to be extremely helpful in writing the chapter on defining women's intimate violence.

Since asking questions is an essential component in any research project, it was given priority. Having completed an initial read of all the working transcripts, I began the process of selective reading. In this second read of the transcripts, I asked the

general question, "what is going on here?" My aim was to identify all the important and notable themes found in the data, drawing out any major patterns of ideas, incidents or circumstances that I believed spoke to the women's experiences surrounding the issue of intimate violence. The data were then broken down into discrete parts, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. Through this process, my own questions pertaining to the research project were explored.

To aid in the exploration of my research questions, I constructed a draft outline of the main themes and organized these themes in terms of the order in which they might appear in the thesis. Having divided this draft outline into chapters, I then went through the transcript texts again and recorded portions of the previously selected text, relevant to certain themes, on colour-coded index cards (one colour for each potential chapter or theme). The index cards served as a tool for remembering certain thoughts, feelings, perspectives and experiences that the women shared, as well as where they may be found in the transcripts. At the top of each index card, I recorded the main theme to which the portion of text was relevant. I also recorded the interview number, the page number and the line number with which the selected text could be located. With the themes that were found in the data now indexed, colour-coded and coordinated with the draft outline, I was able to rearrange the index cards, as well as my draft outline, in the order that the themes might appear in the thesis. This was the final step I made toward organizing and analyzing the data in preparation for writing the

thesis. This step was also one which was repeated over and over again, until the long-overdue first draft of the thesis was, at last, printed on paper.

Finally, following the revised outline and the correlated index cards, I began writing the first draft of the thesis. Nevertheless, even as I began writing the thesis, I continued to analyze the data in greater and greater detail in order to ensure that my findings were both accurate and accountable to the women who participated in the research project. The findings of the thesis are based upon my analysis of the data found in the typed transcriptions of the third focus-group discussion and the 12 in-depth interviews that I conducted. In addition, these findings reflect careful consideration of the information found in the 17 field notes journals that I had accumulated throughout the course of the research project.

Appendix B
CONTRACT OF PERMISSION
(unsigned copy)

This contract of permission represents my written permission to conduct the "Aboriginal Women and Violence" thesis research project, in conjunction with the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc., as part of the University of Manitoba, Department of Sociology thesis requirements for a Master of Arts degree.

The research project focuses on the issue of women's violence within the context of intimate partner relationships. The main objective of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the issue of women's intimate violence and the circumstances which bring women to the point where they engage in violent behaviour. Given that violence appears to be an especially pressing issue in the lives of Aboriginal women, the proposed study will focus on this particular group. The aim of the research will be to explore the issue of violence from the standpoint of Aboriginal women who engage in violent behaviour against their intimate partners. Specifically, the research will address a number of questions: What forms does women's intimate violence take? In what social contexts does the violence occur? What meanings do the women attach to their violent behaviour? How do they understand their own anger and aggression? Is their violence connected to their social locations in terms of their race, class and/or gender position? What strategies or resources do the women think are needed in order to reduce the incidence of violence in their lives?

By listening to what women themselves have to say about their own experiences with violence, this research may provide a basic map for understanding women's intimate violence in terms of how it develops and what the issues are for those involved. As well, the research offers the potential to highlight some of the general principles related to appropriate interventions for women's use of violence and, thus, assists in the re-construction of healthier, safer communities.

Two research strategies will be used in the project. First, three focus-group discussions will be conducted with women who participate in the Family Violence Program offered at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. The focus-group discussions are designed to provide the participants with a forum in which to discuss and reflect upon their experiences and understandings of violence, as well as their ideas for strategies to ameliorate it. Second, 10 to 12 in-depth interviews will be conducted with individual women to explore their own experiences with violence, their use of violence in intimate relationships, and their coping strategies and suggestions for responding to women who use violence in their relationships with intimate partners.

Each focus-group discussion and in-depth interview is expected to take approximately one to two hours to complete, and they will be conducted at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. Focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews will be audio tape recorded and later transcribed. However, with the exception of any disclosures on child abuse, the information collected throughout this research project will strictly adhere to the ethical guidelines of anonymity and confidentiality. It will not be possible to identify any research participant in the final report.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and research participants will not be obligated to answer any question in which they do not wish to respond. There will be no prejudice or consequences toward those individuals who choose not to respond to any question that may be asked of them. Likewise, if a research participant chooses to withdraw from this research project, she may do so at any time, without the risk of adverse consequences for her decision to withdraw. There will be no fee to participate in this research project, and there will be no financial incentives awarded for research participation.

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. will be informed of all developments and issues of concern, throughout all stages of this research project. In addition, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. will be provided three copies of the final thesis report.

I permit Lisa A. Murdock, graduate student of the Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba, to conduct the "Aboriginal Women and Violence" thesis research project, as outlined above, in conjunction with the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc.

Date

Sharon Perrault
Family Violence Program Team
Leader and Central Site Manager
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc.

Date

Lisa A. Murdock
U. of Manitoba Graduate Student
Department of Sociology

If you should have any questions or concerns regarding this thesis research project, please feel free to contact me at (204) 555-1234. Further questions or concerns may be provided to you by contacting my thesis advisor:

Professor Elizabeth Comack
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
Rm. 323 Isbister Bldg.
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
(204) 555-4321

Appendix C INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The "Aboriginal Women and Violence" research project is being conducted as part of the University of Manitoba, Department of Sociology thesis requirements for a Master of Arts degree.

The research project focuses on the issue of women's use of violence against their husbands, their common-law partners or their boyfriends. The main purpose of this research project is to get a better understanding of women's anger and aggression and the details that bring women to the point where they fight or use violence. Given that violence appears to be a problem in the lives of Aboriginal people, the aim of this research will be to look at the issue of women's intimate violence through the eyes of Aboriginal women. Specifically, the research will address a number of questions: What type of fighting or violent acts do women use in intimate relationships? In what kind of environment does the violence take place? What explanations do women give for their violent behaviour? How do they understand their own anger and aggression? Is their violent behaviour connected to their position in society in terms of their race, class and/or gender? In what ways do women think they can reduce or end their use of aggressive or violent behaviour in their lives? What kind of programs would women like to see in order to help them cope or manage their violent behaviour?

By listening to what women themselves have to say about their own experiences with anger and aggression, this research may provide an important map for understanding women's intimate violence in terms of how it develops and what the issues are for those involved. As well, this research offers the possibility of highlighting some of the general ideas related to appropriate interventions for women who use violence and, therefore, it may help to re-build healthier, safer communities.

I am requesting that you take approximately one to two hours of your time to talk with me about your own experiences with anger and aggression and about your own thoughts on intervention programs for women who use intimate violence. Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and you will not be forced to answer any question that you do not want to answer. There will be no prejudice or consequences for your decision not to answer any question that may be asked of you. Likewise, if you decide to stop the interview, you may do so at any time, without being punished for your decision to quit. There is no cost to participate in this research project, and there will be no money or any other awards given to you for your research participation.

Our interview will be tape recorded. However, you may ask to have the tape recorder turned off at any time you want. **With the exception of any confessions of child abuse, anything said in our interview will be kept confidential.** It will not be possible to recognize any research participant in the final report. Although the transcript of our interview will not be made available to you, you will be given the chance to look over our interview transcript if you would like to do so.

I should inform you that current laws require that certain offences against children be reported to legal authorities. Therefore, if you tell me any information related to the abuse of children or any other

defenseless persons, as a researcher, I am required by law to report this knowledge of abuse to the appropriate legal authorities

I agree to participate in the "Aboriginal Women and Violence" research project, as outlined above, and I allow the researcher to use the information collected for the purpose of writing a final report as credit toward a University of Manitoba, Department of Sociology, Master of Arts degree. In addition, I allow the researcher to use the information collected in this research project for the possible purpose of creating future programs and policies relating to the issue of women's intimate violence.

Date

Research Participant

Date

Lisa A. Murdock
U. of Manitoba Graduate Student
Department of Sociology

If you should have any questions or concerns regarding this research project, or if you would like to obtain a copy of the final report*, please feel free to contact me at (204) 555-1234. Any other questions or concerns regarding this research project may be brought to the attention of my thesis advisor:

Professor Elizabeth Comack
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
Rm. 323 Isbister Bldg.
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
(204) 555-4321

* A copy of the final report is not expected to be available until September 2000.

The "Aboriginal Women and Violence" research project has been approved by the Department of Sociology Research Ethics Review Committee. All complaints or concerns regarding any part of this research project may be reported to the Head of the Department of Sociology, at (204) 555-6789, for referral to the Research Ethics Review Committee.

Appendix D

FOCUS-GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

I. Understanding Women's Violence

1. Like men, women too may fight or use violence. How would you explain women's use of violence? Why do you think women fight or use violence?
2. What about women's fighting or use of violence toward an intimate partner? How would you explain this type of violent behaviour?
3. What kind of fighting do you think women may use toward their intimate partners? In what kind of environment do you think this violence takes place?
4. We now know that there is an historical connection between residential schools and some of the problems that Aboriginal people face today. Do you think that residential schools have, in some way or another, added to Aboriginal women's violent or aggressive behaviour, either directly or indirectly through the generations?
5. Sometimes, some men will call women names such as bitch, slut, whore, cunt. Why do you think these names make some women so angry?
6. What does it mean to you to be angry and aggressive?
7. Do you look at women who fight or use violence as victims or perpetrators of violence or, do you see them as both victims and perpetrators?
8. Overall, what kind of effect would you say women's use of violence has on women themselves, as well as on others?

II. Gender Role Expectations

9. How do you think people look at women who fight or use violence? Do you think women who fight are treated differently than men who fight?
10. What do you think the impact will be of women being told that they are not supposed to fight or use violence?
11. Do you think that women's use of violence in intimate settings is reported less than actually is the case?

III. Treatment and Intervention Programs

12. Do you think that there is enough being done to help women who fight or use violence against their intimate partners?
13. How do you think women can end or reduce their use of violent or aggressive behaviour in their lives?
14. What kind of programs would you like to see for women who are trying to cope or manage their violent behaviour?
15. Some agencies now offer programs and services to women who are trying to manage their anger and aggressive behaviour. Most of these programs focus on women as victims or survivors of violence. What do you think about this?
16. At the present time, would you say that women's needs are being met in terms of support and intervention to reducing their violent behaviour?
17. In closing, with regard to the issue of women's intimate violence, would you like to add anything that you think may be of importance to my study, but I may have missed it during our focus-group discussion?

Appendix E
CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS IN A RESEARCH PROJECT
ON ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THEIR USE OF VIOLENCE

My name is Lisa Murdock. I am a graduate student from the University of Manitoba, and I am currently working toward the completion of a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. As part of the thesis requirements for this degree, I am conducting a research project focusing on the issue of women's intimate violence, and I am inviting you to participate in this research project.

The research project focuses on the issue of women's use of violence against their husbands, their common-law partners or their boyfriends. The main purpose of this research project is to get a better understanding of women's anger and aggression and the details that bring women to the point where they fight or use violence. Given that violence appears to be a problem in the lives of Aboriginal people, the aim of this research will be to look at the issue of women's intimate violence through the eyes of Aboriginal women. By listening to what women themselves have to say about their own experiences with anger and aggression, this research may provide an important map for understanding women's intimate violence in terms of how it develops and what the issues are for those involved. As well, this research offers the possibility of highlighting some of the general ideas related to appropriate interventions for women who use violence and, therefore, it may help to re-build healthier, safer communities.

Participation in this research project is open to all females, aged 18 years and over, who have used violence toward an intimate partner at some point in their lives and who are willing to voluntarily share their own experiences of this anger and aggressive behaviour with me in a private, one-to-one interview. The interview is expected to take approximately one to two hours to complete, and it will be conducted at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. Family Violence Program site. The interview will be tape recorded. With the exception of any confessions of child abuse, anything said in the interview will be held in confidence. It will not be possible to recognize any research participant in the final report.

If you are a woman who has ever fought or used violent behaviour against a husband, a common-law partner or a boyfriend and would like to help in meeting the needs of women who use intimate violence, I would really like the chance to interview you about your own experiences with anger and aggression. A confidential interview may be arranged by telephoning me (Lisa Murdock) at (204) 555-1234.

Any other questions or concerns regarding this research project may be brought to the attention of my thesis advisor:

Professor Elizabeth Comack
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
Rm. 323 Isbister Bldg.
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
(204) 555-4321

Lisa Audrey Murdock

Aboriginal Women and Violence

The "Aboriginal Women and Violence" research project has been approved by the Department of Sociology Research Ethics Review Committee. All complaints or concerns regarding any part of this research project may be reported to the Head of the Department of Sociology, at (204) 555-6789, for referral to the Research Ethics Review Committee.

Appendix F INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I. Current Demographics

1. How far did you go in your education? (i.e. high school, GED, university, college)
2. How do you currently support yourself?
3. What is your current marital status? (i.e. married, common-law, single, never-married)
4. Do you have any children? Age and sex of the child(ren)? Do they live under your care?

II. Childhood and Teenage Experiences

5. Could you tell me a bit about yourself in terms of where you grew up, your family background, where you are coming from, and where your life is at now?
6. What kind of family did you grow up in? (i.e. one- or two-parent family, step-parents; number of brothers and sisters)
7. Could you describe how life was like for you in your childhood and teenage years? (i.e. economic situation, schooling, emotional and physical support, family, friendships)
8. Do you remember ever being treated differently because you are Aboriginal?
9. What kind of experiences with drugs or alcohol did you have as a child or teenager? Did you try using it yourself? At what age did you first try using drugs or alcohol?
10. What about violence? What kind of experiences with fighting or violence did you have as a child or teenager?
11. How about your own use of violence? Do you remember ever fighting or acting violently as a child or teenager? Could you describe the details of this fighting for me?
12. In looking back on your childhood and teenage years, what kind of effect, negative or positive, would you say your experiences had on your life?
13. How old were you when you first left home? Could you describe the circumstances around which you left home?

III. Contact with the Criminal Justice System

14. Have you ever had any involvement with the police? As an accused or complainant? How recently?
15. How old were you when you first came into contact with the law?
16. Have you ever been charged with a criminal offence? Did it involve fighting or violence? What was the outcome of the charge(s)?

IV. Personal Experiences with Drugs, Alcohol and Violence

17. As an adult, have you ever experienced any kind of fighting or violence from another person? Could you describe the details of this fighting for me?
18. What about violence from an intimate partner? Do you remember ever experiencing any kind of fighting or violence from an intimate partner that you were either dating or living with? Was drugs or alcohol involved in this fighting? In what kind of environment did the fighting take place? Were there any other incidents of violence by an intimate partner?
19. What about from yourself? Like men, women too may fight or use violence. Do you remember ever fighting with another person? With an intimate partner? What type of fighting did you use? Was drugs or alcohol involved in this fighting? In what kind of environment did the fighting take place?
20. How would you explain your own use of violence? Why do you think you fight or use violence?
21. We now know that there is an historical connection between residential schools and some of the problems that Aboriginal people face today. Do you think that residential schools have, in some way or another, added to your violent or aggressive behaviour, either directly or indirectly through the generations?
22. Sometimes, some men will call women names such as bitch, slut, whore, cunt. Why do you think these names make some women so angry? Do they make you angry? Why?
23. What does it mean to you to be angry or aggressive?
24. Do you think of yourself as a victim or perpetrator of violence or, do you see yourself as both a victim and a perpetrator?
25. How do you think people look at women who fight or use violence? Do you think women who fight are treated differently than men who fight?
26. Do you think that women's use of violence in intimate settings is reported less than actually is the case?

27. Overall, what kind of effect would you say your own use of violence has had on yourself? On others?

V. Coping Strategies and Interventions

28. How do you deal with your violent or aggressive behaviour? What kind of support systems do you have to help you cope with your own use of violence?
29. Do you think that there is enough being done to help women who fight or use violence against their intimate partners?
30. How do you think women can end or reduce their use of violent or aggressive behaviour in their lives?
31. What kind of programs would you like to see for women who are trying to cope or manage their violent behaviour?
32. Some agencies now offer programs and services to women who are trying to manage their anger and aggressive behaviour. Most of these programs focus on women as victims or survivors of violence. What do you think about this?

In closing . . .

33. With regard to the issue of women's intimate violence, would you like to add anything that you think may be of importance to my study, but I may have missed it during our interview?

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