Exploring a Delinquent Past:

Women's Experiences
as
Adolescents Involved in Delinquent Activities

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ABSTRACT

Historically, research on adolescent delinquency has focused on statistically determined causal risk factors and has been conducted utilizing male participants (Barron, 2000; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004). As summarized by Chesney-Lind and Sheldon (2004) "delinquency theory has ignored girls and as a result there is considerable question whether existing theories that were developed to explain boys' delinquency can explain girls' as well" (p. 98). Using a basic interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam, 2002b), the study's purpose was to explore and gain a better understanding of the personal experiences of women who were involved in delinquent activities during adolescence. Five women between the ages of 19 and 59 years participated in three interviews. The data collection interview focused on the women's experiences as an adolescent female involved in delinquent activities. The participants' descriptions lead to the identification of four descriptive categories: experiences with abuse, experiences with substance use, experiences with challenging and complicated relationships, and experiences that made a positive difference. These four categories of experiential description are discussed in terms of application(s) to counselling practice and future research.

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Table of Contents

Exploring a Delinquent Past:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On the night of November 14, 1997, Reena Virk was attacked by a group of 7 girls and 1 boy in a small suburb of Victoria, BC. After enduring a terrible beating, Reena Virk staggered across a bridge in an attempt to get home. She was followed by Kelly Ellard and Warren Glowatski, told to take off her shoes and jacket, and then viciously beaten again to the point of unconsciousness. Ellard and Glowatski then dragged her body to a waterway known as "the Gorge", where she struggled for life. Ellard held her foot over Reena's head until she drowned. Glowatski was convicted of second degree murder last year. Neither Ellard nor Glowatski knew Reena Virk - they had only met her that night. According to the pathologist's testimony, the injuries Reena suffered that night would have killed her even if she had not been dragged to the water and drowned. She noted that Virk had been kicked 18 times in the head and her internal injuries were so severe as to result in tissues being crushed between the abdomen and backbone. She added that the injuries were similar to those that would result from a car being driven over a body (Jiwani, 2000, The denial of race in the murder of Reena Virk, para.3).

The tragic murder of Reena Virk was a story involving female delinquent behaviour highlighted within Canadian media. Reena Virk, a 15 year old girl, was brutally beaten and murdered by a group of teenage girls and one boy (Moretti, Odgers, & Jackson, 2004). After this appalling event, public and research communities began exploring the phenomenon of female aggression and violence. Consequently, a conference devoted to girls' involvement in aggression and violence was held in Vancouver, British Columbia, "The Vancouver Conference on Aggressive and Violent Girls," in May 2004. This conference highlighted the need for further research in the area of female aggression and violence (Moretti et al., 2004).

Research on youth delinquency (e.g., Calhoun, 2001; Cummings & Leschied, 2002; Heilbron, Leschied, & Cummings, 2002; Kakar, Friedeman, & Peck, 2002; Lessen, Doreleijers, Dijk, & Hartman, 2000; McKnight & Loper, 2002; Wood, Foy, Layne, Pynoos, & James, 2002) has focused on various causal factors affecting youth participation in delinquent acts including biological, psychological, and environmental variables. There have also been numerous theoretical perspectives on the etiology of delinquency. Many of these theories have originated

from sociology, and historically have been developed by male researchers based on male delinquency data (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004). For instance, based on the social disorganization and social ecology theories, researchers have correlated an individual's physical environment to crime. That is, poorer areas and communities experience a lack of organization within institutions such as family, school, and community, which may influence an individual's involvement in delinquent or criminal activities (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004; Shaw & McKay, 1969). The differential association theory has described human behaviour as an outcome of a learning process. From this perspective, an individual learns behaviour, values, beliefs, and attitudes through their association with others (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004; Sutherland, 1955). Social control theories have postulated that individuals who have close bonds to positive conforming social groups and institutions are less likely to become involved in delinquent activities. Alternatively, individuals who have close bonds to non-conforming social groups are more likely to be involved in delinquent activities (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004; Hirschi, 1969). However, these frameworks have been focused on the risk, resiliency, and protective factors and communicate little about the way youth describe, account for, and reflect on their own experiences and behaviours (Kakar et al., 2002).

The scope of the phenomenon of female delinquency has not been well understood since the literature has generally defined juvenile delinquency in andocentric terms, often neglecting the experiences and concerns of girls (Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995). Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995) emphasized that "the stereotype of the delinquent is so indisputably male that the police, the general public, and even those in criminology who study delinquency, rarely, if ever, consider girls and their problems with the law" (p. 409). For example, Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995) reviewed studies focusing on both male and female gang involvement. They concluded that many of these studies minimized and distorted the role of females who became involved in gang activity due to the *gendered habits* or *gender bias* of male researchers, who collected the viewpoints of exclusively male gang members to speak on behalf of female gang members' experiences (Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995). They concluded that research on juvenile delinquency has primarily focused on understanding boys. Consequently, the juvenile justice system has been designed to accommodate boys; leaving girls who have broken the law to enter into this system (Kakar et al., 2002).

Recent literature on female delinquency has suggested that the predictive and/or risk factors for male and female delinquency are not the same (Chamberlain & Reid, 1994; Lessen et al., 2000; McKnight & Loper, 2002). One gender difference that has been studied is abuse. Compared to boys, an increased number of girls who have been involved in delinquent activities have reported experiencing physical and sexual abuse during their childhood and adolescence (McCabe, Lansing, Garland, & Hough, 2002; Miller, Fejes-Mendoza, & Eggleston, 1997). An additional gender difference is the importance and affect of relationships on girls' involvement in delinquent activities (Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). Studies have assessed the positive and negative influence that parents and peers have had on female youth delinquency; where these relationships can act as either protective or risk factors in delinquent involvement (Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Goldstein & Heaven, 2000; Kakar et al., 2002; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005; Peiser & Heaven, 1996).

The identification of gender differences has promoted a need for an improved understanding of the factors that influence female delinquent involvement. A better understanding of this phenomenon would help address and enhance appropriate prevention and intervention programs (McKnight & Loper, 2002). Due to the gender imbalance observed in crime rates, the development and delivery of specific intervention programs for females has not been considered a primary concern relative to male intervention programming (Kakar et al., 2002). As Chesney-Lind (2001) stated "the girls are almost always invisible when the *problem* of delinquency is discussed and largely forgotten when programs for *delinquents* are crafted" (p. 60).

The Current Study

My initial curiosity in delinquent behaviour stemmed from my work as an undergraduate student in social sciences. I have always been intrigued by the depiction of youth in the media and the minimal representation of youth voice within the research literature. Currently, I work with young males and females who experience behavioural, emotional, and intellectual difficulties. Many of these youth have experienced varied traumas such as neglect, abandonment, and abuse. Furthermore, some of these youth have been involved in various delinquent activities. In hopes of working more effectively with youth by gaining a better understanding of their experiences, the current project was shaped. My objectives were to explore descriptions from females who were involved in delinquent activities, to gain understanding of their experiences,

and to employ a methodological strategy that would support the generation of data and analysis for these purposes.

The current study focused on the experiences of adult women who identified themselves as having been involved in delinquent activities during adolescence. The purpose of the study was to explore and describe participants' experiences through their perspectives and voice. A qualitative research design was most suitable to elicit valuable knowledge and understanding of female participation in delinquent activities.

The research question that guided this inquiry was, "What experiences do adult women describe regarding their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities?"

Chapter Organization

A review of the related literature in regards to juvenile delinquency follows in Chapter 2. A description of the research methods and procedures employed is presented in Chapter 3, while an analysis of the data is presented in Chapter 4. The final chapter, Chapter 5, summarizes the conclusions of the study, offers direction for further research, and identifies implications for practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents literature on juvenile delinquent behaviour and/or juvenile offenders. A general review of youth delinquency, the differences between male and female delinquent behaviour, as well as literature examining females who were involved in delinquent activities is presented.

Risk, Resiliency, and Juvenile Delinquency

The terms *juvenile* and *delinquent* are used to refer to and represent individuals who are under the age of 18 and who have participated in activities that are defined as illegal or criminal by societal laws (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997). This is consistent with the legal definition of a juvenile delinquent or young offender, "someone between 12 and 17 years of age who through the due process of law has been found to have violated criminal legislation, and is therefore subject to punishments determined by a youth court" (Vaz & Baron, 2007, Juvenile delinquency section, para.1). There are two categories of illegal behaviour, criminal violent (serious) offenses and delinquent status (minor) offenses. Violent offenses include such acts as murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997). Status offenses include other assaults, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, break and enter, stolen property, vandalism, prostitution, drug abuse, liquor violations, driving under the influence, curfew violations, self-endangerment, becoming a gang affiliate, and running away (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997; Kakar et al., 2002). In addition, a status offense is an act that is stated by statue to be an offense, but only when committed by a youth (Schmallenger, MacAlister, McKenna, & Winterdyk, 2000). Delinquency is statistically measured and represented by using official records of arrests and/or convictions and using self report measures from juveniles (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). According to Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, data from 122 police services in nine provinces revealed that females aged 12 years and older accounted for 21 percent of persons accused of a Criminal Code offence in 2005 (Kong & Aucoin, 2005). Furthermore, this police-reported data indicated that the overall rate of offending among females was approximately one-quarter that of males (Kong & Aucoin, 2005).

Factors that increase the possibility of youth participating in delinquent activities are referred to as risk factors (Farrington, 2002). Masten (2007) referred to risks as "an elevated probability of an undesirable outcome" (p. 39). In addition, Masten (2007) stated that, "resilience in human development generally refers to positive adjustment among individual's exposed to

serious threats to adaptation or development; in other words, doing well in spite of adversity" (p. 32). When considering risk and/or resiliency factors from an ecological or psycho-social framework there are two sets of variables, individual and contextual (Leschied, Cummings, Zerwer & Saunders, 2002). Examples of individual risk factors include: gender, age, hyperactivity/impulsivity (temperament), low self-esteem, and biology (Cunningham, 2002; Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, & Huber, 2004). Examples of contextual risk factors include: family, peers, school, neighborhood, community, and culture (Cunningham, 2002; Mullis et al., 2004). Individual factors coupled with contextual factors have demonstrated the complex spectrum of variables and the possible interactions between factors that may affect or influence youth's involvement in delinquent activities.

Researchers have explored the influence of various risk, resiliency and/or protective factors in youth who have been involved in delinquent activities. Carr and Vandiver (2001) explored protective factors associated with non-repeat juvenile offenders along with the risk factors associated with repeat juvenile offenders. Carr and Vandiver (2001) measured three factors: stressors, risk, and protective, within a sample of 43 females and 43 males between the ages of 11 to 17. Data was collected through archival records that were completed during 1994 to 1996. Each archival record included a personal interview and a case history. The archival profiles also included information on the youth's experiences with the stressors of familial separation and poverty. The data gathered was then presented on a subject data form including a 23 item risk factor measure which assessed: personal characteristics, familial conditions, drug use, peer selection, school attendance, and school difficulties. In addition, the subject data form also included a 23 item protective factor measure, which assessed: personal characteristics, familial conditions, positive role models, peer selection, school interests, and activities and hobbies.

The authors found significant distinguishing protective factors between repeat and non-repeat offenders (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). Non-repeat offenders had significantly higher mean scores compared to repeat offenders in regards to personal characteristics. For example, non-repeat offenders reported being happy with themselves and they believed that they got along well with others. In addition, non-repeat offenders reported having more positive attitudes towards authority, police rules, school rules, and they often acquired more help with their school work.

Non-repeat offenders also had significantly higher mean scores in familial conditions including structure, rules, support, guidance, and fewer siblings. Furthermore, non-repeat offenders reported having many or some friends as compared to repeat offenders. The findings suggested that protective factors played an essential role in the rates of youth recidivism.

There were no significant differences between the non-repeat and repeat offenders on the number of prior offenses, total stressors, and total risk factors (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). However, the risk factors of personal characteristics and familial conditions did distinguish the two groups. Carr and Vandiver (2001) findings suggested that protective factors influence or decrease recidivism among youth offenders. One limitation stated by the authors was that the identification of risk and protective factors were restricted by the agency's questionnaires, rather than allowing the factors to emerge from the non-repeat or repeat offender's experiences.

McKnight and Loper (2002) conducted two separate studies exploring specific risk and resiliency factors associated with female delinquent involvement. The authors assessed data from a previous data collection from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health from 1994 to 1996. Approximately 7836 adolescent females and their parents and/or guardians were interviewed and a sample of 2580 girls between the ages of 10 to 19 was selected. The girls were asked to complete a delinquency measurement on the number of times they performed delinquent acts during the previous 12 months. The authors assessed resiliency factors by survey item responses. These factors included: the quality of the parent-child interaction (i.e., you get along well with your daughter?), school involvement (i.e., involvement in sports and clubs), substance abstinence (considered abstinent if they indicated that they had not used any illegal substances the previous 30 days), religious convictions (i.e., how important is religion to you?), school fairness and acceptance (i.e., teachers at this school treat students fairly?), and attitudes concerning college attendance (i.e., how much do you want to go to college?). The authors also assessed risk factors by survey item responses. These factors included: sexual abuse (i.e., were you ever forced to have sexual intercourse against your will?), poverty status (i.e., are you receiving public assistance?), minority status (interview observation), single parent status (based on parent or guardian response), neighborhood trash (i.e., in this neighborhood, how big a problem is litter or trash on the streets/sidewalks?), and neighbourhood drugs (i.e., in this neighborhood, how big a problem are drug dealers and drug users?).

In the first study, 2245 girl's responses to the survey questions were examined to determine whether resiliency variables were related to delinquency after controlling for risk factors (McKnight & Loper, 2002). The results revealed that risk factors were significantly linked to delinquency. Sexual abuse and single-parent status were particularly significant. McKnight and Loper (2002) summarized that both sexual abuse and being raised in a single parent house hold supported findings within contemporary literature. In addition, several resiliency factors were related to the prediction of delinquency. These factors included: abstinence from alcohol, perceiving that teachers are fair, endorsing a feeling of being loved and wanted, religious belief, and parental reports that the youth is trustworthy (McKnight & Loper, 2002).

In the second study, 335 adolescent girl's responses to the survey questions were examined to determine if resiliency factors could distinguish at-risk girls who were involved in delinquent activities from those who were not involved in delinquent activities (McKnight & Loper, 2002). Girls who reported five or more items on the delinquency measure were categorized as the at-risk group for delinquency, while girls who reported no delinquent activities were considered non-delinquent. The results suggested that resiliency factors distinguished the two groups in 80 percent of the cases (McKnight & Loper, 2002). Therefore, the presence of resiliency factors related to a decrease in girls involvement in delinquent activities. The resiliency factors that were significant in predicting lower levels of delinquent involvement, included: resistance to substance use, feeling that teachers treat students fairly, feeling loved and wanted, parents feeling they can trust the adolescent, and religiosity (McKnight & Loper, 2002). McKnight and Loper (2002) summarized that these resiliency factors promoted positive self perceptions; meaning that when girls feel like they have some control over and are supported in their choices they are less likely to engage in delinquent activities (McKnight & Loper, 2002). In conclusion, McKnight and Loper (2002) revealed that the "prediction of delinquency in adolescent females is improved by including resilience variables representing personal choices or behaviours to prediction based on demographic and historical risk factors" (p. 193).

To summarize, risk, resiliency, and protective factors have been shown to influence involvement in delinquent activities. Authors have discovered factors affecting adolescent delinquent behaviour through quantitative research (Carr & Vandiver, 2001; McKnight & Loper, 2002). McKnight and Loper (2002) demonstrated the importance of resiliency factors in

hindering the involvement in delinquent behaviour and/or activities. In addition, Carr and Vandiver (2001) demonstrated the importance of protective factors in decreasing the rates of repeat offending. These authors suggested that decreasing the presence of risk factors and promoting resiliency and/or protective factors will diminish the probability of delinquent involvement. Therefore, these factors should be considered in the development of prevention and intervention programs (Carr & Vandiver, 2001; McKnight & Loper, 2002). Furthermore, it is important to reflect on whether females and males are influenced by similar or different risk, resiliency, and protective factors. Reitsma-Street (2004) stated that the unique experiences of females are usually overlooked when genders are not differentiated.

Gender Differences

Decades ago, delinquency was considered largely the domain of boys, and females were only labeled delinquent for running away from home and engaging in promiscuous behaviour (Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). Currently, females are being arrested and charged for involvement in armed robbery, gang activity, drug trafficking, burglary, weapons possession, aggravated assault, and prostitution (Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005; Mullis et al., 2004). Mullis et al. (2004) reviewed research on female juvenile offending and stated that in Canada female criminal charges increased by 68 percent between 1990 and 2001. Females and males have varied on the frequency, type, and severity of delinquent involvement. For example, boys are more likely to commit property crimes (11:1) and violent crimes (9:1) (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997). The male to female ratio for overall delinquency rates has been approximately 4 to 1 (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997). Females have been more likely to commit status offenses including running away, truancy, vagrancy, ungovernability, and self-endangerment. Girls are also more likely to become a gang affiliate, break and enter, damage property, theft, prostitution, substance abuse, and underage liquor law violations (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997; Kakar et al., 2002). Most of these status offenses have typically involved one victim or are self-harming; as Belknap and Holsinger (1997) stated "the only victim left behind from a female delinquent act is herself" (p. 40). Male delinquency has been generally more severe in terms of victimization of others and has created a more publicized impact on society (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997). Therefore, the development of intervention programs for males has been identified as a necessity to protect the public from future victimization. In contrast, girls have not been considered an immediate threat to society; consequently, there has been less emphasis on the development of

intervention programs for female youth (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997). Presently, research studies have begun to assess gender differences that have played a role in the etiology of delinquent behaviour.

McCabe et al. (2002) examined and compared psychopathology and environmental risk factors among delinquent girls and boys. The authors interviewed a total of 625 parents and/or primary caretakers and youth. Of the 625 participants, 112 females with an average age of 16 were interviewed. Various quantitative measurement scales were used: the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children IV (DISC-IV; Shaffer, Fisher, Lucas, Dulcan, & Schwab-Stone, 2000), the Composite International Diagnostic Interview-Substance Abuse Module (CIDI-SAM; Cottler, Robins, & Helzer, 1989), the short form of the Family History section of the Service Utilization and Risk Factors Interview (Lahey, Flagg, & Bird, 1996), the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Short Form (CTQ; Bernstein & Fink, 1998), the Children Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991a), the Youth Self-Report (YSR; Achenbach, 1991b), and the Columbia Impairment (Bird, Shaffer, & Fisher, 1993).

McCabe et al. (2002) found that female delinquents were described by their primary caretaker as having greater psychological symptoms than male delinquents on both the Total Behavior Problems scale and Externalizing Problems scale according to the Cognitive Behavioural Checklist. On the Youth Self Report, girls scored higher on the Total Behaviour Problems scale and on Externalizing Symptoms scale than did their male counterparts. Females were more likely to have experienced abuse and neglect including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and physical neglect as measured by the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire. There was no difference found between genders for substance abuse on the Composite International Diagnostic Interview-Substance Abuse Module. Females were significantly more likely than males to meet criteria for the presence of at least one Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) diagnosis. Specifically, females were significantly more likely to meet the criteria for any mood disorder and any disruptive behavioural disorder (McCabe et al., 2002). However, females were also more likely to have a family history of psychopathology. The authors suggested that both a genetic predisposition to psychopathology and an environmental risk factor of living within a difficult family environment may increase the risk of delinquent behaviour for girls (McCabe et al., 2002). McCabe and colleagues (2002) summarized that their results supported past research findings that female

delinquents suffered from greater environmental risks for delinquency and co-occurring psychopathology as compared to males. However, the authors stated that a limitation of this study was that both youth and parent perspectives were represented by self-report data, which may have impacted results due to inaccurate recall or reporting biases.

Calhoun (2001) investigated the emotional, behavioural, and psychological needs of a group of female adolescent offenders. The author intended to increase the understanding of adaptive and maladaptive characteristics as well as to explore the differences between male and female juvenile offenders. The participants were 44 male and 44 female participants between the ages of 13 to17, who were on probation with the department of juvenile justice and were receiving counselling services. Charges ranged from status offenses (e.g., truancy, unruliness) to crimes against property and/or persons (e.g., assault, burglary). Calhoun (2001) utilized the Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC) Self-Report of Personality- Adolescent form (SRP-A; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) in order to evaluate both positive (adaptive) and negative (clinical) dimensions of behaviour and personality.

The clinical subscales of locus of control, social stress, anxiety and depression; and the adaptive subscales of relations with parents and self-esteem revealed significant findings. Female juvenile offenders reported significantly different psychological, emotional, and behavioural issues than male juvenile offenders. For example, the female juvenile offenders demonstrated a significantly higher external locus of control than did males, which indicated a perception that events in their lives were determined by other people and circumstances outside of their own control (Calhoun, 2001). Females revealed higher levels of social stress, signifying increased levels of stress regarding interpersonal relationships. Females also reported higher levels of anxiety than males, which indicated a greater sense of fear and worry coupled with heightened sensitivity. Females reported higher levels of sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, and helplessness, which led to depression. Females also reported a perception of being less valued or important in their family compared to males. Females reported significantly lower self-esteem or a greater sense of dissatisfaction with self than males. Calhoun (2001) suggested that "female juvenile offenders travel on different pathways to delinquency than male juvenile offenders" (p. 94) and that juvenile justice programming should be tailored to meet the multifaceted needs of each gender.

Wood et al. (2002) designed two studies to assess the relationship between violence exposure, posttraumatic stress symptomology, and delinquent activity among urban adolescents. Participants included 200 youth who were involved with the juvenile justice system and 200 inner city high school students with no delinquent involvement. The incarcerated and high school sample consisted of an equal number of females and males, Latinos and African Americans, and youth convicted of violent and non-violent offenses. The average age of both samples was 16 years. Data were obtained through structured interviews with the incarcerated sample and through brief questionnaires or self-reports with the high school sample. Quantitative measures included: the Survey of Children's Exposure to Community Violence (SCECV; Richters & Saltzman, 1990), the Los Angeles Symptom Checklist (LASC; Foy, Wood, King, King, & Resnick, 1997), the Physical Punishment subscale of Assessing Environments-III (AEIII; Berger, Knutson, Mehm, & Perkins, 1998), and the Sexual Abuse Exposure Questionnaire (SAEQ; Rowan, Foy, Rodriguez, & Ryan, 1994). Delinquent activity was also assessed through official records and questions embedded in the interview protocol regarding gang affiliation and ownership or use of firearms or weapons (Wood et al., 2002).

The first study compared results between the incarcerated and the high school samples. The findings revealed that the incarcerated sample reported significantly higher levels of exposure to sexual violence, community violence, and higher levels of PTSD symptomatology compared to the high school sample (Wood et al., 2002). Twenty nine percent of the incarcerated females reported having been sexually assaulted or molested compared to 11 percent of high school females. In both samples, females received higher mean PTSD scale scores than males.

The second study examined the relationship between exposure to violence (physical punishment, sexual abuse, community violence) and PTSD symptomology. In addition, the authors examined the relationship between violence exposure (physical punishment, sexual abuse, community violence) and more serious delinquency activity. This study analyzed the differences within the incarcerated sample assessing females and males separately. For the males, community violence was the strongest predictor of PTSD symptoms and physical punishment also emerged as a predictor. For females, all three types of violence were significant predictors of PTSD symptoms. The authors found that the differences in levels of delinquent activity were not consistently associated with higher levels of violent exposure. However, the authors did find that the incarcerated youth who reported higher levels of delinquent activity also

reported higher levels of violence exposure in their homes and communities (Wood et al., 2002). Due to the cross-sectional design of the study, the authors could not form conclusions regarding community violence as a risk factor in the development of delinquent activity. The authors suggested a need for longitudinal research to better understand the relationships between risk factors and delinquent behaviours to help develop prevention and intervention programming (Wood et al., 2002).

All of the above studies utilized quantitative measurements to analyze, interpret, and compare the experiences of female and male delinquents (Calhoun, 2001; McCabe et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2002). Overall, females report higher levels of psychological, emotional, and behavioural symptoms and report higher levels of abuse (Calhoun, 2001; McCabe et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2002). However, McCabe et al. (2002) noted that using self-report measures was not the most adequate form of data collection due to recall effects and reporting biases. Nonetheless, the differences between genders suggests the importance of assessing the unique aspects of female delinquent behaviour in order to understand the context that females and their behaviours develop in and evolve from.

Female Experiences

Many authors and researchers have stated that female experiences in the context of juvenile delinquency need to be considered apart from male experiences (Acoca, 1999; Belknap, Holsinger, & Dunn, 1997; Calhoun, 2001; Miller et al. 1997). Some researchers have incorporated qualitative research methods in order to explore and gain an understanding of female experiences (Belknap et al., 1997; Coll & Duff, 1995; Kakar et al., 2002; Simkins & Katz, 2002). The following section presents research studies focusing specifically on the experiences of females involved in delinquent activities.

Belknap et al. (1997) along with the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services assessed the experiences of female delinquents in order to explore and identify the special needs of adolescent females in Ohio's juvenile justice system. Data were gathered on adolescent girls by completing 6 focus group sessions, ranging in size from 7 to 11 participants (Belknap et al., 1997). There were a total of 58 girls between the ages of 13 to 20 years. The girls' placements within the juvenile justice system included: group homes, probation, detention, house arrest, and diversion.

The focus group questions and requests were as follows: tell me about what you made out of the magazines and markers, what do you like most about yourself? Who do you look up to?

Who would you want to be like? What could happen that could have kept you out of the system? What would you change about the system? What changes would help you? Do the staff treat you differently than they treat the guys? What happened that you got into trouble the first time? Who do you want attention from? Who is your ideal mentor, what kind of person? What changes would you like in your family and other placed outside of the system? What are your feelings about leaving this institution? And what are your hopes and dreams?

The qualitative data were analyzed and organized into five key findings (Belknap et al., 1997). The first key finding was the importance of respect, the girls reported not feeling respected in their relationships. For example, one girl stated "what I really want is someone who will love and respect me for what I am, not what they want you to be… to ask you what you think" (Belknap et al., p. 393). The girls conveyed a want for more one-on-one relationships with caring adults who would listen to and love them.

The second finding identified the facilitation of treatment as being varied according to gender (Belknap et al., 1997). The girls felt their treatment from the juvenile and criminal justice authorities was influenced by stereotypical gender beliefs. For example, one participant stated "boys can cuss all they want. Girls say one cuss word, and they miss their home visit for the weekend" (Belknap et al., 1997, p. 393). The girls described differences between the males and females programming within the treatment centers, including boys having more privileges, space, equipment, programs, and better treatment.

The third key finding related to difficult family and life experiences (Belknap et al., 1997). The experiences the girls shared ranged from neglect to severe physical and sexual abuse. In addition to abusive home experiences, the girls also reported complicated social experiences. From the girl's statements, the authors suggested that the girls searched within peer groups for the security and acceptance they lacked at home. Some girls reported becoming involved in delinquent activities in order to be accepted by their peers.

The fourth finding was the girl's health concerns including experiences with pregnancy, miscarriages, drug and alcohol addiction, eating disorders, and sexually transmitted diseases (i.e., human immunodeficiency virus) (Belknap et al., 1997). One girl stated, "I was on crystal meth and crank and had a miscarriage" (Belknap et al., 1997, p. 396). Many of the girls talked about their substance use but did not identify this as a problem. In addition, some of the girls were worried about partaking in drug use when leaving the institutional settings and returning home to

where parents and others use drugs. Furthermore, the researchers who facilitated the focus groups believed that a few of the girls demonstrated strain and mental health problems resulting from being incest survivors.

The final finding portrayed the girl's feelings about leaving their institutional settings (Belknap et al., 1997). For example, many girls expressed happiness and excitement in anticipation of leaving, while a few girls, who had been institutionalized for a longer period of time, were concerned and anxious about the possibility of repeat offending. One girl reported, "I'm shaky. I've been here so long; I don't want to just be thrown out. I'm anxious" (Belknap et al., 1997, p. 396). One recurring theme was the girl's reflection on the reality that no one would be responsible for them once they return home (Belknap et al., 1997). The girls were unsure how they would adapt to daily regular routines or practices such as driving, attending regular school, cooking, and getting along with others.

Belknap et al.'s (1997) study highlighted problems and experiences of girls before and during institutionalization within the juvenile justice system. The girls varied in their experiences; however, significant key findings did emerge. The authors concluded with the following recommendations. They found a need for future research to track female offenders and to improve data collection in order to understand who is getting into the system, for what and whether the processing is sexist and/or racist. Another suggestion was to begin public education, training, and information sharing about gender specific issues. In addition, a need to identify current services and programs for girls and to measure their effectiveness was stated. The final recommendation was to increase funding to development appropriate gender-specific programs and services that would focus on mentors and transitional supports for girls leaving the system.

Kakar et al. (2002) assessed adolescent's individual, family, and neighborhood contexts to better understand how criminal behaviour may develop. This study used descriptive analysis of official record data and qualitative data of focus group discussions. One hundred females who were in juvenile detention centers were recruited. The official data records were analyzed to answer the question "is female delinquency associated with childhood victimization, parental incarceration, and school discipline problems?" (Kakar et al., 2002, p. 63).

The questions posed within the focus groups were designed to determine: "what is the family, psychiatric, social and behaviour context of adolescent girls in detention? And what are the crimes committed by girls in the past 6 years?" (Kakar et al., 2002, p. 63). During the focus

groups, all of the girls described significant family verbal and physical violence in combination with disruptive, untrusting, and unstable conditions. The majority of girls felt they could not discuss their problems with parents or guardians and instead sought advice from other family members or friends. One girl, who had experienced severe trauma in her family, felt most comfortable with her *peeps* (friends) (Kakar et al., 2002). When asked about forms of discipline within the girls' families, several of them reported being beaten by parents when they did something wrong. Almost all of the girls reported exposure to substance abuse either through friends or family members. Overall, a significant theme that was presented throughout the duration of the study was that fragmented and chaotic families influenced the girls' involvement in delinquent activities (Kakar et al., 2002). Based on the official data records, the authors found the presence of all three or any three variables (childhood maltreatment, parental incarceration and school discipline) were not significantly associated with participant's involvement in delinquent behaviour. The authors concluded that official records should not be considered adequate sources of data to assess juvenile delinquent experiences and that focus groups or interviews should be utilized to gain representational data.

The Kakar et al. (2002) and Belknap et al. (1997) studies demonstrated the usefulness of qualitative research. Qualitative research methods gathered and re-presented the perspectives and voices of girls. Both studies found abuse, family issues, and substance use to be significant factors in these girls' experiences. In addition, Kakar et al. (2002) and Belknap et al. (1997) concluded that girls are in need of gender specific programming to address the significant experiences and risk factors in their lives.

***Bonds to peers and parents*.** The reputation enhancement theory (RET) is a social-psychological perspective which has suggested that adolescent reputation enhancement beliefs about who they are, *private-self*, and how others see them, *public-self*, have been components associated with delinquency (Carroll, Green, Houghton, & Wood, 2003). This theory postulates that if adolescents are surrounded by non-conforming peers, who identify as being against societal norms or laws, they will be actively motivated to partake in delinquency (Carroll, Hattie, Durkin, & Houghton, 1999; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). In contrast, if adolescents are surrounded by conforming peers, who follow societal norms or laws, they will be motivated to perform socially desirable or non delinquent activities (Carroll et al., 1999; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). The peers that adolescents choose to surround themselves with provide them

with what they perceive as positive feedback or a positive reflection of themselves (Carroll et al., 1999; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). Thus, the identity or reputation that adolescents actively construct may be influenced by perceived bonds to others who are either conforming or non-conforming (Carroll et al., 1999; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). Therefore, delinquent behavior may develop within the context of close peer relationships (Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005).

In Kerpelman and Smith-Adcock's (2005) study of how reputation enhancement affected female delinquency, they chose to use a non-clinical sample of 188 female participants' from grades seven to eleven. These authors suggested that delinquency has often gone undetected by formal identifying systems (e.g., official crime reports). Consequently, the authors employed a self- report delinquency scale, social bonds measure, and reputation enhancement scale to explore the following questions: "what are the factors that prevent girls from becoming involved in delinquency? And to what extent do girls bonds to parents interact with positive reputation enhancement to explain their delinquent conduct or lack of deviant behaviour?" (p. 183). Kerpelman and Smith-Adcock (2005) found that lower scores on the delinquency scale were directly related to positive reputation enhancement beliefs and indirectly related to bonds to parents. The authors explained that positive bonds to parents promoted positive self views or beliefs for girls, which influenced their decision to participate in delinquent activities. For example, if girls reported positive bonds to parents, they tended to have more positive views of self and were less likely to associate with delinquent or non conforming peers. Kerpelman and Smith-Adcock (2005) concluded the strong utility of a social-psychological perspective such as reputation enhancement perspective theory, "offers movement towards more complex explanations of why having weaker bonds with parents increases the likelihood of delinquency for girls" (Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005, p. 179).

Relationships. Jean Baker Miller (1976), who studied women's development and growth through the Stone Center at Wellesley College, stated that a woman's primary motivation was to build a sense of connection with others, rather than separation as a developmental milestone in maturity. Relationship connections are highly significant to women's development and psychological problems have been found to be related to disconnections within various relationships (Covington, 1998). According to Miller (1986), connections are mutual, empathic, creative, energy-releasing, and empowering for each individual in the relationship. These types

of connections have been found to create five psychological outcomes (Miller, 1986). These include: increased zest and vitality, empowerment to act, knowledge of self and others, self-worth, and a desire for more connection (Miller, 1986). However, disconnections or abusive relationships also create psychological outcomes including: diminished zest or vitality, disempowerment, unclairty or confusion, diminished self-worth, and turning away from relationships (Miller, 1988). Overall, most relationships do involve some disconnections. However, if the relationship was positive to begin with then each member of the relationship can work to turn the disconnection into a connection. On the other hand, if the relationship was always abusive or negative, then the disconnections will remain unhealthy (Covington, 1998).

In order to evaluate this theory, Coll and Duff (1995) gathered quantitative and qualitative data with a total of 54 adult women participants who were in prison. They completed 11 focus groups in their efforts to explore the importance of relationships (not all participants participated in the focus groups). Four questionnaires focused on demographics, relational profiles, a needs/strengths statement, and a mutuality scale were completed by the participants. Coll and Duff (1995) found that disconnection and violation were prevalent in the experiences of most women within the criminal justice system. Coll and Duff (1995) reported that 38 percent of the women lost parents in childhood and that 70 percent of the women left home before the age 17. The authors stated that a relational disruption or attachment loss at an early age may impact relational experiences later on in life. Furthermore, studies have shown that leaving home during this time period is most often attributed to seeking safety from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in the home (Gilfus, 1992). Sixty nine percent of the women were abused as children and 70 percent reported being repeatedly verbally, physically, and/or sexually abused as grown women. Therefore, the authors concluded that if one experienced abuse as a child they were more likely to experience abuse during adulthood. Coll and Duff (1995) noted that many incarcerated women arrived in prison with multiple trauma histories and lacked exposure to and experience within mutual, and/or empathic relationships.

Sexual abuse. Miller et al.'s (1997) review article looked at the profile of female offenders, and reported that female and male offenders have different profiles. These authors stated that a major area of difference between the genders was physical and sexual abuse (Belknap, Holsinger, & Sutherland, 1999; McCabe et al., 2002). A reported history of abuse is high among young women in the juvenile justice system, with estimates of up to 92 percent

having experienced at least one form of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse and 56 percent reporting sexual abuse (Acoca, 1998; Belknap et al., 1999). Miller et al. (1997) continued to detail that among the female and male offenders who were sexually abused, females tended to manifest more problems with self-image, sexual attitudes, family, vocational and educational goals, relationships, and self-determination.

Goodkind, Ng, and Sarri (2006) assessed young females involved with the juvenile justice system or at risk of involvement to better understand the relationships among sexual abuse, risk factors, and outcomes. The participants were receiving services at one of five participating agencies with the following three service-delivery approaches: a) community based nonresidential approach emphasizing prevention and education, b) community based open residential approach including prevention, treatment, and transitional services, and c) closed residential approach with a traditional juvenile justice treatment approach. Out of the 204 participants, 32 percent reported experiencing sexual abuse, 51 percent said they did not believe they had been sexually abused, and data were missing on this question for 17 percent of participants. Therefore, only 169 participant's data was used for analysis. The average age of participants was 15.92 years with a range of 11 to 21.

Goodkind et al. (2006) focused on the relationships between sexual abuse, women's experiences, and outcomes in seven areas: family background, school experiences, mental health, substance use, delinquent behavior, service use, and sexual and reproductive behaviour. Sexual abuse was measured using the Child Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein, Fink, Handelsman, & Foote, 1994). Family background was measured by questions focusing on family income and family experiences with the justice system. School experiences and substance use were measured using the Monitoring the Future Study (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 2000). Depression was measured using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). Delinquency was measured using the Self-Report Delinquency Scale (Elliott, Huizinga, & Morse, 1986). A scale of barriers to service use was created using a list of 16 possible reasons why the respondent had not accessed services in the past. Sexual and reproductive behaviour was measured using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (1999) Youth Risk Behaviour Survey and Teen SMART Reproductive Health Questionnaire (California Office of Family Planning, 1995). A general negative outcome scale was constructed to test for differences in negative outcomes.

Goodkind et al. (2006) found that sexual abuse was related to negative outcomes. Results demonstrated a strong relationship between sexual abuse and mental health problems, which was indicated by suicide attempts and negative feelings about life. In addition, sexual abuse was found to be related to school problems (i.e., expulsion), substance use (i.e., alcohol and marijuana), risky sexual behaviours (i.e., using drugs and having multiple partners), and delinquent behaviours (i.e., vandalism). Furthermore, participants who experienced sexual abuse reported considerably more barriers to service use than those who have not experienced sexual abuse (Goodkind et al., 2006). The authors concluded that females who have experienced abuse require specific intervention programming in order to prevent its many negative outcomes.

Simkins and Katz (2002) developed the Female Detention Project in order to assess commonalities in girls' experiences that led them to participate in delinquent activities. The researchers gathered data by reviewing 26 female court history files of Defender Association clients in Philadelphia's Youth Study Center, along with completing personal interviews. The interview protocols were designed to focus on family histories, placement and detention histories, the diagnoses and recommendations from the girls' psychological and psychiatric assessments, their drug and alcohol histories, and their trauma histories. From the data, a profile of the typical girl residing at the Youth Study Center in Philadelphia was created. The typical girl was African American, deemed dependent (in need of care due to abuse or neglect at home), had five or more foster care transitions, had at least one parent who abused drugs and/or alcohol, had experienced some type of trauma (sexual, physical abuse, neglect, or being a witness to violence), had been committed to a psychiatric hospital at least once (most likely for a suicide attempt), abused drugs or alcohol, exhibited violent behaviour (most likely in a school setting), had an Axis I diagnosis of oppositional defiant disorder, had been arrested for aggravated assault, would stay in detention for more than a month (even if it was her first time in detention), and had a history of running away. Defiance, hostility, and disobedience behaviours are characteristics of oppositional defiant disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Furthermore, the authors stated that "violence and substance abuse were significant overarching themes in the girls' lives" (Simkins & Katz, 2002, p. 1483).

This review of the literature on the experiences of females who were involved in delinquent activities reveals many affecting issues and factors. The lack of positive relationships with parents or peers and the experiences of trauma and/or abuse appear to be the most prevalent

issues for girls (Belknap et al., 1997; Coll & Duff, 1995; Goodkind et al., 2006; Kakar et al., 2002; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). Furthermore, the presence of mental health issues were identified; therefore, suggesting that increasing access to mental health services to assist female youth in coping with trauma and unhealthy relationships would be an important intervention process to promote (Belknap & Holsinger, 1997; Calhoun, 2001; McCabe et al., 2002; Simkins & Katz, 2002). Overall, prevention and intervention programming should be targeting, promoting, and fostering positive relationships with parents, peers, schools, and community resources.

Summary

The aforementioned studies addressed the characteristics of juvenile delinquents, gender differences, and experiences of female's involved delinquent activities. The influences of risk, resiliency, and protective factors were demonstrated to increase, decrease, or prevent youth's involvement in delinquent activities (Carr & Vandiver, 2001; McKnight & Loper, 2002). Three studies compared females to males finding that females involved in delinquent activities reported higher levels of psychological, emotional, and behavioural symptoms and higher levels of sexual assault and/or abuse (Calhoun, 2001; McCabe et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2002).

Although the reviewed studies provided important information relevant to female youth delinquency, most used quantitative methodologies to gather and analyze data including self-report, archival data, and assessment measures (Calhoun, 2001; Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005; McCabe et al., 2002; McKnight & Loper, 2002; Wood et al., 2002). A few limitations were noted among the quantitative studies such as the lack of adequate data collection through self-report measures (Kakar et al., 2002; McCabe et al, 2002) and that the identification of risk factors was restricted by the measure and/or questionnaire used (Carr & Vandiver, 2001).

Alternately, qualitative studies illuminated the importance of other variables such as peer and parental bonds, the importance of relationships, and experiences of sexual abuse for female youth involved in delinquent activities (Belknap et al., 1997; Coll & Duff, 1995; Goodkind et al., 2006; Kakar et al., 2002; Simkins & Katz, 2002). These studies utilized a qualitative methodology as a guiding lens to focus on and explore the experiences of females who were involved in delinquent activities. It was valuable to hear the participants' perspectives and voices to gain a better understanding of their experiences. Qualitative tools allowed for key findings to

emerge from the perspectives of female youth and for recommendations to be made (Belknap et al., 1997; Coll & Duff, 1995; Goodkind et al., 2006; Kakar et al., 2002; Simkins & Katz, 2002).

Reviewing these studies helped to solidify and encourage my objectives: to hear female perspectives and/or voices, to explore and gain an understanding of their experiences, and to employ a methodological strategy to support the generation of qualitative data and analysis. Therefore, this study sought to explore the research question: "What experiences do adult women describe regarding their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities?"

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a tool used for discovery and exploration (Creswell, 2003; Kearney, 2001). Morse and Richards (2002) stated that the beginnings of a qualitative research strategy should start with a question that seeks to understand complicated data within its context. A question of this nature leads to qualitative methodology, "a set of procedures that will generate data with unstructured, open-ended interviews, and participant observation" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 213). Qualitative methodologies can vary from narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies or case studies, all different strategies used for discovery (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research is also a process of induction, which allows "researchers to use previous literature to help increase their learning from participants, instead of using the literature to develop questions or hypothesis to answer" (Creswell, 2003, p. 30). Analysis involves identification of recurring patterns or common themes that are present within the data (Merriam, 2002b). All qualitative strategies represent rich and descriptive nonnumeric forms of data including words and pictures (Schwandt, 2001). Merriam described that "the overall interpretation will be the researchers understanding, mediated by his/her particular disciplinary perspective, of the participants understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 2002b, p. 38). On a whole, qualitative research is a tool that seeks to explore and gain the perspectives and understandings from participants within an area of interest (Creswell, 2003; Kearney, 2001).

Basic interpretive methods. The purpose of this research study was to explore and understand the experiences of females who were involved in delinquent activities as adolescents. According to Morse and Richards (2002), qualitative methods are the best way of addressing a research area where little is known, where the intention is to make sense of complex situations, where the goal is to learn from the participants, and to understand phenomena in detail. Merriam (2002a) stated that:

"a basic interpretive and descriptive qualitative study exemplifies all the characteristics of qualitative research that is the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researchers as instrument, the strategy is inductive and the outcome is descriptive" (p. 6).

A qualitative approach was the best method to answer the research question: "What experiences do adult women describe regarding their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities? The basic interpretive approach was a starting point for qualitative investigation, where little was known and could produce future questions for further in-depth qualitative inquiries such as phenomenology or grounded theory.

Research regarding youth who are involved in delinquent activities has been primarily quantitative and statistical in nature. Acland (1995) stated that statistics are a better reflection of the politics of those who are defining them than they are an indication of the number of violent incidents (Barron, 2000). Barron (2000) further stated that individuals who are represented by numbers (statistics) are not afforded with a well-developed description of who they are, since statistics are often detached from individual context(s). Qualitative research has assisted this project to: add depth through the use of descriptive voices, generate data without destroying its intricacy, and has allowed for discovery to take place through the perceptions and interpretations of the participants (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Research Procedures

Participant selection. The intent of this project was to explore and understand the experiences of females who have been involved in delinquent activities as adolescents. Therefore, purposeful sampling was used to select participants based on specific characteristics that would contribute to this understanding (Morse & Richards, 2002). Participant selection promoted in-depth knowledge and information to be provided by a group of participants who shared their experiences and were knowledgeable within the area of investigation (Merriam, 2002a; Morse & Richards, 2002). Five adult females who identified has having been involved in delinquent activities in adolescence were recruited for participation in this study. Criteria used to determine participant eligibility included:

 a) be female,
 b) be adult over the age of 18,
 c) identify as having been involved in delinquent activities as an adolescent,
 d) identify as being capable of reflecting, expressing and sharing their experiences,
 e) no longer participating in delinquent activities.

Participant screening occurred via phone to ensure criteria were met (see Appendix A). During this phone conversation, an interview was scheduled to address ethical concerns, participation requirements, and to begin data collection.

Recruitment location. Participants were recruited through a "Call to Participate" notice (see Appendix B). The recruitment notice was posted at a local youth centre, family service centre, health service centre, and a women's shelter, all located in Saskatchewan, Canada. The notice described the research project including participation criteria, general participation requirements, and the researcher's contact information. Nine women responded to the recruitment notice; however, only five women could be reached in order to complete participant screening and schedule the first interview meeting.

Data generation. Each participant completed three research interviews. The first interview focused on building rapport and an atmosphere of trust between the participant and the researcher. This supported both participant and researcher in getting to know each other and to create a more comfortable atmosphere for discussing topics of a sensitive nature. In addition, this first interview, allowed for space and time to discuss why each participant responded to the call to participate, to introduce the main research question, to answer any questions and/or concerns, and to review informed consent. Informed consent was signed and obtained with a written consent form (see Appendix C) that summarized the purpose of the research study, participants' rights, and contact information. By presenting the main research question in this first interview, the participants were able to reflect on and consider what experiences they might want to elaborate on in the second interview. This interview was not audio-tape recorded but the information shared was considered part of the data generation process.

The second interview was designed as an unstructured data collection interview, where open-ended questions would explore and capture the perspectives of the participants without imposing a predetermined point of view or framework (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Patton, 1980). An unstructured open-ended interview was a means of gathering data by providing the opportunity for participant's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, and experiences to be expressed by interacting with and being listened to by the researcher (Mason, 2002). The focus of the unstructured open-ended interview was to cover the *hows* or the constructions within participants' environments; in addition to the *whats* or activities (Fontana & Frey, 2005). In other words, I wanted to provide participants with the opportunity to share, describe, and explore

their experiences. This interview provided an opportunity for experiences to be shared with minimal interruption from the researcher, who was listening attentively in order to learn from each participant (Morse & Richards, 2002). The unstructured data collection interview consisted of one main open-ended research question "please describe your experiences as an adolescent female involved in delinquent activities?" and a few prepared open-ended questions or probes for clarification (Morse & Richards, 2002) (see Appendix D).

Three data collection interviews took place in a secure research office at the University of Saskatchewan and two data collection interviews took place within the community. One participant requested that we complete the interview at her work office, which she felt was secure and confidential. The other participant was temporarily residing at a women's shelter and requested that we complete the interview on site for child care purposes. The times and dates of the data collection interview depended on the schedules of the participants and researcher. The data collection interview was audio-tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Audio-tape recording promoted accuracy of data and ensured attention was paid to the participant since the researcher did not have to take in-depth notes (Patton, 1980). At the end of the data collection portion of the interview, participants were verbally debriefed and thanked for their participation.

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher contacted each participant to arrange delivering the transcripts to them for review and to schedule the third interview. The third interview provided an opportunity for each participant to review the interview content with the researcher and to share any further reflections. This interview also provided each participant with the opportunity to alter or delete any material, although none of the participants changed any of the information that was contained in the transcripts. Participants were asked to sign a data release form (see Appendix E). Each participant was also provided with a $50.00 honorarium to compensate for any external costs for participation. In addition, each participant was asked to sign an acknowledgement of receipt of honorarium to ensure payment and to add to the audit trial (see Appendix F).

Data analysis. The intent of this project was to explore and describe the experiences of females who were involved in delinquent activities during adolescence. Therefore, this project employed an inductive analytic process, where categories emerged from the participants descriptive data; "….allowing the data to speak for themselves" (Kearney, 2001, p. 148), without following an existing theory or framework (Creswell, 2003; Kearney, 2001; Patton, 1980).

The first point of analysis involved listening to each participant's audio recorded interview to check for accuracy of recording and to review the general content. Each audiotape was transformed into a word document by a transcriber other than the researcher. The transcriber was highly recommended by another researcher; she was qualified and had experience transcribing interviews of sensitive content. Before interviews were transcribed, a confidentiality form was signed by the transcriber to ensure the safety of the participants (see Appendix G). Once interviews were transcribed, each was listened to and read again to check for accuracy and to review general content.

The second point of analysis began by recording the researchers' thoughts and reflections on the transcripts (Creswell, 2003). The researcher began to formulate a list of possible common categories or patterns based on each participant's interview. For example, one of the many initial lists included: family, peers, abuse, delinquent behaviours, risk factors, resiliency factors, coping, positive influences, mental health, change, and turning points.

The third point of analysis began with coding categories or patterns within each transcript on a paper copy. Each transcript was then entered and coded on a computer software program called Nvivo7, a data management tool. Throughout this phase, the researcher tried to focus on the guiding research question, 'what were the participants' experiences?' Categories or patterns were contemplated, discussed, reworked, and transformed into descriptive categories. Kearney (2001) described utilizing descriptive categories as a means of portraying discovery findings. Kearney (2001) defined descriptive categories as a sequence of labeled data categories, where clusters of data are labeled with relevant headings to demonstrate the topic information. These categories can represent a *wheel or daisy format* if diagrammed (Kearney, 2001, p. 147). Showing that the categories are all elements of a main idea or experience; however, the relationships among these elements or categories are not detailed. Kearney (2001) reported that data categories are helpful to provide *vivid and informative data* in an unambiguous fashion (p. 148). Overall, the clarity of descriptive categories would represent new discoveries and understandings within the experiences being explored and would foster new questions for future research (Kearney, 2001).

The researcher allowed for much time to be spent on reworking each descriptive category, with the aid of diagrams and flow charts to help formulate an understanding of the participant's data. All descriptive categories that emerged from the participant's interviews were reviewed by

and discussed with the project supervisor. The project supervisor helped to reprocess the list of categories by assisting the researcher to focus on experiences rather than a list of factors. For example, the list of factors that participants described evolved into categories of experiences, such as the factors of family and peers turned into the category of experiences with relationships. Once the categories were re-presentational of the participants experiences, direct quotations from participants' responses were included in order to enhance each descriptive category (Creswell, 2003).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval through the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Science Research Ethics Board (see Appendix H) was required for this study. Participation was strictly voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any time. The purpose of the study and informed consent was established before formal data collection. If recalling past memories caused any discomfort for the participants, a list of resources that they could access was provided at the end of the consent form (see Appendix C). None of the participants showed any signs of discomfort or distress during or immediately after the interviews. All data collection interviews took place in secure locations. The research offices at the University of Saskatchewan are considered to be highly secure and confidential. In addition, the participant that requested to use her own office worked within a helping profession and had a highly secure and confidential office. Furthermore, the women's shelter includes high security surveillance and confidentiality. Audiotapes of the interviews were utilized by the transcriber for transcription then given back to the researcher. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure security and safety of all participant data (see Appendix G). All participants signed a data/transcript release form after they reviewed a transcript of the recorded interview. Data will be securely stored for the required five years in the office of my supervisor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan regulations.

Evaluation Criteria

It was essential to answer the following question in terms of evaluating the research project, "how can an inquirer persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified trustworthiness as key to fostering the confidence that a study is worthy of attention. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criteria of trustworthiness that

evaluate qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In addition, Lincoln (1995) focused on emerging criteria to evaluate the quality of qualitative research: positionality or standpoint judgments, community as arbiter of quality, voice, critical subjectivity, reciprocity, sacredness, and sharing the perquisites of privilege. The evaluative measures for this research project were: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, voice, and reciprocity. These criteria appeared most appropriate based on the goals and method of this study.

Credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in order to "establish trustworthiness, one needs to demonstrate *truth value* to show that the representation of multiple constructions are adequate, that is, that the reconstructions that have been arrived at are credible to the constructor of the original multiple realities" (p. 296). Member checks, where participants agree that the transcripts and direct quotations were accurately represented within the transcript were used in order to seek credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Emphasis was placed on providing participants with the opportunity to reflect upon and provide feedback on their accounts. Each participant was given a paper copy of her interview transcript to review. Once reviewed, another interview was scheduled in order for participants to add, delete or change any information. In addition, this interview was used to provide participants with honorariums and to sign the data release form. None of the participants altered or deleted any of the content of their interviews and all signed off on the data release form. To the researcher's knowledge there were no issues of coercion.

Transferability. Qualitative research methods do not offer statistical generalizability of findings. Rather, a substantial description of data is provided to enable readers to form their own conclusion on whether a transfer of information can be established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, it was my responsibility, as a qualitative researcher, to re-present the data in a way that makes transferability judgments possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each data category was highly substantiated by the participants own words through the use of direct quotes.

Dependability and confirmability. According to Creswell (2003) "validity...is used to suggest determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (p. 195). My goal was to prioritize all standpoints in this research. Therefore, to demonstrate dependability in conjunction with confirmability, the use of an auditor was applied along with the completion of an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated the tasks of the auditor are to: examine and confirm the

study's dependability and examine the findings, interpretations, and recommendations to assure they are reflected within the data. In addition, the auditor or supervisor thoroughly reviewed and critiqued the process of how I gathered data and processed interpretations. Morse and Richards (2002) referred to an audit trail as a record of all events, happenings, findings, and analyses throughout the research project. This documentation does need to be detailed in order for an outside individual or auditor to read, review, and understand the process of the study. In order to accurately complete an audit trial, I kept an in depth journal detailing the procedures, thoughts, and understandings of the emerging findings for further analysis.

Voice. The premise of this project was to hear and understand the experiences of females who were involved in delinquent activities. According to Lincoln (1995), this is a characteristic of qualitative discovery. I had hoped to add voice to the existing literature on females who are involved in delinquent activities by means of re-presenting these women's descriptions of their experiences.

Reciprocity. Lincoln (1995) stated that reciprocity as an important component of qualitative methods, due to the person-centered and relational nature of the data collection process. Emphasis was placed on building good rapport and an atmosphere of trust with each participant by using active listening and empathetic understanding. An atmosphere of empathy, authenticity, active listening, non judgment and non interpretation was provided to validate the experiences and feelings of each participant and maintain active communication during data collection interviews (Westra, 1996). In addition, I informed each participant that I was present to learn from them, since they are the expert of their own experiences.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I start with a description of each participant including background information and context. Then, I present the descriptive categories that evolved from the participants' interviews about their experiences as adolescent females involved in delinquent activities. The descriptive categories include experiences with abuse, experiences with substance use, experiences with challenging and complicated relationships, and experiences that made a positive difference. Each category is supported by direct quotes from the participants' interviews. These quotes were specifically selected in order to demonstrate and highlight aspects of participant experiences. To maximize confidentiality and anonymity, I chose pseudonyms to use for names of the participants, spouses/partners, children, and geographical locations. In addition, some quotes required minor editing to remove identifying information.

Description of Participants

The five women who participated in this research study - Gwen, Audrina, Rose, Lucy, and Tiffany - demonstrated diverse characteristics and backgrounds while all meeting the specific criteria for participation in the study. Each participant was over the age of 18, disclosed having participated in delinquent activities during adolescence (12-18 years), identified as being able to reflect, express, and share their experiences, and confirmed as no longer participating in delinquent activities. Summaries of each woman's context are provided to present some background and history information.

Gwen. At the time of the interview, Gwen was a 29-year old Aboriginal woman. She was married to a healthy supportive partner and was working full-time in a helping profession. At the interview, she did not report experiencing any health issues or concerns.

Gwen began her interview by describing the impact of her father's death, "*my grandparents and my aunts say that I was born a grieving baby, anything that affects the mother will obviously affect her baby*". Gwen's mother was experiencing grief at the loss of her husband and was put on medication while she was pregnant with Gwen. Even after Gwen's birth her mother was "*unable to take care for us (Gwen and her brother) properly*" because she was heavily medicated with tranquilizers. Therefore, Gwen and her brother spent a considerable amount of time with family members and babysitters during this time of loss and grief.

Gwen spent most of her childhood and adolescence years growing up on a reserve. She described her mother as a good financial provider; however, her mother worked all the time and

was emotionally and physically unavailable. Gwen easily recalled the beginning of her involvement in delinquent activities:

> *It was around that time that I started acting out in school. I would do anything for attention, I would steal, I would get up out of class, I was rude and I was really disruptive.   I can remember not feeling safe at home and just wanting to be anywhere else, so I started to run away or not go home at night.*

In the first interview, Gwen reported that since she had experienced healing from her past, she would be able to easily talk and share her experiences. Furthermore, she was eager to share her story in hopes that it would help others. During the data collection interview, Gwen appeared to be calm and comfortable while describing her experiences. However, at times I could see in her eyes the difficulty of sharing such sensitive information. Gwen detailed how her delinquent involvements and behaviours (i.e., shopping lifting, using drugs and alcohol, running away from home) lead to her admissions to a youth residential treatment center and a group home placement. Gwen also described unhealthy abusive relationships that were present throughout her childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, and how these relationships affected her. However, Gwen was able to reflect on and detail the experiences that made a positive difference, and helped her to move forward and successfully complete a University Degree.

Audrina. At the time of the interview, Audrina was a 29-year old married Caucasian woman. Audrina also worked full-time in a helping profession and was expecting her second child. She did not report experiencing any health issues or concerns. Audrina described how she was "*doing fine*" as an adolescent; for example, she had good grades, a part-time job, was recognized as a student leader at her school, went to science fairs, and helped organize neighborhood community programs. However, Audrina and her friends were also stealing, joyriding in cars, and experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Audrina described her family as being hard working, middle class, and living in a wealthy neighborhood. On the other hand, Audrina described her family as "*dysfunctional*", a family where alcoholism and abuse were present. Audrina struggled with and rebelled against the public image that her family portrayed and the reality of their family dynamic. Audrina reflected on her struggle:

> *So it's very confusing in a lot of ways you know, Dad and Mom fought a lot and there was domestic abuse and there was alcoholism, and addiction but there was that element of a closed alcoholic family system and although their friends knew because they would be*

over and they would be part of it, no one really knew and so my school didn't know and they wouldn't have thought it, and my friends knew cause they'd see, they'd go over and they'd hear it and I'd be so ashamed but they didn't really know and some I guess I would tell more like in High School I'd start talking about it more and kind of opening like outing them I guess to a certain degree but at the same time I had the exact same behaviors like I was drinking all the time.

Audrina easily made friends with people whose families did not hide the presence of abuse and/or addictions. She described how many of these friends lived in poverty and were involved in delinquent and/or illegal activities. She felt that these families lifestyle normalized her own behaviours. Audrina saw these families as being "*real*" and felt connected to them, "*it was far from my reality but at the same time it's really close to my reality*". In addition, Audrina described her "*rebelling*" as being against or not wanting to conform to what was going on in her family and the expectations of society:

I had a big problem with authority because it was hypocritical and because of the way it was in my family I guess and the way I saw it in sometimes in my friend's families and I just wanted nothing to do with it and I remember even like as a kid playing with it like playing with some of my Dad's behaviours cause I didn't want to be the Mom or I didn't want to be submissive so I would try to dominate.

At the first interview, Audrina reported that when she first saw the call to participate she was not sure about participating but that she became interested after discussing the opportunity with a friend. During the data collection interview, Audrina also appeared to be calm and comfortable while describing her experiences. Audrina easily reflected on and recalled her experiences as an adolescent involved in delinquent activities. In addition, she described the decisions and choices that she made in order to seek out new experiences, which lead to positive self-discoveries. New experiences and realizations about herself influenced Audrina to return to school and achieve a University Degree; and at the time of the interview she did talk about pursuing graduate studies.

Rose . At the time of the interview, Rose was a 59-year old Caucasian woman working within a helping field. She reported not being in an intimate relationship; instead she "*nourishes relationships that are more socially orientated towards change and family*". Rose does not have any formal education; however, she felt *"fairly self-educated in a lot of ways"*. Rose described

how she worked at developing and maintaining healthy positive relationships with her children and grandchildren and that she had been clean from drugs and alcohol since she was 39 years old. She did not report any present health issues or concerns. Rose grew up in a very poor rural farming community. Rose defined what poverty meant to her as follows:

> *It was the poverty, in the aspect that I see poverty. Poverty also doesn't mean just not having money; it means not having the skills, not having the access. We had a very small farm, being in the poorest place in our little community, we just didn't have the information. There may have been other information out there that we wouldn't have heard of because we just pretended everything is okay. And you don't realize that as a kid, I lived on a farm, it was fairly isolated we actually were one of the poorer families in our community, and that was relevant to me.*

She reported that this community provided her with few opportunities to get into trouble; however, she still managed to steal money, smoke cigarettes, and drink alcohol. Rose described the abuse she experienced within her family and community, which lead to her running away at a young age. She moved to a nearby city, became pregnant, and married an abusive husband. For many years, Rose and her husband stole property and money in order to eat, maintain shelter, and care for themselves and their children. In addition, they both battled drug and alcohol addictions. Rose's husband widowed her at the age of 29 with four children.

After her husband's death, Rose described experiencing "*repressed delinquent behaviours*". Since she had no education and no experience she started selling drugs. Rose's addiction to drugs and alcohol lead to her involvement in various treatment centers, therapy groups, counselling services, and support networks. Rose's experiences with abuse continued throughout her life and she recalled numerous partners that physically abused her. Rose reflected on how she perpetuated a cycle of violence while raising her own children. She reported how her experiences of abuse influenced her to use physical violence with her own children. Furthermore, Rose recalled how her one child was sexually abused by one of Rose's friends.

On numerous occasions, Rose contacted social services in order to gain financial support; however, she felt that her requests for help were ignored. She called herself a "*welfare scammer*", where she eventually learned how to "*scam*" money. She talked about how that lack of support turned into hate or feelings of anger towards a system she felt never supported her. In

the end, Rose did find refugee in a few supportive services and people that acted as positive role models, who helped Rose initiate change.

When Rose first contacted me in response to the call to participate poster, I was initially concerned about her age and how that may affect her ability to recall past adolescent experiences. Her delinquent behavior also extended 20 years past adolescence, which was different than the other participants. However, I decided that she met the study's inclusion criteria and her longer period of involvement with criminal activities would valuable in terms of understanding the range of female adolescents' experiences with delinquency. At the first interview, Rose looked to be very interested in the project and sounded as though she had a lot to share about her experiences. During the data collection interview, Rose appeared to be calm and comfortable although she displayed what seemed to be a nervous laugh or giggle while sharing information of a sensitive nature. Rose easily reflected and recalled her experiences as an adolescent involved in delinquent activities. At the third interview, Rose stated that since the data collection interview, she had been reflecting on her life and that she felt very fortunate. Therefore, she decided to volunteer at a sexual assault centre in order to help those who may not be so fortunate.

Lucy. At the time of the interview, Lucy was a 19-year old single Aboriginal woman finishing high school, unemployed, caring for one child, pregnant with her second child, and was not involved in an intimate relationship. She had future aspirations of going to university to provide a better life for herself and her children. Lucy recalled that her delinquent involvement began when she was 12 years old. Lucy described how she and her peers would skip classes and vandalize school property. Furthermore, Lucy provided examples of her aggression and violent behaviours towards others and how she became involved in a gang. Lucy described how she and her siblings grew up in foster care due to her mother's drug addictions and her father's lack of involvement with the family. Eventually, Lucy returned to live with her mother and siblings. She described how they lived in poverty and that her mother was abusive. While living with her mother, Lucy reported harming herself and one attempted suicide, where her younger brother found her and saved her life. In addition, Lucy talked about how she suffered from depression throughout her life and that this still affects her today. Lucy described giving birth to her first child at the age of 17. However, not long after she gave her baby up for adoption. During that time, Lucy recalled her struggles with alcohol and drug use and how she eventually reclaimed and is now raising her first-born child.

After the first interview, I was concerned about how descriptive Lucy would be in telling her experiences; she did not appear to be very expressive. However, she was very polite and eager to participant in the project. Lucy had much to share and was able to describe her experiences well. Overall, Lucy easily reflected on and recalled her experiences as an adolescent female involved in delinquent activities.

Tiffany. At the time of the interview, Tiffany was a 27-year old Aboriginal single mother of three children. She was living in a women's shelter and caring for her two younger children while her first-born had been adopted into another family. Tiffany described her delinquent involvement starting at the age of 16, when she decided to leave her family's home. Tiffany reported having to leave home due to *"bad circumstances"*. Once away from her family she quit attending school, started hanging out with the *"bad crowd",* started drinking alcohol, using drugs, assaulting people, completing break and enters, and stealing. Tiffany admitted to first using drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with what was going on in her life and with the disconnect from her family. Tiffany reported that she and her friends stole in order to feed themselves. Tiffany reflected on what she had to face once she was on her own:

> *It wasn't fun at all because I didn't have a place to sleep; I didn't feel safe, I was just worried about when the next night, or night that was coming up, I didn't know where I was going to be, I didn't have money to eat, so I was going out and doing stuff like getting into trouble just to feed myself or me and my friends were getting into trouble to feed ourselves it was like that for the whole summer.*

Many times throughout Tiffany's story, she talked about wanting to and attempting to change her behaviour; however, she would relapse into old behaviours or patterns. Tiffany's first child was placed in foster care when he was eight months old due to Tiffany and her boyfriend's unhealthy lifestyle. Eventually, Tiffany did find a place with positive influences and connections that helped her change. She did go on to have another child with her first baby's father and another child with a different positive supportive man that she met through school. However, they separated and she now raises her two children on her own. Tiffany reported that she felt good about where she was at, felt that she was a good mother, and would really like to finish her education in order to find employment. In addition, Tiffany did not report any present health issues or concerns.

After the first interview, I was concerned about her present circumstances. Tiffany appeared to be in a vulnerable state, she had no money, no nearby friends or family, and was residing at a women's shelter. However, she also appeared to be strong and not worried about her circumstances. Tiffany stated that it would be easy for her to share her experiences since she had dealt with and taken responsibility for her actions. During the data collection interview, she also appeared to be calm, friendly, and cooperative but she did not elaborate or give explanations to many circumstances or events that she experienced, even after being prompted.

A sixth woman, myself. During the interview process, like the participants, I also felt calm and comfortable. Despite not having similar experiences during adolescence, I still felt connected to the participants because I could identify with some of their described experiences with relationships as well as experiences with positive influences. However, at times it was hard and overwhelming to listen to their traumatic experiences. But in the end, I always felt hopeful and inspired while hearing their experiences with change and triumph. All interviews ended on positive notes with participants describing the positive and healthy experiences of where they are now.

Summary. Most of the women described and reflected on a life journey beginning in childhood, moving through adolescence, and continuing on to adulthood. These women did not separate their experiences as an adolescent from their other life experiences or separate their experiences as a female involved in delinquent activities from their other experiences. In addition, while describing their adulthood experiences they were able to share experiences that made a positive difference for them, which also guided them to where they are today. Within the interviews, these women sought to describe all of their life experiences that they believed were connected to their experiences as a female adolescent involved in delinquent activities.

Due to the diversity of the participant group, all the women were at different points in their lives. Three participants, Gwen, Audrina, and Rose, were more able to be reflective and descriptive, sharing more information and detail about their experiences as compared to Lucy and Tiffany. In addition, Gwen, Audrina, and Rose all reported having dealt with or healed from many of their experiences. However, the youngest woman, Lucy, and the woman without a permanent home, Tiffany, were more in flux. Lucy appeared to be dealing with difficulties like finances, parenting, school, and a lack of support resources. Tiffany was also dealing with many of the same difficulties, particularly finances and parenting two young children.

Nonetheless, there were shared experiences across the women's recollections of being an adolescent female involved in delinquent activities, which I chose to represent as four themes.

Descriptive Categories

Many of the experiences described by the women were within the context of relationships. For example, many experiences described by the women stressed how abuse and substance use were harmful aspects of negative unhealthy relationships. As such, there seemed to be a single overarching theme of relationship. However, I chose to represent these shared common threads in the form of four descriptive categories: experiences of abuse, experiences with substance use, experiences with challenging and complicated relationships, and experiences that made a positive difference. This approach was helpful to understand and make sense of each aspect separately while also seeing how enmeshed each aspect was within relationships. In addition, it was important to draw attention to the category of experiences that made a positive difference to present how the women developed, changed, and succeeded.

Experiences of Abuse

Gwen, Audrina, Rose, and Lucy all recalled past experiences of abuse when describing their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities. Different types of abuse (e.g., emotional, physical, sexual) were either observed and/or experienced by this group of women. Abuse was perpetrated by different types of people (i.e., family members, friends, intimate others, and strangers) and at different periods in their lives (i.e., childhood, adolescences and adulthood).

Tiffany's story was different. Tiffany never explicitly reported any experience of abuse. However, she did mention that she left her family, *"just because of what was going on between me and my step-dad and my Mom is the reason why I left home and then… just getting into everything was yea… not good"*. When asked if she ever considered returning home, Tiffany replied:

> *Um… well… no, I don't think … no… I wouldn't have wanted to go home no… I even, I remember thinking about it like I should just go home, but then just going home I would be in a worse position, I'm thinking like maybe I wouldn't even be alive today, if I did go back home or you know like I could be in a hospital or something, I'm glad I never went home.*

It appeared that Tiffany experienced some form of maltreatment or abuse at home but that she was reluctant to talk about it. Her facial features and body language suggested that she did not want to discuss this issue any further.

Emotional abuse. Only one participant, Audrina, labeled the abuse she experienced within her family as emotional abuse. Audrina described her father as having the ability to withdraw love and treat her as though she were dead; he would tell her that "*he didn't want me to be a part of the family*". Even though only Audrina described emotional abuse, I believe that each woman likely experienced emotional abuse; however, the abuse was never framed or identified in this manner.

Physical abuse. Four of the woman recalled experiences of physical abuse. Gwen experienced physical abuse from an intimate partner that she dated. Gwen described her partner as being jealous, angry, paranoid, and accusing her of wanting to be with other men. Gwen also saw physical abuse within her family home while growing up. She described one incident where her step-father threw her mother into the bathtub, held her head under water choking her, and then forced her head through the wall.

Both Audrina and Rose were physically abused by their fathers. Audrina stated that her father could become violent but did not provide any further specific details. According to Audrina, there was alcoholism and domestic abuse in their home. She stated that her father would hit her mother and "*do atrocious punishments*". Rose described numerous beatings from her father, some to the point of leaving her unconscious. Rose was later physically abused by intimate partners throughout her life, first her husband then various other partners. Drugs and/or alcohol were involved with most of Rose's experiences with physical abuse.

Lucy was physically abused by her mother. She recalled how her mother would not allow her to eat food, until she turned yellow from malnutrition. Lucy described the fights that they would have. For example, once her mother ripped her shirt off and Lucy fell down the stairs.

Sexual abuse. Four of the five participants described sexual abuse experiences. Audrina and Lucy described date rapes. Audrina recalled how she shared the story of her date rape with two of her friends. She had been drinking at a party, fell asleep, and was raped by a man. The story of her rape spread around her school, but she changed her story by saying that the incident

was consensual.   She decided that she would rather have a reputation as being "*easy to sleep with*" than being a "*victim*".

Lucy recalled how she had run away from a treatment center to a nearby reserve and had been drinking with a group of people the night before. When she woke up in the morning, she was not wearing any underwear. She stated that someone who she had been drinking with had taken advantage of her when she was passed out. She never reported the incident, even though the police had picked her up and questioned her about the "*hickies*" on her neck.

Rose and Gwen described sexual abuse beginning in childhood. Rose described experiencing sexual abuse at a very young age. She remembered participating in "*sexual play*" with other children. Rose recalled some details of this experience:

> *I remember at this one farm house another older family and this woman, well she was only sixteen but I must have been six or seven and as part of play I had to, we had to suck her breasts cause she was the mother so yea, so definitely I think it was, there was a lot of stuff going on that nobody really knew about… and I think even younger like nine, ten I remember just seeing myself with my cousins cause there was a lot of that kind of play.*

Rose was also raped as a young girl. She had been picked up by an older man for a ride into the city. However, once in the city he refused to drive her home. They ended up at an apartment building where she recalled:

> *I remember walking down this long apartment building and knowing at the end of the thing there was a phone there but I didn't have the education that I could call the police, I was terrified to call my parents' cause I'd get a beating because they would have to drive to a long way to pick me up so basically I just went back into the room and that was my first sexual experience and so I think everything turned off after that.*

Gwen experienced sexual abuse beginning in childhood at the hands of different people; she counted approximately 15 or 16 perpetrators. She was sexually abused by teenage babysitters and other family members when her mother was not home. She recalled babysitters forcing her and her older brother to perform sexual acts on each other. Beginning at age seven, her mother's boyfriend, who lived with the family, began molesting Gwen, which continued well into her teenage years. Gwen told her mother, school counsellor, and the police; however, the perpetrator was never charged. Her mother attempted to separate from him but they always reconciled and are still together today.

Impact of abuse. Gwen, Audrina, Rose and Lucy had ideas about how their abuse experiences had affected them. Gwen explained that her victimization left her with an unhealthy perception of sexuality, where she believed that women did not have the ability to say no to unwanted sexual advances. She described being emotionally impaired:

> *I just wanted love and I wanted attention from men, I can honestly say that I was promiscuous from the time that I was fourteen until I was seventeen because I didn't know how to say no. Because I had been victimized so much I felt like I couldn't say no you know when they made advances towards me you know I just felt like I had to and so, and plus I wanted them to love me you know like that's what I, I thought love was and... and it wasn't.*

Gwen was also very confused about her relationship with her mother. After numerous confessions about the abuse, her mother stayed with her partner. Therefore, Gwen never knew whether or not she should keep telling her mother about the persistent sexual abuse she was experiencing from her mothers' partner:

> *I didn't know what to do with that information you know cause as much as I hated him, as much as I love my Mom, I didn't want to tell her I didn't want to break up her marriage like, I didn't want to be the reason and I didn't know how to tell her like how do you tell your Mom, I was just so confused I had no idea what to do, I knew I had to tell her but I just didn't know when.*

Growing up, Audrina was very confused by the manner of which her family hid the alcoholism and abuse. Audrina stated that she was ashamed of her family's behaviour. Although at the same time, she reported that she was participating in the same behaviours herself.

Rose recalled how the beatings she experienced from her father actually "*turned her brain off*" or put her into a "*survival mode*". She reported losing a sense of safety at home. Her father's abuse was spontaneous, "*you never knew like one day you'd do something and nothing would happen, but the next day, or five minutes later, he'd lock you out of the house*". Rose felt that she had to run away and build a life for herself.

While living with her mother and being physically abused, Lucy began engaging in self-harming behaviours and tried to commit suicide. Lucy described how she would hit, punch, or slam herself into walls. She stated that she would do "*anything to make it feel better*". Lucy detailed her suicide attempt:

I tried to commit suicide, I tied a scarf around my throat and my little brother ended up finding me and I was like almost dead, I could feel that like I could feel myself fading away and I couldn't even feel my brother lifting up my head or you know I couldn't feel anything until my brain actually told me to start breathing again and I was able to and I woke up and I realized my brother just saved me from dying. I got up immediately and I got dressed and I grabbed some stuff from my room and he's like where are you going? To find something better... he's like you're going to leave me and I said we need to find something better for ourselves and I ran out the door and I ran down to my friend's house like half a block away and I didn't leave her house for like five weeks, I stayed inside her house.

Summary. The experience of abuse was clearly embedded in the participants' descriptions of their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities and throughout their lives. All of the women experienced some form of and/or multiple forms of abuse, although one woman provided no detail about these experiences. Four women were abused by family members or witnessed abuse within their families, three women were abused by intimate partners, and four were abused by strangers. In two cases, the women were abused within the context of both family and intimate partner relationships.

Experiences with Substance Use

Gwen, Audrina, Rose, Lucy, and Tiffany all recalled past experiences with substance use including alcohol and drugs, when they described their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities. All of the women were adversely affected by others in their life that were using substances. Their experiences with substances and their descriptions of the effects of substance use were diverse.

Gwen recalled how from the age of 15 when she moved in with her boyfriend, his alcohol abuse directly affected her and their relationship. Her partner consumed a lot of alcohol on a regular basis and Gwen admitted to drinking moderate amounts of alcohol herself. She described events when her partner drank that lead to physical fights. Gwen stated "*he'd end up hitting me or trying to hit me and I would never back down, I would always fight back, I'd never just lie down and let him beat me up*". Furthermore, Gwen reported that by the end of their relationship they both were experimenting with cocaine.

Audrina observed unhealthy alcohol consumption growing up in her family and described one incident in particular where she was directly affected by her father's drinking:

> *He got very upset that we had taken this, this beer out and, and he got really mad at this young man and really mad at me and pulled me out of the car and it was a bit physical in front of you know a hundred friends and family and it was just an awful scene.*

Audrina recalled her own experiences with using alcohol and drugs, "*I went out lots and drank lots and you know tried lots of different drugs*". Audrina reflected on how poor her self-care and health was when she was using drugs and alcohol:

> *I wasn't eating, I wasn't taking care of myself at all, I didn't have an eating disorder per say, but I remember going for a whole summer and I would go out and drink like crazy and then I would sleep in the morning. I'd maybe go and do a shift at work and then I would maybe have a pizza pop and then I would go and drink and that would be all I'd have to eat, so I just really wasn't taking care of myself at all... I didn't really understand that, you know, I didn't really understand self care.*

Alcohol and drugs were a significant factor throughout Rose's life story. Rose labeled herself as having an "*addictive personality*" and as being an "*alcoholic*". She remembered as a youth being drunk walking around town and how no one ever said anything or addressed the issue. Rose talked about the "*hippie*" era when everyone was experimenting with drugs without knowing any kind of consequence or long-term effects. She stated how grateful she was that none of her children were born with fetal alcohol syndrome. Rose stated that "*drugs and alcohol are a symptom, they're not a sickness in themselves, and they're just a symptom of all this other sickness that was kind of crawling away in my body*". She drank alcohol heavily with her husband, *"I ended up starting to drink, it used to be the theory what's good for the goose is good for the gander kind of thing"*. Rose was directly affected by her partner's alcohol consumption:

> *I was in the hospital with my baby like he came in just roaring drunk with four or five of his friends it was so embarrassing, even when we got married he was drunk, his uncle got him drunk and he showed up dead drunk for our wedding.*

Furthermore, Rose shared that drugs were also always present in this relationship. Once Rose became a widow, her drug addiction worsened and she became a drug dealer, selling marijuana as a means of supporting herself and her family financially. Rose went into treatment twice for her addictions.

Lucy described how drugs and alcohol influenced her life. Lucy's mother and family used substances and exposed Lucy to alcohol and marijuana at a young age. Lucy detailed her first experience with cocaine; she was thirteen years old:

We(her and her uncles) scraped out this pipe and took the resin and one of my Uncles said we could either smoke it like weed or we could smoke it like crack and I was, like, let's smoke it like crack and I was scared after I was stoned it was scary and my Mom was sitting there on the couch, and I come into the living room and I'm like, Mom, I feel like my throat is closing in and she's said you have to let it cool off, she was like let yourself cool off, don't get scared, if you get scared you're going to end up freaking out and doing something terrible.

Lucy and her friends spent a lot of time smoking marijuana during school. Lucy's drug addictions lead her to make some poor choices; for example, she stole valium and jewelry from her Grandmother, when she was living with her. Her Grandmother was so upset that she placed Lucy back in foster care. Lucy was also placed in an addictions treatment center, where she was discharged early for running away and drinking.   Lucy's addictions also influenced her decision to place her child in an adoption program. A turning point for Lucy was the last time she used cocaine:

I was with one of my friends and she knew this guy who asked her to go keep him company once in a while. She told me that we could go get drunk and high and that he had a friend and his friend wanted to meet me. It was just some nice powdered up way of saying we're going to go be prostitutes to get crack.

Lucy was in a hotel room for two days with this girlfriend and two men who were trying to take advantage of the girls' sexually. Two days after the incident, Lucy contacted the adoption worker and asked for her child to be returned home.

Tiffany recalled how she used alcohol and drugs in her life. She began using drugs and alcohol with friends and then later with intimate partners. Tiffany described numerous times how she and her intimate partner attempted to quit. They would move to new cities and/or towns in hopes for change; however, they would revert back into old patterns. Tiffany described how she became involved in drugs and alcohol as a means of coping with her anger and frustration. She reported that the drugs and alcohol helped her forget about her family problems and her feelings.

Summary. Experiences with substance use were clearly embedded in participant descriptions of their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities. Participants described the presence and effects of substance use within their families and their personal experiences. Some participants described how they were involved with intimate partners and peers who also used drugs and alcohol. In addition, substances were used as a means of financial support and as a coping mechanism. Overall, it appeared that substance use was part of family, peer, and intimate partner relationships, especially abusive relationships.

Experiences with Challenging and Complicated Relationships

Gwen, Audrina, Rose, Lucy, and Tiffany all talked about past experiences with challenging and complicated relationships when describing their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities. Each woman described relationships with family members, intimate partners, peers, and their own children. Although the women perceived some peer relationships as supportive (i.e., provided a sense of acceptance connection, control, and attention), it was striking how abusive and neglectful their primary parental relationships were as well as many subsequent intimate partner relationships.

Relationships with family members. Parental relationships during childhood and adolescence through until the present were confusing, neglectful, and challenging for each of the women. Gwen reflected on the lack of relationship she had with her mother. Gwen shared that while growing up she tried to portray a rough exterior, she was a tough girl who liked to fight. However, she described how she was "*crying on the inside trying to gain her mother's love*". Gwen recalled how as an adolescent her feelings for her mother were inconsistent. She was upset with her mother's choice to stay with Gwen's abuser; however, "*despite her not being there for me the way that I thought she should be like I, I still loved her so much*".

Once Gwen became an adult, she was able to make the decision that she no longer wanted to be anywhere near her mother's partner, the abuser, and would not participate in any family functions or activities with this man. Gwen reported that she continues to talk to her mother and siblings, but that it is a struggle to maintain her relationships because her mother and Gwen's abuser are still together. Gwen described the tension and the choices that she has made:

> *That's my decision; I'm kind of still struggling with that right now, with my Mom. I'm a*
>
> *grown up now, it's my life, I don't need that garbage and it's my choice whether I allow*

that garbage in my life and I don't need it anymore and so I just got rid of it and me and my Mom we have a long way to go but I'm not giving up on that either….

Furthermore, Gwen shared how the death of her father and not having a relationship with him affected her:

I've carried that with me like all my life and I've dealt a little bit with the grieving of my father but it's still a big part of my life and it had a lot to do with why I made the decisions that I made as a young adult and as an adolescent and it really contributed to all the negativity that I experienced in life.

Overall, Gwen described the lack of supportive and healthy relationships with both her mother and father and that she believed this had an impact on her involvement in delinquent activities during her adolescent years.

Audrina described her parents as uninvolved and permissive. She stated that "*mom and dad were pretty involved in their own issues*". Audrina never had a curfew growing up and was never grounded for poor behaviour. She reflected, "*I think it was harder for them to kind of hang out with me, like having me as part of the household than it was for me to be out and doing my own thing*". Her father's parental attitude was "*my way or the highway*". Furthermore, Audrina admitted that she did "*mirror*" her father's behaviours, portraying a responsible young woman but was participating in harmful behaviours. Audrina's mother came from a very poor family, where she experienced abuse. Audrina stated that her mother learned to survive by "*disconnecting*" from others or not being "*intimate*" with others. Audrina felt that her mother lacked the ability to talk about "*real*" issues in an authentic manner. Audrina described her mother as a "*product of her generation*", where she behaved as a happy traditional house wife with a controlling and domineering husband. This was the stereotype or image that Audrina was rebelling against, "*I am not doing that, and it would drive me crazy*". Audrina reported that she would become mad at her mother for "*putting up with it, putting up with the abuse*". Furthermore, Audrina described how she felt like a parent, where she would emotionally care for her mother. Audrina had a difficult time supporting her mother's decisions to stay with her father. Eventually, Audrina realized that it was not her "*job*" to help her parents and she "*ended up just doing the rebel hard*".

Audrina also described the importance of her relationships with her siblings:

> *If I didn't have my siblings I would have been in big trouble because definitely from the*
> *time that I was probably eleven I can remember all of the attachment stuff that we're kind*
> *of supposed to have with your parents I had with them and although they didn't have*
> *really the ability to be able to do it I think as we got older we got better at it, I think we've*
> *gotten better at being able to do it for each other because unfortunately my parents are*
> *still unable to get outside of themselves and play that role.*

Their sibling attachment and support continues to this day.

At a young age, Rose felt that she lost the ability to communicate with her parents, due to not feeling safe within their home. Rose explained that her parents were uneducated and did not understand that she was in need of support, such as counselling. Once Rose left her parents and moved into the city, she was not in touch with them until she wrote a letter informing them of her first pregnancy. Rose did not describe any involvement from her parents throughout her young adult to adult years. Rose reflected, "*it's having a relationship with them that I think was missing and that's what I really missed... and knowing that there was somebody out there that cared about me, that I didn't have*".

Lucy described the dysfunctional relationship that she had with her mother. When she was fourteen, she left foster care and moved in with her mother, who sold drugs and had addiction problems. Lucy detailed the living conditions at her mother's house, "*we had serious poverty issues, like not even soap to do dishes or do your laundry or wash your face, it was serious poverty*". Lucy also never had a curfew growing up and she understood this as her mother's lack of knowledge on how to care for a teenager. Lucy recalled how she would stay at home and care for her younger siblings because her mother was drinking, smoking marijuana, taking pills, or playing bingo. Lucy described her mother as a "*beast"* when she was drinking. Lucy reported that her father was never a part of her life growing up. However, now they do have a positive relationship.

Tiffany appeared to be guarded about sharing information about her family. She did not say much about her parents or their relationship, even after probing questions. Tiffany did leave her parent's home at a young age:

> *It was horrible, it was hard for me but I had to leave home because my family situation*
> *just something big that was going on in my life at that time and I couldn't stay there*

anymore so I went to school and I never went home, I just went with a friend back to her

place and it was something I did not want to go back to anymore.

After leaving home, Tiffany reported that she cut off communication with her parents. After staying at various friends' homes, Tiffany moved in with a cousin for awhile. Tiffany reported that her cousin was strict but that she was trying to help Tiffany. Tiffany spoiled this relationship by not following her cousin's rules, which lead to her moving out.

Like Audrina, Tiffany noted the importance of her current relationships with her siblings. Tiffany described how she had three sisters and two brothers, but that she did not grow up with them. However, she stated that they are now close and share a connection. Tiffany also lived with one of her siblings for a while when she decided to go back to school. Tiffany reported that this sister was a good influence and encouraged her to change:

My sister, she tried to be a good influence on me she tried to encourage me to straighten

out my life and getting my education because she always used to tell me I can see you

doing a lot more with your life, she used to always tell me she still tells me. She knows

that I want to finish school and she's not pushing me but she knows I will sometime. I

guess my sister has been always like a really positive influence on me just cause she got

her education and she's one of those people who likes to help or do whatever she can to

help people I look up to her, she's just a really good influence on me.

Relationships with peers. All participants described being involved with peers who were participating in delinquent activities. Gwen stated that she hung around with the "*worst*" kids. She reported that these peers completed break and enters, used drugs, partied, stole cars, and stole from stores. Audrina described how her friends would encourage and entice her to participant in delinquent activities; such has joyriding family member's vehicles. Audrina recalled how changing schools affected her; she described the shift from elementary to high school. She stated:

I think when things really kind of switched was when I switched schools and I went to a

junior high that was close to my neighbourhood, which was middle class. So I went with

lots of really privileged people and it was privileged, we had photography and home

education and really good teachers. I tended to do much better academically when I was

in that school. I was still rebellion, but my teachers allowed that, I could bring that in, I

was doing different things with that and I was joining different student groups. Then when

I got into high school, it changed. That's when I really started hanging out with the boys

from the other side of town, who were in lots of trouble.

Another part of this change was that Audrina became less involved in school activities and more involved in delinquent activities. She stated:

I went from doing lots in junior high, being really involved to looking at how to get

involved. The high school was really large and I wasn't in any sports. Mom and Dad

hadn't really been able to encourage me or be consistent in anything even though they

were always telling me I couldn't be consistent in anything. I really didn't have any

other outlets you know; although I was rebelling I was kind of fitting into this micro

mirror of society that was available at the high school. I was fitting a certain stereotype

too. There was the stereotype about girls, the young women I hung around with were all

quite pretty, but we were also really bad right.

Audrina described how she and her girl friends were "*high achieving young women*", where they were living within "*middle class*" and doing well academically in school. She recalled how they would share their experiences with date rape, molestation, and racism. Audrina stated that by the time her and her friends were in grade ten, they started hanging out with boys who were from the core inner areas of the city. She described how these boys' families were similar to her own, particularly in terms of the substance abuse within the family. Except that these boys' parents were not functioning as well as her parents due to poverty issues. Audrina reflected on how she connected with these people:

These people were more authentic than most people I was meeting, and in the same way

they were able to have open relationships, real relationship. They had some really huge

dysfunction but at least it was real and it was raw. You know their Mom was making Kraft

Dinner and ichiban and that's what they were eating, but their Mom was hanging out

with us, she might have been sharing a joint with us but at least she was hanging out with

us, and talking to us in a real way, and it was really normal in my group that I had started

kind of hanging out with.

Audrina recalled how and why she chose her friends in high school:

Lots of my friends were in trouble for sure in high school, and I picked them because they

were in trouble. Those were the people I was interested in being with. And that was my

normal right, other people seemed really boring and privileged, and you know wonder

bready. I didn't lose that for a long time. It was hard for me, and I can see the difference now but at that point I didn't want to be a straight girl, I didn't want to be with the straight edge people.

Rose described how she hung out with older kids in order to get alcohol. Rose stated how she avoided getting into trouble with the police:

We'd get pulled over by the police and some of the older guys sometimes would be charged for driving and drinking, but I never did. Or we would get caught for driving without due care and attention, but the local cops would just basically let it go. They wouldn't talk to your parents because we had stuff on the cops. I mean, we knew that this cop was having an affair with someone. It was really a convoluted situation.

Furthermore, when Rose ran away from home she already had friends who were out of school, working and living in the city, and would help her. She stated, *"I hung out, I had friends who already were out of school, so I remember being out at their places and looking for work. I was sixteen at this point and I don't know the city, I mean I'm totally ignorant".*

Lucy and her friends used to vandalize school property and steal people's Christmas decorations and lawn ornaments. In grade seven, Lucy, and her friends started smoking cigarettes, in grade nine they started smoking marijuana. Lucy reported how they used to smoke drugs at school before attending classes. Lucy and her friends used to spend time walking around at night to get away or escape from home; they would run into the dark and not worry about people bothering them. However, Lucy recalled that when she was fifteen, her entire group of friends rejected her. Her friends said she was a bad influence and that Lucy was influencing other girls to be "*sluts*". Furthermore, Lucy recalled how she always felt that people were blaming her for influencing others into bad behaviour. These thoughts and feelings left Lucy to feel depressed and isolated. Lucy stated:

I always felt like people were saying that I was always leading everybody into terrible things. I did you know, I came up with a lot of suggestions and I demonstrated promiscuity and things like that. We never went out and became prostitutes and shoved needles in our arms, but we would get drunk and not care and waking up with shame in the morning. They decided to blame me for that and I fell into a really deep depression after than happened. I stayed home a lot and took care of my brothers and sisters.

When Tiffany ran away from her family she met a group of people who were engaging in break and enters, vandalism, fighting, and partying. Shortly after meeting and spending time with these people, Tiffany found herself becoming involved in these types of activities as well. Tiffany stated that she felt like she had no other choice but to hang out with this group and partake in delinquent activities, due to being on her own and not having anywhere else to go.

Three participants talked about the meaning of their peer relationships. Gwen described how her behaviours were influenced by seeking acceptance from peers and a sense of control. She stated:

> *I was willing to do anything; I just wanted to prove myself or show people that I wasn't scared. I did it just to fit in, I wanted to be accepted and if it meant doing all those bad things then so be it. It also gave me a sense of power and control because I didn't have any in my life. It wasn't a good power and control because I was hurting other people but I guess it gave a false sense of power and control. I didn't want to back down; I didn't want people to think I was scared or that I couldn't do it.*

A factor that influenced Audrina's behaviour was a need for acceptance and to create a connection for herself among her peers. She described:

> *Craving for intimate group, a craving for an all accepting group, a craving for closeness and you feel it with these people when you take these kind of risks although it's somewhat of an illusion it's not real but you feel it with them and that's and you don't have words for why you want that right and you don't think about going and joining model UN or peer counselling to get that right because the people who are joining society right and, and you're not so, so you get that feeling and I think that's a big thing, and there's no way if someone offered me a group at that point that I would have attended (laughing) right like there's just no way, I wouldn't have talked to a counsellor you know I would have talked to some friends about some pretty, very serious issues but wouldn't talk to a counsellor you know and so there's this fine line when I think you can actually connect with these people because I mean they're so guarded.*

Furthermore, Audrina described how her participation in delinquent activities led to feelings of personal control. For example, she stated, "*it feels pretty powerful to steal a couple hundred dollars worth of stuff or although it was a store it feels powerful and if you don't feel power in another way then you need to*".

Lucy described how her involvement in delinquent activities was influenced by the need to divert others awareness away from family issues and to seek attention from others. For example, she stated:

> *I was looking for fun, looking for attention, I wanted to look cool. I didn't want people to concentrate on the fact that you know my Mom uses drugs and that I was in foster homes. My friends found out my Mom was a prostitute and it was hard, I just did those things to cast away the attention of what was bad I figured if I did other things what was really wrong in my life wouldn't matter anyways, I was just a little.*

Relationships with intimate partners. Each woman described various experiences within her intimate partner relationships. Gwen described how when she was 15 years old, she moved in with her boyfriend after being kicked out of her mother's house and spending time in a youth residential facility. This boyfriend was very controlling, possessive, and jealous. Alcohol and drug use as well as physical abuse were present throughout most of the six year relationship. Gwen described how she started to take on the aggressive characteristics of her abusive partner:

> *Okay, a lot of my fighting had to do with Bob cause I believed that I took on a lot of his behaviors and his attitudes as time went on like his jealousies and stuff, I became him I became suspicious and jealous and so a lot of the time I was fighting, for what I had no idea.*

Furthermore, Gwen recalled that towards the end of their relationship she had feelings of depression; the substance use and domestic abuse were finally becoming too much to handle. Gwen left her boyfriend after catching him in bed with another woman, she reflected on her reaction to this event, "*I just thought no he doesn't love you, you don't deserve this and you don't need this*".

Two weeks after the break up Gwen met another man and they started dating. This relationship was very different. Gwen described how in this new relationship they decided to wait to have a sexual relationship, "*I think that makes a big difference because we got to know each other, we became friends*". This man is now her husband. Gwen reported that her husband is a source of inspiration to her. She shared how he helped her achieve a high school diploma and to continue on and complete a university degree. Gwen reported that she feels open and as though she has the right to be herself with her husband, something she never felt with her first partner.

Audrina only talked about her current relationship with her husband, who she met after she returned from traveling. She described how they were both moving in the same direction of becoming more mature and responsible. This included being involved in music, writing, and buying a house as well as moving away from drinking alcohol and using drugs. Audrina described her husband as *"very mentally well, very positive, works in his passion"*. Furthermore, she stated that he was her first experience of dating someone who lacked problems, *"that I did not try to play with and fix"*. Audrina stated that she felt as though he was her *"first safe base"*.

Rose met her first intimate partner, future husband, through a friend. Rose recalled how her husband had lived in a foster home for severely delinquent children and had spent time in jail. Rose thought that the attraction they shared stemmed from experiencing similar childhood traumas. Rose also recalled how he was really immature, was not able to contribute a steady income, and that there was a lot of physical abuse in their relationship. Rose described what her life was like with her husband:

> *After he got this gun it just freaked me and he actually helped me, he knew enough about himself that he would keep the bullets in the basement. I remember fighting with him with this gun and I have three little babies, I'm twenty one years old, I'm totally naïve and stupid (laughing) and I'm fighting with him with this gun cause he's going down in the basement to get the bullets and he's going to shoot me and all the kids and himself. It didn't happen obviously, but that's basically what life was.*

Rose was widowed when she was 29 years old; her husband was killed in a motorcycle accident. After his death, Rose had various boyfriends. These subsequent relationships were also filled with drugs, alcohol, and abuse. At the time of the interview, Rose stated that she had not been involved in an intimate relationship for ten years. Furthermore, she never reported whether she had ever experienced a healthy non-abusive intimate relationship.

Lucy did not talk about either of the fathers of her babies; however, she did briefly mention two intimate partners. One was addicted to methamphetamine and the second worked away lot and made good money; but when he came back from work, they would drink large amounts of alcohol and smoke crack cocaine. Both of the intimate partners Lucy described used and influenced her use of drugs and alcohol.

Tiffany talked about the time she spent dating the father of her two eldest children. They met when Tiffany ran away from home and was hanging around with a group of peers who were

involved in delinquent activities. Her boyfriend lived with her while she resided at the home of members of her extended family.   At one point, they both decided to change their habits and moved to a new town together.   However, shortly after they reverted back into old patterns, using drugs and alcohol again. They lived together when their first child was born, but broke up after the baby was placed in foster care.

Tiffany moved again to another town and met another man who helped her raise her second child. Tiffany described this relationship as positive, where they both attended school and raised her child together. After some time, Tiffany started to have mixed feelings about the relationship:

> *He started talking serious stuff like marriage and wanting to spend his entire life with me. I felt that way too but it was so hard for me to open up with him, because of past relationships and trust issues. It seemed like I couldn't trust any guy at all but I did. I told him how I felt but it was not the same way he felt.   I did feel those things that he was feeling. I wanted to be with him, I wanted to be his wife and he wanted to have kids with me. He wanted to start this really nice life with me and I was just so happy that I found somebody that doesn't do drugs or anything like that. I was happy but I was scared. I was thinking okay this is too good to be true, it's going to screw up in a year or two and it's going to all end. I kept doubting myself and doubting us. He kept reassuring me and telling me that I have nothing to worry about and trying to reassure me.*

They ended the relationship just after their baby was born, Tiffany's third child. Tiffany described her actions during this time:

> *I guess I was just bringing up old feelings and old thoughts and I started stressing myself out and I kept talking to him about what if this happens and he kept telling me don't worry about it, don't worry about it when it comes we'll deal with it but then I started putting all this stuff in my head like he's going to leave me I kind of sabotaged our relationship. I don't know sometimes I think that I don't deserve someone as good as he is.*

Relationships with children. Four of the five participants were mothers and one was a grandmother. At the time of the interviews, Audrina was expecting a second child. Audrina talked about how important her siblings were to her and thought that may be one reason for having a second child. She reported having a positive connection and attachment with her

siblings that helped her through tough times and she would like to give that opportunity to her own children. Audrina also talked about how she wanted her children to have options. She was aware of research suggesting that if children are involved in activities they are less likely to be "*swallowed up*" by a delinquent culture.

Rose described how she became depressed upon finding out she was pregnant with her first child. She described how her feelings and behaviours turned "*inward*" and how she attempted to lose her pregnancy by taking hot baths. Rose stated that she had no one to confide in or talk to about her pregnancy. Rose reflected on how her lack of education and informational resources influenced her life as a parent:

> *I had no knowledge of birth control or nothing, so I ended up having three children by the time I was twenty. Doctors didn't do that type of thing I didn't have the information even to know how to ask. In rural communities especially in those strong religious communities that wasn't general information that anybody would have, that you could get birth control or condoms. I didn't even know what a condom was probably so basically, I just kind of toughed it out you know. I didn't have any advocate.*

When Rose's first child was born, she and her husband started stealing money and food in order to support their family. After Rose's husband died, she was left to financially support her children on her own. This was very challenging.

> *I had applied for welfare, but I didn't know what to do, I had no money. I was living in this little town, I didn't have any job skills, I had four kids three to nine years old, I was a widow, and I was in a shitty place. I have a car but we ended up with no food and nobody is supporting me. Even my family because I'm the bad girl, cause I'm still using or whatever, I wasn't using all the time.*

Furthermore, as Rose's children were growing up, she recalled how she perpetuated a cycle of abuse:

> *Then I ended up creating the same cycle of sexual abuse with one of my children, some friend of mine ended up sexually abusing one of my children. That's the cycle and that was so traumatizing for me.*

Rose reported that, "*I also became an abusive parent to my children at times because violence was all I knew*". However, her recognition of the perpetuated abuse was a turning point for Rose:

Probably mid-seventies and I ended up in a parents in crisis group which one of the things that I really wanted to stop cause I had that same thing that my father had is I lashed out with my children. That was probably my first real focused healing thing and I started going to these groups which is fashioned after AA only it's done on you have to admit that you actually abused your children.

In order to maintain regular financial income, Rose described how she moved and "*dragged*" her children around a lot. Eventually, some of Rose's friends confronted her and told her how she was an "*unfit*" mother. Rose recalled becoming very defensive, "*I was like Mother Bear with my kids and nobody is touching my kids*". Rose stated that it was always important to her to provide shelter and food for her children. However, because Rose was constantly working, her children were left to care for each other. Eventually, all four of her children started working and became independent. Rose felt fortunate that she had four girls in her family and once her children were older, she labeled their house "*the feminist house*". She stated that this perception actually helped them connect and begin to heal.

Rose proudly shared that two of her children completed university degrees and that *"all of them are well adjusted as well as they can be"*. Rose stated that her children are wonderful parents who do not abuse their children. Rose reported that it is really important for her to spend time with her grandchildren and build good relationships with them.

Lucy had her first child when she was seventeen years old and was a single parent. Lucy placed her child up for adoption just shortly after the baby's first birthday. Lucy felt as though she could not parent on her own and that her child deserved to have two parents. However, after one night of using drugs, Lucy had an awakening and decided she had to get her baby back. Lucy reflected on the conversation she had with the adoption worker:

I realized that I have no success; I have no means for success if I didn't have my child. I would have no reason to accomplish anything except for myself who I felt I wasn't worth it. It was like if I don't have my child then I don't have a life, I don't have a way to say no to drugs, to crime, to prostitution, to failure, I don't have a way to say no cause if I had my child I could say no whenever the hell I want to. It was just like this crash where it was just, everything that I had my mind set up for was gone and I just wanted my child home.

Lucy's baby was gone for approximately eight months before she had her child returned to her care. This experience demonstrated how Lucy came to the realization that she needed to change. She realized how important it was to have her child and how she needed to change in order to care for her child. Lucy described how she changed once her child was returned to her care:

> I stopped doing bad things and you know became an adult and allowed myself to be a Mom and allowed myself to love and to be loved and not care if my friends don't want to be my friend anymore because I don't do that stuff anymore. I'd just been through so much crap that it didn't even matter you know.

Lucy is highly devoted to her child:

> I love my child so much and I've dedicated myself to my child so much and it's not that I don't care about the other relationships but it's like I don't know, that I don't have to put my emotions into anybody else except my child unless I choose to put my emotions into somebody else like say a boyfriend or you know my best friend.

At the time of the interview, Lucy was pregnant with her second child. She reported that she was going to be taking time off from school in order to care for both of her children, since she is a single parent.

Tiffany had her first child when she was eighteen years old. She reported that her and her boyfriend did not drink alcohol or use drugs during her pregnancy. However, shortly after the birth of their child, they both started drinking again. She described how they would take turns where one would stay home with the baby and the other would go out to drink. Then their drinking reached a point where they began to hire babysitters to watch their baby so that they both could go out. Tiffany stated:

> Then the crime started again, but not as much, we were getting assault charges, not on each other but with other people and mischief charges, possession of a weapon and possession of stolen property. It seemed like it was all starting up again, except that we had a kid. I guess we never really grew out of doing all that stuff. Even though we were parents, we were still kind of stupid, young stupid parents trying to raise a kid but couldn't.

Tiffany and her boyfriend broke up when their baby was seven months old. Tiffany recalled how when her baby was eight months old, "*we lost our child*". Their child was taken from them and placed in foster care. Tiffany reported that she moved to a different town with her mother. This

move was in hopes of cleaning herself up to regain custody of her child, but she relapsed back into old patterns of drinking alcohol and using drugs.

After some time, Tiffany moved in with a family member and registered herself in school. She had a short rendez-vous with her old boyfriend, the father of her first child, and became pregnant. Then she met another man at school. They spent a lot of time together and he was very supportive. He did not drink alcohol or use drugs and he was not involved in any delinquent or criminal activities. He was also a single parent and wanted to help support Tiffany during her pregnancy. They moved in together and began raising Tiffany's second child. Tiffany recalled how they decided to have a baby together. Shortly, after the birth of her third child, Tiffany and her partner separated. At the time of the interview, Tiffany was caring for her two youngest children by herself and her first child was in a good foster home, where she maintains visitation rights.

Summary. Relationships were clearly embedded in participant descriptions of their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities. Participants described experiences with family members, peers, intimate partners, and their own children. Some women's reflections on relationships were positive and supportive, mostly their current relationships, whereas many others were harmful and destructive.

Relationships with family members, mainly parents, were described as unsupportive, uncaring, unsafe, uninvolved, not protective, and not nurturing. Two participants left home at young ages because of their abusive family situations, which fostered their involvement in delinquent activities as a means of financially supporting themselves. All the participants described how they participated in delinquent activities with their peers. Two other participants described how they sought out acceptance, power, and/or control with their peers, due to the absence of these characteristics in their other relationships. Intimate relationships were generally characterized by abuse, substance use, and delinquent involvement. The exception was intimate partner relationships subsequently developed in adulthood, which were described by three participants as healthy, supportive, and positive.

Four out of five participants had children. One participant had her child during adulthood when she was no longer involved in delinquent activities and the other three participants described having children at a young age while in the middle of their delinquent experiences. These mothers faced many challenges assuming the role of the parent, which affected their

parenting abilities. For example, they faced challenges associated with past and present experiences of abuse, experiences with substance use, experiences with being a single parent, and having limited or no income. Growing up in abusive homes had a far reaching impact. One woman described how she perpetuated a cycle of abuse, where she was physically abusive towards her children. However, despite the difficulties and challenges, all four participants described how important it was to them to care for and support their children.

Experiences that made a Positive Difference

Gwen, Audrina, Rose, Lucy, and Tiffany recalled various positive experiences that helped encourage coping, healing, and realizations from their damaging experiences. Some of the women recalled specific positive role models and how they helped influence their growth and change.

Coping. Two women recalled resourceful ways in which they were able to cope with their difficult childhood experiences. Rose stated how she became a "*loner*" at a young age as a means to cope with the sexual abuse. She described how she would spend a lot of time in nature or with her family's horse in order to avoid hanging out with large groups of cousins or other people. She shared that this technique was her "*saving grace*".

As a means of coping within her family, Lucy shared how she would stay in her room to spend time writing:

> *I wrote a lot of actual things that happened in life and the possibilities of what if and the things that I dreamt of or the wonderings of what life would be like. And a lot of the things that happened throughout my teenage years.*

Healing. Although coping helped other women to manage their childhood experiences; for one woman, healing involved experiences of transformation and acceptance. Gwen described how she experienced healing with the help from elders and cultural practices (i.e., sweats, smudging, round dances, and Pow Wows'). Gwen sought advice from elders in regards to her problems and/or issues with her mother and her abuser. She also reported how her cultural practices helped her reflect on her experiences and to forgive others. Gwen reflected:

> *I smudge and I go to sweats and I continue to heal because I'm not a hundred percent and I never probably will be but I take it day by day and concentrate on my life. I don't concentrate on my Mom's garbage and her relationship with him anymore I don't dwell*

on that anymore or I'm not going to hold my breath and wait for them to or her to snap out of it because I've just kind of given up on that.

Realizations. Moments of realization were another important facilitator of positive change that women described. Realizations were experienced within particular contexts and lead to changes in the women's perspectives. Gwen spent approximately six months at a youth residential treatment facility and another six months at a group home placement. Gwen recalled her experiences while residing in these placements:

I felt like I was a bad kid and nobody wanted me and I thought and being in XXXX and seeing these kids, younger kids than me and kids that were even the same age as me who had nobody like had nobody, nobody to phone them, like write them a letter, nothing they had nobody and I just had this self realization don't feel so sorry for yourself at least you have a Mom even though she's not the best Mom or the ideal Mom, you have a Mom and you have a family that loves you and quit feeling sorry for yourself and start doing something with your life and that's kind of where that started, seeing people that were less fortunate than me made a big impact.

Audrina reported that a pivotal time in her life was when she was traveling and spent time living with and learning from new cultures and people. She recalled how this impacted her view on communities and families. She stated:

I think I just needed to be apart from it, I needed to be away from it and I realized that families could be really different I remember being like this family which was really different because I was kind of on the inside and because you're in a different culture you're reading things like an anthropologist more you're kind of noticing things on a different level and it's different languages and different ways to frame things definitely staying in the commune was so different. I do remember having the realization that there are lots of different kinds of families.

Audrina reflected on how she changed and grew during her travels:

Traveling can give you not only that broader perspective on your own culture but on your family as well and that helped me a lot to kind of understand and have more opportunities for difference too because some of the cultures that I had stayed in were more emotional and more passionate and then I had always thought those were really awful qualities in myself and then I was starting to see them as positive so I could start seeing some of my

own qualities as positive and I could find well other cultures utilize it in this way and the

freedom of that was a way of coming into yourself that's not as convoluted.

Upon her return, Audrina described how she came home to *"nothing"* and had to create new support networks. Audrina reported that this lead her to find new interests rather than returning to old habits.

Importantly, Audrina returned to school which provided her with a new perspective about herself. She stated:

I went back to school and that made a difference. I started having different

responsibilities, I bought a house. I also realized I need to have lots going on too. I'm the

type of personality that can get caught in my own brooding. And I realized I could have

lots going on, I just had to make it happen. I came back with this great sense of self

advocacy, where I could make whatever I want happen and I really like the last probably

seven years of my life. I've just been building and I still have that sense like if this isn't

quite right, what do we want, what do we want it to look like, how do we get there.

Audrina found her *"place in school"* and found a profession where she could help others. Audrina stated, *"I had been studying this thing my whole life and I didn't really realize that I had been. I had lots of skills and I was real interested in it, so I could do really well"*. Audrina shared that she learned how to create boundaries not only professional but within her personal relationships as well.

 Role models. Three women directly acknowledged the importance of people in their lives who made a positive difference. While residing in a treatment facility, Gwen found positive role models, who were genuine, caring, and inspired her to change.

I was totally inspired by this one worker I wanted to be her, she was pretty, she had a

nice vehicle, and she had a good job like she was in University. I really admired her and

that's another part of my life where I kind of started to think about what I want to do with

my life. Because this, what you're living right now cannot be it I wanted more out of my

life.

Gwen recalled another teacher who always went an "*extra mile*" for her which greatly impacted her experience. Gwen described how she wanted to write this woman a letter to describe the impact and importance that she played in her life:

I've always wanted to give her a card or write her a letter and say thank you I don't know
if you know that you made a difference in my life and I really appreciate it what you did
because I know if it wasn't for her I probably wouldn't have finished my grade 10 English
and I probably wouldn't have continued on. There are people like that kind of made little
differences in my life. I want to acknowledge them.

Lucy also described how she had positive supports in her life. She had a teacher who helped set up work experience programming for her and her friends to deter them from vandalizing school property. Lucy really liked this special programming and reported that she still remains in contact with this teacher. In addition, Lucy described the support she received from a community service program designed for youth. She described the positive connections that she made with the people there.

Rose found and was able to make a supportive connection at a crisis center. Rose described how this center was facilitated by a group of feminist women who were *"independently minded"*. These women helped Rose apply for welfare and register into life skills classes. Rose described how her involvement with these helpers initiated change in her attitude and helped her find strength in herself. In summary, Rose stated *"the things that made me change and the things that kept me alive were when people didn't make me talk about my past; they gave me something to hang onto"*.

Summary. Positive experiences that unmistakably made a difference in the participants' lives were present in the descriptions of their experiences as an adolescent involved in delinquent activities. All of the women had a range of positive experiences. Descriptions included experiences with coping, healing, realizations, and caring role models. Some of these positive influences were intuitive and self-initiated (e.g., writing, walking in nature) whereas others were a direct result of experiences with abuse, drugs and alcohol, relationships, and/or delinquent behaviours (e.g., supports within treatment centre and crisis centre). Other supportive influences occurred when the participants sought help and/or change (e.g., speaking with elders, traveling). Overall, participants described making a positive connection with someone or something that was able to help them in their experiences.

Reflecting on Results

This study explored the experiences of women who were involved in delinquent activities during adolescence. The rich descriptions presented in this chapter re-present Gwen, Audrina,

Rose, Lucy, and Tiffany's recalled experiences, which led to the identification of four descriptive categories: experiences of abuse including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; experiences with alcohol and drug use; experiences with challenging and complicated relationships including family members, peers, intimate partners, and their children; and experiences that made a positive difference in their lives.

In listening to the women share their experiences, it was evident that many of their experiences were connected or intertwined. Many of the descriptions of abuse, substance use, and relationships were neither distinct nor separate. For example, abuse was present within family and intimate partner relationships; substance use was present in and affected relationships with family members, peers, children, and intimate partners. Furthermore, experiences across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood ran together, as though the participants could not separate the period of adolescence from other periods in their lives. This demonstrated the connectivity or overlap between experiences in one period of life to another. For example, experiences of abuse at a young age within the family could continue with experiences of abuse in intimate partner relationships and influence their own parenting behaviours.

I found their voices and stories to be powerful, distressing and inspiring. Hearing about the successes and triumphs in their current lives provided me with hope for them and for others who may have similar experiences. In addition, their stories were informative, humanizing, and insightful, which contributed important understanding about the experiences of female adolescents who were involved in delinquent activities. For me, these women's experiences fostered a desire to protect females from unhealthy relationships, and from abuse and substance use. My present place of employment fosters such intervention practices, providing youth with a safe, structured, and caring environment that focuses on and nourishes positive and healthy relationships, in order to facilitate teaching and learning positive adaptive and coping skills. Furthermore, on a more systemic level, these women's descriptions demonstrated a need to support families, peers, and communities to promote healthy and positive relationships that will encourage and influence adolescent girls to have positive behaviours and/or outcomes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002b) was conducted to explore adult women's descriptions of their past experiences as adolescent females who were involved in delinquent activities. Five adult women shared and described memories of their life experiences. This chapter reviews the main findings of the study and then analyzes the findings in terms of the existing literature on female delinquency. The strengths and limitations of the present study, areas for future research, and implications for counselling practice conclude the chapter.

Review of Findings

Participants shared common experiences as adult women recalling their experiences as adolescent females involved in delinquent activities. These commonalities were re-presented in the form of four descriptive categories: experiences with abuse, experiences with substance use, experiences with challenging and complicated relationships, and experiences that made a positive difference. Even though participants were only asked about their experiences during adolescence, most participants described experiences from across their life span. For example, some participants started their stories at birth through childhood, adolescence, and then adulthood. It appeared that the participants had a need to share their before- and after-adolescent experiences in order to convey a complete picture or understanding of their experiences.

The first descriptive category re-presented the participants' descriptions of their experiences of abuse. Four participants experienced multiple forms of abuse including emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. Two participants who experienced abuse in childhood also experienced abuse in adolescence and in adulthood. The majority of abuse perpetrators were family members and intimate partners. Some participants also described how their experiences of abuse affected them (e.g., having no understanding of sexuality, being emotional impaired, lacking a sense of safety, engaging in self-harming behaviour, and leaving home at an early age).

The second descriptive category re-presented the participants' descriptions of their experiences with substance use. All participants described the presence of alcohol and/or drugs in their lives when reflecting on their experiences as adolescents involved in delinquent activities: substance use impacted their childhood families, their subsequent intimate partner relationships, and themselves. For example, four participants recalled how they along with their intimate partners used drugs and alcohol. Another participant talked about being a drug dealer in order to financially support her family.

The third descriptive category re-presented the participants' descriptions of their experiences with challenging and complicated relationships including childhood family members, peers, intimate partners, and their own children. Many participants described unhealthy and negative relationships with childhood family members and intimate partners. They also described negative influences experienced with peer relationships involving alcohol and/or drug use and delinquent involvement. However, all participants also described relationships with peers or intimate partners that provided support (i.e., acceptance, attention, control). Some participants described the challenges they faced in parenting their children, for instance substance use, loss of children, and domestic abuse.

The fourth descriptive category re-presented the participant's descriptions of the experiences that made a positive difference in their lives. These positive experiences encouraged coping, healing, and realizations for the participants. For example, one participant described spending time in nature as a means of coping with being abused and another participant described healing from her experiences with the support of Aboriginal cultural traditions. Some participants shared positive experiences with role models that catalyzed them to change and grow as well as key realizations. Many of these experiences took place during adolescence as well as later in adulthood.

These four descriptive categories re-present the reflections and descriptions that were shared by adult women who recalled their past experiences as adolescent females involved in delinquent activities. The present findings contribute to and can be further understood in terms of the existing literature in the area of female delinquency, especially within the areas of abuse, substance use, and relationships.

Integration of Findings with Existing Literature

The present findings added depth to and an understanding of the current literature in the area of risk and positive factors involved in female delinquency through the use of participant voice and informed by descriptions of their life contexts. Furthermore, the present findings have highlighted the significance of relationships and the harmful aspects that can be involved in unhealthy relationships.

The literature has identified abuse, substance use, and relationships with abusive parents and non-conforming peers as factors influencing delinquent involvement. These factors were

evident in participants' reflections and descriptions of their involvement in delinquent activities as a female adolescent.

Abuse. Many researchers have noted that females involved in delinquent activities also report experiencing abuse (Belknap et al., 1997; Coll & Duff, 1995; Kakar et al., 2002; McCabe et al., 2002; Miller et al., 1997). In this study, four of five participants reported being abused and it seemed likely that fifth woman was as well although she was unprepared to discuss this. Simkins and Katz (2002) reported that many girls do not report incidents of abuse especially when involving a parent or caregiver, "… due to fear of increased violence, loss of connection with family, or an accurate belief that nothing good will occur if they tell anyone about the abuse" (p. 1485). This was the case for one participant who reported the abuse she was experiencing to her mother, her school counsellor, and the police. However, she did doubt the benefits of continuing to report the abuse since no one was intervening and she did not want to hurt her mothers' feelings.

Although all forms of abuse have been reported in the literature; the connection between sexual abuse and delinquent involvement has been found to be more prevalent for girls (Goodkind et al., 2006; McKnight & Loper, 2002; Simkins & Katz, 2002). In addition, Goodkind et al. (2006) found that sexual abuse was related to substance use and that there was a relationship between mental health problems, particularly suicide attempts, and sexual abuse. In this study, four participants described being sexually abused and using substances during adolescence. Only one participant identified as having attempted suicide.

Since experiencing abuse has been reported in the literature to be related to delinquent involvement, this study's findings are confirming and not a new discovery. However, listening to the participant's emphasize the lack of consequences for their perpetrators and the lack of support available for them as victims of abuse added a new level of understanding for me as a researcher and counsellor. Reading accounts of abuse is very different than hearing it first hand. As a researcher, these descriptions revealed the importance of looking beyond risk factors as variables and instead, considering the critical experience(s) and contexts surrounding these risk factors for individual adolescents. As a counsellor, I became more aware of the extent and severity of the experiences with abuse and how these experiences may have influenced the women's subsequent decisions and lives. This awareness and understanding have altered my perception on the significance of family relationships; where counselling and/or treatment services should notably

consider and focus on family relationships and address or help clients to reflect on related issues such as intimate partner abuse, and/or substance use.

    Substance abuse. Research literature has demonstrated that female youth involved in delinquent activities also report using drugs and alcohol (Belknap et al., 1997; Goodkind et al. 2006, Kakar et al., 2002; Simkins & Katz, 2002). Chesney-Lind (1995) and Gilfus (1992) suggested that girls may use or self-medicate with drugs and alcohol to deal with the various types of trauma and chaos they have experienced. This finding was reflected clearly by one of the participants in this study. She described using alcohol and drugs to forget what was happening in her life, "*it was something to help me forget about all my family problems and what I was feeling*". Even though, only one participant clearly stated this, I inferred that all the women were using drugs and alcohol as a means of coping with their environments. Since many experiences with abuse began in early childhood and/or adolescence, none of the women would have been given the opportunity to develop or learn positive coping skills.

    Kakar et al. (2002) reported that most female youth are introduced to drugs and alcohol either through friends or family. In the present study, all participants reported being introduced to alcohol and/or drugs through family and friends. Therefore, family members and friends were often reported as negative influences in the use of drugs and alcohol. Fletcher, Steinberg, and Williams-Wheeler (2004) found that when parents were warm and involved in an adolescent's life, the youth were less likely to engage in substance use. Parental involvement was defined as requesting information on their youth's activities and providing their youth with higher levels of control over activities. None of the participants' within the present study reported their parents as warm or involved in their lives. In fact, two of the participants' reported their parents to be very much uninvolved. According to these participants, parents did not set curfews or rules which resulted in their youth spending more time spent with peers, who were using substances and involved in delinquent activities.

    Overall, participant descriptions support an association between substance use, delinquency, and relationships with family members and peers. Participants' descriptions of how substance use was involved in their lives and in their relationships with others added to a new level of understanding of this experience. For example, two participants described how the presence of alcohol and intoxication would lead to physical fights with either parents or intimate partners. In addition, two participants described how their substance use separated them from

their children; one woman's child was apprehended, the other woman chose to give her child up for adoption.

Relationships. Researchers have reported that youth who experience negative and/or abusive relationships within their families, peers, and communities report higher rates of delinquent involvement (Belknap et al., 1997; Calhoun, 2001; Coll & Duff, 1995; Kakar et al., 2002; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005; Miller, 1976; Wood et al, 2002). Belknap et al. (1997) found that incarcerated females reported not feeling respected in their relationships with family members, that may have led them to search within their peer groups for the security and acceptance they lacked at home. The participants in the present study also reported turning to their peers for support, safety, and acceptance. The peers that each participant was associated with were already participating in delinquent activities, which increased their motivation to partake in delinquent activities as well. This bond to non-conforming peers and experiencing a weak bond to parents is consistent with the reputation enhancement theory (RET) (Carroll et al., 1999; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). The reputation enhancement theory suggests that adolescents actively re-present themselves by the peers the bond with. If these peers are non-conforming or involved in delinquent activities, then an individual is motivated to also become non-conforming or delinquent. On the other hand, if an adolescent bonds to conforming or non-delinquent peers, then they will be motivated to be similar.

Research on female relationships with family members documents a connection between neglectful and/or abusive parent-child relationship and delinquent involvement. However, the present study's descriptions of how relationships with parents can affect other relationships such as those with intimate partners and children add a fuller picture to the existing literature. These participants described how poor relationships with their parents led them to have poor relationships with others. For example, two participants who experienced abuse from their parents during childhood became involved with abusive intimate partners and one of these two participants also became abusive towards their own children.

Positive Change. Lastly, participants described various positive experiences that made a difference in their lives when recalling their adolescent involvement in delinquent activities. Descriptions included positive experiences with coping, healing, realizations, and with role models.

Using nature as a way to escape and turning to animals for emotional support was also found in Rhinas' (2006) research study investigating the resiliency of women who grew up in homes characterized by interparental violence. In addition, similar to the present findings, Hunter, Logan, Goulet, and Barton (2006) found that First Nations people learned to rely on traditional teachings and ceremonies (i.e., ranging from drumming, talking circles, sweat lodges, the sacred pipe, stories, healers, and smudging) for strength when in grief and working through traumatic experiences. First Nations people reported that participating in these traditions provided them with comfort, peace, and balance (Hunter et al., 2006). Furthermore, role models and/or supportive individuals have been widely documented within the literature as resources that help deter negative risk-taking behaviours (Abbott-Chapman, Denholm, Wyld, 2008; Carroll et al., 1999; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005; McKnight & Loper, 2002; Miller, 1986; Ungar, 2004). In addition, participants in the present study described supportive people and resources that helped them to change and grow, which suggests how adolescent females can become resilient within the context of positive experiences and relationships.

Summary. The present findings confirm some of what is known about risk factors associated with adolescent girls' involvement in delinquent activities. Using a qualitative approach added personal descriptions in context and individual voices, which demonstrated how the nature of relationships are very complicated and can involve many harmful aspects that put adolescent girls at risk for delinquent behaviour. Whereas previous qualitative studies (i.e., Belknap et al., 1997; Coll & Duff, 1995; Kakar et al., 2002) used focus groups to explore the needs, contexts, and experiences of females involved in delinquent activities and were designed to focus on specific questions and areas, the present study explored all experiences that participants felt were significant to their involvement in delinquent activities as adolescent females.

In the beginning of the analysis process, the complexity of the described phenomenon was overwhelming. Knowing about the area of risk factors that increase delinquent involvement only modestly prepared me to hear about and work with the actual experiences of these risk factors and how the combinations of such experiences could affect female adolescents. This research experience has made me see that risk factors are not just a list of variables that may or may not influence one's participation in delinquent activities. Instead, I see these factors as pieces of an interrelated web each influencing the other, interacting and creating different

experiences based on the factors that are linking together. These factors are not the same for each individual, we all bring different experiences and perceptions to events in our lives. The implication of these differences means that practitioners need to be aware that an individual with a history of unhealthy negative relationships may also have experienced or be experiencing related harmful aspects, such as substance use and delinquent involvement.

Revisiting Resiliency

Michael Ungar has catalyzed a new wave of resiliency research based on the premise that "resilience is both an individual's capacity to navigate to health resources (including emotional, physical, sociopolitical) and a condition of the individual's family, community, and culture to provide those resources in culturally meaningful ways" (Ungar, 2008, what is resilience?, para.3). Therefore, based on available resources, a child learns to behave in patterns that are most effective to him/her at that time (Ungar, 2004). Acquiring resources are not always within an individual's control and can be the result of structural inequalities. A lack or absence of available health resources may jeopardize or in danger an individual's sense of wellness. Ungar (2004) stated that where or how a child finds a path to resilience is hard to discern since "it is the process by which high-risk youth gather the resources needed to sustain an image of themselves as healthy that creates resilience" (p. 79). Using this definition, Ungar (2004) found that high-risk youth explain their problematic behaviours as strategic ways to compose healthy stories about themselves. Therefore, behaviours, whether conforming or non-conforming, can be understood as adaptive depending on an individual's context (Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Cheung, & Levine, 2008). Several researchers (Felsman, 1989; McAdam-Crisp, Aptekar, & Kironyo, 2005; Panter-Brick, 2002) have found that non-conforming behaviours can be purposeful, where behaviours work to navigate to and secure health resources.

Therefore, this definition of resilience can make sense of the current participant's behaviours and actions. For example, selling drugs to financially support a family since no other options were available, or participating in delinquent activities as means to secure physical health (food and shelter).

Further Considerations

The following considerations, in regards to the participants, need to be discussed in order to more fully conceptualize and appreciate the contexts that informed the participants' experiences.

Development. Adolescence is an important period in human development. It is a time when youth first start forming individual identities (Dacey, Kenny, & Margolis, 2000). Furthermore, relationships are thought to be especially important in the formation of girls and/or women's identity (Josselson, 1987). Research (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 1990; Josselson, 1987, 1996) has demonstrated that adolescent girls seek out close relationships that will foster their development; it is through relationships with others that their sense of self grows. Gilligan et al., (1990) found that when girls were asked to describe themselves, they discussed and defined their sense of self in terms of the relationships and connections that they were involved in. Gilligan (1982) reported that adolescent girl's relationships with others are a defining characteristic of their lives and have an impact of their well-being. Thus, positive experiences and relationships are critical in developing a healthy self-concept and identity (Dacey et al. 2000; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005; Reitsma-Street, 2004). On the other hand, if adolescent girls experience negative relationships that involve aspects of neglect, abuse, and/or violence, this trauma may affect her sense of safety within her home and community, trust, and relationship attachments (Greenwald, 2002).

Gender. The severity of violence against females has been alarmingly reported as "common and endemic in Canadian society" (Calhoun Research and Development, & C. Lang Consulting, & Savoie, 2005, p. 41), where girls are frequently abused in their homes. Family and home is supposed to be characterized as safe and protected especially in order to develop positive and healthy identities. In addition, children and youth who witness family violence are more likely to be involved in violent relationships as adults; particularly girls, since they tend to accept violence in their relationships as compared to boys who are more likely to be the perpetrators (Calhoun Research Development et al., 2005).

Ethnicity. Girls in general are placed in a position of disadvantage, but when gender and ethnicity are combined greater challenges and barriers are present. In Canada, 3% of the population is Aboriginal and 14% of the population in Saskatchewan is Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2006). Socioeconomic problems facing Aboriginal youth are: lack of parental involvement and support, being single parents, poor parenting skills, substance use, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, high rates of poverty, high victimization, high crime rates, loss of identity, language, and culture, racism, discrimination, lower levels of education, high unemployment rates, difficulty accessing services (e.g., funding, awareness of what is available)

(Chalifoux & Johnson, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2006). Compared to the rest of the Canadian population, the Aboriginal population is relatively young and increasing more rapidly (Statistics Canada, 2006). By 2017, 21% of the population will be Aboriginal in Saskatchewan and by 2045, 50% of the population will be Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Therefore, the combination of social factors (adolescence, gender, and ethnicity) and personal experiences (negative relationships, abuse, and substance use) must inform prevention or intervention efforts so that they reflect a diversity of awareness.

Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study

This study added personal descriptions of experience in context to the existing research in the area of female adolescent delinquency. In-depth interviewing of five adult women allowed detailed descriptions to emerge about their past experiences and perspectives as adolescent females involved in delinquent activities. Currently, few qualitative studies investigate female delinquent experiences through the perspectives of the participants. The qualitative framework of the current study further illuminated the experience of female delinquency, fostered learning from the experiences of participants, identified the integrated and relational nature of female experiences, and increased understanding of the phenomenon of females involved in delinquent activities as adolescents.

Each participant I spoke with wanted to share their stories in hopes of helping other females, who have had similar experiences. For example, some participants stated how they did not disclose about their experiences to anyone until much later in life. Therefore, by sharing their stories, other women can read and understand that they are not alone and that others have had similar experiences. A few participants also thought it would be interesting to share their experiences in the context of a research interview. For example, one woman hoped to gain further insight into herself by recounting her experiences. Overall, I hope that sharing their descriptions was a strengthening and empowering experience for each participant.

These women who participated in this study came from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, were different ages, and had varying levels of education. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to a particular population. However, the purpose of this study was not to generalize but to provide an in-depth perspective in order to reveal the particular experiences of adolescent females who were involved in delinquent activities. Guided by the basic interpretive qualitative method (Merriam, 2002b), the goal of this study was to explore and

understand the phenomenon of females previously involved in delinquent activities. The present research could apply and be helpful to other adolescent females who may have been in similar situations, came from similar backgrounds, or who have had similar experiences. For example, an adolescent reading about experiences with abuse or substance use may be alerted to the consequences of these experiences and might help her avoid similar situations or influence her to seek help. Gwen's experiences with healing through the support and help of her Aboriginal cultural traditions, may initiate other women who have had similar experiences to seek cultural support. Reading about participants' descriptions of their experiences in relationships with family and/or intimate partners may serve to educate other women about the risks and consequences of experiences in their own lives.

This study did not allow for direct access to the current experiences of adolescent females involved in delinquent activities. Therefore, another limitation was in the participant criteria; each adult participant was recruited on the basis of her ability to provide a retrospective account of her experiences during adolescence. For some participants, the experiences they shared were quite recent, whereas for others they were not. For example, one participant was considerably older than the others and I was concerned that her recalled experiences may be diluted or weakened. She appeared to have a clear picture of her experiences, but in the interview it appeared that she had some challenges with the time lines of when events occurred. However, her age allowed her time to think about and reflect on her experiences. Two other participants were closer to these experiences in terms of age and time. They appeared less able to stand back and reflect on their experiences. However, their experiences are very valuable and beneficial and their accounts may reach out and connect to others within similar age range, who may still be participating in delinquent activities, or who is just starting to initiate change. Cumulatively, the participant's experiences demonstrate how an individual can change, become healthy, and achieve success and what that looks like at different times across the lifespan.

Implications for Future Research

To address the limitation of interviewing women retrospectively, future research exploring adolescent participants who are directly involved in delinquent activities would be an extension of this research project. Interviewing adolescents would help to better understand the phenomenon by gaining direct insight and recent recall of experiences, since the research question would be more in the present. However, there would be special ethical concerns to

address such as vulnerability, informed consent, and participation retention. In addition, data collection methods should be considered. For example, open-ended interviews may not produce rich data with youth due to maturity and/or cognitive development. Furthermore, recruiting females who are officially charged or convicted of an offense may provide detail on the process of being involved in the criminal justice system. Due to restricted access to juvenile offenders and their identity such research would have significant ethical concerns and considerations in regards to confidentiality and vulnerability.

The present study extended the literature in the area of female delinquency, yet raised awareness questions about the roles of environmental context, relationships with family members, intimate partners, children, and peers. Recent research (i.e., Belknap et al., 1997; Goodkind et al., 2006; Simkins & Katz, 2002) and findings from this study clearly demonstrate the connections between abuse, substance use, relationships, and delinquency. However, it would be useful to further explore all of these connections together instead of separately. This was modestly demonstrated in the current study through detailed participant description of their experiences. In addition, future research assessing positive influences and individual capacities to navigate towards health resources (Ungar, 2004) may allow for a deeper understanding of how to assist adolescent females to avoid involvement in delinquent activities; thereby, aiding the development of prevention and/or intervention programs. Prevention and intervention programs should also be evaluated on how well they meet the needs of females to ensure the most effective programming is being offered.

Other research tools and methods should also be considered. For example, a social-psychological model (i.e., Reputation Enhancement Theory) would be helpful since this perspective looks towards more complex explanations of relationships (Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005). Furthermore, Kakar et al. (2002) concluded that "…the process leading to delinquency was different for each individual and composed of complex interactions of factors that can only be researched with advanced methodologies" (p. 71). Another framework that should be considered is narrative inquiry. Murray (2003) stated that narrative analysis reflects on the account as a whole, whereas other analytic techniques break the narrative down into parts. Therefore, the advantage of this strategy would be its focus on the participants' life stories as a whole, rather than focusing on specific pieces of the life story. Furthermore, Bochner, Ellis, Tillmann-Healy (2000) stated that:

Narratives ask the reader to feel 'truth' and thus to become fully engaged- morally, aesthetically, emotionally, and intellectually. Whether we trust stories of not, they remain one of the few human resources capable of telling us what we do not hear and showing us what we fail to see (p. 29).

A narrative re-presentation can invite and draw in the reader into real life accounts; thereby, increasing understanding and knowledge of the experiences and lives of the participants. When conceptualizing the present research study, I decided to focus on the period of adolescence and not life stories as a whole; however, the data clearly shows that participants needed to provide all their experiences in order to make sense of their adolescent experiences. I chose to make use of the basic interpretive qualitative research method because it allowed for openness and construction to occur; where as a researcher, I could form the strategies or tools to best work with the data rather than following a stringent set of guidelines.

In summary, qualitative research should be used to discover, explore, and foster understanding of the experiences or relationships, whereas quantitative research should be used to pursue findings from qualitative discoveries, for measurement of risk and protective factors, and for statistical program evaluation and measurement. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach could work to accomplish both goals.

Implications for Counselling Practice

It is my aspiration that counsellors and other helping professionals, who develop and implement prevention and intervention programs, will become more aware of the complex experiences of adolescent females who participate in delinquent activities. An increased understanding of the phenomenon of female adolescent delinquency will promote more informed practice by counsellors and others working with youth. Many authors have argued that females who become involved in delinquent activities face unique challenges and require individual prevention and intervention programming that targets (is responsive to) their specific experiences and needs (Belknap et al., 1997; Calhoun, 2001; McCabe et al., 2002; Miller et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2002). Understanding that females who participate in delinquent activities are likely to have experienced abuse, substance use, and unhealthy relationships will help focus, develop, implement, and increase the success of prevention and intervention programming. An important understanding for anyone who is working with youth who are/were involved in delinquent behaviours is that delinquency is a complex phenomenon; one needs to look beyond the overt

behaviour to find the underlying causes and motivations. Delinquent behaviours are much more than conduct problems. Such behaviours may stem from individual experiences and influences within the family and community. Following Ungar's (2004) view that non-conforming behaviours are adaptive, leads to the implication that society needs to understand that youth attempt to cope the best way they know how with the resources available to them (Ungar, 2004). In addition, Ungar (2004) has stated that helping professionals need to focus on the context of behaviours and health rather than on individual psychopathology. Therefore, sensitivity to context and addressing more than one risk factor (i.e., unhealthy relationships, substance use, and abuse) would offer a more comprehensive intervention approach. This perspective has been helpful for me when working with youth who are or were involved in delinquent activities. I no longer focus primarily on the overt external behaviours that youth demonstrate; instead I seek to understand the underlying internal issues that may be the guiding source of the external behaviours.

Furthermore, knowing that females can develop positive relationships and have positive experiences with others suggests the need to foster positive relationship building with others including community members (i.e., teachers, helpers, and counsellors), extended family members, and friends. Culturally meaningful healing practices such as sweats, smudges, round dances, and talking to elders should be part of intervention programming in order for youth to develop into healthy adults.

Knowing the benefits of positive relationships for females has guided my practice, prompting me to help foster potential positive relationships with family members and community members in order to promote change, growth, and resiliency. I emphasize to any family members (i.e., parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents) the importance of being supportive and caring within their relationships with their children. In addition, I help to rebuild or repair these relationships that are unhealthy or damaged between youth and their family members. Furthermore, I foster community connections and/or ties for young people by informing them of the resources, supports, and recreational activities that they can become involved in, in hopes that the relationships they develop will provide youth with positive alternatives to becoming involved in delinquent activities.

Conclusion

By inviting participants to share what they believed were influential experiences in their lives as female adolescents engaged in delinquent activities, this study offers a first-hand insider perspective (Mason, 2002; Merriam, 2002a). A careful listening to their stories revealed common experiences during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood that were organized into four descriptive categories: experiences of abuse, experiences with substance use, experiences with challenging and complicated relationships, and experiences that made a positive difference. In summary, this study confirmed the findings of past research in the area of female delinquency and extended the literature with the use of participant descriptions of interrelated complex experiences that provided the context for their delinquent behavior.

I learned about the continuous link between participants' childhood experiences, adolescence experiences, and adulthood experiences. Participants described that being involved in delinquent activities was connected to experiencing multiple forms of abuse, substance use, and was influenced by harmful relationships with family members and others. Experiencing abuse and using substances affected other areas in an individual's life, such as their experiences with peers, intimate partners, and their own children. For example, negative relationships with parents' may influence peer selection, involvement in abusive intimate partner relationships, and parenting of one's own children.

I also heard the women recognize ways in which they moved forward, grew, and experienced change in their lives. I was intrigued by the fact that each participant at some point reached a state of readiness and openness to change. This state came at different points for each woman. However, they all had to have a certain receptivity or ability to respond and make positive changes. I discovered how these experiences can be interconnected and are related to one's involvement in delinquent activities. Overall, I learned or gained an understanding of how an accumulation of negative experiences and a lack of developmental assets or health resources led to delinquent or survival behaviours. Furthermore, these findings solidified the importance of developing and delivering prevention and intervention programming addressing the specific needs of girls.

The stakes are high. In the Reena Virk story, the six females who were involved in the beating, also known as the *Shoreline Six*, were convicted of assault in 1998 and sentences ranged from 60 days conditional sentences (i.e., treatment, curfews, community service) to one year in

jail (Mulgrew, 2005; Murder of Reena Virk, n.d). In addition, Warren Glowatski was convicted of second-degree murder in 1998 and sentenced to life in prison. However, since he was 16 years old at the time of murder, he was eligible for parole after serving 7 years. In November 2004, Warren was first denied day parole, but in June 2007 he was granted day parole. In March 2000, Kelly Ellard was convicted for second degree murder; however, in February 2003 this conviction was over turned and a new trial was ordered. In July 2004, the second trial ended in a mistrial due to a hung jury. In addition, in between Ellard's first and second trial, she was arrested and charged with assaulting a 58 year old woman. In April 2005, a third trial was ordered and Ellard was convicted again of second degree murder and given automatic life sentence with no parole eligibility for 7 years. However, this verdict has been appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada which can either rule to hold a fourth trial or elect not to retry Ellard who currently remains incarcerated (Mulgrew, 2005; Murder of Reena Virk, n.d). If youth are given opportunities to experience healthy resources such as positive supportive relationships within family and community, negative consequences such as this may be prevented.

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Appendix A: Telephone Script for Participation Criteria

R: Thank you for expressing interest in the research project. Now I just want to confirm that you meet participation criteria. So first of all, **are you over the age of 18?**

R: Can you identify as having participated in delinquent activities as an adolescent?

R: Do you feel as though you are capable of expressing and sharing your past experiences of when you were an adolescent involved in delinquent activities?

R: Are you currently participating in any delinquent or illegal activities?

R: Great, now that we covered the participation criteria, I would like to set up a time to meet and hear about your experiences. I have an interview office at the University of Saskatchewan campus available. Do you require directions and/or bus tickets in order to meet?

Appendix B
Call to Participate

Adult Women who were Involved in Delinquent Activities

Were you involved in delinquent activities when you were younger? (Includes any illegal activity for example drug & alcohol abuse, assault, theft, break and enters, vandalism, prostitution)

Would you be willing to discuss your experiences in a confidential research interview?

Under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie Martin, a Registered Psychologist, I am a graduate student researcher in Educational Psychology & Special Education at the University of Saskatchewan. I am interested in adult women's reflections of their experiences as an adolescent involved in delinquent activity. I am seeking volunteers to participate in three individual one to two hour meetings. To off-set any costs associated with participating, a fifty dollar honorarium will be given upon completion of three meetings.

In order to participate, volunteers must:
A) be female,
B) be an adult over the age of 18,
C) identify as having participated in delinquent activities as an adolescent (such as: drug and alcohol abuse, assault, theft, break and enters, vandalism, assault, prostitution),
D) identify as being capable of reflecting, expressing and sharing their lived experiences,
E) no longer participating in delinquent activities.

For more information, please leave a message at (306) 979-1870 for Holly Kruger
Or email: hak234@mail.usask.ca

Appendix C
Information and Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled ***Adult reflections on adolescent delinquent involvement.*** Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researchers:

Holly Kruger, Master of Education Candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan (T) 979-1870 Email: hak234@mail.usask.ca

Stephanie Martin, Ph.D. Registered Doctoral Psychologist, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan (T) 966-5259 (F) 966-7719 Email: Stephanie.Martin@usask.ca

Purpose and Procedures:

The purpose of this study is to expand the understanding of females who have participated in delinquent activities. You are being asked to participate in a series of meetings designed to provide an overview of your descriptions, accounts, and reflections of what it looked like to be an adolescent girl participating in delinquent activities. I want you to talk freely about your experiences and I am prepared to listen to you. You are also free not to answer any questions you do not want to. I would like to meet with you three times for approximately one to two hours. I will ask your permission to audio-tape the second meeting as a data collection interview; at any point, you can request that the audio tape recorder be turned off. The second meeting or data collection interview will be transcribed and you will be presented with a written copy of the meeting to read and review within the third meeting. The information from the taped recording will be strictly confidential and your name will be kept anonymous. The third meeting will focus on reviewing the transcript and addressing any questions or reflections that might arise. You will be provided an optional opportunity to review all interpretations resulting for the data collected. All interviews will be conducted in a secure office at the University of Saskatchewan at an appropriate time for you.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

Any risk involved with this study is minimal. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time. It is possible that you may experience some discomfort and negative feelings in recalling past events. At all times, you are in charge of what you want to share and have the right to not answer questions, turn off the tape recorder and withdraw from the study. If you do experience negative feelings and discomfort a list of resources and/or counselling services will be provided along with assistance to access resources if necessary.

Participating in this study may also benefit you by allowing you to share your stories. It may help in your understanding of yourself and situation. Taking part in this study may benefit the academic community in acquiring knowledge that may lead to further developments in research and in intervention. You will also receive a fifty dollar honorarium upon completion of the third meeting or an amount equal to the number of meetings completed.

Data Storage:

All data collected during the study will be properly coded to ensure your confidentiality. All data will be safely stored in the locked office of Dr. Stephanie Martin at the University of Saskatchewan campus for a minimum of five years. If you choose at any time to withdraw from the research project your information will be destroyed immediately.

Confidentiality:

Pseudonyms or false names will be written in the final product of this project in order to maintain your privacy and confidentiality. The consent forms will be stored separately from transcription data so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given responses. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be identified by a number that will only be known to the researcher, and the interview audio-tapes will be erased following completion of the thesis. Although excerpts of the transcripts will be included in the final study, no direct identifying information will be used. As a participant you have the right to request that portions of the transcripts not be included in the thesis. Following completion of the interview and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and the interpretations made.

Please note that I am required by law to report any current illegal activities to the legal authorities. Also if you reveal that you are planning to harm yourself or someone else I am obligated to report this to the authorities as well.

Right to Withdrawal and Questions:

You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data you have contributed will be destroyed. Should you choose to withdraw there will not impact or consequence.

Questions:

If you have questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point during the process. You are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Sciences research Ethics Board on _____. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office (306) 966-2084. If you wish to read a final copy of this project, details will be provided on how to access upon completion.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Holly Kruger

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description of Holly Kruger's study provided above. I have been provided an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, with the understanding that I may withdraw consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

_____   _____
(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____   _____
(Signature of Researcher)   (Date)

Resource Guide for Saskatoon Services

Counselling and Support:
Saskatoon Victim's Services   975-8400
Saskatoon Indian and Metis
Friendship Center   244-0174
Survivors Inc.   683-8667
Saskatoon Family Support Center   933-7751
Saskatoon Family Services   757-6675
Egadz Youth Center   931-6644
Child and Youth Mental Health
and Addiction   655-7950
Help Line:
Crisis Line (24hrs)   933-6200

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Possible Questions for First Interview:
Introductory Questions:

1. What prompted you to respond to the advertisement?
2. What do you consider to be delinquent involvement/activities?
3. Are you able to recall and reflect on your experiences during that time in your life?

Possible Questions for the Second Interview:

After our discussion from the first interview, we can now start discussing……

1. Let's explore some of your general experiences as an adolescent who was involved in delinquent activities.
2. What factors or experiences can you describe or recall that were related to your delinquent involvement?
3. How would you describe your environment or context? (family, home, neighborhood, school, etc)
4. How would you describe the relationships in your life? (family, peers, etc)
5. What did it feel like, and look like, to be a female involved in delinquent activities?
6. Were there any influencers or deterrents that were apart of your delinquent activities?

Possible Questions for the Third Interview:

Having read through the transcript from the second meeting (data collection interview) does it accurately describe what you said? Is there any information that you want add, alter, or delete?

Appendix E

Data/Transcript Release Form

I, _____, hereby give acknowledgement that the data I have given can be shared and used for interpretation. I am satisfied with the efforts that have been taken to ensure that any identification of this material has been altered or eliminated. I hereby authorize release of these stories to Holly Kruger to be used in the manner described in the research Consent Form.

I have a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

_____   _____

Participant   Date

_____   _____

Researcher   Date

Appendix F
Acknowledgement of Receipt of Honorarium

I acknowledge that I have received an honorarium for my participation on the research project titled: *Adult reflections on adolescent delinquent activities.*

$50 received in the form of: ☐   cash

_____   _____
Recipient's Initials   Date

_____   _____
Witness Signature   Date

_____
Witness - Print Name

Appendix G
Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____, have been employed to help transcribe data
              (Name)
collection interviews. I acknowledge the confidentiality of participant's information.
I agree that this information will not be revealed to or discussed with any third party other than
my employer.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____   _____
Witness   Date

Appendix H

Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Application for Approval of Research Project

Information Required:
1. **Name of researcher(s)** and/or supervisor (s) and related department(s).

Researcher: Holly Kruger
Supervisor: Stephanie Martin
Department: Educational Psychology and Special Education

1. Name of student(s),

Student: Holly Kruger B.A, M.Ed. Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education

Anticipated start date of the research study (phase) and the expected completion date of the study (phase)
Start Date: September 2007
Completion Date: June 2008

2. Title of Study: Adult Reflections on Adolescent Delinquent Involvement.

3. Abstract

There has been an increasing trend reported within the media and current research literature in regards to adolescent females who are involved in delinquent activities and/or demonstrating delinquent behaviours (Moretti, Odgers, & Jackson, 2004). Historically, youths demonstrating delinquent behaviour have been studied from various sociological theories of delinquency, such as: control theory, differential association, labeling theory, and social disorganization/social ecology theory (Chesney-Lind, & Sheldon, 2004). However, the majority of these studies have focused on male participants and statistically determining causal risk factors of delinquency (Chesney-Lind, & Sheldon, 2004, & Barron, 2000). It is evident from past and current research that there are many factors influencing delinquent activities and/or behaviour in youth (Heilbron, Leschied, & Cummings, 2002; Cummings, & Leschied, 2002). Chesney-Lind and Sheldon (2004) stated that "delinquency theory has ignored girls and as a result there is considerable question whether existing theories that were developed to explain boys' delinquency can explain girls' as well" (p.98). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to expand the understanding of young females who have participated in past delinquent activities. The focus of this study is to gain awareness through the perspectives and voices of adult women that were once adolescent girls involved in delinquent activities. Since participants' descriptions, accounts, and reflections will be at the forefront of this study, a basic interpretive qualitative research design will be used in order to fully gain an understanding of the experiences of females who have participated in delinquent activities.

4. Funding

The student researcher will provide the primary source of funds to support this research study. The researcher is offering a fifty dollar honorarium to each participant upon the completion of the projects data collection procedures. This is to off-set any costs that the participants may experience due to their time involved in the project (e.g., transportation, childcare, etc). Each participant will be asked to sign an acknowledgement of receipt of honorarium to confirm that they received the honorarium (refer to Appendix G).

5. Expertise

As a graduate student in School and Counselling psychology, I have completed course work focusing on communication and listening skills and a counselling practicum placement that was affiliated with Children and Youth Mental Health Services, Saskatoon Health Region. Through this practicum placement, I worked with a vulnerable youth population, who presented with various mental health and behavioural issues. I believe working with this vulnerable population provided me with the experience for conducting this research study with females who have been involved in delinquent activities. Both course and practical training provided the tools for working with sensitive material such as this.

6. Conflict of Interest

There is no potential for conflict of interest in the research study.

7. Participants

Three to five adult females (18 years of age and older), who self-identify as having participated in delinquent activities as an adolescent (13-17 years of age) will be asked to voluntarily participate in the research study. Participant selection is based on recruiting information-rich cases, who meet the specific including:
    a) be female,
    b) be an adult over the age of 18,
    c) identify as having been involved in delinquent activities as an adolescent (Status Offenses such as: drug and alcohol abuse, assault, theft, break and enters, assault, sexual promiscuity),
    d) identify as being capable of reflecting, expressing and sharing their lived experiences,
    e) no longer participate in delinquent activities.

7a. Participants will be recruited through a "Call to Participate" notice (refer to Appendix C). This notice will be posted at the University of Saskatchewan campus, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (Siast), Saskatoon Downtown Youth Centre Inc (Egadz), and Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan, all located in the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. The notice will describe the research project and provide the researcher's contact information. A contact cellular phone number, which is only used for project and business purposes, will be utilized due to lack of university campus resources. Potential participants will be screened by phone in order to determine if they meet participation criteria (refer to Appendix B).

8. Consent

At the beginning of the first data collection interview, informed consent will be obtained with a written consent form (refer to Appendix D). The informed consent summarizes the research study, and the participant's rights and obligations. Signing the form will signify the participant's understanding of these rights and obligations, and will be accepted as consent to participate. Participants will receive a copy of the consent form. A section within the consent form will discuss the optional opportunities to review transcripts and/or interpretations that may appear within the project and to grant release of this material. They will be notified that, at any time, they can remove their responses and/or withdrawal completely from the study.

9. Methods/Procedures

A series of three one to two hour meetings will be completed with each participant. The times and dates for meetings will depend on the schedules of the participants. The site for all meetings will be at the University of Saskatchewan within a secure research office.

The first meeting will focus on building rapport, signing informed consent (refer to appendix D) and discussing the purpose and main question of the research project. The second meeting will consist of an unstructured data collection interview, which will be audio-tape recorded for transcription. The interview will consist of open-ended questions pertaining to the participant's recollections of their experiences as a youth involved in delinquent activities (refer to Appendix E). The third meeting will focus on providing participants and the researcher the opportunity to review all content data gathered from the second meeting in the form of a written transcription. This meeting will allow the participants to review data, ask questions, and make changes or deletions to the information they have shared. Participants will be asked to sign a data/transcript release form after confirming the accuracy of the transcription (refer to Appendix F). Each participant will receive a fifty dollar honorarium at the end of the third meeting. However, if participants withdraw from the study they will receive payment equal to the number of meetings completed. In addition, each participant will be provided with an optional opportunity to review analysis interpretations. A time and data may be arranged to drop off or pick up documents, if participants show interest.

10. Storage of Data

Data, in the form of audio-tape recorded interviews and transcripts, will be securely stored in the locked office of Dr. Stephanie Martin on the University of Saskatchewan campus for a minimum of five years. All data will be properly coded to maintain the confidentiality of participants. If a participant decides to withdraw, her information will be destroyed immediately. A master list with participant's names and contact information will be kept separately from audio-tapes and transcripts to ensure anonymity.

11. Dissemination of Results

The data collected will meet partial requirements for a Master's degree in Education in Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan. Data and conclusions may be presented at conferences, and/or published in scholarly journals.

12. Risk, Benefits, and Deception

Risks of research: Participating in this research study involves minimal risk and no deception. However, negative feelings and discomfort may be a consequence of recalling past memories and events. To support participants, they will be reassured that they are in charge of the information they share and that the interview can cease at any point, if they are feeling distressed. If participants experience negative feelings and discomfort, recommendations and support will be provided for seeking crisis intervention resources and individual counselling.

Benefits of research: Participants may benefit from participation by sharing their experiences. Therapeutic effects may emerge from the opportunity to share, listen and fully understand their stories. Murray (2003) found that when given the opportunity to tell their stories, adolescent participants began to make sense of their experiences and began to make connections between their past and present behaviours. Each participant will also receive a fifty dollar honorarium.

13. Confidentiality

Participants will be informed at the initial meeting about their right to confidentiality. Participant's names will be coded in order to protect their confidentiality and privacy. Audio-tapes and transcripts will be identified by code that will be known only to the researcher. Passages and quotations may be included within the re-presentation of data but no identifying information will be used. Each participant will have the opportunity to review the re-presentation of data in the analysis meeting.

A section on the consent form will notify the participants that if they report any current illegal activities the researcher is required by law to report to the legal authorities. In addition, if they reveal that they are at risk of harming themselves or someone else this will also be reported to the authorities.

14. Data/Transcript Release

Each participant's signature on the Data/Transcript Release Form (see Appendix F) will confirm that they are willing to share their stories and allow for interpretation and consent to what is included in the final document, and possibly future scholarly papers and presentations.

15. Debriefing and feedback

At the end of the data collection interview, participants will be verbally debriefed and thanked for their participation. The participants will be offered an optional opportunity to meet to review transcripts or at a later date to review interpretations. If participants wish to receive further feedback and/or receive a copy of the final research study, details with be provided on how to access the final copy.

16. Required Signatures and Date

Holly Kruger- Masters Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education

Stephanie Martin- Supervisor, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education

David Mykota- Department Head, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education

17. Contact Name and Information

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