YOUNG WOMEN'S NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE

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by

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There is a growing interest in females who commit acts of violence with the mass media claiming that we are witnessing the emergence of a breed of new violent females. This thesis, however, challenges the argument that we are seeing the emergence of sassy, independent, violent females who are imitating, or in some circumstances being more violent, than males. Based on narrative interviews with a group of young women in the North West of England, this thesis reveals the pervasive nature of social control mechanisms that are at play in these young women's lives. In order to adhere to entrenched ideas of appropriate female behaviour, these young women employ a variety of preventative strategies in order to avoid or negotiate violence, sexual or otherwise. As such these strategies were not only employed to prevent violence by males, but also to prevent violence from other women, thus demonstrating women's universal fear of men and their particular fear of other women.

This thesis also builds on Kelly's (1988) continuum of violence theory, suggesting that a matrix of violence is better able to capture the subtleties and complexities of violence in the everyday lives of these young women. As such, there is no clear-cut distinction between victims and perpetrators, thus disrupting the dichotomy in which women are seen either as innocent victims or as offenders. Rather, the young women may find themselves at various places in this matrix as the dynamics of a conflict change. These conflicts are not only evident with regard to physical violence but also with the young women either being victims, or perpetrators of, what was termed 'mean' or 'bitchy' behaviour. However, the author suggests that we should be careful not to conflate the severity of this 'mean' behaviour with the harm inflicted by physical violence.

The young women's motivations for using violence are also explored. Important here is the concept of 'respect', which, it is argued is not gender specific. Rather the young women regarded respect in the same manner as boys and men; it gave them status among their peers. However, it was found that ideas of respectability and respectable femininity were gender specific. It was also evident that these latter terms carried different meanings for the young women at various times in their lives depending upon the circumstances and situations they found themselves in.

CONTENTS

1. DISCOVERING THE 'NEW' VIOLENT FEMALE 1
Gender variations in crime 7
Media, women and violence 12
Defining violence 19
Summary 26

2. GIRLS, WOMEN AND VIOLENCE 30
Violent girls 39
Normal girls, normal violence? 49
Summary 57

3. RESEARCHING YOUNG WOMEN AND VIOLENCE 59
Methodology and methods 65
Narrative 77
Ethics, consent and gatekeepers 83
Research participants and sampling 89
Face-to-face interviews 91
Email interviews 93
Analysis 98
Reflections on the research 101

4. 'I'M NOT A FIGHTER' 103
Avoidance strategies 108
Lessons in life 108
Avoiding dangerous people 112
Avoiding dangerous places 116
Negotiating strategies 120
Talking things through 120
Walking away 123
Deference 127
Summary 131

5. 'GIRLS CAN BE SO MEAN' 133
Friend or Foe 136
'Girls are such bitches' 142
'She's all that' 149
Summary 151

6. 'YOU'VE GOT TO STAND UP FOR YOURSELF' 153
Who's fighting who 155
Fights with siblings 155
Fights with friends and peers 160

Fights with strangers 167
Motivations for fighting 171
External motivations for fighting 173
Loyalty to others 173
Taking control 177
Internal motivations for violence 179
For the buzz 179
Jealousy 182
Emotionality 186
'I feel so ashamed' 187
'Why did I do that' 190
'I just don't know' 192
Summary 194

7. INTIMATE VIOLENCE 197
Dating violence 199
Love the one you're with 204
Fighting back 206
The ties that bind 210
Coping strategies 214
I'm not a battered woman 219
Sexual Assault 220
Self regulation 222
Self blame 223
Child abuse 230
Summary 234

8. THE STORY SO FAR 237
Preventative strategies 240
Mean behaviour 242
Gaining respect 244
Matrix of violence 245
Respectability 247
Safe victims 250
Future directions 251

BIBLIOGRAPHY 254

APPENDIX A 280
APPENDIX B 283
APPENDIX C 285

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Chapter 1

Discovering the 'new' violent female

> It was a late afternoon in September, a surprisingly hot day for the time of year, when I walked into the cool, dimly lit entrance of the drop-in centre. I was excited. At the interview it had been relatively quiet and peaceful, there had only been a skeleton staff on duty, two volunteers and a few young women using the computers. However, on this day I was in for a shock. After crossing the quiet threshold it was like walking into the dragon's den. The sights and sounds were mind blowing, everything was a whirl. I can only describe it as standing in the middle of a fair ground with the volume and speed cranked up high. I wanted to turn around and run. At one side of the reception room there was a group of four girls, quite young I would say, about 14 years of age, yelling at each other and calling each other names. I wondered how young women knew such foul names. On the other side of the room was an irate young woman shouting down the phone. When I slowly ventured further into the building there were three girls fighting. I later learnt that this had started as a 'play fight' that got out of hand. There were young mothers 'disciplining' their children, children fighting over toys in the crèche. It was unadulterated bed-lam. Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse a young woman suddenly appeared in front of me, aggressively demanding to know what I was smiling at. In reality it was a very nervous smile. My knight in shining armour came in the form of the drop-in co-ordinator, she cheerfully informed me 'not to worry, it's always like this you'll get use to it'. But did I want to get used to the fighting, the name-calling, the ostracising, the bitchy behaviour, or was I already part of it?

The above extract describes my first day as a volunteer detached youth worker at a drop-in centre for young women in the North-West of England. There is little investigation into the behaviour displayed by many of those I first encountered in the drop-in centre described above, whether as victims or perpetrators. Such behaviour as displayed by these young women rarely results in legal intervention but forms a part of the everyday life of these young women. This research aims to address this gap in the literature as such the central question of this research was, what views,

attitudes, beliefs and experiences do young women have towards violent behaviour? The study and especially the data-gathering process will be guided by the following questions: What do young women understand by the term 'violence'? Do young women's definitions of violence correspond with legal definitions? What factors contribute to or affect young women's decisions to use violence?

The participants for this study numbered 32 young women between the ages of 16 –26 (see Appendix A). Twenty five of the young women were white, six were black and 1 young woman described herself as Muslim. The majority described themselves as working-class with nine describing themselves as middle-class. This sample was chosen because of their transition from adolescence to adulthood, including education to employment, social activities, including socialising in bars and clubs. The study was conducted using qualitative research, and the data collection used narrative interviews. Narrative interviews were chosen because they provide the best means of gaining the data that is required in order to address the issues of the research. Additionally the use of narrative interviews is relatively rare in the study of young women and violence. The study adhered to the overarching principles of feminist research, and data analysis was guided by grounded theory. Although, it must be stated that the research did not follow either feminist research or grounded theory rigorously, rather it used aspects of both that were important for this research without restricting the aims and objectives.

What literature is available on girls, women and violence is limited and focuses mainly on girl gang violence, and girls and women in institutional settings. In contrast there is a plethora of research on men's violence against women. Feminist scholars have been instrumental in bringing men's violence against women and women's victimisation to the forefront. They have also highlighted the relationship between this violence and

power, inequality and social structure (Bart & O'Brien, 1985; Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1975). Studies have neglected however to identify the role of violence in the everyday lives of young women; this is especially true in the UK. Studies have in the main focused on boys and men's violence, and as a result, violence has been conceptualised in relation to male experiences of violence. Very little is therefore, known about the nature and extent of violence in the lives of young women (with the exception of domestic and sexual violence). When women do display acts of aggression and violence they are much more likely than males to be labelled as mentally ill and in need of treatment rather than labelled as criminal (Belknap, 2001; Geiger, 2002). Since most girls and women are not criminals or delinquents previous research has revealed little about how girls and women experience violence in their everyday lives. Therefore social attitudes around violence work to eradicate and normalise women's victimisation, but also work to reduce women's violence to acts of irrationality and pathology.

Violence by women challenges dominant gender norms, and as such is regarded as threatening the moral fabric of society. Thus concerns about women using violence relate to the apparent decline in women's 'civilising effect' upon men (Hughes, 2002) and their calming influence to discourage male-on-male fighting. Therefore in order to preserve existing models of appropriate gender norms, female violence is portrayed as an aberration, that is, it is masculinised and/or pathologised. Alternatively, it is redefined as the natural state of femaleness, that is, females as emotional and/or irrational (Burman et al, 2003), while men's violent behaviour is often regarded as rational and instrumental (Campbell, 1993).

There are few studies that look solely at the issue of violence and aggression within all-female samples outside of an institutional setting (Campbell, 1984, 1991; Artz, 1998; Batchelor et al., 2001; Batchelor,

2005). Therefore, all-female research into the everyday experience of violence in girls and women's lives is needed which this research argues may in some instances resemble men's violence but also differs from boys and men's experiences of violence in a number of ways. I will argue that there is also a need for more qualitative studies that focus on understanding the motivations, beliefs, experiences and processes at work in girls and women's lives and their experiences of violence that are extremely difficult to capture in quantitative research. There is also a need for further research into girls and women's preventative strategies, which this research found was important to the young women.

Much research on violence and aggression has been couched within a sex-difference framework (see for example, Burbank, 1994; and Kelly, 1988), which has consistently concluded that, acts of violence and aggression are predominantly carried out by males on males. This literature has continually reinforced a view of women as passive and non-violent. It has been shown that the studies couched in this sex-difference framework have focused on a narrow and male-centred definition of aggression and violence (Kelly, 1988). This construction of violence has ignored a whole range of non-physical acts, such as verbal abuse and as such, it may be that much aggression and violence perpetrated by girls and women has been largely overlooked or discarded.

Research that focuses on violent acts perpetrated by girls and women is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, Burbank argues (1994: 169) that to ignore the fact that women commit acts of violence and aggression is to 'ignore critical areas of research with vital social implications'. Secondly, examining violent acts perpetrated by girls and women helps to deconstruct the myth of the non-violent female. It 'helps to deconstruct prevailing representations of masculinity and femininity (for example, men as aggressive and women as passive) and promotes a more sophisticated

view of gender in line with proponents of feminist post-structuralism' (Day et al, 2003:154). This myth of the non-violent female has been important because it serves a number of purposes which mainly centre round the fact it maintains the focus on boys and men who in reality commit more violent crime than females. But it denies agency to girls and women in that those who do use violence are seen as irrational and/or pathological, because if it is believed that girls and women do not use violence then those who do must be an aberration. These ideas are not restricted to violent crime but also reflect the general view of women and crime. More importantly, to ignore women's violent behaviour,

> encourages a "backlash" effect where some investigators feel challenged to "prove that women are just as violent as men. It contributes to the fiction that women who are violent must somehow be extraordinary freaks, it denies women any agency or choice in their lives, but perhaps most crucially it leaves society and the justice system with little understanding of their behaviour, or guidance on how we should react to them or help them' (Correctional Services of Canada, 2000).

It would be misleading however to assume that everyone agrees with the argument that research on women and violence is important. Rather Burman et al (2003) has suggested that some feminists may be reluctant to study females and violence for fear that drawing attention to it will inevitably distract attention away from men's violence, which is far more serious and lethal than female acts of violence, and occurs at higher rates:

> This is a key reason why feminists have traditionally ignored female violence, fearing the potentially negative political and social costs for the feminist movement more generally. After all, if energy and resources are expended on addressing *female* violence, the hard-won acknowledgement that sexual and physical violence are gendered crimes may be lost within a 'woman blaming' backlash (Burman et al 2003:74, original emphasis).

The aim of this research is to attempt to understand the meaning of violence from the perspective of young women. It will examine young women's experiences of violence outside of a criminal context in order to appreciate young women's experience and use of violence. Stanko (2006: 546) highlights 'the importance of using women's ordinary voices in accounts and accounting for violence. We had to learn to hear ordinary women about ordinary violence'. Thus this research will examine young women's attitudes, experiences, motivations, and views surrounding violence and violent behaviour. It also aims to understand the factors that may influence the young women's decision to use violence. It is also hoped that this research will help challenge traditional thinking about violence in the lives of young women. Because of the contested nature of violence this research did not attempt to define acts of violence in the young women's lives. Rather the young women themselves identified incidents of violence through the use of narrative interviews. Each young woman in this study was asked what they understood by the terms anger, aggression, and violence. They were then asked to tell the researcher a story about a time when someone was violent or aggressive to them. They were also asked to tell a story of a time when they were aggressive or violent to someone. In this way the young women in this research identified the violence themselves rather than working with a definition used by the researcher. The interviews consisted of these several questions which were designed to elicit narrative answers, rather than explanations or descriptions.

It will be illustrated throughout this research that violence in the lives of these young women is complex and as such time, space, and context are influential factors. Thus the young women in this research either perpetrated acts that may be defined as violent or are victims of acts that may be defined as violent at certain times in their lives under certain circumstances. Stanko (2006) insists that in order to understand violence

we need to 'develop a cognitive map for contextualising "what happened". The landscape is tightly woven around social identities, social meanings, and social context. Moreover, Stanko (2006: 545) argues that 'How "seriously" we as a society respond to an incident of violence will vary by the situation within which it takes place'. As such social context should be considered important to our understanding of how violence is 'defined as criminal harm or as harmful by perpetrators, victims, criminal justice officials, and society at large' (ibid). For example, the young women did not define some acts as violent under certain circumstances and when committed by certain people. Instances include; fights between siblings even when injuries required medical attention, acts of violence between dating partners and sexual acts which closely fit the legal definition of sexual crimes.

Gender variations in crime

Although research (see for example, ESRC Violence Research Project) has shown that violent crime is a complex and broad group of offences of varying levels of seriousness, legal definitions of violence consist of a narrow group of behaviours ranging from homicide to less serious wounding including common assault. Official crime statistics show that the level of violent crime has fallen by 43% since its peak in 1995 and has remained relatively stable since 2000. In 2004/05 the total number of reported violent offences in England and Wales was 2,412,000. These included 401,000 incidents of domestic violence, 828,000 incidents where the offender was an acquaintance, and 836,000 incidents where the offender was a stranger (Home Office, 2005/6). These statistics challenge the assumption held by some people that 'real' violence is perpetrated by strangers.

Official statistics show there has been a rise in the number of women committing violent offences. For example in 1981 violence against the

person accounted for 6 percent of all indictable offending by females aged between 10 and 17 years of age in England and Wales. By 1999 this had risen to 12 percent. The number of women found guilty or cautioned for violence had increased by 14 percent between 1994 and 2003 (Home Office, 2004/05). Comparison by gender shows that men still outnumber women in arrests for violence against the person[1]. Among the population of sentenced female offenders in June 2001, 15 percent were sentenced for violence against the person (Coleman et al, 2006). This is supported by the British Crime Survey which found that between 2004 and 2005 a higher proportion of males than females (20 percent against 11 percent) had committed a violent offence (ibid).

This picture of gender differences in crime is borne out in prison statistics. Official crime statistics show there has been an increase in women cautioned and sentenced to prison for violent offences[2]. Alder and Worrall (2004) suggest that while there were reported increases in girl's violent offending in Australia, Canada, and the UK, their convictions were often for minor offences. Many of their victims were care workers or police officers, suggesting that girls' normal resistance to discipline is more readily criminalised and punished. The majority of the sentenced female prison population are serving sentences for non-violent offences[3]. Most of the increase in the female prison population can be explained by a significant increase in the severity of sentences (Prison Reform Trust,

[1] Between 2004 and 2005, 328,300 males were arrested and charged with violence compared to 67,600 females.

[2] For the offence of violence against the person, the number of women sentenced to immediate custody in 2004 was 751 (18.1 percent). The total number of females sentenced to immediate custody for violence against the person in 2005 had increased to 764. In 2006 the figures decreased to 678, and 2007 once again increased slightly to 691 (Home Office, 2007). The figures for men sentenced to immediate custody for violence against the person are 12,078, 15,537 and 17,057 respectively

[3] The most common offence for women receiving a prison sentence and for receiving a community sentence is for theft and handling stolen goods (Howard League, 2006; Prison Reform Trust, 2007).

2007). In addition, over half the women in prison say they have suffered domestic violence, and one in three has experienced sexual abuse (ibid, 2007: 14).

As demonstrated crime surveys appear to support the claim that young women are becoming more violent, however, as with all official statistics care must be taken to place the data in context. Violent crime recorded by the police has shown substantial increases due to changes in recording practices, increased reporting by the public and increased police activity. Worrall (2004: 44) argues what we are also witnessing a:

> paradigm shift in the treatment of bad girls: more girls who offend are being dealt with by the criminal justice system rather than the welfare systems; more bad behaviour by girls is being redefined as criminal, particularly fighting; more immoral behaviour by girls is being constructed as "near criminal" ... As a consequence of these changing attitudes, there has been a shift away from the "welfarisation" of troublesome girls toward their criminalization.

Supporting this Worrall cites Heidensohn (2001) who has pointed out '"that we do not have notions of 'normal' uses of force and violence by women and girls," which contrasts with our acceptance of "rough play and fighting" among men and boys' (ibid: 53). Home Office statistics indicate the increased use of custody for women does not in general reflect more serious offences being committed by women, but rather a greater propensity by magistrates and judges to send women to prison (Howard League, 2006). This pattern has remained largely unchanged for the past twenty five years, with girls and women accounting for a very small percentage of violent crime. Hence one of the most overwhelming facts about crime is that it is predominantly committed by men, more notably young men.

Self-report studies including British Crime Surveys (BCS) also show the gender difference in crime. These surveys are considered the most reliable

measure of violent crime[4] (Walker, et al, 2007), and are subdivided into a typology of four groups. This subdivision is based on the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. These groups are domestic violence, muggings – comprised of robbery, and attempted robbery, acquaintance violence - in which the victim knew the perpetrator even if only by sight; and stranger violence - in which the victim did not know the offender (Home Office 2002). Findings from the BCS show that violent crime in England and Wales is still a rare occurrence for men as well as for women[5].

With regard to victimisation the BCS found that between 2006 and 2007, 45 percent of female victims knew the main suspect. 15 percent of violent incidents were of domestic violence, of which 80% of victims were women (Home Office, 2007). The BCS also found that domestic violence has the highest rate of repeat victimisation of any crime – 35 percent of households have a second incident within five weeks. Over a third of all female murder victims are killed by a current or former partner. With regard to offender relationship to the victim in violent incidents it was found that for males aged between 18 and 25 a partner was the offender in 2% of cases, for females aged between 18 and 25 a partner was the offender in 48% of incidents (Coleman, et al, 2006).

In addition to official statistics and surveys, research undertaken in Scotland using self-report studies found that violence committed by girls is rare. 5 percent (n=30) of the 670 girls aged 13-16 years of age reported being routinely violent towards others (Burman, et al, 2001). This research

[4] Between 2006 and 2007 there were approximately 2,471,000 violent crimes in England and Wales (BCS). In the same period the number of violent crimes reported to the police stood at 1,046,437 indicating that approximately only 45 percent of violent crime gets reported (Walker et al, 2007).

[5] Young men aged 16 to 24 were the group found to be more at risk of being a victim of violent crime in 2006/07.

noted that 'despite high levels of interest in "girls' violence" ... there is a paucity of British literature on girls and violence. ... Girls voices are rarely heard' (Burman et al, 2003:72). When the girls used violence it was usually described as one-to-one fights with other girls or boys. This usually takes the forms of punching, kicks, slapping and hair-pulling. Although this research has shown that girls use a variety of coping strategies to control their aggression and violence, including; talking things through, using humour, and walking away, it has not been discussed in any length.

Motivation for female violence includes girls' gendered experiences. Research has shown that many girls who use violence have been victims of high levels of physical violence as well as sexual and emotional abuse, often at the hands of close family members. (Artz, 1998; Burman et, al. 2003; Chesney-Lind, 2001). As indicated above, girls and women are more likely to report previous sexual or physical abuse than incarcerated men, suggesting that the majority of young women's offending, including their relatively low use of violent crime, is primarily a response to their victimization. Additionally, the statistics compiled by the Howard League (2006) indicate that 50 percent of women had experienced and/or witnessed sexual abuse and 60 percent had experienced and/or witnessed emotional abuse[6]. This suggests that violent and criminal girls and women are more likely to come from troubled or violent families with a history of sexual, physical, and verbal abuse. Moore (1991) and Chesney-Lind (1987; 1993; 2001) also found that girls and women were frequent victims of sexual abuse. Additionally Batchelor (2005) in her study of violent young

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[6] See the work of Baskin and Sommers, *Female' initiation into violent street crime* (1993) for the counter argument that emphasizing previous victimization constructs girls and women as having no agency. Additionally, recent qualitative studies suggest that young women are motivated to engage in violent acts for reasons beyond victimization. Miller's (2001) work *One of the Guys*, challenges the argument that young women's use of violence is explained entirely by one's victimization history. She provides a discussion of how the motivations for young women's violence are sometimes similar to men's motivations, which include competitions for status and recognition.

women detained in a Scottish Young Offenders Institute found that a high number of them had been victims of some form of abuse; two fifths of the young women she interviewed had been sexually abused, usually by a family member.

Baskin and Sommer (1998) have shown that other motivational factors play a significant role in young women's decision to use violence, these include; disaffection, anger, humiliation, and breaches of trust. A number of other factors that are evident in the decision making process include: peer relations, group processes and situational motives. In terms of situational dynamics, most violent encounters involve three key stages: verbal conflict, threats, physical attack in which retaliation plays a crucial role (Baskin & Sommers, 1998). For some young women, using violence and being aggressive brings a number of rewards, these can be summarised as, reputation as being tough and able to stand up for one self, as being a person who is not easily fooled, status and respect as a fighter, and feelings of empowerment. These kinds of motivations and incentives challenge the notion that girls' violence is irrational, hysterical and pathological (Burman, 2004:21).

Media, women and violence

Consumers of both print and television news reports do not uncritically accept everything they hear and see in the media, but that does not mean it has no influence upon them, people generally get their information about crime and violence from the media. The press, since the mid-1850s, and latterly television, are the most important medium for creating the public's awareness and perceptions of violent crime. Murders, assaults and other crimes against the person have literally made headline news (Archer & Jones in Stanko, 2003:17). However, as Cohen (1973) has highlighted, the media have been found to exaggerate and amplify social problems far beyond their real extent contributing to a national 'moral panic'. In this

manner the media coverage on crime and violence can be very punitive, contributing to the public's fear and anxiety which in turn contributes to the demonisation of girls and women. Faludi (1991) has shown how 'independent women (read feminists) have been increasingly portrayed by the media as capable of extreme acts of violence, particularly homicidal violence against men' (cited in DeJean, 2003:118).

The image being portrayed by the print media and television is of a shift in the behaviour of girls and women, including the use of violence, becoming gang members, and binge drinking. This also includes concern about girls entering the domain of boys and imitating their behaviour, the masculinisation thesis (Chesney-Lind, 2006). This image of the 'new violent female offender' is not new. In the 1970s, a notion emerged that the women's movement had "caused" a surge in women's serious crime (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; 32).

In the 1970s the silence on women and crime was broken by the work of Adler (1975) and Simon (1975) which introduced the 'liberation hypothesis'. They insist that girls are seeking equality with boys. The Women's Movement was blamed for this change and has been linked to a new wave in violent offending. It was claimed that the Women's Movement encouraged young women to adopt certain "male" behaviours such as drinking, stealing, fighting, and the use of violence,

> ... in the middle of the twentieth century, we are witnessing the simultaneous rise and fall of women. Rosie the Riveter of World War II had become Robin the Rioter or Rhoda the Robber of the Vietnam era. Women have lost more than their chains. For better or worse, they have lost many of the restraints, which kept them within the law (Adler, 1975: 24).

Adler (1975) assumed that the more women's position in society neared that of men, then the more alike their criminal behaviour would become,

and that women would naturally wish to copy male patterns in criminality and as a result would adopt masculine roles to do so.

> Women's unaccustomed involvement in crimes which require high levels of violence or potential violence is not limited to the sensation, but can be seen in other, less publicised areas. In the cities, for instance, young girls are now taking to the streets just as boys have traditionally done. It has now become quite common for adolescent girls to participate in muggings, burglaries, and extortion rings which prey on schoolmates (1975: 22).

Simon's (1975) work introduced an alternative version of Adler's liberation hypothesis. In contrast to Adler, Simon moved away from the prediction that as women's attitudes changed so would their crime rates. Rather Simon argued that as women's opportunities increased this would lead to them committing more property crime and less violent crime.

Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004: 32) argue that today the theme is the same, but the terminology has changed, with newspaper articles arguing:

> "The plague of teen violence is an equal-opportunities scourge"

Thus, the media has shown a great deal of interest in this topic with hard hitting headlines spanning many years including 'Sugar and Spice, but not at all nice', (Brinkworth, 1996) 'Tank Girls' (Guardian, 1994), 'Gangs put boot into old ideas of femininity' (Guardian, 1998) and 'Girls lead the pack in new gangland violence' (The Observer, 2001), 'Deadlier than the male? (Sunday Times, 2005); and 'British Girls among most Violent in World (Guardian, 2006).

Furthermore, Burman et al (2003: 74) argue that:

> The media attention and publicity that is generated by doing research on girls and violence may in fact lend credence to the argument that violence perpetrated by females is a growing

problem, or that females who commit violent acts are worse than boys who commit the same or similar acts.

The media reports present girls who use violence as challenging femininity and as such they are often masculinised, pathologised or redefined as part of the female condition. As such girls and women are often regarded as emotional, irrational, and out of control and this often denies female agency. Moreover, women convicted of serious violent crime are often portrayed in the media in highly sensationalised ways. If they do not become like Myra Hindley, an iconic image of evil and depravity in modern art and culture, their sexuality and toughness may be emphasised as "Tank Girls" (Heidensohn, 2001). As a result the media are suggesting that we are seeing an unprecedented rise of girls and women acting violently, with headlines depicting a 'New Violent Female'.

The media also like to use religious metaphors, for example, describing Beverley Allitt as the 'Angel of Death' (Godsi, 2000:39). Thus the media reports about female acts of violence perpetuate the myth of the 'new violent female'. These accounts continually emphasis individual explanations, as well as the changing role of female, and ignore or de-emphasis the importance of wider social structural patterns of disadvantage (Websdale & Alvarez, 1997 in Chesney-Lind, 2006: 12) including the patriarchal ordering of society. These media reports together with the use of statistics on female arrests for violence are brought forward as evidence of girls and women's increasing use of violence. However, there was a moral panic about female violence in Victorian England. As Davies (1999), and Godfrey, (2004) have shown this concern mainly surrounded young working class women. Historical studies challenge the myth of the non-violent female and the idea that we are witnessing the emergence of the 'new' violent female. Both Davies (1999) and Godfrey (2004) have shown that the 'moral panics' about the emergence of the new violent females are not new rather they have shown that these fears re-appear

sporadically throughout history. Historical evidence has found that there was concern and panic about the violent behaviour of girls and young women in Victorian England, particularly their involvement in violent gang activity. This has also included both verbal and physical violence and has provoked concern from both welfare and criminal justice agencies with women being pathologised or demonised.

Historical analysis by Davies (1999) in Victorian Manchester and Salford focused on working class young women. It looked at newspapers and court records of the time. This research has shown that female violence is not a new phenomenon or that female liberation was the cause for the supposed increase in female violent behaviour. Davies found that serious violent fights were not uncommon, and these fights between and by young women were severe and resulted in serious wounding or death. The findings from this research have highlighted that gang violence was not an exclusively male preserve. Females were involved in violent confrontations, these were between rival gangs or attacks on local people and the police. The women in Davies' study where regarded as 'fallen' women because they lacked 'womanly' qualities such as gentleness, passivity, submissiveness, and virtue and they were defined as sexually degraded. However, these women where seen as less dangerous than their male counter-parts. It was also thought that these women were less responsible for their actions than violent male gang members.

Davies (1999) also found that the women in his study sometimes fought in the street in revenge of insults that where aimed at them, or family members, or to solve disputes. However, shame was attached to these women; they were not awarded a position of status. Davies' findings highlight the fact that young women in this period spent a great deal of their leisure time in groups on street corners, in beerhouses, music, and dancehalls. They found themselves in the same situation as young men,

that is, they frequented places where violence was more likely to happen. These gangs also frequently used weapons such as bricks, stones, and knives. These findings appear to challenge the taken for granted notions of girls' violence as irrational, hysterical and pathological as the young women in this study used violence to solve disputes. Davies also provides evidence that we are not witnessing the emergence of a new violent female, instead girls and women have used violence throughout history.

In Godfrey's (2004: 27) review of violent women, 1880-1930, evidence has shown similar statistics on female violent offences, that is, young men vastly outnumbered young women for the offence of assault. 'For every girl aged between sixteen and twenty-one, there were five boys prosecuted for violence in Northwest England. Thus, Godfrey found no evidence of rampaging female gangs, rather young women's involvement in the gang was minimal with only small numbers of girl gang members. When these young women were involved in gang activity it was usually in a minor capacity such as 'molls, hangers-on, or trophies'. When young women were involved in violent conflict many of these young women argued that it was warranted, for example, defending oneself and family members. 'In those circumstances girls showed no natural psychological or biological disinclination to hitting someone when kith or kin were threatened (Godfrey, 2004: 35).

The past inattention to girls and women's involvement in crime by academics and policy makers was partially attributed to their perceived limited involvement in crime, especially violent crime. Also, males have until fairly recently dominated academia and research on crime and violence and have perpetuated the myth of low female involvement in violence. This had resulted in girls and women being 'added on' to theories of male violence. As will be shown throughout this research there is a small but growing body of research that focuses on girls, women and violent behaviour, which is now dismissing many of the myths that have

built up around females. However, it may be creating a whole new set of myths. With the help of the media, especially the print media, we are seeing a growing public fear about violence and the demonisation of girls and women.

In the UK and US today we seem to be living a moment of fascination with women who are violent, especially women capable of murder, and even with female serial killers (Godsi, 2005: 119). Godsi, points out that recent literature would have us believe that a 'new violent female' is emerging; however, if we look back in history we can see that women have been capable of displays of violence for centuries. This fascination with girls and women who commit acts of violence is not new. As far back as the 1800s researchers have attempted to show that females commit acts of violence. Lombroso and Ferrero (1895) attempted to show that delinquent women were abnormal and a throw back to more primitive times. While Pollak (1950) argued that women who commit crime were more devious than their male counterparts. Women who commit criminal acts hide behind their femaleness, or use their deceitfulness to cover up their own crimes (Pollak, 1950).

This fascination with finding evidence to support and document the belief that women are becoming more violent is evident in the words of Schaffner (1999: 32)

> These girls are out here acting like males! They are in gangs, carrying weapons, beating each other up! They hide razor blades in their hair, under their tongues. Our police officers have to be very careful when dealing with the young ladies on the streets nowadays.

These authors present a sleight of hand; they discuss aggression but use it as a synonym for violence (Pollock & Davis, 2005: 8).

Defining violence

The term 'violence' may at first sight appear unproblematic; however a review of the literature reveals a multitude of definitions. In addition official statistics and self-report studies work with a legal definition, while the young women in this study identified a number of other behaviours that do not appear in self report studies or official statistics on violence. A number of researchers have used a narrow, precise definition, while others have opted to use a much broader one. Each discipline, sociology, criminology, psychology, and legal tends to define the term in different ways, further adding to the problem. Some of these disciplines have tried to produce an exact definition of violence, which Siann (1988: 2) argues 'excludes reference to many aspects of the common everyday usage of the term', while other disciplines opt for a broader, all-inclusive definition. Moreover, the terms 'violence' and 'aggression' are often undifferentiated, that is they are often used interchangeably throughout a number of disciplines including sociology, criminology and psychology. It is usually, but not always, the case that psychology prefers to use the term 'aggression', because it relates to personality (individual characteristics rather than acts). While in sociology and criminology the term preferred is 'violence'. What also needs to be taken into account when defining violence is the legal definitions of violent crime. These cover a variety of acts, which range from murder, harassment, which is putting people in fear of violence, to other acts including child abduction and concealment of a birth.

As a result, reaching a satisfactory definition of violence, which would encompass all disciplines, is very difficult for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is little consistency in the definitions used by different disciplines or researchers. The definition of violence used in early studies of violent crime was behaviour by individuals that intentionally threatens attempts or inflicts physical harm on another. Others, particularly those concerned with

violence against women, do not restrict their definition to physical harm. Stanko (1994) describes violence as the infliction of psychological, sexual, physical, and/or material damage. She has highlighted that the contributors to the Economic and Social Research Council's Violence Research Project, have 'no set and agreed definition ... of what violence is. Bullying, verbal abuse, physical harm, threats, intimidation, and killing all feature' (2003:3). Stanko further argues that she 'would even go so far as to suggest that it is only through fluidity of definition that we can think creatively about disrupting violence as a social phenomenon (2003: 3). In addition a number of studies regard self-injury and suicide as violent behaviour. In the literature on child abuse there are conflicting views on what differentiates "violence" from "punishment" (Correctional Services of Canada, 1992). Furthermore, in some contexts violence is acceptable in others it is regarded as abhorrent, while the meaning that people give to their own and others behaviour in violent incidents can be crucial.

The terms 'violence' and 'aggression' cover a variety of acts from verbal abuse to mass destruction, as a result there are an array of acts that are regarded as violent or aggressive including; murder, contact sports, criticising, public ridicule, intimidation, fighting, bullying and gossip.

> The word violence is associated with the practice of physical harm inflicted by one person on another. Yet, it can also refer to the trauma (emotional or psychological) that comes from being frightened or threatened, or consistently terrorised, and it has also been used to denote not only particular acts or their consequences but also a general climate in which the omnipresence of violent acts creates an atmosphere of fear and demoralisation (Tonry & Moore, 1988 cited in Burman, et.al. 2003: 73)

Some acts of violence are thus considered to be more acceptable or tolerated than others, for example, war is considered a necessary evil by many people in order to defend deeply held ideals and beliefs, and the use of physical aggression to defend oneself can be regarded as legitimate use

of violence. Other acts such as murder and child abuse are more readily condemned. This problem of defining violence raises fundamental questions for violence research, as Leibling and Stanko (2001: 426) have highlighted:

> This moral discourse is steeped in contradictory notions of what kind of crime and violence are normal, acceptable, illegal and abnormal. As researchers we are often in situations where we are to make judgements about behaviour, and decide whether such behaviour is worthy of note.

This problem is further complicated by the fact that the term aggression is sometimes split into two categories, direct and indirect aggression, the former refers to such behaviour as physical violence, while the latter refers to such behaviour as verbal abuse. This is especially evident in the psychology literature.

Kelly (1988) insists that commonsense definitions of violence reflect men's idea about normal behaviour. As the definition of what constitutes violence is widened, young women are more likely to appear in the data as perpetrators, for example, when indirect aggression such as verbal threats and intimidation are included. As Chesney-Lind (2001: 19) asserts:

> The psychology literature generally shows that boys and men are more likely to be physically aggressive than females, but the difference begins to even out when verbal aggression is considered (yelling, insulting, teasing). Further, adolescent girls may be more likely than boys to use 'indirect aggression' such as gossiping, telling bad or false stories, or revealing secrets.

The Finnish psychologists Bjorkqvist, et al. (1992) have defined indirect aggression as social manipulation where the target is attacked, indirectly and the aggressor can thereby remain unidentified and avoid counterattacks. According to Batchelor et al (2001), girls use indirect

aggression, which includes manipulative methods such as gossiping[7], exchanging friends, trying to win others to one's side, excluding from groups and writing nasty notes. They found that the girls' concepts of direct aggression included physical acts such as hitting, kicking, punching, slapping, or fighting. The girls in their study also regarded sexual assaults, self-harm, being locked in cupboards, and verbal confrontations such as offensive name-calling, bullying and cruelty to animals, as acts of direct aggression. Consequently, Batchelor, et. al. (2001) defined violence and aggression as an intentionally harmful interpersonal physical act. Thus, violence is subjective and as such what one person may perceive as a violent act another may not, thus Burman et al (2003: 73) suggest that;

> ... in order to comprehend fully the causes and consequences of violence, it is important to bear in mind the wider meanings that embrace emotional and psychological effects, as well as individual incidents of physical harm.

In a number of psychology research papers it is claimed that aggression among young children is predominately direct aggression, due to a lack of verbal skills. As they get older and develop these skills, girls tend to use indirect aggression and boys direct aggression (Bjorkqvist et al, 1992). The work of Bjorkqvist and his colleagues has contributed to our understanding of girls' aggression.

Some studies have shown that some forms of violence from a woman are more acceptable than violence from a man, for example Howe (1994) have shown that discipline by a mother was rated as less severe than identical discipline by a father. Aggression and violence committed in public by a woman, however, tends to be treated more severely by the police, courts and general public, and this is usually reflected in the sentences that

[7] Campbell, et al (1997: 169) in *Sex Differences in Aggression: Does social representation mediate form of aggression*? have argued that gossiping among women should not be classified as aggression because the intent to harm another person may not be there. Rather, they argue that gossiping is about 'forming rapport with another woman, not aggressing'

women receive (Smart, 1979; Heidensohn, 1985). Thus, in some contexts violence is accepted, while in others it is abhorrent. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish a relationship between the severity of a violent incident and the impact that it may have upon the victim. For example, Burman et al (2003) found that verbal aggression can have a more debilitating effect on a victim than physical violence.

In addition to the problem of defining violence there is also the way in which words are used to describe certain acts and behaviours and how this determines whether they are taken seriously by the police and other criminal justice agencies. For example, the word 'abuse' denotes a 'softer' word and differentiates it from 'harder' words such as 'violence' (Mars, 1982). Crimes such as child abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse are violent crimes but until fairly recently were not considered as 'real' crimes, rather these crimes were regarded as private issues in which the criminal justice system had no role to play. For example using the term 'domestic' violence differentiates this form of violence from those acts of violence committed in public, thus, placing acts of violence into different categories and contexts. How violence is perceived and responded to by criminal justice agencies depends upon a range of political and social factors. The Violence Research Program's studies underscore the observation that social context is highly relevant to the way in which violence is defined as criminal behaviour or as harmful by perpetrator, victim, criminal justice official, and society at large (Stanko, 2006: 545).

It may prove difficult to objectively define the term 'violence'. This is due to the fact that it is both socially and politically constructed, and also its meaning and impact vary for different people. 'Arriving at a precise, yet inclusive, denotation of violence is much more than a simple definitional issue: it is also an important political and policy issue' (Burman, 2003:73). To overcome the difficulties of defining violence Renold and Barter (2003)

suggest using an inclusive definition. This would overcome a number of problems including methodological ones, for it would allow participants in research on violence and aggression to communicate the meaning of their experiences, and as such their experiences of violence and victimisation would not be lost, rather these experiences would highlight the enormously diverse nature of violence. As Waddington et al (2004: 1) have stated, 'Inclusivity deliberately avoids stipulating any denotative components of violence'.

Research has a tendency to interchange violence with aggression; this is also true of the young women in this research. They used the terms 'violent' and 'aggressive' interchangeably throughout the interviews. They began using the term 'violent' at the beginning of the encounter and then started using either aggression or anger as the encounter proceeded. Rather than describing their behaviour as violent a number of young women used the term 'anger'. They said that they got angry and the anger took over them.

Many of the young women said that anger, aggression and violence were similar in that they are directed at someone and these behaviours make people feel intimidated, frightened or scared. The majority of young woman regarded aggression and violence as the same behaviour and included a range of behaviours, for instance name-calling, undermining someone and hitting. They thought that name-calling and intimidation could be just as harmful as physical violence; furthermore this form of aggression can take much longer to heal than physical injuries.

Some of the young women made a distinction between these behaviours. They associated anger with negative feelings that we all experience on occasions and included shouting, while aggression was behaviour that was insulting or offensive and usually directed at someone. Finally violence

was behaviour that is physical acts towards someone. A number of the young women found it difficult to distinguish between aggression and violence, but were able to make a distinction between anger, and aggression and violence; in this instance they regarded aggression and violence as the same behaviour. Some of the young women considered all three forms of behaviour to be the same, and as such, found it difficult to distinguish between them. They considered all three behaviour to be the same but at varying degrees and one leads to the other. For example, a person gets angry, this leads to aggression and then they act violently. In these accounts anger is a warning sign. If someone gets angry that is a warning that they will become aggressive and violent. Thus violence is an accumulation of anger and aggression.

There were a small number of the young women who identified aggression as verbal insults that are intended to cause harm and upset. It is any behaviour that is intentionally intended to harm someone. However, the young women did say that there was a fine line between anger and aggression.

A small number of the young women associated aggression and violence with masculinity and anger with femininity. Some also thought that aggressive and violent behaviour perpetrated by males is more acceptable than the same behaviour by women. These ideas were consistent with the literature on violence and aggression. Various acts of anger, aggression and violence were also associated with particular situations and people, a behaviour that might be acceptable in one instance, for example, loyalty to a friend or family member may be unacceptable in another place or at any other time.

One young woman expressed anger and aggression as normal behaviour that everyone experiences at some time or other:

> Anger is a broad term that encompasses a range of emotions. Feeling angry can lead to feeling different emotions like hate or jealousy. A feeling like frustration makes it possible to feel angry. I don't believe that anger alone leads to violence. Anger for me is a healthy emotion that normal people experience on a regular basis. Aggression can be healthy if projected in the correct way. However, if it is not vented constructively it can lead to a multitude of problems and if it is suppressed it is often projected onto a person in the wrong way. Aggression comes into play if in a competitive situation such as a sports game, for me however aggression is viable if I feel threatened in any way, even if it is not a physical threat. Finally, violence is ruthless. It can be calculated and manipulative, it can also be uncontrollable. I think violence is the act that is committed from the feelings of aggression.' (Helen)

Summary

This chapter has been concerned with putting this research into context including a discussion of the difficulty in defining violence, the media's fascination with girls and women who commit violent acts, and a focus on why this research is important. The next chapter discusses studies that have focused on girls, women and violence. This includes the work of Batchelor et al. (2001), Phillips (2003) and Shacklady-Smith (1978) which where conducted in the UK. Further studies include Chesney-Lind (1997; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, (1992) and Miller, (2001) which have been conducted in the US and Artz's (1998) study of six Canadian school girls. Much of this research has identified girls' previous victimisation as their motivation to commit violent crime. Miller (2001), Batchelor, et al (2001) and Phillips (2003) however challenge previous victimisation explanations; rather they suggest that girls use violence to increase their self-esteem, status and loyalty to others, including friends.

Chapter 3 takes the reader through the journey of conducting this research. There is a discussion of the methodology and methods that were used and, more importantly why they were used. My concern was to make this research non-hierarchal and participant centred. This chapter also focuses on the ethical issue involved in researching violence in the lives of young

women. There were a number of difficulties in gaining access and I explain how these were overcome including making use of email interviews as a data collection method. I provide a discussion of the problems and advantages of using this method on such a sensitive topic as violence.

Chapter 4 focuses on the preventative strategies that the majority of these young women employed in order to avoid or negotiate violence. These strategies included avoiding certain places and people who the young women considered to be potential sources or sites of violence. This also involved avoiding certain areas in their neighbourhoods, and bars and clubs that had a reputation for violence. A number of the young women also avoided coming into contact with certain people who had a reputation for fighting. When these strategies proved unsuccessful the young women employed a number of negotiating strategies. The most common was talking things through, which was followed by walking away, and deference to the challenger or protagonist. The young women demonstrated the importance of knowing how and when to use preventative strategies in situations of real or perceived violent situation when other young women were the protagonists.

In chapter 5 the accounts demonstrate how pervasive, what the young women called 'mean' behaviour, was in their lives. The young women had a variety of experiences of mean behaviour in which they were either the victim or perpetrator, or both. The young women provided narratives of meanness such as name-calling, spreading rumours and bitchiness. This mean behaviour often acted as a mechanism of informal social control, for example, many of these young women knew that there was a fine line between appropriate and inappropriate female behaviour. When this line was crossed the young women became the targets of meanness. This

meanness was argued to be justifiable because the young woman had brought it on herself through her bad behaviour.

Chapter 6 examines the young women's experiences of physical violence that they described as 'fights'. Some of these fights were the result of unsuccessful preventative strategies. Motivations for fighting included loyalty to others, especially family members and friends; status and respect as a fighter, that is, not being seen as a wimp or a push over; and excitement and control over what were perceived to be uncontrollable or chaotic situations. This chapter demonstrates the instrumental element of these young women's violent behaviour and the way it was often justified or excused. For example, fighting was often used to settle disputes over a boyfriend's infidelity however it was the other girl who was the target of this violence and not the boyfriend who had cheated on his girlfriend. These fighting narratives demonstrate the role of violence in policing female behaviour that is perceived to be transgressing the boundaries of appropriate female behaviour.

Chapter 7 focuses on intimate violence. Accounts of dating violence, sexual assault and child abuse were narrated by a small number of the young women however these accounts demonstrate the magnitude of this violence in these young women's lives. These accounts also used a number of justifications and excuses for the violent behaviour. In the dating violence narratives the young women justified and excused their boyfriend's behaviour by using culturally acceptable accounts, including blaming themselves for the violence, and the role of alcohol in their boyfriend's violent behaviour. In the sexual assault narratives the young women did not report the incidents to the police because they held strong beliefs about appropriate female sexual behaviour and they believed they had brought it on themselves by going back to the attacker's home. One of

the young women did not describe the incident as 'rape' even though what she recounted fitted the legal definition of rape.

Chapter 2

Girls, women and violence

As discussed in the previous chapter early theorists proposed that there was an innate instinctual and biological mechanism, which predispose people towards aggressive behaviour. With regard to women and crime Lombroso and Ferraro (1895) contended women who committed crime were abnormal and a throwback to more primitive times. Pollak (1950) however, argued that there is nothing exceptional about women's criminality, rather they are inherently inclined to mask their violent crimes. This they achieve through their biology and social role as carers. This was then followed by a discussion of the 'liberation hypothesis' put forth by Adler (1975) and Simon (1975). This hypothesis examined the issue of women's involvement in crime generally, and particularly women's violent crime. Adler predicted that as women's attitudes became more like men's, which she argued was a consequence of the Women's Liberation Movement, they would imitate traditional male behaviour including violent crime. Simon's (1975) however argued that it was the changing opportunities open to women rather than their changing attitudes that would result in increased numbers of women committing crime, especially violent crime.

After the work of Adler and Simon, theorists were concerned to find the 'real' female offender. This search unearthed the view that it is girls and women's previous victimization that paves the way to their criminal behaviour, this section includes the work of Campbell, 1986, 1993; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004, and Shacklady-Smith, 1978. It also deals with studies that have focused on girl gang members. This research on girl gangs is important because it highlights the importance of regulation, social control, and socialisation in the lives of girls and women, which are not restricted to

girl gang members but are evident in the lives of the young women who participated in the research for this study. It also highlights the importance of appearance, especially the idea that girls and women should be sexually attractive to boys and men, and the contradictory message that they should not have 'too' much sexual experience, that is, they should be respectable and not have slept around. Included in this is the importance of being 'coupled'. The girls in the gang and the young women who participated in my research discussed the social value of being in a relationship. Throughout the girl-gang literature there is a discussion on the fine line between acceptable and unacceptable female behaviour, which is evident in the accounts told by the young women I interviewed. What is also evident is that the girls in the gang are 'doing gender', that is, they are also concerned with ideas of femininity.

This is followed by a focus on violent girls, that is, girls who have been identified as violent by welfare, criminal justice agencies, parents, and teachers. It focuses on the work of Pearson (1997), Kirsta (1994), Artz (1998), and Cummings and Leschied (2000). These studies illustrate the role of violence in the lives of women, especially women as perpetrators of violence. Running through this literature is the idea of appropriate female behaviour based on gender norms and stereotypes. There is also a discussion of Ballinger (1996) and other contributions in *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence* who look at historical and contemporary violent women and examine social attitudes towards them and their violent behaviour. The final section provides an overview of the literature that focuses on ordinary girls and ordinary violence, conducted by Phillips, (2003) and Batchelor, et al. (2001). These recent studies, which were conducted in the UK, examine girls and young women's experiences of violence in their everyday lives.

Adler and Simon's liberation hypothesis resulted in a great deal of debate, research and theorizing on the nature of women's offending which led many to search for the 'real' female offender (Chesney-Lind, 1997; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Shacklady-Smith, 1978). A study conducted by Shacklady-Smith (1978: 86) in the UK using a self-report questionnaire on girls found that fights among girls were fairly common. She also found that these girls had a history of previous victimisation. In addition the girls said that they fought as 'seriously as the boys'. Although being able to fight was important to these girls it was considered unnatural and unacceptable by the girls' parents and agents of social control including social workers. In addition, research that investigated the working practices of agency workers from assessment centres also found similar attitudes. Gelsthorpe (1989) found that workers regarded aggression amongst girls as unnatural. They disliked seeing girls fighting. A supervisor described girls fighting as 'savage ... animal fighting' where they bite, kick and pull hair. Boredom was said to be the main cause of many fights, as there was a distinct lack of activities for the girls to take part in. Other causes included disturbed behaviour, which required psychiatric help, the mad/bad discourse which is still evident in more recent reviews of females' violent behaviour (Ballinger, 1996; French, 1996; Pearson, 1997). Gelsthorpe also found that the social care workers assumed that bitchiness among girls was a natural part of the female personality.

This early research by Shacklady-Smith found girls violent behaviour was usually ignored by official authorities who were far more concerned with the girls' sexual behaviour, this included the policing and surveying of such behaviour. Although this study was conducted thirty years ago these attitudes are still prevalent today. The young women who participated in the research for this thesis narrated how sexual behaviour was monitored, and used as a weapon to hurt and humiliate them.

Campbell's (1986) self-report study of fighting among girls was conducted in the UK across five geographical areas, two in Glasgow, and one each in London, Liverpool, and Cambridge. The average age of the girls was 16. Across all the samples most of the fights occurred when friends were present, with only one opponent who was usually another girl. Fights usually consisted of punching, kicking, slapping, scratching and biting. The schoolgirl sample reported that they had fought for reasons relating to their personal integrity, including false accusations, gossiping, and remarks about promiscuity, nasty comments about friends or relatives. The girls often described these fights as being very physical; however, 81.3% of the sample said that they had not used any weapons. Despite the use of violence, very few girls sustained injuries. Campbell (1996: 33) suggested that winning a fight was not as important as taking part in one:

> It may be no more than a demonstration of certain qualities (toughness, determination, positive self-concept), which are fulfilled merely by being in the fight than necessarily winning it.

Furthermore, the girls reported that they did not bear grudges against their opponents for very long. The majority of them had seen their opponents since the fight and over half of the sample said that they felt okay about them after the fight was over. Although the girls participated in fights, the majority viewed it in a negative way, and insisted that fighting was not the best way to settle disputes. Despite these views one-third of the sample said that fighting was a necessary part of life. A large number of the girls also said that fighting was legitimate. Campbell moreover, notes that both the borstal and prison women had a positive attitude towards fighting; they argued that fighting was a good way to release anger.

Chesney-Lind (2001) argues that it is not girls and women's changing attitudes or opportunities but rather their troubles that structure their path to crime. She asserts that it is the marginal position of girls and women and

not their liberation that paves the way to girls and women's crime. In addition, she suggests that the majority of girls and women's offending, including their relative low rates of violent offending, is primarily a response to their victimization. In this work Chesney-Lind (2001: 19) has highlighted how 'girls capacity for aggression and violence has historically been ignored, trivialized or denied ... gender has coloured and differentiated girls' and boys' violence'. Furthermore, she insists that 'existing theories of crime and delinquency, because they were constructed almost entirely with boys and men in mind, would appear to be fundamentally inadequate to the task of explaining young women's crime (Chesney-Lind, 1993: 322).

Studies on girl gangs challenge the thesis that girls and women's use of violence is explained entirely by one's previous victimization (Miller, 2001). Findings reveal that girls may join gangs to protect themselves from further violence, but they also join for other reasons including: revenge, to achieve a sense of family and belonging, and to escape economically disadvantaged homes, and self-esteem (Campbell, 1984; Moore, 1991; Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995; Harris, 1988, 1994). They also found that gangs provided protection and skills necessary for girls to defend themselves against violence in their families and neighbourhoods.

Throughout much of the literature girl gang members are portrayed in stereotypical ways, for example, girls are seen as the property of male members and as sexual objects. A number of studies (Harris, 1988, 1994; Campbell, 1984, 1995) have described how girls aim to be sexually attractive and how they, more than males, are socialised to value and define themselves within relationships. As such, their sexual activity within the gang labels them 'bad girls'. Further, Messerschmidt (1997: 83) contends that:

> Female violence is a resource for establishing a particular notion of femininity, that of the 'bad girl'. This street reputation and status

> translates as power for girls who operate within the patriarchal power structure of the gang, the streets, and society. At some time, girl gang members embrace and engage in some forms of culturally appropriate femininity.

To achieve this femininity and sexual attractiveness the girls in the gang concentrate on their appearance with the use of make-up and fashion. The girls do not want to appear as 'tomboys', rather they want to flaunt their sexuality and be defined as sexually attractive young women who are also able to fight and defend themselves and their fellow gang members. Harris (1994) also reported that adolescent girls joined gangs because of a need for revenge (e.g. sibling murdered, having been raped), protection, and to achieve a sense of family because they often came from violent and disrupted family environments. She observed that female gang members engaged in high levels of crime and delinquent behaviour. In fact, an ability and willingness to fight was highly valued within these groups, as well as the willingness to use, and distribute drugs. These behaviours were prized and honoured among the other gang members. Therefore, once a girl had demonstrated the ability and willingness to fight and show loyalty they became members of the gang. Violence was an expected activity within the gang and as this violence escalated so did the use of weapons. Violence usually revolved around ideas of honour and defending local turf. This study also found that girls joined the gang for a number of reasons, included a sense of belonging, also the need for support and revenge. Harris (1994: 293) reports that:

> For most core gang members, bonds to both family and school are weak. Generally they have low aspirations and are isolated from dominant institutions. None of the females in this study completed high school. The gang provides a source of status, identity, cohesion, esteem, needs and a sense of belonging ... and provides a strong substitute for weak family and lack of conventional school ties.

The girls in this study reported being independent of their male gang members, however the data showed that they allowed male dominance in many situations. Harris also found that female behaviour reflected their roles within the subculture, and the group controlled the behaviour of the girls by socialisation and sanctions.

Campbell's (1984, 1991; 1995) study 'The Girls in the Gang', which was conducted in New York, US found that many of the young girls suffered from acute hardships due to low-income, turbulent family ties, poverty, abuse, lack of education, and the everyday difficulties of being poor young girls of colour. Many of the young girls joined gangs because it served a social function, that is, the gangs provided a place where they felt they belonged, where they were accepted and protected. The gang also provided a solution to difficult life circumstances, such as a lack of educational opportunities, social isolation, and male domination, especially in the home, sole responsibility for children, and the threat of victimisation. In this study, Campbell found many incidents where girls competed with young men, where they liked to be tough and engage in fights. Girl gang members and 'bad girls' who are essentially passive with a traditional attitude towards men may fight another girl over a relationship with a male gang member. Whilst many of the girls admitted that fighting sometimes made them feel unfeminine, they still enjoyed involvement in fighting. These fights usually occurred because the girls who instigated the fights felt that other girls were being disrespectful, were lacking in manners, or where perceived by the aggressors as being promiscuous.

Current research on girl gangs has begun to move beyond stereotypical notions about girls and women as simply auxiliaries of male gangs to more careful assessment of the role played by these gangs in girls' lives. Data has also shown that female gang members are involved in less violent crime than male gang members' and are less likely to be armed, either with

knives or guns. However, their crime rates do exceed those of non-gang males. Moreover, their affiliation with the gang places them at high risk of becoming a victim of violence by both male and female gang members, either from their own gang and/or from competing gangs. As such, violence is endemic within the gang culture. In *One of the Guys* (2001), Miller (2001: 11) found that young women's involvement in violent delinquency is 'patterned in important ways by larger dynamics within gangs, such as group processes shaping notions of threat and respect and the normative responses to such phenomena. Miller (1998) also found that young women were actively engaged in street robberies. They accomplished these robberies in what she described as gendered ways; for example, the young women rarely used guns and rarely stabbed other women when accomplishing street robberies.

Physical aggression was a primary form of social interaction and problem solving. It was often assumed that girls who used violence were competing with boys, and one thing that all these studies have in common is that they conceptualised violent women in masculine terms. As Archer (1998: 3) has succinctly stated:

> Typically, research on auxiliary female gangs, or on females within mixed sex gangs, has characterised these female gang members as being either 'bad' girls, that is sexually promiscuous, or as being 'tomboys', that is frustrated males. In either case women are not viewed as being on equal terms with men. They are regarded both as sex objects and subservient to men or as 'male clones', which is a denial of their sex.

In *Casualties of Community Disorder* (1998), Baskin and Sommers argue that women's involvement in violent crimes like street robberies are influenced by a variety of 'push-pull' factors. These include peer influences, drug abuse, victimization and criminal opportunities as well as the decline in family and neighbourhood supervision, earlier termination of education, which they suggest particularly effect women. Baskin and

Sommers also found that being treated with respect and not allowing someone to disrespect you, that is, placing respect above all else is evident in economically and socially marginalised women's lives. The findings from my research demonstrated that this attitude was evident in the young women's accounts of fighting. For the working-class as well as the middle-class young women gaining respect was important as it formed part of their repertoire of self-protection, status and respect as someone who could 'hold their own'.

As previously noted, research on girl gangs was originally conducted in the US. However, there has been much debate about the number of gangs in the UK, especially girl gangs. A number of researchers have failed to find evidence of any girl gangs. Burman, et al (2001, 2003) in their research *Let's Hear It From The Girls* conducted in Scotland found that rather than girls being involved in gangs they were involved in close-knit friendships which they described as the most important things in their lives. Young (2005) also found that girls were involved in social groups with other girls, that is, friendship groups. She found no girls who described themselves as gang members. As a result, Hallsworth and Young (2004: 12) challenged some of the current myths about gangs in the UK. They have argued that the tabloids and documentary makers have been 'hell bent on suggesting that Britain's fair streets are being over run with feral gangs'. They found no evidence to support the suggestion that Britain is witnessing the same formation of US style gangs. Rather what they have found was groups of youth who hang around together in a social manner. As a result, they warn us 'to be very careful about accepting the idea that when youths congregate collectively, crime and anti-social behaviour somehow emerge as a consequence' (Hallsworth & Young, 2004:12).

Violent Girls

Patricia Pearson's (1997) *'When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence'* concentrates on extreme forms of violence committed by women. She argues that the belief in female non-aggressive behaviour is a pure myth. Both feminists and society have perpetuated this myth and as a result have failed to see women as dangerous, destructive, or violent. She argues that society still refuses to acknowledge that women can commit acts of violence; rather they still wish to believe that women are by nature gentle, maternal human beings who are not capable of vicious brutality. Society still tries to associate violence with males. When women do commit acts of violence it is deemed an involuntary response, which is sparked by mental illness or provocation. Rarely are fury and frustration seen as the motivation for such violence. Thus violence in all its forms is 'still universally considered to be the province of the male. Violence is masculine. Men are the cause of it, and women and children are the ones who suffer' (Pearson, 1997:7).

Although Pearson's book is non-academic and her arguments are badly thought through, it is often cited in chat shows[8] and popular literature on females and violence, as providing evidence of the increasing use of violence by girls and women. It is therefore essential that such works on girls, women and violence are critiqued and are considered within the discussion.

Pearson draws on research from the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, medicine, forensic science and law, as well as feminist literature, and newspaper articles. She also draws on her interviews with men who have been the victims of female violence, female ex-convicts, a number of law enforcement agencies and social service workers. Finally, she uses in-depth analysis of specific murder cases in America. She

explores historical, judicial, and scientific evidence to demolish the myth that women are not naturally violent. Pearson considers two different issues, firstly, how we see violent women, in this instance she insists that, we either excuse their behaviour with a 'syndrome defence' such as battered woman syndrome, or we see them as the passive partners of violent men. Secondly, Pearson considers how we see aggression itself, that we perceive it as physical, and that in this way we miss the ways in which women more commonly use verbal and indirect aggression. She follows this second issue to describe how easy it is for men to be set-up on charges of abuse. She argues how false claims of abuse can be effective especially given current police policies on domestic violence, and how women can use their victim status and presumed innocence to avoid detection or get lighter sentences:

> Women can operate the system to their advantage. Donning the feminine mask, they can manipulate the biases of family and community ... in order to set men up. If he tries to leave, or fight back, a fateful moment comes when she reaches for the phone, dials 911 and has him arrested on the strength of her word: 'Officer, he hit me'. (Pearson, 1997: 142).

This idea is reminiscent of the early psychological and biological theories (Pollak, 1950), where women who commit criminal acts hide behind their femaleness, or use their deceitfulness to cover up their own crimes. In this book she cites Pollok when he made the claim that women are able by their sex to mask their criminality, and although she agrees with the charge of sexism made against him, she does insist that the 'essence of his thought is correct' (ibid: 21). It would appear that Pearson is prepared to pull women back into the dark ages with regard to their innate nature.

Pearson argues that if we continue to ignore the fact that women do kill and commit other acts of violence and brutality it is a dangerous oversight

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[8] For example, *Oprah Winfrey Show* 'The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls' (April 2002)

that has and will cost lives. However, it would be just as dangerous to overstate the extent, severity and causes of violent acts perpetrated by females, to ignore or neglect the fact that women commit less violent crime than men and that they are more likely to be the victims of male violence. Pearson (1997) falls somewhat short in her attempt to show that women abuse and commit acts of violence as often as men in their personal relationships. She found a few studies that supported her argument; however, the vast majority of research, statistics, and experts dispute such findings. This book appears to contradict popular belief that females are catching up to males, rather Pearson seems to be arguing that women have always been as violent as men, they have either been able to hide it behind their feminine role as mother, wife, nurturer, or been excused for such behaviour, for example their hormones or their madness.

Kirsta (1994) also conducted case studies of women who committed acts of violence. These acts ranged from school bullying and gang crime to husband battering and child murder. She was concerned with examining the violent behaviour of women in relation to their own victimisation and exploitation. Kirsta concludes by stating that there should be an end to seeing female violence as a novelty, and insists that there should be a move towards recognising the psychological damage to women's well being including their physical health

In *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence* (1996) the contributors in this book explore and examine women who commit violent acts against men, and women who commit acts of violence with their partners/husbands. These contributions look at historical and contemporary high-profile violent women and societal attitudes towards them and their crimes. The writers examine the real images behind the media representations of these women and challenge traditional explanations of violent women as falling into the categories of either victims or demon.

The themes that run through each of the chapters include the women's previous victimisation, ideas about appropriate female behaviour, ideas of real victim behaviour and demeanour, and male violence as normal and female violence as an aberration, and the mad/bad discourse.

Ballinger (1996) compares the cases of Marie Fahmy who in 1923 killed her husband and was acquitted of his murder and Ruth Ellis, the last women to be hanged in England for killing her lover in 1955. Ballinger examines notions of femininity and how these influence both legal and public perceptions of females who commit acts of violence. In contrasting the cases she demonstrates how different models of feminine behaviour led to opposing judgements of their similar crimes.

Marie Fahmy conformed to the stereotypical image of femininity, 'a woman who communicated through the dominant modes of expression with great expertise ... Madam utilised and exploited her ability to express herself in an ultra-feminine manner, adhering closely to highly conventional expectations of female behaviour' (Ballinger, 1996:3). Ruth Ellis on the other hand failed to conform to this stereotypical image; rather she challenged 'appropriate standards' of female conduct. This failure to conform to appropriate female behaviour 'assured her a position within a "muted" group – her account was not "heard" because there were no channels open to receive what she had to say, as such she was classified within the "bad" category. Her account of her crime appeared to be grounded in matter-of-fact logic and coherent rationality which ensured her exclusion from either the "mad" or the "victim" category (Ballinger, 1996:4).

In an attempt to highlight the different discourses associated with each case, Ballinger describes the appearance and demeanour in court of both Marie Fahmy and Ruth Ellis. Marie Fahmy utilised discourses around

women's irrationality, emotionality, motherhood, and victimhood. Ballinger (1996: 11) highlights the fact that the 'case study of Mme Fahmy provides an example of a woman who displayed "true" and appropriate feminine behaviour during her trial. There was no conflict between expected and actual female conduct, at no point did Madame challenge dominant modes of expression'.

Although there were many similarities between Marie Fahmy and Ruth Ellis, the outcome of the cases and the media portrayal of each woman could not have been more different. The media immediately portrayed Ruth Ellis as an 'immoral' woman and as such even before the trial commenced she was stereotypically portrayed as a 'bad' woman. In stark contrast to the appearance of Marie Fahmy, Ruth Ellis appeared in court looking like a 'film star'. She actively rejected dominant discourses surrounding appropriate femininity, 'her calmness and composure during the trial were overwhelmingly interpreted in negative terms – further evidence of her dangerousness as a cold, calculating and ruthless killer (Ballinger, 1996:15). Ruth did not display any signs of irrationality and emotion and as such she did not display the appropriate signs of victimhood.

In conclusion of these cases Ballinger (1996: 20) states, 'The cases of Fahmy and Ellis illustrates how essentially similar crimes came to be "heard" very differently according to the discourses utilised by the defendant'. She highlights how Fahmy's willingness to show conformity to stereotypical images of femininity including ineptness and helplessness fitted the discourse of 'victim'. In sharp contrast, Ellis's repeated rejection of this image left her adrift of appropriate discourses and thus she was labelled as 'bad' and as such undeserving of compassion and understanding. Finally, Ballinger (1996: 26, original emphasis) insists that 'we need new discourses and alternative "truth" – not just in explaining

women's violence against men, but in *all* types of violence carried out by women'.

French's 'Partners in Crime' (1996) examines a number of cases of women who commit acts of violence with their partner; he specifically focuses on the cases of Rosemary West in the UK and Hedda Nussbaum in the US. In the Nussbaum case, both the husband and wife were charged with the murder of their adopted daughter and the neglect of their adopted son. However, there was no evidence to prove which one of them was responsible for the murder and neglect. This allowed Nussbaum's defence to claim that she was forced into the participation of this crime through her husband's abusive behaviour, that she was also the victim of her husband's violent behaviour. French argues that this case benefited greatly from the accepted stereotype of the man as violent and the woman as the passive and helpless victim. He argues that this case highlights society's reluctance to acknowledge women's capacity for violence. The result of this reluctance was that Nussbaum had all the charges against her dropped because she agreed to testify against her husband. French highlights the criminal justice system's reluctance to criminalize women, especially with regard to serious violent crime, and its eagerness to shift all blame and responsibility for the crime to men, thus reinforcing men's capacity for violence, whilst at the same time excusing or denying women's capacity for violent crime.

In contrast, Rosemary was charged with her husband of the murder of ten young women including her own daughter and her step-daughter. She pleaded not guilty to all the charges, but was found guilty of all 10 murders, and was later refused leave to appeal against her conviction.

The fact that Rosemary had been abused by her own father and was only fifteen when she met Fred West, who had already committed two murders,

could have been regarded as mitigating circumstances. In her defence, Rosemary could have admitted to participating in some of the murders, but denied responsibility for her actions on the grounds that she had been brainwashed and dominated by Fred West. As French (1996: 31) has postulated, 'would not a jury of ordinary people be more willing to believe that a girl had been bewitched into participation in these atrocious crimes than that the two worst serial killers in British history happened to meet and marry?'

In comparing the cases of Nussbaum and West, French (1996: 38) highlights a number of significant differences between them, and asks whether the defence strategy employed in the Nussbaum cases would have been successful in the West case. He asks 'did she [Rosemary West] have to be found guilty because, in the absence of Fredrick West, a scapegoat was necessary?'. He further argues that people might find it easier to identify with the situation of Nussbaum, rather than with the situation of West. It may be easier to explain the behaviour of Nussbaum who came from a middle class background and was a children's book publisher, than to explain the behaviour of West who came from the unrespectable working class. As French (1996: 38) states,

> The disparity between Nussbaum's appalling neglect of her children and what might have been expected of a woman in her position was so great that factors were found that might explain it away.

Stanko and Scully's chapter focuses on the case of Emma Humphreys who was convicted of the murder of Trevor Armitage, her partner, but later had her conviction for murder quashed and replaced with a conviction of manslaughter on the grounds of provocation. The authors examine the legal system with regard to women who kill their violent partners, focusing on the system's difficulty in linking domestic violence with self-preservation, self-defence, and provocation. It is argued that women who

kill violent husbands or partners should not be regarded as 'cold-calculating killers' or 'murderers', rather these women should be seen as acting in self defence. Stanko and Scully (1996:70) argue:

> When a man dies, the law must consider the culpability of an independent actor. The range of this consideration is limited by the very method through which law operates. Rather than seeking to understand the specific circumstances of the death of a man, the law seeks to mould the female actor's motivations to its own logic'.

Although Emma Humphreys won her appeal, it should not be assumed that women who kill abusive husbands or partners will have recourse to a defence of provocation. These authors argue that, 'The method by which the law delivers its decision contributes to its ability to address the impact of cumulative abuse (ibid).

A study conducted by Artz (1998) in Canada focused on 6 school-girls aged between thirteen and sixteen who had been identified by school and agency counsellors, classmates, and themselves as being physically violent. This research found that the girls' home lives were characterised by poverty, divorce, parental death, abandonment, alcoholism, and/or frequent abuse (sexual abuse and physical). This research also highlights the previous victimisation of girls who used violence. The language used by the girls indicated that violence and abuse was a routine part of their lives. Artz hypothesised that a major factor in girls' aggression toward other girls is a negative view of females based on a personal low sense of self-worth, resulting from sexual abuse and an internalised belief in women's inferiority. She also suggests that failure in school increases young girl's risk of engaging in violent behaviour.

These findings also suggested that fighting was not spontaneous eruptions of rage or anger, but rather they where pre-arranged for entertainment value. It was also important for the girls who instigated the fights that boys

as well as girls were in the audience to witness the fights because the girls who fought felt equal to boys when they were fighting. The victims of fights where often chosen because other girls thought they needed to be taught a lesson and this was considered reason enough to instigate the fights. The targets of the fights were thought to be acting cocky instead of subordinate, or were thought of as 'sluts' and this was considered enough for victims to be attacked or challenged to a fight. The instigators of the fights believed that the victims only had themselves to blame for the fights because it was argued that they deserved it because of their bad behaviour. This led Artz (1998) to insist that the girls had internalised societal messages that demean girls and women. Sexual inequality had a major role to play in the violence and the girls gained power through 'horizontal violence', that is they were violent to other girls. Artz also interprets these findings as first being a repetition of their parents' way of justifying their punishment/violent behaviour with their children (all six girls came from violent homes).

Artz's data further suggests that aggression in girls has a goal of relational influence as well as the goals of competition, status, and dominance that have also been identified in boys' violence. Moreover, she suggests that aggression for these girls maybe viewed as a means of avoiding subsequent re-victimisation. Artz insists that there needs to be more research conducted on how violent girls interpret and make sense of their own violence.

A study by Cummings and Leschied (2000) improves on Artz (1998) study. This study used a larger sample of 70 girls. It was concerned with examining the 'perceptions of the individual girls, as well as the contextual and situational factors of their conflicts within significant relationships with peers and their conflicts with parents' (Cummings & Leschied, 2000:6). This research identified at-risk adolescent girls' because the

researches believed that this sample was more likely to have experience with aggression. The 70 participants volunteered to take part in the research, and they ranged between 12 – 19 years of age from several residential facilities in South-western Ontario, Canada. This study found that less than half of the girls described violence as only physical contact, and over half of the girls viewed violence as emotional, mental, or verbal violence. Further, the majority of the girls said that it was not okay for them to use violence; however, one-third said it was okay to use violence when they were angry, to revenge a friend who had suffered physical abuse, and when someone had slept with their boyfriend. Over half the girls had been involved in at least one physical fight, and about half reported that they fought with other girls on a weekly or monthly basis. The reason cited for the fights was the other person's behaviour, for example, being teased about their past, name-calling (slut, dyke) and humiliating others.

When asked about their feelings during a fight, only 49 girls answered the question, over half of these reported experiencing negative feelings such as feeling bad or stupid. There were only a few girls who experienced positive feelings, for example, they felt relieved to release anger, while for others, they felt proud they had fought and not walked away. Findings revealed that almost all the girls had been in at least one verbal fight. Half of the girls reported being in a verbal fight daily or weekly. The reason for starting a verbal fight was a disagreement with someone. Threats to friendships where also cited as a reason, as well as name-calling, which the researchers found was the only category which overlapped with reasons for physical fighting. Furthermore, the research found that more girls reported negative feelings with verbal aggression than with physical aggression. These negative feelings included being upset, scared, guilty, sad, angry, stupid, and useless. Only a few girls reported positive feelings. When asked what started these verbal confrontations only a few girls said it was

the behaviour of others. Similar to Artz (1998), the results from this study show that the majority of the girls were against violence, but they felt compelled to fight especially when it was felt that the other girl had stepped out of line or needed teaching a lesson, thus the girls regarded the other person as the cause of the fight. The majority of the girls used verbal aggression far more frequently than physical aggression.

Results from this study show that a third of the girls reported using proactive measures such as walking away to avoid fighting. Further, a number of fights where stopped by outside intervention, such as staff stepping in to stop a fight. Although a number of girls used proactive measures to avoid fighting, those that did participate in fighting were unaware of the consequences of their actions, for example, the seriousness of injuries inflicted, including psychological harm for the victims.

Normal Girls, Normal Violence?

In 1993, Campbell focused her attention on 'ordinary' women, rather than girl gang members or females in institutions. She observed that the women's stories were of anger and frustration that they felt in stressful situations. Campbell described this behaviour as 'expressive'. She claims that women interpret hostile actions as stressful and unpleasant. Men however, talked of fighting to protect their reputation and they did not feel the need to excuse or explain their behaviour, which she defined as 'instrumental' aggression. Campbell (1993) further found that boys imitate violence that they see in the media, whilst girls learn to suppress their anger. Boys learn that their aggressive behaviour would bring rewards, including respect and self-esteem. They also learn about the instrumental benefits of aggressive behaviour through stories, education, the media and daily interactions, whereas girls learn that aggressive behaviour is frowned upon, and their actions will be viewed as bitchy, hysterical, crazy or villainous.

A number of studies in the UK have also started to look at 'ordinary' girls, that is, girls who have not been identified as violent by agencies including the criminal justice system and social services. Research conducted by Batchelor et al's (2001) sought respondents from a range of socio-economic backgrounds across Scotland. This was a multi-method exploratory study, which consisted of quantitative survey method, focus groups, and individual interviews. The sample consisted of approximately 800 girls aged between thirteen and sixteen years, recruited from youth centres, high schools and on the street while associating with friends. This research did not intend to study violent girls; rather it was concerned with the everyday understandings and experiences of ordinary girls. It did not concentrate on deprived areas, or girls who identified as violent by the criminal justice system or social services. This research found that a focus on physical violence resulted in hiding the more pervasive and harmful verbal abuse, which was an everyday occurrence for many girls. Verbal abuse caused the girls more concern and anxiety than physical violence and they often described feeling more hurt when they were verbally abused. The quantitative survey found that 91% of girls have suffered verbal abuse, usually in the form of offensive name-calling, while 61% reported being the victim of malicious gossip. This abuse often resulted from the break-up of friendships. The girls described these friendships as being the 'most important thing' (Batchelor, et al., 2001: 129) in their lives, because they spent a great deal of time with friends and as such this made up a large part of their social activity. Fifty nine percent of them said that after such a confrontation they had self-harmed which included; making themselves sick, either overeating or not eating, and more seriously physically hurting or cutting themselves.

Batchelor et al's (2001) study show that violent confrontations were not one-sided events; rather it was found that they were often a 'two-way activity'. Seventy two percent of Batchelor et al's survey sample reported

being the victim of verbal abuse and the majority of this abuse came from other girls. Thus, the majority of the girls were both perpetrators and victims of this form of abuse. Batchelor et al found that 'this was a dynamic process where girls assumed different roles at different times, and sometimes within the same conflict situation' (Batchelor, et al: 2001: 129). Violence played a significant role in the girls' lives. Findings suggest that the girls used indirect aggression, which includes manipulative methods such as gossiping, exchanging friends, trying to win others to one's side, excluding from groups and writing nasty notes. The girls' concepts of direct aggression included physical acts such as hitting, kicking, punching, slapping, and verbal confrontations such as offensive name-calling, bullying and threats.

When the girls talked about physical violence it emerged that ninety eight percent had witnessed this form of violence at least once, and seventy percent had been witnesses to physical violence five times or more. Sixty five percent of these girls knew someone who had been involved in physically violent incidents and as a result had sustained injuries. Furthermore, the majority of the girls reported these incidents as 'normal' everyday occurrences and regarded them as 'unremarkable'. The research also found that only 30% of the girls admitted being physically violent to someone, of these only 10% admitted to being routinely violent. The girls who made up this ten percent reported being involved in more than seven violent incidents. Only girls from this latter group identified themselves as being violent. These 'violent' girls were between the ages of 15 and 16, and came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and locations across Scotland. This research found that girls who identified themselves as violent did not all come from deprived, inner-city, lone parent environments.

Batchelor et al's research also found that the girls interviewed did not view their behaviour as deviant or unacceptable. The girls interviewed hardly ever used the word 'violent' in their 'everyday discourse'. They used an array of other terms to describe 'a spectrum of unruly and violating behaviour from paradigmatic acts of interpersonal criminal violence to threats, to verbal intimidation' (Burman, 2003: 76). Importantly, the girls did not regard sexual assault from someone they knew as violent behaviour.

Finding did show that girls were violent for the same reasons as boys, for example, fights over territory, policing other girls' sexual behaviour and maintaining a reputation for being tough and standing up for others and one self. Burman et al (2003: 83-4) insist that 'there is a suggestion from this research, and from other studies that girls are spending significant amounts of time in public places. The increased visibility of girls not only has implications for how girls may be perceived (by adults, by the police, by other young people) but also increases their chances of observing and/or participating in violent encounters with other young people'.

Findings suggest that there needs to be a move away from conceptualising female violence as a response to gendered forms of victimisation. Burman et al (2001: 21) argue that 'whilst girls' gendered experiences do provide motivations for violence, there are other broader motivational factors, such as disaffection, anger, humiliation and breaches of trust, which are often overlooked in accounts of girls aggression'. It was found that some girls experienced feelings of empowerment when using violence, while others experienced enhanced levels of self-esteem and of feeling respected and secure from being labelled 'hard' amongst peers. Some of the girls described how they needed to be perceived as 'hard' by other girls in order not to be a constant victim of violence. Ideas of being 'hard' where related to the girls' standing up for themselves and others, even to the extent of

using violence to accomplish this. Many of the girls did not think that violence was always a bad thing. This was especially true if the girl was defending herself. However, there were incidents where girls thought it was okay to use violence to guard against insults about family and friends, particularly if the insults where aimed at the mother.

The girls in Batchelor et al's study also made a distinction between their ability to use violence and their actual use of violence. They particularly wanted the researchers to understand that they were not aggressive people and they wanted them to go away with a good impression of them, they wanted the researchers to see them as 'nice' girls. Thus, the researchers concluded that there was not a rising tide of female violence, and they did not find a large number of 'violent' girls. Moreover, they did not find any evidence that girls were behaving violently because they were becoming more like boys. The findings suggest that there has not been a massive rise in the number of violent girls, nor has there been a significant rise in the number of girl gang members. There is also little evidence to suggest that girls are becoming as violent as boys. However, it did find a high level of verbal aggression, which is frequently and routinely used, which the researchers argue is 'not as readily visible as physical violence' (Batchelor, et al, 2001:131).

Phillips (2003) conducted a small exploratory study of girls' aggression and violence in the early 1990s. This study was concerned with 'normal' and acceptable violence; it also provided an insight into the way girls reflect on normative gendered behaviour. Phillips' sample of 31 young women where recruited from a further education college in South London. The majority of the young women reported that school was, overall, an enjoyable experience, and they had a good network of friends. However, the young women identified an 'in group' whose members had a reputation for being 'hard'. They maintained their position and reputation in this

group by being verbally and physically aggressive to the girls lower down in the hierarchy. This research found that these girls aspire to power, position, and reputation in the same way that boys do. These young women held mixed views about the popularity of the 'in group'. Those girls who were members of the in group remember these girls as being 'popular and admired', while those further down the hierarchy regarded members as being 'cowards' because they needed the support of the group to maintain their position.

There was also disagreement over the organisation of the 'pecking order'; some girls suggested that the 'posh' girls were at the bottom of the hierarchy; while others suggested it was the more 'immature' girls who resided at the bottom. However, the research found that 'there was a strong sense in which the girls knew their place within it' [the hierarchy] (Phillips, 2003:716). Violence was not confined to the actions of the 'in group'; rather, it was much more pervasive. This violence included verbal aggression and intimidation and it was used to solve friendship disputes and fallouts, although this form of violence was believed to be more damaging and hurtful than physical violence. Those girls who were fearful of being victims of this form of behaviour often missed school to avoid it.

In this study, eight girls admitted to bullying in school, and only one admitted to being both a bully and a victim. The victims of aggression were chosen for a number of reasons including being 'too mouthy', disputes over territory, 'falling out', and 'policing' the sexual behaviour of other girls. Physical fights usually started because of derogatory remarks. The fights where usually consented to, but on a number of occasions, the young women were reluctant to fight. When they decided to fight, it was usually because they wanted to maintain their reputation as being hard, or because of peer pressure to fight. They did not want to be a wimp.

Results from Phillips' study have also shown that violence serves a function in the lives of the girls' as it released tension and frustration as well as providing entertainment both for other girls and for boys. Although physical violence in the form of fighting was commonplace it was rarely serious, rather rules and rituals governed it. Moreover, fighting was a regular occurrence and because of this it was regarded as normal, 'The girls did not appear to have been influenced by any external pressures to act in a gender-appropriate way by avoiding the use of physical aggression' (Phillips, 2003:719). The young women did not perceive this behaviour as deviant, the girls themselves did not regard fighting as inappropriate female behaviour. Rather Phillips found that the young women neutralized their violent behaviour by suggesting that it was a 'school time thing'.

Phillips also found that the young women believed that boys found girls' fighting very entertaining. The boys would often encourage the fights to continue and would 'egg' on the participants of fights. Some of the young women believed that boys were attracted to girls who could fight, 'as they liked girls who could show that they were tough and could stand up for themselves' (Phillips, 2003:721). However, a number of young women said that some of the boys found girls who participated in physical fighting 'disgusting', 'shocking', 'unladylike', fighting was not considered appropriate behaviour for girls and young women. According to a number of the young women interviewed, they found the idea of boys' views with regard to girls fighting ridiculous. Retrospectively the young women felt that their behaviour was wrong and harmful, looking back, they could see how their behaviour could be harmful to their victims.

The majority of the respondents now regarded this behaviour as inappropriate for more mature young women. Phillips (2003: 720) suggested that this might be due to a 'reduction in the impact that pressure from peers had'. Although, the young women succumbed to peer-pressure

from their boyfriends who did not want their girlfriends fighting, rather they wanted them to be lady-like and feminine. She also suggested that this research highlights that young women, as they matured, were 'becoming more aware of societal pressures on them to become more passive and feminine, or alternatively to be assertive through verbal means' (Phillips, 2003: 721). It would appear that the young women matured out of violence. They behaved in a more socially appropriate way for a number of reasons including the belief that fighting was now 'tomboyish' or 'manly'.

The research conducted by Stanko (1990) from the perspective of the victim provides a major source for understanding violence as ordinary behaviour. She says:

> My approach differs from the traditional studies of criminologists in several ways. First of all, rather than viewing violence as a disruption to the supposedly calm life we lead; I perceive it as an ordinary part of life (Stanko, 1990: 5).

Stanko interviewed 51 women and men, both in London, UK and New England, US. The sample was drawn from a range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds; and ranged from 16 to 72 years of age. Her main proposition is that the risk of sexual and physical violence is taken into account and is managed by people in their everyday lives. This management of risk is a 'continuing, conscious, although mostly routine process' (Stanko, 1990:7). Stanko also claims that learning safety begins in childhood. It is in childhood that relatives and family friends may be the source of abuse and threat, and that neighbourhood children may cause anguish in their bullying behaviour. Most of the men and some of the women interviewed reported that it was in situations such as these that they learnt to respond with violence. Stanko suggests that, like women who have been abused by men, those threatened or beaten may turn to precautionary strategies to avoid the violence happening again.

Summary

Recent research (Artz, 1998; Batchelor, et al, 2001; Batchelor, 2005; Phillips, 2003) on female violence may help to dismiss the myths and stereotyped images that have built up around girls and violence by providing evidence about the nature and extent of girls and women's use of violence. The media has been instrumental in creating and sustaining these myths. Media accounts describe women's desire to be equal to men, the breakdown of the family, and the lack of socialisation as the main causes of girls and women's increased involvement in violence (Brinkworth, 1996). Heidensohn (2001: 20) has highlighted how "women convicted of serious violent crime are often portrayed in the media in highly sensationalised ways, ... an iconic image of evil and depravity in modern art and culture, their sexuality and toughness may be emphasised as 'Tank Girls'". The media also emphasis a biological, psychological and genetic explanations of such behaviour, these people are labelled as 'mad' or 'bad', and there is no examination or focus on the social and environmental factors that may have contributed to such behaviour.

It would appear that there is little evidence to support the idea of a new violent female offender. As previously noted, studies have shown that girls have been involved in violence for decades. However, the public, academics, and policy makers have chosen to ignore or trivialise this fact and instead concentrated on males and collective violence. As such when concern started to grow over girls' involvement in violent offences, these violent offences where seen from a male perspective and girls were seen as trying to copy males. Chesney-Lind (1993: 340) however, asserts that:

> This most recent female crime wave appears to be an attempt to reframe the problems of racism and sexism in society. As young women are demonised by the media, their genuine problems can be marginalized and then ignored. Indeed, they have become the problem.

From a review of the literature, it is apparent there are few studies that focus exclusively on the violence of girls and young women outside the gang context. This is due mostly to the fact that research on delinquency and criminal behaviour of girls in general has been lacking (Heidensohn, 1985; Smart, 1976; Gelsthorpe, 1989; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992, Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004). The studies cited in this chapter have highlighted the fact that males and females are involved in violent behaviour for different reasons, with girls and women engaging in less physical aggression than males. However, studies of girls and women have examined areas of social life where violence is common. Research has highlighted the commonplace and routine nature of fighting and other assaultive behaviour. Recent research, which has examined the victimisation and offending among young people, has identified that such violent behaviour is a relatively everyday phenomenon. Furthermore, this behaviour is accepted by young people as inevitable, and 'as part of life'. Although boys engage in violent behaviour to a greater extent than girls, the use of violence by girls is not restricted to the use of just verbal abuse.

The literature supports the view that girls participate to a lesser extent than boys' in physical violence. These studies have also pointed to the routine use of violence by young people, including girls and women and as such, it is acceptable and inevitable. This taken for granted nature, of violence between young people is important but has often been understated or ignored. Thus, the notion of 'normal' violence is very useful in conceptualising such 'ordinary' everyday violence. It can be used to explore and extent our understanding of the meaning of violence and aggression.

Chapter 3

Researching young women and violence

As explained in the introduction I came to this research through my voluntary work as a detached youth worker and as such I understand that my beliefs surrounding this research have arisen from the context of personal relationships and experience with the young women. Whilst working as a volunteer at the Empower drop-in centre for young women in the Northwest of England I learnt a lot about the personal experiences of the young women I worked with. I was struck by the role that violence played in their lives. The young women who attended the centre consisted of a number of groups, including those who were identified as troublesome and those who were not identified as problematic. Some of the young women were referred to the drop-in centre because of their troublesome behaviour which included truanting from school, and family problems and running away from home. Another group of young women attended the centre as part of the outreach youth work project. These young women were encouraged to make use of the centre rather than spend their time in groups socialising on the street. Other young women attended the centre for advice and help with childcare and financial problems.

Alder (1989) asserts that criminologists must start listening to girls and women and taking what they say seriously. My aim was to listen carefully, seriously and above all respectfully to the experiential accounts given by each respondent. Furthermore, I believed that any research into violence and young women that did not do this was likely to be seriously flawed and partial.

The methodological approach to this research had been informed by the quantitative-qualitative debate and by an awareness of feminism, which are

discussed later in this chapter. The objective of investigating young women and violence was achieved through narrative interviews. My rationale for undertaking this research using a qualitative research method was motivated by a desire to understand violence from the perspective of the young women. The principle aim of this research was to try to understand in detail the part that violence played in the everyday lives of these young women. Quantitative methods are unable to do this. As Dobash and Dobash (1991: 374) note:

> The survey is particularly poor at investigating complex behaviours, emotions and social processes such as those associated with violence, and its necessary brevity means it can rarely be used to explore the contexts associated with social behaviour.

Furthermore, as Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 11-12) have highlighted, 'the survey type research assumes that the respondent is one who shares meanings with the researcher, is knowledgeable about his/her experience; can capture it satisfactorily in a single concept; ... can convey that knowledge to a stranger listener; and is motivated to tell the truth.

I was attracted to qualitative methods because of its emphasis on the ways in which social actors interpret actions and give meaning to them:

> Because of its facility to examine subjects in depth, qualitative research provides a unique tool for studying what lies behind, or underpins a decision, attitude, behaviour or other phenomena. It also allows associations that occur in people's thinking or acting - and the meaning these have for people - to be identified (Ritchie, 2003: 28)

As this research was based on an exploratory study of young women and violence, qualitative research methods were the most appropriate for exploratory research.

In addition I was drawn to feminist methodology because of its focus on women and making their experiences the central focus (Davies, 1985;

Griffiths, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1990). This includes making women the main focus of the research, that is, research with rather than on women, and the research should as much as possible be of benefit to women. There is also the argument that feminist research should encourage the empowerment of women (these issues will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter). However, Truman (1994) casts doubt upon the empowering nature of much of social research on the wider stage, and looks toward the experience of participation as something beneficial in itself, as opposed to the impact. So although this research may not have such a beneficial impact for girls and women on the wider political or social stage, it was beneficial for the young women themselves as individuals.

Many of the young women I interviewed contacted me after the interviews to express their gratitude and a number of them said that they had begun counselling to understand their aggressive or violent behaviour or that of their boyfriends. Some of the young women, such as Catherine expressed their thanks at being able to talk about their behaviour without being judged,

> To be quite honest this is the first time that I've actually spoken to someone about this. I didn't think anyone would be interested in listening to me. Well people would think I was mad or something if I told them what I've told you, like, well you've just listened to me without saying anything horrible or saying that what I've done is disgusting or anything like that. It's been really good talking to someone who is willing to listen. (Catherine)

While others, such as Tiffany felt empowered to confront their boyfriends about their violent behaviour towards them in an attempt to change it,

> Since the interview I've spoken to my boyfriend about his behaviour and we've both decided it would be good if we went to counselling to sort this out. I know some people will think I'm stupid for still wanting to be with him, but I love him and if we can sort this out with counselling then it will be worth it. (Tiffany).

Although a PhD thesis alone may be restricted in its ability to empower women on the wider social and political stage, it does have the capacity to empower and be beneficial to individual women. So although Plummer (1995: 24) argues that stories can be used to maintain the status quo, they can also have an emancipatory function transforming individual lives and the wider culture. The majority of the young women expressed positive feelings after the interview. They were glad to have had the opportunity to take part in the research being able to talk about what was important to them and being taken seriously. They also talked about gaining an insight into their own lives that they had not had before. As noted above Tiffany came back after the interview and told me that both her boyfriend and her-self were going to counselling with regard to their violent behaviour. She said that this would not have happened if she had not been involved in the research. It was only through being able to discuss her behaviour and that of her boyfriend that she began to question this behaviour. Furthermore, a week after the interview another young woman, Michelle contacted me to let me know that she was attending counselling sessions. She expressed her gratitude at being involved in the research as it gave her the opportunity to talk about issues that were important to her, issues around anger, aggression, and violence, without being criticised or made to feel stupid for discussing these issues. She said that she had never before had the opportunity to talk openly about her feelings and experiences. Furthermore, she felt that she had gained an insight into her life. This feedback from the young women had a positive effect on me because they felt that they had got something back from the interview and as such it was not just a one way process in favour of the researcher.

However, one of the over-riding concerns of researchers is that we should not cause harm, fear, and/or regret to participants, (see BSA, 2002 Statement of Ethical Practice) and as such it could be argued that this research did just that because these young women were reflecting on what

could be painful and intimate topics. However as Hollway and Jefferson (2000) found, talking about private and intimate topics, such as those discussed by the young women in this research, can have a beneficial impact on the participants. It can provide:

> … experience of the value of talking about personal, emotionally difficult issues in a supportive and trustworthy context. To be more precise, the interview provided the context of a relationship with someone who was capable of listening well (especially paying attention to emotional significances), was not competing for attention, who could reflect back in questions and comments a recognition of her experiences which was emotionally appropriate and by whom she did *not feel judged* (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000: 87, emphasis added).

Bearing this in mind, before any interviews were conducted I spoke with counsellors from both the drop-in centre and the college and made arrangements for them to be available should the young women in this research want to discuss any issues that arose from the interviews, or just to get advice about any issues that were discussed. For those participants who were interviewed via email I supplied them with information including telephone numbers of counsellors and Relate. This information was supplied in the introduction to the interviews and also on a number of occasions throughout the interview sessions.

After reading Hollway and Jefferson's *Doing Qualitative Research Differently* (2000) I decided that the most appropriate type of interview for this research was narrative interviews as I felt that the young women's experiences could not easily be explored using any other data collection method. Although research using narrative interviews is in many ways the least recognised as authoritative, unbiased knowledge, it is the most appropriate method for this research as it aims to capture and understand 'real' life from the perspective of participants. In addition:

> The particular story told, the manner and detail of its telling, the points emphasized, the morals drawn, all represent choices made by the story-teller. Such choices are revealing, often more so than the teller suspects. ... The implications of this for the traditional interview method are a recommendation to 'narrative topics', that is, to turn the open-ended 'What do you most fear?', which could elicit a one-word answer rather than a story, would be modified to read 'Tell me about your experiences of fear' or, better, because more specific, 'Tell me about a time when you were fearful' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 35).

Qualitative methods argues that human beings are conscious, they have feelings, intentions and have an awareness of being that is used to define situations and make meaningful the actions of self and of others. As a result, the focus of the qualitative researcher is on exploring social reality as it is constructed by social actors. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the view of the world through the research participants. This requires both the researcher and the participant to have greater contact than is usually required in quantitative research. This approach is also more open and flexible in collecting data enabling leads and ideas to be followed up as the research progresses. For example, a researcher is able to probe areas of interest that the respondent may only refer to, thus allowing greater depth and insight. It also enables participants to provide data that is important to them rather than being restricted to what is important to the researcher. The outcome is data that is not 'superficial' but is rich and detailed (Bryman 1988). Thus, qualitative researchers are generally more concerned with validity and richness of data. From a personal perspective, the process of gathering data on such a sensitive topic made qualitative research methods an obvious choice to use. The nature of the epistemological task required exploratory and questioning approaches which statistical analysis just could not provide. The research question requires analysis of feelings, opinions, attitudes, and thoughts, which statistics would not be able to reveal to the same extent as qualitative methods.

Positivists argue that interpretive methods of inquiry are inadequate to fully understand human behaviour because they are not rigorous enough, and more importantly, that they are not scientific approaches. However, this had been disputed on a number of levels. Firstly, interpretive methods require openness, closeness, and understanding of the lived experiences of others. As Prus (1996: 23 has argued:

> It is only through conversing with the other and attempting to experience the situation of the other through extended role taking activity that one may tap into the life worlds of the other on a more adequate (accurate, sustained, and comprehensive) basis. Attempting to achieve an insider-level working knowledge of the other by opening oneself to the lived experiences of the other by direct, sustained contact, ethnography is the technique in the social sciences that most readily enables researchers to respect the nature of human group life.

Being a detached outsider would not have given me the closeness that was required in order to explore in detail the young women's experiences and beliefs. So although I was not an insider, that is, I did not conduct ethnographic research, using narratives gave me some degree of closeness with the young women that helped me to explore their lived experiences more accurately and comprehensively. Remaining outside the respondent's world of understanding and lived experience would provide only a partial picture of violence and aggression in the lives of the young women. It would severely restrict access to their decision making processes, including their awareness of a violent encounter, how they identified a violent encounter and also their attitudes to violence.

Methodology and Methods

Researching young women and violence raises issues of sensitivity. Violence not only invokes ideas around power, pain and control, but also emotions such as shame, guilt, fear, and excitement. As a result, it is important that the research methods and the epistemology are sensitive to

the needs of the research participants. As Lees (1993) argues any research that is concerned with violence will have elements of discourse which could be potentially uncomfortable for the participants; in addition, violence is an experience that will have a variety of meanings for many people. This understanding however should not detract from a serious investigation that aims to provide a deeper understanding and knowledge of young women and their experiences of violence. Furthermore, it is important that these methods and epistemology fulfil the rigorous demands of the social sciences. As Maynard (1994: 10) has observed:

> Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate.

As such feminist methodology and methods were considered useful in collecting the data for this research. The epistemological underpinnings of feminist theory rest on the fact that women can be knowers about their own experiences and that their experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge, and that subjective experience is valid data.

It is also crucial that the researcher should indicate to the participants that it is they who are important as individuals not the data that is produced. As a result, feminist methodology has a well-established record of understanding and interpreting the experiences of women, without being exploitative. These experiences vary according to a number of characteristics including race, class, location, and education. As such there is no one single truth. Feminism questions and analyses existing 'truths', challenging accepted constructions of basic concepts of power, knowledge, truth, and gender that influence our social arrangements (Wuest, 1995: 1).

Smith (1987) explains how feminist methodology must transcribe the experience of women in a sociological way; to be able to add to the

existing knowledge of women in society, reaching beyond the personal experience of any given individual woman:

> "A sociology for women must be able to disclose for women how their own social situation, their everyday world is organised and determined by social processes that are not knowable through the ordinary means through which we find our everyday world" (Smith, 1987: 23).

This reaffirms the feminist belief that research should not be about the need for the researcher to create data, but also producing data that represents and articulates women's lives. As Ramazanoglu (1989: 435) argues, "feminist research is to produce knowledge that provides understanding of women's experience as they understand it, interpretation of their experience in the light of feminist conceptions of gendered relationships, and a critical understanding for the research process. Furthermore, Acker et al (1991: 134) state that "understanding the processes that result in inequalities is a necessary step toward changing women's position". They urged that the social sciences should not be content to describe the world, but should contribute to changing it. The research methods for conducting research on young women and violence need to be carefully constructed to accommodate a number of factors including; the sensitive nature of the research; age of the young women; and their social position. They must also allow for a deep appreciation of women as participants in the research process, that is, giving them the space and time to tell their accounts as they desire, emphasising issues, experiences, beliefs and attitudes that they consider important without being restricted by the biases and influences of researchers.

Feminist researchers recognise that interviewing women can entail issues of power. This awareness is a central issue for this research, and as such the aim of this study is to reduce as much as possible the power relationships that can be produced between researcher and participant. This

was partly achieved by offering each young woman the opportunity to select a pseudonym. More importantly it was achieved by asking the young women what they understood by aggression and violence rather than having the researcher impose her own definitions. Furthermore, Mies adds, "women scholars committed to the cause of women's liberation cannot have an objective interest in a 'view from above'. This would mean that they would consent to their own oppression as women ..." (Mies, 1993: 68).

Feminists contend that researchers should maintain non-hierarchical power relations. Feminist researchers recognise the potential for a researcher to exploit the participant. Researchers need to be aware of the possible vulnerabilities of young women in contrast to the researcher being in a position of relative strength and power, especially when they are talking about sensitive issues on violence in their lives. For example, Finch (1984) found in her research that the woman-to-woman interview was special in that it created informality and trust, which helped to avoid a hierarchal relationship between herself and the interviewee. It was this special relationship however, which Finch (1984: 81) felt made her research participants vulnerable:

> These techniques can be used to great effect to solicit a range of information (some of it very private), which is capable of being used ultimately against the interests of those women who gave it freely to another woman with whom they found it easy to talk.

However much unintended, the interview may be constructed hierarchically with the participant feeling that they have been exploited in terms of the information that she has given and because she felt pressured into revealing details that she would rather keep private. This will be particularly relevant with this study because of the sensitive nature of the topic. As Burman et al (2001: 447) highlights, the researcher needs to be aware of the personal, emotional, psychological and social effects of

disclosing painful or personal incidents. However, if we insist on eliminating power difference would this have an impact on women's telling of their experiences in some way? For example, powerlessness may play a part in young women's violent behaviour. Thus as researchers we should not dismiss, ignore or downplay hierarchal power relations. Instead it would be better to acknowledge these power relations within the research process. People experience power relations in every aspect of their lives, as such would it be practical, useful and honest to try and erase it from the research? Power relations are experienced by girls and women and as such have a part to play in their views of the social world; furthermore, girls and women will experience these power relations in different ways. Therefore, it is important that power relations are acknowledged and incorporated into the research process.

Stanley and Wise (1990) insist that gender and power should be of central importance in the research process, especially the gender and power relations between the researcher and the researched. They also insist that the female participant should not be treated as a mere object of the research. Rather they should be seen as active subjects in all stages of the research process. However, this relationship needs to strike a balance between power and friendship. If the relationship between the researcher and the researched becomes too close the participant may give information that she may later regret, or she may later feel rejected and abandoned when the interview is completed and the researcher walks away. Power may not always reside with the researcher; it may be transferred from researcher to respondent throughout the research process or may ultimately reside with the respondent at the outset (Stanley & Wise, 1990). This power may come in the form of resistance from participants, for example, one young woman in this study responded minimally to questions and ignored some questions. Participants may also break appointments, turn up

late, or leave early before the session has finished. This highlights the researcher's dependence on the co-operation of participants.

Researchers may find that their 'power' as researchers is questioned by participants who overtly or covertly display their own knowledge, for example, re-directing questions, not answering questions asked but answering questions that they think are important, and ending an interview before the researcher has finished. Tang (2002: 710) argues that when interviewing 'elites' or persons of higher social standing, regardless of wealth, they have the power to restrict interviews to a specific time scale, place a limit on the length of the interview etc. She found that when she interviewed female academics in the UK she was 'not being regarded as an academic mother of equal social status'. In this research project Tang was a PhD student interviewing female lecturers and professors. She found that the balance of power within her interviews shifted frequently depending on a number of factors including age and experience of the interviewees. With senior members of academia the power shifted to the interviewees, while with the younger members power was with the interviewer. In conclusion Tang (2002: 718-9) writes, 'there are different forms of power relationships in relation to social, cultural, and personal differences in women interviewing women. ... The power relationship is very complicated not only in researching "down" and "up", but also in interviewing peers'. These forms of power relationships were evident throughout the interviews I conducted, for example, the balance of power swung between participants and myself on a number of occasions.

However, I would have to disagree with Tang's experiences, and it would be too simplistic to say that power was dependant on age and status. In my experience power within the interview relationship did not reside with the interviewer or older participants alone but was also evident with some younger participants. When conducting the interview with Julie, an 18 year

old from the drop-in centre, there were many interruptions. She kept leaving the room to see what was happening outside in the reception area. This was very disruptive to the interview and Julie needed reminding what she had been saying each time she came back into the room. So although Julie was among the youngest group of participants and I was 38 at the time of the interviews it could be argued that she held a more powerful position.

Power relations also greatly influence quality and quantity of data, but they also influence the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. This was brought home to me quite forcefully when one respondent provided only minimal responses throughout the interview, when she re-directed questions back to me, and also when she abruptly ended the interview before it had been concluded. Thus it would be misleading to assume that the researcher is in a position of power throughout the research. Rather, 'power dynamics are fluid and as such cannot always be guarded against. The researcher may have no control over the research process; therefore the presumed dominant position of the interviewer within the research relationship has been put into question' (Millen, 1997; Cotterill, 1992). In some interviews the balance of power may be on the side of the participants with the interviewer having little or no power at all. Power relations can also be affected by a number of other factors including age. For example, Cotterill found that throughout her research the balance of power between herself and her participants was not fixed, but varied 'according to how particular participants are recruited into the study and the age and status of the women being interviewed' (1992: 599). As a result, Maynard (1994: 16) argues that

> ...it is not always so easy to reduce the power dynamics that are likely to be present in research and it is unlikely that they can ever be eradicated completely.

However, positions of power are more evident at the analysis stage of the research. The researcher has control over what data to include and what data to dismiss. They also exert power in interpretation of the data. Indeed as Ribbens (1989) argues, to define other people's realities for them and for a wider audience may be the greatest power that the researcher processes.

Furthermore, feminist researchers insist that there should be reciprocity between the researcher and the researched. This however is not restricted to feminist research, for as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 91) note 'reciprocity should be an issue of all research and they believe that "it is hard to expect honesty and frankness while never being honest and frank about oneself'. While conducting the interviews for this study many of the young women asked me questions about my personal and academic life. They asked me why I was doing this research, how long I had been attending university, what I would do once I finish this work. Questions were also asked about my family, how many children I had, how old they were and what they were doing, whether they were in school, university, or working. When these questions were asked I provided honest replies. Many of the young women also compared my education to theirs and remarked that they could 'never do anything like that' (Mandy, a twenty year old university student).

In this study I took care not to lead the young women because its aim was to examine young women's own meanings and definitions of violence. This research was interested in young women's views, experiences, motivations and feelings about violence and as such the researcher's role was that of a vessel through which these young women's voices are heard and to analysis these finding and identify themes and concepts in order to make the young women's experiences available to the academic community. In addition there is an awareness of the sociological need to

make clear what these young women are saying but not to override their experiences. As such my primary concern in conducting qualitative research was to situate knowledge in the experiences of these young women, regardless of whether these experiences were ordinary or extraordinary experiences and the interpretations the young women gave to these experiences. Although the subjectivity of both the researcher and the participant is an integral part of qualitative research, decisions have to be made by the researcher, which are based on objective criteria. These decisions include what is to be studied and how it will be studied, what literature is relevant to the study, who to include and how large the sample would be (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

Research that concerns violence may be potentially threatening for the young women. As Payne et al (1981) have highlighted, when researchers are, or perceived as, involved in the unearthing of what can be regarded as incriminating evidence it is understandable that participants may develop a fear of scrutiny. The challenge of researching violence is that any enquiry conducted on an issue that is considered a social blemish may very well be regarded as intruding into the lives of participants and causing distress. This may explain why a number of drop-in centres and colleges refused me permission to approach young women to participate in the research (this will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter). In addition, I thought that they would not offer their co-operation because they were concerned about being associated with this kind of research. I assumed that they would not want to be connected with research on young women and violence. This concern about the fear of scrutiny and intruding into people's lives was discussed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and Lees (1993). Lees (1993) identified a number of areas where research can become threatening:

> The first is where the researcher poses an 'intrusive threat', dealing with areas which are private, stressful or sacred. Although it can be

> argued that all research has the potential to fall under the rubric of sensitivity it appears that it is not the topic per se that is sensitive but the relationship between the topic and the social context within which the research is carried out. Furthermore, what constitutes the sensitivity of a topic is not universal, in that what is sensitive to one person may not be so to another. The second relates to the study of deviance and social control and involves the possibility that information may be revealed which is stigmatising or incriminating in some way.

This 'intrusive threat usually involves the disclosure of private information which is likely to be problematic because privacy itself produces pluralistic ignorance' (Lees, 1993). Each participant only knows her own feelings and as such they are often unsure how 'normal' they will be perceived by the researcher. This was highlighted in this research when one respondent asked me if she was 'normal' because of the severity of the injuries she inflicted on her victims. Michelle talked about being 'pathetic' for staying with her violent boyfriend she said 'a normal person wouldn't stay in such a relationship, would they?'

Qualitative research methods favoured by feminists are not specific to feminism; feminists did not create these methods, although they may have been modified to take into account feminist needs and requirements. What does distinguish feminist research from non-feminist research is its focus on women's experiences, also its rejection of hierarchal relations, and its concern with reflexivity. Truman (1994: 22) states,

> Although feminists argue that there are characteristics within feminist research which provide it with distinctiveness from other forms of social research, there is no common definition or understanding of what actually constitutes feminist research.

Many of the concerns of feminist researchers are evident in other methods. For example, action research is concerned with non-hierarchal relationships. Thus researchers use methods that best fit their research. Grant (1993: 7) further states that,

> Methods used might also reflect where women are practically situated in universities and the training skills, and equipment they can be exposed to. In some instances, women invest or innovate methods that are particularly appropriate for addressing questions of interest to feminists.

Although there is no distinct definition of feminist research methods, there are a number of principles that underpin feminist research. These include; knowledge produced by research should be useful to and for the participants; the research methods should not be oppressive; and the research methods should be reflexive allowing for reflection on both the intellectual traditions and the process of the study (Acker, Barry & Essevald, 1991). The principle aims of feminist research is to reflect the diversity, differences and similarities in women's experiences, feelings and beliefs; empower women; and ensure that women's voices are heard. Feminists also believe that research findings should not be confined to academia, "Feminists should not confine their output to scholarly journals but also find new ways of dissemination which reach those who participate in research (Truman, 1994: 33).

This study was given back to the young women who took part in the research in the form of a talk about conducting research. This was received with interest from the young women who attended the college and university as they were in the process of conducting small scale projects as part of their courses. In addition, the coordinators from the drop-in centre suggested that the findings be presented to board members and other organisations that come into contact with the drop-in centre. The information gained from the research will be incorporated into the wider programme within the centre; for example, it could be incorporated in workshops with the young women. Although the findings will not be fed back to the interviewees, the findings were also presented at the university in a number of lectures and seminar groups.

However, it must be remembered that data can be used against the interests of women, even feminist research. An example of this situation was Burman et al's (2001) research on violent girls in Scotland. Their data was used by the media as evidence of the increasing use of violence by girls, and also of a growing problem of girl gang membership.

The challenges presented by young women have been succinctly put forward by Furnham and Stacey (1991). The following extract contextualises the complexities and choices faced by young people:

> "... there is some general agreement about how young people move through stages in acquisition of their knowledge of the institutions and functioning of the social world. The determinant of the development are factors from within and without – that is, the youngster's present understanding leads him or her to interact with the social world in a particular way and hence, gain experience. Young people construct and test reality in the social world (Furnham & Stacey, 1991: 18).

Because of the tensions and contradictions between various social pressures the research methods for this population must try and understand this culture. When researching issues of morality and deviant behaviour these give rise to emotional reactions in the participants themselves. It is important therefore to convey a personal belief in wishing to understand more about young women's perceptions of themselves and their behaviour without prejudicing the production of information. This was achieved, in part, by indicating that the researcher was interested in the participant as an individual and not just being interested in a deviant group. The research methods needed to be carefully constructed to accommodate all of these factors, and allow a deep appreciation of young women as individuals in a group who may well be vulnerable participants in the research process.

Narrative

Narrative research allowed the young women in this study to define the world in their own words; it also allowed them to talk about issues that were important and relevant to them with regard to the subject under investigation. Using narrative research enabled the young women in this study to discuss what they regarded as violent behaviour in their lives. As a researcher I was aware that I entered the field with my own biases, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences and as such I did not want to impinge on the young women's own attitudes, beliefs and experiences. Narrative allowed the participants to have their voices heard, to speak for and about themselves, and their unique experiences. It required the young women to reflect on events and experiences they may have not thought about fully before. However, it should be emphasised that a narrative is not a report on every event in one's life so far. Rather, a narrative always draws selectively upon lived experience (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). As Bruner (1987: 153) has asserted:

> Stories give meanings to the present and enable us to see that present as a set of relationships involving a constituted past and a future. But narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete. There is no fixed meaning in the past, for with each new telling the context varies, the audience differs, the story is modified.

The young women in this study made use of narratives to put into words what they considered to be the most important experiences of violence in their lives. For some of the young women this was the first time that they have fully reflected on these events and experiences. As such, I was concerned that they may be reluctant to talk and that they may only provide brief responses, or they may be unemotional when providing the narrative. Which according to Atkinson (1998: 9) "could result in short listings of factual events that have occurred". If this were to happen, the narrative would lack any feelings, and the experiences and thoughts felt maybe

overlooked or neglected altogether, leaving a large proportion of the story untold. However the majority of the young women I interviewed provided much more than a listing of events, rather they provided detailed accounts that were not lacking in feelings or emotions.

When narrating their story, participants may seek to present themselves in a favourable light to the researcher. Smythe and Murray (2000: 328) argue that, 'Participants seek to present and promote views of themselves and their lives that they can make sense of and live with'. As a result, participants may only disclose elements of their story that they deem relevant for this purpose. If this happens then large sections of the narrative may be left untold. This 'art of impression management' (Goffman, 1969) is present in all social interactions. The participant is not the only person who may pursue this line of self-image. The researcher as well as the respondent may project images of themselves, and these images can be portrayed throughout the narrative interview. For example, the interviewer may portray herself as an efficient and accomplished researcher as well as an experienced academic. Researchers are expected to remain and inspire confidence throughout the research. They are also expected to be relaxed and capable regardless of any concerns and insecurities they may have about the interview situation.

This method of selective story telling has the result of omitting important and relevant data. Thus, the researcher must always remember that narrators are ordinary people, the majority of whom may not have any experience of research, let alone narrative research. People do not always tell their story as it actually happened; sometimes they forget some of the details, exaggerate other details, lie, and get things wrong. This was brought home to me when one young woman while narrating her story talked about another participant. Grace revealed information about Jessica that she herself did not talk about in her narrative of the same incident.

Researcher should be sensitive to this and be aware that they cannot prove or disprove the 'truths' of the narrative. Bourdieu (1997: 37) has argued that the interview is one of the weakest research methods; this is because the interviewee is likely to provide the interviewer with the 'official account' of what ought to happen rather than what actually happened. This 'official account' reifies norms, values, and ideals.

These problems are minor when compared to the fact that narrative research achieves a richness of depth that empirical research involving large-scale samples, such as surveys, is unlikely to generate. Although personal narratives do not always reveal the truth about what happened they do offer important information about what people think about violence and aggression. As such narrative research helps to improve our understanding; this is especially true of sensitive topics that may not be fully researched using a more structured approach. By allowing the young women to talk about issues that were important to them it brought to light themes, concepts, ideas, attitudes and beliefs that I had not initially considered.

When interviewing the young women I became aware that certain factors could have an effect on the quality of the data. For example, not all of the young women responded well to being open and reflective about their experiences. Some young women responded positively to telling their story by making sense of their experiences, others responded negatively. The open-ended, unpredictable character of narrative enquiry and the depth of self-disclosure may be either detrimental or have a cathartic effect for participants. 'One never knows when a narrative interview might threaten to move beyond the boundaries of what is safe for the participant' (Smythe & Murray, 2000: 330). They further insist that (ibid, 331) 'Researchers need to use their intuition and judgement to avoid harm'. Narrative research can prove to be a painful, demanding, and emotionally draining

experience for participants. However, as we have seen narratives can also been beneficial to participants.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to predict what will happen during the course of a narrative interview. Each interview is very individual and as such the data generated greatly depends on the relationship between the researcher and participant and the rapport that develops between the two. Rapport cannot be turned on and off when needed, rather it develops between the researcher and the respondent. Differences between the researcher and the participant, such as age, race, gender, dress, language, etc., can become an obstacle to rapport. It is an unfolding process that cannot be anticipated or results guaranteed. Moreover, the narrative can be told in the order that the narrator feels comfortable with, rather than having the order imposed on them through structured or semi-structured methods. Regardless of the structure the narrator can still find order and meaning in the story being told. A narrative can be told in a number of different ways but still generate useful data.

In listening to the narrative accounts it is important to analyse the construction of 'stories' as statements in their entirety. The power of narrative research can be said to be evident in a number of factors including the fact that the stories comprise the selection of events that may be real for the person telling the story but by other accounts may be distorted, or more importantly, not heard at all. The important point being that the teller must organise and pattern the structure of their narration that will be meaningful to them. Secondly, the selection and employment of the issues within their account may well be subconsciously derived and the person themselves may not appear to understand why they are important. Thirdly, the narrative account may incorporate different levels of meaning, which are open to interpretation on a number of variant themes. Fourthly, in telling their story the participant feels both 'distant' and 'close' to the

events (Fisher, 1987). As such the respondent may feel safe recalling past events. For example, some interviewees in this study had no difficulty in telling their stories, they just poured them out and were able to articulate them well, while others found it difficult to convey their stories, or found it hard to find the right words to describe their experiences, and they were more circumspect.

This study hopes to further understanding of violence by focusing on how young women construct the meaning of violence in their lives. Whether in the streets between strangers or in the home between parents, siblings, or partners, the meaning and acceptability of violence are shaped by cultural contexts. Discourses that are available at any moment in cultural life constrain the options open to individuals for making sense of threats and acts of aggression, as well as to the relationships in which they occur.

The assumption of narrative approaches is that humans make sense of themselves through stories or narratives. In advancing the narrative paradigm, Fisher (1987: 24) asserts that humans 'experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives'. In order to make our lives understandable and coherent to both others and ourselves we rely on narratives, which Fisher (1987: 58) defines as 'symbolic actions ... that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them'. Fisher (1987) insists that humans are capable of creating or accepting new narratives when those they have grown up believing no longer suffice to explain or guide their lives.

In his discussion of narrative theory, Fisher (1987: 67) claims that humans are not constrained to accept the stories already established in a culture. People have the ability 'to formulate and adopt new stories that better account for their lives'. As a result, when we place ourselves within some narratives and disregard others, we confer structure, sequence, and

coherence on experiences that would otherwise be fragmentary and inchoate. In so doing we create and recreate ourselves, and our lives (Gergen, 1997). Narratives are rooted in and thus supported or undermined by the larger culture. The narratives authorised by a culture are neither finite nor fixed, they are re-made continuously as individuals and institutions decide that existing ones are inadequate to define and direct our lives.

Narratives are social in nature, as a result, they are not strictly personal accounts or stories, rather, they are decisively social, which is to say culturally constructed, sustained, reproduced and some times altered (Berger, 1996). Thus, the stories told by the young women in this research are both personal and social. They are personal in that they are accounts constructed by particular young women to describe their individual experiences. Furthermore, because both the researcher and participant have their own agendas for taking part in research this ultimately has an impact on the narrative that is told. Because of this, the researcher must always be aware of the narrator's motives for telling her story.

When conducting narrative research it is important to ask 'how' questions rather than 'why' questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Asking 'why' questions imply that the researcher wants to know what has happened, and as such can invoke short abrupt answers. Hollway and Jefferson also advice against using 'why' questions, they found that asking 'why' questions 'elicited an intellectualisation. While this was appropriate to the question, it was uninformative in terms of the research questions' (2000: 35). In support of this they cite Sacks who found that because she asked sociological questions her women interviewees offered sociological responses, but 'the abstraction of such talk – its disconnection from their actual lives, made it hollow' (cited in Chase in Hollway & Jefferson, 2002: 35). 'How' questions can have the

opposite effect, they can invoke long detailed answers, which give the researcher far more information, or data than they could have assumed possible, things that they never thought to ask about. 'How' questions provide stepping-stones. Therefore, 'what' and 'how' questions encourage participants to describe their experiences, while 'why' questions can lead to dead ends' (Darlington and Scott, 2002: 57).

Ethics, consent, and gatekeepers

At the time of submitting my research proposal and conducting this research there was no system in place at the university for ethical clearance. However, I did take into account the ethical guidelines issued by the British Sociological Association (2002), and I also adhered to the university department's ethical guidelines. These ethical issues include confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent. Kirsch asserts that researchers must usually "make sure that participation is entirely voluntary; that is, participants must be allowed to withdraw from the research at any time without negative repercussions" (cited in Plummer, 2001:226). In some research situations consent may need to be gained not only from the research participants, but also from senior personnel, especially in large organisations. This has been described as a 'hierarchy of consent' (Dingwall, 1980). This can create a number of problems, both for the researcher and the participants. If consent is given by senior personnel and they agree to take part in the research and allow access to less senior members in the organisation, Dingwall doubts whether subordinates within the organisation would feel confident withholding consent. Dingwall (1980: 878) highlights two reasons why this may happen. Firstly, subordinates who refuse to participate may be at risk of 'official disfavour'. Secondly, subordinates can find it difficult to refuse to participate if their supervisor is present; they may feel pressurised into consenting to participate.

This situation occurred when I approached a drop-in centre for young people in the city centre. I found that the co-ordinator at the drop-in centre was very enthusiastic for the young women to take part in the research. She suggested that she sit in with those young women who seemed reluctant to take part. In response to this I made it clear to the co-ordinator and the young women that they were under no obligation to take part in the research. However, the co-ordinator then repeated her statement about sitting in on the interview. As a result the young women agreed to take part. I found myself in an awkward situation, while trying not to undermine the co-ordinator, I tried to make the young women understand that it was their choice whether to take part or not. Three young women agreed to take part in the research. However, two withdrew before the interview took place and the third did not keep her appointment for the pre-arranged interview.

Although I thought these interviews would not be conducted I took the decision to arrange interview appointments with each of the young women. The reason for this was three fold. Firstly, I felt that the co-ordinator was placing too much pressure on the young women to make a decision there and then. Secondly, I wanted to maintain amicable relations with the co-ordinator as she was my access to any other young women who might in the near future want to take part in the research. Thirdly, I thought that this course of action would minimise the harm done to the relationship between the young women and the co-ordinator. Rather than make a stand with regard to informed consent and place the young women in an awkward position I thought it more appropriate for my time to be wasted with regard to missed appointments than to create any tensions between the young women and the co-ordinator.

When discussing the issues of anonymity and confidentiality this situation raised a number of problems. For example, if the interviews had been

conducted with the co-ordinator present it would have proved difficult for me to protect the participants' anonymity and also confidentiality. The co-ordinator could have inadvertently disclosed information to other workers and clients of the centre that would identify the participants. Although I would go to great lengths to prevent identification of these participants with the help of pseudonyms and altering the description of the setting of the centre, all personal and identifying information would be kept private, all this work could easily be undone by the co-ordinator who would have been privy to information that could prove harmful to the participant if she was identified. One solution to this problem would have been to get the co-ordinator to sign a confidentiality form stating that she would not divulge any information from the interviews. However, this may not have proved reliable. The co-ordinator may have inadvertently revealed information without realising the consequences. Thus, although confidentiality and anonymity are amongst some of the essential conditions for maintaining a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participant, I felt that this relationship might have been put under pressure from the presence of the co-ordinator.

With regard to the issue of informed consent, it would be unfair to assume that the participants had provided consent if they felt that they had been pressured into taking part. In this situation, a signed consent form would be meaningless. As James et al (1998: 187) have highlighted, the age, social and economic position of these young women places them in a vulnerable position and may put them 'at risk in the research relationship through placing too much trust in the adult researcher, and the co-ordinator. A balance has to be stuck between too much trust and too little. Participants need to invest a great deal of trust in the researcher especially when conveying personal and traumatic experiences. If the respondent does not trust the researcher then this can undoubtly have an impact on the

relationship and consequently on the information that they are willing to reveal.

Although I expected to face a number of difficult issues throughout this research I did not envisage the problem of over-enthusiastic gatekeepers. As we have seen there is a large amount of literature about the problems of gatekeepers and how crucial they can be with regard to gaining access to participants, but there is very little on over-enthusiastic gatekeepers and the problems that this can cause for the researcher and the participants. Gatekeepers can be very influential when it comes to gaining access to research participants. They can exert power in both directions, not just restricting and withholding access. Given the nature of fieldwork and the crucial importance of obtaining the co-operation of the people being studied, any reluctance on their part, or any feeling of being coerced to co-operate, is likely to make the fieldwork difficult and at worse impossible.

As noted, gatekeepers can also restrict or hinder access to participants. I was confronted with this problem when I approached a third young persons' drop-in centre. I contacted the centre on a number of occasions both on the telephone and in person. The organiser explained that the centre conducted aggression workshops for a number of young women who attended the centre. She told me it would be helpful to both the work that they were doing and my own research. She initially identified 8 young women who she would approach on my behalf with regard to taking part in the research, and would pass on their names and details if they agreed to participate. However, she would not give me access to talk to the young women directly about taking part in the research. I could not approach them myself to ask if they would be willing to be interviewed. The organiser insisted that due to the nature of my research and the work that they carried out it would be more appropriate if she spoke to the young women on my behalf. It was suggested that this approach would reduce

conflict and embarrassment for the young women; they would be more comfortable telling her that they did not want to take part in the research. This arrangement proved to be unfruitful. Each time I contacted the organiser for an update on her progress she told me that she did not have time to speak to the young women, and I was still denied access to approach them myself. A solution to this problem may have been for me to pass out a leaflet explaining the research with a contact number attached for the young women themselves to contact me, or put up a poster in the centre with all the relevant details attached.

The difficulty in gaining access to participants may be indicative of society's attitudes to girls and women's use of violence. There is still the idea, ingrained in society, that females are passive and nurturing, and men are dominant and aggressive. Ideas about appropriate gender roles and behaviour may have been challenged by this research, and it is this that may have been the over-riding factor in the decision to grant or deny access. After access was denied from a number of colleges and other organisations I immediately assumed that it was due to their concern for the students' psychological well being with regard to talking about such a sensitive topic as violence. I thought that the colleges were concerned that talking about the violence and aggression that the young women had either suffered or perpetrated would cause psychological upset or trauma for them and that the counselling services would be unable to cope with the aftermath once the researcher had conducted the interviews and left

The key issues of confidentiality and anonymity are not always as straight forward as issuing reassurances to participants. Although I could assure and reassure participants of confidentiality, it was virtually impossible to expect participants not to discuss the interview with others. This was illustrated when conducting the interviews in both the college and the drop-in centre. The participants in both venues spoke to me about sharing the

research experience with others. They spoke about what to expect with regard to the questions and the interview experience, and spoke to each other about some of the content of their interview discussions. A number of participants in the college confided in their personal tutor, and discussed the interview with them. Some spoke of the experience of being involved in the research, while others gave details of the content of their interviews. This brings to light the complexity of giving reassurances of confidentiality, as although I could assure participants of confidentiality as a researcher I could not issue assurances of other peoples' commitment to do the same when they chose to share the contents of their interview with other participants.

There is often a difficulty between being honest about the research and creating bias. Being honest about the research involves telling the respondent the full nature and purpose of the research, however providing a full and accurate account of the research may bias the outcome. The respondent may only provide information that they consider relevant to the research and thus leave out important and pivotal information. For example two of the young women said that they had nothing to contribute because they had not been involved in violent incidents. It was only after further discussion with these two young women about their general beliefs and attitudes that they felt more comfortable being interviewed and disclosing information.

The participants may provide deep and painful information about themselves without the researcher realising the emotional impact that this may have on the respondent. In addition, participating in this study may undermine the young woman in the eyes of her colleagues, friends, bosses and users of the drop-in centre. There may be long term consequences including loss of employment or promotion because it is deemed that the respondent's past behaviour is at odds with the ethos and aims of the

centre. It may also undermine the young woman's professional standing in the drop-in centre with fellow colleagues. With regard to clients of the drop in centre and the college, the young women's past behaviour may colour the workers' and tutors' attitude towards them. It may have an impact upon the facilities available to them; for example, they may be restricted from residential workshops, etc

Research participants and sampling.

The interviews were conducted at a drop-in centre for young women, a further education college and finally e-mail interviews were conducted through a university. The drop-in centre was chosen because I had previously been a volunteer there. As such I assumed that gaining access would be a relatively easy process. In the first instance, I telephoned the co-ordinator of the centre and made an appointment to discuss the research with her. At this meeting, I was assigned a worker who would assist me in gaining access to the young women. This person recommended the best time to attend the centre in order to discuss the research with the young women themselves. Furthermore, she suggested that I spend some time in the centre getting to know the young women; this would also enable the young women to get to know me and build up a relationship with me.

When making contact with the college I initially telephoned the personnel department. The department then put me in contact with the head of the health and social care school. I had a number of meetings with the head of department regarding the aims and objectives of the research, and also ethical issues such as confidentiality. Once the head of the department was satisfied with the information given and reassurances over the welfare of the young women I was given the help and assistance of a senior tutor in the department. In the first instance we organised a number of meetings to discuss the research and also the practicalities of conducting the interviews, including the availability of a room, time allocated for each interview, and

the number of young women to take part in the research. The senior tutor was very keen for the young women to participate in the research because it would be valuable experience for the students in their own studies, as they had to complete a research module and they could use the experience of the interview to support their study, however she was aware of the need for confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. As such she did not put pressure on the young women to volunteer, but gave them all the information about the research and asked to leave their name on a piece of paper at the end of the class if they wanted to volunteer.

Initially I intended to select all the participants randomly from the centres database and the college and university registers and then ask for volunteers from these random samples. However, I opted to forgo the random selection and instead asked for volunteers to be interviewed. The decision was made mainly because I felt that asking young women to discuss such a sensitive topic with a relative stranger might be embarrassing, painful or traumatic. In addition, while spending time at both the drop-in centre and the college I became aware that these young women were discussing my presence and asking questions as to why I was there, this raised an ethical issue for me with regard to the selection process. I did not want to cause concern among the young women as to why they were being asked to volunteer and others were not. I was also aware that I could offer the young women nothing in return for their participation. Although this method of sampling might be regarded as methodologically unsound, because people who volunteer to participate may be more likely to be affected in some way by the topic. For example, these volunteers may have been physically aggressive themselves, bullied, a bully, or involved in a number of confrontations either as a victim or perpetrator, a random sample may not have identified themselves as any of these. A number of researchers have noted how information and contacts in ethnographic research may come from individuals who are marginal or who are keen and

willing to voice their opinion. As such these young women may not be representative and as a result the data cannot be generalised (Blau, 1964 in Bryman, 1988.)

Face-to-face interviews

A total of 22 face-to-face interviews were conducted, the first 10 were conducted in the drop-in centre and remaining 12 in a further education college. Initially I was present at the drop-in centre for approximately 3 hours a day, twice a week. This enabled me to build up a relationship with the staff, volunteers, and clients and organise appointments for the interviews. The majority of interviews were scheduled on separate days because of respondent's commitments; however, two interviews were arranged for the same day. When this occurred I usually spent the time between interviews helping out in the centre. This help usually consisted of general administration duties and making tea and coffee.

In order to conduct the interviews I was allocated an office that was situated next to the crèche at the front of the building on the main road. Because of the position of the office, there was quite a lot of background noise from the road traffic and the children in the crèche. However, the office was private and out of bounds to clients and as such this meant that there were very few interruptions.

The number of volunteers from the college totalled twelve and the interviews were conducted over a period of two days. This was in order to maintain the participants' interest in the research. All the interviews took place at the college and in college time. It was also practical for the students as they were at the college and fitted the interviews around their studies. Each interview held at the college began with me thanking the young women for their time. This was followed by an explanation of the research and also a review of the ethical element of the research including

a statement about anonymity and confidentiality. At this stage I also made it clear to each participant that they could withdraw from the research at any time and that they were not obliged to continue if they felt uncomfortable or distressed. None of the participants discontinued the interviews. I also explained that I preferred to tape-record each discussion so that I could concentrate on what was said and not be distracted by writing copious amounts of notes. Furthermore, assurances were made that the tapes would be transcribed verbatim and then destroyed. No one objected to the use of the tape-recorder, and usually within a few minutes, participants appeared to forget about it.

The majority of the interviews were carried out in a relaxed and friendly manner. The narrative interview gave the young women time and space to think about events and incidents. Some of the young women had no difficulty in narrating their story and were able to talk for over an hour. There were two interviews that tended to resemble a question and answer format and these lasted for approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The majority of the interviews lasted somewhere between 50 minutes and 1 hour and 20 minutes. At the end of each interview I asked each young woman if there was anything else they would like to say. Generally, all said that there was not, they felt they were given plenty of time and opportunity to discuss what was important to them. Some asked if what they had said was what I wanted to hear. On reflection this could be due to the fact that these young women initially said that they did not have anything interesting to say with regard to aggressive or violent behaviour, it was only after they had taken a few minutes to reflect that they began to recall events.

The nature of the topic made me aware that some of the young women might become distressed by recalling unpleasant or traumatic experiences. As a result I arranged that my liaison worker at the drop-in centre and the senior tutor at the college be on hand should the young women want to talk

to some-one. I also talked to them after the interview myself and asked them how they felt with regard to what they had talked about. After each interview there was generally an opportunity to have a coffee and a chat with each of them. It was on these occasions that the young women would often ask me questions about my personal background. For example, they asked if I had children, and how old they were, if I worked, how long I had been at the university, and what I was going to do when I finished this research. As Darlington and Scott (2002: 61) have indicated:

> Saying yes to a cup of tea that is offered can be an important message of acceptance of the interviewees as a person. ... It is more likely to provide the time and space for a real and meaningful interaction that enables both researcher and participant to effectively disengage from the relationship. ... It is important that they feel they have been dealt with sensitively and not left feeling emotionally raw or used.

On a number of occasions, the young women and I talked quite generally about the topic of violence and aggression, about newspaper articles and some anecdotal stories about friends. Two of the young women at the drop-in centre were not interested in small talk and when the interview was completed this signalled the end of any further talk. At the college there was not the opportunity to spend as much time with the young women after the interviews, but there was time to offer reassurances and make sure that they were not too distressed by the interview. I did however suggest that they could make an appointment with the college counsellor if they felt they needed someone to talk to, who would listen to them without judgment.

Email interviews

In order to overcome some of the difficulties of gaining access to participants for this research (see previous sections) I decided to conduct a

number of interviews by email, I conducted 13 interviews in total[9] but was only able to analyse 10. Initially I contacted a number of university societies and sports clubs in order to recruit participants, however the timing of the meeting with the members clashed with examinations and sporting torments. To overcome this problem I asked the young women if it would be more convenient to conduct the interviews by email. There were a number of young women who said that this would be more acceptable. On reflection I decided to send a poster to all female students through the university email server system. The poster invited female students aged between 18 and 26 to participate in the research. These email interviews gave me access to potential students from a variety of backgrounds which helped me to gain a broader social class distribution. These young women were also familiar with electronic systems and as such were an ideal group for this method of data collection.

Once I received responses from potential participants I sent each one a carefully worded consent form (see Appendix B) and further information (see Appendix C) regarding the research and the research method being used. These forms were the same as those distributed to young women who participated in the face-to-face interviews. Before the interviews began I decided to send introductory questions based on background information including how old the participant was, some family background, and also educational background. This not only allowed me to gain demographic information but also to establish some rapport with potential young woman. Once this was completed I sent each participant the four main narrative questions. After receiving these replies I sent further questions related to the original answers, these questions were aimed at probing and expanding information. The amount and frequency of responses between

[9] Three email interviews were started but not completed. One participant was going to work abroad and was not able to complete the interview and requested that I did not include her interview. The second participant was going home and did not want to continue the interview she asked to be withdrawn. The third participant did not want to continue and asked to be withdrawn

the researcher and participants depended on each individual interview, and as such some of young women provided lengthy narratives, while others provided narratives that were shorter and less descriptive.

Along with the ethical issues that need to be considered when conducting either face-to-face or email interviews, I was also aware that establishing rapport and using verbal and non-verbal cues could all pose a problem throughout the email interviews, but overall this did not appear to become a major problem. In some cases I felt that the email interviews were more honest and open than the face-to-face interviews. For example, four participants said that they would not have talked so openly about some issues if they had been interviewed face-to-face. One participant also said she had not spoken to anyone about the sexual abuse she had suffered and had only spoken to me about it because of the anonymity afforded to her by the email interview. She felt safe in the knowledge that if we passed on the corridor I could not identify her through her physical features. However, I did hold information about the young women in the form of their email address and their name. This information was held in strictest confidence and was not made available to anyone else. Each email was printed to form a hard copy and then deleted from my email system in order to minimize the risk of other people accessing the information.

A major problem which I found hard to overcome was how to use probing questions. With face-to-face interviews it is much easier to ask follow up or probing questions to expand and make clear an answer. The immediacy of face-to-face interviews allows the interviewer to ask probing or follow up questions such as 'how did that make you feel', there and then while the discussion is still on going. However, with email interviews this immediacy is missing. I decided the best way to overcome this was to remind the participant what they had said word for word and then ask the probing or follow-up question. In some cases this proved difficult, one

respondent came back and said that she had not answered the question in that way and then gave a different answer to the original question. However, the majority of participants provided very rich and informative data.

There was also the problem of participants ignoring or only providing very limited responses to questions that they did not like or found difficult. This problem was much easier to overcome with face-to-face interviews. Firstly I left a period of silence in which the participants could think and if this did not bring forward a response I was able to probe and refocus the interview. So in this respect it was more difficult for face-to-face participants to ignore or side track difficult or uncomfortable questions. This however did not mean that I did not make any attempts to elicit a response from email participants. On the contrary I would reformulate the question or send probing questions in order to gain a response. In the majority of cases this worked but in some cases no matter how many times I asked the question, reformulated it, or probed I still could not elicit a response. One way around this dilemma was to pay very careful attention to the way in which I worded questions. I took care for questions and other communications not to sound judgemental. In some instances questions were reformulated a number of times before emailing them to the young women in order to avoid ambiguities or leading questions.

The main advantage of conducting email interviews on sensitive topics is the anonymity afforded to participants. The young women expressed their relief at discussing violence in this way as they felt free to discuss negative emotions and experiences without fear of being condemned and/or rejected. Moreover, research has shown that using the internet makes people feel less self-conscious and less aware of being judged for their behaviour, this in turn allowed people to disclose intimate information while at the same time maintaining distance and personal space (Turkle,

1995; Whitty & Gavin, 2001). As Adams et al (2005: 1295) have asserted, the anonymity of cyberspace allows internet users to express themselves in ways that might be constrained in their real-world interactions. Thus the use of the internet provided rich data that may have not been forthcoming in face-to-face interviews and as such this proved to be an invaluable research tool for examining violence.

This data collection method could be criticised for not being able to identify the young women participating in the research. Especially as the email server list contained both male and female students and as such I could not be sure that the only students who replied to the email were female. For example, how did I know that the young women were who they said they were since I could not see them face-to-face and as such could not guarantee who they were. In some cases the email addresses contained the name of the student and so in these cases there was information as to the identity of these young women. In other cases the email address consisted of a sequence of numbers and letters and therefore made it difficult to be sure that these students were young women. As I was unable to identify the young women, I used a number of checks and balances in looking for signs that the young women were who they said they were in order to bring out the true accounts. This was accomplished through building up some rapport with each young woman before the interview commenced.

As previously discussed I sent each respondent a number of emails over a period of a week in order to obtain demographic information, for example, how old they were, did they have siblings, if so how old were they, were they employed, what degree they were reading, what year of study they were in. Not only did these initial emails provide useful information about the young women but they also allowed me to check for any inconsistencies before the main interview commenced. Although this

method cannot fully guarantee that the young women were who they said they were it did put these measures in place to help identify as far as possible any inconsistencies. This problem is not restricted to email interviews rather it is true for all research data collection methods including telephone and postal surveys, as such all researchers have to take on trust that the respondent is who they say they are, and more importantly that they are describing their experiences. With regard to the 'truthfulness' of accounts the interviewer conducting email interviews finds themselves in the same position as those conducting face-to-face interviews with regard to the truthfulness and accuracy of accounts.

Analysis

As previously discussed the problem with recruiting participants for this research was that interviews had to be conducted in block sessions. The main draw-back with conducting the interviews in block sessions was that I could not transcribe the tapes and analyse the data before conducting the next interview, therefore I could not conduct the constant comparative method. As I intended to use grounded theory this severely restricted my ability to conduct the research using the systematic techniques and procedures espoused by the designers of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Concurrent interviewing and analysis is a preferred methodological practice in analytic induction. In the process of analysing data, understandings derived from interviews conducted later in the research process are tested against and used to illuminate interviews conducted early in the project through a 'constant comparative process' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 65), which refines both broad coding categories and analyses of specific interviews.

In grounded theory analysis is guided by what emerges from the data rather than by a priori theoretic formulations (Charmaz, 1983). The concepts that emerge become coding categories that provide conceptual frameworks for

analysis. These coding categories and themes from each interview were colour coded to help identify similarities and differences and were then supported by direct quotes from the interviews (Patton, 2002). These coding categories are reshaped and refined throughout the analysis and are then woven together to permit a holistic, procedural rendering of lived experience. So although the idea of 'pure' grounded theory has been called into question as it denies any pre-existing knowledge, ideas, theories and hunches that the researcher brings to the research, there were certain aspects of the theory that were adhered to, these included the use of codes and categories, as well as memos, which were used to develop themes.

My analysis more closely resembled the later work of Glaser (1992) who focused more on the emergence of themes which the researcher identifies while becoming immersed in the data unlike Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) who remained firmly fixed on the notion of rigorous and systematic coding and methodological procedures. So although my research was not produced using the exact procedures of grounded theory it did use elements of the theory that were relevant to this research. This is supported by Denscombe (2003), who notes that the term grounded theory is used to describe a broad approach which has diversified from its original formula and as such can be used selectively according to the needs and requirements of particular research projects.

Finally, in analysing the data I opted to use a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis tool, Nvivo, which is specifically designed to code and categorise data, which can be used to aid the generation of theory (Robson, 2002). Initially this method was expedient and helped speed up the data analysis process. However it soon became clear that I was losing sight of the voices of the young women and as such I felt I was becoming distanced from the data. As my intention and aim was to tell the young women's stories and let the data speak I decided to transfer to the manual method

which helped me to feel immersed in the data and to become familiar with the themes and content. It also assisted me in becoming familiar with the young women all over again, which I felt I had previously lost sight of.

Recurrent themes from the interviews were chosen for further analysis and interpretation, and importantly they were the concepts used by the young women themselves. It is important that direct quotes from the young women's stories are used to fully understand their feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. As such there will be little attempt to interpret their words, this will ensure that the reader is able to read exactly what the young women have to say. Thus the following chapters will focus on the young women's own words, and as such editing and interpretation will be kept to a minimum and will only be used when necessary. As Plummer (2001) has highlighted, interpretation can be placed on a continuum, what he terms 'a continuum of constructions'. At one extreme the researcher does not allow the respondent's words to be heard, this form is usually associated with theory construction, 'the sociologist's "pure" construction' (ibid). At the opposite end of the continuum is where the researcher publishes the respondent's own accounts, their own 'pure construction' with no analysis, editing, or interpretation. Therefore, this research lies in the middle of the continuum, what Plummer terms 'systematic thematic analysis'. Here the participants speak for themselves; however the researcher arranges their voices into themes. As such there will be some interpretation and selection of the most appropriate quotes to support the themes. Moreover, although selection and interpretation will take place, the quotes from the young women will remain in their entirety.

As highlighted in the introduction, the purpose of this research was to hear the voices of the young women; therefore, by focusing on the stories as told by the young women themselves, it was possible to explore their participation and use of both direct and indirect violence. It was also

possible to explore the context in which these encounters took place, and also to examine young women's attitudes to the use of violence. Finally, the narratives of the young women allowed me to examine their motivations as to whether to use violence or not, and if not the strategies that the young women employ in order to avoid violent incidents.

Reflections on the research

Conducting this research has enabled me to gain a significant insight into the dynamics of young women's beliefs and experiences of violence, and their life experiences. It has made me consider more carefully and fully the research process. It has highlighted the difficulties and dilemmas which any/and every researcher has to face, as well as the experiences of the research participants. It has also highlighted methodological strengths and weaknesses of the research methods chosen and also the difficulty in gaining access to participants.

I was initially concerned about 'using' these young women for the research, however I felt I have overcome these anxieties by asking for volunteers and by offering the young women and others involved in the research a presentation which provided an example of social research in practice. Some of the information gained from conducting this research has been adapted and used in a number of workshops at the drop-in centre, for example workshops on coping strategies such as avoiding and negotiating violent situations. In addition a number of the young women have expressed their gratitude at being allowed to talk about violence in their lives without being judged, this was especially true in the accounts about dating violence.

As an older female researcher I did feel somewhat 'different' to the young women I interviewed. This was most apparent with the younger of the single women. I was several years older and married with three grown

children who were of similar age to a number of the young women. I was also in a relatively more powerful position to them as I was the one who initially directed the interviews and set the agenda. However, I feel that by making use of narrative interviews the young women were the ones who directed the data. They decided what was important to them; they discussed what they saw as important issues and events. As a result, I did not feel in a superior position to them.

One of the main criticisms of this research could be directed at the sampling, that is, the use of volunteers. This meant that I could not be sure why these particular young women agreed to take part. Some may have volunteered because they had either been victims or perpetrators of violence. The aim of this research was to explore young women's understandings and experiences of violence and as such was not intended in producing a representative sample, which could be generalised to the wider population. I intended that the research be small-scale and exploratory.

In this exploration a number of themes emerged from the data. These formed the basis of the following chapters. The next chapter deals with the theme of the young women's self-identification as non-fighters and the strategies they employ in order to avoid and negotiate violence. This is followed by an exploration of 'mean' behaviour including 'bitchiness', name-calling, spreading rumours and isolation. This is followed by those accounts were young women fought, but provided a number of justifications and excuses for their behaviour. In these accounts the young women did not identify themselves as violent instead they used a number of other more acceptable identifications such as bad-tempered, frustrated or angry. The final empirical chapter explores the issue of violence from intimate partners, what as been termed 'dating violence', sexual assaults and child abuse.

Chapter 4

'I'm not a fighter'

Fear of crime, especially violent crime, is argued to be most prevalent among women. British Crime Surveys (BCS) have continually found that women have higher levels of fear of crime than men. This fear it is argued is a fear of men's violence, that is, their perceived vulnerability to men's physical and sexual violence (Hanmer & Maynard, 1987; Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1990;1995). In addition, feminist research in the area of fear of crime has focused on understanding personal fear of crime among women as a means by which patriarchal social control can be maintained (Stanko, 1990; Madriz, 1997). Madriz (1997: 2) maintains that:

> Fear of crime contributes to the social control of women by perpetuating the gender inequalities that maintain patriarchal relations and undermine women's power, rights and achievements.

Crime surveys have also found that it is men who are more likely to become victims of crime than women. These findings may be tainted by the fact that women, by virtue of socialization, are more open to admitting their fears or acknowledging their unwillingness to put themselves at risk. In addition, women may possess a greater awareness of their vulnerability to violence because of their socially disadvantaged position. In trying to find explanations for women's higher level of fear of crime four theories have been proposed, including the argument that if the true victimisation rates of women were known it would be higher than that of men (Pain, 1993; 1997). It has also been proposed that men may be less accurate in their assessment of risk and this may have an impact on their experiences of fear of crime (Smith & Torstenson, 1997). Additionally Sutton and Farrell (2005: 219) found that 'men, more than women, feel some pressure to suppress their experiences of this fear'. As such men may not wish to

appear less masculine by admitting to a personal fear of crime (Goodey, 2005; Sutton & Farrell, 2005).

Since the publication of Stanko's *Everyday Violence* (1990) little has been written about the precautionary strategies women use to reduce not only their fear of crime but also avoiding or reducing becoming a victim of crime. When these strategies are discussed it is usually glossed over (see for example, Batchelor, et al, 2001; Burman, 2003) undermining the importance of such strategies. They usually focus on protecting property, including homes and cars, learning self-defence and avoiding dark and isolated places, that is protecting oneself from men's violence. However the young women in this study talked about the importance of being able to negotiate or avoid real or perceived threats of violence which went beyond those discussed in the literature, including deference to others. They also placed great importance on acquiring the skills and knowledge to use these strategies successfully. Additionally, the literature on fear of crime has generally focused on women using a variety of precautionary strategies against male violence including sexual assault. It has generally overlooked the ways in which girls and women use these precautionary strategies against other girls and women.

Not all of the young women in this study only employed precautionary strategies against potential male violence. They also employed precautionary strategies against real or perceived threats of violence from other women. Therefore this study furthers Stanko's (1990) argument that women have a universal fear of men, and men have a particular fear of men. The young women's accounts in this study demonstrated that women not only have a universal fear of men but they also have a particular fear of other women. In addition this study departs from the findings of Jones (2004) who found that the young women in her study used fighting and their reputation as a 'violent person' to negotiate violence. In contrast, the

young women in this study did not regard fighting as a negotiating strategy rather they spoke of using violence only when the preventative strategies failed.

The young women's accounts also demonstrated the uneven distribution of fear of violence and the variety of strategies they employed in order to avoid or negotiate violence. For example, Kelly, (a 17 year old college student) said she had no previous personal experience of being a victim of crime but was cautious of socialising in public places such as bars and clubs. Julie (twenty two years old and from the drop in centre) on the other hand had been involved in a number of violent incidents but still frequented the bars and clubs in which these incidents occurred. Thus some of the young women took more precautionary strategies than others throughout their everyday activities, while others only spoke of employing these strategies immediately after a violent incident and then later resumed, what they called their 'normal stuff' [behaviour].

This study also adds to the literature which suggests that women turn to men for protection (Stanko, 1990). In some situations these young women turned to other women rather than men for protection and as an aid in avoiding and negotiating violence. It was suggested that other women could provide protection without fear that this protection would turn threatening or sexual. For example Tiffany recounted how she sought the protection of a male stranger when a group of males were chasing her, only for this to bring her further fear from her protector when he made sexual advances towards her. Tiffany said she had learned through her own experiences that the male as protector was a fallacy. As a result of their own experiences and knowledge these young women turned to other women for protection. Tiffany's experiences are in contradiction to official crime prevention literature which stresses that 'Women need men to

protect them, and women who have men to protect them will experience less fear' (Stanko, 1990: 86).

Although some of the young women in this study could and did fight there where others who attempted to avoid violent conflicts at all costs, whether as victims or perpetrators. Research has encouraged us to reconsider current discussion about 'violent girls' that tend to pathologise young women ... who use violence while ignoring the structural and cultural context within which young women negotiate conflict and violence and the variety of strategies they use to do so' (Jones, 2004: 61). Many of the young women in this study utilised a variety of strategies to avoid and/or negotiate what they perceived to be potentially dangerous situations, places and/or people. They attempted to employ a number of strategies including confining themselves to their homes, and negotiating violence including walking away, and talking things through. When these strategies failed some young women fought, but for some the strategies were successful. The fear of becoming a victim of violence encouraged these young women to take precautions that were often spatial in nature (Koskela, 1999) such as avoiding certain places and restricting their activities to certain times of the day.

The young women who participated in this research spoke of employing precautionary strategies against physical violence whether perpetrated by other women and/or men, and against sexual assaults. They also used negotiations and employed avoidance strategies in order to ensure that they and people important to them, including family members and friends, felt confident in their social interactions, including, socializing in public places. Two young women told how they frequently spent a great deal of their time at home or in the home of relatives and friends. This type of strategy had severely restricted young women's social interactions and freedom. This was a strategy that could prove very useful for those young women

avoiding retaliation after a conflict/confrontation. When in public spaces these young women relied on past experiences and gossip and used this information to avoid places and people deemed to be potential sources of conflict. They chose to remove themselves from the areas in which the majority of violent conflicts were most likely to occur.

Many of these young women were acutely aware of the consequences of failing to skilfully negotiate the various forms of conflict in their lives, which included social isolation, name-calling, and/or serious injuries. However, these young women were also aware that at times the use of violence could help secure respect and security by being seen as a person who could defend themselves. It was within these contexts that these young women made decisions about how they would, and/or how they would not; respond to perceived and real threats of violence in their everyday lives. Thus these young women had learnt two lessons in response to violent situations/confrontations. Firstly the value of non-violent responses which included avoidance and negotiating strategies, and secondly the lesson that violence was a potential tool in violent situations/conflicts when non-violent responses had been exhausted.

In some situations the use of violence was considered a necessary resource. This is demonstrated in the following quote from Tricia, who believed in negotiations but relied on violence if this failed,

> it's never acceptable to use violence cos there's always a way you can get out of it [violence], you can negotiate with the person and you don't always have to solve something with violence, but sometimes violence can come in handy.

This contradiction could be seen most forcefully in accounts about supporting family and friends. Young women spoke of using violence to stick up for family members and friends when they were either verbally or physically assaulted. In these situations young women did not adopt

avoidance strategies or 'just let it go me head', rather as Tricia said 'but if it comes to the family or me friends then I really will go at the person'. For many of these young women sticking up for family and friends also included ideas of gaining and/or maintaining respect, not only for the young women themselves but also for family members.

This chapter will discuss a number of themes that emerged from the data with regard to the trajectory of avoiding and negotiating strategies which are used by the young women when they feel that they are facing real or perceived threats of violence. The first strategy included avoiding certain places that were perceived to be potential sites of conflict and people who the young women thought or believed to use violence. The second theme which emerged was concerned with negotiating real or perceived acts of violence, these strategies included talking things through, walking away and deference to the aggressor. When these strategies failed a number of the young women used physical violence, that is when all else failed these young women fought.

Avoidance strategies

Lessons in life

This section focuses on the young women learning how and when to use negotiating and avoidance strategies. These lessons are either learned through their own previous experiences of violence, or knowledge and advice passed on from family, friends and peers. When the young women have learned these lessons in life they then pass them on to others including their own children.

Some of the young women had no, or a very limited history and experience of witnessing and participating in violence and were quick to distinguish themselves from people who did use violence. Abby recalled how her friend was being taunted to fight a fellow student at school, but that she

had repeatedly refused because she did not regard herself as a fighter, 'me mates really shy, and she's not a fighter at all, she can fight but she doesn't get into fights or nothing'. Her friend would always try to resolve conflicts using a number of strategies including talking things through or walking away. The friend insisted on not getting involved in the conflict and this resulted in increased taunts and name-calling which lasted for about three weeks. The antagonist and her friends would follow Abby's friend around and try to provoke her into a fight by calling her names, bumping into her, or spreading false rumours about her.

When Abby's friend's aunts were informed of the situation they insisted that she face up to the antagonist. They sized up the situation and ordered their niece back to fight. The aunts went with their niece and Abby to ensure that there was a fair fight and that the antagonist and her friends abided by the rules of a fair fight and did not 'jump in' (that they did not all start fighting with her), they ensured that the fight remained one-to-one between the antagonist and their niece. 'My mate's aunts were like holding the kids back so that they couldn't get involved, so that it was just the two of them fighting'. The aunts were not concerned whether their niece won the fight, rather what was important was that their niece met the challenge and stood-up for herself in order to put an end to the conflict. They insisted that their niece stood up to the intimidation and it was this standing up to the challenge that was regarded as important, not whether or not she actually won the fight.

The outcome was that the antagonist refused to fight and 'me mate was so angry cos she'd been being followed around, called names and threatened for like weeks and she was scared, so she just jumped on her and fought'. In this incident the ability to 'stand up for herself' resulted in Abby's friend having new found respect and status which initially came from the antagonist and then from fellow students in the school. Although Abby's

friend fought on this occasion neither she nor Abby considered her a 'fighter' as this was the only fight that she had been involved in. Rather she continued to use avoidance strategies when she found herself in what she perceived to be violent or threatening situations, she knew the value of trying to negotiate and/or use other avoidance strategies.

As we have seen, only when these strategies did not prove successful were the young women likely to use violence. Some of the young women learnt that violence in these situations should only be used as a last resort, when all else had failed. Some young women taught these lessons to their children. An example of these teachings was found in the account given by Jessica. This first account involved her young son and the children of one of her friends. This confrontation began when Jessica's son was being 'picked on by her friend's older children'. Jessica tried to resolve the situation by speaking to her friend and asking her to stop her children bullying her son. After approaching her friend, Jessica said the problem escalated between herself and her friend. When this strategy did not solve the situation Jessica told her son to hit the other children back, 'I just said to my son hit them back, don't just let them hit you, hit them back, you have got a hand to hit them back, cos if you don't they'll just keep hitting you'. The overriding concern for Jessica was that her son should learn to 'stand up' for himself and fight back if avoidance strategies have no affect on the situation. She strongly expressed her belief that her son had to learn not to be picked on, 'at such a young age he needs to know that he shouldn't get bullied'. In this situation Jessica believed that her friend's children had 'to learn that they could not just go round hitting people'. Jessica taught her son the value of negotiating violent confrontations, however she was aware that these lessons should be accompanied with the important lesson that violence is a potentially useful tool, 'I always tell him to walk away or something, but if that doesn't work then I tell him to just hit them'.

Jessica also taught this same lesson to her daughter. This account involved not only her daughter and another child, but also Jessica and her neighbours. Jessica's daughter was being bullied by an older child who lived next door, the bully was twelve years old and Jessica's daughter was five. The bully was picking on Jessica's daughter every day, this bullying included name-calling, throwing things and hitting. In an attempt to solve the conflict Jessica approached the child's mother to explain the situation and get it resolved. However this only served to make the situation worse. The conflict escalated and resulted in not only the fighting between the children but also conflict between the parents. When Jessica explained to the neighbour's that 'your girl has thrown a bottle at my little girl and has hit her and could you make sure that she doesn't do it again' the mother called her husband who immediately came out into the street and pushed Jessica. Jessica's first reaction was to hit the mother but she quickly decided against it as the mother was pregnant and Jessica thought it would have been inappropriate to hit a pregnant woman. However she expressed the thought that the woman was a coward because she involved her husband in a dispute between two women. When expressing her thoughts about the husband who pushed her, Jessica held very strong views about a man hitting a woman, she thought it was highly inappropriate for a man to hit a woman whatever the provocation, 'I just thought he was a coward, he was a man and he pushed me. Whatever the reason a man should not hit a woman'. Jessica did not retaliate but told how she finally got the upper hand in the conflict, 'I got me satisfaction when they moved out, they got evicted and I just laughed at them when they were going, I won in the end cos it was they who had to move out'.

These lessons in life were also discussed by Zara, she said her mother has been a good role model throughout her life, and she described her mother as a 'peace-keeper'.

> My mum is always the peace-keeper between everyone. I mean I have two brothers and so she is the go-between for the whole family and she does a very good job of it. She's quite sensitive herself and I think her mentality is more "anything for a quite life", rather than "I have to be right and get my own way"... My mum stays neutral and accepts everyone's flaws and tries to explain how the other person in the situation feels and not really excuse anything they have done but explain why and defuse as much tension as possible. She's very understanding and forgiving.

Through this teaching Zara has learnt the value of using avoidance and negotiating strategies. She uses these strategies in a number of situations that she perceives to be violent or threatening and she has found them successful to date. Although Zara was taught these strategies she was also aware that in the future there may be occasions when she needs to use violence. As demonstrated by the accounts discussed above, knowing how and when to fight is regarded as a necessary skill when all else fails in a potentially real or perceived violent situation.

Avoiding dangerous people

Restricting one's social relationships was a strategy that only three of these young women used in order to avoid violence. For example Kirsty, a university student, said how she would not become friends or acquaintances with others who had a reputation for fighting. It was thought that if you associate with a 'trouble causer' or a 'fighter' you were much more likely to get involved in violent situations and/or conflicts.

This restricting of social relationships and guarding against danger from strangers (Green & Singleton, 2006) was also discussed by Joanne, a 20 year old university student, of the relationship between herself and her housemate who Joanne identified as a violent and aggressive person:

> I mean I try to distance myself as much as possible from her because she's someone I don't consider to be a friend, not even an

> acquaintance, she's just a person I happen to live with. I mean I've got use to it kind of thing, er the abuse I do get. But it's just something I've learnt to ignore because at the end of the day it's her problem because she needs to deal with it and if she wants to be angry and use aggression then that's fine by me because I know that every time I react she wins and then you give them more stimulus and more motivation to go for it again. I've stopped going any where near her, but like now she's moved out but like I don't go any where near her at the uni either cos I know what she's like and that she'll just like be aggressive over nothing, she'll just blow up for nothing.

Although this strategy restricted Joanne's social relationships with other members of the house and fellow students' she considered this a small price to pay in order to avoid violent confrontations. This strategy also affected Joanne's relationship with her boyfriend and family members as she found it difficult to invite them round to her home as she was wary that her housemate would 'kick off when they were around, I always had it in the back of my mind "would she explode while they were there". You know it's not nice to invite people around and then have someone kicking off like that, it just causes more trouble'.

The unpredictable nature of this behaviour caused Joanne and the other housemates concern because there were no warning signs before the explosion of aggression and violence making it was difficult to avoid. This situation caused tensions among the other housemates, who felt like they were 'walking on egg shells'. It was this unpredictable nature of the conflicts that was the deciding factor in Joanne's decision to isolate herself from her housemate, she considered this a small price to pay for the security this strategy afforded her. Avoiding this housemate did prove difficult at times for Joanne and on these occasions she would use a variety of other strategies including ignoring the behaviour when it was possible, this was a strategy that Joanne was well versed in because she had used it on many occasions with this young woman. Generally though, when Joanne could not avoid this young woman or ignore the behaviour she

would walk away. Throughout this account Joanne repeatedly made comments about violence being senseless, that it does not solve the problem but generally makes the situation worse. However, although Joanne used a variety of strategies including avoiding this housemate as much as possible there were some occasions when she would be provoked into arguing or fighting back and this reaction would on many occasions result in the escalation of the aggression. Therefore as with many of the avoidance strategies employed by many of these young women there were some situations when they proved be unsuccessful.

Lucy, a 17 year old college student, made a distinction between fighting people she knew, for example, siblings and friends and fighting strangers, she would try to avoid fights and other violent confrontations with strangers. In her narrative she recalled a number of fights and arguments she had with both friends and peers, but she wished me to understand that she does not fight when she goes out to town (drinking in the clubs and bars in the city centre). She explained how she tried to stay away from trouble when she was out socialising. This involved identifying other young women who she perceived to be 'fighters' and keeping her distance from them. Lucy said that you could easily identify young women who are 'fighters' or who use violence, 'You can just see the girls that you know are out for trouble, you can just see the ones who want to fight, so you just stay away from them'. In support of her belief about being able to identify fighters, Lucy provided the following account,

> It's like people who are drunk, okay they bump into you, they say they're sorry, it happens, stand on your toes, it happens, but some girls just go over the top for someone bumping into them or standing on their toe, but like there's no need for it, like they just use that as an excuse to start a fight, it's anything for a fight. You know, other people would just like accept the apology and get on with it, you know, enjoying their night out. But like for some girls it's like they don't have a good night out until they've had a fight.

Lucy, further explained that she is always vigilant when she is out in town at night, 'I always try to be aware of what's going on, to see, if like, if there's a fight I try and move away, you know I don't want to get involved in a fight especially when it's over nothing, er, cos like there are girls who just want to fight when they've been drinking. I don't know, maybe it's like it gives them courage, maybe they wouldn't act like that as much if they didn't drink' [alcohol].

The following account from Tiffany also highlights the strategy of avoiding people who are perceived to be dangerous. She became aware of the reputation of one young woman through her relationship with a boy:

> I was involved with a boy for about a year; he had a baby to a girl whom he had told me he wasn't seeing anymore. Looking back I think I knew there was still something between them I just chose to ignore it. The girl in question was off the estate and she was someone to be feared if only by reputation. My friend and I where drunk one night walking home past her house which I was very wary about doing, it was somewhere I tried to avoid. She came over and put her arm round me neck pretending to be nice but she was squeezing me so I tried to kind of get her off me. She head butted me and punched and kicked me, my friend grabbed her off me and started fighting with her. All the boyfriends stood around and didn't try to help. I can remember being glad that I didn't get beat up as bad as I had imagined I would.

Tiffany had on many occasions avoided this young woman because of her reputation as a fighter, however on this occasion she, after having consumed a large amount of alcohol, with her friend decided to take a short cut home only to be confronted by the young woman. Although this strategy of avoiding what she perceived to be a dangerous person had been successful in the past, Tiffany let her guard down. While under the influence of alcohol she felt that she should not be the one to have to constantly be on her guard and instead did not police her own boundaries for her own safety. This account from Tiffany is consistent with studies that have found that consuming large amounts of alcohol appears to

precipitate such incidents and also increases the risk of becoming a victim of violence.

This was not the only account Tiffany provided of being involved in a conflict with a girl who had a reputation as a fighter. While recalling this second incident she told how she tried to avoid this young woman who had been 'going to do it for a long time so it was expected'. On this occasion Tiffany had tried on a number of occasions to avoid this girl only to be confronted by her when she was least expecting it and the girl 'head butted me and punched me, and she was like much older than me although she wasn't that much bigger, but I didn't fight back cos I thought that if I did she would only batter me worse'. These accounts demonstrated young women's ability to use these avoidance strategies but also highlights occasions when for one reason or another, the strategies were unsuccessful.

Avoiding dangerous places

The strategies that some of these young women employed to avoid confrontations not only isolated them from who they perceived to be violent people but also what they perceived to be potentially dangerous places. The fear of becoming a victim of physical violence was generally associated with the public sphere, for example, bars and clubs, certain estates, and places of transit including bus stops. These young women associated physical violence with certain environmental contexts (Pain, 1993; Valentine, 1992). Thus decisions concerning the places they go to are modified by the threat of violence (Koskela, 1999: 112). In addition this avoidance and fear of places that are perceived to be dangerous can serve as a powerful mechanism of self-regulation and self-exclusion from public spaces (Pain, 1997, 2001).

Nancy told how she did not go to pubs or clubs unless it was for a special occasion. Unlike a number of the other young women, she did not frequent

pubs and clubs in the city centre on a regular basis, she did not use them as a place for regular socialisation with friends. In her account she told how she did not like going into town after dark because she was afraid of the fights and shouting that she thought frequently took place there when people had been consuming alcohol. Studies on alcohol and situational factors and violence, support the belief that a substantial amount of violent incidents occur in and around licensed premises. These violent incidents were classified as serious assaults by researchers. Furthermore, the researchers found that 'some patrons are vulnerable to attack due to their extreme intoxication, when formal and informal controls are not sufficient to deter violence, and when potential offenders are drunk *and* frustrated, frustration perhaps being promoted by poor quality entertainment or by crowding' (Tomsen, Homel and Thommeny, 1991: 690, original emphasis).

A strategy employed by one group of friends included nominating one person to look after the group of friends when they socialised in clubs. The nominated woman would not consume alcohol when they went into town for a night out. The young women took it in turns not to drink. The young woman who took the role of care-taker for the evening was nicknamed the 'guardian angel'. This strategy ensured that there was one person who remained sober and this person would 'look after' the rest of the group. This included making sure that they did not have too much to drink, that they did not leave their drinks hanging about, this ensured that their drinks were not 'spiked' with drugs, that they all went to the toilets together, and that they all got home safely as the guardian angel would be the last person to be taken home in the taxi.

The young woman who narrated this account said this was a strategy that many of her friends and acquaintances used to avoid potentially dangerous incidents. This is also demonstrated in the following account by Angela,

who explained that they do not nominate a care-taker; rather they have a friend who does not exceed her limit when consuming alcohol she will only have a few alcoholic drinks and then consume soft drinks for the remainder of the night. This friend then takes on the role of care-taker and ensures that all the friends are safe, 'She'll like count us to make sure that we're all there, she watches what we are doing, if one of us goes the toilet she makes us all go together so that we don't lose each other. She's the sensible one'. This situation makes both Angela and her friends feel safe when they go socialising in the city centre as they know that if they were to find themselves in a dangerous situation their friend would employ a number of strategies such as talking things through to avoid violence.

While this strategy was employed by some young women and proved to be successful it was not a strategy employed by all the young women in this study. Anne's account of her attack by three girls in a night club demonstrated how vulnerable some young women can be (see chapter 6). After this attack Anne recalled how she became very wary and 'will make sure I have my wits about me all the time. For instance I don't go to the toilet by myself anymore when I'm out. I think it's safer if people are in numbers'. She told how:

> I'm more wary when in clubs and bars because I know what a bad effect drink can have on people and their judgement. Alcohol really changes people for the worse and it is in bars and clubs that you can really see that. I'm okay, normally it is mainly when in bars and clubs especially because glasses can be used so easily. The pubs and clubs shouldn't be allowed to use glasses, they should use some sort of plastic. I feel really sorry for people who have been scarred as a result of someone else's drunken stupidity.

Anne also spoke about how this attack changed her attitude about being 'care free' and thinking that 'it wouldn't happen to me'. After the attack Anne changed her behaviour when she was out in the clubs and bars she said that she was:

> … no-longer naïve and carefree. I'm more aware of what is going on around me and how much I drink. I take care where I'm going and won't go to clubs or bars that have a reputation for trouble. One time if someone said about not going to a certain place cos it had a lot of fights or whatever I would just shrug it off and tell that person not to be so stupid, but I've changed so much now, like I won't go to clubs where I know there is trouble and fighting.

It was only through experience that Anne has learnt the value of using avoidance strategies such as looking after each other, identifying and avoiding dangerous places. She said that she had also learnt another important lesson from the attack 'such things can make you a stronger person. I think that anything that happens in your life builds your character and makes you a stronger person, it is the tough times that make you grow as a person'.

Laura recalled how she would try to avoid a housing estate which was only a few miles from her home. She told how some of the girls on this estate had a reputation for causing trouble and how she would 'do anything to avoid confrontations with any of the girls off the nearby council estate'. However on one occasion she could not avoid passing by the estate and was confronted by a number of girls who lived there. This confrontation resulted in name-calling and insults and Laura recalled how lucky she had been that it had not resulted in a fight. After this incident she made every effort to avoid the estate even when this meant she had to travel around the estate resulting in longer travelling time. These accounts highlight the measures that a number of these young women took in order to secure their own personal boundaries and avoid violent confrontations including restricting their use of public space which Koskela (1999: 121) argues is not regarded as a serious constraint but rather a normal and accepted condition for women.

Negotiating strategies

Talking things through

Among the strategies adopted by some of the young women was talking things through, however this strategy was the least used strategy by the young women in this study, only seven spoke of using this strategy. Mandy's account demonstrated how 'talking things through' could defuse a potentially violent situation. She recounted how she approached a young woman who had been spreading rumours about her and calling her names. This she did away from the 'prying eyes' of an audience, this audience could include friends of both young women who could act as protagonists, that is, this audience could 'egg you on to fight even when you didn't want to'. She explained to the young woman that 'you don't even know me'. This brief exchange paved the way for further talks between the two young women and subsequently resulted in them, not becoming friends, but having a better understanding of each other, and it did resolve the conflict. Mandy also provided an account of the usefulness of being prepared to talk things through rather than fighting. In this account she identified herself as non-violent:

> I'm not a fighter; I'm not like one of them people. There's always better ways of sorting things out like just talking about things. Like I can talk about things and I can stay calm, but like I know people who start to talk to sort it out but then like just get frustrated and start shouting and then in the end the problem just gets worse like cos they're shouting louder and louder.

Talking things through was a strategy that Grace also used on a number of occasions, especially in her working environment. From her previous experiences of a conflict with a client of the drop-in centre Grace was reluctant to 'just ignore' someone when they were getting angry. She felt that this strategy of ignoring someone would most likely escalate the situation and only serve to frustrate the young woman further. Grace said 'I know how I would feel if somebody ignored me'. In this situation with the

client Grace thought that talking through the disagreement would help solve the problem. However she made it clear that she did not agree with what the young woman thought, but offered her advice on how to solve the problem and directed her to the right person who could help with her complaint.

As highlighted in the above account, talking things through is not always enough to defuse a potentially violent situation, listening to what a person has to say is just as important. Zara emphasised the importance of coming to an agreement and/or compromise with the other person:

> I try and defuse a situation by seeing both sides of the argument and trying to compromise and come to an agreement with the other person or people and also by trying to get the other person to see my point of view as well. I think it's important to stay open to other people's views, opinions and feelings. Although I must admit that it's difficult sometimes and I don't always practice what I preach but I try and keep in mind that I need to see the situation from the other person's point of view.

Talking things through was argued by these young women to be a mature and civilised manner of dealing with problems and potentially violent situations and/or confrontations. Many of these young women said that shouting and arguing only served to complicate the situation; they insisted that it worsens the situation because people say things they do not mean in the heat of the moment. When people use violence this becomes the main issue and the original problem is forgotten.

The following account given by Tricia also demonstrates the importance to these young women of supporting family members. The conflict began when Tricia's younger cousin was being bullied by a sister of one of Tricia's friend's. When Tricia was told about the bullying she approached her friend and explained the situation to her and asked her friend to speak to her sister in order for the bullying to cease. Tricia adopted this strategy

as she did not want the conflict to escalate and thought that her friend, being an older sister to the bully, would have some influence and guide the bully in understanding the hurt she was causing. On the first occasion this strategy worked well and initially the bullying stopped, however, when the bullying resumed and Tricia approached her friend for the second time to put an end to the bullying the strategy was not so successful.

On this second occasion an argument began between Tricia and her friend at which stage Tricia threatened her friend with violence if she did not stop her sister bullying Tricia's cousin. This threat of violence only served to escalate the conflict and Tricia's friend retorted with a challenge to fight there and then. Although the conflict escalated with both young women challenging each other it was Tricia who once again adopted avoidance strategies by walking away from the conflict. There were a number of reasons for Tricia adopting this particular strategy. Firstly she did not think that fighting was the correct way to resolve this situation, given that she was negotiating an end to the bullying of her cousin. Secondly, the conflict was with her friend, who was also a family friend, with both sets of parents also having a long friendship with each other. Tricia spoke of a clash of loyalties and the difficulty she felt in taking sides, 'maybe it's the respect I had for her, for her mum and my mum that I just stopped it and walked away' Thirdly, when the conflict began to escalate Tricia noticed that a group of fellow school girls had congregated around them:

> Like there were people just watching us. Like they just stopped and we were arguing in the corridor and people that were walking past just stopped and watched. They, you know what kids are like, they love a fight or argument and they were like eager to see a fight, like they just want you to go that bit further er, but I was just thinking, "I'm not going to give them a show".

Walking away

The majority of the young women who participated in this study said how they would not stay and fight, they would rather just walk away from the conflict if they could, even if that meant being called names. Pauline said that she would:

> not wait around and waste time trying to calm someone down when they were angry and out for a fight, no I'd rather just walk away and leave them to it. I'm not going to waste time trying to make them see that they are wrong. If they can't see that then that's their problem.

Walking away from a real or perceived violent situation was a strategy employed by Angela who participated in this research, she said, 'like if I see mates arguing and think it's going to get out of hand I say "come on let's go over there", like I think making people walk away is the best way to stop people fighting'. This was a strategy that Angela also employed when her boyfriend was arguing with a group of men in a club. She recalled how her boyfriend was annoyed by what she had done, not only for the fact of 'making him look stupid in front of the lads' but also because she could have got hurt in the fight. Angela's concern lay with avoiding the fight,

> I just wanted them to stop the fight cos not only did I not want it to happen but this lad's mates didn't want it to happen either, and so it was just like, it's one lad who, all this lad done was like bumped me by the shoulder, and I'm thinking like well why can't you just be the bigger man and just let it go, why do you just have, you know, what's the point, you can just walk away and enjoy the rest of your life, what's turning round and decking this lad going to do, it's not going to, yes it might make you feel better but he's got six mates, you deck him and they're going to deck you.

Throughout her account Angela made a number of references to walking away from real or perceived violent situations. She used this strategy regardless of who was involved or where it was taking place. Not only did

she walk away from confrontations, but she also encouraged others to walk away, these include her friends and boyfriend. Although, she did add that this strategy was not always welcomed by all her friends. Angela did not identify her friends as fighters, 'luckily none of my mates are the kind of people to get into fights', however if Angela dragged them away from a confrontation in order to prevent a fight from starting her friends would be annoyed at her and 'get into a really big mood with me'.

Kirsta also found that walking away was a useful strategy when faced with a potentially violent situation. Kirsta recounted a violent confrontation with a friend. This took place as Kirsta was socialising in the city centre with her friends. One of the friends began to argue with Kirsta, over what she described as petty issues:

> Like I had this girlfriend and every time we went out she got, like we'd be out in town drinking and every time we'd all be out together it was like she wanted to pick on me and say things just to cause an argument with me, but I won't fight with her so I just go home.

However, what Kirsta found most upsetting was the fact that the other friends never supported her in these arguments and violent situations, by this Kirsta said that although they supported her they do not get involved and leave Kirsta and the other young woman to argue between them selves. It is only after the confrontation had taken place did the other friends speak to Kirsta and offer their support:

> There's not usually me and her there when she kicks off on me, there's usually other friends, and everyone will be on my side but no one will say anything to her, everyone will just keep out of it, and it will just be her shouting at me for nothing so in the end I'll go home and the next day everyone will like phone me and say she was wrong but they don't say it to her. But like it's just best to just walk away and keep the peace, it's not good fighting it just makes it worse.

The behaviour of Kirsta's friends was in sharp contradiction to how she believed friends should behave in these situations and also in contradiction to the assumption held by many of the young women in this study, that is, that friends stay loyal to each other and provided support.

Magda and Dawn recounted how they learned the real value of trying to avoid or negotiate a violent confrontation. Both young women were the victims of serious violent attacks by other young women. Magda's account drew heavily on her own personal experiences of being a victim and it was through this experience that she feels she had learnt a valuable lesson. As will be discussed in the chapter on fighting Magda was the victim of a very violent attack which resulted not only in serious physical injuries but also psychological injuries.

> Like I think I've learnt a very good lesson from that attack , like if someone said anything to me I'll be like angry but like I'll just walk away, I'll be fuming, like I'll still want to turn around and hit them, but I'll walk away and I won't say nothing. But like at one time I'd have just hit someone if like they said something I didn't like. I think they [her attackers] were a lesson for me, I've learnt the lesson that there's no point in fighting with anyone, I've learnt from experience what can happen when you use violence (Magda).

Although both young women spoke of learning a valuable lesson with regard to walking away from violent situations, both also told how on some occasions they found it very difficult to walk away.

The accounts discussed so far have concerned strategies employed to avoid violent situations with people known to the young women. This following account describes a situation in which the young women were confronted by a violent stranger. Dawn recalled how her friend and her-self were confronted by a stranger on a bus.

> While riding the bus into town me and my friend were causing no harm sitting chatting, when we got up to get off at our stop, we

> were still chatting and other people were getting up to. My friend was in the gangway and I was following her out and there was a man walking through the bus and I was going to wait for him before I left the seat but he stopped and I stepped in front of him while I was still chatting to my friend, I glanced up at him smiled and kind of whispered "thank you". We were walking up the bus and he mumbled something so me and my friend turned around and she said "pardon", and he said "don't look at me like that, I'll knock your head off, who do you think you are". We turned back around to ignore him and try not to cause any trouble, and he continued to mutter that he was going to knock our heads off and punch us in the face. When we got off the bus he was still muttering and he said, "you, you", I turned around and he said "you want to watch your self'. I turned and walked off with my friend and he went the other way.

After recounting this incident Dawn told how her friend and her-self were not frightened using public transport but that they are more wary than they were prior to it. This demonstrates that even minor offences can cause fear for these women, this fear includes becoming the victim of more serious attacks by reminding them of their vulnerability and the possibility of further victimisation (Stanko, 1990). Due to this wariness both young women took care to sit on the lower deck of the bus in order to be in close proximity to the bus driver and tried to sit next to or close to other female passengers. They believed that applying these strategies it would reduce the risk of becoming the victim of verbal abuse in the future because they felt safer being in the sight of other people, who may be more willing to help them if they become the victims of violence (Gardner, 1990; Koskela, 1999). This wariness also included travelling to the bus stop and waiting for it to arrive. Dawn and her friend felt unsafe while waiting for the bus to arrive because 'you can't rely on them turning up on time'. This resulted in them making every effort to time their arrival to coincide with the bus's arrival at the stop. However they felt that all this effort was of little value because of the unreliability of public transport. Thus these young women said that on many occasions they would be waiting at the bus stop for

significant lengths of time and this would increase their feeling of fear and vulnerability.

In these situations the young women said that they would use a number of precautionary tactics, especially when a man or group of men appeared. These precautionary tactics included crossing over the road, walking to the next bus stop, and in some cases hailing a taxi even when they could barely afford the fare. Before the incident these young women did not generally consider public transport to be especially unsafe during the day, it was at night that they felt unsafe and vulnerable, however their attitude has changed and they now believe that public transport could prove to be unsafe at any time of the day or evening. These findings are consistent with the work of Green et al (cited in Hanmer & Maynard, 1987: 89) who found that 'Many women are afraid to use public transport after dark or late at night, whilst for others it is having to walk to bus stops and wait there after dark which deters them'. Although this account of verbal abuse may not be regarded as criminal and is often trivialised (Morrell, 1996), it can cause fear which takes the form of spatial constraints (Koskela, 1999: 116).

Deference

Knowing how to be deferential is a valuable skill (Young, 1999) and as such the strategy of deference is useful in minimising the risk of violence. When someone bumps into a person it is usually accompanied with an apology which indicates that the bump was accidental and unintentional. Deference forms part of the informal guidelines that inform social interaction, including the belief that people are expected to maintain their physical distance and not to enter other's space without an invitation[10]. However if an apology is not offered then it is considered a challenge that

[10] See Goffman's *Behaviour in Public Places* (1963) for a discussion on interpersonal rituals

the young woman who is bumped must address. This scene is often given as an excuse for fighting as it violates one's physical boundaries. When an apology is freely given it may not always defuse the situation. There where examples from this study that demonstrated that deference does not always have the intended non-violent outcome. Julie provided an example of just such an incident that escalated into a violent confrontation:

> This girl, you know, you're in a big crowded place you're bound to knock into somebody when you're walking through, and I knocked into this girl and I said I was sorry and that, and spilled her drink, and I said "here I'll get you another drink", and the girl just roared back "I don't want your fucking drink" and stuff like that, and you know how girls are, hand and arms in your face and stuff like that, and I thought "leave it alone" so I went into the toilets to clean my skirt like cos I spilt some of the drink on me as well. Then I went back onto the dance floor and just forgot about it and had a good time.

Julie did not think about this confrontation any further as she thought that it had been settled. But to her surprise when Julie was leaving the club she was confronted by the young woman who was involved in the minor incident:

> Like this girl just confronted me again and I was like "what are you doing, I offered to buy you another drink so why are you getting all aerated over it, it was like a bottle, or something like that, a two quid bottle or something". I like handled it when it was a dispute like that but then got in me face and like I just went blind, it's dead weird cos I can't see them or can't hear them, I can just make sense that they're there cos of their breathe on me face and that, and then I just butted her and I don't know where it come from or nothing, and the bouncers just pulled me of her and I was, I just butted her like that, cos it was like, I just go into something else cos I was thinking to myself "I'm not going to let you kick off on me and make a show of me, make me look like a tit". You know, when there are like fifty people out there, so I just butted her and then her partner was like just giving it loads and just coming into me face and I was like "I'm not being funny lad but you've seen what I've done to her and I'll just do the same to you if you don't move away". Cos I'd warned her about three times, I said to her "look just back off I'll give you the two pound go in there and buy

> yourself another drink, don't get all frustrated over it". Like I even offered to pay for her dress cos she was moaning about the drink being spilt on it. I'd warned her for like three times to just leave it, and that if she wanted to talk about it "I'll talk to ya but I'm not fighting with ya". I was like calm with her and she was like really brassy and arguing and arms in the air and stuff like that and I just thought like are you deaf or something.

Julie was aware that she was alone in this situation as her friends had remained in the club and she thought that no matter how much she tried to settle the dispute non-violently the young woman who challenged her would not be pacified with Julie's deference. As such Julie became tired of deferring to this young woman who repeatedly challenged her and decided to stand up for herself and take control of the situation. Such a direct challenge resulted in Julie being identified as the 'fighter' and being 'barred' from the club in the future. Once the fight was over Julie believed that she was justified in taking the action that she did, she said that she was defending herself. In her account Julie believed that the young woman had provoked the incident which resulted in a violent confrontation. Julie also believed she had made every effort to settle the dispute non-violently including deferring to the young woman and offering to pay for both a new drink and also the young woman's outfit.

In this account Julie did not identify herself as a 'fighter' even though she recounted butting the young woman. Firstly she justified her behaviour as she believed she acted in self-defence, and secondly she did not go out that night looking for a fight but when the conflict arose Julie made every effort to resolve the confrontation. When asked how she felt Julie gave the following account:

> The first thing I thought was like, what are you doing cos like you're just going to get yourself a reputation of being a bloody head butter or something, you know what I mean. Like when I'm out with mates I don't like them to look at me like that and think, she's a strange girl, you know, she goes round hitting people and

> stuff like that, like them thinking I'm a thug or something cos I not and I looked, I just looked down at her like to see what she was like and she was covered in blood. Like I just felt all weird and I got scared and I just needed to get home.

In the following account Louise recalled how she used the strategy of walking away in her work situation. She told how it is inappropriate to get angry and argue back while she was at work, especially as she was working with vulnerable young women, who on many occasion would also have their children with them in the drop-in centre. Although Louise made it clear that she generally uses the strategy of walking away in what she perceives to be threatening situations, she employed this strategy most successfully while in work:

> I'd just walk away from it, like in work I wouldn't argue back, but sometimes, at some point but like not really, not in this position, like a working position. In work you have to behave in a certain way and you've got to walk away from it cos if you're like the supervisor you can't argue. At work if you're the supervisor you have to be careful that you are not seen as picking on someone, you have to be diplomatic. But like in all situations I'm no good at arguments so I always do my best to walk away and not involved if I can.

Walking away from what were perceived to be violent or threatening situations or confrontations was the strategy the majority of young women in this study employed. From their own experiences they believed this to be the best strategy to use in order to avoid a violent situation or confrontation. Margaret used her previous experience of being involved in a fight and now employs the strategy of walking away from a confrontation when ever possible. She told how she still gets angry but

> I don't hit people like I use to. I can't say that my temper will never get to that stage again or I won't drink that much and allow my temper to get the better of me, but like nowadays though I count to ten or mostly I walk away cos shouting and screaming in the heat of the moment will make things ten times worse.

However, although this strategy proved successful in the majority of cases, there were a small number in which this strategy did not defuse the situation.

Summary

As demonstrated, the young women in this study do not engage in fighting all the time. There were accounts from young women who did not use violence and did not regard themselves as 'fighters'. Rather what has become clear throughout this chapter is that all young women, whether 'fighters' or not, use a variety of strategies to avoid and/or negotiate their way through what they perceive to be real and/or potentially dangerous and violent situations and conflicts. Therefore it would be misleading to assume that sheer good luck alone was responsible for many of these young women not becoming involved in violent conflicts. Rather it is because they had invested a great deal of time and effort into learning and using a variety of strategies to avoid and/or negotiate what they perceived to be real and potential threats of violent conflict. These strategies included avoiding dangerous places and people which often result in women distancing themselves from potential aggressors (Valentine, 1992), and using negotiating strategies such as talking things through, and walking away. When discussing avoidance strategies Kirsty, a university student, made the point that 'being able to defuse a confrontation without resorting to physical violence is a skill and is an admirable quality'. When fighting did arise it was mainly the result of standing up for other people such as family and friends.

A small number of the young women, three in total had managed to avoid engaging in fighting altogether. These young women had adopted the same strategies as the other young women who had not managed to negotiate or avoid conflicts so successfully. The young women employed similar strategies of avoidance and negotiation with varying degrees of success.

For these young women who had no, or relatively little experience of fighting or violence the implication is that they may negatively label (Becker, 1963) other people or places as violent or dangerous. As demonstrated, even for those young women who did not identify themselves as 'fighters' they were aware that there were occasions when they felt they had to confront and negotiate both real and perceived threats of violence. Thus there were some situations when some young women felt they had to meet a challenge head on. In these situations using avoidance strategies and/or negotiations simply was not an option. Although these young women did not actively take on the identity of a 'fighter' they did express delight that they could 'hold their own' in a fight, that they could handle themselves. This was a reason why they did not feel compelled to challenge any and every verbal assault, bump or push. Therefore when a conflict did arise they were not compelled to fight back, rather they were more inclined to use a variety of strategies. These avoidance and negotiating strategies proved useful in maintaining these young women's personal boundaries, just as violence did for those young women who used it to police their personal boundaries.

Chapter 5

'Girls can be so mean'

The previous chapter focused on the strategies the young women in this study used in order to avoid and/or negotiate real or potential sources of violence and the importance of learning these skills. However, there are some forms of violence that are more difficult to negotiate or avoid. These indirect forms of violence include; name calling, spreading rumours, and ostracising which were often referred to by the young women as 'meanness'. This chapter will explore the place of 'meanness' in the lives of these young women. Even though physically less serious, this behaviour was agued to be very harmful emotionally.

Concern with girls' meanness has taken a foothold in the media. An article appeared in The Observer entitled 'Mean Girls'. This article quoted psychologists who had found a new form of non-physical cruelty spreading through schools so extreme it has been given the name 'relational aggression' (Hill & Helmore, 2002). In the same year a report by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was published. 'If Looks Could Kill: Young Women and Bullying' equated mean behaviour with violence.

However before the popular press became fixated with this behaviour the psychological research (see for example Bjorkqvist et al, 1992; Crick, et al, 1996) argued that boys and men engage in direct violence to a greater extent than girls, who typically engage in what the psychology literature terms 'indirect violence'. This use of indirect violence by women is generally negatively stereotyped. For example they are often accused of being 'bitchy' and 'gossips' who are apt at spreading rumours in order to cause harm to their female enemies. Heim and Murphy (2003: 115) argue

that, 'The way men use indirect aggression is effective, whereas the way women do it often gets them labelled as bitches'. Through socialisation, girls and women are taught the negative impact of using physical violence as they are continually discouraged from using direct violence but are also rebuked when they use indirect forms of violence. Women's use of indirect violence is condemned and often cited as evidence of female deviousness, manipulative and maliciousness. These ideas are hardly new, which may, in fact be one reason that the police and the media embrace them so quickly (Chesney-Lind et al, 2007: 332). 'The hitch is that because women are strongly discouraged from being physically aggressive, they learn to be indirect, but then they are rebuked as being bitchy for that very indirectness' (Heim & Murphy, 2003:116). Girls learn the power and use of words and manipulation as:

> Throughout history, women have been punished for obvious displays of aggression: they have been forced to camouflage their intent to hurt others, their opposition, and even their positive forcefulness, to deliver their aggression in culturally sanitised but more hidden ways (Jack, 2001: 4)

Campbell et al (2001) argue that we should not seek explanations of the different rates between males and females in biology, rather we should examine the different ways in which males, and females are socialised. They claim that men are more violent than women because they learn different attitudes towards violent behaviour. Men are taught to be aggressive from a very early age, for example, in rough and tumble play. They also learn that aggression is a practical way to impose control over others, while women are taught to be passive and subordinate. Rough and tumble play is considered to be inappropriate for girls. Rather women learn to regard aggression as a personal failure, as a loss of self-control and therefore as something to be avoided.

Studies (Bjorkqvist et al, 1992; Crick, et al, 1996) on very young children suggest that there is very little difference between anger and aggression of male and female infants. However, as they grow older and start to develop an understanding of gender roles and identity they are socialised in very different ways. This differential socialisation results in boys being taught how and when to use aggression, and girls are taught to suppress their anger. As Campbell (1993: 20) asserts:

> The most remarkable thing about the socialisation of aggression in girls is its absence. Girls do not learn the right way to express aggression; they simply learn not to express it.

Socialisation theory has been criticised by feminists who argue that gender-socialisation explanations are developed from the belief of the innate differences between men and women. This theory ignores the power of institutions such as the family, school, the state and the media, to construct, maintain and reinforce these differences. Furthermore it implies that there is only one single way in which people are feminine or masculine, and that these are passively accepted. As Messerschmidt (1993: 29) has stated:

> An emphasis on socialisation also suggests that males and females passively accept what they are taught, rather than actively contribute to the construction of gender.

However, White and Kowalski (1994: 501) point out that 'feminist analysis of power relations indicate that men have defined who can be legitimately aggressive – effectively silencing women with regard to their aggression in response to frustration, anger, and instrumental goals'. Furthermore, Campbell (1993: 142) asserts that patriarchy has hidden women's 'anger from them by their belief in the naturalness of their subordination to men'. Socialisation theories are embedded in sexist assumptions and fail to take into account the contradictory ways in which women and men often behave in different contexts (Lees, 1993: 14). Girls and women have not been permitted to use direct, physical violence, if they

do resort to using violence, whether in self-defence or anger, they may face terrible consequences. Rather girls are socialised to be conciliatory and to avoid overt violence and aggression in order to sustain relationships and be liked by people (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Underwood, 2003). Thus in order to nurture relationships and avoid negative consequences, girls are more likely to use indirect or mean behaviour. This behaviour may be the only way girls and women can express their anger without being sanctioned or excluded.

The themes that emerged from the young women's narratives include bullying which mainly occurred when the young women were at school. There are also accounts of bullying in other situations including the workplace. This will be followed by an examination of what has been termed 'bitchiness' in the lives of the young women. This behaviour includes; name-calling, gossiping, spreading rumours, and ostracising. What differentiated the majority of accounts of bullying and bitchiness was friendship groups or other close relationships with peers. Accounts of bullying usually centred round more continuous forms of mean behaviour between friends and peers. Bitchiness on the other hand tended to be one off incidents of mean behaviour with peers and strangers rather than the more continuous forms of mean behaviour. The final section will focus on narratives of popularity and how this can either position the popular girl as the instigator of mean behaviour, or the victim of such behaviour.

Friend or Foe

In their accounts of mean behaviour the young women narrated accounts of bullying. In these accounts bullying behaviour was not described as physical rather the young women recounted incidents of mean behaviour including name-calling, spreading rumours and excluding from friendship groups.

Until fairly recently bullying was seen as a boys' issue. Identifying a bully was usually associated with identifying the characteristics of a boy. '...the more visible signs of bullying such as fist fights, pushing, and harassing and threatening behaviour, were more likely to involve boys' (Brown, 2005: 13). Bullying behaviour by girls was largely ignored. Rather the assumption was that girls were good at maintaining relationships and that, relationships between girls were reciprocal and healthy. Girls rely heavily on best friends for love and support and research has shown that girls spend more time with friends than boys do (Wong & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), have smaller more close knit groups of friends than boys (Belle, 1989), are more likely than boys to share secrets with best friends (Berndt, 1982; 2002), and also to experience more loyalty, kindness and commitment than boys friendships (Clark & Bittle, 1992; Griffiths, 1995).

The separate cultures thesis, [that is, boys and girls inhabit separate, gendered cultures] assumes that boys roam in large groups whose ethos is based on hierarchy, competitiveness, team games and sports, toughness and aggression. Girls, on the other hand, are assumed to socialise primarily through shifting alliances of 'best friends', to engage in co-operative rather than competitive play, to value emotional and physical intimacy and to prefer 'nice' behaviour to 'meanness' and 'toughness' (Thorne, 2002:291). It has been suggested (Maccoby, 1986; LaFontaine, 1991) that these friendship groups between girls and women are characterised as small, intimate and close-knit, that girls and women place great importance in these friendships, and as such confide in their friends. They often exchange secrets that they would not tell other people including parents, as demonstrated in the following quote from Kirsty:

> I've just never been very open with my parents. As in I talk to them and tell them what I'm doing, about my friends and things and the work I'm doing and if something has upset me because of work, but we just don't talk about very personal things, particularly sex and the like.

This intimacy may be the cause of disputes between friends, and it is argued that these disputes are common in friendships (Maccoby, 1986; LaFontaine, 1991; Campbell, 1993; Batchelor, et al, 2001). When the other person transgresses the rules of the friendship in some way, for example, telling secrets to others, and spreading rumours, it can be very upsetting, traumatic and hurtful. This sense of betrayal was said by the young women in this research to be more hurtful than the physical violence that may accompany such acts of betrayal. The young women talked about not being able to rely on friends all the time because they had been betrayed by them. Some young women also talked about only having a few of what they would regard as 'real' friends. This was due to the fact that many of their friends could change from one minute to the next, 'one minute they're your best friend and then the next they're stabbing you in the back' (Magda, 17 years old) 'they're nice to you one minute and talking about you behind your back the next' (Angela, 19 years old). It was further found that girls are far more likely to use subtle power games to bully other girls and this can take place amongst seemingly 'best friends'.

Research has shown that girls learn how to use their verbal skills in an exploitative way and that girls' act in this way because they are seeking ways of handling negative feelings (Bjorkqvist, et al, 1992). This often results in scapegoating where girls make someone else feel bad rather than themselves. They transfer these negative feelings onto another person in order to make themselves feel better. This may be in the form of name-calling about another girl's weight, clothes, hair, facial looks and also family members, especially mothers. This is reflected in the following quote from Helen:

> One particular girl bullied me incessantly from erm, about 3rd year juniors; she wasn't even in my school. She use to follow me and back me into a corner, she was only like 6 stone soaking wet, there was nothing of her and she just use to really, really torture me, and

> she really did. She would bully me over silly things like, "you're still a virgin"'.

This is further highlighted by Jayne, who was physically, sexually and emotionally abused by her mother's boyfriend and found it extremely difficult to make friends. She was afraid that the school children would find out what was happening to her and her sister. She could not explain to them that her abuser would control the way she physically looked and how she dressed:

> When I was in school and that I use to get bullied and that because, cos he use to control, he was so controlling, he use to abuse us in every way, in every way possible, really, and er, he use to get our hair cut dead short and things like that, and we use to get picked on and that, and so it was hard for us to make friends because we. They just didn't understand why we were like, we use to be dead quiet and shy anyway, and it was hard to make friends with people, it's more easier now like, but it's still like difficult to trust them and that.

Jayne's difficulty in making friends could also be explained by her devaluation of herself and her mother and this could have impaired her development of friendships with women (Herman & Hirschman, 1977). In order to overcome these difficulties DePinho (1992) contends that counselling should work with both the mother's and daughter's affectivity (emotions) which would assist the mother in empathising with her daughter. This would help Jayne in not only regaining her trust in her relationship with her mother but also in other relationships including friendships with other females.

Concern about bullying appears to focus mainly on school children being bullied by their peers. Although this concern is justified because of the trauma and harm that school bullying causes, it is not the only form of bullying that people encounter. Margaret, a 26 year old married woman was bullied in work by her line manager. She spoke about the campaigns

aimed at children, including child-line, and the numerous anti-bullying campaigns and policies in schools. She found it very difficult to talk about her experiences; she felt she had no-one to turn to. Margaret said her boss would pick on her, she said that her manager would 'continually criticise me for the most petty things, things that didn't even affect the job. Like for example, she would always comment on the way I dressed even though I dress appropriately'

Rather than just singling out one particular girl, bullying in friendship groups can be aimed at all members of the group, with each girl being bullied in turn. One respondent told how a different girl from her group was picked out each week and bullied. She would be left out from the group; she would be ostracised and called names. Later she would be accepted back into the group and then another girl would face the same treatment. The leader of the group dictated what the other girls would do, 'She bullied us all, and it was really hurtful. One morning walking to school she told me best mate to fuck off and walk on her own because she was a fat monster' (Annette, 21 years old).

Angela also provided an account of bullying in friendship groups with the ring leader dictating who could talk to whom and who could be friends with whom:

> Yeah, like it happened loads throughout seniors. I got in with a group of girls and we were like all really good mates but there was this one girl and she was an absolute bitch, like if she fell out with someone the whole group, like she was the ring leader of it and it was like if she fell out with you everyone would and it would just like it happened loads in school. Like I think when you're in school like you're scared in they turn on you. But it's horrible, it's such place to be cos it's a form of bullying, you know, excluding and then you get upset and depressed and you get to the point where you just don't want to go to school, you know, I just sort of buried me head in books, so like everyone else would be like together through break and all sat in their groups and I'd be sat in the library reading. But like after a week or so they would come

> and sit with you again, but like at the time when you're 13 or 14 you kind of like go "okay then let's be mates, and you'd be best mates for a few more weeks and then it would happen again. Sometimes it got so bad you know that I got my parents down to the school cos I didn't want to go and stuff. Like in lessons you'd hear them talking about you and they'd pass notes and giggle. But like it's horrible, you get so upset and depressed and you think can it get any worse and then they'll always find something, they'll start spreading rumours.

Angela knew that each girl would be the victim of bullying, however she found it hard to stand up for her friend who confronted the bully because she was concerned that when it was her turn to be 'picked on' the name-calling and excluding would be worse for her. In this situation, Angela made full use of the power of her friendship with the other girls in the group to protect herself. By policing not only her own behaviour, but also that of her friend, by excluding and name-calling, she ensured that she did not make herself too vulnerable in the future. These young women knew that to compete and challenge the bully would result in more extreme forms of name-calling and disapproval for themselves. Therefore in order to reduce their vulnerability they put the other girls in the group down.

This behaviour can severely affect young women throughout their educational years and may result in them leaving school with little or no qualifications and low self esteem. As demonstrated in these two accounts both Annette and Angela found this behaviour very distressing and the psychological effects were still being felt into their late teens. Less is known about this form of violence because as McRobbie and Garber (1975, 1991) have highlighted, girls' friendships are typically private with much of their interaction taking place in girls' bedrooms. However, this situation is changing with more girls' interactions taking place in the public sphere (Burman 2003). This increased visibility increases girls' and

women's' chances of not only witnessing more violent behaviour, but also participating in violence with other young people[11].

'Girls are such bitches'

Research conducted by Whitney and Smith (1993) found that girls were most at risk of name calling, being ignored, and having rumours spread about them, which is often referred to as bitchiness. In addition when women are fighting, either physically or verbally, they are often referred to as a 'bitch'. This derogatory term has a uniquely anti-woman emphasis and there is no such equivalent for men, except for the phrase 'son of a bitch' (Heim & Murphy, 2003), which is in common usage in the US, but is rarely used in the UK. In the Collins English dictionary the term bitch is defined as 'a malicious unpleasant, selfish woman, especially one who stops at nothing to reach her goal'.

Bitchiness, including gossiping and spreading rumours can be a form of perceived power; some people can feel that they have gained power when they tell something that they know about something or someone (Gamache, 1991). Gossiping about someone can also be used to diminish that person's power. Therefore 'gossip can be used to gain power for oneself, redress the power balance, or diminish someone else's power. It can also taint other people's view of the victim, and thus hinder their chances of having a good relationship in the future' (Coyne, et. al. (2006: 304). Moreover, Brown (2005: 16) argues that mean behaviour is more often used by people with less power as it 'protects one from retaliation or from punishment by those in control. It is a very useful strategy for girls because it provides a cover from unfeminine emotions like anger'. In addition:

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[11] see chapter 6 for a discussion of fighting among these young women

> Girls' meanness to other girls is a result of their struggle to make sense of or to reject their secondary status in the world and to find ways to have power and to experience feelings of power (Brown 2005: 32)

Throughout the interviews the young women frequently said that girls can be 'bitchy', furthermore some suggested that girls and women are inherently bitchy. Annette suggested that the term 'bitchy' has always been associated with women and not men,

> I've always found that men are more willing to be open about their feelings or simply ignore people they don't like, instead of pretending to like them and them talking about them negatively.

Furthermore, research has suggested that boys and men do not 'bitch' but they do gossip, however, this is not in the same manner as girls and women, rather men gossip about business and use it to their advantage in the workplace' (Heim & Murphy 2003).

The interviews provided a number of examples of what the young women referred to as 'bitchy' behaviour which was directed mainly at other young women. These bitchy comments included; continuous name calling and remarks about appearance. Appropriate dress, hair and demeanour appear to be important for girls and women and as such if these are considered to be wrong or inappropriate in some way then this will make young women susceptible to being called names. Davies (2002: 281) has asserted that, 'dress, hairstyles, speech patterns and content, choice of activity - all become key signifiers that can be used in successfully positioning oneself as a girl or a boy'. Therefore, by the time girls reach their teens or even earlier, they know they have to 'look good' and be attractive to the opposite sex. Importantly, being fat is taken as a sign of inadequacy, incompetence, or psychological problems - a failure in adjustment (Szekely, 1987). This means, among other things, 'that they must do everything possible to avoid being fat, to have fair, clean skin ...' (Szekely,

1987:10). For example one of the interviewees, Tricia, made comments about her friend's hair and this was perceived in a negative light. It caused much distress to the young woman who the comments were aimed at, which resulted in an argument and Tricia being called a 'bitch' by the other young women involved in the conflict.

These ideas about appearance may go some way to explaining why this 'bitchy' behaviour is regarded as more hurtful than physical violence. For example, Tiffany described herself as a 'complete bitch', she said how she constantly put girls down, 'I pick their clothes and hair to bits'. She also told how she would be horrible to girls who she considered to be better looking than her, and who she regarded as a threat to her relationship with her boyfriend. This behaviour was also found in research conducted by Szekely (1987: 9), who found that, 'Women know, tacitly or explicitly, that attractiveness is the value of currency in the male realm; it is men they must attract.... It is through this ability to attract and thus be attached to a particular man that women's lives are presumed to be fulfilled and their continued existence guaranteed'. This is illustrated in the following quote from Tiffany;

> I was horrible to a pretty girl whom I worked with in a bar because she fancied my boyfriend. I didn't speak to her and made her feel uncomfortable.

As indicated in the above statement, this bitchiness is intended to exclude young women. A number of the young women said that excluding other people made them feel better. If the young women were feeling vulnerable, or upset they would put someone down and exclude them. This had a cathartic effect for some young women as it was perceived to release their resentment and made them feel better. They also said that excluding someone from an event had the effect of making the person feel isolated because they were not able to join in with the conversation.

A comment frequently made by the young women about bitchiness was that it was more pervasive and hurtful than physical violence. It was often assumed that name-calling and spreading rumours did not cause harm or distress to the recipient and that people should be more concerned with the harm done by physical violence. This is demonstrated in the rhyme 'sticks and stones may break your bones but names will never hurt you'. However, research (Batchelor, et al 2001) has shown that name-calling and spreading rumours can be far more vicious and oppressive. As a result of this many young women felt 'paranoid' about people talking about them behind their back. The young women felt vulnerable when they walked into a room and immediately thought that the people were talking about them. Julie said that:

> Even like being skitted or bitchiness with other people if me back is to them, or I walk into a room and the conversation stops that make me like just go into big paranoid, and I just have it out with them. 'What are you talking about', if they go 'nothing', like then I would be like, it would get me angry cos you feel as if they are, cos if the conversations gone dead you're like, er, what's going on here, and they're like, 'nothing', and I'm like 'no tell me what you're talking about', and you turn your back again and suddenly they'll all be laughing again and you turn round and it'll stop, and you're like, er. You just don't know.

A number of the young women claimed that girls use this form of behaviour as an alternative to physical violence. They claimed that women will use physical violence far less than men, but will bitch and harbour resentment. Rather than using physical violence they will be bitchy towards people. They believed it was far more hurtful and damaging than physical violence, which they believe will quickly heal. However, the emotional bullying, name calling and put downs are much harder to recover from. One young woman believed that emotional bullying is far more damaging because the effects can be devastating and last longer than physical bullying. The physical bullying will heal after a short period of

time, but the emotional bullying will take longer to heal. She talked about an incident that had remained very painful for a long time:

> There was this girl at school and she would always call me names and made fun of me in front of other kids at school. She would skit me about my weight and the way I looked. It always made me feel embarrassed about myself. To be honest I became really conscious and paranoid about it (Annette)

The young women also provided accounts about their sexuality, including ideas around appropriate sexual behaviour. Holland et al (1996) found that young women and men have shared expectations that it will be men who initiate sexual activity and women who are supposed to regulate it. They argue that young women are under constant pressure to defend their sexual reputations. However, it is not only the young women involved in the sexual activity who are supposed to regulate their sexual behaviour but also other young women as well. Thus women's sexual activity is continually regulated. The young women interviewed for this research described how they were bullied about their sexuality. For example, they told how they would be called names such as 'slag' if they were perceived by others to be having too much sex or with too many boys, In contrast the term 'virgin' was used in a derogatory manner if the young women were perceived by others not to be having sex. This was a fine line that many of the young women found difficult to balance. As Chesney-Lind et al (2007: 341) have highlighted: 'when girls (and boys) call girls *sluts* ..., they are reflecting the common double standard that prohibits sexuality in teenage girls, but encourages it in boys. The young women were fully aware of the double standards around sexual behaviour. Boys and men could and should have numerous sexual experiences without suffering negative consequences. Girls and women, on the other hand, run the risk of these negative consequences to their reputations, including being labelled a 'slut' or 'slag' and being labelled as sexually easy by both men and women.

Verbal violence mainly took place when they were younger and in high school. As they have grown older the violence has lessened, Hazel said that her sexuality has been more accepted at university. She recounted how she confided in her friend about her sexuality, that she is a lesbian, only for her friend to betray her trust and tell other pupils in the school. Once other pupils found out there were rumours spread and name calling. As a result of this Hazel believed she lost many of her friends because of her sexuality:

> It's hard to explain everything that went on, it was mainly a matter of a girl making life hell the way they do through bitchiness and doing things without any physical abuse to me or my girlfriend.

Although Hazel initially said that the abuse was verbal she was also the victim of physical violence, 'but it meant that you would get pushed in the corridor and spat on. You would also get called names, dyke being a favourite of them'. To avoid the confrontations Hazel would spend a lot of her break time in other school activities, rather than having to endure the abuse in the playground. Moreover, she told how teachers would ignore the behaviour of the other pupils. She believed they turned a blind eye to the abuse because they themselves found it difficult to understand her sexuality.

These accounts have highlighted the all encompassing and hurtful nature of bitchy behaviour. What is also evident from speaking to these young women is that once a rumour starts it can quickly get out of control. The rumour may be passed on to a large number of people and thus result in distortion and exaggeration. It can take on the appearance of 'Chinese whispers' with certain words being omitted and others being added on. When rumours start to spread there is very little that the recipient of them can do. As Laura has pointed out,

> But at school, cos there's so many people you get one thing said about you and it's like Chinese whispers. It goes wrong and people add to it and take things away from it, and you've got no control over rumours and gossip. You can't say I didn't say that, who's going to believe you when someone had got something against you.

Finally, when rumours were spread about a young woman they were generally believed to be true and very difficult to refute. As such, gossip performs an important function as social control. The 'What will people say?', 'Tongues will wag' which in the past kept women from engaging in sexual promiscuity, having children out of marriage, or breaking other social taboos, was in large part the result of fear of gossip. Gossip becomes a tool of sexism, a way for girls to keep others in line or excluded (Brown, 2005: 163). Throughout history women have used gossip and rumours as a form of social control in order to police other women and behaviour that is considered to be problematic. Trofimenkaff (cited in Heim & Murphy, 2003: 119) writes that gossip,

> Defines a code of behaviour by women and for women, with very strict sanctions against transgressors. "What will people say?" is a much more powerful deterrent than any man-made law.

In order to avoid becoming a victim of gossip and rumours Caroline rarely told fellow school pupils about herself.

> I'm nice to other girls but I don't tell them 'bout meself. Like I'll talk 'bout ordinary stuff, where I went at the weekend, what I watched at the pictures and stuff like that, but I wouldn't tell them anything important.

When elaborating on this Caroline was adamant that her peers and friends could not use anything against her and use it to hurt her.

> It's not that I don't have good friends, but I wouldn't trust them to keep secrets. I've seen what friends to when they fall out with each

> other and there's always one friend who comes off the worst. The others go spreading rumours and telling all her secrets.

This situation of shifting alliances had a negative impact on young women, including the constant struggle to maintain friendships and loyalties without putting oneself in danger of becoming the next 'victim'. Caroline often found herself in precarious positions:

> I hate it when my friends fall out and call each other names. You just know that they'll spread rumours and call each other fit to burn and the next week they're all friends again. But I don't like that so I try to stay in the middle and be friends with everyone.

The spectre of rumours and the use of gossip to control and police other girls, to ensure that certain norms of behaviour are upheld, certain codes of conduct adhered to, takes a toll. Girls become wary and untrusting of other girls (Brown, 2005: 162).

'She's all that'

'Popularity' narratives provided two sides to the same tale. On the one side the popular girl meted out the mean behaviour. Some young women recounted how being popular usually meant being horrible and mean to other girls who were not considered, by the popular girl, to be pretty. As a result popular girls were considered to be 'stuck-up', 'full of themselves' and 'she's all that'. In these tales of popularity the popular girls had pleasure in putting unpopular girls in their place which included bossing other girls around and calling them names.

The other side of the tale provided stories where the popular girl was the victim of mean behaviour through jealousy. Jessica told how girls tried to become friends with her because she was popular and other girls wanted to share in that popularity. This popularity usually entailed not only having numerous friends but also being attractive to boys. 'There were like lots of

girls who were jealous of me cos I had lots of friends and these other girls were like jealous of all the attention I use to get'.

These accounts highlight how girls themselves engage in the surveillance of other girls. Every aspect of their lives is regulated and surveyed.

> One problem is that this surveillance operates through a sense of ever-present but silent double standards: ... girlhood as a culturally constructed way of being is regulated by conventions about their appearance; but not self-absorbed about their appearance; they must be attractive to boys but not seen to be too sexually forward, they must be noticed and liked by the right people but not a social climber, independent but not a loner (Currie, et al. 2007: 31).

This surveillance and policing of the boundaries of other girls behaviour through gossip about looks and sexual behaviour is through a 'male gaze' (Fine, 1988). I would add that these young women are also surveyed through a female gaze. Thus, girls' violence has a distinctly patriarchal context, in which girls and young women fight about boys and popularity. Brown and Chesney-Lind (2005: 77) suggest that girls are socialized in ways that turn them against one another:

> In a sexist climate, it is simply easier and safer and ultimately more profitable for girls to take out their fears and anxieties and anger on other girls rather than on boys or on a culture that denigrates anything remotely associated with femininity.

Accounts revealed the pervasive nature of the popular narrative. Mandy admitted that she was jealous of the popular girls in school. She recalled how she wished she could look like them. She told how she was 'jealous of other girls' appearance, how well they did at school, their boyfriends, their clothes and their friends. 'She [the popular girl] always has lots of friends and they're like all lovely looking, they have lovely hair and clothes and like they always have lots of lads after them, like loads of lads like them and want to go with them'. Similar to Phillips (2003), this research found

there where mixed feelings about the popular girls. Some of the young women aspired to be like them. While others thought that the popular girls were:

> not worth bothering about, like they always have friends with them, they don't confront or call someone names when they're by themselves, no they need their friends for support and courage. They're weak by themselves (Angela).

Summary

The narratives presented in this chapter highlight the pervasive nature of mean behaviour in these young women's lives. They recounted stories of mean behaviour in friendship groups which was intended to exclude some young women. Other accounts demonstrated the use of meanness to survey and police other young women's behaviour including their sexual behaviour. This mean behaviour, it is argued, is used by less powerful people (Brown, 2005; Chesney-Lind et al, 2006; Chesney-Lind, et al, 2007). Alternative aggressions are, fundamentally, weapons of the weak. They are reflective of girls' powerlessness as they are of girls' meanness. Women …have not historically been permitted direct aggression (Chesney-Lind et al, 2006).

Recounting their narratives of mean behaviour the young women suggested that this can have a profound impact on them, 'when you're fighting, the physical injuries heal quick, but like with name-calling and that the hurt can last much longer' (Julie). Recently Chesney-Lind (2006; 2007) has challenged this assertion, she has asserted 'researchers have failed to identify any long-term negative consequences of indirect aggression in contrast to clear evidence of harm associated with physical aggression' (2007: 336). Rather she argues:

> There is evidence to suggest that non-physical but emotionally hurtful behaviours such as rolling eyes at, or spreading rumours about, or excluding individuals from a group belong in a different

> category of behaviours than physical attacks, in terms of the dynamics involved, the consequences of the behaviour, and the long-term implications of the behaviour (Chesney-Lind, 2007: 339-40).

Although these young women said the mean behaviour they were the targets of caused them more harm and distress than the physical violence and that physical injuries heal quickly, it was not these young women who talked of long term psychological stress. Rather as will be discussed in the fighting and intimate violence chapters it is the physical violence, the rape and sexual abuse, and dating violence that caused young women long term psychological harm, including self-harm and physical injuries.

Chapter 6

'You've got to stand up for yourself'

The previous chapter focused on young women's 'mean' behaviour, such as name-calling, spreading rumours, and ostracising. These indirect behaviours are said to more evident in girls and women than boys and men, with boys and men using direct physical violence to a great extent than girls and women. However there are some young women who use violence, and others who are the victims of violence, which they themselves described as 'fights'. These 'fights' took the form of one-to-one or group physical conflicts. When discussing group fights the young women's accounts included several people fighting against one person and also groups of varying numbers fighting each other. These young women's accounts may not appear to conform to taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes a fight with its informal rules of engagement.

In some accounts the young women in this study saw physical violence as inevitable and as such avoiding fighting was not considered a viable option, rather they felt they had to face the conflict 'head on'. Other young women discussed how fighting offered them status and respect. This finding is consistent with the work of Batchelor, et al, (2001) and Phillips (2003) who found that fighting maintained a reputation as being hard or tough. Identification as a 'fighter' proved useful for some young women in this study, however as these young women matured some found this identification cumbersome. In addition, identity as a fighter provided some of the young women with the confidence that they could stand up for themselves. In some instances an identity as a fighter reduced the amount of fights these young women were involved in. However, in other instances and for other young women the identity as a fighter actually increased the number of fights they were involved in. None of the young

women identified themselves as 'fighters' or as a 'violent' person, rather, similar to the girls in Batchelor et al's (2001) study, the young women said they were angry, bad-tempered or frustrated. The reasons cited by the young women for using violence included the likelihood of increased vulnerability to violence in the future if they walked away from the conflict, and status and respect as a fighter. This status and respect included being able to defend oneself and family and friends, including ones reputation. Other reasons included loyalty to others including family and friends, and taking control. Jealousy was also given as a reason for fighting not only between siblings and friends but also between strangers and peers over boyfriends.

The first section of this chapter examines young women's accounts of fights with siblings, both as perpetrators and victims In these accounts young women describe how fights started over 'silly things', jealousy over parents paying attention to one sibling to the neglect of other siblings, and arguments and fights over personal space including bedroom and personal property. It also highlights commonly held assumptions about what constitutes 'real' violence and 'real' perpetrators, normal behaviour, the normalization of violence and ideas about safe victims. This is followed in the second section by an examination of young women's accounts of fights with friends and peers. These accounts also demonstrated how fights started over 'silly things'. Fights with peers and friends were on many occasions not regarded as serious rather in recounting these fights the young women described them as 'normal' behaviour between friends.

The third section deals with young women's accounts of fights with strangers, whether as victims or perpetrators. In some accounts the fights were between groups of people, there were also accounts of several people fighting one person and one-to-one fights between strangers. These fights took place in a variety of locations including bars and clubs, streets and

young women's neighbourhoods. Some young women also provided accounts of what they regarded as the informal rules of fighting which were in conflict with the description of fights offered by some of these young women in this research. This is followed in section four with a discussion of young women's motivations for fighting including loyalty to others, taking control, and jealousy. The fifth section explores the emotions associated with fighting whether as victims or perpetrators of fights. These feelings occur before, during and after the incident, and include shame, guilt, fear and embarrassment.

Who's fighting who

Fights with siblings

This section discusses violence between siblings. Although this form of violence is argued to be the most common form of family violence (Hoffman, et, al., 2005; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) fights with siblings were not considered serious by the young women interviewed. In some cases a number of the young women said that they would only be wasting my time talking about fights they had with their brothers and sisters because they happened all the time and were just a part of growing up. This is consistent with the research conducted by Felson (1983: 282) who found that high school children 'engage in more physical violence with a sibling than they do with all other children combined'. In addition, Hoffman et al (2005: 1123) found that 'almost 70% of the young adults in their study had committed at least one violent act against their closest-age sibling during their senior year of high school'. However when the young women described their fights with siblings many of these took the form of serious conflicts that resulted in injuries including cuts, bruises, large open wounds and broken limbs. Thus these conflicts involved a variety of violent behaviours including shoving, slapping, hitting, punching and using threats, as well as using weapons such a cricket bats and skates. Sibling violence, it is argued, often leads to retaliation and

the escalation of violence between siblings (Dunn & Munn, 1986). In addition violence between siblings is more likely to be repeated because of the continuing relationship which takes place within the privacy of the home. It is also substantially underreported and this may also be explained by the idea of privacy within the home. It may also be difficult to determine who the perpetrator is and who the victim is as in some instances they may both engage in mutual violence. Researchers have also found that sibling violence and poor peer relationships are closely linked (MacKinnon-Lewis, et, al. 1997).

Culturally, sibling violence is tolerated more than any other form of violence and this is evident in the fact that when the young women were talking about violent and aggressive situations with their siblings they talked about it 'always being that way', and 'it's just what we've always done'. Thus it was considered normal for siblings to fight and argue. Furthermore when talking about violent encounters with siblings there was little concern about injuries. They did not regard injuries as very serious even when medical attention was needed, for example when sibling's injuries required stitches or limbs setting in plaster, and despite the fact that this violence was a regular occurrence and had both short term and long term consequences. These violent encounters with siblings dated back to when they were very young and continued well into their late teens. Dawn, a nineteen year old university student, told how when her sister and herself were younger they would fight all the time but as they got older this behaviour ceased:

> Well we use to always be fighting all the time, but now we have got closer as I've got older, cos like when, there's like a fourteen year gap between me and me sister. ... It's just always been like at each others throats, but now that we're older and stuff we get on. We just like argue now, just like petty arguments, chasing each other up the stairs and attacking each other. ... But it was bad at onetime, it was bad, but I think because I was the younger one I use to annoy

> her, ... But it's better now cos like she doesn't live at home now as well so, I think it's only really got better since I've got older

Violence with siblings was regarded as normal behaviour. Thus:

> physical violence between siblings provides an example of the ways in which the relationship between those involved plays a key role both in the ascription of meaning to a given situation and in pressuring individuals to act in a certain way. ... Sibling fights are normalised within the context of domestic and family relationships (Batchelor, et. al. 2001: 82).

This is demonstrated in the following account from Tina:

> I remember one particular time, I think my sister was being rude to my mum and I decided to take the upper hand and get involved in their argument. I remember we were shouting at each other, my sister was crying and I felt tense with anger, shouting louder and louder to get my voice heard. She started to scream and scream and then picked up a wooden chair and threw it across the room at me.

The young women interviewed for this research also discussed how siblings know how to provoke you, 'they know what buttons to push'. The consequences of this form of violence with close family members is that it is not easily forgotten what has been done and said. As such the situation needs to be resolved in order for the relationships to continue in harmony, however sometimes it is very difficult for the victim to forget what has been said. Some of the young women repeatedly said that when arguing with strangers it is not as important if the conflict is not resolved because you will not see them again. With family and friends however you see them all the time and if the conflict has not been resolved then this can have a serious impact on the relationship, not only between the aggressor and victims but also on other family members and friends who are caught in the middle of the conflict and who may have divided loyalties. Therefore the young women said that there were fewer repercussions with an aggressive or violent encounter with a stranger than with a family member

or friend. With some incidents of sibling violence the aggressor and victim may not speak to each other for a while and in some instances this can last for a long period of time and can have negative consequences for other members of the family, including the psychological impact of being caught in the middle of a long conflict. This situation can cause tension within the family and can also escalate the situation.

A number of conflicts with siblings started as minor incidents and escalated into more serious conflict. The young women told how the arguments would start over 'silly things' and then would quickly escalate resulting in acts of violence. This is illustrated in the following quote from Grace, twenty-four years old from the drop-in centre:

> In one incident me brother accidentally ripped me poster cos he wanted blue tack from the back and I exploded and put his 'Lord of the Rings' books in the bath to soak them and then ripped them up. We started arguing and then I kicked him in the face and kicked him down the stairs.

A major cause of sibling violence highlighted by the young women in this thesis was space and property that is, sharing bedrooms, and also other forms of property including such things as clothes and perfume. 'I use to go in her room and move her stuff around, and spray her perfume, and try on her clothes' (Dawn).

A further issue that was raised during these interviews was jealousy and competing for parent's attention and affection, referred to as sibling rivalry. Thus, jealousy was often used by these young women as a reason for their fights with siblings. This view is often characterised as 'non-realistic conflict' (Coser cited in Felson, 1983: 271), which is characterised by aggressive behaviour that is solely aimed at hurting each other, as opposed to realistic conflict which is characterised as a means of achieving a goal.. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> ...there's a fourteen year gap between me and my sister so when like she found out me mum was like having a baby she didn't want to know type of thing, she was jealous of me cos she had me mum and dad to herself for such a long time and then I come along and upset all that. So we were like at each others throats all the time. (Lucy, seventeen years old college student)

And also this quote from Helen:

> I have a sister who is 22 months younger than me and we are now best friends, but when we were younger we were constantly at each others throats. I think a reason why we used to argue and fight with each other so much was because we use to vie for our mum's attention and get very jealous if one of us did something the other didn't.

However, it was found that although these young women reported fighting with siblings they did not regard this as violent behaviour regardless of how physical it was or whether their sibling sustained injuries. In these accounts there appears to be a contradiction in these young women's understandings of violent behaviour. As discussed some people do not regard violent encounters with relatives, especially close relatives, as violent. The assailant is not regarded as a real criminal, that is, they do not match the image or stereotype of a criminal. The real criminal continues to be the faceless assailant.

The current thinking about safety and danger fails to capture what people know and experience as personal violence. Whilst our attention is continuously attuned to that which happens in public places, there is a stony silence, almost a denial of the extent of violence that happens in private, usually between those who already know each other, however slightly. To the extent that it is acknowledged at all, we assume that this private violence is normal. Real violence, that committed by strangers, is abnormal, an affront to public safety. (Stanko, 1990: 9). Furthermore, Stanko insists that, 'Children are taught to stay away from strangers. When

a respectable adult is threatening and untrustworthy, a child may have a difficult time assessing who is safe and who is unsafe' (1990: 59).

The findings from this study are also consistent with the work of Hoffman et al (2005: 1124) who found that 'sibling violence has both instrumental and expressive sources' as demonstrated in the accounts of sibling rivalry, jealousy and incidents over personal space and property. Although this research has found consistencies with the sibling violence literature there is still much research that needs to be done in order to fully understand this area of violence. We have witnessed an explosion of research on family violence, including child and elderly abuse, as well as wife and partner abuse, but there is still relatively little research on sibling violence both in the UK and the US.

Fights with friends and peer

Narratives demonstrated how quickly a situation with friends and peers can erupt into conflict. This account from Tricia began when she was in school, in sixth form taking her A' levels. A fight began when she was accused of causing damage to another girl's coat. She felt that she was provoked into the fight by the girl because this girl would not back down and accept that Tricia had not caused the damage. Tricia felt that she was justified in fighting the girl because she did not react immediately to the provocation. She told how she felt justified in fighting because the girl continued to blame Tricia for the damage to her coat. She had tried to ignore the girl and let her comments 'go over me head' but the girl was insistent that Tricia had done something wrong and kept repeating the allegation. Tricia described how she was overcome by her emotions and as a result when she started the fight she did not want to stop until she had beaten the girl. Furthermore she said she felt she had no control over her behaviour at this stage and she 'just couldn't stop'. Rather the fight was stopped when a teacher intervened. However Tricia felt that it was premature because she

still felt rage and anger towards the girl and was still pent up with anger. Because Tricia could not release her anger towards the girl she transferred these feeling to the teacher who had intervened and called her names including 'bitch'. However on reflection Tricia felt remorse for her behaviour towards the teacher:

> Er, with the teacher, er, it was inappropriate with the teacher, but erm, towards the girl she really had it coming to her and I'm not sorry for what I done to the girl. But I, maybe I should have been more wise when I was talking to the teacher and not called her a bitch and stuff. Maybe that was inappropriate behaviour for a seventeen year old, but I do apologise for that but not for what I did to the girl cos she really was a bitch. If she was like that with everyone but she's that find of person were she's like 'hiya' and all dead happy and you know, bubbly, and she'll stand there talking to you for ages and it would be alright at first but then, then the next couple of weeks she's like 'oh get away' and she would just stop talking to me cos she would grab you and just start talking to you for ages and you're like, she's one of them people. Like even everyone said she was annoying, she was annoying in that way but she was a nice person. Yes she was alright but she did come on a bit, do you know what I mean, like she would go on and on. That's what people thought of her and I told her to tone herself down and when, it just started from her accusing me of something I didn't do.

Tricia felt doubly victimised by the whole incident; firstly the girl started the confrontation by accusing Tricia of damaging her coat and would not believe Tricia when she said she had not done it. Tricia felt justified in her reaction because she felt provoked to take action against her accuser. She also tried to ignore the girl's accusations however the girl continued to accuse Tricia, which she felt resulted in her losing her control and attacking the girl. Secondly the teacher who intervened in the fight did not listen to Tricia while she was trying to explain her side of the story. She believed that if the teacher had listened to her then the argument and name calling with the teacher would not have taken place. Tricia was frustrated by the teacher's unwillingness to listen because she identified herself as a good pupil who had a good reputation at school and this caused her to

become confused and angry. She did say that she tried to find a reason for the teacher's reaction but could only think that the teacher did not like her and this once again caused confusion.

The following account from Magda demonstrates how quickly friendships can change and friends become protagonists. The conflict between Magda and her friend started as two girls arguing over 'silly things'. Magda explained how she regarded this behaviour between two friends as 'normal'. Although Magda and her friend were arguing over silly things they were also talking to each other and were good friends. The situation reflected a cycle of friendship and arguing 'one minute we'd be arguing and the next we'd be laughing and joking and I thought it was just normal, like friends having an argument and that'. Magda identified the incidents that would spark an argument and described these as silly, for example, 'sitting in the wrong place in class, you know, sitting in someone else's chair, or forgetting to give a pen back'. These silly arguments escalated over time and resulted in a violent attack on Magda by her friend and seven other young women. Magda described the incident as follows:

> It was outside school, in town and I was walking on me own and she came with a group of friends and, and started a fight with me, they got me down on the floor within minutes, seconds, whatever, and I was gone. I was in hospital for about 6 weeks, I couldn't move or nothing. Like I was just walking. I was going to meet me friends in town and I was just walking then from the back I just felt a girl jump on top of me that was it. They weren't saying nothing, they just carried on hitting me and hitting me and, they didn't say a work, they were just hitting, they had nothing to say at all. There were about 7 of them all together and it was about 5 o'clock in the centre of town. There was, at first there was about 4 girls who jumped me and got me to the floor and then the rest just dived in and they weren't saying nothing, they had no communication between them at all. It was just like, it was just hitting me and I was like a punch bag and they were taking turns of piece and they didn't say nothing at all. The only way that I knew it was them was when I saw that girl. I seen her face and I thought will it must be them. But I think they were trying to protect themselves, like if they

> didn't say nothing "If we don't say each others names then she won't know who we are", but then I seen her face and I, I knew who they were straight away. Erm, it was like two of them would hit me and then walk away and then another two would jump in their place and then the other two would ease off and someone else would walk in their place. They would keep going on and the fight went on for about half an hour and I was like getting punched and beat. I was on me own, I mean I tried me best to defend myself but there's only so much you can do against eight girls. I couldn't do much, like when they got me on the floor I mean I was gone.

This attack left Magda with a number of injuries including a broken arm, leg and ribs as well as internal bleeding. The injuries also include psychological harm. Initially Magda could not speak for a few weeks after this attack which was followed by an extended period of fear of being alone and then fear of being in public places. This psychological harm included Magda inflicting injuries on herself. She recounted how after the attack she would self harm in order to release her anger and frustration. Self harming behaviours cover a range of acts; including cutting the skin with a weapon, such as a knife, a razor, and a pair of scissors. These cuts are usually confined to the forearms, wrists and legs. Cutting the skin is the most common form of self harm. Other acts include scratching, hitting oneself, hair pulling and breaking bones (Smith, Cox & Saradjian, 1999). Magda's self harm consisted of severe scratching resulting in drawing blood and attempted suicide. Connors (1996) identified four main functions of self harm; re-enacting past traumatic experiences, expressing feelings and needs, managing chaotic environments, and controlling internal dissociation processes (cited in Abrams & Gordon, 2003). From Magda's narrative it may well be the case that she is re-enacting the trauma of the violent attack she was the victim of. Magda explains how her anger would build up inside her and the only way she felt able to release this anger was to hurt herself. This self harm also took a number of more serious forms including throwing herself down a flight of stairs, trying to drown herself, and crashing her father's car into a tree. Magda told how

she would take her anger out on herself on a regular basis. She spoke of having something evil inside her:

> It was something took over me, like something inside me, like the devil inside me that just takes over me and when, when I'm angry I got to go and kill what I've got inside me.

With regard to hurting herself Magda told how she took her dad's car and drove it straight into a tree because she felt she could not release her anger any other way. This is expressed in the following quote:

> It was last year, June or July, erm, there was a lot of family problems going on in the house, and everyone in the family turned against me for some reason. They were all one side. I was on me own and it was really getting to me so I grabbed me dad's car keys and got in the car and drove and crashed into a tree. ... I, I was ready to take my life there and then and anyone else who was in front of me, that I'd do anything to try and release it.

This self harm gradually escalated into more serious attempts. It started with Magda throwing herself down the stairs and culminated in the attempted suicide. Magda did not regard this behaviour as a major concern; she insisted that she did not need help from anyone, especially a counsellor.

> It's gradually got worse, gradually, but I think I can control me anger meself. It can get out of hand but then I, I can stop it meself as well. I can control it meself.

Laura, a 17 year old college student, also talked about harming herself in order to release the anger and frustration. But unlike Magda, she described herself as a 'complete maniac'. She said that harming herself was better than hitting someone else; directing her anger and frustration inwards to herself was more acceptable than directing it at someone else by using either indirect or direct violence. Laura describes how she inflicts these injuries on herself:

> I ended up scrapping [scratching] me head and I had all scratches down me face you know cos I had to take me anger out on something and usually I just do that and, but it just weren't working and it's just, it's just a horrible feeling and I wish I could never get angry but then I think I do feel better when I've got it all out and I know I sound like a complete maniac but I don't know, it's just like, it's like, it's like the one thing that can annoy you and it just gets into the back of the head and you, you just got to like punch it out of you and then, and then you're alright.

Laura also narrated accounts of self-harm. She gradually inflicted more severe injuries on herself in order to release the anger. At the beginning small cuts and scratches were enough to release the anger, but as time went on Laura found that she needed to inflict more severe cuts and scratches in order to get the same cathartic effect. Unlike Magda, Laura was aware that she had a serious problem with self harming and knew that she needed professional help in order to control it. When these two young women felt anxious and the pain was intolerable they harmed themselves because they said that they would rather feel the physical pain than the psychological pain. When they saw the blood it was evidence of their anxiety and hurt. At times these young women would not feel the physical pain when they were self harming but would be aware of the aesthetic effect. For example, Laura said that when she was scratching her head and face she did not feel the pain, it was only once she had released the psychological pain and anxiety that she realised what she had done to herself. This behaviour was often regarded as a way in which the young women could control their anger, rather than lashing out on someone else they directed their angry towards themselves.

Helen's (19 year old university student) account also demonstrates how seemingly trivial matters can quickly escalate between friends and peers. This incident took place between two groups of friends and resulted in one of those friends being hit with a bar. The victim of the fight was confused

because her attacker had mistaken her for someone else even though they had attended the same school:

> I was walking home from a friend's house with three other friends when we walked past a group of people, I didn't recognize them but my mate John did and so he began talking to them. He was talking to one of the girls who I recognized from being a year below me in school. She had in her hand what looked like a small bar or pole and began chasing him with it and swearing at him. John thought it was funny and continued winding her up, she then turned to me and asked if he was my boyfriend, I said "no". She then starting shouting at me hysterically and asking her friend to batter [hit] me. She said "no", that she wasn't going to fight with any one. The next minute the girl hit me across the face with the metal bar. I screamed at her that if she wanted to fight me she should put the bar down and do it properly unless she was too scared to without a weapon. She hit me again with the bar, a few times across the arm and a few times across the face. I could see my friends arguing with the other people but wasn't taking much notice rather I could see that there was no point in me fighting as she had a weapon and wasn't going to put it down. My mate shouted at me to run so I started walking away from her, feeling like if I ran away I would be making myself look weak. She then hit me across the back of the head and that's when I decided to run. She ran after me screaming and shouting at me and eventually I realized she wasn't going to give up so I stopped. She hit me again and I tried to hit her back but she swung the bar at my arm. Her friend caught up with us and managed to wrestle the bar out of her hand. She then tried to punch me but this time I could bloke her and punched her back in the face. ... After that I realized I could stand up for my self, whereas at the time I'd never come across anything like that before. I'm embarrassed by the incident though, mainly cos I showed I was scared and cos I didn't fight back.

This account demonstrates ideas about a fair fight and using a weapon. Helen felt at a distinct disadvantage because the aggressor had a weapon and used it continually throughout the attack. In this attack Helen was very fortunate that she did not receive serious injuries. She also told how this attack had taught her a valuable lesson, in that she now knows she is capable of standing up for herself. Helen regarded this young woman as 'sick' because she used a weapon to attack someone without provocation. Additionally she thought this young woman was not confident in her own

ability to fight without weapons and as such she was a coward and did not gain any respect or status from the fight.

Fights with strangers

Some young women found themselves the victims of violence from strangers. In accounts given by the young women these attacks involved one-to-one attacks by strangers but also included multiple perpetrators, that is, the victim was attacked by a group of strangers; this could involve two or more people. Some of these violent attacks happened in bars and clubs and highlighted the role of alcohol in violent encounters. Other accounts demonstrated the dangers that these young women faced from strangers in other public spaces including the streets and estates in their neighbourhoods.

This account from Anne, a 21 year old university student, demonstrates the dangers that some young women face when out socialising in bars and clubs. She recalled an incident in which she was the victim of a violent attack by three young women in a club in the city centre. This attack happened in the ladies toilets away from security staff and fellow club goers. Situational factors and poor management, including poorly trained bouncers and floor staff, as well as the lack of female security staff, are important factors with respect to violent incidents in bars (Homel & Tomsen, 1991) with male bouncers being restricted from entering ladies toilets. This isolation and the fact that Anne was attacked by three people was used as evidence that this fight was totally unfair[12]

> There was just me and the three girls in the toilet. I was waiting to go into the cubicle and I knocked on the door to ask them to hurry

[12] Anderson's work on *Codes of the Street*, for a description of a fair fight between two young men 1999: 89)

> up. When the door opened one girl just flew at me and as I was fighting back they all joined in, they were like animals. The attack went on for a short while and they were punching, kicking and kneeing me in the face. I was overpowered but I kept fighting back cos if I didn't I know I would have been worse. One of the girls smashed a glass in my face. It smashed but somehow it didn't cut me. That was the point at which I realised how bad the situation was. After the attack I had to go to hospital. I ended up with two big black eyes and a broken nose and I still suffer with sinus problems. The moral of this story is do not drink and try to avoid people who have being drinking heavily.

For Anne, the experience of being attacked by three young women who had been consuming alcohol may contribute to her belief in the role that alcohol plays in violent incidents. While recalling this attack Anne also told how she felt let down by a number of people including her friends and also the police. These feelings erupted after the attack when Anne found out that someone had walked into the toilets and saw what was happening. This woman immediately went out for assistance and asked a group of young men to help, these men were standing by the toilets and were the nearest to the incident to assist. Upon this request the woman was told by the men to 'let them get on with it'. It was later revealed to Anne that she knew these young men, they were friends of hers. These feelings of 'being let down' were further heightened when she left the club and phoned the police to report the incident and ask for assistance. She described this experience as the 'worst ordeal' of the whole incident,

> I called the police and explained to the male officer what had happened and asked him to take me to the hospital which was not very far but it was pitch black and I was by myself, and besides this, the police were told that the girls were seen heading in the same direction as the hospital. He then told me in no uncertain terms to walk. That was the most heart breaking point that I was visibly upset and the person who was there to help refused. That hurt more than the incident itself. I felt scared and isolated.

Although Anne felt let down by both her male friends and the police she was able to forgive her friends more quickly than the police officer. She

put this down to the idea that the police are there to help people who have been the victim of a crime and who as a result of the crime are in a state of distress and need assistance. Thus the police officer's attitude challenged Anne's ideas, beliefs and expectations. During this account she told now the police were more interested in arresting two males for being drunk and disorderly because they were arguing in the street. 'To be honest I feel more angry at the police for not taking it seriously. Before that happened I wanted to go into the police, now I have distinct contempt for their practices'.

On reflection Anne's feelings of anger and retribution towards the young women who attacked her have changed. She now feels pity for them because she believes that one day the young women will become the victims rather than the perpetrators, that is, she believes that one day they will attack the wrong person and this person will retaliate with violence. 'I pity them cos what goes around comes around and if they are the type of girls who go around picking on girls then one day they'll pick on the wrong person and the same will happen to them'. Furthermore Anne believes that although she was the victim of a violent incident she has gained something positive from the experience in that she now feels that she is a stronger person. Anne has not taken on the identity of a victim.

The accounts given by both Magda and Anne demonstrate strong ideas and informal rules about a fair fight. Tricia (18 year old college student) spoke about her ideas of a fair fight which included the fact that when fighting you should fight properly, not just a 'cat fight', for example pulling hair and scratching, but rather 'you should punch like boys and not just cat fight like stupid girls'. Tricia regards these 'cat fights' 'as girlie and stupid and not worth wasting your energy on, if you're going to fight you should

punch and punch properly'[13]. Other ideas about a fair fight include not hitting a person when they are down, not using weapons, and not causing permanent injuries (Moore, 1991; Sweeney, 1980; Ury, 1999). Many of the young women who spoke about a fair fight also said that using a weapon or hitting a person when they are down does not enhance your reputation as a 'fighter', rather it has a negative impact on your reputation and status because you have not fought properly. They also made the remark that if you hit people when they are down or use a weapon then you were not strong enough to win the fight by yourself, rather you won the fight by unfair means, that you had an unfair advantage to win the fight 'you're just a wimp if you do that' (Tricia).

In many cases the young women thought that 'standing up for yourself' and fighting was more important than actually winning a fight. For example, if the young women walked away from a fight or had someone intervene on their behalf this could result in them being vulnerable to further challenges for fights. The young women also told how they would be subjected to name-calling and other forms of abuse, not only from the challenger of the fight but also from the people who were in the audience at the time of the challenge. Thus 'standing up for yourself and fighting' also acts to preserve a sense of self especially when there is an audience of peers and friends present. The young women did not want to appear 'soft' or vulnerable in front of this audience. This idea of standing up for oneself was noted by Anderson who found that adults in the inner-city verbally informed children they should 'watch their backs', 'protect themselves', 'don't punk out', 'respect yourself', and 'if someone disses [disrespects] you, you got to straighten them out' (Anderson, 1999: 70).

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[13] This idea of a 'cat fight' being stupid is reflective of the argument that girls are not allowed to learn how to fight or use weapons ... hence, few women have the necessary technical ability (Smart, 1976: 66)

When asked about the rules of a fair fight these young women held strong ideas about what constituted a fair fight[14]. A fair fight was argued to be one-to-one fights with no-one else taking sides and 'jumping in' to help one of the fighters gain an unfair advantage. By contrast, the young women said that an unfair fight consisted of two or more people fighting against one person. This was illustrated by Abby, a seventeen year old college student, who provided an account of her ideas of a fair fight. She said it was essential to have friends around who would ensure that the rules of a fair fight are adhered to, this included friends who were prepared to get involved in the fight when bystanders 'jumped in' to even up the numbers and have equal numbers fighting. Thus some young women supported a friend in a conflict by ensuring that it was a fair fight, however, this situation could quickly escalate from the young woman being a by-stander to a fully fledged participant when the rules of a fair fight were broken. Rules can also be broken when one fighter continues to hit the other when they are on the floor. Furthermore it is considered especially repugnant if a fighter kicks or stamps on the head of the opponent.

Motivations for fighting

As we have seen some of the young women in this study could and did fight. In providing their narratives of these fights the young women provided a variety of techniques to disavow their violence and thus present themselves as non-violent young women. This process of disavowal was discussed by Mills (1940) who highlighted the concept of 'vocabulary of motives'. This vocabulary of motives is learned through socialisation and is used to explain deviant or criminal behaviour in socially acceptable ways. Sykes and Matza (1957) later drew criminologists' attention to techniques for justifying and excusing wrongdoing, and how these are used as defence mechanisms to avoid facing the consequences of actions. This

[14] For rules on a fair fight see Anderson's *Code of the Street* for a description of a fair fight between two young men (Anderson, 1999: 89)

neutralisation is used to refer to a range of techniques or strategies for removing shame from wrongdoing, providing a dictionary of rationalisations and justifications that are deemed culturally acceptable. These neutralisations were evident in a number of the young women's accounts, for example, when injuries were inflicted they were often minimised, and in the denial of the victim some of the young women put the blame on the victim saying that they brought it on themselves.

The neutralisation most cited by the young women in this study was the appeal to higher loyalties, that is, fighting to defend a family member or friend. In addition Scott and Lyman (1968) described excuses and justifications as linguistic 'accounts' that explain and remove culpability for a deviant or criminal act after it has been committed. As well as being socially approved vocabularies that neutralise deviant or criminal behaviour or its consequences, accounts are also a manifestation of an underlying negotiation of identity. In using excuses the person admits that the action is bad, wrong, or inappropriate, buts tries to persuade others that they did not mean it. Justifications help to 'exonerate the perpetrator from criticism, as well as reducing the risk of retaliation and retribution from others' (Hara, 2005: 198).

In providing justifications for their violent behaviour these young women accepted responsibility for their fighting but did not regard it as unacceptable. For example, the young women who fought provided a variety of justification and/or motivations for fighting. These motivations can be split into two categories. Firstly there are external motivations including loyalty to other people, for instance family members and friends, and taking control of the situation or conflict. Secondly, there are internal motivations which are related to excitement and jealousy.

External motivations for fighting

Loyalty to others

One of the commonest reasons cited for getting involved in fights was loyalty to others including family and friends. For some of the young women these were one-off incidents, for others they were more regular. These accounts demonstrated the commonly held assumption that family and friends should 'stick-up for each other'. Thus one's loyalty to family and friends can quickly render avoidance strategies and negotiation useless and unnecessary. It is commonly understood among these young women that family and friends are worth fighting for and/or with. Thus these young women are realistic about their ability to avoid all violent situations and confrontations. Many fights that these young women were involved in were the result of previous fights concerning other young women, that is, they are a consequence of friendship groups and family loyalties.

Lisa, a twenty year old university student, told how she involves herself in other people's arguments when it does not concern her. She regarded this as major problem because it had the consequence of escalating the arguments resulting in fights. The following incident took place when Gemma was eighteen years old and involved her close friend. While out in a bar Sarah's friend saw her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend who called Gemma's friend names:

> I immediately stepped in and told her [new girlfriend] not to talk to Claire [her friend] like that. This aggravated her mate and she started on me. So it ended up Claire arguing with her ex-boyfriend's girlfriend and me arguing with her mate. I was angry at her and she was angry at me for having a go at our friends. I was angry and though I needed to stick up for Claire. This however got out of control and I got slapped. I was stunned for a few second and then something clicked in me and I was consumed with rage and launched myself at the girl. All I could think of was that she was going to get away with hurting me. We soon got dragged off each other. ... Like I think the fights all stem from me being a confident person. I feel like I have to stick up for people who maybe aren't as

> outgoing as me. I don't know, I just don't like seeing people picked on and like I said, I think because I'm quite confident and am able to stick up for myself I feel like I should stick up for people who can't do it for themselves. But like I think I make it worse for the people who I'm sticking up for because I don't know the full story and I sometimes get it wrong. Also I think it can make the person I'm sticking up for feel quite weak as if I don't trust them to stand up for themselves and they can look quite weak to the person they are arguing with. Sometimes I think I can help, but sometimes I do go in all guns blazing and get the wrong end of the stick.

Although Lisa had good intentions her intervention in the situation only proved to aggravate the situation resulting in all the young women fighting. It was only when the young women were pulled apart did the fighting stop and no serious injuries were inflicted. However the account given below by Grace (twenty-four from the drop-in centre) demonstrates how 'sticking up' for someone can result in serious injuries. The incident took place in a 'goth' club in the city centre and Grace who described herself as a 'goth' and her friend as a 'girly girl' was being called names and pushed about by a group of other young women. In this quote Grace describes how she stood up for her friend and how after the incident she found it difficult to describe her feelings:

> I was a pretty horrible person for a while. I'm not proud of it, it's just that I couldn't stand around and let me mate be treated like that. It was like a goth club, and actually I was all gothed out at the time and me friend came in and she's all into like dance music, and she come in and she was getting loads of stress off people, because they were all pointing at her and stuff because everyone was in black leather and lace and stuff and she was in like a twin set with a little skirt and this girl, in erm, the toilets was literally giving her really bad vibes and calling her names and like pushing her about and I just said, you know, I first tried to defuse the situation, but she ended up kicking off on me, something to do with a bloke, or something or other and I saw a lip ring and I ended up pulling it out of her lip. Literally pulling it out of her lip and her whole lip ring out of her lip will cause a bit of damage sort of thing, and erm, there was blood everywhere, it was all over the girl and everywhere. I didn't actually, like I can't remember feeling anything after it, not feeling remorse or anything. It didn't make

> any sense, it didn't feel, it felt robotic, it didn't feel like me doing it. It didn't feel, I didn't feel powerful, I didn't feel empowered, I didn't feel anything, I just thought it was funny, like to pull the lip ring out of this girl's lip, it was just funny.

In the club Grace's friend was regarded as 'weird' because she was stepping into the subculture of the 'goth'. She did not dress the same, and the other people 'believed that she was different to them, and didn't understand them' (Grace). However as for Grace she felt comfortable and accepted by her peers in the 'goth' culture. This was in sharp contrast to how she felt outside this culture, she felt she did not fit in with the rest of society and said she often rebelled against the 'norm'. She told how she did not want to conform to the rest of society and its rules rather she 'wanted to be different, to be separate and distinct'. She felt she achieved this through being part of the 'goth' culture in which she dressed in black clothes and wore black make-up. However, although Grace felt comfortable in this subculture she still felt that she had to protect her friend from the teasing and name-calling.

This was not the only incident that resulted in violence when Grace was 'sticking up' for a friend. Once again this incident took place in a bar in the city centre and involved her friend being provoked into a fight. Grace felt compelled to intervene as her friend was 'not the fighting sort, she hatred fights'. In this incident Grace described how she grabbed the antagonist by the hair and slammed her head into the edge of the bar. 'Her head was just like bleeding all over the place but like at that time I thought the girl deserved it for what she did cos like she was really hassling my mate for nothing and I knew that if they started to fight my mate would just be like beaten to a pulp cos she just couldn't fight'.

Other accounts demonstrated young women's concerns for friends who had health problems and were thus regarding as being vulnerable. Tiffany, a twenty three year old university student, told how she fought with a girl

and her boyfriend over what she regarded as their inappropriate behaviour towards her friend, and how this situation quickly escalated:

> This girl fell on my friend who had just been diagnosed with kidney problems, my mate lifted her off and girl said something under her breath as she walked away. I immediately picked up on this and started arguing. The girl came by our car to argue some more and she grabbed my hair. We were fighting on the floor and her boyfriend was stamping on my head. The police came and split us up. The girl and I were still shouting insults at each other and her and her boyfriend were handcuffed.

Even those young women who had not been involved in fights believed that it was right to stand up for a family member or friend. This was the only occasion when they said they would personally get involved in a fight. On reflection Grace and Tiffany said their behaviour was inappropriate. In addition Grace spoke of crossing boundaries of justifiable and acceptable behaviour, including causing serious physical injury and harm. They were more accepting of boys and men fighting 'it's something that they do, but with girls everyone's like oh girls shouldn't fight, it's not proper is it. It's much easier to understand boys fighting than girls' (Grace). Other young women thought that girls who fought were 'quite boyish cos you don't expect girls to act like that do you, you expect them to have a bitch or a slap or that, but you don't expect them to fight. Women are not suppose to fight' (Maureen). These accounts reflect the continued fear of being marginalised if women do not fit into the dominant discourse which defines appropriate female behaviour. Tiffany's account also demonstrates ideas about appropriate male behaviour, for example men fighting with women. This idea was also discussed by Jessica who believed that a man fighting with a woman was inappropriate and cowardly behaviour.

Although these young women fought and in some cases caused serious injuries to their victims they did adhere to traditional feminine discourse,

for example, many of them talked about traditional feminine traits such as passivity and nurturing, including ideas about being a good wife and mother. Grace now regarded her behaviour as inappropriate for a wife and mother. She was no-longer a single young woman with no responsibilities and as such she should conduct herself in a more appropriate manner befitting her role as wife and mother. In addition, Zara talked about her boyfriend wanting a girlfriend who was 'nice and feminine', he did not want a girlfriend who was always fighting and causing conflict when they went out socializing in the bars and clubs. The attractiveness of a girl is altered by having a reputation as a 'fighter'. Thus as these young women matured they regarded their behaviour as transgressing 'normal' female behaviour. What became evident throughout these narratives was the young women's fragmented identities and how they brought these together in order to understand their own sense of self. In many cases the young women resisted a number of identities by appealing to other more favourable identities including being a 'good mother' and, 'a good friend who would stand up for more vulnerable people'. In addition, the young women redefined their behaviour as angry or bad tempered rather than violent people. Finally they draw on accounts that positioned themselves as less violent than other people.

Taking control

One aspect of the interviews that also deserves attention is the idea of young women using violence as a form of control in an uncontrollable situation. These ideas are related to Lyng's (1990: 858-9) theory of Edgework' which involves a 'clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence ... the ability to maintain control over a situation that verges on complete chaos'. These accounts are also linked to ideas of risk, which will be discussed later in this chapter. One example comes from Julie, an eighteen year old from the drop-in centre, who spoke of gaining control in an uncontrollable situation:

> I don't like being not in control of things, you know what I mean. I'm not like a big control freak or nothing, but if I'm not in control and I don't know what's happening next it really makes me really anxious and scared, and I get really wound up and stuff which if just like, it's just like really, really mad. But then it comes to a point where you have to be like in control of them physically cos you have to like try and get them off people and try and try and calm it down a little bit. You try and calm it down cos you're not interested cos you've had a good night. That's like the first part of the control, and when they wouldn't listen then I felt like it had completely got out of control and it was out of my hands and I didn't like feeling like that cos I'm thinking I'm not really good at surprises and when people pull things out their pockets and things like that, I'd faint or something. I get really nervous and I would say it's like more physical control that I need, that are needed in situations like that, but in other situations it's more like mental control. Cos if I can't control them physically, if their hands are everywhere, but like, psychologically I can control them like that cos I'm really calm with it. I'm really calm and I don't want to fight them cos their hands are like going even more and I'm like, I just want to stop it so I just head butted her and she just went down. I was thinking to meself I'm not going to let you kick off on me and make a show of me, make me look like a tit, you know when there are like fifty people out there watching you, so I butted her and then her partner was like just giving it loads and just coming into me face and I was like "I'm not being funny lad but you've seen what I've done to her and I'll just do the same to you if you don't move away".

According to Lyng (1990: 872-3): males are more likely to have an illusory sense of control over fateful endeavours because of the socialisation pressures on males to develop a skill orientation towards their environment. It could be suggested that Julie also displayed this distorted sense of her ability to control this situation.

In addition Julie was concerned with other people invading her personal space as she regarded this as a threat to her ability to control the situation. This feeling was exacerbated when Julie viewed other people's behaviour as unpredictable, for example when people were waving their hands about in front of her and were threatening her with violence. In these situations Julie felt that she could not control them physically and that they would

take advantage if a fight broke out, as a result she would pre-empt the violence and strike the first blow. This also included people 'squaring up' to her and 'getting in her face'. On rare occasions when this happened Julie told how she would lose control and 'I just can't see them any more, I just can't hear them or nothing. I can just feel them there and I really don't like that, that really makes me feel paranoid with them cos I'm like "what's going on". It is at times like this that Julie strikes out in order to gain control of the situation. On reflection she told how she chose to act violently, she made a rational choice to use violence, but she said that she could control her behaviour if she really chose to:

> Sometimes in hindsight I think I make a choice to be violent and I probably could control it if I wanted to, on this occasion I couldn't, I literally exploded.

This idea of taking control in an uncontrollable situation is in sharp contrast to the image of girls and women being passive and submissive. It is more generally accepted that men will use violence in order to take control of situations and women use violence expressively (Campbell, 1993). As we have seen traditional research focused on the biological differences between men and women and it was assumed that these differences were the reason for the different rates of violent crime. Girl's and women's violent behaviour was largely explained as them reacting to forces beyond their control. However the results from this research suggest that some young women are using violence in order to take control of uncontrollable situations rather than reacting to these situations or using avoidance strategies.

Internal motivations for violence

For the buzz

Motivations for fights and acts of violence also included the excitement or the 'buzz' (Katz, 1988; Sanders, 2006). Two young women recounted how

they would put themselves in positions/situations that they thought would result in physical violence for the sheer enjoyment and excitement. Thus risk offers not only negative values but positive ones and as such risk taking can be a source of pleasure, excitement and enjoyment (Lupton, 1999). This first account given by Jessica, twenty-four from the drop-in centre, describes how she tries to provoke a reaction. She told how she would only behave in this way with other young women and would not try to provoke a reaction from someone who she regarded as weaker than her, for example she would not behave in this way towards someone who she thought was far younger or older than her. She also said that she would not behave in this way with men because 'usually men will not react in the same way as other women and will not fight with women and so there's no excitement in it'

> Many things make me fight it doesn't have to be cos someone's done something to me or anything like that. Like sometimes it's just fun, like if I'm bored I'll fight. You know, like during a fight I get excited, it's like an adrenaline rush. I enjoy the fear I think. I have had tendencies to put myself in dangerous situations, like knocking a person on purpose to get a reaction from them so that I can start a fight. It's like I want bad things to happen to me now. But like after the fight or whatever I get a mixture of emotions, like sometimes I feel ashamed of what I've done and sometimes I feel satisfied, like I've got a buzz out of it, especially if I've won the fight, if the other person has got like hurt in the fight and I haven't.

The concept of 'risk' could well be used to describe this account given by Jessica. She took on the challenge and demonstrated to herself that she could meet and conquer it. Additionally, she got a 'buzz' and was exerting control, as well as taking control of her own fears.

This idea of excitement was also discussed in the account given by Tiffany but it differs from the previous account in that the excitement was heightened with the use of drugs. In addition Tiffany was not concerned

about the gender or age of the people she confronted in order to provoke a reaction:

> One night when I went out into town with some friends, it was a Saturday night and we'd all gone out together but I ended up losing them and couldn't find them, but I couldn't be bothered going home so I stayed out by myself. I was in a club and there was this group of boys and we'd taken some cocaine, in fact it was quite a lot and I got paranoid that they were going to do something to me, and I thought they were following me around. I kept going to the toilets to see if they were still there when I came out and they were. I was convinced that they were going to hurt me, but I wanted them to, like I wanted them to start fighting with me. To be honest I was scared but I was more excited than scared. So like when they went outside I waited for a few minutes and then went outside but like I didn't want them to know that I was following them so I just hung around outside for a while pretending to be waiting for a taxi but like then they stopped in front of me in a van and I thought they were going to drag me inside so like I freaked out and started running for a taxi. When I eventually got in the taxi I was relieved and disappointed at the same time, but like I was just buzzing from it all, like I had such a rush, pure excitement.

Tiffany's and Jessica's risk taking behaviour could be regarded as transgressing the boundaries of appropriate female behaviour. 'Dominant notions of femininity tend to represent the careful avoidance of danger ... they are more often portrayed as the passive victims of risk than as active risk takers (Lupton, 1999: 110). Risk and risk avoidance are profoundly gendered and as such women face a double bind with respect to risk taking (Walklate, 1997). Furthermore, Walklate (1997: 43) posits that this has fed into criminological research and theory:

> Women unquestioningly seek pleasure, excitement, thrills and risks. How and under what circumstances this occurs however, had been explored relatively infrequently, and when it has it has often been pathologised. Women are, after all the 'Other', typically defined as being outside the discourse of risk and risk seeking.

Although many of these young women's accounts demonstrated their strategies to avoid risk, there were as we have seen young women who took risks for excitement and thrills. However, Jessica described her risk taking behaviour as 'stupid', but the 'adrenaline rush is worth it'

Jealousy

Another common reason put forward by a number of these young women for fighting was jealousy over boyfriends. In these accounts the young women did not tackle the boyfriend's behaviour but rather fought with the young woman who was 'seeing my boyfriend behind my back'. They draw on accounts that blamed the victim for the violence. Thus these young women blamed other young women for their boyfriend's betrayal. As Vauhkonen notes, 'A jealous woman will always find extenuating factors responsible for her partner's conduct' (cited in Moi, 1982: 63). Twenty nine of the young women interviewed believed that jealousy over boyfriends was the main catalyst for many of the fights they either witnessed or were involved in[15].

When Tiffany found out that her boyfriend was having a relationship with another woman while he was still having a relationship her, she blamed the other woman because 'she should have known better'. 'When jealous women do express their aggression they tend to attack their rival, whereas men are inclined to kill the unfaithful partner. ... jealous aggression is expressed differently in men and women' (Moi, 1982: 63). On no occasion did Tiffany direct the blame at her boyfriend. Similar to the accounts discussed on sexual assault and dating violence, men's culpability is reduced and women are blamed not only for their own behaviour but also for the behaviour of the man. The 'other' woman is blamed and

[15] Studies claim that the main reason for violence between women is over a man (Burbank, 1994; Campbell, 1984; Duncan, 1999; 4).

stigmatized as a 'slut' or 'slag' while the man's behaviour is reduced to his uncontrollable sex drive, 'if she [the other woman] hadn't put it on a plate he wouldn't have done anything' (Tiffany). In the case of Tiffany this behaviour was not restricted to women who were having relationships with her boyfriend, she would also be jealous of other women who found her boyfriend attractive:

> I constantly put girls down I pick their clothes and hair to bits. I was horrible to a pretty girl whom I worked with in a bar because she fancied my boyfriend. I did not speak to her and made her feel uncomfortable. I also told a girl who came into the bar we had no jobs because she was pretty and I didn't want competition or somebody my boyfriend may be attracted to.

For Tiffany, a girl who is pretty is also seen as being sexually attractive making her vulnerable to violence from other girls. This jealousy of pretty girls and the threat that is felt to the young woman's relationship is often accompanied by the girl being called a 'slag', suggesting that she has a reputation for being 'easy' and as such her overt sexuality has to be controlled (Lees, 1993: 43) with violence if necessary. These young women blamed the victims for the violence, that is, they brought it on themselves through their own behaviour. When young women were perceived to be sexually promiscuous, for example, seeing someone else's boyfriend, this was regarded as unacceptable behaviour and needed to be acted upon. Thus when young women policed other young women's behaviour through violence, this violence was regarded as acceptable. The victim is seen as a certain type of person, for example, a slut, and so becomes a legitimate target for violence (see Sykes and Matza 1957).

Whether the violation of seeing someone else's boyfriend is real or imagined, 'the disrespect that a girl often perceives and then dishes out is enough to start two girls down a path to a physical confrontation' (Ness, 2004: 11). Annette recounted her experiences of a fight she was the victim

of. The provocation for the fight was the belief held by the perpetrator that Annette had been dating her boyfriend. Annette rejected these allegations but felt compelled to try and 'stand up for herself'. In this conflict Annette had little time to employ avoidance or negotiating strategies, 'like I didn't have enough time to say nothing to her before she starting fighting'. In this account Annette had been mistaken for another woman who was having a relationship with the perpetrators boyfriend:

> I can remember this woman marching over to me in a rage, pushing my mate out of the way and pinning me against the wall. She was calling me a 'little slut' and asking me how long it had been going on and telling me she was going to kill me and him both. I can remember feeling really confused and worried. I was continually telling her I didn't have a clue what she was talking about but she was accusing me of going with her boyfriend. My friend tried to calm her down telling the woman we never even knew her or her boyfriend. The only made her angrier and she just shouted abuse back at me mate. I remember thinking 'what am I going to do' and a bit embarrassed as people had started to stop and watch for what seemed like ages. There wasn't much I could have done as she was a lot older and stronger than me so I was maintained pinned against the wall. The next thing I remember is three of the woman's friends approaching us.

When recounting this story Annette told how the woman who attacked her had mistaken her for someone else, but because she was angry she did not listen to Annette or her own friends who repeatedly tried to persuade her she was mistaken. What concerned Annette most about this attack was the fact that other people had overheard what was said and the names she was called. This caused Annette great anxiety because she did not want to be 'thought of as one of those women who goes after someone-else's boyfriend, I'm not one of those girls'. Although Annette rejected these allegations she felt compelled to 'stand up for meself'. In this conflict she had little time to employ avoidance or negotiating strategies as her challenger starting hitting her while she was pinned against the wall.

Abby also thought it was acceptable for girls to fight with other girls who were 'seeing' their boyfriend:

> I think like sometimes it's acceptable to fight like cos my mates have had fights with girls and I've thought that they were right cos like they've been going out with me mate's boyfriend and they knew they were together and she'd fight them. Like I do think it's acceptable when girls fight over someone else going with their boyfriend cos I don't think it's right to be going with each others boyfriend.

However, this account departs from previous accounts in that Abby's friend did not place sole responsibility on the girl who was 'seeing' her boyfriend, rather she thought that her boyfriend was also to blame:

> She's fought with her boyfriend as well for going with this other girl, but like some girls now will only fight with the girl, they won't say nothing to the boy, they'll stay with the boy and I don't think that's right cos I think most people, like when you're a couple, if someone goes with your boyfriend and then you find out and they [the other girl friend] didn't know then girls still go for them even though they didn't know that they had a girlfriend, when they could have told her.

Accounts also demonstrated that the young women get jealous when their boyfriend is looking at another girl even if he is not 'seeing her'. Jealousy can also arise if a girl is found talking to someone else's boyfriend, especially if the girlfriend perceives this other girl to be pretty. 'Thus much violent behaviour by girls serves to oppress other girls as a result of their intense competition – frequently over boys and men. This oppression of girls by other girls is at its starkest when we consider the way in which girls censure other girls' sexual behaviour, according to sexist notions of appropriate behaviour' (Phillips, 2003: 723).

Violence arising from feelings of jealousy were not restricted to sexual/intimate relationships, rather accounts demonstrated that jealousy between sibling (see section on 'fighting with siblings in this chapter) and

in friendships can also lead to violence including jealousy about young women's popularity. Jessica described herself as being very popular throughout her junior and high school years. This popularity was a double-edged sword, for although Jessica had many friends, she also had many peers who were jealous of her which according to Jessica resulted in them picking fights with her. In one incident Jessica told how a fight started because one of her friends was jealous of her being friends with some else. She explained how it was horrible when her friend behaved in this way because it had an impact not only on Jessica but on all the friends in the group:

> It's not nice having someone that jealous of you, like everything you've got they want. I think she felt left out by it all or something like that cos she wanted to be the glamorous girl in the group, but I was and she didn't like it. The first fight I had with her we were in senior school.

Emotionality

Whether as victims or perpetrators the young women spoke of a gamut of emotions including fear, pity, confusion, shame, and guilt. As discussed earlier shame and guilt are usually felt by the perpetrator when they can find no justification for their behaviour. Although all these emotions were discussed, those most commonly talked about were shame, guilt and confusion. Shame is a more self-oriented emotion tending to focus on one's own distress, while guilt is a special case of empathy, involving feelings of concern coupled with a sense of personal responsibility for having caused distress (Leith & Baumeister, 1998). Many of the young women tried to justify their behaviour both to themselves and to others. These justifications included denying their own responsibility, denying the victim, and denying injury (Sykes & Matza, 1957). This self-justification suggests the presence of feelings of shame and guilt (De Haan & Vos, 2003), 'which transform our experience of ourselves and our surroundings

in distinctive ways. ...we feel worthless and may even feel physically smaller. We lack power and are left with little control' (Lindsay-Hart, 1984:693). Grace describes her feelings of shame and lack of control when she met someone who knew of her reputation as a fighter:

> Like I had no control over what they thought of me, I just couldn't change their thoughts, they knew what I was like and that's what they're always going to think of me (Grace).

'I feel so ashamed'

The young women who spoke about fighting often accompanied these accounts with a discussion of their feelings especially their feelings after the fight had taken place. Although they provided reasons and often felt justified in their actions they also recounted how they felt ashamed of this behaviour. Joanne often said she felt ashamed of her behaviour and wished that she had found a more appropriate way of dealing with situations rather than resorting to fighting.

> I am not proud of the situation and I have never had a street brawl before and hopefully I never will again. I was so ashamed that I had hit another person like that. When I got into the taxi after the fight I felt really ashamed and upset that I could actually fight in the street. I kept thinking how my mum would be upset if she knew what I had done, even to this day she doesn't know I had the fight.

Grace also told how she fought back against being bullied but this action led her into using violence on all occasions where she felt vulnerable or threatened. The benefits of fighting back included freedom from fear of being bullied, self-confidence in their ability to handle future challenges, status, and respect. The negative consequences for Grace of using violence in retaliation to bullying was that she had a reputation as a fighter, and as such was always being challenged to fight. Thus in some cases such a reputation does not discourage future challenges but may actually encourage it. So although Grace used her reputation as a fighter to navigate

the immediate and potential threat of violence in her everyday life, she recalled how this reputation came back to haunt her:

> Erm, just after I met me husband we use to go to these parties and his friends from college would come and erm girlfriends and stuff there and erm his mates would have mates from university and stuff and I'm about the same age as the ones from college and they were all, no one was talking about fighting, no one was talking about bearing anyone up, beating anyone's head in. And there was a girl there and she to me "I know you, I know your face". She remembered me from a fight she'd seen me have with a friend of hers and she had a look of horror on her face cos of the way I was fighting like smashing a girl's head and stuff like that. Then she went off to talk to the others and she just looked at me with disgust and told the others and now like they don't look at me with any respect at all. And like the only jokes they make with me are about "you'll paste me", or "you'll batter him won't ya". It's like, I don't know, it's like I've got to live with that, that's the legacy I've got to live with. People see me as that girl who beats people up. I'm not going to be taken seriously in that circle of people so I avoid being around them as much as possible. But like everyone I use to hand about with before that saw my fighting as an impressive thing, or a funny thing. But like now it's just people think "she's a dickhead, she's an absolute dickhead if that's the only way she can get her point across.

In expressing feeling of shame and in acknowledging these feelings, the young women accepted that they felt ashamed and came to terms with their responsibility for what had happened, and in some instance took steps to make amends for the harm done (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004). In her account of fighting over her boyfriend, Tiffany told how she apologized to the young women who she accused of 'seeing' her boyfriend behind her back:

> The next day when me friends told me what I'd done and said to this girl, like I'd been really, really drunk and couldn't remember much of what had happened until me friends told me, I later found her and apologised. I told her how sorry I was and that I'd mistaken her for someone else.

In addition, a pervasive shame experience is often related to feelings of inferiority, helplessness, a loss of self-esteem (Cook, 1996) and a fear of social exclusion (Elias, 1994). Rather than being excluded or rejected by her husband's friends Grace made the decision to distance herself from them where and when ever possible. In this way she took control of the situation and felt less helpless, thereby reducing the negative consequences of her past behaviour. Thus, 'shame appears to be more strongly linked to responses aimed at insulating oneself from negative evaluations. Thus ... feelings of shame provoke a desire to hide, disappear or escape' (Tangney, 1995; Wicker, et al, 1983).

These feelings of shame further encouraged Grace to make every effort to desist from fighting in the future and to use more 'acceptable ways of resolving disputes with people'. However she was aware that her reputation as a fighter will always be with her. For as Lindsay-Hart (1984: 696) has highlighted, 'in shame we view ourselves through the eyes of another and then realize that we are who we do not want to be and that we cannot now be otherwise'. The concerns expressed by Grace are closely related to the work of Goffman[16]. Grace has been involved in accommodating the attempts of others to discredit her by changing her behaviour to what she regards as more appropriate female behaviour. In her attempts to conceal her stigma she has made attempts to distance herself from previous friends and acquaintances:

> I don't want people to see me as that person anymore cos like I do control my behaviour now, but like they will always see me as that person.

[16] In *Stigma* (1970) Goffman discusses the concept of 'spoiled identity' and examines the ways in which those who are blemished physically or socially suffer damage to their social identity as a consequence of the treatment they receive at the hands of those around them. In coming to terms with stigmatisation

Other accounts referred to feeling ashamed for someone else's behaviour, from acts that they have committed. Jessica recounted how she felt ashamed for the behaviour of her neighbour who acted inappropriately. In this account she told how in a dispute with her neighbours, a husband and wife, the husband raised his hand to hit her. She recalled how she immediately thought that he was a coward, 'cos a man shouldn't hit a woman, like he should 'ave just left it to his wife to argue with me, but like he didn't, he started arguing with me and them went to hit me. He's a man and like I felt ashamed for him like going to hit a woman like that'. Another account of feeling ashamed for someone else's behaviour was given by Lucy:

> I feel ashamed for them I really do. You see two girls fighting and it's so undignified it really is, I'm like "for God's sake". You know, especially if you go out to town and it's like 3 o'clock in the morning and everyone's tanked up [drunk] and you're waiting for a taxi and you see girls fighting and you're just like "oh God" and they're in short skirts and their tops come down and you're just like, "you'll wake up in the morning and you'll regret that". It's just undignified. But if I walk past I think "I'm glad that's not me".

'Why did I do that'

Many of the young women who recalled accounts of fighting also said that they felt guilty over their behaviour. This guilt was still felt by many long after the incidents. In one account Annette told how she felt guilty over her own involvement in a violent conflict in which her friend stood up for her and fellow friends against a fellow pupil at school only to be punished while the rest of them benefited but with no repercussions.

> I feel terrible, I feel so bad, I, I don't know, I feel so guilty, I think why? I mean at the end of the day she's always there for me, she's, she's doing all she can to help me, she's going to help me get through it, she say's "it's all right we'll be alright. Like she risked everything for us. We were scared of standing up to this bully and when she did she got expelled from school and it wasn't even her

> fault. Like I don't know I feel really, really guilty. Even when we went and told them [teachers and parents] what was going on they didn't believe us until like she had been expelled and by the time they did it was too late cos she had already been blamed and many people thought that she was the bully, but she wasn't, she was only standing up for us (Annette).

Guilt was also expressed by those young women who had reflected on their behaviour and came to the conclusion that they had over-reacted to the situation. In these situations some young women went out of their way to apologise to their victim. If the victim did not accept the apology, this resulted in the young woman feeling confused and frustrated. She could not understand why the apology was not accepted as it was offered in all sincerity. Helen described how a woman who had mistaken her for someone else later came over to apologise for her behaviour, 'she said she had been drunk and couldn't remember much until her friends told her. But like I was really pleased that she apologised cos that must have taken some guts'. Thus guilt is particularly linked to a desire to confess, apologise, or atone for one's own wrongdoings (Tangney, et al, 1995; Wickers, et al, 1983). Laura told how she felt guilty because 'looking back I over-reacted and I should have just handled it in a different way, I was wrong to hit out like that'. In these accounts the young women felt guilty because they considered their behaviour to be wrong. In other instances, the young women felt guilty because they had lost control of themselves and the situation. They told how this sort of behaviour was inappropriate for girls and women as they regarded losing control as a male characteristic and as such unfeminine behaviour.

Feelings of guilt show that 'we accept the idea that we did a bad thing. However, we do not fully embrace the idea that we are a bad person' (Lindsay-Hart, 1995: 695). Lindsay-Hart further asserts that 'our identity is not fully transformed by guilt because we are not sure why we did what we did (ibid). This is displayed in the following account from Helen:

> I just don't know why I behave like that. My mum's a really good person and she listens to me without shouting and all that, and I treat her like that. I just don't know why I do it.

'I just don't know why'

Confusion was a feeling that four of the young women spoke about in their accounts of fighting. This confusion resulted from their own behaviour and also the confusion about how the situation got so out of control that it ended in fighting. There was also confusion as to why they were the one's who had been attacked:

> I can't understand what I did to make them do that to me'. I was confused, I tried to think of anything I'd done that could be interpreted as bullying and I couldn't, then I tried to persuade her she must be mistaken and eventually I realized she didn't really think I'd bullied her she just wanted to fight and she provoked me into a fight cos she just wanted to fight. It's really confusing that I ended up fighting for nothing (Helen).

For some young women the confusion was the result of their lack of control over their behaviour. They told how they hated fighting, and knew that it did not solve problems rather it only made the situation worse. However when they were confronted by someone and 'provoked' into a fight they were confused and disappointed by their reaction to that provocation. 'During the fight I was really upset, crying and all that, and I didn't know why they were being so cruel and where it had all gone wrong' (Magda).

'It's so mixed up'

Although some young women had clear thoughts about their feelings, for example feeling ashamed, guilty or confused, others had much more mixed emotions. For example feeling scared before a fight and then feeling proud that they had stood up for themselves. Others said that they did not feel anything at all, while some said that they felt good because the other

person deserved what they got. This idea of the deserving victim is similar to Sykes and Matza's (1957) theory of techniques of neutralization in which they postulated the 'denial of the victim'. Here the young women justified their behaviour as the victim deserved what they got and so were punished for their misdemeanour:

> Like if she didn't do that to my mate then I wouldn't have touched her, but she shouldn't behave like that and not expect to get away with it (Julie).

While recounting an incident in which Grace smacked her child she described an array of feelings. These included feeling frustrated and angry that her daughter was not doing as she was told; this was followed by her losing her temper and smacking her daughter. Grace described how immediately after this she felt 'crushed and horrible' which were followed by 'feeling ashamed, guilty and embarrassed' for her behaviour.

Tiffany, who had been involved in a number of violent incidents, both as a perpetrator and victim, including fighting with strangers, dating violence and sexual assault spoke about feeling a mixture of emotions. While having a fight with a stranger she told how:

> The fear gives me an adrenaline rush. My heart beats fast and then at the end of it all I get an overwhelming need for revenge. Like I sometimes feel ashamed when I look back over my behaviour and sometimes I feel sorry but sometimes I get satisfaction from it. Afterwards I feel quite proud that I didn't get beat up and I'm relieved and disappointed at the same time.

Expressions of mixed emotions were coupled with embarrassment over their behaviour. Tina described how she felt embarrassed because she felt she had let her mother down by fighting in the street, 'I kept thinking how my mum would be upset if she knew what I had done, even to this day she doesn't know I had the fight'. This embarrassment was also reflected in

Tina identifying herself as 'one of those girls who brawl in the street'. She considered violent behaviour inappropriate for girls and women (see previous sections for a discussion on these ideas). Tina held very rigid views about appropriate female behaviour including the belief that women should be passive and gentle:

> I think that females should behave like women, I don't like it when they fight, but I think if a girl does it just looks wrong, girls should be gentle and more passive than men. Violent women aren't attractive, it's vulgar and common. I just think that women that you see fighting in the street usually are harder and more scally. You would really be surprised if you saw two posh women fighting. It's just that you would associate harder, more scally women with fighting. I do think that women who fight in public are lower class in the sense that it is the type of bringing up they have had. My mum always brought me up never to air my dirty washing in public and that's one of the reasons I feel so embarrassed about my behaviour, like fighting in public is just so common and I let my mum down.

Summary

Miller (1998) provides a discussion of how the motivations for young women's violence are sometimes similar to men's motivations, which include competition for status and recognition. The interviews for this research found that young women also used violence for the 'buzz' and excitement and to take control of what they perceived to be uncontrollable situations. However, the results from this research also suggest that young women's motivations are more complex and include loyalty to others, especially family and friends, and jealousy over boyfriends.

In narrating their accounts of fighting the young women used a variety of justifications and excuses to absolve themselves of responsibility and place blame on the victims. The victim had brought it on themselves through their own inappropriate behaviour. For example, a young woman who was dating someone else's boyfriend was argued to be a legitimate target.

Policing of young women's inappropriate behaviour was believed to be acceptable because they were 'being too mouthy', 'falling out' and 'policing' the sexual behaviour of other girls (Artz, 1998; Batchelor, 2001; Phillips, 2003, Miller, 2001). Other acceptable situations included standing up for family members and friends, and for people who were believed to be more vulnerable, that is, they 'were not fighters'. Although some of the young women in this study fought they held strong beliefs about appropriate female and male behaviour with it being inappropriate for girls and women to use violence, but normal for boys and men.

It was commonly believed that a woman who fought was unattractive and transgressing 'normal' female behaviour. This is in contrast to Phillips (2003) who found that girls in her study believed that boys were attracted to girls who could fight. There is a contradiction in these fighting narratives. Fighting was used as an informal social control mechanism against other young women who were transgressing the boundaries of appropriate female behaviour while fighting itself was regarded as inappropriate female behaviour. However, in order to reconcile their identity as a fighter these young women did not describe themselves as violent, rather they appealed to more favourable identities such as 'a good mother', or friend. They also identified themselves as angry or bad-tempered or compared their own behaviour to someone else who they believed to be violent.

The interviews demonstrated that fights between and with some people were regarded a normal. For example, fights with siblings and friends were described as 'it being like that, that's just what we do'. They were described as 'just part of growing up' and 'not serious'. In reality some of these fights resulted in injuries that required medical attention. These young women held stereotypical images of a criminal and victim of violence. The real criminal was the faceless stranger rather than someone

known to the victim. In addition many of these fights took place in the young women's neighbourhoods or while they were out socialising in the city centre. In those accounts that took place in the bars and clubs it was believed by the young women that alcohol played a significant role in the violence. They believed that the person was fighting because they were drunk.

While narrating their stories of fighting the young women, whether as victims or perpetrators, talked about a wide range of emotions they felt before, during and after the incidents. Some of the young women said they felt ashamed of their behaviour and wished they had found more appropriate ways of dealing with the situations. Others said they felt guilty, not only for their own behaviour but also because they believed they had let other people down. For example, Helen felt guilty that she had let her mother down because 'I had fought in the street for all to see'. As well as feeling of shame and guilt a number of the young women said they were confused. They did not understand why they had been the target of violence. In other cases they could not understand why they had reacted with violence. Similar to the accounts of preventative strategies these accounts of fighting demonstrate the deeply held beliefs about appropriate female behaviour.

Chapter 7

Intimate violence

The previous chapters have looked specifically at the young women's attempts to prevent violence, their experiences of indirect violence, and direct violence. This chapter focuses on the violence experienced by these young women at the hands of the men in their lives, these acts can also include sexual assaults. Historically, violence against women by intimates and sexual assaults including rape has largely been ignored or trivialised. Rape and domestic violence were not widely discussed by male academics who explored almost every other form of male activity (Griffin, 1979). However in the 1970s these attitudes began to change, largely as a result of the second wave of feminism. Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975) was one of the first pioneering books that raised recognition of sexual violence. Feminist scholars highlighted the neglect and misrepresentation of domestic violence and sexual violence. Thus 'feminism has been credited by a number of scholars with defining [domestic violence] and rape as significant social problems, and feminist writing on sexual violence and [domestic violence] has had a major influence on the reconceptualisation of rape [and domestic violence]' Ward, 1995: 11). This awareness has generated changes in legislation and increased resources including refuge centres and rape suites, as well as specially trained police officers to deal with incidents of rape.

The British Crime Survey (BCS, 2002) estimated that one in ten women have been sexually victimised since the age of 16. The BCS further estimated that less than one in five incidents of female sexual victimisation came to police attention (Myhill and Allen, 2002). Between 2006/07 the reported number of sexual assaults and rapes accounted for 42 percent and 23 percent of sexual offences respectively.

In addition 31 percent of violent incidents reported to the BCS in 2006/07 against women were domestic violence, compared with five percent of incidents against men (Walker, et al, 2007). However, both official and BCS surveys are notorious for not covering these types of crimes well. People may be less willing to disclose being the victim of sexual assault or domestic violence than they are of disclosing being a victim to burglary or street crimes.

In order to understand violence between boyfriends and girlfriends in the UK, a study commissioned by the National Society for the Protection of Children (NSPCC) with 2,000 teenagers aged between 13-19, which was conducted through the teenage magazine 'Sugar' in 2005 found that 1 in 5 teenage girls had been hit by a boyfriend. These findings have been supported by a survey conducted by ICM commissioned by the End Violence Against Women campaign (EVAW) (2006) which found that 42% of young people know girls who have been hit by their boyfriends and 40% knew a girl who had been coerced by her boyfriend to have sex. Furthermore the survey found that 59% of young people felt they did not have enough information and support to be able to help someone they knew to be a victim of physical or sexual violence. 4 in 10 (43%) believed it is acceptable for a boyfriend to get aggressive in certain circumstances, for example, if a girl cheats on her boyfriend, dresses inappropriately or shouts at him, and 6% had been forced to have sex by a boyfriend.

Thus young women are not isolated from violence by virtue of their gender rather gender may increase young women's exposure and vulnerability to certain forms of violence, for example, violence in dating relationships and sexual assault. This exposure and vulnerability to these forms of violence vary in degree, seriousness and consequence for young women who learn to respond to these threats in a variety of ways. These responses range from silence to violent physical resistance, and retaliation. For example,

the interviews demonstrated that some young women may feel physically competent to retaliate against dating violence or sexual assault with violence including a push or punch. Other young women may use violence as a last resort when they feel they have exhausted all other avenues. In addition some young women may not retaliate against their boyfriend or the perpetrator, either directly or indirectly, instead they may tolerate the violence in silence. The reason for this tolerance may include fear of the violence escalating. In addition the young women's ability to counter threats of violence may be constrained by a number of factors. These may include, differences in strength, whether the assailant uses a weapon, and power dynamics. Threats, exposure and vulnerability to intimate violence including dating violence and sexual assault may have an impact on young women's social interaction, social mobility, safety and well-being.

Although some of the young women tried to resist their boyfriend's violence, for the young women who recounted their stories of sexual assaults they felt less able to fight back. These accounts of sexual assaults demonstrate young women's deeply held beliefs about appropriate female behaviour, self-regulation and self-blame. These accounts also highlight how these young women were aware of the danger of being sexually assaulted, not only from strangers but also acquaintances. These young women did not feel safe walking alone at night and employed a number of precautionary strategies similar to those discussed in chapter 4 to avoid danger.

Dating Violence

The definitions of courting, dating and intimate violence have evolved from the early research, for example, Makepeace's (1988) early work used the concept 'courting violence' and defined it as violence which inflicts injuries. In her later work she was to change the concept from 'courting' to 'dating' violence. Furthermore Carlson's (1987: 17) definition involves

'violence in unmarried couples who are romantically involved'. Piug (1984: 268) argues that it involves 'acts of physical aggression directed at one dating partner by another partner'. Moreover, Sugerman and Hotaling (1991: 101) argue that dating violence occurs when 'the use or threat of physical force or restraint that has the purpose of causing injury or pain to another individual'.

To date there has been relatively little research conducted on dating violence in the UK, especially when compared to the vast literature on domestic violence. The majority of data on dating violence has come from US studies. Therefore, very little is known about the extent of dating violence in the UK. Makepeace (1981) was among the first to conduct research on dating violence in the US, in a study which was conducted with college students who were in courting relationships. The US studies (see Makepeace, 1981; White & Koss, 1991; Kaura & Allen, 2004) have found that approximately ten percent of dating teenagers have experienced some violence in the context of a heterosexual dating relationship.

The term 'dating' violence rather than 'partner' or 'intimate' violence is preferable here because firstly the young women in this study were either living with parents and/or family, or were sharing accommodation with fellow students at the time of the interviews rather than living their boyfriends. Secondly, a small number of these young women were not 'intimate' with their boyfriends when the abuse started. Thirdly, the use of terms such as 'marital' and 'domestic' violence are contested terms because not all cases involved partners who were married, cohabitating, or heterosexual. Fourthly, as discussed in the introduction when we restrict our language with the use of 'abuse' it appears to denote less harm than when we discuss violence, however the term violence obscures a range of other behaviours such as intimidation, degradation, and threats, that may

cause the same level of harm and damage, if not more, than physical violence. Ferraro (2006: 16) argues that:

> When we speak of "intimate partner violence" in legal, social science, and lay terms, people distinguish between "hitting, kicking, and beating up" and making derogatory comments, ignoring a loved one's needs for attention and respect, or engaging in emotionally frightening or damaging behaviour. Men who physically beat their wives are subject to legal interventions, even if those interventions are light and sporadic. Men who denigrate their wives' appearance, performance and abilities, flaunt marital infidelity, monitor and control their wives' actions, and scare them with aggressive driving, angry verbal outburst, or other frightening behaviours are rarely subject to criminal sanctions.

This section focuses on violence in the context of dating relationships, that is, boyfriend-girlfriend and girlfriend-girlfriend. At the time of the study 27 of the young women said they were either currently in a relationship or were divorced/separated. Further to this, a sub-section of the young women, 7 of the 27 talked about their boyfriend's aggressive and violent behaviour. These 7 young women all came from the college and the university groups, and were aged between 17 and 23, none of the young women from the drop-in centre discussed dating violence. This violence ranged from subtle psychological violence to serious physical violence. The psychological violence included; hurting their feelings, including calling them names, bringing something up from the past to hurt them, policing their social behaviour, for example, what clothes to wear, where to go and where not to go, and also who to see and not see. The psychological violence can also include promoting feelings of disempowerment. Kirsta often talked about feeling disempowered by her boyfriend. He would often put her down with regard to her parenting abilities, and also encouraged her to withdraw from college and concentrate on caring for him and their child. Kirsta found it a constant struggle and a great source of anxiety to 'please' her boyfriend and continue her studies.

It is rare for young women to disclose their experiences of dating violence. The young women in this study had not previously disclosed this form of violence to others, especially parents and friends. Only one young woman interviewed had discussed the violence with her sister however, she was reluctant to discuss the full extent of the violence in her relationship for fear that her sister would tell others, especially her parents, and furthermore she did not want her sister to dislike her boyfriend anymore that she already did.

The physical violence included; pushing, slapping, punching, choking, restraint, and damaging possessions. Throughout the interviews it became apparent that there is a great deal of variation in what the young women perceived as violent behaviour. For example, they provided quotes such as 'it was only a slap' or 'he only pushed me'. These statements indicate that the young women may not identify these experiences as violent, but also that they may minimize or redefine these experiences.

This research found that the young women believed the underlying function of many of these acts is to instil fear in them, and the consequence of this fear is that many of the young women believed their boyfriend was exerting control over them and also controlling the relationship. This fear can also include the constant threat of ending the relationship. As such the young women tolerated the aggression and violence in order to maintain their relationships. What made these findings most interesting was the fact that the young women repeatedly said that men should not use violence against women. This is reflected in the extract below:

> No matter what you shouldn't do that to girls, you know, you shouldn't hit out like that, like you know what I mean (Catherine).

These seven young women reported one or more incidents of violence and aggression in their dating relationships. As previously stated this took a

number of forms including name-calling, punching, throttling, and hitting. There were also a number of accounts that highlighted the role of alcohol in dating violence. Two of the young women said their boyfriends were more violent when they had consumed alcohol. 'Alcohol plays a big part in our fights' (Tiffany). 'One time when he was really aggressive towards me we had both been drinking and he tried to throttle me and he tried to hit me with a golf club (Anne). These young women repeated the argument that being intoxicated absolved their boyfriends of responsibility for their violent behaviour. This is due to the belief in the temporary suspension of their self-control, and the belief or idea that the alcohol has taken over control of the boyfriend. Research suggests that men are regarded as less culpable for their behaviour when they are intoxicated. MacAndrew and Edgerton, (1969), noted that because of the believed disinhibition effects of alcohol, behaviour that is usually frowned upon is tolerated when the perpetrator is intoxicated[17]. However feminist researchers have argued against the alleged link between alcohol consumption and violence as it serves to excuse violence against women (McGregor, 1990). Other accounts suggested that the young women tolerated or redefined their boyfriend's use of violence in order to maintain their relationships.

Using direct quotes from respondents will highlight a number of issues that the young women discussed around issues of dating violence, these included stranger and acquaintance danger, redefining violence, gender symmetry, that is, the argument that females are as violent as males in their heterosexual dating relationships, and also young women changing and altering their behaviour in order to keep the peace and maintain their relationship with their boyfriend. Their boyfriend's domination, manipulation and aggression, even to the point of physical violence in

[17] There are however a number of studies that challenge the causal link between alcohol consumption and violence (Lang, 1993; McCord, 1993).

dating relationships was often considered relatively minor in comparison to other dangers, including stranger danger.

Love the one you're with

'Stranger danger' is taught to children from a very young age, often to the neglect of acquaintance danger, with government advice trying to assuage women's fear by suggesting that women adopt individually managed precautionary strategies to minimize encounters with male strangers (Stanko, 1990; 1995; 1996). This idea is highlighted in the following quotations, especially this first quote from Anne who compared her boyfriend's violent behaviour to her with that of three girls who attacked her in a night club:

> I don't think he would hurt me really badly; he has never hit me, so in a way I feel safer with him than I did when I was attacked by the girls. Erm, they really hurt me and they didn't care how they did it, there was no regard for me in any way. They wanted to hurt me, whereas my boyfriend was letting out his anger. Er, I'm not sure how I can explain it. I felt safer with my boyfriend than I did with three total strangers. I don't think he would ever hurt me in the same way.

This quote from Angela also minimises the incident by referring to it as domestic argument:

> We just had a big argument one night and, er, in a club somewhere, and it got a bit, and he pushed me by the arm and I said yes like 'I'm not taking that from anyone'. Erm, that was it really, it wasn't too bad, just a bit domesticy (Angela).

What this young woman later revealed was that her boyfriend had pushed her to the ground in the night club with broken glass and bottles on the floor, and then he walked away.

The young women who had been victims of stranger violence or who had been in fights with friends were more willing to talk about the injuries that had been inflicted and sustained than the young women who had experiences of dating violence. When they did talk about them they tended to minimise the injuries saying that they were only scratches and bruises. However, while they were saying this they also said they had sustained bloodied noses, black eyes, and swollen faces from being repeatedly punched in the face. When asked if they had to receive medical attention for these injuries the young women either ignored the question or refused to answer it. This may well be due to the fact that once the injuries had been identified, named or talked about, it would be far more difficult to minimise or redefine the violence inflicted by their boyfriends. This redefining or minimising of violence was prevalent throughout these interviews. This is demonstrated in the words of two of the young women. The first quote is from Anne who had been in a long term relationship with her boyfriend:

> I sometimes feel scared when he really loses it, that is, when he is violent, er, he hasn't ever seriously hurt me, mainly he'll grab me and push me around. One time when he was really aggressive he tried to throttle me and he tried to hit me with a golf club and, erm, he's never hit me.

This second quote comes from Kirsta who had been with her boyfriend for eighteen months:

> He was physically and verbally aggressive as well. He pulled me hair and called me names. Like to me it wasn't like I was getting hit, it was like when we argued, it was like, in a way I believe that I drive him to it when we argue, and it, it, cos it wasn't actually getting battered, that it would just be like getting strangled or getting hit cos I wasn't actually battered on the floor, to me it wasn't bad, it wasn't as serious.

So while hitting might be considered to be behaviour that should not be tolerated or accepted, other aggressive and abusive behaviour such as name-calling and throttling appear to be regarded as more tolerable and less serious. Furthermore, Kirsta talked about the abuse as separate incidents and as such was unaware of its prevalence within her relationship with her boyfriend:

> It's like er, it's not all the time, but when we argue it's like he gets really mad, he'll strangle me, or pull me. Like he once pulled me like a mile by me hair, do you know, and he's liked punched me or kicked. It won't be like all at once, it'll just be like little things so I think it was only that, it was only that (Kirsta)

Fighting back

A number of researchers (Archer, 2000; Archer & Ray, 1989; Dutton, 1994 Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, 1993) argue that intimate violence is not restricted to men as perpetrators rather they argue that women are just as violent in their relationships as men. Research conducted in the UK by Archer and Ray (1989) and Archer, (2000) found what they called gender symmetry, that is that women are just as violent as men in their intimate relationships[18], with regard to psychological and physical violence. However, research findings are contradictory and point in two directions, with some revealing that women are as likely as men to perpetrate violence against an intimate partner (symmetry) and others showing that it is overwhelmingly men who perpetrate violence against women partners (asymmetry) (Dobash & Dobash, 2004: 324).

[18] Newman & Thompson (2005) argue that we have witnessed a shift away from gendered analysis, to approaching sexual violence as a gender neutral issue. This is, they argue, part of the general backlash against feminism, which is informed by the belief that feminism has gone too far and tipped the balance of equality so that it is now men who are disadvantaged. This argument supports and reinforces the presumption that sexual violence is something that is committed by people against people

The findings from this research dispute that there is gender symmetry, rather it is suggested that young women used violence and aggression in response to their boyfriend's violence. The young women used violence either in self-defence or in retaliation. These reasons were also found in studies conducted by Makepeace (1986) and Hird (2000). Hird (2000: 75) found that '...results strongly suggest that much of girls reported physical aggression was actually self-defence against a boyfriends' use of physical and/or sexual aggression'. Dobash and Dobash (2004: 1) support this assertion, they found that intimate partner violence is primarily an asymmetrical problem of men's violence to women, and women's violence does not equate to men's in terms of frequency, severity, consequences and the victim's sense of safety and well-being. More importantly, women and girls may actually report more incidents of violence against their partner than men. Men may be reluctant to report the actual extent to which they use violence against their partner, or they may forget incidents of violence, especially when they have consumed copious amounts of alcohol which was evident in all the accounts of dating violence in this research. In some cases it may be difficult for them to distinguish one incident from another, especially if they use violence against their partner on a regular basis; one incident may roll into another in the memory of the perpetrator (Pollock & Davies, 2005). As the two quotations below illustrate, it may be more complex than previous research has suggested:

> Every time we fight I will not back off. I always fight back even if it's just scratching. He always wins and pins me down, punching me head, yet I never walk away from it. If my boyfriend and I are fighting I don't cower away, but sometimes when we are arguing and he comes close or starts throwing things I will cower away a little. I usually don't realise I've done that until afterwards. It's during the actual fighting that I won't back down (Tiffany).

This second quote from Kirsta:

> Erm, it's bad sometimes cos like things will be fine and other times it just won't, it'll just like take its toll on me. He's accused me like of er, being horrible and, I mean there probably has been times when I have been horrible to him, but it's only cos I can only take so much and then I just like be strong and I'll stand there calling him for everything and then the next morning I'll be like a mouse again. It makes me feel better cos like he needs to know and, but then he'll call me worse back anyway.

Furthermore, men in Cavanagh et al's (2001: 701) study did not identify their behaviour against their female partner as violent, rather they identified themselves as 'non violent'. They were able to do this because of the way in which they defined violence. These men did not regard themselves as violent because they were not violent to other people other than their partners. This form of "denial" implies that violence against a woman partner is somehow different from other types of violence, and this distinction was often associated with some aspect of her behaviour. Some men made a distinction between what they saw as "real" violence (against other men) and violence against their partner, which was "less real" often because of who she was (a wife, a woman) and because the violence was deemed to have been "provoked" or "deserved" or "mutual".

As the above quotations demonstrate, it would be misleading to rely solely on the findings which suggest gender symmetry. The young women in this study used violence in self-defence or in retaliation, they did not instigate the violence, they fought back. It is important therefore that we examine the lived experiences and complexities of the young women in order to see what is actually happening. As demonstrated there is great variation in what the young women perceive as violent behaviour. For example they provided statements such as 'it was only a slap' or 'he only pushed me' or their partner lied to them on a regular basis indicating that they do not

identify these experiences as violent, but also that they minimise these experiences.

Jealousy[19] is a major factor in violence against the young women in this research. It is also 'very common for men to accuse women of flirtations and affairs that have no basis in women's actual behaviour or desires' (Ferraro, 2006: 73). In these accounts their boyfriend's jealousy was often cited as a reason to get angry and also used to justify and excuse the violence and aggression. Kirsta told how her boyfriend would accuse her of flirting with other boys including his friends:

> But like if his friends just like smile at me or putting his arms around me and he'll like shout at me rather than shout at them. It's probably cos I'm more vulnerable than them cos I'm a girl and I'm younger and they're his mates and he knows, and if he said something to them it could come into a fight and he doesn't want that cos they're his mates, but if it's me it's different cos, erm, he says.

What this quote also demonstrates is that Kirsta felt vulnerable in these situations. What is also evident from this quote is that her boyfriend chose to blame Kirsta instead of his friends, who initially instigated this. The idea of a 'safe victim' is evident here. Kirsta's boyfriend did not tackle his friends about their behaviour because of the negative consequences this may have had. Rather he transferred his anger to Kirsta because she would not fight back and so there would be no negative consequences for his jealous behaviour. Accusing these young women of infidelities reinforces the long held belief in women as men's property. Ferraro (2006: 39) has highlighted that, 'As sexual property, they [women] had no right to look at other men, and certainly not to talk to or spend time with other men. By punishing women's transgressions of the rules they set, men are performing masculinity in a manner that re-inscribes patriarchy'.

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[19] See chapter 6 for a discussion on jealousy as a motive for fighting.

The ties that bind

These young women did not want to end their relationships with their boyfriends rather they wanted the violence to end. In all these accounts of dating violence the young women demonstrated most forcefully that they were committed to making the relationship with their boyfriends work. They further demonstrated that it was they and not necessarily their boyfriend or family members who were more fully committed to making it work. For example a primary concern for Michelle is that while she is still in a relationship with her baby's father she feels that this affords her some status and this distinguishes her from other young women in similar circumstances. For example, having the baby's father in her life Michelle feels that this makes her 'better' than women in a similar position but whose baby's fathers are absent. More importantly for Michelle, she wants her daughter to have a 'proper' father in her life. In this Michelle is connected to her baby's father. In addition the father's presence in the relationship may not only enhance Michelle's social status but also increase their children's physical safety (Fine, et al. 2000)

Many of the arguments between Michelle and her boyfriend resulted from his failure to meet Michelle's expectations of what a father is supposed to do and how he is supposed to behave. For example, his lack of financial support and general child care responsibilities frequently frustrated Michelle. In addition to this her boyfriend would constantly tell her to withdraw from her college course to take care of him and their child[20]. Michelle's concerns are in accordance with the work of Ferraro (2006: 73) who has stated: 'Most women in abusive relationships report their partner's lack of interest in their thoughts and dreams or in sharing domestic tasks and projects'. This insecurity on her boyfriend's part may in part be

[20] Dominant ideology about being a good wife and mother demand that women are seen to sacrifice their own interests for the interests of the family Oakley, 1974. Similarly Hughes (2002) has suggested that 'caring' is regarded as an essential part of a woman's subjectivity

explained by his concern that her educational and occupational attainment is greater than his (Gelles, 1974; Macmillan & Gartner, 1999). This created tension between them and frequently resulted in arguments in which Michelle felt intimidated and frightened. In addition to the lack of child care and financial support Michelle's boyfriend also failed to provide the emotional support that she desired and expected. This failure is often demonstrated in her boyfriend's criticism of her parenting skills. Although Michelle was concerned about her daughter having her father in her life, she was also aware and concerned about the impact that the fighting would have on her daughter and she wanted to protect her from this. Thus for Michelle who craves the emotional and financial support, her relationship with her baby's father can have a serious impact on her ability to end the relationship.

In contrast to Michelle's commitment to make her relationship work her parents had not encouraged her to remain in the relationship with her boyfriend rather, they had encouraged her to concentrate on her studies and her daughter. In addition, it is her parents who have provided Michelle with the much needed support, both financially and emotionally, that she craves from her boyfriend.

What became clear throughout these interviews was that the young women expressed their anxiety at their boyfriends' anger, aggression and violence while at the same time professing their love and dependence on them, and vice versa, their boyfriends' love and dependence on the young women. However these young women are constantly struggling to please their boyfriends in order to maintain their relationships. The young women have become hypersensitive to the moods of their boyfriends, they feel that they understand them better than anyone else and this creates a special bond between them. This has led researchers and commentators to compare battered women who remain in violent relationships to hostage captees

who form a bond with their captives. This has been referred to as Stockholm Syndrome. Graham et al (1988) and Graham & Rawling, (1991) have hypothesized that a number of dynamics take place in a hostage or battering situation, these include; an abuser traumatising a victim by threatening her either physically or psychologically. This trauma results in the victim needing nurturing and protecting. If the abuser shows any signs of kindness towards the victim, this then creates hope in the victim who bonds to the positive side of the abuser. Kirsta told how when her boyfriend was 'nice he was really, really nice' and he would give her anything she wanted including gifts. He would also promise that he would change his behaviour and demonstrated this in his willingness to spend more time with Kirsta and reduce his alcohol consumption. The young women also worked to keep the abuser happy, this involves trying to determine what the abuser is thinking and how they are feeling. This behaviour was evident in a number of interviews, for example, Kirsta explained how she could read her boyfriend and predict his moods and use this information to reduce the risk of violence and make every effort to pacify him.

There is also evidence that the young women appear to believe that a violent relationship is better than no relationship at all. This reflects the importance society places on relationships. Women remain in violent relationships for a number of reasons including social and peer pressure to be 'coupled' as expressed by Tiffany: 'All I have wanted since the age of 11 is to have a boyfriend and to be in a relationship'. 'The social message to women is that their own self worth is defined by their success at maintaining relationships, even if violent and even at great personal cost' (Greene & Chadwick, 1991:147). Greene and Chadwick (1991: 150) argue,

> As with many adult abused women, the teens seem to feel strong pressure to continue their relationships subsequent to the violence,

> based on the importance of forgiving, the fact that their partner can be and has sometimes been good to them, the woman's feeling that she "needs" the man emotionally, the woman's isolation as a result of the violence in the relationship and her sense of responsibility to help or change her partner. These factors are closely related to social expectations for all women: Women have primary responsibility to nurture and maintain relationships; the value of a woman is measured by her ability to establish and maintain a relationship.

Indeed this research supports feminists arguments that women have been systematically encouraged to minimise the violence that they suffer at the hands of men in order to preserve romanticised notions of intimate relations (Hester, et al, 1996; Yllo, 1988). More importantly these young women's narratives often reflected cultural stereotypes that something was wrong with them because they were abused by their boyfriends.

Magazines as far back as the 1950s have given young women advice on how to attract and keep a man. Articles give information and advice on maintaining a relationship and pleasing your partner. This information is aimed solely at women reinforcing the notion that it is the responsibility of women to maintain the relationship at all costs including their health and safety. These articles emphasise the importance of being 'coupled' for a woman, whose destiny is as wife and mother. Additionally, according to Friedman (1998), the feminine mystique proclaimed full feminine achievement was to be found in being wife and mother. This is especially true for working class young women, '... who really do need to make a good marriage; their lives are very intelligently directed to that objective. They are also policed towards that objective by other girls, by boys, by social workers, courts and the police (and presumably also aunts and uncles, teachers and parents, clergy and the mass media' (Cain, 1989: 12). That is girls and women more than boys and men are socialized to value and define themselves within relationships.

One narrative of dating violence departs from those discussed above. Aisha left her boyfriend after he had been physically violent to her. She described how he hit, punched and viciously kicked her while she was down on the ground. Immediately after the attack she told her boyfriend that the relationship was over and that she 'didn't want to set eyes on him again'. She recounted how her boyfriend apologised for his behaviour blaming it on his relationship with his father. Unlike the previous accounts of dating violence Aisha did not deny or minimise the violence, neither did she normalise it, rather she said there were no excuses or justifications for behaving in that manner. Previous to this assault her boyfriend had not been violent to her:

> it just came out of the blue, we'd argued before but like he'd never hit me before, this was the first time, but that was enough. It doesn't matter what was going on in his life he still shouldn't have hit me like that. Like once they do it once they'll do it again, it's like giving them a licence to hit you if you stay (Aisha).

Although Aisha described being disgusted by her boyfriend's behaviour she was shocked by the behaviour of his friends, both male and female, who witnessed the assault and did not intervene and stop the violence. Later Aisha asked a number of them why they had not helped her when she was being attacked. In reply they said that 'it's a private matter' between herself and her boyfriend and 'they should sort it out between themselves'. In response Aisha did not see them again and did not regard them as friends or people she wanted to associate with, she reasoned that if they could not help a friend when she was being attacked regardless of who the attacker was then they were not true friends.

Coping strategies.

As we have seen the primary concern of the young women who provided accounts of dating violence was not to end the relationship with their boyfriend but rather to end the violence. Thus, as these young women were

reluctant to end the violent relationship they considered and used a variety of ways of coping with the actual or potential threat of violence. Many of these coping strategies vary in magnitude from those preventative strategies discussed by the young women in chapter 4. For example, the coping strategies used by the young women in this chapter were more intensive in nature and duration with these young women using them more frequently resulting in more negative impacts on their own behaviour.

A strategy employed by two of the young women to negotiate their violent relationship was to return to the family home. They thought that the likelihood of their boyfriends hitting, intimidating or threatening them would be reduced. Both of these young women said they relied on the presence of family members to help protect them however, they did not disclose any information about the violence in their relationships:

> My parents aren't keen on him but they don't know about his violence because at the time when he was most violent I lived with him and not my parents. My mum sometimes notices bruises on me but I pass them off. Like I tell her I fell over when I was drunk and stuff like that. I think she has an idea that he can get a bit aggressive but to be honest I wouldn't confide in her because then she would not want me to be with him and it would cause more problems. To be honest it isn't as bad as it sounds. It is only occasionally that he will be violent and I don't feel in danger, he hasn't been violent towards me since I moved out of his house although he has become more paranoid and controlling. I think he's like this because he doesn't have the opportunity to hit me like he did when we lived together (Anne).

Furthermore, psychological and physical violence is often used to modify or control the girlfriend's behaviour. However, these young women do take action against the violence, not by tackling the behaviour of their boyfriend but by changing their own behaviour. They believe that this is the only action that they can take that will have immediate effect. For example some of the young women changed what they wore, where they went, and

who they saw because this had the immediate effect of reducing the violence for a short time. This is reflected in the following quotations:

> I try to avoid arguments and confrontations. I don't do anything that I think he wouldn't like me to do. Erm, I don't speak to other lads, I don't go on nights out as much cos it causes tensions and arguments. Basically I don't do anything that I think he would kick off about. I try not to tell him some things in case he gets in a mood. Erm, I do act differently to avoid arguments, sometimes it's like walking on egg shells. I think it has also caused me to lose touch with some of my friends cos so much of my time and effort is taken up with keeping the peace between us, and also because I don't go out as much as I use to (Anne).

> It doesn't start out being an aggressive relationship, no, not for a long time, but then it will go, it's little by little. It just builds up, but I don't notice it. Like with me ex-boyfriend it was little stuff at first, just like, 'you're not wearing that', 'I don't like them people you're with', you know little things like that, erm, 'be in by this time', and then all of a sudden it was everything and I didn't see it coming up, but then I realised I couldn't go anywhere, I can't see anyone, I can't do or wear what I like. With me ex-boyfriend I changed me behaviour, but I don't' even know why. But I can't explain it, it's just like, I don't know, just like instinct, you change it for; you just change to keep the peace (Kirsta).

Finally, this account from Tiffany who had not previously had boyfriends, this was her first serious relationship with a young man:

> At 22 I met my boyfriend and er, I think I fell in love with him immediately. I did everything he asked of me. There were clothes he didn't want me to wear and I agreed, er, also places I wasn't allowed to go and people I wasn't allowed to see. I gave up everything he asked me to (Tiffany)

These accounts support Holland et al (1996) who have argued that 'heterosexual individuals reproduce male power through regulation'. This regulation takes a number of forms, thus affirming acceptable male and female behaviour within dating relationships. These interviews have also shown that when these young women decided to resist or challenge the

violence, whether it was psychological or physical violence, they were labelled by their boyfriends as narky, moaners or other such derogatory terms, and as previously noted, there are plenty of these derogatory terms to choice from. What also became clear throughout these interviews was the fact that boyfriends showed a range of emotions including jealousy. Initially this jealousy was regarded as evidence of the boyfriend's love; as such the young women equated jealousy with romance and love. This behaviour made the young women feel special and treasured. This jealous behaviour can have an enormous impact on people's behaviour, not just the person displaying these jealous feelings but also the person the behaviour is directed at.

In addition Michelle described how she would walk away from her boyfriend when he became angry or violent. She used this coping strategy because if she continued to stay in close proximity to her boyfriend he would continue the violence, which would include pushing, showing and intimidating her. Using this strategy helped to defuse the situation and as such the violence did not escalate. When the situation had calmed down Michelle would confront him about his behaviour towards her however, this action only resulted in the conflict being blamed on her. Michelle's boyfriend did not take responsibility for his behaviour. In addition Michelle became very frustrated by her boyfriend's refusal to apologise for his behaviour. This act of contrition would assure Michelle that her boyfriend loved her as she associated this willingness to apologise with love and romance, that is, her boyfriend loving and respecting her enough to apologise for his behaviour. On rare occasions when her boyfriend did apologise she believed he did not mean what he said. This belief came from previous experiences in these situations:

> I just walk away cos like if I stay there I'll just get upset so I just walk away and leave him to calm down and then wait for him to say sorry but he never ever realises anyway. He does say sorry

> sometimes but he's stubborn so it takes him a long time. It just makes me think do I really want to be with him cos like he, he must not love me that much if he, if it takes him along time to say sorry and he still does the same things, he still, like he doesn't see it from my point of view. Sometimes I confront him about it but as I say he just changes everything around so, he just, I don't know, he just does me head in. It's hard cos he's, he's just that stubborn that he won't, he always thinks that he's right and that's it. He always thinks he's right so that's why he thinks he doesn't have to apologise for anything.

What is evident from this account is Michelle's more mature self-reflection, that is, she appeared to have emerged with a more mature and adult perspective on her relationship with her boyfriend. So although Michelle was approximately 6 years younger than her boyfriend, (she was 17 and he 23 at the time of the interview), it could be argued that she has traversed the period of adolescence at a different rate (Berk, 2004) to her boyfriend, with him lacking the capacity to form a mature, stable relationship. This self-reflection was also evident in Anne's account of dating violence:

> his possessiveness and temper make me think about our relationship differently sometimes, I think is it all worth it, but I know it would break his heart if we finished and besides which when we get on we are the best of friends.

There was only one young woman who used the legal system as a coping strategy against the violence. Tiffany told how after a particularly violent attack by her boyfriend she phoned the police to report the incident. This strategy was used to scare him and also to take revenge against the violence. She told how she could not fight back because her boyfriend was too strong and she was fearful of the violence escalating. This fear gave her an 'overwhelming need for revenge and I wanted him to hurt'. However on reflection Tiffany regretted the action she took and retracted her statement. Initially she felt good and justified in her actions but this quickly faded

when she realized the full consequences of reporting the attack to the police:

> I really didn't think he would be charged I just wanted to get back at him. Like when I was making the statement at first I felt satisfied that he was going to get what was coming to him. Then the more I thought about it I realized how ridiculous it was because I was going to end up going back to him anyway.

'I'm not a battered woman'

Many of the young women found it hard to reconcile the abuse they were subjected to with the label of 'battered woman'. For 'the term "battered woman" focuses on victimization and suggests an *identity* as victim rather than a set of experiences. The victim identity is stigmatised in a culture that stresses individual responsibility, strength, and assertiveness' (Ferraro, 2006: 19, original emphasis). In providing accounts of her experiences of dating abuse Kirsta did not identify herself as a 'battered woman', and could not reconcile the image she had of herself with the image she held of a 'real battered woman'. These latter images were incompatible because she was not battered on the floor or required immediate medical attention. These young women may have found it difficult to define themselves as a 'battered woman' because they continually recalled the good times and/or aspects of their relationship. Thus, there were good parts of the relationship that the young women wanted to preserve and wanted to share with me. Women may find excuses to explain away the violence and remain hopeful that the relationship will work. As Kirsta has stated women may also avoid accepting the reality that they are being violently abused by their husbands/partners/boyfriends by comparing themselves to others who have been the victims of more extreme forms of physical and/or psychological violence. In this, they may view their situation as much less serious. Battered women often deny that they are in danger or that their

husband/partner/boyfriend intended to or actually did harm them (Towns & Adams, 2000)

In addition, they wanted me to understand that their boyfriends were not bad people, and as such, none of the young women used derogatory terms such a 'monster' to describe their boyfriends. Furthermore, these young women did not reflect on the bad times of their relationships in isolation from the good times. None of the young women expressed feelings of terror dominating their relationships however, some felt fearful at times. In addition, Tiffany said 'I give as good as I get most times'. As such, she did not perceive herself as a victim because she fought back with physical violence against the violence of her boyfriend. These young women tried to avoid perceiving themselves as victims by using rationalizations to have a continuous relationship and by creating accounts that are mutually validating (Weber, Harvey & Melinda, 1987 in Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1999).

Sexual Assault

Throughout this research the young women have repeatedly provided accounts of the strategies they use in order to avoid or negotiate a real or perceived threat of violence. This theme was also discussed with regard to sexual assaults and women's fear of being sexually assaulted. A further sub-section of the young women, eleven out of 32, talked specifically about fear of being sexually assaulted. These young women talked about regulating their own behaviour for fear of being the victim of a sexual assault. This regulation took the form of avoiding walking alone late at night and walking in isolated places at night, and for two young women, this included not using the university campus at night. For those young women who did not 'take care' and who did not use precautionary strategies the results were devastating. Two young women from the university who participated in the email interviews had stories to tell of

sexual assaults. Both of these young women told me that they would not have talked about the assaults in face-to-face interviews. Rather the young women said they felt more confident telling their stories using email because they could not be identified by me, that is, I did not know what they looked like and they did not know what I looked like.

One of the young women, Tiffany, aged 23, told of the sexual assault that occurred at the hands of an acquaintance, while the other young woman, Helen, aged 20, told of the assault that occurred at the hands of a stranger. Intertwined in these accounts of sexual assault are the deeply held beliefs about appropriate female behaviour. Both of these young women held stereotypical ideas and beliefs of what a real sexual assault was, including ideas about real victims and perpetrators. According to these ideas a perpetrator was a stranger who jumped out at the victim in the dead of night, while the victim was a respectable woman who would not put herself in danger by her inappropriate behaviour, however if she finds herself in this situation she would fight to the death to prevent the assault. As such these two young women did not regard themselves as real victims. These views were based on the fact that both young women believed that they had brought it on themselves, for example, wearing inappropriate clothing, putting themselves in that position, going back to the perpetrator's house. 'It's my own fault, I should have said "no" to going back to his, but at first I thought we were going to a café, it was only when we were there that I realised we were going to his flat' (Helen). In the case of one of the young women, drinking copious amounts of alcohol and taking drugs:

> Like how would people believe me. That I didn't ask for it. I shouldn't have gone back to his but most of all I shouldn't have drunk so much or taken beak [cocaine]. If some girl told me that she was attached and then told me that she had done what I did, I wouldn't believe that she wasn't asking for it (Tiffany).

These ideas about 'real' victims is not restricted to the young women, rather they are endemic throughout society.

Similar to the accounts of dating abuse, these accounts of sexual assault have remained secret from family members and friends. In addition some accounts exposed women's multiple experiences of violence, that is, a young woman had several experiences of both dating violence and sexual assault. Tiffany provided accounts of not only her experiences of sexual assault but also dating violence. In these accounts of sexual assault Helen had remained silent about the assault, while Tiffany retreated further into drug and alcohol abuse.

Self regulation

Self regulation was considered by twenty two of the young women as just part of life, to protect themselves from sexual assault which was considered a major safety concern for these young women (Pain, 1993; Warr, 1985, 1990). This fear was almost exclusively restricted to the public sphere (Pain, 1993). Mandy and Hazel, two university students, were reluctant to go to the university's library to study alone at night because they were fearful of being sexually assaulted. They described the campus as being unsafe at night because there were a number of isolated spots including passage-ways between building that were poorly lit and out of sight from passer-bys. In addition, these young women believed that the campus was deserted after dark; therefore if they were attacked there would be no one to call upon for help. Mandy said that she felt safer and less vulnerable to a sexual assault walking in the city centre at night because it is generally well lit, there were more people around, there were CCTV cameras and on most occasions there would be police patrolling the streets. She felt that there would be less opportunity for a man to attack her while in the city centre than on the university campus, which she described as dark, unwelcoming, unsafe and isolated. Their apprehensions showed a

strong temporal dimension, since specific fears regarding 'dangerous' or 'scary' places were strongly linked to bad lighting, darkness (Warr, 1990) and restricted surveillance.

Women continually make decisions everyday of their lives in order to help keep them safe. These decisions will often place limits and restrictions on their lives and 'have become a way of life so we forget to acknowledge them as unfair, controlling, and an utter breach of our freedom and human rights' (Newman & Thompson, 2006). The young women in this research have taken on board and absorbed the official warning for taking responsibility for their own behaviour, which places the emphasis on women to regulate what they do, where they go and who with. In this context men's use or threat of sexual assault could be argued to be placing less culpability on the perpetrator and shifting the blame to the victim. This shifting of blame to the victim was expressed by many of the young women who said that if a woman drank too much alcohol and went back to a man's house, if she walked alone at night in dark isolated streets, or went out at night after being given police warnings not to, then she brought it on herself if she was sexually assaulted and as such she only had herself to blame.

Self blame

Tiffany referred to a sense of unreality and especially fragmentation when she was recalling her experiences. She expressed concern at her inability to recall exactly what had happened. This concern was reflected in her decision not to report the incident to the police. She said that if she could not remember all the details of the assault then the police would not take her seriously. This was accompanied by Tiffany initially considering her attacker as harmless because he was 'old enough to be me dad' and also because she had known him for sometime while working in a bar in the

city centre. In addition she had been back to his house on a number of occasions with friends to consume alcohol and drugs:

> At the end of the night he said I should come to his to smoke some cannabis as I had done before so like I didn't think anything of it, but this time my friends didn't want to come so I went by myself. When we got to his house I was very drunk. He got me a drink and we smoked a spliff but after this I immediately felt stoned and I was heavy and docile so I asked him to ring me a taxi. I had a feeling he had not bothered to ring one cos it was a long time. For some reason I started to feel scared, I think it was cos I just got a feeling something wasn't right. He then turned off the lights and come over to where I was sitting and started kissing me. I turned my head away so he was kissing my cheek. At this point I was terrified but I didn't react I felt numb and in a daze. I think it was at this point that he performed oral sex on me, but, I know this is going to sound stupid but I still felt rooted to the seat. I didn't wriggle or move I was still as a soldier. I can't remember properly but I may have been crying cos like later my eye make-up was all smudged. He then tried to undress me and I was terrified I thought he was going to kill me even though he hadn't been violent up to that point; it was then that he had sex with me. All I could think of was to be quiet and pray for it to be over as quickly as possible. Looking back I should have screamed or fought or done something, but I couldn't I just felt paralysed, I don't think I would have been able to scream even if I tried. I don't know how but when it was over I asked him for a drink of water and when he went to get it I just ran, I ran out of the house and just ran as fast as I could. The problem is I didn't even shout or scream or react in any way. I can't even remember say the word 'no', I think I may have done but I can't be a 100% sure. I should have reacted differently, I should have screamed 'no' so he knew, but I didn't I was just paralysed. I don't think I've got the right to say it's affected me in a serious way cos it wasn't violent. But like I don't think anyone would believe me cos I went back on my own accord and I was drunk and smoking cannabis and as far as most people are concerned I was having casual sex with my boss at the bar, and sometimes another girl who worked there would join us in having sex, so to other people I was just like a slag anyway.

This was not an isolated sexual attack for Tiffany, a few months after this attack she was on holiday and was sexually assaulted by a man who she met while in a local club with friends. She explained that she went outside

with him by herself and he assaulted her by putting his hand up her skirt. On this occasion Tiffany retaliated with violence, she slapped and punched him leaving him with scratches and bruises.

On both occasions Tiffany did not report these assaults to the police. She told how people already thought that she was a 'slag' so the police would not believe that she had been attacked. Tiffany has every reason to believe that the police would not take her seriously. The police are less likely to believe a woman who was drunk at the time of the rape. It would appear that although there have been significant changes in legislation and resources old police attitudes and practices, widely assumed to have vanished, are still in evidence and continue to cause victims pain and suffering (Chambers and Millar, 1986; Temkin, 1997: 527; Jordan, 2004)

In addition, Tiffany also believed that she had brought it on herself by going back to his house, drinking alcohol and taking cannabis as well as dressing in inappropriate clothing, that is, she was wearing a short skirt and a top that showed her cleavage. Research conducted by Finch and Munro (2005: 31) on juror stereotypes and blame attribution in rape cases found that participants were:

> adamant that the voluntary ingestion of intoxicants placed a higher burden of responsibility for events that followed on the victim and that this led to a corresponding lessening of the defendant's responsibility further, suggesting that even when the victim's drink had been surreptitiously strengthened, she should nonetheless retain responsibility for subsequent events, as she should have taken greater care about what she was drinking .

Tiffany also believed that if she could not remember saying 'no' then the man who raped her could have assumed that she had consented to sex. She was fully aware of society's attitudes about appropriate female behaviour and she said that she had flouted all those conventions by her own behaviour; she had put herself in danger. Thus women are still told, and

still feel, that sexual assault is her fault. Stanko (2006: 546) asserts that, women's use of a discourse of self-blame has not diminished during the 25 years [she's] been working in the field.

What is also evident in Tiffany's account is the terminology she used, for example, she uses the word 'sex' rather than 'rape'. This is supported by research by Garvey (2005) who insists the 'naturalisation of women's passivity' can let rape been seen as 'just sex'. Walklate (2004: 121) has also found that 'on the whole, women do not easily choose the word 'rape' to describe their experiences. Recent Home Office study of women who have been subject since the age of 16 to an act that met the test in the 1994 Act for legally defined rape or attempted raped, the majority (67 percent) did not define the act as rape (Walby & Allen, 2004: viii). In addition, Tiffany equates real rape with violence, that is, the perpetrator using violence in order to commit the rape. Research has found that rape victims are more likely to acknowledge the rape (Bondurant, 2001) and report it to the police (Bachman, 1993) if they have been physically attacked in the course of the rape. Prior to the rape Tiffany believed that if a woman voluntarily went with a man back to his house and was sexually assaulted it was her own fault, that is, 'she was asking for it'. However her views have changed dramatically since her own rape, she now believes that no matter what the circumstances a woman should not blame herself for being raped, she firmly believed that no man has the right to rape women however she dresses or behaves.

Tiffany is not alone in holding negative views about women's provoking their own attack, for research has found that the higher the sex role stereotyping, sexual beliefs, and acceptance of interpersonal violence, the greater a respondent's acceptance of rape myths (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Caron & Carter, 1997). These rape myths are prevalent throughout society, and are not just held by men and boys but also by women and

girls, thus the young women's accounts demonstrate that misconceptions about sexual assault are still deeply engrained in society, thus helping to support men's control of women. They help to perpetuate the normalization of violence and domination and portray women as enjoying rape (Berrington & Jones, 2002).

Even though Tiffany did not label this sexual assault as rape she still suffered the same psychological and physical consequences as those self-acknowledged rape victims. However there may be several explanations as to why Tiffany and Helen refused to acknowledge that they have been sexually assaulted, even though the acts and circumstances described by these two young women qualify them for legal definitions of rape and sexual assault. Some women simply may not believe that they have been raped '... In addition, admitting to yourself that you have been raped necessarily means conceding the fact that you have been a 'victim, - a very vulnerable place to find yourself. ...' (Allison, 1993: 63). Some women may not label the assault a rape because as we have heard from Tiffany, they blame themselves for contributing to its occurrence – either through being naïve and having placed themselves, through excessive drinking, in a vulnerable situation

A further account that demonstrates these deeply held beliefs about sexual assault and appropriate female behaviour was given by Helen:

> This happened when I was 16 and I was in London sitting outside the British Library when this lad came along and starting talking to me. He was 19 so to impress him I told him I was 18 and at university. After a while I went into the library and when I came out he was still there waiting for me and he asked me to go for a drink. I said yes assuming that he meant a coffee or something so we starting walking but he took me back to his flat and offered me alcohol which I declined. It was quite a small flat that he shared with other students. He went and sat on his bed but I refused to go into his room, instead I stood against the door. By this point I was properly scared and tried to make my excuses to leave. I told him I

> wanted to leave and he didn't want me to go but I was insisting and the next thing I remember is him standing in front of the flat door blocking my way out and I was backed against the wall and I was half shouting and half crying begging him to let me out. He kinda reached out to cover my mouth so I couldn't shout and to stop me calling out. I'm quite small and he was fairly large and rather strong. I was practically hysterical by this point backed right up against the wall begging to be let out. As I was trying to get out he started to touch me. At this point I was screaming and shouting for him to get off. I don't know what made him do it but after a little while he did let me go. I was quite luck in that he only touched me but didn't try to have sex with me.

While recounting this assault Helen told how she felt dirty and disgusted with herself for 'putting' herself into that situation, 'I should have known better, like you're always told not to go with strangers but like a fool I did'. Helen also spoke about changing her behaviour and appearance after this attack, for example she would wear clothes that were 'big and baggy' because she felt that this made her less likely to attract the attention of men. 'Wearing clothes that hid my body made me feel invisible because guys wouldn't look at me or make comments. In a sense I was invisible to guys'. Using this strategy Helen was adhering to the notion that women provoke male behaviour and by dressing inappropriately they bring the sexual assault on themselves. These ideas of bringing the attack on oneself are linked to the literature on victim precipitation.

In the 1940s the focus started to shift from looking almost exclusively at the offender and the causes of crime to examining the role of the victim. Victimology studies have been concerned with victims' contributing to the crime. This perspective argues that victims play an active role in their own victimisation. Von Hentig (1940 in So-Kum Tang et al, 2002: 972) highlighted ideas around victim precipitation and victim-proneness. He claimed that in cases of murder and rape victims' actions play a major role in the offence. For example, rape victims seduce the perpetrator. This claim was followed by Amir (1971: 42) who studied victim-offender

interaction as a precipitating factor. He found that 19 percent of rape cases in his study were victim precipitated. He identified a number of behaviours that he claimed where victim precipitation, for example, voluntarily drinking alcohol, accepting a ride from a stranger, and not taking the necessary precautions, dressing provocatively, and generally behaving inappropriately. With regard to domestic violence, Straus and Gelles (1990) found that men frequently blamed their wives or partners for provoking the violence by not behaving properly, not doing as they were told, disrespecting them and nagging. Feminist researchers have been critical of such contentions. So-kum Tang, et al. (2002: 975), have highlighted that:

> Feminists argue that victimological explanations have created 'facts' that ignore the omnipresent impact of power and its differential distribution in society. According to these explanations, women's experiences of victimisation result from qualities of the women themselves, rather than being a reflection of the social systems that shape women's lives. Attribution of women's victimisation to qualities within them supports victim blaming interpretations charging women with the responsibility.

What is evident in both of these accounts is that women are deemed to be responsible both for their own behaviour, and for the behaviour of the men they come into contact with. For example, it is still commonly believed that once a man becomes aroused his sexual drive is uncontrollable (Plummer, 1995) and that this uncontrollable sexual drive is often the result of women's provocative behaviour. Thus police comments upon, and media coverage of reported sexual assaults, highlight the distinction between deserving and undeserving victims (Hanmer & Maynard, 1987; Malloch, 2004; Richardson & May, 1999) with those women considered to be deserving victims being blamed for bringing it upon themselves. In addition, Goodey (2005: 11) notes that 'when women become victims of crime ideas of appropriate femininity are mobilised to establish deserving or undeserving victims.

When I asked these two young women why they did not report these assaults to the police they both said that they should not have gone back to the man's house and therefore, the police would do nothing about it because they had brought it on themselves, they were deserving victims. Some individuals are seen as more "deserving" of violence and less deserving of victim status than are others on the basis of their "behavioural responsibility" for risk avoidance (Richardson & May, 1999: 309). Not taking the necessary precautions is also linked to current thinking of women being blamed for the increasing numbers of women being 'sexually assaulted while drunk' (Moore, 2005: 29). The media has been expedient in reporting that women who consume too much alcohol are in danger of being raped. In these reports, the emphasis is on the women's lack of personal responsibility for their own safety and in essence, they were asking for it. Malloch (2004) describes how women's behaviour and demeanour, particularly their use of alcohol and drugs, is pivotal to determining whether they are deserving and undeserving victims. In addition Malloch (2004) contents that literature on alcohol focuses on women's drinking and how 'binge' drinking can increase the likelihood of women's victimisation.

Child abuse

Caroline, 21 years of age from the drop-in centre, was the only participant who narrated an account of child abuse. This included physical, sexual and emotional and the perpetrator was her stepfather. The abuse began when Caroline was 8 years old and ended when she was 15 years old.

Child abuse remains largely hidden and unreported and as such, it is difficult to get accurate figures of its prevalence, this is especially so with child sexual abuse. Research has shown that girls are more likely than boys to be victims of child sexual abuse (McCollum, 2005), and that fathers, especially step-fathers, are more likely to abuse children seriously (Corby

2000). Children with step-parents were found to be more at risk of abuse than children living with both biological parents.

While narrating the abuse, Caroline appeared to be emotionally detached. This detachment may have been due in part to the counselling she had received for a significant period of time after the abuse: 'I think it has helped me manage me feelings, the counselling has helped me a lot. I've learnt a lot about meself'. However, when she talked about her mother she became visibly upset. The re-occurring theme throughout Caroline's account was the ideology of motherhood. She believed her mother had let her and her sister down by not being there to protect them from the abuse:

> I still feel really hurt by me mum cos she let me down. She had let me down, she really let me down. She should have been there, she should have protected us, that's what parents should do, they should protect you, mums should protect their children. I've blocked a lot from me mind and that. I remember feeling more hurt and that, obviously I hated him for what he did, but I feel more hurt about me mum cos she didn't protect us. I just remember longing for her to become this really brilliant mum and protect us from him, who wouldn't let him do anything to us, but that didn't happen. Like my feeling towards me mum are still very strong cos it's something I'm still dealing with now. I still feel very let down and even more since I've got me little girl and that I'm getting on with me life. I feel even more let down by her and really hurt towards her and I feel really angry towards her. I'm still looking for her to be something that she wasn't, that she couldn't be cos she just isn't. I still blame me mum for what happened cos she should have stopped him and she should have stopped it but she didn't. But like the worst thing is like when I ask her about things that happened then and she just says she can't remember those things happening, and like cos she can't remember them it seems like she's just, she doesn't even care, and she doesn't even acknowledge, and she's just lying and saying she can't remember and really hurts. But like if she was to acknowledge them and then maybe it would make me feel a bit better and maybe help me. She should have been there and helped me and just been a mum but she wasn't. I just wish sometimes she'd be that mum, you know what everyone thinks a mum should be, but she isn't and it really angers me and frustrates me.

Caroline was not only ashamed of the abuse but also of the way in which both her mother and step-father behaved in front of other people. Caroline recalled how they would appear 'all loving to each other in front of other people'. In addition Caroline and her sister were told what to wear and also how to wear their hair. Their step-father would make both girls have their hair cut very short, 'we always looked like boys cos our hair was always really short, it's like he want us to be boys instead of girls'. Caroline's step-father enforced social isolation. Her sister and herself were not allowed to play with other children. They could not go to parties, they would not be allowed to spend time at relatives and friends homes or have relatives and friends in their own home. The unequal distribution of power is the basis for explaining parental physical and sexual maltreatment of children. 'The exercise of parental power over the child victim leads to disempowerment of the child rendering the child helpless (Finkelhor & Brown, 1986: 183). Because of the abuse, Caroline felt ashamed and this emotion further isolated her from people, she would not spend time with people in case they could 'see what was going on'.

Although Caroline said she had come to terms with the abuse with the help of counselling she still found it difficult to understand why her mother did not protect her and her sister. Whether Caroline would have felt let down by both parents if she had been abused by her biological father is difficult to say. However, research (Crogham & Miell, 1995; Herman & Hrischman, 1977; Jacobs, 1990; Lovett, 1995) suggests that daughters hold their mother primarily responsible for letting the abuse happen and find justifications and excuses for their father's abusive behaviour. Thus Caroline's account highlights the apparent effect of sexual abuse on the child, that is to 'destroy the mother-daughter bond in such a way that it is the mother who is thought culpable and responsible for the violation and betrayal that was experienced as a result of the abuse' (Jacobs, 1990: 501).

Caroline appeared to be comparing her experiences of family life and motherhood with stereotypical ideas of 'normal' motherhood. She made clear distinctions between her mother's inadequacies and the way in which 'real' mothers would behave. In her eyes 'real' mothers would protect their children from the abuse:

> She should have left him, she shouldn't have stayed with him, like even when we were taken into care she stayed with him, it wasn't for long, but she still stayed with him. If she was a proper mum she would have left him, but she didn't.

Women who suffered male abuse often present mothers and mother figures as to blame because they had not protected their daughters from abuse.

> The propensity to blame mothers and mother figures for the abuse was most marked where women had been sexually abused. Sexually abused women were even more likely than physically abused women to give explanations which presented their family relationships in interpersonal or dispositional terms, and to play down the social and situational factors which might have made it difficult' (Herman & Hirschman, 1977: 38-9).

However, contrary to this research which has suggested a hostile and rejecting relationship Lovett (1995) found that the young women she interviewed had a warm and accepting relationship with their mothers.

Caroline did not acknowledge the gender-based differences between her mother and her step-father, for example, she did not discuss the power dynamics in their relationship. There was no discussion about the resources available to her mother, whether she had any where to go if she left. From Caroline's account it appears that there was no family network that could provide support to her mother.

Similar to the findings from Herman and Hirschman (1977) and Hooper, (1992), Caroline was preoccupied with the fear that she would not be a good mother, she thought that the abuse, the relationship with her mother

and not having a proper role model would make her a bad mother, that she would not be able to have a proper mother-daughter relationship. Furthermore, Caroline was concerned that she could not protect her daughter from abuse by other men, 'cos you just don't know who is capable of it [abusing children]'. Although she did repeatedly make it clear that she trusted her husband with their daughter.

Caroline's narrative demonstrates the strong ideology of the family as a safe haven and the social construction of motherhood. 'Feminist critiques of the family have argued that there are powerful and *distinct* social expectations which surround motherhood and fatherhood and which serve to define parameters of 'normal' mother-child and father-child relationships' (Crogham & Miell 1995: 32, original emphasis). These expectations emphasis women's responsibility for the well-being of their family (ibid). Mothers are expected to do everything possible for their children and are held responsible for all their imperfections. In addition women in their role as mothers are held responsible for identifying who is safe and who is not, they 'are expected to know when ... trusted individuals pose a serious threat to the safety of their children' (Carton, 1993: 77) They are also held responsible for the actions of male perpetrators of violence. As such Caroline's mother failed to meet the expectations of good mothering including nurturing, caring, and above all protecting her daughter from abuse.

Summary

In cases of dating violence and sexual assault some young women may fight back, however their ability to counter threats of violence are constrained by a number of factors including fear of retaliation, physical strength, and feelings of self-blame. In addition some of the young women fought back only to find that this strategy actually increased the severity of the violence in their relations. Other young women, including Kirsta and

Anne were more fearful of fighting back and instead adopted a variety of strategies including moving back to the family home, changing their behaviour, appearance and restricting their movement. As Ferraro (2006: 45) argues:

> The development of a category of "battered women" to describe women's experiences reflects dominant, conventional notions of femininity that reinforces these notions and draw boundaries around certain kinds of women who conform to these notions ..., the narrowness and contradictions within expectations for "pure victims" exclude most women.

These accounts have also demonstrated how young women took great care to conceal the violence and assaults from others especially family members. They often made excuses for the injuries, bruises and marks that were inflicted by their boyfriends

Although there is an abundance of literature linking the witnessing or experiencing of violence as a child to future violent relationships, including the cycle of violence theory (see for example: Baskin & Sommer, 1998; Campbell, 1981; Chesney-Lind, 1987; Fitzroy, 2001;) not one of the seven young women who discussed their own violent dating relationships or the two who recounted sexual abuse talked about witnessing violence between their parents or experiencing violence as a child. There was only Kirsta who described her parents as separated but not divorced, and she made it abundantly clear that her father had never been violent to her mother, herself or her brothers and sisters. The other five young women either refused to answer any questions about their parents or ignored the questions. However, this cannot be taken as an indication of domestic violence in their family.

As we have seen these young women did not report incidents of dating violence or sexual assault to the police. There were a number of reasons given for this decision. For example in cases of sexual assault, the young

women believed that they had brought it on themselves because of their own behaviour including the fact that they had been intoxicated, 'stoned', willingly went back to the house with the perpetrator and also dressed inappropriately. Thus violence against women is but one method of social control. Women's bodies and minds become subject to extreme social control. The law continues this control by judging whether she is a 'good' or a 'bad' victim (Artz, 2001). Furthermore, rape, claims Cahill (2001), affects not only the young women who were sexually assaulted but all women who experience their bodies as 'rapable' and thus adjust their actions and self-image accordingly. As such the threat of rape can have a profound effect on the structure and quality of women's lives, for example, walking alone at night, avoiding places that are deemed dangerous. As these young women's accounts demonstrate, even for those who had not been sexually assaulted, the threat of rape may not be far from their minds. This restricted their behaviour including women regulating their own behaviour and that of other women.

Stereotypes and social constructions of women were also evident in Caroline's narrative of child abuse. Throughout this chapter there are examples of appropriate female behaviour, from sexual appropriateness to motherhood. Girls and women are expected to protect their sexual reputation and themselves from sexual violence as well as protecting their own children. In addition they are expected to identify who will pose a danger not only to themselves but also to their children and take necessary precautions to guard against it. Thus women are seldom completely free from the fear of sexual assault because they are aware that it can occur at any time, in any place and to any woman.

Chapter 8

The story so far

Research continually demonstrates that boys and men commit the majority of violent crime. Kelly (2000) has stated that one of the most powerful findings of three decades of research has shown that boys and men commit the majority of violent crimes. As shown in Chapter 1, official, self-report, and prison statistics continually demonstrate the gender difference in crime, with men outnumbering women in all forms of crime including violent crimes. Public and professional concern about young women's proportion of the offender population and the nature of the crimes they commit is comparatively minor (Burman, 2004). However, Worrall (2001) argues that responses to girls and young women who offend have undergone a fundamental shift, from a traditional welfare-oriented approach to one which seeks to criminalise and punish a supposed 'new breed' of 'nasty little madams'.

Using narrative interviews this study set out to explore the role played by violence in the everyday lives of 'ordinary' young women. The picture that has emerged is quite a complex one. There is no clear-cut distinction between victims and perpetrators, thus disrupting the dichotomy in which women are seen either as innocent victims or as offender. Rather, the young women were both victims and perpetrators of violence at various times and in a variety of contexts in their lives. This is further complicated by the fluidity of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. Violence occurs between people who have close relationships, for instance, between siblings and friends. It is very rare between strangers. They do not, as some research and media accounts suggest, predominately attack or are attacked by strangers. Rather they are more likely to be victims of

sibling, peer and boyfriend violence. With regard to committing acts of violence their victims are more likely to be siblings and friends.

This research does not provide any support to the frequent media claims about the emergence of a new violent female. The media would have us believe that we are now embarking on a new era of sassy, independent, violent females who are imitating, and in some circumstances being more violent than males. Rather than being sassy and independent these young women gave accounts of the pervasive nature of social control mechanisms that are at play in their lives. Equally important is the role of informal control mechanisms and self-regulation that are endemic in these young women's lives. Policing, not only of young women's sexual behaviour, but many other aspects of their everyday lives was highlighted time and again. These young women are aware of the double standards in society around gender role behaviour. Girls and women's subordination is reflected in the surveillance and policing of their behaviour. What is evident in these narratives is that these young women know that violent displays perpetrated by females are 'wrong' and will bring them strong censor and condemnation. This powerlessness, that is, the lack of acceptable avenues to display and express violence, aggression and/or anger, may explain why girls and women use violence against each other.

In some respects this picture reflects the findings of other research, for example, these young women used violence to gain status and respect. In others it goes against it, particularly the research which suggests that the motivation for using violence is girls and women's previous victimisation. This research found that these young women's motivations were far more complex. This study supports the contention of Burman et al, (2001: 21) that we should move away from conceptualizing female violence as a response to gendered forms of victimization; 'whilst girls' gendered

experiences do provide motivations for violence, there are other broader motivational factors.

This study would also endorse the findings from research conducted by Batchelor et al, (2001) and Burman et al (2003: 85) who found that

> the meaning(s) of violence for those who use it and experience it are inextricably bound up with lived experiences, subjective identities, and intimate and social relationships. Girls' relationships to violence need to be understood as rising from a complex set of social, material and gendered circumstances and cannot be addressed in isolation from other aspects of their lives.

Furthermore, if we start with a definition of aggression and then refer to this behaviour as violence then we widen the net and include behaviour that previously would not have been considered as violent. For example, name-calling is included in a number of studies on violence and aggression. This has the effect of increasing incidents of violence. As illustrated in the introduction there are a number of definitions of aggression and violence used throughout the literature, but there is no consistency in the research.

Given that there is little consistency in the definitions used by researchers across the disciplines of criminology, sociology, and psychology, major problems occur in conceptualising and understanding violence. Furthermore, as Burman (2003) has pointed out it is important to understand young women's own definitions of violence and aggression in order to inform policy decisions and gain a greater understanding of that behaviour. It is also important, for both the young women and policy makers alike, to understand young women's definitions with regard to self-identification, for as Batchelor et al (2001) have pointed out many of the girls in their study did not describe themselves as violent, or aggressive, rather they described themselves as angry. Violence has appeared to be

apparent and uncontested in its meaning across gender and class. Pollock and Davies (2005: 26) argue that,

> Further research in this area must include an empirical analysis of this issue. For example, "deep file analysis" of women charged with violent crimes could provide more substantive evidence of how, why, when and under what circumstances women are most likely to engage in violent crime. We would hypothesize that most instances will involve abused women or women acting in self-defence.

Definitions of violence have been contested in this study. The young women in this study have identified a number of behaviours that have previously remained invisible. For example, self-harm was also identified as violent behaviour. This form of behaviour would not normally be found in definitions of violence or aggression, and as such it is important to include the young women's own definitions in order to fully understand the impact and occurrence of violence in the lives of young women. The definitions identified in the introduction mask or neglect a number of behaviours identified as violent by the young women. As Burman et al (2003: 77) have identified:

> Knowing the extent and forms of violence is important, as is documenting its pervasiveness in girls' lives. In order to inform policy and practice in this area, we need to ensure that our definitions and understandings of violence are both grounded in and pertinent to girls' own lived experiences.

Preventative strategies

In order to prevent, avoid or negotiate violence young women learned and used a variety of preventative strategies. The acquisition of these strategies informed these young women how and when to respond to real or perceived threats of violence, including acts of violence in interpersonal relationships, their local neighbourhoods, and intimate relationships. These strategies included, where possible, avoiding what were perceived to be dangerous places and people, and negotiating violence, with both

strangers and acquaintances, such as talking things through. A number of the young women used deferring to others to avoid violence. Saying 'sorry' could quickly defuse a potentially violent situation. However, some young women described how even deferring to other people did not defuse the situation. Rarely did these young women say they used violence as a preventative strategy. This is in contrast to Jones (2004) who found that young women in distressed areas of the US used violence in that way.

These avoidance and negotiating strategies also included avoiding certain areas that were perceived as dangerous, restricting travel to safe times of the day and travelling in the company of other people, usually other young women. These strategies where employed not only with regard to the fear of sexual danger but in addition to it. This aspect was mainly discussed in relation to socialising at night. Great importance was placed on acquiring the skills and knowledge to use these strategies successfully. For example, a number of the young women talked about teaching these skills to their children in order that they could reduce the likelihood of being involved in fights. Other young women were taught these lessons later in their teenage years.

Preventative strategies were not only used to avoid or negotiate violence by males, rather the young women employed these strategies to avoid becoming the victim of violence from other women. They demonstrated women's universal fear of men and their particular fear of some other women. This supports, but also adds to Stanko's (1990) work in which she found that women have a universal fear of men and men have a particular fear of other men. In addition this research challenges the literature which suggests that women turn to men for protection. The accounts given by Anne and Aisha demonstrated how the image of the male as protector fell far short of their experiences. The men who witnessed both of these young women being violently attacked did not intervene to stop the violence. This

has resulted in these two young women turning to other women for support and protection.

Mean behaviour

Throughout the interviews the young women talked frequently about verbal abuse, which included name-calling, insults and in some instances threats. In these accounts of verbal abuse the young women were either victims, perpetrators or both. This form of violence was very pervasive in the young women's lives and rather than it being a one off incident, it could extend to long periods of time, including being ostracised, which resulted in distress and anxiety for the young women. What was termed 'meanness or bitchiness' by the young women was prevalent throughout the majority of their narratives and can be related to the formation of cliques, this is demonstrated in the sharing of secrets and other personal details. When these cliques form they can either be very good for some young women and very bad for others. In the first instance they can be very good because they bring like-minded girls and women together to provide friendship and support. However, they can also be damaging for some girls and women who are excluded from the group

Recounting their narratives of mean behaviour the young women suggested that this can have a profound impact on them, 'when you're fighting, the physical injuries heal quick, but like with name-calling and that, they can last much longer' (Helen). However, it was not the young women who recounted incidents of mean behaviour who talked about self-harming, and their reluctance to go out in public places. These long term effects of being the victim of physical violence, whether at the hands of strangers, acquaintances, or boyfriends, and the sexual assaults and child abuse narratives demonstrate the severity of not only the immediate violence but also the long term psychological harm. They also demonstrate the long term impact on the victim's sense of self, their self-worth, and

their trust in other people. Additionally the narratives of mean behaviour did not include accounts of attempted suicide and family break-up as a result of the violence. Therefore it is important that when widening the definition of violent and aggressive behaviour to include indirect violence we do not conflate the impact of this mean behaviour and lose sight of the damage that can be caused through physical and sexual violence. This is not to suggest that the young women who narrated accounts of mean behaviour did not suffer from the psychological effects. Rather, it is the magnitude and severity of the violence and its impact that we should bear in mind.

To conflate this mean behaviour would be doing a great disservice to victims and perpetrators of both forms of violence. In addition, Chesney-Lind et al (2007: 332) assert that 'what the research on relational, covert, or indirect aggression 'is really doing is systematically measuring a set of attributes that have always been associated with girls and women (i.e., their devious and venomous natures) and then intellectually equating these aggressions to boys violence'.

This recent concern over new 'mean' behaviour by and between girls and women has resulted in numerous newspaper articles, chat shows and popular psychology books calling for something to be done to solve this 'problem'. So what makes this meanness a problem that has to be dealt with and treated? Could it be the fear that this behaviour can easily spill over into direct physical violence? However, as discussed in the introduction, research needs to take into account the concerns highlighted by feminists and the dilemmas faced when conducting research on girls, women and violence, including the fear that focusing on girls and women will detract attention away from the violence of boys and men. In order to address these issues we need to find a way in which we can discuss and research this behaviour without adding to the recent moral panic that

contribute to the social construction of a new breed of deviant girls and women.

Gaining respect

For those young women who did use violence they contended that being able to fight helped them protect their own personal boundaries and enhanced their self-esteem, status and respect as someone who was not a 'push-over' or a 'wimp'. As demonstrated throughout this research some of the young women's motivations for fighting were to gain respect. This suggests that 'respect' is not gender specific, and as such these young women regarded respect in the same manner as boys and men, that is, it gave them status among their peers. In addition, respect for some of these young women was understood in masculine terms of power and control.

A number of fights were in defence of acquaintances and friends, and it was found that standing up and defending a friend holds deep meanings for the young women. For example it reinforces and enhances a friendship providing deep and binding ties between friends. However, the research also found that violent encounters were motivated by quarrels and disagreements with the victim. The young women also normalised the impact of violence in their lives; this was especially evident with regard to self-defence and 'standing up for significant others', including friends and family. Additionally the young women did not identify themselves as violent people rather they used an array of mechanisms to disassociate themselves from this label. For example, they appealed to more favourable labels such as being a loyal friend. In some cases they compared their own behaviour to more violent behaviour by other people including people who used weapons or did not abide by the informal rules of a fair fight. They also described themselves as angry, frustrated or bad-tempered, rather than as violent people. This is consistent with much of the research on girls,

women and violence (Artz, 1998; Batchelor et al, 2001; Batcherlor, 2006; Phillips, 2003).

Matrix of violence

As previously discussed preventative strategies proved successful in lessening the risk of violence. However, strategies such as walking away and talking things through were unsuccessful in intimate violence. In cases of dating violence the young women provided an array of factors that constrained their ability to use the preventative strategies previously discussed. Rather these young women employed a different set of strategies in their intimate relationships. These included changing what they wore, and who they socialised with. For example the young women would not talk to male friends or male strangers when in the company of their boyfriend. The use of a weapon further constrained their ability to fight back. The narratives of sexual assault and child abuse also demonstrated the young women's inability to fight back. For example, there was the difference in physical strength and stature, and the power dynamics embedded in the relationship with their attacker.

In recounting their experiences of dating violence and sexual assault the young women frequently blamed themselves for the violence often drawing on strongly held beliefs and attitudes about appropriate female behaviour. For example, Tiffany who was raped by her male friend blamed herself for going back to his home by herself, for drinking alcohol and taking drugs, said that she was 'asking for it'. These beliefs and the fact that women are continually warned against stranger violence influenced their decision not to report the attacks to the police because they believed it would not be taken seriously. But as Stanko (1994: 102) states, 'women are almost always harmed by ordinary men, who... are not characterised as presenting a threat to women. "Criminals" at least those who attack women whose complaints are sometimes upheld in court, are portrayed as savage

beasts not as the guy next door'. This 'starkly illustrates a profound difference in the structure of gender oppression compared to other structures of power, not only are women required to live alongside and respect their oppressors, they are expected to love and desire them' (Kelly, 2000:52). When these young women did use violence against their intimate partners, it was usually in self-defence and retaliation.

Feminist research has shown that women are most likely to be assaulted by men known to them in sharp contrast to popular assumptions that continue to inform fear and danger. These are 'typically linked with violence committed by strangers in public places' (Stanko, 1998:78). Furthermore, Mullender et al (2002) found that both boys and girls were ambivalent about what constituted 'domestic violence'. This may explain why the young women did not identify certain behaviour from their boyfriend and male friends as violent. As such violence is bound up with intimate and social relationships and may involve the shifting meaning of violence in the lives of the young women. What is evident in the accounts of dating violence given by the young women in this study is a 'continuum of violence' (Kelly, 1988) ranging from subtle psychological abuse to severe physical violence.

This continuum, however, focuses only on women as victims of violence reinforcing the view of a dichotomy between victim and offender. This view ignores the interchangeability of these roles, which has been highlighted throughout this research. As such it may be more appropriate to think in terms of a matrix of violence which is more able to address the complexities and subtleties of everyday violence in the lives of these young women. Many of these young women found themselves moving within this matrix from victim to perpetrator or vice versa. As the dynamics of a conflict changed, a young woman found herself moving from the victim to the offender. In addition the conflict may change from mean behaviour to

physical violence. For example acting in self-defence may propel a young woman into the role of the offender rather than the victim. Thus as these dynamics change a young woman may be identified by significant others as a violent person, or, more may identify herself as a violent person.

Respectability

Although education and careers were found to be important to the majority of the young women in this study, with their aspirations stretching far beyond wife and motherhood, they held deeply ingrained ideas about appropriate female behaviour. This included the maintaining of intimate relationships. For example, being 'coupled' was argued to be very important. The desire to have boyfriends, husbands and children was dominant in their future plans. This desire to be 'coupled' often came at the expense of their safety. In the dating narratives the young women wanted the violence to end but most importantly they wanted their relationships to continue. This was especially true in Michelle's narrative, she demonstrated the importance of having her baby's father in her life as she did not want to be seen as 'one of those women', she wanted the status and associated respectability afforded by being in a relationship with her daughter's father.

As previously discussed, the picture of young women and violence is a complex one and within this a number of themes emerged. These young women were aware of the fine line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour across all areas of their lives. This was illustrated in a number of accounts that discussed appropriate sexual behaviour and fighting, and the need for regulation. These behaviours were not only regulated by the males in these young women's lives, but also by other young women. Furthermore, the young women in this study were more aware, and had more experience of informal social control mechanisms in their lives than formal social control. Informal social control and regulation were highly

prevalent in every aspect of their lives. The enforcement of this form of social control was achieved by evoking fear and a sense of powerlessness in the young women for as previously discussed some of the young women felt they had no control over what other people said about them.

In addition it was found that the young women did not regard violence against themselves in terms of legal categories. This may be due to social norms around violence which work to eradicate and normalise women's victimisation, but also work to reduce women's violence to acts of irrationality and pathology. Violence was considered to be natural for boys and men to engage in, but more importantly unfeminine for girls and women.

Some young women in this study found it difficult to reconcile their violent behaviour with other identities of who they are. This resulted in fragmented identities in order for the young women to understand their own sense of self. But more importantly they used these fragmented identities to resist some unfavourable labels. For example, rather than focusing on label of 'violent', they focused on being a good mother, friend, etc. For others this process was relatively easy. The young women were able to resist the label of 'violent' by utilising numerous accounts and neutralisations to deny the victim, or more often to deny the injuries and appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Grace retained her personal integrity by appealing to higher loyalties. She contended that 'sticking up' for friends who could not stand up for themselves was a good quality to possess. 'You can't stand back and watch someone being hurt, you have to support them' (Grace). They were also able to resist the violent label by admitting to fighting but claiming that they were not at fault. They diverted the blame and responsibility to the other person, or circumstances, in this way they absolved themselves of responsibility.

This is also true with being a victim of a violent incident. Some young women found it relatively easy to identify themselves as victims, while others found the process difficult. For example, Kirsta did not regard herself as a victim of dating violence. She accomplished this in a number of ways including blaming herself for the violence, excusing her boyfriend's behaviour, and blaming others for provoking an argument between herself and her boyfriend.

Transgressing boundaries of appropriate behaviour was a theme that emerged in the majority of these young women's narratives. It refers to a number of issues including causing serious harm and injuries, using inappropriate behaviour such as violence and physically hurting someone. It also includes ideas about gender role expectations, and as such using violence was regarded as unfeminine and inappropriate. There is also evidence that young women use violence and/or aggression in order to regulate other young women's behaviour, including sexual behaviour, this use of violence is considered acceptable in order to police inappropriate behaviour. Girls and women who transgressed conventional normative standards of behaviour were regarded as legitimate targets. This research found that derogatory terms and labels such as 'slag' and 'slut' are a strong form of informal social control of women's behaviour, not only by boys, but also by other women (Lees, 1989).

It would appear that girls and women's use of violence is seen by society in general as challenging femininity and as such it is often masculinised, pathologised or redefined as the feminine condition, that is they are regarded as emotional, irrational, and out of control. Furthermore girls and women who use violence are seen as a threat, not only to the institution of marriage and the family, but also to society at large (Hughes, 2002). It is seen as a threat to social order and gender roles, and it raises questions around gender. As a result girls and women are continually discouraged

from using violence, but they are also rebuked for using mean behaviour. This in effect leaves girls and women with no acceptable avenues of expressing violence, aggression or their anger.

This awareness that certain types of behaviour are regarded as wrong or inappropriate for girls and women to engage in, resulted in them being less tolerant of such behaviours in other girls and women. Running through these accounts were ideas of appropriate female behaviour based on gender norms and appropriate female behaviour. As previously demonstrated the regulation of these young women's behaviour far exceeds just the regulation of their sexual behaviour, rather it extends into all forms of behaviour.

Safe victims

Identification of a 'safe' victim emerged in the fighting and dating narratives. Kirsta recounted how her boyfriend's jealousy resulted in fights over her supposed flirting with other young men including his friends. In these confrontations her boyfriend would confront her but not the young men who were also involved in these flirtations. Kirsta put this down to the fact that she would not fight back but the other people would, including his friends, 'they could give as good as him and so he could end up getting beat up, but like with me I can't fight like him' (Kirsta). In addition, Anne told how she felt safer when she was being attacked by her boyfriend compared to being attacked by three strangers in the city centre. She justified this with the comment that she knew what her boyfriend was capable of, whereas she had no experience of the levels of violence these strangers were capable of. Anne was unable to predict the actions and severity of violence from strangers.

Fights with siblings also demonstrate this theme of the safe victim for these young women. Fighting with siblings did not bring these young women the

condemnation associated with fighting in public or with strangers. Rather as we have seen fights with siblings were regarded as normal and took place in the privacy of the family home. As such the perpetrators were much less likely to be seen as behaving inappropriately. Sibling violence epitomises examples of everyday violence and how some acts are considered 'normal'. The young women who recounted stories of sibling violence said 'that's just what we do'. However, in some instances everyday violence can have serious consequences. For example, 'Girl, 14, stabbed sister in back in fatal argument' (Carter, 2007). This incident occurred between two teenage sisters after one sister insulted the boyfriend of the other. Both sisters received stab wounds, one in the leg, the other in the back. This case illustrates that this everyday violence can end up with serious consequences including some-one being killed.

Future directions

This research has also highlighted a number of areas for further investigation. Further research on the preventative strategies employed by girls and women is needed in order to examine the impact of these strategies on their lives. This research suggests that as women mature these strategies become more sophisticated and take on greater importance in their lives. However, Jones (2004) found that the young women she interviewed in distressed areas of the US used violence to negotiate violence. This is in contrast to the narratives of the young women in this thesis. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the young women interviewed for this thesis were older than the sample in Jones' study and they lived in less violent and distressed neighbourhoods.

As these young women mature it may also be the case that ideas of respectability and respectable femininity are internalised. Ideas of respectability and being respectable, however may not be static concepts and as such may well be gender specific, having different meaning for

women and men. They may also carry different meanings for different women at various times in their lives, and may also be dependent on the circumstances and situations they may find themselves in. As such it would be beneficial to examine these ideas with regard to the everyday violence in women's lives, specifically domestic violence and dating violence. The literature in this area has failed to examine the role of respectability and ideas of being respectable in women's decisions to remain in violent relationships. Rather it has focused on women's financial dependence, fear of reprisal from their abuser, and for the sake of the children (Barnett, 2000; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Hamberger & Phelan, 2006; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). Psychodynamics theories have postulated that a man's violent behaviour is the result of deep rooted frustration and anxiety, while the woman derives masochistic gratification from the violence, and this is why she will not leave a violent partner (Shainess, 1979; Young & Gerson, 1991). An examination on the impact of respectable femininity on women's decisions to remain in violent relationships, including violent dating relationships would challenge conventional understanding. For it may well be the case, that some women do not leave violent partners because they gain respectability from being in a relationship no matter how violent, especially if they have children.

It may also be the case that ideas of respectability and being respectable are influential in these young women's decisions not to use violence. For example, one young woman said how she did not want her mother to discover that she had been involved in a street fight. While it was found that other young women took a number of precautions against being called a slag or a slut or other such derogatory names. As such, concepts such as respect, respectable and respectability are important factors that should not be ignored when exploring violence in the lives of young women.

Finally, feminists have failed to fully explore young women's use of violence to control what they perceived to be uncontrollable situations. Taking control for these young women may differ considerably from the meanings boys and young men hold. For example, taking control for these young women may mean taking control emotionally, while for boys and men it may mean taking physical control of the situation. Thus taking control of an unpredictable situation for these young women may not have been regarded as a masculine or negative trait.

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APPENDIX A: Details of Respondents

NAME	AGE	CHILDREN	SIBLINGS	SAMPLE	WORK – PAID AND VOLUNTARY	BOYFRIEND, PARTNER. HUSBAND.
Grace	24	2, son and daughter, 1 & 31/2 years old	3 brothers	Drop-in Centre	Youth worker	Husband, married for 4 years
Jessica	24	2, son and daughter, 4 & 5 years old	4 brothers and sisters	Drop-in Centre	12 months at drop-in centre, crèche worker, client for 5 years	Husband, married for 2 years.
Caroline	21	2, son and daughter, 2 and 3 years old	1 sister	Drop-in Centre	5 years at Drop-in centre, as client and volunteer	Husband, married for 3 years.
Julie	18	None	13 brothers and sisters, 1 blood sister, 12 half brothers and sisters	Drop-in Centre	6 years at drop-in centre as client and volunteer	Boyfriend
Louise	23	2, son and daughter, 2 years old and 4 months	1 sister	Drop-in centre	1 year at drop-in centre as volunteer	Married
Maureen	26	3 children, 1 son and 2 daughters	2 sisters	Drop-in centre	Personal assistant. Used drop-in centre for advice and counselling	Divorced

Margaret	25	None	2 brothers	Drop-in centre	Financial assistant. Used drop-in centre for socialising	Separated
Angela	19	None	1 brother	Six form college	Nursing assistant	Boyfriend, 1 year
Magda	17	None	None	Six form college	n/a	Boyfriend
Nancy	16	None	1 sister	Six form college	Part-time cook	None
Lucy	17	None	1 sister	Six form college	None	Boyfriend
Abby	17	None	1 sister	Six form college	Part-time glass collector	Boyfriend, 6 months
Kelly	20	None	2 brothers	Six form college	Support worker	Boyfriend
Laura	17	None	3 brothers and 1 sister	Six form college	Part-time, prescription pricing assistant	Boyfriend, 18 months

Kirsta	17	None	5 brothers and sisters	Six form college	Part-time shop assistant	Boyfriend, 1 ½ years
Michelle	17	1 daughter, 6 months old	1 sister, 1 step sister	Six form college	n/a	Boyfriend, 18 months together
Nancy	17	None	1 sister	Six form college	Baby sitter	No boyfriend
Aisha	18	None	2 brothers, and foster brothers and sisters	Six form college	Health care assistant	No boyfriend
Tina	20	None	1 sister	University	Part-time bar staff	Boyfriend 10 months
Anne	21	None	1 brother and 1 sister	University	Part-time shop assistant	Boyfriend, 7 years
Annette	21	None	1 brother and 1 sister	University	Part-time bar staff	Boyfriend, 1 year
Tiffany	23	None	2 brothers	University	Part-time bar staff	Boyfriend, 18 months

Kirsty	20	None	None	University	Part-time sales assistant	Boyfriend, 6 months
Helen	19	None	None	University	Part-time sales assistant	Boyfriend
Mandy	20	None	1 brother	University	Volunteer at her local church	None
Hazel	21	None	None	University	None	Girlfriend, 9 months
Lisa	20	None	1 brother	University	Part-time bar staff	Boyfriend
Helen	19	None	1 brother	University	Part-time sales assistant	None
Joanne	20	None	1 brother, 1 sister and 1 half sister	University	Part-time youth worker	Boyfriend, 2 years
Dawn	19	None	1 sister	University	Part-time bar staff	Boyfriend

APPENDIX B

Consent Form.

Title of Project: Aggression/Anger and Young Women.

I (name) ....

Address ....

....

....

have read and understand the 'Information Leaflet' which describes this research project and I have been given a copy of this to keep. I have had time to decide whether I wish to take part.

I give my consent to take part in this study.

Signed ....

APPENDIX C

Information leaflet for the research project: Aggression/anger and Young Women.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of aggression/anger and young women between the ages of 15 – 26

I am a research student at Liverpool University carrying out this study for my doctorate thesis.

I would like to interview you with regard to this study. The interviews will last for approximately one hour.

The interview will be tape recorded with your consent. This will be conducted in strict confidence and your anonymity will be maintained. I (as the researcher) will be the only person to have access to the information contained on the tapes and any subsequent notes that may be taken during the interview.

You can withdraw from the study at any time, before or during the interview, without giving any reason.

Thank you very much for your time.

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