WORKING REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF, OTHERS AND RELATIONSHIPS
IN WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED AS CHILDREN:
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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in the Department of Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By
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June, 1995

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SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION
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of the requirements for the

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WORKING REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF, OTHERS, AND RELATIONSHIPS IN WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED AS CHILDREN: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The purpose of this study was to investigate the working representations of self, others, and relationships in women who have been sexually abused as children. A qualitative approach was used to elicit individualized and descriptive accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others and relationships.

The conceptual frameworks informing the research included psychodynamic/interpersonal; social-cognitive; feminist; and general trauma formulations. As well, Finkelhor and Browne's Traumagenic Dynamics Model of Child Sexual Abuse was employed.

The study consisted of two components. First, seven women currently or recently in therapy to deal with issues of child sexual abuse were interviewed about the impact of the abuse on their representations of self, others, and relationships. The interviews were analyzed using a thematic content analysis. A narrative describing the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others, and relationships was constructed for each woman on the basis of the interview data. Then, individual feedback meetings were conducted in which each woman was given the opportunity to indicate the accuracy of the narrative in describing her experience as outlined in the interview. This feedback was integrated into the narratives and a summary outlining the dominant themes found across women was constructed.

The dominant themes found across women regarding their representations of self included: a) low self-worth; b) lack of knowledge about self; c) confusion about female identity; d) distorted body image; e) disrupted sexuality; and f) biased perceptions of the world. The dominant themes found across women regarding their representations of others and relationships included: a) disrupted relationships with men; b) revictimization; c) disrupted relationships with women; d) distorted and generalized representations of others. Despite the common themes found across women, unique underlying dynamics of the effects of child sexual abuse were apparent for all of the women. The results offer a more comprehensive and individualized understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse than much of the current research.
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Abstract

This study investigated the working representations of self, others and relationships in seven women who have been sexually abused as children. A qualitative approach was employed. Representations of self, others and relationships were defined as the theories of self, others and relationships that the women used to process information in the world. They included assumptions, beliefs, attributions, behavior and affect. The women who participated experienced sexual abuse as children (i.e., 3 to 16 years of age) by important male figures (i.e., family friend, father-figure, uncle). Participants were currently in or had recently received therapy for issues involving their experiences of child sexual abuse. The study consisted of two meetings. In the first meeting, the participants were interviewed regarding: a) their representations of self, others and relationships; b) the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations; c) their understanding of any changes that may have occurred in their representations since the time of the abuse; and d) the influence that therapy and other important experiences may have had on the way they perceived the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations. In the second meeting, the participants were given the opportunity to respond to the researcher's reconstructions of their thoughts and descriptions given in the first meeting. Information about the details of the abuse, such as number of perpetrators, severity of abuse, and duration of abuse; and life circumstance information, such as level of education and marital status, was obtained through a questionnaire filled out by the participant and/or her therapist. A thematic content analysis was employed to abstract themes regarding the women's understanding of the impact of the sexual abuse on their working representations. A narrative was constructed for each woman outlining the specific effects and a summary of the dominant themes found across women was written. The dominant themes found across women regarding their representations of self included: a) low self-worth; b) lack of knowledge of self; c) confusion about female identity; d) distorted body image; e) disrupted sexuality; f) biased perceptions of the world. The dominant themes found across women regarding their representations of others and relationships included: a) disrupted relationships with men; b) revictimization; c) disrupted relationships with women; d) distorted and generalized representations of others.
Despite the common themes found across women, unique underlying dynamics of the effects of child sexual abuse were apparent for all of the women. The results offer a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse. Implications for further research and clinical application are discussed.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Clinical evidence and current theorizing suggests that child sexual abuse has a major impact on the development of a sense of self and relationships with others (Alexander, 1993; Cole & Putnam, 1992; Courtois, 1988; Herman, 1992; Price, 1994; 1993; Putnam, 1990). Cole and Putnam (1992) discuss the impact of incest on self development and social functioning. They say,

... the development of self is integrally related to social development and a sense of others; sexual abuse by a parent violates the child's basic beliefs about safety and trust in relationships, disturbing both the sense of self and the ability to have satisfying relationships in which one feels loved and protected (Cole & Putnam, 1992, p.174).

Several theorists have speculated that the dynamics inherent in situations of sexual abuse involving a child and a trusted significant other seem particularly disruptive to the child's developing sense of self and views of others (Alexander, 1992; Cole & Putnam, 1992; Summit, 1983). For example, some theorists argue that child sexual abuse by a significant other is a trauma that can threaten the development of basic assumptions about the self as worthy, others as benevolent and the world as meaningful (Herman, 1992; Jehu, 1992; McCann &Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; Price, 1993; 1994). These basic assumptions of self, others and the world are regarded as necessary for adaptive functioning (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Epstein, 1973; 1985; 1991).

In normal development, children look to their caregivers and other significant people to support, love and protect them (Bowlby, 1973; 1988). It is through their important relationships that they learn about themselves, others and the world, particularly the interpersonal world. Bowlby (1973; 1988) suggests that children develop internal working models of self and others through their interactions with
significant others in their early lives. He indicates that these internal working
models guide the individual in her or his later interactions. I have used Bowlby's
(1973; 1988) concept of an internal working model and have used the phrase
working representations of self, others and relationships to denote it. According to
Bowlby's (1973; 1988) theory, if children experience their early important others
as unsupportive, unprotective, and exploitative, as may be the case for children who
have been sexually abused by a significant other, they may begin to view themselves
as unworthy of love and protection, others as malevolent, and the world as
unpredictable and meaningless.

Clinical literature suggests that representations of self, others and
relationships that are formed out of early experiences of violation, such as child
sexual abuse, are often generalized to experiences later in life (Herman, 1992;
McCann & Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; Price, 1993; 1994). These representations
then become maladaptive and impede individuals from perceiving and experiencing
themselves and others in less restrictive ways. As a result, these individuals tend to
experience many personal and interpersonal difficulties. Fine (1990) says that
incest victims, "...construct or reconstruct a world based on distorted beliefs and
misguided assumptions that will determine their causal attributions, set up their
strategies for predicting outcomes, and dictate their life views" (p. 163). Despite
the rich clinical and theoretical literature, there has been little systematic empirical
investigation of the impact of child sexual abuse on individuals' representations of
self, others and relationships.

The current research investigated the representations of self, others and
relationships held by seven women who were sexually abused as children by
significant male figures, such as a father, father-figure, family friend, uncle,
brother, or grandfather. A semi-structured interview was employed to investigate
the women's understandings of the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships. Four areas were explored in the interviews: 1) the participant's representations of self, others and relationships; 2) the participant's views of how child sexual abuse impacted upon her representations; 3) any changes in representations that may have occurred over the years as well as the participant's understanding of those changes; and 4) the participant's views on how therapy may have influenced her perceptions of how child sexual abuse impacted upon her representations. The methodology chosen for this study included a phenomenological method of investigation. Given that there has been little systematic investigation of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others and relationships, it makes sense to begin this area of investigation with phenomenological inquiries. At this stage in the research, phenomenological descriptions may point to fruitful areas of investigation that may be overlooked using nomothetic approaches.

The literature review that follows includes both empirical and theoretical research which suggests that the investigation of female survivors' representations of self, others and relationships from the perspectives of women who have experienced child sexual abuse is an important area for inquiry. The first section will provide an overview of some of the empirical research with a specific focus on that research which outlines the impact of child sexual abuse on self-development and interpersonal functioning. Although this research has not specifically addressed the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others, and relationships, it has investigated what might be considered components of women's representations by focusing on constructs such as self-esteem, self-concept or social adjustment. Unless otherwise noted, only those studies which have employed adult samples are included. Some of the limitations of this research are outlined as is the
need for the systematic investigation of female survivors' representations of self, others, and relationships.

In the second section, an attempt is made to integrate literature on self-development with current clinical conceptualizations outlining the effects of chronic trauma on the developing self. The theoretical literature drawn upon includes: psychodynamic/interpersonal; social-cognitive; and feminist. Each of these perspectives maintains that a sense of self develops in the context of interactions and relationships with others (Bowlby, 1973; 1988; Horowitz, 1987; 1990; 1991; Jordan, 1991; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; Sullivan, 1953; Surrey, 1991). The discussion of this literature will outline how child sexual abuse may have an impact on women's representations of self, others and relationships. This section will end with a discussion of Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) Traumagenic Dynamics Model of child sexual abuse and how it can further our understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse when considered with these other theoretical frameworks.

Literature Review

Empirical research

Little research has systematically investigated the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others and relationships. The bulk of research has focused on symptomology reported by women who have histories of child sexual abuse. Results from these studies suggest that female survivors of child sexual abuse report a variety of difficulties. For example, anxiety, fears, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexual maladjustment, suicidal ideation and behavior, eating disorders, difficulties in trusting others, impaired interpersonal relationships, feelings of isolation and stigma, low self-esteem, substance abuse and revictimization are among some of the many symptoms and difficulties associated with
the impact of child sexual abuse (Beitchman, Zucker, Hood, daCosta, Akman & Cassavia, 1992; Briere, 1992a; Briere & Runtz, 1988; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Finkelhor, 1988; 1990; Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor, 1993; Schetky, 1990). No one symptom appears to be manifested by a majority of the participants across studies. It is likely that maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships are related to or may underlie many of these difficulties reported by survivors of child sexual abuse (Cole & Putnam, 1992; Jehu, 1992).

Although the current research has not specifically assessed female survivors' representations of self, others, and relationships, some of it has assessed what may be considered components of women's representations. For example, some researchers have found that adult female survivors show: low self-esteem, as assessed by self-report measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Hoagwood, 1990; Jackson, Calhoun, Amick, Maddever and Habif, 1990; Silver, Boon & Stones, 1983), the Janis Self-Esteem Scale (Testa, Miller, Downs & Panek, 1992), and items based on Coppersmith's conceptualization of self-esteem (Schiller, 1988); discrepant self- and ideal self-concept as measured by the Leary Interpersonal Checklist (van Buskirk & Cole, 1983); identity disturbance (i.e., elevations on scales assessing self-alienation, lack of ego mastery, and low ego-strength) as measured by the MMPI (Scott & Stone, 1986; Lundberg-Love, Marmion, Ford, Geefner, & Peacock, 1992); and self-perception distortion (i.e., viewing the self as fundamentally damaged and painfully inadequate) as measured by the Rorschach (Nash, Sexton, Harralson & Lambert, 1993; Owens, 1984). Also relevant to the present study, there are researchers who have found that adult female survivors of child sexual abuse report: social alienation as measured by the MMPI (Lundberg et al., 1992; Scott & Stone, 1986); poor social adjustment as measured by the Social Adjustment Scale (Jackson et al., 1990); an impaired ability to form close relationships (i.e., lack of acceptance
or the inability to feel a need for affection and dependency) as measured by the Rorschach (Owens, 1984); and dissatisfaction with their interpersonal relationships as measured by the Leary Interpersonal Checklist (van Buskirk & Cole, 1983).

It seems clear from this brief overview of the literature that self- and interpersonal-functioning may be effected by experiences of child sexual abuse. However, it is difficult to compare the results of these different studies because many different definitions of self- and interpersonal-functioning are used and many different assessment tools are employed to assess the different constructs. In addition, as alluded to earlier, these constructs tend to be unidimensional and may only be aspects or components of women’s representations of self, others, and relationships. For example, self-esteem may be one aspect of individuals’ representations of self. Likewise, dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships may be one aspect of individuals’ representations of others and relationships. As noted by Briere and Runtz (1993) self-reference and disturbed relatedness have not been adequately assessed in survivors of child sexual abuse. The investigation of female survivors’ representations of self, others, and relationships may offer a more unified and comprehensive way in which to assess the impact of child sexual abuse.

In addition to the research discussed above, a review of some of the diagnostic literature is relevant to the current study. Again, although most of the diagnostic research has not specifically assessed women’s representations of self, others, and relationships, the findings suggest that many of the difficulties reported by adult survivors of child sexual abuse may be reflective of maladaptive representations. For example, some of the literature suggests that sexual abuse appears to be more common among certain populations, specifically, individuals diagnosed with disorders reflecting identity confusion and impairments in interpersonal functioning (Cole & Putnam, 1992; Courtois, 1988; Herman, 1992; Putnam, 1990; Stone, 1990).
Maladaptive representations of self, others, and relationships may underlie identity confusion and impairments in interpersonal functioning.

Kinzl and Biebl (1992) found that many of the psychiatric inpatients in their sample who had histories of child sexual abuse were diagnosed with one or more of the following disorders: somatoform disorders; eating disorders; substance abuse; multiple personality disorder; major depression; factitious disorder; borderline personality disorder; paraphilia; and obsessive-compulsive disorder. In addition, McClelland, Mynors-Wallis, Fahy and Treasure (1991) assessed 55 individuals diagnosed with eating disorders for the presence of personality disorders and histories of child sexual abuse. Twenty-six of the 55 individuals (52%) were diagnosed with personality disorders and 15 of these individuals reported histories of child sexual abuse. Only two individuals who reported histories of child sexual abuse did not receive a diagnosis of a personality disorder. In contrast, there was no evidence that personality disorders were more common in individuals who had been raped as adults. McClelland et al. (1991) speculated that sexual abuse may be more damaging to a developing sense of self than to an integrated one.

Furthermore, the empirical literature suggests that those with a history of child sexual abuse are frequently diagnosed with cluster B personality disorders (Raczek, 1992), such as borderline personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder. Much of the research finds a specific link between a history of child sexual abuse and the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder in which severe interpersonal problems are frequently prominent (Briere & Zaidi, 1989; Bryer, Nelson, Miller, & Krol, 1987; Carmen, Reiker, & Mills, 1984; Herman, 1986; Herman, Perry, & van der Kolk, 1989; Landecker, 1992; Lobel, 1992; Ogata, Silk, Goodrich, Lohr, Westen

Despite the controversy over diagnosing individuals who have experienced child sexual abuse with personality disorders, particularly borderline personality disorder (cf., Brown, 1992; Harney, 1992; Herman, 1992; Saunders & Arnold, 1991), many of the characteristics required for a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder may be considered an extreme manifestation of maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships. For example, clinical descriptions of individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder include disturbances in five core areas: 1) affect regulation; 2) impulse control; 3) reality testing; 4) interpersonal relationships; and 5) self-concept or identity formation (Stone, 1990; Herman & van der Kolk, 1987).

Nigg, Silk, Westen, Lohr, Gold, Goodrich, & Ogata (1992) found a connection between a history of sexual abuse, borderline characteristics, and maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships (or what the authors refer to as object relations), as measured by the Early Memories Test. The Early Memories Test is a structured interview in which an interviewer asks individuals about their earliest memories, their next earliest memories, and their earliest memories of their mothers and fathers. The earliest memories chosen and reported by individuals purportedly reflect chronically activated ways of experiencing and representing the self, others and relationships.

Nigg et al. (1992) assessed the early memories of 29 individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, both those who had (21) and had not (8) been sexually abused as children. They compared these 29 individuals to 14 individuals diagnosed with major depression and to 15 individuals without psychiatric diagnoses. Four of the individuals diagnosed with major depression also reported a history of
child sexual abuse and three of the individuals with no psychiatric diagnoses reported a history of child sexual abuse. Nigg et al. (1992) found that a reported history of sexual abuse predicted the presence of malevolent representations of self, others and relationships in all groups. For example, individuals who reported a history of child sexual abuse exhibited malevolent attributions of self, others and relationships and expected emotional injury in their interpersonal interactions.

In addition, the authors suggested that individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder who had histories of child sexual abuse reported malevolent representations of self, others and relationships more often than those nonabused individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. They concluded that the malevolent representations in the earliest memories of sexually abused individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder may be partially related to a history of child sexual abuse. While the small sample size and the questionable validity of the Early Memories Test limits the conclusions that can be drawn, the results are intriguing.

A number of researchers have interviewed women about their experiences of child sexual abuse. While none of these researchers asked participants specifically about the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships, their results offer further evidence that these areas may be important to explore. For example, Armsworth (1990) interviewed 6 female incest survivors about their experiences of being sexualized and/or sexually victimized by previous therapists. Armsworth's (1990) results suggest that the women reported difficulties which were reflective of maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships formed out of experiences of child abuse. Although Armsworth (1990) argued that the therapists were solely responsible for the sexual assaults of their clients, she suggested that the victims' views of self and others seemed to make it
more difficult for them to recognize that the violations by their therapists were in fact exploitative.

First, she found that these incest victims described early environments that destroyed and/or prohibited the development of a sense of "personhood". For example, Armsworth (1990) indicated that all six subjects experienced sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abandonment, and double binds from one or both of their primary caregivers and that these abusive experiences led to, "... the formation of fragmented self and object representations, boundary disturbances, and the inability of the child to differentiate and function autonomously" (Armsworth, 1990, p. 548).

Furthermore, according to Armsworth (1990), participants described repeated experiences of depersonalization that reinforced a state of non-personhood. For example, participants did not develop a sense of self or trust in their perceptions of the world and this became an established pattern for their later interpersonal relationships. Armsworth (1990) states, "Unfortunately, relationships beyond the family of origin were continuations of the pattern to deny the subjects' personal existence. The repetition compulsion appears to be related to the trauma of the loss of a secure base.... and the patterns established as the child attempted to adapt to a hostile, depersonalizing environment" (p. 550).

Finally, the adoption of a "surrender pattern" to cope with violations was also evident in the incest survivors' accounts. Participants described continued experiences and perceptions of helplessness throughout their lives which prohibited them from acknowledging situations in which they were being violated. Components of the surrender pattern included: a) passive submission to the abuse; b) dissociation as a defense; and c) a pervasive sense of hopelessness and choicelessness regarding abusive interactions.
Despite not being questioned specifically, maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships may underline the difficulties in a sense of 'personhood', the depersonalization and the 'surrender pattern' described by Armsworth (1990). How these difficulties may have been specifically related to experiences of child sexual abuse was not explored by Armsworth (1990). Other difficulties in this study include the methodology used by Armsworth (1990). The interviews conducted by Armsworth (1990) were not audiotaped for later transcription. Rather, Armsworth (1990) based her analyses on written notes she constructed after the completion of each interview. It is not possible to evaluate how much of Armsworth's (1990) findings were based on her own or the participants' perspectives.

Other qualitative studies of the impact of sexual abuse on adult functioning were conducted by Sleeth and Barnsley (1989), Herman (1981), and Roth and Lebowitz (1988). Again, the impact of child sexual abuse on the participants' representations of self, others and relationships was not specifically investigated in any of these studies. However, many of the findings suggest that women described difficulties which seem reflective of maladaptive representations of self, others, and relationships. For example, Sleeth and Barnsley (1989) interviewed a diverse group of women ranging in ages from mid-twenties to early fifties. The authors developed a 'survivor's cycle' as a framework for presenting what the women told them about the impact of child sexual abuse. All five aspects of the cycle had implications for the women's representations of self, others and relationships. The cycle consists of the following: 1) Confusion about self, others, personal competence, self-other boundaries, and reality; 2) Self-estrangement as evidenced by the use of dissociation as a general coping strategy, feelings of powerlessness, and feelings of stigmatization; 3) Development of survival skills such as intellectualization, withdrawal, passivity, humor, helping others, acting out, escaping behaviors,
rejecting sex, seeking acceptance, and seeking control; 4) Entrapment which manifested itself in accommodating behaviors such as becoming what the abuser wanted, rejecting one's perceptions of reality in accepting the abuser's distorted perceptions, secrets, and lies, and feeling responsible for the abuse; and 5) Negative sense of self which manifested itself through self-denigrating beliefs and behaviors, feelings of loss and hopelessness, and feeling unworthy of intimate relationships.

One of the difficulties with the study by Sleeth and Barnsley (1989) is that there is no description of the method of data analyses. Although the authors developed a 'survivor's cycle' as a framework for presenting what the women told them, it is unclear how they got from the raw data to the 'survivor's cycle'. There is no way in which to evaluate the trustworthiness of the data analyses in the study by Sleeth and Barnsley (1989).

Herman (1981) interviewed 40 women who were victims of incestuous abuse as children. She questioned the women about their personal and professional lives, their families of origin, the history of the incestuous abuse, and the long-term effects of the incest. These women articulated a sense of themselves as evil, dirty, shameful, bitches, whores, and witches. They clearly felt stigmatized by the abuse and in many instances had internalized the perpetrators' views of them and the world. Some expressed feelings of being 'damaged goods', others of being 'special'. Many of the victims felt that their strength was their sexual appeal and convinced themselves that they had control over the perpetrator of their abuse rather than the reverse. For example, many suggested that it was they who seduced their fathers because of their sexual coyness and provocativeness. Despite participants not being asked specifically, these findings seem to provide evidence that child sexual abuse may have an impact on some survivors' representations of self.
In addition to the participants in Herman’s (1981) study describing difficulties which seemed reflective of maladaptive representations of self, they also described difficulties which seemed to reflect maladaptive representations of others and relationships. The women expressed feelings of isolation and difficulties trusting others. For example, many of the women suggested that they came to expect abuse and disappointment in all of their intimate relationships. This was particularly the case with their significant interpersonal relationships. Many of the survivors explained that they felt deeply betrayed by their parents. However, their descriptions of their relationships with their mothers were clearly more conflictual than those with their fathers. Although most of the survivors acknowledged that their fathers had exploited them, they felt a profound sense of abandonment and exploitation in relation to their mothers.

Finally, Roth and Lebowitz (1988) questioned seven women who were victims of sexual trauma, both intrafamilial and extrafamilial, about their experiences and how they coped. Maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships seemed to underlie many of the themes that emerged. Participants described alterations in schemas of self and the world, self-blame, isolation and alienation, helplessness, and difficulties in mother-daughter relationships. The impact of sexual abuse on participants’ representations of self, others and relationships was more evident for those who reported incestuous abuse (n=3) than those who reported extrafamilial abuse (n=4). The incest survivors reported feeling stigmatized and dirty as a result of the abuse and they frequently felt responsible for the abuse. Likewise, the incest survivors struggled with issues of trust due to being violated by their fathers. As well, unique to incest survivors was the feeling that they had been abandoned by their mothers.
Like the study by Sleeth and Barnsley (1989), there is no description of a formalized or systematic method of analyses in either Herman's (1981) or Roth and Lebowitz's (1988) study. As indicated earlier, there is no way in which to evaluate the trustworthiness of the methods of analyses employed by these researchers. In fact, Roth and Lebowitz (1988) indicated that their method of analyses was not systematic and had little reliability across raters. They indicated that they hoped that other researchers would employ more systematic methods of analyses in assessing survivors' affective experiences and cognitive schemas.

Although studies assessing the impact of child sexual abuse in adult survivors are most relevant to the present study, there are a few studies which have assessed the impact of sexual abuse on child victims that are of interest and worthy of mention. Stovall and Craig (1990) and Ornduff, Freedenfeld, Kelsey and Critelli (1994) assessed the perceptions of self and others in child victims of sexual abuse using the TAT. Stovall and Craig (1990) found no quantitative differences on the TAT between sexually and physically abused children. However, there were qualitative differences between the two groups of children that their scoring system was not sensitive enough to pick up. They offered examples of protocols from the TAT stories that suggested that there were more relationship boundary difficulties in the stories of sexually abused children and more aggressive themes in the stories of those who were physically abused. The results in the Ornduff et al. (1994) study more strongly indicate that child sexual abuse is related to the existence of maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships. However, they did not compare sexually abused children to those who were physically abused. Ornduff et al. (1994) found that the TAT protocols of sexually abused children were characterized by: 1) more primitive and simple characterizations of people; 2) more negative and punitive affect in their perceptions of the interpersonal world; 3) an inability to
invest in people and relationships in other than need-gratifying ways; and 4) an inability to make sensible attributions of self and others.

In contrast to the studies discussed above, there are others studies which have failed to find that child sexual abuse has an impact on various aspects of self. For example, Jennings and Armsworth (1992) did not find a difference in ego development, as measured by the Sentence Completion Test, between sexually abused and nonabused individuals. As well, Greenwald, Leitenberg, Cado and Tarran (1990) failed to find differences in self-esteem, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, between individuals who were sexually abused as children and those who were not. Despite low self-esteem being one of the most frequently cited symptoms associated with child sexual abuse (Briere, 1989; Courtois, 1988; Gelin, 1983), Kendall-Tackett et al. (1993) indicate that researchers have had considerable difficulty demonstrating that child sexual abuse has an impact on self-esteem. They attribute this difficulty to the types of measurements most often used to assess self-esteem. As indicated earlier, most studies employ assessment tools that measure unidimensional aspects of self, such as self-esteem. It may be that these measures do not have the complexity to adequately assess the multidimensional aspects of self that may be affected by child sexual abuse.

Finally, studies which have failed to find a relationship between child sexual abuse and variables such as self-esteem or self-concept are more often those using child and adolescent populations rather than adult populations (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; DiPietro, 1987; Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993; Wagner, 1991). It may be that children are more sensitive to appearing socially desirable and so are less likely to report difficulties with self-worth on self-report measures. Alternatively, it may be that children are less able to think abstractly about themselves and so have more difficulty completing self-report measures accurately.
There are also studies which have found that survivors of child sexual abuse do not differ significantly from other clinical groups in terms of self- and social-functioning. For example, Scott & Thoner (1986) and Meiselman (1980) found that incest survivors and nonincest survivors in therapy both showed difficulties with identity formation and interpersonal functioning, as measured by scales 4 and 8 on the MMPI. Tsai, Feldman-Summers & Edgar (1979) found that incest survivors in therapy had elevations on the MMPI which suggested difficulties with identity formation and interpersonal functioning (i.e., scales 4 and 8), whereas incest survivors not in therapy did not exhibit elevated profiles (Tsai et al., 1979). It may be that incest survivors in therapy were more able than those not in therapy to acknowledge the difficulties that they experienced as a result of the abuse. Or alternatively, it may be that those incest survivors in therapy experienced more damage as a result of the abuse than those not in therapy. It may be that those incest survivors not in therapy were simply asymptomatic.

The fact that some survivors of child sexual abuse appear to be asymptomatic is becoming more widely addressed in current literature (Finkelhor, 1990; Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993). In studies that report the numbers of asymptomatic survivors the percentages range from 21% to 49% of participants assessed (Finkelhor, 1990; Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993). Explanations for these findings include that: 1) instruments and assessments have failed to ask the right questions or have not assessed all of the appropriate symptoms; 2) individuals assessed had not yet manifested their symptoms and the manifestation of symptoms might occur at a later time when individuals were under stress or at a different time in their development; and 3) asymptomatic individuals are those who have suffered less serious abuse and have adequate psychological and social resources to cope with the stress of abuse.
In summary, some studies suggest that the difficulties exhibited by some survivors of child sexual abuse may reflect maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships while other studies either fail to support these findings or also find that individuals without histories of child sexual abuse exhibit the same symptoms or difficulties. There are difficulties with some of this research which may shed light on the mixed results (see Briere, 1992a for an overview of the methodological difficulties apparent in much of the current empirical research investigating the impact of child sexual abuse).

Critique of empirical research.

Many of the instruments employed to investigate the effects of child sexual abuse measure unidimensional aspects of self. For example, some researchers assessed self-esteem while others assessed self-concept. It is difficult to compare results of studies like this because of the focus on different aspects of self. As it currently stands, there is little precision about what the ‘self’ comprises and how it may be adequately measured in survivors of child sexual abuse (Briere & Runtz, 1993). It is likely that child sexual abuse has an impact on multiple aspects of self, such as self-esteem, self-concept, behavioral and interpersonal aspects of self which may not be adequately assessed with these paper/pencil measures. Investigating the impact of child sexual abuse on multiple aspects of self by asking survivors about their representations of self may offer a more holistic understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse than is available in the current literature.

In addition, researchers employ different measurements to assess the effects of child sexual abuse on various aspects of self- and social-functioning. For example, some researchers have assessed self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Jackson et al., 1990; Greenwald et al., 1990) and distortion in self-perception
using the Rorschach (Owens, 1984; Nash et al., 1993). Others have used the Leary Interpersonal Checklist (van Buskirk & Cole, 1983) to assess self- and ideal self-concept and interpersonal satisfaction. Still others have used structured and semi-structured interviews (Courtois, 1979; Herman, 1981) to assess survivors’ relationships. The use of different assessment tools makes it difficult to compare the results of these studies.

Furthermore, the use of self-report questionnaires or checklists which are developed to assess general psychopathology (e.g., the MMPI-II) or general psychological functioning (e.g., Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) may be inappropriate as a measure of the impact of child sexual abuse. As evident in the studies by Scott and Thoner (1986) and Meiselman (1980), two groups of people receiving services for psychological difficulties, regardless of the etiological origins of their difficulties, may not differ on a measure of general psychopathology or general psychological functioning. Roth and Lebowitz (1988) argue that the impact of child sexual abuse and coping from it are largely idiosyncratic processes shaped by many factors. General measures such as the MMPI-II or the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale may not detect those aspects of behavior or personality specifically affected by child sexual abuse. Furthermore, symptom checklists and other self-report measures do not inform us of what may underlie the particular symptomology that is reported by women who have experienced child sexual abuse.

In addition, there are many intervening variables that influence and interact with scores on dependent measures. Some of the possible intervening variables include: type of abuse experienced; relationship to perpetrator; use of force; duration of abuse; age at onset of abuse; age at disclosure; removal from the home; and social support as a child and currently (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Conte & Schuerman, 1987; Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993; Mennen & Meadow, 1994; Testa et al., 1992).
Some researchers take some of the possible intervening variables into account when investigating the impact of child sexual abuse (e.g., Briere & Runtz, 1988; Hoagwood, 1990) while others do not (e.g., Scott & Stone, 1986; Scott & Thoner, 1986). Although Scott and Thoner (1986) did not find differences between incest survivors and individuals diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, the characteristics of incest, such as type of abuse and age when first victimized, varied to a large degree across individuals in the incest group. It may be that the heterogeneity of the incest sample contributed to the lack of differences.

Finally, there are difficulties with some of the qualitative studies. These studies (Armsworth, 1990; Herman, 1981; Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989; Roth & Lebowitz, 1988) have typically employed semi-structured interviews to assess the impact of child sexual abuse. However, they are limited in terms of not employing formalized or systematic methods of data analyses. There is no way in which to evaluate the trustworthiness and validity of the methods of data analyses in these studies. There is a need for the systematic investigation of female survivors' representations of self, others, and relationships.

**Summary.**

Despite the mixed results in the current research, a large number of studies suggest that some survivors of child sexual abuse exhibit difficulties in various aspects of self- and social-functioning (e.g., self-esteem, self-concept, interpersonal satisfaction, social adjustment). It may be that the various aspects of self- and social-functioning which have been assessed are components of women's representations of self, others, and relationships. Also, results from diagnostic studies and studies in which adult survivors of child sexual abuse were interviewed about their experiences seem to suggest that some survivors of child sexual abuse
exhibit difficulties which seem reflective of maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships. Although a few studies using child samples have found that sexual abuse seems to have an impact on victims' representations of self, others and relationships, this area has not been systematically investigated with adult survivors. We need to ask women directly about how they perceive experiences of child sexual abuse to have impacted upon their representations of self, others and relationships. Beitchman et al. (1992) argue that because an adult is able to assess childhood events from a different psychological perspective than a child, understanding the adult perspective is necessary to discover the full impact of child sexual abuse.

Theoretical conceptualizations

The empirical research on the effects of child sexual abuse generally lacks a theoretical framework. This section describes three theoretical conceptualizations of self-development that may assist in understanding how child sexual abuse may impact upon women's representations of self, others and relationships. These perspectives include: psychodynamic/interpersonal; social-cognitive; and feminist. It is important to note that although these three perspectives diverge in many ways, they come to many of the same conclusions about basic human behavior and difficulties with living. Their similarities rather than their differences will be emphasized in an attempt to outline how child sexual abuse may impact upon women's representations of self, others and relationships. This discussion will end with an overview of Finkelhor and Browne's Traumagenic Dynamics Model (1988) of child sexual abuse. It is suggested that combining Finkelhor and Browne's Traumagenic Dynamics Model with the theoretical perspectives reviewed provides a rich understanding of the effects of child sexual abuse.
The literature pertaining to the construct of self is vast and complex (Cooper, 1993; Epstein, 1973; Mahoney, 1990; Putnam, 1990; Segal & Blatt, 1993; Strauman & Higgins, 1993; Westen, 1992). Many different labels are used to describe the 'self'. For example, 'self-esteem' has been used to describe affective aspects of self, while terms such as 'self-image' and 'self-concept' have been used to depict more cognitive aspects of self. Others have used behavioral descriptors in defining self, such as introversion versus extroversion. It is likely that the self includes all of these dimensions. Blatt & Bers (1993) say, "The sense of self is primarily a subjective experience; it is the locus of affective experiences (I feel), the source of a sense of agency (I do), and the basis for a sense of self-awareness and self-reflectivity (I am)" (p. 172). Putnam (1990) used the label 'self-representations' to capture the multiple aspects of self. The term representations came out of psychodynamic formulations in which it was argued that individuals develop representations about themselves, others and the interpersonal world (i.e., relationships) through early significant relationships.

All three perspectives maintain that a sense of self develops in relation to others. That is, people come to define themselves through their experiences with other people. One's sense of self is fundamentally interpersonal in nature in that one cannot develop a sense of self in the absence of others (Emde & Sameroff, 1989). For example, Sullivan (1953) argues that the individual comes to experience certain personal characteristics as belonging to the self through the reflected appraisals of others. Sameroff (1989) argues that our expectations in life are built on a lifetime of relationship experiences. As well, Stern (1985) maintains that individuals develop generalized representations of self and others based on their interactions with others. Similarly, Putnam (1990) argues that the identification with others and the internalization of others' expectations of oneself are central to the development of a sense of self. Some feminist writers call this perspective of self 'self-in-relation' (Jordan, 1991; Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1991; Surrey, 1991a; 1991b).

According to psychodynamic/interpersonal theorists, people develop representations of themselves, others and relationships through their early experiences with others, particularly significant others. Representations of self, others and relationships have been referred to as assumptive world views (Janoff-Bulman, 1989; 1992), internal working models (Bowlby, 1973; 1988), cognitive-interpersonal schemas (Safran & Segal, 1990), self-other schemas (Horowitz, 1991), theories of reality (Epstein, 1973; 1985), and cognitive schemas (McCann & Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; McCann, Pearlman, Sakheim & Abrahamson, 1988a; McCann, Sakheim & Abrahamson, 1988b), and are no longer considered the exclusive domain of psychodynamic theory.

This project used the terms representations of self, others and relationships to denote the descriptions, assumptions, expectations, wishes, beliefs and appraisals of self, others and relationships that an individual uses to process information that she
or he encounters in the world (Bowlby, 1973; 1988; Eells, Horowitz, Stinson, & Fridhandler 1993). They are the cumulative experiences of one's self in relationships with others. Representations of self, others and relationships are organizers of subjective experience in that they are avenues through which one's perceptions, interpretations, affective experiences and interactions in the world are filtered. They are also modified by the individual's experiences and are both fixed and evolving (Cooper, 1993; Blatt & Bers, 1993). Blatt and Bers (1993) say, "The experience of the self develops a fixed meaning and a continuity, but it also continues to derive meaning from the situations in which it exists" (p. 173).

All three theoretical perspectives recognize both the continuous and evolving nature of self. Theorists argue that representations of self, others and relationships influence the types of experiences encountered, while the types of experiences encountered by an individual influence the continual development of representations (Bowlby, 1973; 1988; Epstein, 1973; 1985; 1991; Janoff-Bulman, 1989; 1992; Jordan, 1991; McCann & Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; McCann et al., 1988b; Safran & Segal, 1990; Wurf & Markus, 1991).

Many of these writers rely on Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation to explain the development of self. Assimilation involves perceiving and interpreting events in the world in ways which are consistent with one's representations of self, others and relationships. This works to maintain consistency in one's representations and therefore provides predictability in dealing with the world. For example, in the process of assimilation, information that is contradictory to one's representations is modified to become consistent with the representations. Accommodation, on the other hand, involves changing one's representations of self, others and relationships to be consistent with new information that is encountered. Accommodation occurs when assimilation cannot occur such as when information is
too discrepant from one’s representations to be modified or when discrepant information has been accumulated over time.

McCann and Pearlman (1990a), authors who have integrated psychodynamic and social-cognitive theories, discuss the impact of trauma on the processes of assimilation and accommodation. They say,

Just as life experiences shape or reinforce the development of positive or negative schemas, so too can these schemas be disrupted by life experiences that are discrepant with them. In the ordinary course of one’s life, new information about the self and world is assimilated into one’s existing schemas. When a situation occurs that cannot be “fit” into existing schemas, an accommodation or change in schemas occurs. If the discrepancy between one’s existing schemas and life experiences is extreme and perceived as threatening, the event is psychologically shocking. If this discrepancy occurs within a need area that is central to the individual [e.g., intimacy], the event will be experienced as traumatic (pp. 59).

Most theorists maintain that information that is too discrepant from one’s representations of self, others and relationships will likely not be integrated. However, if it is integrated through a process of assimilation and accommodation over time, it may become lost or disintegrated when the individual is under stress (Bowlby, 1988; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McCann & Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; Wurf & Markus, 1991). This may have implications for individuals whose early representations of self, others and relationships developed in the context of experiences of child sexual abuse. For example, if an individual has accumulated experiences in which she or he was violated by a trusted and loved adult, she or he may come to develop representations which depict others as dangerous and untrustworthy and the self as unworthy of being treated with respect and dignity. It may be difficult for this individual to significantly alter these representations to fit later life situations in which she or he is exposed to people who are not dangerous and untrustworthy and to people who treat her or him with respect and dignity. Or
alternatively, when the individual is under stress, she or he may revert back to using maladaptive or restricted representations of self, others and relationships to process information. In the psychodynamic literature, this has been referred to as maladaptive interpersonal patterns or cycles (Elliott, 1994), complementary interpersonal transactions (Conway, 1987); Core-Conflictual Relationship Themes (Strupp & Binder, 1984), and cyclical psychodynamic patterns (Anchin & Keisler, 1982). Therefore, while representations of self, others and relationships continuously evolve throughout the lifespan, they may also be resistant to fundamental alterations. Their resistance to change may depend on the significance of particular experiences in the shaping of representations.

Psychodynamic/interpersonal theorists argue that adaptive and flexible representations of self, others and relationships arise out of early relationships with significant others in which sensitive caregiving has taken place (Bowlby, 1973; 1988; Sullivan, 1953). Sensitive caregiving involves the significant adult being attuned to the individual’s experience. The significant other is able to reflect this experience back to the individual in a way which conveys connection and support but also clear and firm boundaries between self and other. Maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships may result when the significant other is exploitative, inconsistent and not attuned to the individual’s experience. The individual’s experiences of reality may be overlooked or denied by the significant other. A clear sense of self reflected through the appraisals of others may not be obtained in insensitive caregiving and there may be little distinction between self and other. Child sexual abuse by a significant other in which exploitation, manipulation, inconsistency, and confused boundaries are often prominent may lead to the development of maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships.
Maladaptive representations are those that become rigid and generalized beyond the experiences from which they arose.

In addition to drawing upon psychodynamic/interpersonal theory in defining the construct of self, the social-cognitive literature is also relevant (Harter, 1990; Mahoney, 1990; Markus, 1990; Safran et al., 1990; Strauman & Higgins, 1993). According to Markus (1990), the self is a collection of self-schemas and is more accurately called a self-system. Markus (1990) said, "... the self is a multidimensional, multifaceted set of structures that plays a critical role in organizing all aspects of behavior" (p. 242). Because the self is a system, individuals are thought to hold a diverse array of representations about the self.

The idea of multiple selves, or multiple representations of self, is common in the current social-cognitive (Harter, 1990; Mahoney, 1990; Markus, 1990; Neimeyer, 1987; Strauman & Higgins, 1993) and psychodynamic (Bowlby, 1979; 1988; Eells et al., 1993; Horowitz, 1987; 1991; Westen, 1992) literature. The integration of multiple representations is considered a normal developmental achievement of late adolescence (Blasi, 1991; Harter, 1990). General consistency in self-beliefs or self-perceived attributes is considered to be necessary for the development of a coherent and unified self-concept (Strauman & Higgins, 1993; Price, 1993; 1994). In addition, although not specifically stated in the social-cognitive literature, it follows that because self-development normally occurs in the context of multiple relationships with others, individuals may also hold a diverse array of representations of others and relationships.

In making meaning from one's experiences in the world, some representations may become more focal than others, and may develop more fully. The more focal representations of self, others and relationships may constitute a core self (Markus, 1990; Safran et al., 1990; Wurf & Markus, 1991) which may be more resistant to
modification than representations that are less focal. Representations of self, others and relationships formed out of experiences of child sexual abuse may become more focal than others because of the significance of the relationship in which the abuse occurred and because of the extreme and persistent anxiety that may accompany these experiences. Again, these more focal representations may be more resistant to change than less focal ones.

The existence of multiple representations of self, others and relationships is important for the study of child sexual abuse. Traumatizing experiences, such as child sexual abuse by a significant other, may interfere with the normal developmental process of integrating multiple representations of self, others and relationships. In particular, victims of child sexual abuse may rely on defensive processes, such as splitting, dissociation, and identification with the aggressor which may impede a cohesive integration of representations of self, other and relationships (Braun, 1990; Herman, 1992). In addition, the victim who is sexually abused by a significant other, such as a father or father-figure, may have particular difficulties with integration. She or he may have difficulty integrating positive or affirming aspects and experiences of self into her or his working representations because of negative or confusing messages that are conveyed by the perpetrator or other significant people. Likewise, the individual may have never had the opportunity to experience others as benevolent or may have experienced the most significant others as malevolent, or at the very least, self-serving. These experiences may lead to the expectation that others are untrustworthy and hurtful, even when they are not. In sum, the individual who is sexually abused as a child by a significant other may not be able to incorporate information that will disconfirm her or his generalized and maladaptive representations (Price, 1993; 1994).
As mentioned earlier, McCann and colleagues (McCann & Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; McCann et al., 1988a; 1988b) integrated psychodynamic theories of self-development with social-cognitive theories in an effort to provide a way in which to understand the impact of trauma on the individual. They have referred to their theory as the Constructivist Self-Development Theory (CSDT). Consistent with psychodynamic literature, one of the basic tenets of CSDT is that the self develops in relation to others. Also consistent with psychodynamic theories, psychological needs are a central component of CSDT. According to McCann and colleagues, representations of self, others and relationships (which they refer to as self and other world views or cognitive schemas) are the manifestations of the individual’s psychological needs. There are seven central needs and they include: a meaningful frame of reference; safety; power; intimacy; independence; dependency/trust; and, esteem. According to McCann and Pearlman (1990a), the most significant psychological needs for the individual prior to the trauma are those that are most likely to be disrupted by the trauma.

Consistent with social-cognitive literature on trauma (Epstein, 1973; 1985; 1991; Janoff-Bulman, 1985; 1989; 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983), CSDT maintains that individuals have three basic assumptions about self, others and the world that are often disrupted by or interfered with when trauma is experienced. These assumptions include that: 1) the self is worthy; 2) others are benevolent; and 3) the world is meaningful. CSDT maintains that the disruption of or interference with the basic assumptions will become manifested through the individual’s cognitive schemas.

Constructivist Self-Development Theory was not developed to specifically address the effects of child sexual abuse. Rather, it is a theory that has been developed to account for responses to a variety of psychological trauma, both those
that are interpersonal in nature and those that are not. Despite its focus on trauma in general, CSDT is easily applied to the experience of child sexual abuse. As discussed earlier, the underlying salient psychological needs will determine how the impact of child sexual abuse is manifested through the individual's cognitive schemas (i.e., representations). For example, if a need for safety is core for an individual who has experienced child sexual abuse, perhaps because of earlier experiences and/or messages that the individual may have encountered, then themes of safety (i.e., one's unique vulnerability to harm; chronic, generalized anxiety about potential dangers in the world; and concerns about being unable to find a safe place within oneself or in relationships with others) may be prominent in the individual's cognitive schema after abuse. For instance, the individual may come to believe that the world is essentially unsafe (i.e., that all relationships will result in harm), that others are harmful and dangerous, and that the self is incapable of staying safe. Another example includes needs for trust/dependency. Themes consistent with needs for trust/dependency (i.e., betrayal; abandonment; being made a fool of; being disappointed by others; or being reluctant to ask for help from others) may be prominent in an individual's cognitive schema if these needs were central before sexual abuse occurred. For example, the individual may believe that she or he is unable to trust her or his own perceptions and judgments, and that others are unreliable. As may be evident from this discussion, CSDT offers a way in which to understand both the commonalties across people and the idiosyncrasies of people's responses to trauma.

Finally, some recent feminist writings also emphasize the development of self-in-relation to others (Jordan, 1991; Lyons, 1983; Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1991; Surrey, 1991a; 1991b). Like the social-cognitive and psychodynamic theorists, feminist self-in-relation theorists emphasize the existence of multiple
representations of self, others and relationships in the ongoing process of self-development (Jordan, 1991). Especially relevant to the proposed study is the postulation that women's, as opposed to men's, self-development may be more contingent on their relationships with others. In particular, empirical research suggests that women, when compared to men, may be more motivated to preserve connectedness with others in hypothetical and self-constructed moral dilemmas (Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983). The desire to preserve connectedness may have implications for women's development in dealing with child sexual abuse. For example, preserving connectedness in situations of interpersonal violation, such as child sexual abuse, may occur at the expense of self-determined development.

Preserving connectedness certainly fits with psychodynamic theory which argues that the individual's attachment to significant others, including the perpetrator, often makes it difficult for her or him to recognize that she or he has been violated and that the responsibility for the abuse lies with the adult (Price, 1993; 1994). Given that the proposed study is a study involving the investigation of the representations of self, others and relationships in women who have been sexually abused as children, theories regarding women's self-development are particularly relevant.

Surrey (1991a) argues that self-development for women may occur through a process she calls 'relationship-differentiation'. This is a process involving increased levels of complexity, choice, fluidity and articulation in the context of human relationships (Surrey, 1991a). The emphasis is on self-growth within the context of relationships. According to Surrey (1991a), through a relationship-differentiation process individuals are encouraged and challenged to maintain connection with others and, at the same time foster, adapt to, and change with the growth of the other. Therefore, as individuals develop, they do not separate from
their relationships, rather they change the form and content of their relationships in ways which affirm their own development.

In situations of child sexual abuse, it may be that the process of relationship-differentiation for women may be impaired. The core relationships in which the individual defines herself may not be conducive to her self-development and may impede the relationship-differentiation process. For example, the individual's relationship with the perpetrator may continuously require her to give more than she receives. It may force her to neglect her own needs so that the needs of the perpetrator can be met. Likewise, other significant people, such as her mother, siblings, teachers or grandparents may be invested in maintaining the status quo for a variety of reasons and may, often inadvertently, overlook her needs in the process. Consequently, although she may learn how to meet the needs of the perpetrator and others, she may not learn how to meet her own needs within these relationships in self-affirming ways. As a result, her sense of self may become determined by the needs and wishes of others to a point at which she no longer recognizes her own needs and wishes. This process of becoming increasingly other-determined is similar to the conceptualization of the effects of child sexual abuse outlined by Summit (1983).

With respect to the impact of child sexual abuse on women's self-development, there is some theoretical literature which suggests that it is likely that women and men respond differently to experiences of child sexual abuse. Janoff-Bulman (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1987) postulates that men's self-identity as men may be more impaired by experiences of child sexual abuse than women's self-identity as women. She argues that our cultural beliefs regarding the experience of sexual victimization are antithetical to our cultural stereotypes about what constitutes masculinity. Therefore, according to Janoff-Bulman (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1987), men, as opposed to women, are
likely to have more difficulty integrating experiences of sexual violation into their views of themselves as men because of this discrepancy. Likewise, she argues that the homosexual element that men are faced with when a perpetrator is male adds another dimension of confusion that is likely to cause them difficulty when attempting to integrate their experiences of sexual abuse into their views of themselves as men. Thus, according to Janoff-Bulman (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1987), because beliefs about sexual victimization and our cultural stereotypes of femininity are less discrepant than beliefs about sexual victimization and our cultural stereotypes of masculinity, women should have a less difficult time than men integrating their experiences of sexual victimization into their views of themselves as women. Likewise, they are not as likely as men to encounter the confusion regarding their sexual orientation when the perpetrator is male.

Finkelhor and Browne's Traumagenic Dynamics Model

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand the impact of trauma (Briere, 1992b; Epstein, 1985; 1991; Finkelhor & Browne, 1988; Herman, 1992; Horowitz, 1986; McCann & Pearman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; McCann et al., 1988a; 1988b; Summit, 1983). However, only a few of these have specifically addressed the impact of child sexual abuse (e.g., Finkelhór & Browne, 1988; Summit, 1983). Of these, Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) Traumagenic Dynamics Model is the most widely discussed. It outlines four effects that account for many of the behavioral and psychological difficulties, such as self-harm, depression, feelings of low self-worth, and promiscuity, that are commonly reported by some survivors of child sexual abuse. An overview of the Traumagenic Dynamics Model will be offered to demonstrate how this model can be used to further our understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self,
others and relationships. My discussion of Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) model will incorporate ideas from the theoretical literature on self-development outlined above.

Finkelhor and Browne (1988) reduce the effects of child sexual abuse into four core areas: traumatic sexualization; betrayal; powerlessness; and stigmatization. They suggest that the traumagenic dynamics "...alter a child's cognitive and emotional orientation to the world, and thus create trauma by distorting a child's self-concept, world views, and affective capacities....When children attempt to cope with the world through these distortions, it may result in many of the problems commonly noted in victims of sexual abuse" (Finkelhor & Browne, 1988, p. 62).

Finkelhor and Browne (1988) suggested that traumatic sexualization may be a process through which the child's sexuality is shaped in developmentally inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional ways. Traumatic sexualization may result in an impact on sexual behavior, such as promiscuity, sexual anxiety, and low sexual esteem. The impact that child sexual abuse may have on the survivor's representations of self, others and relationships through the process of traumatic sexualization is evident. For example, if a survivor of child sexual abuse was valued by the perpetrator only for her sexuality, she may develop representations of self that reflect this exaggerated emphasis on her sexuality. Her ability to sexually please someone may become a central self-defining feature and she may then interact with others in highly sexualized ways. Likewise, she may come to develop generalized representations of others and relationships that are based on a need and demand for sexual pleasure. Particularly if the perpetrator was male, the survivor may come to perceive all men as wanting and demanding sex from women and all women as
providers of these demands. Sexual revictimization may be related to these beliefs of self, others and relationships.

The second traumagenic dynamic is that of betrayal. A sense of betrayal may occur when the child discovers that someone on whom she or he depends has wronged her or him and caused her or him harm. The child may experience a sense of betrayal not only in relation to the perpetrator but also in relation to other family members and friends who may have been unwilling or unable to protect the child, or who failed to believe the child. As a result, the survivor of child sexual abuse may develop representations of herself as unworthy of protection or support and of others as unable to provide protection or support. She or he may regard relationships with others as avenues through which she or he is betrayed, violated, or overlooked. As a result of these representations of self, others and relationships, survivors may have a difficult time developing healthy relationships and connections with others in which these beliefs could be disconfirmed. Finkelhor and Browne (1988) suggest that a sense of betrayal in relation to significant others may result in feelings of depression, dependency, anger, and an impaired ability to trust and to judge the trustworthiness of others.

Third, Finkelhor and Browne (1988) postulated that a sense of powerlessness may occur as a result of the child feeling that her or his will, desires, sense of efficacy, and perceptions of the world are continually contravened. The child's personal space and territory may be repeatedly invaded through experiences of child sexual abuse and may leave her or him with a sense of powerlessness and loss of self-control. Feelings of powerlessness may invade the child's sense of herself as someone who can have an impact on the world, and someone who has some control over the experiences she encounters. As a result, she may develop representations of self as ineffectual or impotent. Likewise, she may develop representations of others as all
powerful and omnipotent. Finkelhor and Browne (1988) suggest that a sense of powerlessness may result in feelings of fear and anxiety, a lowered sense of self-efficacy, perception of the self as a victim, and an identification with the aggressor in an attempt to gain some power and a sense of control.

Finally, an experience of stigmatization may result when negative connotations around the abuse are communicated to the child by the perpetrator, other family members, friends, teachers, and society at large. The child may begin to incorporate these negative connotations into her or his sense of self by feeling different from others, 'spoiled', or inherently seductive and provocative. Her or his representations of self may reflect the incorporation of these negative messages about self. Kendall-Tackett et al (1993) say, "... stigmatization covers all the mechanisms that undermine the child's positive self-image: the shame that is instilled, the ostracism the child suffers, and the negative stereotypes that are acquired from the culture and immediate environment" (p.174). In turn, she or he may develop representations of others as judgmental and harsh. She or he may regard relationships with others as unsafe. According to Finkelhor and Browne (1988), stigmatization may result in long-term effects such as guilt, poor self-esteem, a sense of differentness or isolation, and secondary problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, criminal involvement, and suicidal ideation or attempts.

**Summary.**

In summary, there are many theoretical frameworks that can be drawn upon to understand the impact that child sexual abuse may have on women's representations of self, others and relationships. These frameworks can be drawn from the fields of interpersonal psychology (Anchin & Keisler, 1982; Sullivan, 1953), developmental psychology (Emde & Sameroff, 1989; Stern, 1985), social-cognitive psychology
(Harter, 1990; Markus, 1990), feminist psychology (Root, 1992; Surrey, 1991a; Jordan, 1991) and trauma psychology (Donaldson & Gardner, 1985; Janoff-Bulman, 1989; 1992). The integration of many of these perspectives is evident in the works of some theorists in their attempts to understand the impact of trauma on individuals' representations of self, others and relationships (McCann & Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; Epstein, 1973; 1985; 1991; Horowitz, 1991). Combining the foregoing theoretical perspectives with Finkelhor and Browne's Traumagenic Dynamics Model provides a rich understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others and relationships.

Present Study

This study investigated the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others and relationships by interviewing women who experienced this kind of interpersonal trauma. The research reviewed suggests that the investigation of female survivors' representations of self, others and relationships is likely to be fruitful. However, examination of the current research also reveals that many of the measurements, methodologies and conceptual constructs employed to investigate the impact of child sexual abuse may not be adequate. For example, current research has typically employed symptom checklists and other self-report questionnaires to assess the effects of child sexual abuse. The self-report questionnaires and checklists often used are general measures of psychological difficulties (e.g., MMPI, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) and may not be specific enough to capture the effects of child sexual abuse.

In addition, these self-report questionnaires and checklists do not seem to offer an understanding of what may underlie particular effects of child sexual abuse. For instance, two incest survivors may both score high on scales measuring depression
and self-harm behaviors. However, an understanding of the ways in which depression and self-harm behaviors developed for each of the women is not provided with these measurements. Understanding the development of psychological difficulties reported by women who have been sexually abused and the meanings they assign to these difficulties is essential for interpretation of research data.

Furthermore, self-report questionnaires have been used to assess constructs such as self-concept, self-esteem, and interpersonal difficulties in survivors of child sexual abuse. Some incest survivors score high on these measures, others do not. These measurements tend to assess only unidimensional aspects of self, such as self-concept or self-esteem and so do not typically provide a holistic look at the effects of child sexual abuse.

Finally, there is a body of research that has employed qualitative methodologies to investigate the impact of child sexual abuse. A review of this research suggests that these methods seem more appropriate for investigating the specific aspects of the effects of child sexual abuse than nomothetic methods of investigation. Despite not systematically investigating survivors' representations of self, others and relationships, results from these studies suggest that the core of difficulties reported by many women who have experienced child sexual abuse seem to be reflective of maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships. However, these studies tend not to analyze the interview data obtained in any systematic manner. Many have relied on clinical impressions (Herman, 1981; Roth & Lebowitz, 1988). There is a need for the systematic investigation of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others, and relationships.

Given that the research exploring the impact of child sexual abuse may not have asked the right questions of survivors (i.e., measurements and methodologies have not been adequate in assessing the multidimensional effects of child sexual abuse),
descriptions of the impact of sexual abuse from the perspectives of people who have experienced this kind of interpersonal trauma seems necessary. In addressing the gaps in the current literature, the present study employed a phenomenological method to explore women's understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships. A phenomenological method of investigation was considered the most appropriate for this investigation because it afforded descriptions from the participants themselves (Giorgi, 1970; 1985; Klein & Westcott, 1994; Osborne, 1994). One of the fundamental assumptions underlying phenomenological methods of investigation includes that people can talk about their own experiences and that there is an inherent value to learning about people's experiences from their own perspectives (Giorgi, 1970; 1985; Klein & Westcott, 1994; Osborne, 1994).

Thus, the goals of this study were to stay as close as possible to the women's words and to utilize minimal levels of interpretation. Essentially, I set out to obtain rich, descriptive accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others, and relationships. Another one of the aims of the study was to confirm existing theories about the impact of child sexual abuse rather than to formulate new theory.

A semi-structured interview was developed. Four areas were explored in the interviews and these include: 1) the women's representations of self, others and relationships; 2) the women's perceptions of how child sexual abuse impacted upon their representations; 3) any changes in the women's representations since the time of the abuse and their understandings of these changes; and 4) the women's perceptions of the role of therapy in their understanding of how child sexual abuse impacted upon their representations.
The semi-structured interview was developed on the basis of empirical and clinical literature which suggests that many of the difficulties reported by survivors of child sexual abuse reflect maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships. The interview was designed to assess multiple aspects of self, such as self-concept, self-esteem, and interpersonal/behavioral aspects of self as well as multiple aspects of survivors' representations of others and relationships. Given that self-development occurs in the context of relationships with others and given that child sexual abuse as it is defined in this paper occurs within the context of significant interpersonal relationships, it seemed particularly important to investigate survivors' representations of others and relationships. Little empirical work has examined survivors' representations of others and relationships. Obtaining descriptive accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others and relationships enabled a more thorough understanding of the development of symptoms and difficulties than is available in much of the current research.

The methodology in the current study also enabled an investigation of the changing nature of representations as well as the changing impact of sexual abuse. This is in contrast to other research which most often offers a snap-shot view of the impact of child sexual abuse. Individuals' representations of self, others and relationships evolve over time (Jordan, 1991). On the basis of current experience, people redefine who they are and who others are in light of past and ongoing experiences. As women encounter new experiences and developmental challenges, they construct and reconstruct a sense of themselves and others in light of their experiences of child sexual abuse. It is likely that through this process the impact of the abuse changes. Changes in participants' representations since the time of the abuse and their understanding of these changes were explored in the interview.
It is important to note that the women who participated in the study were in therapy. Recruiting participants in therapy was necessary because of the painful memories and associations that may have been revisited. By selecting participants in therapy, we could ensure that they had a safe environment in which to work through distressing feelings if necessary (Herman, 1981). Of course, this presents some methodological limitations. For example, Stiles (1991) cautions researchers investigating clinical phenomenon with individuals in therapy about the possibility that participants may merely reiterate their therapists’ views. Also, this limits the ability to generalize the findings of this study to women who have experienced child sexual abuse but who are not in therapy.

In response to Stiles (1991), it is likely that survivors’ perceptions of the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships have been influenced by exposure to various sources of information regarding child sexual abuse. Participation in therapy around issues of sexual abuse may be one avenue through which survivors’ perceptions may have been influenced. Likewise, many other factors, such as sexual abuse media coverage, self-help groups focusing on issues of child sexual abuse, popular psychology literature on sexual abuse, and so on, have likely influenced survivors’ perceptions of the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships. However, the extent to which one can or would want to control these variables is debatable. Even if all these factors could be controlled, one would run the risk of decontextualizing the phenomenon of investigation (Giorgi, 1970; 1985).

To address Stiles’ (1991) concerns, participants were asked about their understanding of how participation in therapy influenced their perceptions of the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships. Also, the primary purpose of this study was not to generalize to a
broader group of women who experienced child sexual abuse. Rather, its primary purpose was to investigate in rich descriptive detail how child sexual abuse may impact some survivors' representations of self, others and relationships. As well, it is hoped that the findings from this study will point to future areas of exploration that may be helpful in understanding the impact of child sexual abuse.

There is recent recognition that child sexual abuse often occurs with other forms of abuse and family dysfunction (Briere, 1992a; 1992b). As a result, there is controversy in the literature about how other forms of abuse and/or family dysfunction may affect outcome independent of, or in interaction with, child sexual abuse (Nash et al., 1993; Briere & Elliott, 1993). In an attempt to construct a more complete understanding of the experience of child sexual abuse, the current study also inquired about other types of abuse experienced by participants as well as the familial and socioeconomic environments in which they lived as children and as adults. This information was gathered in a questionnaire. In addition, information about the details of the sexual abuse such as, relationship of perpetrator, number of perpetrators, and age at abuse, was gathered through this questionnaire. Information about the details of the sexual abuse was gathered in a questionnaire rather than in the interview so that the participants would not have to discuss details of the abuse with the researcher if they did not wish to.

Finally, in addition to the semi-structured interview and questionnaire, a feedback meeting was conducted in which the participants gave me feedback about the accuracy of my understanding of their thoughts and descriptions given in the initial interview. A narrative was written for each woman based on the information obtained in the initial interview. The narrative outlined each woman's understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse on her representations of self, others and relationship and was given to each woman to read before the feedback meeting. Conducting a
feedback meeting is consistent with other qualitative researchers (Rennie, 1994; Schneider, 1990) who argue that obtaining participants' feedback about the accuracy with which the researcher has reconstructed their experience is a way of addressing the trustworthiness of the data analyses.

Based on the clinical and empirical research, the following findings were expected to emerge from this study: 1) women would describe negative effects of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships; 2) the reported effects would echo the traumagenic dynamics outlined by Finkelhor and Browne (1988); and 3) there would be evidence that the women's representations of self, others and relationships became generalized beyond the experiences of child sexual abuse and that this would be seen in their descriptions of maladaptive interpersonal patterns at later developmental periods.
2. METHOD

Participants

Seven female survivors of child sexual abuse participated in the study. The women ranged in age from 21 to 52 years. The women were recruited from outpatient mental health facilities. Therapists were given a list of inclusion/exclusion criteria and invited participation by women who met the criteria. See Appendix A for the inclusion/exclusion criteria. All the women had participated in group and/or individual therapy for issues related to child sexual abuse. Only one woman participated in therapy as a child regarding issues of child sexual abuse.

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of child sexual abuse by significant males figures on the women's representations of self, others and relationships. Thus, all of the women had atleast one perpetrator who was a significant male figure. All of the women indicated that their relationships with this perpetrator were important or very important to them. All but one of the women reported being sexually abused as children by multiple perpetrators. Generally, the other perpetrators were male. However, one woman reported being sexually abused by an older sister and one woman was sexually abused by a group of children which included both females and males.

Six of the women were Caucasian and one was of Aboriginal descent. Six of the women had some post secondary education. Two of the women were attending university at the time of the interview; two of the women worked full-time in professional and semi-professional occupations; one woman was temporarily unemployed due to an injury; one woman was on leave from a full-time job due to issues regarding the sexual abuse as well as career decisions; and, one woman was on disability allowance for ill health.
The women rated themselves on socio-economic status categories which ranged from extreme poverty to upper class. Three of the women reported their socio-economic status as middle class; three reported lower-middle class status; and one reported extreme poverty.

**Materials**

**Interview.**

A semi-structured interview, styled after numerous researchers (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Minister, 1991; Mishler, 1986; Moustakas, 1988; Oakley, 1981) was used to investigate participants' representations of self, others and relationships. These researchers emphasize the importance of the interview being a collaborative effort between the interviewer and participant in the pursuit of understanding the participant's phenomenological experience. They suggest that the interview be an environment in which both the interviewer and participant learn about the topic of interest. This occurs through the interviewer facilitating the participant's willingness to tell her or his "story". The participant is regarded as the expert on her or his experience and the interviewer does not impose her or his biases and views of the topic on the participant.

The interview serves as a tool through which the participant's voice can be heard (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Mishler, 1986; Moustakas, 1988; Oakley, 1981; Stiles, 1991).

Clearly understanding the women's individual experiences from their perspectives was an objective I carried with me throughout the interviews (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Moustakas, 1988; Oakley, 1981). This involved the participant having control over the flow and content of the interview within the confines of the general areas of interest (Mishler, 1986). Specifically, I adopted an inductive, person-centered approach in
interviewing participants in the hopes of not imposing my views and preconceived notions (Belenky et al., 1986; Moustakas, 1988). I developed a positive and empathic relationship with each of the participants so that an environment which was conducive to the discussion of these sensitive issues was created.

The specific areas of inquiry explored with all participants included: 1) representations of self, others and relationships; 2) the impact of child sexual abuse on these representations; 3) changes in these areas over time and participants' understanding of these changes; and 4) the influence of therapy on the participants' perceptions of the impact of child sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships. These questions were formulated by myself after a thorough reading of the literature. See Appendix B for these questions.

Pilot interviews were conducted with two individuals who were not participants in the study. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to get an idea as to whether the questions used to guide the interviews were questions which could be answered. Both of the pilot interviewees indicated that they found the questions to be thought-provoking and, although sometimes difficult to answer, answerable nonetheless. Some revisions were made to the set of questions through feedback from the pilot interviewees and from colleagues in research meetings. The revisions included changes in the use of language rather than changes in specific content areas.

The interviews were guided by the information given by the participants in each of the four areas. That is, the content of each of the interviews varied depending on the information provided within each of these four areas. For example, in addition to the predetermined areas of inquiry, questions which facilitated the women's unique accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse were asked to obtain full and contextual descriptions. Efforts were made to ensure that the words exchanged between myself and the participants had the same meanings. I attempted to achieve this through active listening,
probing for clarification, and paraphrasing throughout the interview (Moustakas, 1988; Schneider, 1990; McCracken, 1988). I listened for key terms used by each participant and prompted the participant to say more about them. I used 'planned probes', as outlined by McCracken (1988), to facilitate and obtain clarification. For instance, 'contrast prompts' were employed to facilitate the participants' descriptions. Contrast prompts are questions contrasting two words, phrases, ideas, or experiences that were offered by the participants (e.g., what is the difference between feeling different as a child and feeling different as an adult?). They provided the possibility for a more thorough understanding of the meanings that participants attached to certain words, phrases, or experiences.

In addition, participants were sometimes asked to recall exceptional incidents of a particular experience (McCracken, 1988). For example, requests such as, 'Tell me about a time when you were able to reach out to others in times of need' were used during the interviews. Exceptional incident questions allowed me to understand participants' assumptions, expectations, and experiences more thoroughly. And finally, general prompts such as those frequently used in psychotherapy were used extensively. For example, requests and questions such as 'Tell me more about that', 'What does/did that mean to you?', 'What was/is that like for you?' were used to facilitate the participants' discussions. Each of the initial interviews took approximately 2 1/2 to 4 hours to complete. See Appendix C for excerpts of an interview with one of the participants.

Abuse and Life Circumstance Questionnaire.

The Abuse and Life Circumstance Questionnaire was modified from Conte and Schuerman's (1987) questionnaire on the impact of child sexual abuse. It included questions regarding age at abuse, age at disclosure if disclosure occurred, consequence of disclosure to survivor and perpetrator, age of perpetrator, relationship of survivor and
perpetrator, and other familial and sociocultural variables that may have influenced the response to the trauma. See Appendix D for a copy of this questionnaire.

The purpose of the Abuse and Life-Circumstance Questionnaire was to obtain information about the characteristics of the sexual abuse without each participant having to go into specific details of the actual abuse during the interview. This enabled the participants to talk more about the impact of the abuse rather than describing specific details of the abuse during the interview.

**Procedure**

After having agreed to make the study known to some of their clients, therapists in various community mental health clinics were given a list of inclusion/exclusion criteria to aid them in choosing potential participants who may be appropriate for the study. I discussed this list with the therapists and answered any questions. I also gave the therapists a description of the study to give to those individuals who may have been interested in participating. This described the purpose of the study and what participation would involve. Potential participants had the option of calling me directly or leaving their phone numbers with their therapists so that I could call them.

When I spoke with potential participants, they were again informed that the purpose of the study was to investigate how women who have experienced child sexual abuse think this experience has influenced their views of themselves and others. They were informed that the study would consist of two meetings: one in which they would be interviewed, and one in which they would be given the opportunity to give me feedback about my summary of their thoughts and descriptions. They were informed that the second meeting would be an opportunity for them to disagree with or elaborate on my understanding of their experience. They were informed that the two meetings would take place in a location in which they felt comfortable, such as their homes, my research
office, or an office in the mental health clinic at which they were receiving services. Potential participants were informed that they could terminate their participation in the study at any time without consequences and that all information shared would be confidential. I answered any questions or concerns they had regarding participation in the study. Those who decided to participate were required to read and sign an informed consent form for participation in the study. See Appendix E for a copy of the form used to obtain informed consent for participation in the study.

Upon meeting me for the initial interview, participants were offered a choice as to whether they would like to have their first names used in the final manuscript or whether they would prefer to use a pseudonym. This is in keeping with qualitative and feminist researchers (Mishler, 1986; Schneider, 1990). Qualitative researchers recommend giving participants the choice of using their first names as a way of making the research more collaborative. Mishler (1986) argues that strict adherence to standard rules of confidentiality may deny participants the right and desire to be identified by their first names. Giving participants a choice as to whether to use their real name or a pseudonym in the written manuscript is also in keeping with literature in the area of child sexual abuse. For example, some clinical researchers have given participants this choice as a way in which they can speak out and make their experiences known. That is, some women who experienced child sexual abuse feel that having their first names appear in the final manuscript is a way in which they can ‘tell the secret’ which they were sworn to keep as children. On the other hand, many survivors of child sexual abuse choose to use a pseudonym as a way in which they can continue to protect themselves from possible risks (Bass & Davis, 1988).

It was explained to the participants that whether they chose to use their first names or a pseudonym was a personal choice and would have no bearing on their participation in the study. The participants were fully informed about the potential
risks in having their first names used in the final manuscript. For example, the possible implications of the perpetrator(s) or others having access to the information was discussed with them. Also, the fact that they cannot change their decision to have their first names used in the final manuscript once it is printed was discussed with them. They were given the option of waiting until the feedback session to sign the informed consent form regarding name usage so that they could think about the possible implications of this decision. Also, before printing off the final manuscript, participants were given the opportunity to change their decision with respect to name usage. See Appendix F for the informed consent form regarding name usage in the final manuscript.

Finally, during the initial meeting, each participant was given the choice to fill out the Abuse and Life Circumstance Questionnaire by themselves or with their therapists. They were also given the option of having their therapists fill out the questionnaire on their behalf. Participants who chose to fill out the Abuse and Life-Circumstance Questionnaire by themselves were mailed a copy of the questionnaire after the initial interviews had been completed. All but two of the participants chose to fill out the questionnaire by themselves. Two of the participants chose to have their therapists complete the questionnaire. There were some questions that their therapists could not answer and the participants assisted them by providing this information. See Appendix G for the informed consent form regarding the Abuse and Life Circumstance Questionnaire.

*Initial Interview.*

All but one participant chose to meet in my research office. One participant asked to meet at her home. Interviews began with questions regarding participants' current life circumstances and general demographic information. This enabled a
working relationship to be established between the participants and myself before the more focused discussion of the impact of sexual abuse followed. It also provided a current contextual perspective in which to place participants' responses. The guided interview questions discussed above as well as specific questions regarding the individual's particular experience(s) of child sexual abuse ensued. With the consent of all participants, the initial interviews were audiotaped so that they could be transcribed verbatim at a later time.

After the initial interview was completed and analyzed, a narrative was written for each participant based on each participant's understanding of how the experience(s) of child sexual abuse impacted upon her representations of herself, others and her relationships. This narrative was given to the participants in preparation for the second meeting in which they were requested to give me feedback about my reconstruction of their experience(s).

**Feedback meeting.**

Feedback meetings took approximately 1 to 3 1/2 hours to complete. Participants were given a choice to receive the narrative a few days in advance of our second meeting or to read it upon meeting me for the second time. One individual reported that she was quite depressed at the time the feedback meeting was to take place. Therefore, I decided not to give her the option of receiving the narrative ahead of time. In the event that the narrative may have caused her undue distress, I felt more comfortable having her read it while I waited in an adjoining room. In total, three women read the narrative while I waited in an adjoining room and four women were given a copy of the narrative to read in their homes a few days prior to our arranged second meeting.
When they met in their homes or upon meeting me, they were inclined to give feedback that was given to me, and they were widely reading and thoroughly into completing their feedback, using as much time as they required. The feedback was then used in the

When the participants were read their immediate reactions; at this point, they were presented with their experiences, concerns, and disagreements for discussion in the second session (1990). Participants were informed that the sexual abuse(s) they experienced were audiotaped.

One part of her narrative, related to her history of sexual abuse, was read through to her immediate reactions. As she related to the information she read, she spontaneously asked questions derived
Whether the participants chose to read the narrative before hand in their homes or upon meeting me did not seem to have an impact on the amount or quality of feedback that was given about the narrative. For those who read the narrative upon meeting me, they were instructed to come and get me in an adjoining room when they were finished reading and writing comments. In this way, they were not rushed or pressured into completing the task within a certain period of time. They were given as much time as they required. At their request, I met two of the participants in their homes for the feedback meeting and the remaining five in my research office.

The general instructions for reading the narrative included having the participants read through the narrative twice: once quickly to jot down immediate reactions; and once more slowly to assess whether the narrative accurately represented their experiences. The participants were asked to write down any comments, concerns, disagreements and/or elaborations to what they had read in the narrative for discussion in the second meeting. This feedback procedure is in keeping with Schneider (1990).

Participants were also asked to assess whether what I concluded was an impact of the sexual abuse was actually an impact of the sexual abuse and not some other experience(s). With the consent of the participants, all the feedback meetings were audiotaped.

One participant was not able to complete the task requested of her in the narrative instructions. She was experiencing some personal difficulties, not related to her history of sexual abuse. This prevented her from slowly and thoroughly reading the narrative to point out errors, disagreements, clarifications and/or elaborations. She read through the narrative once quickly before meeting me to discuss her immediate reactions. As well, I gathered some additional information which was relevant to the information that I had gathered in the first interview. Although she did not spontaneously comment in detail on the narrative, her responses to questions derived
from my reading of the interview were elaborative and suggested that I had stayed close
to her experience.

The feedback meetings with the remaining participants involved myself and each
woman discussing any questions, comments, disagreements and/or elaborations that she
had after reading the narrative. Also, I used the feedback meeting as an opportunity to
gather more information relevant to what I obtained in the initial interview. Therefore,
the questions that I asked each participant were unique and based on her individual data.
In most cases the questions served to clarify ambiguous information. As well, they
enabled me to explore in more depth areas that were central to the individual's
representations of self, others, and relationships.

I used Alexander's (1988) identifiers of salience to guide me in constructing
additional questions for the feedback sessions. These identifiers of salience include:
primacy (the first bit of information that the participant shares after each question);
uniqueness (information that the participant relays as unique or unusual, or
information that is not necessarily identified as unusual by the participant but seems
unusual or out of the ordinary as compared to the other participants); negation
(information that the participant indicates is unimportant when it appears quite central
to the discussion); emphasis (information that is directly emphasized as important by
the participant); omission (information that is left out from the discussion but that
seems important and central for the flow of the discussion); incompletion (information
that is left incomplete by the participant); and finally, inconsistency (information
offered which is inconsistent, incongruent, or in conflict with previous or later
information offered by the participant).
**Method of Analyses**

A content analysis was done. The steps taken were guided by Schneider's (1990) thematic analyses. First, all of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself or a hired transcriber. After the interviews were transcribed, I read through them while listening to the audiotapes to correct for any errors and to insert words that were not heard in the initial transcription. For those sections of audiotapes that were difficult to hear, I persisted in trying to decipher the words a total of three times. If I was unable to decipher the word(s) after a third try, I marked the inaudible sections with the letters 'ch' (i.e., cannot hear). Many of the women were able to provide missed word(s) in the feedback session. Also, most of the inaudible sections of the interviews consisted of one or a few words and it was generally not difficult to decipher the meanings of these sections. Participant feedback suggested that I had accurately interpreted these phrases.

Initially, I read through the interviews several times to identify excerpts relevant to representations of self, others and relationships. In an effort to retain clarity of meaning in the data, excerpts could contain one or several meaning units. A meaning unit consisted of a sentence or group of sentences in which the individual talked about her views of herself, others, or herself in relationships. Because there was sometimes more than one meaning unit in each excerpt, one excerpt could be coded into the self, others, and/or relationships categories. That is, an excerpt could be coded into all categories of self, others, and relationships but for different reasons. For example, the following excerpt was coded into the self and relationships categories: "I wasn't allowed to make mistakes and I wasn't allowed to do anything wrong and if I admitted to it then there was something wrong with me. So I was one of those people who had to be right about everything... [what did it mean to not be prefect?] It meant that I wouldn't be loved or cared for and it meant that I wasn't good enough, that people wouldn't like me."
For this woman, her high standards for herself seemed related to her feelings of low self-worth and this part of the excerpt was coded into the self category. In turn, her feelings of low self-worth seemed related to her belief that she was not good enough in relation to other people and this part of the excerpt was coded into the relationships category.

References to self involved the individual talking about herself, including such things as self-concept, self-awareness, self-esteem, and behavioral manifestations of self. References to self often included values, assumptions, beliefs, and affective experiences of and involving the self. Some examples of meaning units coded into the self category include the following: "I was just convinced that there...had to be something wrong with me. I was eleven years old and I thought I was simply a sexy little girl...I couldn't understand why this kept happening. I must have been doing something wrong"; and "...As a result of being abused I grew up believing myself to be dirty, ugly, and...I believed that I had no skills. I believed I didn't have the right to be alive. I believed I was stupid. I grew up with a lot [of these beliefs] and...I still struggle with a lot of stuff."

See Appendix H for more examples of meaning units coded under the self category.

References to others involved assumptions, expectations, wishes, beliefs and appraisals of the participant regarding the thoughts, feelings, intentions, values, beliefs and behavior of others. These included references to specific others (i.e., mother, father) as well as generalized others (i.e., all men, all people). Some examples of meaning units coded into the others category include the following: "Men [were] these people who just thought about sex and that was it. [They] had no regard for people's feelings and [they] treated them like objects"; and "I grew up believing that other people could not be trusted and I could not defend myself and...I believed that other people did not have my best interests at heart and...they had control over me." Both of these examples include references to the participants' generalized views of others.
Examples of references to specific others include the following: "At that point I loathed and detested him [her father] anyways for being such a critical man and such a racist! ...A real superficial guy"; and "I've got friends that have been....[like] this guy that sat and said, 'I like you Marilyn', he's been such a good friend....He's always been really supportive of me". References to specific others were used in the analyses only if: a) they became generalized to the participant's views of all others; b) they influenced her later relationships in maladaptive ways; and c) they were somehow connected to the participant's healing process. See Appendix I for more examples of meaning units coded as references to others.

References to relationships involved descriptions of the participant-in-relationships (e.g., "I was a rescuer in my relationships with others"); and "I surround myself with people who will validate my feelings"). A number of cues were used to identify these meaning units. For example, a conjunction (e.g., if, because, and) was sometimes used or implied in the meaning units involving references to relationships (e.g., "[I believed that] if I show people this horrible stuff {about me}...they are going to think I'm bad"). Also, it was often difficult to conceptually disentangle representations of self from representations of others in the meaning units coded into the relationships category (e.g., "I honestly believed too for a long, long time, that you simply had to do that {have sex} to maintain a relationship....It was a duty...You paid your dues that way. You had to do that or no man would ever stay with you at all..."."). References to relationships could be cognitive, affective, or behavioral descriptions. Likewise, they often included values, assumptions, and beliefs of and involving the self-in-relationships. Some examples of meaning units coded into the relationships category include: "I remember saying things like, 'Don't even try hurting me because I will get you before you think about it!'....I was so...defensive...I was waiting for someone to hurt me....I was just waiting for the bomb to fall"; and "I could be used and abused....I

The narratives contain two sections: 1) representations of self; and 2) representations of others and relationships. A decision was made to combine representations of others and relationships in the narrative because the meaning units for each often conveyed redundant information. This increased readability of the narratives. In addition, there is a subsection in the narratives that includes experiences which were pivotal to the changes in the women's representations of themselves, others and relationships. Finally, at the beginning of each narrative, there is a small section outlining the type and duration of sexual abuse experienced as well as other information relevant to placing the interview data into the context of the participant's past and present life. This information was obtained from the Abuse and Life-Circumstance Questionnaire outlined above.

After the narratives were complete, a summary of the dominant themes across narratives was developed. The summary provides the reader with an overview of the dominant themes regarding impact that were found across the women and how these dominant themes were manifest across women. The first step in the summary analysis involved reading through the narratives and meaning units for each woman another time. For each narrative I wrote an outline summarizing its content. Next, I constructed a large summary chart which consisted of general outlines of the narratives of all women. While developing this chart, I began to develop the summary of dominant themes by looking for similarities and differences in the themes found across and within each narrative. Consistent with the narratives, the themes found across women have been organized into two sections: 1) representations of self; and 2) representations of others and relationships.
3. RESULTS

It should be noted that in addition to child sexual abuse, all of the women in this study experienced other kinds of abuse, such as physical and emotional maltreatment, as children. For the women in this study, the emotional, physical and sexual abuse that they experienced as children as well as the generally chaotic family environments in which they lived seemed to contribute to the development of maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships. Furthermore, the women indicated that the abuse that they experienced as children set them up to experience emotional, physical and sexual abuse as adults which also had an impact on their representations of self, others and relationships. Many of the women indicated that it was difficult for them to separate out the effects of the various kinds of abuse that they experienced, both as children and adults, on their representations of self, others and relationships. I have attempted to include only those effects which the women felt were related to their experiences of sexual abuse as children. In many cases, however, this overlaps with the impact of other abusive and violating experiences that they may have encountered both as children and adults.

Reliability and Validity - Plausible Construction?

Issues of reliability and validity take a different form in qualitative research than in quantitative research (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Rennie, 1994; Stiles, 1991). Rennie (1994) indicates that qualitative research should be evaluated on whether it offers a plausible construction of the phenomenon of interest. A plausible construction is one that is credible (i.e., parallels the experience of participants) and confirmable (i.e., others reading it generally agree that they would derive a similar construction) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Rennie, 1994).
I will attempt to illustrate how I achieved a plausible construction of the women's experiences. I have drawn on Stiles' (1991) criteria for good practice in qualitative research.

Stiles (1991) discusses several criteria that can be used to assess the reliability and validity of qualitative research. The research is evaluated with respect to: the investigator; other researchers and readers; the participants; and current theories in the field. First, according to Stiles (1991), disclosure of the investigator's orientation aids the reader in knowing how the investigator made sense of the data. The reader can then assess whether the investigator was unduly limited by her or his biases in the analyses of the data. Stiles (1991) recommends that the investigator disclose her or his expectations, preconceptions, values and any theoretical commitments she or he may hold. I have included a thorough discussion of my theoretical commitments (i.e., psychodynamic/interpersonal, social-cognitive, and feminist) and my expectations for the study (i.e., that child sexual abuse would have a negative impact on women's representations of self, others, and relationships and that maladaptive interpersonal cycles would be apparent in the women's descriptions) in previous sections. The reader is referred to the sections entitled, "Theoretical Conceptualizations" and "Present Study" for more thorough descriptions of this information.

In keeping with Stiles (1990) and other qualitative researchers (Rennie, 1994), I will take this opportunity to disclose the personal values that I believe influenced my approach to this study. I believe my feminist philosophies influenced me both in terms of my desire to study the specific area of child sexual abuse and in the choice to use a phenomenological methodology. First, I believe strongly in the rights and freedoms of women and children. I believe that male violence against women and children is a problem of epidemic proportions in our society. I also believe that child sexual abuse leaves women and children with many devastating difficulties and that the
study of these difficulties deserves a central place in psychological and sociological research. I believe that we can only work toward the amelioration of the effects of child sexual abuse for women and children if we understand fully the many ways in which it can and does affect women and children.

In saying these things, I also recognize that women too can be violent and that there are female as well as male survivors of child sexual abuse whose perpetrators were significant female figures. I also realize that some survivors may feel that they have gained something positive through their experiences of child sexual abuse. Throughout this investigation, I kept these two factors in mind (i.e., that the participants in this study were women who were sexually abused by important male figures and that some of the participants may have felt that they gained something positive through the experience of being sexually abused). I believe that this allowed me to stay open to the multitude of experiences and meanings that the participants assigned to their experiences of violation.

Second, the choice to use a phenomenological method of investigation was also influenced by my feminist philosophies. Before describing this influence, I would like to emphasize that the choice of methodology was also based on gaps in the current literature. That is, there is a need for the systematic investigation of the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others, and relationships from the perspectives of women who experienced it. The results in the empirical literature suggest that we have not asked the right questions of survivors of child sexual abuse. Therefore, I believed that descriptive accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse from women could point to important areas for investigation and how we might ask about them.

With respect to my feminist philosophies, I believe that it is important for us, as researchers and clinicians, to listen to women's accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse without imposing interpretations which go beyond the women's experiences. The
experience of child sexual abuse is often one in which girls (and boys) are told that their perceptions of what is happening are inaccurate. They are frequently led to believe that they cannot trust their own perceptions and must rely on others to provide them with the 'truth'. In investigating the impact of child sexual abuse, then, I felt it was extremely important to learn about the impact of sexual abuse as seen by the women who experienced it. Hence, my analyses were primarily descriptive and only interpretative in the sense of making connections between meaning units and the themes which came to represent them. In addition, obtaining feedback from the participants about the accuracy of my constructions of their experiences was based on the goal of wanting to stay as close as possible to their words.

Also with respect to the researcher's role in the investigation, Stiles (1991) indicates that the researcher's full engagement with the material is essential if one wants to stay close to the raw data. He suggests that it is crucial for the researcher to get past the 'press release', or what might be deemed acceptable to share by the participants. He recommends a number of things which can be done to check for the degree of engagement with the material and these include: using a non-structured interviewed; having personal contact with the participants; discussing the preliminary constructions with other investigators; checking participants' reactions to the constructions; and actively seeking disconfirming data. First, I employed a semi-structured interview which centered around the impact of child sexual abuse on women's representations of self, others, and relationships as well as on the changes in representations over time. Within this focus of investigation, the interviews were essentially unstructured. See the "Materials" section for a more thorough description of the interview. In addition, I shared preliminary constructions of the data with other researchers and obtained feedback from the participants as to the accuracy of my constructions. The process of obtaining feedback from other researchers and the
participants will be elaborated on below. Finally, I sought disconfirming data by asking the participants to evaluate whether what I had concluded was an impact of the sexual abuse was in fact an impact of the sexual abuse and not some other experience(s). As well, as mentioned earlier, I was open to the possibility that participants may have felt that they gained something positive from their experiences of child sexual abuse. Indeed, some of the women indicated that although the impact of the abuse was not positive, their healing from it was very positive in that they came to view themselves as strong and capable of coping with any adversity.

In addition, Stiles (1991) indicates that cycling back and forth between one's observations and one's constructions of the data (i.e., iteration) as well as grounding one's constructions in the data are essential to staying close to the data. The process of interviewing and analyzing involved much cycling between the data and my constructions of the participants' experiences. For example, during the interviews, I frequently paraphrased what participants had said and inquired about whether I understood it correctly. As well, in the analyses, I continuously went back to the meaning units and interview transcripts in attempts to check for the accuracy of what I was writing in the narratives. And again, I actively solicited comments and suggestions from the participants as to the accuracy of the narratives.

Furthermore, my constructions of the narratives (what Stiles would call the interpretations) were grounded in the raw data. In the narratives, I used verbatim quotes to illustrate the themes that were apparent in each woman's interview. The level of abstraction in the analyses of the data was quite low and simply consisted of deriving themes (e.g., self-worth) from the meaning units (e.g., I felt ugly, dirty, and stupid). In addition, the data as well as the process of gathering and interpreting it are open to inspection by the reader, as recommended by Stiles (1991). See Appendices C, H, I and J for excerpts of raw data). Finally, inspection was open to other researchers who were
given the interview transcripts, the meaning units and the narratives to assess the
accuracy of my coding of the raw data and the constructions of the narratives. This was
done before the feedback meetings were conducted with the participants.

Consensus among researchers was achieved, as recommended by Stiles (1991).
According to Stiles (1991), consensus among researchers suggests that the
constructions of the data are valid. Specifically, I had an independent researcher read
through the interview transcripts, meaning units and narratives of all participants. As
well, I had another researcher read through the meaning units and narratives of the two
participants whose data I found the most difficult to organize because there was so much
of it. The researchers were instructed to assess the data with the following concerns in
mind. First, they were instructed to assess the classification of meaning units into
categories of self, others and relationships to determine whether they agreed with the
classifications. In addition, they were requested to assess the themes which were
extracted from the meaning units to determine whether they reflected the information in
the interviews (i.e., were not idiosyncratic organizations of the data).

In some instances, there was disagreement about the meaning of particular
meaning units. At these times, consensus was obtained through discussion and through
searching for confirming or disconfirming evidence in the transcript. In addition, the
researchers were instructed to assess whether the narratives were reflective of the
themes and whether my descriptions went beyond the data. There were occasions when
the other researchers believed that my descriptions were interpretative and went
beyond the data. In these cases, I went back to the original interviews as well as to the
thematic classifications of meaning units and re-read the pertinent sections. I amended
these sections of the narratives to be descriptive rather than interpretative. In
general, the other researchers found that the narratives were 'coherent' (i.e., they hung
together or were internally consistent) and 'uncovered' something of relevance.
According to Stiles (1991), constructions of the data which are coherent and uncover something of relevance (i.e., addressed the initial research concerns) suggest that the data analyses has validity.

In addition, obtaining feedback from the women as to the accuracy of my summaries of their thoughts and descriptions served as a form of reliability as well as validity. The feedback meetings with the participants were audiotaped but not transcribed. I listened to each of the tapes once and incorporated any new, clarifying, elaborative, or discrepant information obtained from the participants into the narratives. All additional information incorporated into the narratives is prefaced by the words, 'In the feedback session' or 'During the feedback session'. Corrections, such as missed words, or minor clarifications, such as a change in emphasis, are included in square brackets [ ]. There were some changes in content. However, most of these changes involved only minor details or changes in emphases.

Stiles' (1991) criteria for testimonial validity was one of the ways in which validity was assessed. For example, all participants made allusions, both direct and indirect, to being understood. For instance, some participants informed me directly that the narrative was an accurate description of their perceptions of the impact of child sexual abuse on their views of themselves, others and relationships. Other participants indicated that they agreed with what they had read about themselves in the narratives. As well, the participants' reactions to the narratives, both favorable and unfavorable, were consistent with the descriptions. For example, after reading the narrative, Elsie indicated that she sounded 'crazy'. Elsie is an individual who has struggled to develop compassion and empathy for herself. In addition, Marilyn indicated that at times she felt as though she were reading someone else's 'story' because she could identify so much growth in herself since the time of the initial interview which occurred a few months earlier. Growth and development have been central factors in Marilyn's healing
process. And Rita described feeling horrified by how uneducated she sounded in the narrative. Rita has struggled to become less judgmental and harsh with herself.

Finally, all participants revealed new and deeper material in the feedback sessions after having read the narratives. Evidence of this can be seen in the narratives below.

Some of the participants reacted quite strongly to the meaning units being transcribed verbatim. They did not like the way they sounded and felt embarrassed by their nongrammatical speech. One participant informed me that if I were to keep the meaning units as they were (i.e., verbatim) in the narratives, she would like to have a pseudonym replace her actual name as she felt she sounded 'simple'. After hearing the feedback from these participants, I edited the meaning units in the narratives so that they were grammatical and did not include nonspeech utterances, such as umm, ahh, yea. Also, words were inserted to make complete sentences where necessary. In editing, I was careful to maintain the original meaning of the utterances.

Also with respect to the participants' feedback, Stiles (1991) indicates that one of the ways with which to assess the validity of the research is to assess the degree to which the research process energizes and empowers the participants. Stiles (1991) refers to this as catalytic validity and indicates that something of value and importance has been created when the research has an impact on those whose experience is being described. The degree of empowerment reflects the degree to which the participants' experiences have been accurately conveyed.

A sense of empowerment and becoming energized through the research process was evident for many of the participants in this project. Many of them indicated that participating in the study enabled them to continue to grow and develop in their healing processes. Many explained that it was an opportunity for them to take a more public stance with respect to their histories of sexual abuse than they had been able to do in therapy. As well, some of the women indicated that they believed it was an opportunity
for them to contribute to others' healing; others who may read the manuscript and/or other survivors who may come into contact with those who may read the manuscript. Furthermore, at the feedback meeting, some of the women indicated that the narratives tied their experiences together in a way in which they had never done before. And finally, one participant reported that she was going to give her parents a copy of her narrative so that they could better understand the impact of the sexual abuse on her and her healing from it. It was clear for her that the narrative rang 'true' to her experience. Fuller descriptions of the participants' experience of participating in the study can be seen in the narratives below.

Finally, Stiles (1991) indicates that the validity of the research can be assessed in terms of whether it has an impact on current theories which explain the phenomenon. For the most part, the current study has served to validate many of the clinical writings on the impact of child sexual abuse. Theoretical conceptualizations outlining the impact of child sexual abuse tend to be quite rich. However, much of the empirical research does not utilize the theories in understanding the results. This study has attempted to use theories to provide a way in which to understand the impact of child sexual abuse. The ways in which current theoretical conceptualizations are validated by the current project can be seen in the "Discussion" section.

The current study does challenge Janoff-Bulman's (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1987) theoretical notions about how sexual violation is likely to impact upon women and men differently. Janoff-Bulman indicates that sexual violation is likely to have a greater impact upon men's views of themselves as men than women's views of themselves as women because cultural beliefs regarding masculinity are in polar opposition to beliefs about the experience of sexual victimization. Also, she suggests that the confusion about sexual orientation when a man or boy has been sexually violated by a man makes it more difficult for men to integrate this experience into their
views of themselves as men than when women or girls are violated by a man. Although the current study did not compare women and men, the current finding that women struggled with their identities as women as a result of the sexual abuse suggests that the impact of child sexual abuse on gender-identity might simply be different for men and women rather than having a greater impact on men and a less significant impact on women. Further discussion of the impact of child sexual abuse on women’s identities as women can be seen in the "Summary of Narratives" and in the "Discussion".

In summary, the reliability and validity checks have been outlined above and included: utilizing a collaborative approach; obtaining feedback from participants and research colleagues; and including excerpts of the raw data in the written manuscript for the reader’s evaluation. Having myself, the participants, other researchers, and the reader evaluate my analyses and the narratives fulfills Stiles’ (1991) criteria of ‘triangulation’. Triangulation involves exposing oneself to multiple perspectives and sources.
Narratives

Christine

Christine is a woman in her forties. She was raised in an intact family. She has two brothers. Christine was sexually abused in many forms throughout her childhood. She was sexually abused by her father from the ages of 3 to 12 years. This abuse involved vaginal penetration. She also described being sexually abused through conversation and through the general lifestyle in her household. For example, she recalled that her father often justified his sexual abuse of her by making reference to the Oedipal Complex. As well, Christine indicated that she was her mother’s confidante regarding sexual matters and activities that went on in the household. And finally, Christine noted that there was always a lot of sexual paraphernalia lying around the house, such as nude Polaroid’s of her mother and other pornographic materials. She reported that her father was extensively involved in paedophilia organizations and that her parents engaged in partner swapping when she was a child. Christine stopped the sexual abuse by her father by screaming ‘No’ to him at age 12 years. She then disclosed the sexual abuse to her mother. Although Christine recognized that her mother took action to ensure that the sexual abuse did not continue, she also indicated that her mother maintained a belief that all her father did was ‘pet’ her. She reported that she believed that her mother denied the seriousness of the sexual abuse in order to maintain her marriage. Christine explained that there was an unspoken rule in her family that the sexual abuse was not to be discussed. Finally, according to Christine, all of the doctors and psychiatrists she saw as a child seemed to be aware of the sexual abuse, however, no one intervened in any way.

In addition to the sexual abuse, Christine indicated that she was moderately physically abused and severely emotionally abused as a child. She also indicated that she was neglected as a child. Throughout the interview, Christine explained that it was impossible for her to separate out the impact of the various types of abuse that she experienced as a child. She believes that the impact of the sexual abuse is intertwined with the physical and emotional abuse she experienced, as well as with the emotional enmeshing of her and her mother. Furthermore, she married a man who was very physically and emotionally abusive to her during their marriage. She is now divorced and has sole custody of her children.
Christine's representations of self.

Christine identified that living in the environment that she did as a child left her with some skewed ideas of what was normal behavior and what was abusive. The experience of sexual abuse seemed prominent in her description of this impact on her perceptions. She said, "It seemed to be acceptable and so I didn't realize the wrong that had been done to me, or the harm... I didn't know that...I was experiencing changes because of my sexual abuse. I never knew that I was altered from that," and "... Everybody knew that I had been sexually abused but it wasn't any big thing. It was too bad that all of us thought that it wasn't really that big of a deal."

In addition to having skewed ideas of what was abusive and what was normal behavior, Christine indicated that as a result of the sexual abuse as well as other forms of abuse, she maintained a belief that something was fundamentally wrong with her. For example, she said, "I knew that there was something wrong I just didn't know how many different things and what it was exactly, but, I knew there was a lot wrong with me. That was my presumption, that was my thinking pattern." Related to her sense that something was wrong with her seemed to be a view of herself as worthless. She said, "it (being obsessed with her appearance)was a great cover for my self-esteem which was zero. I had to look good all of the time in order to feel that I was worth..." In addition, she described feeling overwhelmingly ashamed of herself and indicated that she frequently and openly criticized herself.

Another way in which Christine's sense of worthlessness seemed to manifest itself was through a belief that she deserved to be hurt. Christine described inflicting pain on herself by pulling out her hair at age 15 years. She also described inflicting pain on herself by biting her nails to a hurtful point before having to play the piano for company that was visiting at her house. She said, "...on some kind of a level I thought I deserved to be hurt and if there wasn't anybody hurting me I would hurt myself. Somehow that would be hurting." In addition to believing that she deserved to be hurt, Christine indicated that inflicting pain on herself was a way in which she dealt with her anxiety. She indicated that she continues to deal with this as an adult. She said, "And I still do pull my hair out at times, and I still do bite my nails to a hurtful point when I am anxious. It goes beyond just a little bit of a you know nibble on my nails, it gets to the point of pain."
Changes in Christine's feelings of self-worth were evident in her fondness for herself and efforts to take care of herself. For example, she indicated that she now likes herself. She said, "...this is where I sort of get to be the person that I want to be....I get to be who I want to be now. I am! you know? ...Well, I'm not perfect, but then again I basically think I like who I am..." Efforts to take care of herself were also apparent. She said, "I still do that sometimes when things are hard...I just take care of her sort of thing [herself as a child]. That's the way I look at it, I almost have to do that visualization where I hug her and I will ...hug myself and comfort myself in a lot of ways that seem weird perhaps to other people but to me it's very healing." Likewise, she described herself as increasingly being able to realize her potential and good qualities. Also, Christine seemed able to recognize her less desirable characteristics without being self-denigrating.

Christine indicated that in coping with the sexual abuse as well as other forms of abuse, she became cut off from herself in many ways. One of the ways that she seemed to be cut off from herself was in becoming desensitized to physical pain. She explained that becoming desensitized to physical pain generalized to her life in such a way that she was out of touch with her body sensations. She indicated that being unaware of herself and her body interfered with her ability to take care of herself. She said, "I didn't look after me whether it meant not excusing myself from a telephone conversation when I was bursting and my back teeth were floating, I wouldn't, like...taking the normal bathroom break like we did...today. Nothing like that. I would experience and tolerate pain for nothing! All the time. Like in so many many contexts. Not go to bed when I was tired, stay up. Not exercise when my body was aching for it. Just being out of touch with what body messages were completely."

In addition to being cut off from her body sensations, Christine indicated that she was cut off from her emotional experiences before her healing began. For example, she described having no reaction to things that would normally bother other people. In talking about seeing nude pictures of her mother around the house, she said, "I didn't feel discomfort. ...I didn't feel my feelings." Christine indicated that she was cut off from her feelings in a number of ways. For example, She described herself as an excellent actress who constantly performed for others in order to hide her feelings. It seemed that Christine regarded her acting as a strength that ultimately became maladaptive for her. She said, "I had talent and that was almost essential in my life. Having been abused the way I was, I realize that now, that was my strength. I didn't have to retreat into no
memories, I just had to act. And I acted and I acted so well and it was so good, people could never be sure. [There] was always something about me that didn't seem like a lot of people. I could sense this even as a woman, a young woman, that people really didn't think I was real. There was something about me that wasn't real and there was that funny little feeling people would have, 'She's just not being real'. ... I was on stage all the time. And I certainly didn't want to have any private moments, no time alone! I would never allow myself to be alone." Although not explicitly stated, it seemed that spending time alone may have been threatening for Christine because she was faced with her feelings.

Furthermore, consistent with her tendency to act and perform, Christine indicated that she developed a 'false self' or a 'pretense' that enabled her to hide from her feelings. She said, "it (the false self) was a great fake. It was basically a super act...I didn't know I was doing that, I really didn't. I didn't know I was hiding anything. I thought I was very honest..." Christine explained that she no longer uses her 'false self' to hide from her feelings. She said, "I wish I had more of the false sort of face that I once had. I don't have it all anymore. Somebody tells me something or if I read something sad in the paper, or if I see a picture like I did this week of David La Chance's face,...they have a picture of this man whose brother was killed in the paper, and it just brought tears to my eyes"

Another way in which Christine seemed to be cut off from her emotional experiences, involved her developing a tough exterior that she presented to the world. In the initial interview, she used the word 'callous' to describe the exterior she developed in response to the world. However, in the feedback session, she indicated that it was more accurate to describe this exterior as 'tough'. In the initial interview, she identified this tough exterior in her response to a comment from a sexual partner that she was not a virgin. She said, "Hah that (partner's comment that she was not a virgin) was my, well of course, stab to the heart! I wasn't! And you know, I just felt terribly low about things like that, but I pushed them away, pushed them away, I didn't dwell on those feelings at all. I knew how to get right out of them so I did, you know, So What! That was our pat response to anything that was rough, So What! " In turn, it seemed that Christine felt that this tough exterior impeded her from experiencing her own vulnerability. She said, "so this child sexual abuse gave me a very callous, I had no knowledge of my gentle, like my own vulnerability or anything like that. That was absolutely taken from me..." Christine described her reaction to a miscarriage she had as illustrative of her toughness and estrangement from her feelings of vulnerability. She
indicated that she felt no loss or no grief whatsoever in response to her miscarriage. She also explained that she experienced no feelings with respect to contemplating an abortion at an earlier time in her life. Again, she attributed this lack of feeling to her 'toughness'. She said, "I'd had this callousness about sexuality and misinformation and I didn't have a sense of the spiritual or the preciousness of any of it, so it really did affect me. Not that I don't believe that women have a choice, I do think they should have a choice but I don't think that I was in touch with any of ...what would have been a normal process of selecting an abortion with some objections in my own mind to it. I had none! Absolutely none." Christine now regards this reaction as unusual and as directly related to the sexual abuse that she experienced.

Furthermore, Christine indicated that her taking on the role of an adult when she was a child was also related to the tough exterior that she developed. She said, "This was prior to my therapy and when it concerned myself, I was tough! And I was very adult, and I was from the beginning adult , I looked after Mom and Dad..." Christine explained that there were other developmental losses that she experienced through being abused and living in the environment in which she did as a child. In particular, she indicated that she was prohibited from going through the normal developmental milestones regarding her sexuality. Her response to her losses seems to have been to deny their significance by presenting a tough exterior.

Christine described herself now as a 'thriver'. Through 'thriving' she indicated that she is now able to feel her feelings in contrast to before in which having a 'pretense' or 'false self' enabled her to not feel. She said, "I'm a survivor but I think I'm more of a thriver...I was surviving...now I'm thriving and it's a full range of feelings I have. I'm in touch with a full range of feelings and it isn't wrong to experience these feelings. Unfortunately, sometimes it's overwhelming for me..." Furthermore, she explained that it's now very important for her to be herself completely rather than a pretense like she was before. She said, " (now) it's (being extremely open) just to be myself. It's to consciously refuse to be a pretense because I was a pretense for so long and it was [such a] waste! It was a total waste of who I am-was, you know? I was always constantly trying to present for other people, why?... I'm doing this for me, I know who I am {now}..." Despite experiencing more of her emotional self, Christine indicated that, like before, she continues to struggle with doing too much, not spending time alone, and not attending to herself. She said, "I could never do that (be alone) - I had to have at least three things to do and be late for two of them, you know? (laughs). That was me. And even to this day,
I have to continually, as an adult who finished her therapy basically work through a lot of this stuff, and [I] realized - Wow, you don't need to take on so much, make yourself so busy that you can't attend to certain things of self that need attention."

In addition to lacking a sense of worth and being cut off from her emotional self, Christine indicated that her sense of self was very determined or governed by others, particularly her parents. She described herself as having no separate sense of self. She said, "It was...all messed up and my others were, Mom and Dad were always in my thoughts too. I wasn't aware of myself very clearly as separate from them. How they would think about something, what they would approve of or not approve of was very much in my thoughts and governed me either in terms of being defiant of it or seeking their approval and so I had no sense of that...they were a very big part of my adult life too and there was no growing up in that regard."

Being governed by others seemed to lead to Christine behaving in ways which were not self-affirming, despite her behavior being attempts at self-preservation. Her struggles for self-preservation seemed most apparent at the times when her behavior was governed by others the most. For example, her attempts to defy her father seemed to be an example of both her struggles for self-preservation and her tendency to be other-determined. She described being deliberately defiant of her father by enticing him to hit her. She maintained a belief that she would defy her father by taking the pain he gave either through his hands or his penis without giving him the satisfaction of knowing that it was hurtful. In addition to her belief that she deserved to be hurt, taking pain also seemed to serve the purpose of defying her father. She said, "This was my defiance, this was my victory, was to take pain...whether it was from his penis or his hands and I would take this pain and defy him...That seemed to be something that changed me, that I didn't experience pain. I was really really numb to pain." Christine also described defying her father by limiting her academic performance in Math. Christine's father was a Mathematician and she explained that she was unaware that her poor performance in Math was an act of defiance against him at the time. However, she indicated that as an adult who has now scored over the 90th percentile in high-school Math, she has realized that this is the purpose it served. Finally, she explained that she defied her father by marrying a Polish man whom her father disapproved of. However, she indicated that she was unaware at the time that her husband was very much like her father - abusive and controlling.
Despite acknowledging that her defiance of her father was an example of being controlled and determined by him, it also seems that this behavior may have enabled Christine to preserve a sense of herself as someone who did have some input into what happened to her. It is clear that Christine did not define herself as a victim. In fact, it seems that she went out of her way to disassociate herself from what she regarded as weakness. For example, she described denying her femininity through an identification with men, specifically her brothers. She explained that her identification with her brothers was a way in which she could deny the 'weakness' of femininity as well as gain the approval of her parents. Again, elements of being other-determined and efforts at self-preservation were apparent. She said, "I understand that as strength (identification with her brothers). I understand that as denying the weakness of femininity and developing a strength of maleness in me, [a] sense of power kind of thing that I would have from being physically strong - playing with the boys, being like the boys, I felt like one of the boys, I wanted to be one of the boys and I was devastated when I realized that it didn't matter. At the age of 12 I realized that it didn't matter if I went to University or not ...I realized that they didn't expect from me what they did from the boys." Self-preservation was also evident in her description of an instinctive knowledge that she had with respect to taking care of herself. She said, "I guess I just heard an instinctive knowledge that I listened to instead of wanting to give up (by taking drugs and suiciding)."

Christine's views of herself have changed and continue to change quite dramatically from the way in which she viewed herself as a child after the sexual abuse. In contrast to Christine's sense of self being determined by others, she now views herself as more self-determined. It seems that she no longer has a need to preserve a sense of herself in the face of her father's control. She said, "You know I still think of them of course (her parents), but it's not in terms of decisions that I make regarding other relationships or regarding myself." She indicated that she no longer has a need to defy her father. In speaking of her ability in math, she said, "my math has been unlocked...I no longer need to keep that so low to kick my Dad back by being the very thing that would disappoint him [the] most - lousy in math! (Laughs)." Furthermore, Christine described herself as now able to confront her father about his behavior without feeling guilty or responsible. Another example of Christine being able to separate from her father's control is in now living common law with a man that she loves. In the interview, she indicated that her father was very opposed to people living
common law and felt that people who lived like this were the 'dregs of society'. It seems that as Christine has been more able to separate herself from her father's control, she has also been able to behave in ways that are more self-affirming.

In addition, Christine continues to like her masculine side, however, she indicated that she now 'knows' her feminine side. She now seems to have a better sense of who she is as a woman. She said, "I know the feminine side of myself now. That's what's new, knowing it. I think I just didn't know my feminine side. And now I know what I'm like..." In addition, Christine described discovering that she is a feminist; a discovery that surprised her given her identification with men earlier in her life.

Finally, Christine described many physical effects of the abuse. She explained that she was quite severely depressed and was not able to function physically at times. As well, she described herself as living a concentration camp kind of existence in which the tension was so complete that her forearms were covered in eczema and she failed to menstruate at the age appropriate time. Finally, she indicated that she developed an eating disorder which seemed related to the discomfort and lack of safety she felt while in her bed. For example, she described herself as frequently 'grazing' in the middle of the night in which she would get out of bed and go into the kitchen and eat continuously and compulsively.

Despite the adverse effects that the experience of sexual abuse has had on Christine, she indicated that she experienced difficulty acknowledging her anger regarding being abused. The one instance in which she expressed having clear and unbridled feelings of anger was when she thought of someone sexually abusing her daughter if she were to have one. She said, "I never wanted a girl, that's for sure, I was glad they were boys, I had nightmares when I was pregnant about having a girl...I could not contain my anger if anyone would sexually abuse my daughter. I would have ripped them apart with my own hands. I would have tore the flesh off their face and everything else. I knew I would be completely unable to withstand anybody hurting my daughter. I would kill with a mutilating way of killing. I would murder them with my bare hands. There would have been no stopping me, I knew that. And that was scary!" It seemed that it was easier for Christine to get angry when she thought of someone else, rather than herself, being sexually abused. Christine described getting in touch with her own anger through talking with her brother about his experience of sexual abuse which was perpetrated by their mother at their father's insistence. She said, "when D {brother} told me it was like I got unlocked and then I got really aware of how angry I really was! I
was so upset, I was raged! I was outraged! I was full of anger. You wouldn't believe how much anger I had..."

Christine also expressed much anger regarding our society and its views toward child sexual abuse. She indicated that the mass denial and minimization of child sexual abuse in our society feels like a repeat of the messages that she received about her own sexual abuse when she was a child. She explained that this is an area that she continues to struggle with. For example, she indicated that she wishes that she could take things in stride a little more than she does. The experience of sexual abuse continues to be central in Christine's description of herself. She said, "I guess maybe I was the only person that phoned about it [a lawyer who equated survivors of child sexual abuse with those claiming to have been abducted by UFOs], that really object[ed] to it, [I felt] that an objection needed to be said. When I told my girlfriend at bridge how much this had taken out of me she said, 'Oh Christine, you know', she was wishing I could just basically forget it and not have it drain me in anyway because it's so stupid!... And in a way I wish I could laugh it off...but I don't really laugh it off right now...it doesn't seem funny to me at all. This {being sexually abused} is just something that I know!"

**Pivotal experiences.**

Christine discussed a number of ways in which her representations of self changed and continue to change. She described a time when she began to identify that she wasn't feeling healthy and needed to reach out and get professional help. She did this by recognizing that she was miserable despite having a safe and comfortable life away from her father and ex-husband. She said, "$ that's what twigged me to how crazy this was...I had my youth, I had everything that anybody would want, and yet I was longing to be in there [obituaries], not that I was going to put myself in there but just that I thought they were luckier than me and I thought this is crazy...I gotta reach out to somebody."

Reaching out to professionals was particularly difficult for Christine to do in light of messages that she was given from her father that people who saw mental health professionals were 'scum of the earth' and the 'dregs of society'.

In addition, Christine described learning how to take care of herself while she was in therapy by visualizing herself as a small child and then doing things for herself that she did not experience as a child. For example, she described buying herself big beautiful pillows and comforters so that she could make her bed a safe and comfortable place.
Finally, Christine described a dream she had of her father in which his penis and hands were ground up in the meat grinder. She saw this dream as an example of her being liberated from her father's control. Through the dream she recognized that he can no longer hurt her. She said, "It was a wonderful dream. It was a freedom dream. There's no more of that that can hurt me. It's gone, it's gone. He can't hurt me with his hands or penis because they've been ground up in the meat grinder and he won't be able to hurt me again. And it was really a good dream."

**Christine's representations of others and relationships.**

Christine identified that the sexual abuse was central to her learning maladaptive concepts about herself in relationships with other people. She learned maladaptive ways of how she should be in relation with others as well as how others were likely to be in relation with her. Christine described being taught to accept the unacceptable from people. She said, "I was taught to accept the unacceptable. And I accepted it! In fact I not only accepted it , I remembered it and I forgave it! I told myself I forgave it...[when she was violated]." Christine indicated that she learned to accept the unacceptable primarily through her mother who accepted the unacceptable from her husband with respect to both herself and her children. Furthermore, Christine indicated that she learned to change herself in order to meet the needs of others. She said, "I don't have the driving desire to change. That ...really was the definition of my life for so many years, to just change into whatever it was that somebody needed me to be in order to be acceptable, you know?" She indicated that she learned this message very clearly during acts of the abuse by her father in which she perceived herself to be a dart board on which he played darts.

Christine identified a connection between her experiences of sexual abuse, as well as other violating experiences, and having hurtful people in her life. She noted, "I did make sure in a way, not that I knew it but there were people in my life that hurt me, there was always someone that hurt me." Also, Christine explained that she maintained an expectation that others would degrade her. A lack of self-worth seemed central to this belief. She said, "I mean if someone happened to recognize that I was awful, they were right! In fact most of the time I made sure that I said the degrading remark first, it was less painful than to hear it from someone else when they were just going to say what I already knew anyway."

Christine indicated that the experience of sexual abuse led her to develop a 'toughness', not only with respect to herself, but also in regard to intimacy with others.
She said, "I practiced also casual sexual relationships and felt no guilt. None! I didn't even think it was unusual. I thought it was my prerogative, as a woman, to have as casual as any man and somehow in that I lost my, I had no, I never developed the realization of my own, you know the real beauty and the really marvelous intimate connection that can happen between two people in a very meaningful way. And I have discovered that with my present partner and it's a very beautiful thing." Christine also indicated that her tough exterior interfered with her relationships with her peers. She said, "I always thought that other kids were very immature and really didn't know what was up. They were really out of it. They hadn't a clue and this was basically how I thought, that most kids were so stunned and I can remember feeling like that. I never played with dolls!, and "I thought it was really stupid when girls, when women got stuffed animals. I mean there are a number of women that do. They like stuffed animals and they buy them for themselves and I thought that was really really stupid! I had absolutely no time whatsoever for anybody that juvenile...when it concerned myself I was tough."

Christine indicated that her experience of sexual abuse in her family of origin was one of her boundaries being constantly violated. This seemed to influence the way that she interacted with others as an adult, particularly sexually. She said, "I was really boundaryless in my sexual life but I expected to have a good sex life and I did. That was one thing I had. I had orgasms without difficulty and my Mom had told me that this is what you do is when you're partner is coming in, if they were in the bathroom, you masturbate until you peaked then you're going to be ready for whatever they do. You'd be more into it. So she trained me...in certain techniques that most mothers don't tell their kids. I didn't know that," and "I was really great at pleasing. I thought I was probably better than anybody else in terms of sexual options that would be perfectly alright with me...I wasn't fortunately put into a situation where I had to [do] anything like whips and that sort of thing. There [was] no sadistic stuff I've ever done... Thank God I never had that experience cause it would have been even more damaging to me. [It's] terrible but I probably would have. It was not as though I had any boundaries or anything, it just didn't come up. Thank God. But I mean, as far as any kind of penetration is concerned or any amount of anal or oral or anything else - I mean I had no problem with any of it! ..." She also described having difficulties with boundaries in her nonsexual relationships. She said, "I was really caught up in what I call triangular relationships. I don't know if you're familiar with that concept? Victim, persecutor, rescuer? I liked being the rescuer instead of a victim, that made me comfortable to feel that I was a rescuer. And I
used to feel that I was good that way. I would really really want to be helping other people to a nuisance level...Not that I realized it at the time. I didn't even know about that."

Christine's desire to be a rescuer rather than a victim in her relationships is consistent with her attempts at self-preservation in which she did everything that she could in the face of her father's control to maintain a sense personal power.

As with her views of herself, Christine described being determined by others in her relationships. For example, she explained that she had a tendency to meet others' needs at the expense of her own. She indicated that this was evident in her decision-making process regarding a desire to have an affair outside of a relationship she was in. She said, "I did think of being unfaithful to my partner prior to my own therapy and I couldn't inflict it on him because he didn't deserve it. He didn't deserve [it] you know, I love him. I didn't want to hurt him. And even if it meant sacrificing my own sexual appetites which it did at that time, I felt that for him I would do that. But it wasn't the sense that I have now, it was more you know because I wouldn't hurt the man. He'd been so super and kind and gentle and he didn't deserve another hurt in his life and I couldn't hurt him. But it wasn't that I had any notion of personal worth regarding sexuality."

Christine indicated that her tendency to meet others' needs at the expense of her own was also evident in her parenting of her children when they were very young. She said, "like I knew how to nurture my children, I was very good at looking after them, really good! They were really really loved and sweetly cared for as babies and so on and I liked to...meet their needs cause that was sort of ...something that gave me worth. It was again a rescuer thing really. It wasn't coming from a solid sense of self but it did end up being nice for them to experience. I could have given them as much care and given myself the care which I didn't know..." Again, Christine's lack of self-worth was prominent in her tendency to disregard her own needs in attempts to meet the needs of others.

Christine identified ways in which the sexual abuse had an impact on her relationships with men in particular. For example, Christine indicated that the sexual abuse by her father set her up for more and more abuse in her relationships with men generally and with her husband specifically. In speaking about herself in relation with men generally, Christine said, "so this child sexual abuse gave me a very callous ... I just was almost tough as nails with regard to sex. You know they could basically fuck me any which way and it wouldn't matter to me. ...It just didn't matter! And it was too bad because it was more and more abuse" and "I always did expect to have a good sexual life in my relationships with men. I wanted to and felt it was important. It was extremely
important in our family. That was a major thing...it [was] certainly the most important thing in any relationship between a man and a woman as far as I knew when I grew up. It was a constant theme and I certainly realized [that] it was my job to please sexually."

In addition to setting her up for more and more abuse in relationships with men, Christine indicated that the abuse influenced the way that she interacted with men. She described herself as using sex to gain power over men. She said, "I had to have a sense of power over men with sex. Whether it be my casual conversations, my party repertoire, or whatever it's called when ...you ...do the little flirtatious and slightly lewd conversation, cocktail conversations kind of thing. If it would make you obviously attractive to men in that way, I was good at that. And it came very naturally and then if I felt like indulging myself I had no reason not to in most circumstances and I felt triumphant in that, somehow power, that was one way I was more powerful. But it was really kind of foolish....I don't feel powerful regarding that at all (now). I think that's a false notion which was only useful for a very brief time in my life. It didn't serve me well."

Christine indicated that her views of herself in relation with men have changed quite a bit. She indicated that she is less trusting and more cautious with men. She also indicated that she feels more vulnerable with men now because of her history of sexual abuse. She said, "I also feel vulnerable because of my sexual abuse and the fact that it's not a secret. ...I'm discounted more easily than when I was a basic sex object and I was a babe you know? That gave me a lot more power over these jerks basically (laughs)."

Christine also explained that she now feels uncomfortable with having power over men. Her healing is obvious. She said, "Now when I'm being real and I'm seeing that it hurts individuals to be exploited and violated...and for their gratification of the dominant person, this is not alright, be the dominant person male or female."

Christine made a clear link between the experiences of sexual abuse by her father and her marriage to an abusive man. For example, she explained that she married a man who was very similar to her father - excessively critical of her and extremely abusive - sexually, physically, and emotionally. She indicated that although all the signs that he was an abusive man were there from the beginning, she was unable to see them because of the environment that she grew up in which abusive behavior was normalized. She identified that the views that she gained through her relationship with her father seemed to be related to her choosing to marry the kind of man that she did. She said, "The others that have been in my life have been almost repeat performances of Dad. A lot of
similarities. I feel now that this man that I married, I was almost going to say the poor man, but...this individual that I married is almost as an individual insignificant!...I feel that if it hadn't been him, it would have been someone like him. I honestly believe that I wouldn't have thought anything else was love. I would have identified that kind of abuse with love. And I mean let's face it that was imprinted pretty young. All this I love you, I love you, I love you as he's hurting and hurting and hurting. And then seeing it all my life, every part of it, the violence and the enmeshing and the mess of it all ...

Furthermore, Christine identified that the views of herself and others that she learned through her relationship with her mother were related to her staying in a marriage in which she was repeatedly abused. She said, "I was very optimistic. I felt there was nothing I couldn't do with the amount of love I had in me and...I was going to love everything in the whole wide world into the right shape and the right place. It was going to be a radiance and a glow, an irresistible magnetism and I was wonderful because I had all of this in me... I think that concept is actually a little skewed and I didn't realize it. It was one of my survivor techniques. I didn't know that but it was something that I had worked hard at. My Mom did too. I was really modeling her - if you just try enough and just love enough and just this enough, then everything will work out fine. And no matter what is being done, no matter how unacceptable it may seem at that moment, you can forget it, you can forgive it instantly, it's over, and pretend like it never happened and you go on fresh, and you're fresh again, and you're fresh again, fresh again! So it's amazing how much you can go on day by day forgiving and forgetting." In addition to her accepting the unacceptable in her marriage, she explained that her belief that she needed to be whatever someone else wanted her to be was evident in her marriage. She said, "The self had to be changed...to the point where I felt enthusiastic about those changes (laughs). I was right into doing whatever it was I had to do to make this marriage work, including quitting my job...but when you're in an abusive situation it's not an accurate perception of the scene and I didn't see actually until my family doctor had examined me... I was quite naive, absolutely naive!"

Christine has made and continues to make significant changes in her relationships with others. In speaking of herself in relationships now, she said, "MY own desire, my own change [makes relationships end]...I don't have perpetual relationships with something that doesn't add to my life. I don't have any relationship if something doesn't add to my life.....", and "...therefore, when someone else thinks differently [than me], do I need to feel furious, or degraded, or humiliated? Like I had to really think all of that
through and realize why I didn't. I didn't have to feel degraded." Christine indicated that she no longer needs to be what others want her to be nor does she feel a need to test everybody with respect to her relationships in her family of origin. As well, she explained that she does not have to rescue others or be a victim to others any longer.

Despite being more self-determined in her relationships with others, Christine indicated that she still struggles with wanting others to like her. She explained that she probably works harder at getting people to like her than others do. She said, "I realize now it still is tough when people don't necessarily like me. That's okay. You know? It is something that's still hard to take because I like being liked, you know? And I probably do work at it a little harder than a lot of people do. I'm still not really, I'm not really comfortable with being not liked. It still is tough to take but I'm starting to realize now that if people don't like me that might be their problem."

Christine's healing seems to be ongoing. She continues to struggle with finding a balance in her relationships whereby she can be with other people while still being true to herself. For example, Christine identified that she is struggling with being inappropriately intimate with nonsignificant others at this time in her life. She explained that she tends to be very intimate with almost anyone and that the people she loves and cares for often feel put off by this. She said, "But my best friends, for example, my dearest friend, S, who has known me since I was just a little kid, [a] preschooler, she says it's sometimes difficult because I give so much of myself and attention to people.... As a dear friend, it's almost a jealousy thing that happens because I don't seem to discriminate. I'm just as interested in you right now as I would be in her, you know how can that be?..." Christine identified that this tendency of hers to be intimate with nonsignificant others is related to wanting to be real and genuine in her relationships; not wanting to be a pretense. She said, "It's not that I want to shock anybody with who I am but I'm not going to be a pretense and if they don't like me, I'll feel the terrible loss, I do. But, I'm not going to put up a pretense to make them like me."

As a result of not wanting to be a pretense anymore in her relationships, Christine indicated that she does not know how to hide anymore and that she's not sure of how much of herself to reveal. She said, "I'm not knowing how to hide anymore. Like I don't seem to have any good common sense about it [about what to tell people about herself], and "I don't seem to know whether or not to say something.... If I say something that what I'm thinking, that's who I am and what I am is too personal, too deep, people don't want to know [that]....." Christine indicated that being so open with people about who she is
sometimes leads to her feeling vulnerable. She explained that figuring out how much to
reveal of herself to others is something she is working on. She said, " there's some
aspect of that that I might want to modify in [the] future because it does make you very
vulnerable. And this vulnerability is also hurtful. ...I want to be careful and I think I
should be working on that a bit more. But ...it's a day by day thing."

In addition to struggling with knowing how much of herself to reveal to others,
Christine also indicated that she struggles with feeling different and alienated from
others because of the sexual abuse and other experiences she has had. Christine identified
this struggle as being particularly acute in her relationships with the women she plays
bridge with. She said, " I have felt very different from them and it's been extremely
difficult to stay with it and to keep going because I felt I'm in a group...a lot of people in
that group have not experienced a single hardship in their life, they don't know any
adversity, they have not had any abuse. They've got lots of money, they've got stable
marriages, they're kids are all doing well at school and one's going ahead in professional
hockey. ...They cannot identify with what has been my experiences in life. I sort of look
the part now - I live in the same suburb, our children go to school together, my children
are doing well, their kids are doing well, but my life experience has been absolutely
different." Again, Christine identified wanting to be genuine in her relationships with
others but indicated that her history of sexual abuse makes it difficult for others to be
around her. She said, " It's really hard because I guess I want to be genuine and I realize
that it's hard for other people to hear it, or to have to deal with it, or respond to it, or
have it in front of them. ...That doesn't make me [a] very easy person to be around all the
time." It seems that Christine is faced with integrating her past into her present life.

Pivotal experiences.

Christine identified that receiving proper love from others was central to her
beginning to view herself as lovable. She said, "I got that [love] and then you know when
you're loved you can start feeling lovable..." She indicated that she received proper love
from her partner and his family as well as from a family that she knew in Holland.
Particularly significant appears to be her relationship with her partner with whom it
took her years to trust and really believe that he loved her. She explained that he was
central to her beginning to take a stand for herself in relation with her abusive ex-
husband. She said, " getting out of that abusive marriage, having W sort of teach me how
to stand up and not be abused on the telephone. For example if my ex phoned me over and
over, I would be on the phone, I would be listening to it, I would allow it! I didn't even
know that I could put the phone down and not listen to this - if this is what you've got to
say, I'm not listening to abuse, this sort of thing. Basically W had to tell me to say 'Fuck
off', I can now say it (laughs)."

In addition to feeling supported and loved by certain others in her life, Christine
indicated that the love she has for herself has enhanced her love of others. She said, "I
feel a great sense of caring about others and I've always felt that although I didn't realize
that I was one of them too. Now I know that and it's enhanced my love for others."
Melanie

Melanie is a university student in her twenties. She was raised by her mother and lived with one sibling, a younger sister. Her parents were divorced when Melanie was 6 years old. Melanie was sexually abused multiple times in her life by different people. She was first abused while she and her family were staying at a women's shelter at the age of 6 years. The perpetrator was an adolescent boy. The abuse consisted of fondling and occurred on one occasion. Melanie was sexually abused for the second time at 8 years of age by her uncle. This abuse also consisted of fondling and occurred several times over the span of a year, at which time the perpetrator moved away. In addition, Melanie was sexually abused during her early teens by neighborhood boys who chased her and her sister and grabbed at their bodies. Finally, Melanie was raped by a boyfriend when she was in her early teens as well as by her former husband. She indicated that she disclosed the first incident of sexual abuse to her mother and the workers at the women's shelter but nothing was done. She did not disclose the abuse by her uncle until 20 years of age, at which time she told her mother. She indicated, however, that her mother and aunt were frequently in the same room at the time her uncle was abusing her and her younger sister. Finally, she indicated that she told numerous people about the incident which involved the neighborhood boys, however, nothing was done.

In addition to the sexual abuse, Melanie reported that she was moderately emotionally abused and neglected as a child. She reported that her mother was quite depressed and was very controlling of her while she was growing up. For example, Melanie explained that her mother would not allow her to cross the street by herself until after she was married. Melanie indicated that her marriage at 16 years of age enabled her to get away from her mother. She explained that her former husband was extremely emotionally and sexually abusive toward her and that he occasionally assaulted her physically. During the interview, she indicated that it was difficult for her to separate out the effects of the sexual abuse from the effects of the other forms of abuse that she experienced. She is currently divorced and maintains full custody of her child.

Melanie’s representations of self.

Developing a clear sense of who she is is something that Melanie indicated that she is currently struggling with. It seemed that she attributed not developing a clear
sense of herself to her life experiences generally in which she felt controlled by many people, including her sexual abusers, mother, and former husband. Therefore, the sexual abuse seems to be one of many experiences that affected Melanie's sense of herself. Despite struggling with developing a clearer sense of herself, Melanie described having a 'core self' that always remained the same in spite of people's efforts to change her. She said, "I remember feeling like there was this core inside of me and that was me and it would never change and around it the other part of me would...[it was]...like a mist. It could always change and people could change it and make me do what they wanted to but I would still be me inside." It seemed that Melanie was suggesting that she always maintained a sense of herself as different from others - a coreness that she could rely on, but that a more peripheral part of herself changed to meet the needs of the people around her.

In spite of having a sense of herself as distinct from others around her, it seemed that Melanie was unclear about what her sense of self looked like. For example, she indicated that she did not know herself. She said, "I didn't really know anyone before and I didn't know myself." As well, she explained that she looked to others to guide her in how she should be. She said, "...I was just busy watching other people do what I thought I should do...." Melanie expressed a strong desire to get to know herself. She said, "I think I really want to know me...and I want to know what I like [and] who I am...I don't want to like things because someone else likes them... I really think about that when I decide I like something - well do I like this because this person has this hanging on their living room wall or is it because I really like it? I really want to know who I am." She indicated that a search for a sense of herself was heightened after she left her former husband. She said, "When I first split with my husband I realized that there wasn't anything there [regarding her sense of herself] and I wanted to find out who I [was]. I got really restless and impatient, I just wanted to find out now! ...I wanted to be who I am NOW and I wanted to know who I really am. I just wanted to know who I was and I realized that if I just waited it would come. I already am who I am, but with every decision that I make it just becomes more evident. It is the little things that I do every day,...[like] playing with my son, those [were] things that I was doing and I was being me. I kind of calmed down and realized it is going to happen anyway no matter what I do. I am just going to have to sit back and wait." Melanie indicated that in therapy, she began to listen to herself more and, in turn, became more aware of herself. As well, she identified that coming to know herself enables her not to ignore herself as she had in the
past. She said, "...I want to get to know myself because then I can't ignore myself."

Finally, in getting to know herself, Melanie is finding that she likes herself. She indicated that as she likes herself more, she also feels more physically attractive despite weighing more than she ever has.

Consistent with not experiencing a clear sense of herself, Melanie described herself as not feeling her emotions. For example, she described a tremendous difficulty that she had in dealing with her emotions, such as when she remembered being sexually abused as a child. In an attempt to deal with her feelings, Melanie explained that she hurt herself by burning her arm with a curling iron. She said, "I realized that something was wrong and it would never go away, no matter what it wouldn't just disappear. I had to deal with it and I had to get it over with. I felt panicky and I felt angry. I felt very angry. I am not used to feeling angry and I had all this anger and I didn't know what to do with it, all this anger, frustration and panic. There was no where for it to go and I wasn't used to dealing with emotions so I didn't know what to do with this. I remember being in a panicky mood and...I had to do something....I was so frustrated I took a curling iron and I burned my arm....just to get something out so I could feel the pain, make it something tangible that I could see and feel because before it was just in my head and there was no where for it to go." Melanie explained that she struggled more with her eating disorder, bulimia, at this time as well. She also indicated that making things difficult for herself was a way in which she could keep busy and keep from feeling. She said, "it was kind of in desperation (making things more difficult for herself), trying to do something for myself. I wanted to get out and get away from my past and myself...I had to deal with it but I couldn't, it was too much." She explained that she would go out the night before she was to write a final exam or go out to the bar when she had a term paper due as ways of making her life more difficult.

Melanie identified that part of getting to know herself is allowing herself to feel. She said, "[I want]...to feel what I feel whether it is good or bad...to accept what I feel whether it is good or bad. If I am angry to let myself feel angry. Or to be disappointed, to let myself feel disappointed." Melanie indicated that feeling her emotions enables her to take care of herself. She said, "I used to just ignore it and go about and do whatever I usually do because I thought well it doesn't matter how you feel because this and this still needs to get done anyway, so you might as well go and do it. That's pretty much what got me through - is just life goes on. I still think that way but I realize that even though you feel bad and you have this and this to do, you still need to take time for yourself, take
care of yourself." In the feedback session, Melanie indicated that she continues to struggle with feeling her emotions. For example, she explained that at times she does not attach her feelings when telling some people about her life-story. She indicated that it merely becomes a story divorced from her as a person.

Melanie's efforts to become more aware of herself are ongoing and are evident in some of her current struggles. She indicated that she continues to struggle with integrating various aspects of herself. In particular, Melanie seemed to struggle with integrating herself as a mother with herself as a young woman. This struggle seemed to reflect a desire to balance her needs as determined by the roles that she finds herself in as a young, single mother. She said, "...at home I am different than at school because at home I am V's mom and I have to be so responsible and I'm in charge of his life but when I go out and at school and when I am with friends I feel like I am twenty-one....I don't know where I belong. It is like being in the twilight zone. It is not as bad as when I was married, it was like being seventeen and thirty years [simultaneously], but now it is a little closer. But it is really hard for me sometimes", and "...what I would really like is just to go out and have fun with my friends and I can be...twenty-one (laughs). When I go out on Friday night for three or four hours, I am twenty-one and I am just like everyone else there except when it is over I have to go home and take care of my son and I have to get up at eight and fix him breakfast." Another way in which Melanie seemed to be struggling with balancing her needs was in determining when she needs time alone to reflect on her life and when she needs others around her so that she does not reflect so much. She said," Sometimes the hardest part is figuring out whether I should be with people or if I should be by myself" and "[when depressed] I either spend lots of time on my own or I be with friends and that is a hard decision because sometimes I need to spend time on my own and deal with it and get it over with. Sometimes spending time with my friends is good because they will cheer me up, or sometimes I spend time with friends so I don't have to think about it. I push it away and deal with it some other time later or just stick it in the corner and not deal with it at all." It seems that Melanie is trying to figure out when being by herself or with others will enable her to take care of herself.

Despite her search for a clearer sense of herself, Melanie seemed to have some very clear ideas of who she is. For example, she indicated that being 'real' and honest are things that have become very important to her. As well, she described herself as a determined and persistent person. She said, " I felt like if she [sister] came and lived with me that I could take care of her... and that everything would be better. But having
her live with me also made me realize that the only reason I got better is because I am so determined to do things for myself...", and "I am extremely extremely determined, persistent." She also expressed a self-reliance which seemed connected to her survival throughout her life. She said, "I will always be able to take care of myself...if they [friends] are there that's great but I will never forget how to take care of myself and do things for myself." Given her experiences with others, Melanie certainly seems to have had a history of relying on herself.

In spite of her self-reliance, Melanie indicated that she has begun reaching out to others in ways that she has never done before. She said, "I was going to call a friend and tell her I was depressed and demand for her to cheer me up. I have never done that before. Usually I just ignore it and go on about my business and go to bed early or something like that... I'm just not used to doing that [asking others for support]." She indicated that she now recognizes that other people struggle with similar things that she does and that reaching out to others helps her join with them on this common ground. Despite feeling that there is common ground between herself and others, Melanie also indicated that she feels different from others as a result of the experiences that she has had throughout her life. She said, "Sometimes since my life has been so different, I almost feel like a freak show. They sit and they listen to me and they are just so amazed and I don't want to tell them anything about myself because I just want to be me and even though that's part of me, they might, I don't know, think something else." It is at these times that Melanie indicated she cuts off from her feelings and merely 'tells' the story of her life. During the feedback session, she expressed a desire for others to relate to her on the basis of who she is and not on the basis of being amazed by what she has gone through in her life. This desire seems consistent with her struggle to gain a clearer sense of who she is.

Melanie suggested that the sexual abuse, as well as other forms of abuse, had an impact on her perceptions. She indicated that she questioned her perceptions regarding the sexual abuse as a result of her mother's response to the abuse. She explained that her mother and aunt were frequently in the same room at the time her uncle was sexually abusing her and her sister. She indicated that neither of them seemed to notice anything unusual about his behavior. In speaking of how she integrated this lack of awareness on behalf of her mother, Melanie said, "we wondered if nothing wrong was happening, I used to try to rationalize that because I thought, my uncle has the shakes and his hands were shaking and you watch him carrying a cup of coffee or something, his
hands are always shaking. I thought, well maybe it is just his shakes." In the feedback session, she clarified that the response of others around her to her disclosures made her question whether the sexual abuse was wrong and whether it was wrong for her to disclose it to someone. These feelings were particularly prevalent at the time of the first incident of sexual abuse. She said, "my mom thought he just showed himself to us (teenage boy in women's shelter who assaulted her and her sister), she didn't know that he had actually touched us. My mom didn't do anything, they just said 'Stay away from him'. So I think we kind of got the feeling we are bad and it is our fault."

In addition, it seemed that Melanie felt that the experience of sexual abuse left her ill equipped to identify when she was being violated. She explained that she did not identify the sexual abuse as abusive or as having an impact on her until right before she decided to go into therapy at 20 years of age. She began to realize the impact that the sexual abuse had on her when, after her sister's second suicide attempt, her mother asked her what had happened to them as children. Melanie connected her lack of awareness regarding what constituted abusive behavior to a tendency to shut off her feelings and ignore things. She said, "I didn't realize how terrible it [a violation] was until later, I was like 'Oh my gosh, I never realized'. I noticed this, but it didn't bother me and it really should have! ...Shutting off the feelings and ignoring things, I have done that a lot!" The sexual abuse seemed to leave Melanie with skewed ideas of what was normal and what was abusive in general. She said, "certain things that wouldn't bother [me], I would notice and they wouldn't bother me (when men would treat her in a sexual way). Like the way the ice cream man, he would look at me when he would come around and I am thinking 'But I was only fourteen then'. The way he would look at me and talk to me and things like that....it was everywhere....It made me feel uncomfortable but in a way I was used to that too and it didn't bother me, it bothered me but it didn't...I was very confused."

Melanie also expressed a belief that the sexual abuse somehow altered her. She remembered feeling different from other little girls who she assumed were not being sexually abused. In speaking of her experience, she said, "[I think] how unfair it was and how young I was and how it's really scary...I was just so young. I think people that come through and ...[stay] innocent are really incredible...in some ways, sometimes I imagine there are all these fingerprints on me and I can't wash them off." Melanie's metaphor clearly indicates a feeling of being tainted or altered by the sexual abuse.
Melanie’s self-concept was also impacted by the experience of sexual abuse. She explained that she always saw herself in a sexual way as a result of the sexual abuse. She said, "As far as the way I view myself now...I realize that without really thinking about it ever since I was a little girl, I have always thought of myself in a sexual way....I wasn't trying to be sexy exactly, but I thought of myself in a sexual way and I noticed when people would look at me or treat me in a sexual way." Also, Melanie indicated that despite seeing herself as sexual, she did not identify herself with her gender. Rather, she always just thought of herself as a person. She explained that she was unaware of the social barriers that women in our society face, such as with education and employment, and simply believed that she had the same opportunities that other people had. She said, "Because I have always thought of myself as a person, not necessarily a woman, but really just a person. I think in a way that has really helped me a lot because I didn't realize what kind of barriers were there." Also, she explained that identifying herself as a female was scary because she 'knew' what kind of attention women got from men because they were women. She indicated that in now accepting the sexual abuse, she has come to accept that part of her identity is being a woman. She said, "I think a lot of it is kind of accepting the abuse....those [experiences] are part of me....And I think also it is also being more accepting of myself and it is easier to be a woman now whereas before it was scary because for me it is like look what kind of attention I got for being a woman, for being female. Now it is easier for me to accept because I know that wasn't right." Melanie has now become aware of the barriers that women in our society face and seems to identify with women because of the barriers. She said, "I think that with women I kind of identify more because they have been, some of them have been through what I have. Or they are in danger of the same thing I am." In the feedback session, Melanie clarified that part of seeing herself as a woman came through seeing herself as an adult. She explained further that she felt like a child around both her mother and her former husband, and that being away from them enabled her to begin seeing herself as an adult woman.

In addition to accepting and integrating her gender as a part of her identity, the acceptance and integration of the sexual abuse also seemed to play a central role in Melanie's self-growth. She explained that she feels fundamentally different from the person she was 3 years ago and she attributed her growth to an acceptance of the sexual abuse and other things that happened to her in her life. She said, "I think it has changed [her sense of self], it has definitely changed. Somehow I feel like everything happened to
someone else and the past three years has just been me. Part of doing it is accepting all that happened to me and taking it from there..." Melanie's acceptance of the sexual abuse and her integration of it into her sense of herself was obvious. She said, "Therapy I think really helped me to think about myself and how...these things affected me... [It] helped me accept myself, like good and bad... Even though these things happened to me I am still me and it is part of who I am. I am still able to like myself because it has helped me to see that it wasn't my fault." Related to her acceptance of the abuse seems to be Melanie's self-acceptance.

Melanie's acceptance of the sexual abuse as well as other violating experiences was also evident in other views she articulated regarding herself. She explained that others tend to see her as strong. However, she explained that she does not agree with this interpretation of who she is. She indicated that rather than seeing an inherent strength as aiding her in her survival, she sees what she has gone through as creating strength in her. She said, "well I remember when people would think...a husband and stuff and people were just amazed and I would tell them that it is not really any big deal, you would have been able to do the same. That was just my view of people. I looked at my situation as that is just the way things are and you do it, not necessarily because you are strong, but because I was in that situation, so I did the only logical thing I could....and now I look at my sister and I realize that everybody is not that strong. I still see it the same way, strength isn't really a measure of who the person is but people get strong due to the things they have been through. You could be that strong too but maybe there isn't a need for you to use it." Melanie's integration of the sexual abuse into her sense of herself is evident.

Melanie seemed to have moved beyond an acceptance of the abuse by claiming responsibility for herself and her life. She said, "What I was afraid of was myself (rather than anything that may have happened to her) - what am I going to do and how am I going to handle it. I realized that part of it was realizing responsibility too because I realized that whatever happens to me and how I handle it is up to me and the decisions I make and, well... who I care about and who I don't care about, what's important to me, it's all up to me. So whether I am hurt or not is up to me", and "even though... some things happened to me,... it is not my fault but how I deal with it is." Movement from seeing herself as a victim with no personal power to seeing herself as responsible for her life and herself was evident. She said, "Well it feels really good {to have a voice} and it's kind of scary because now I am responsible. Before I wasn't responsible for
anything...in some ways, that was easier too, not being responsible. Because I just did whatever anyone wanted me to do." It seems that acceptance of the sexual abuse has enabled Melanie to define herself more clearly.

**Pivotal experiences.**

Melanie articulated a grieving process that began at 20 years of age when she began to realize that what had happened to her was abusive and did have an impact on her. She described herself as being extremely angry, an emotion she had never felt free enough to express before, and sad as she realized the impact of the sexual abuse on her. At this point, she began to view herself differently. For example, she began to view herself as a person who was entitled to feel angry. Also, she gained a new perspective on her life. She said, "I didn't realize that it (the sexual abuse) had any effect at all until this year after I realized I had been molested and that was the big impact. That was the big thing that made me angry and sad was when I realized how it had affected me and I was just mad!... Look what a mess it made of my life....What would have happened if that hadn't happened to me?....It just seemed that it had colored over everything."

Melanie identified a clear connection between herself and others when asked about the process of her healing. Her increased self-awareness seemed pivotal to her healing. For example, she indicated that sharing her experiences with others enables her to become more aware of herself. She described doing this by attending groups at a mental health clinic and by entering some of her poetry into a local publication. She expressed a desire to contribute to others' healing by sharing her experiences of abuse and violation. She explained that she feels it is important for survivors to know that they are not alone. Melanie went on to indicate that her increased self-awareness enables her to identify with others more; something that she struggled with prior to her healing. She explained that she relates to others by drawing on what she knows of herself. During the feedback session, she reported coming to the realization that she can't be that different from others and that, therefore, others must experience similar feelings to her.

Another thing that Melanie indicated was central in her healing was when she began doing things for herself rather than for other people. She indicated that doing things for herself enabled her to get the kind of support that she needed to leave her marriage and to identify what it was that she needed. She said, "I think having school is something for myself and having something for myself enabled me to get support and to realize that I need things for myself. So that was the first thing that I did for myself...I
realized, 'I don't really need you and look what you are doing to me'... (making reference to her former husband)." She explained that coming to identify her former husband as abusive was central to her beginning to do things for herself.

Finally, Melanie indicated that getting out of her marriage was a step in her healing. She described a time when she realized that even though she was lonely when alone, she was happier than she was when she was with her husband. Again, a focus on doing things for herself rather than for other people seemed central to Melanie taking this step. She said, "I finally realized one night that I was worried about what other people thought and not myself and that was a big moment, I was less lonely... and I was a lot happier even though I was really alone. I didn't really have any friends or anything... but I just realized that I was so much happier without him.... That was my choice and I am so glad I did it." In the feedback session, Melanie indicated that through this experience she realized that she made the right decision in divorcing her former husband.

**Melanie's representations of others and relationships.**

Melanie described herself as having no boundaries in relation to others. She said, "I like having boundaries because before I didn't really have any and people would just step on them or...they would make the decisions for me." Melanie also explained that she lacked boundaries in relation with men specifically. She said, "... before I was nice to everyone and I wanted to help everyone. I remember I used to feel obligated, that I didn't have the right to say no to a lot of things. I had a boss, he was the assistant manager where I worked and I went out with him to an amusement park. I thought everyone else was going but it was just me and him and he tried to kiss me and I remember I felt obligated to.... For... months after that in the back room he would give me a kiss or something and I was going out with my boyfriend then.... This assistant manager was... twenty-one and he kept telling me - you should break up with your boyfriend and go out with me. I didn't like him at all! I thought he was kind of a scuz-ball for saying that and I was thinking 'I am only fifteen, you should go find someone your own age'. Then I would kiss him anyway because I felt obligated to because I had once before or something" and "some people will walk up to you in the bar and after five minutes they will be trying to kiss you. That didn't bother me at all when it first happened but after this year I thought that is really stepping on a person's boundaries and that is really disrespectful and how could someone do that? It bothers me now and before it wouldn't
have been any big deal at all." Melanie's increasing awareness of her boundaries in relation with others is obvious.

Melanie's growth in sorting out her boundaries in relation with others in general was evident in other ways as well. For example, she seems to take a stance of cautious trusting in her relationships with others now. She said, "I have always been trusting, but I think now the way I am trusting is a little more realistic. Before I used to trust everyone without discriminating. Now I realize that you can trust people to different degrees." Although it was clear from the interview that Melanie is working to sort out her boundaries with others, she also expressed a wish to be available for others in need. She seemed to be struggling to achieve a balance between meeting her own needs and meeting the needs of others. In speaking of people like a woman she met at her son's daycare, she said, "Sometimes, people like that [who demand a lot from her], it is so hard for me and I am nicer when I talk to them. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable like I almost want to tell them, "don't call me anymore, I don't want to be your friend, it is too much I can't handle it." But then again I feel bad because I was always happy that I could help people....I still want to. It is just sometimes it takes a lot more to be friends and I have to distance myself more from some people like that. I don't have to get quite as involved." Likewise, Melanie identified that sometimes her eagerness to understand others interferes with her feeling her emotions. She said, "he [a former boyfriend] cheated on me the whole time and the thing is...instead of being angry with people, I am more interested in understanding the terrible things that they do. I am so busy being understanding that I don't really get angry', and "If someone hurts me I like to think about why and be more understanding than hurt. But it still hurts a bit to understand why. It helps me deal with it a bit better."

Melanie's representations of herself in relationships have changed and continue to change from the way in which she saw herself with others before. In keeping with her struggle to sort out her boundaries with others, she described herself as being self-determined in her relationships with others; something which was not prominent for her before. She said, "...basically who I am is who I am and I don't see why you would want to change that. It is part of being real and how other people see me, if they don't like it then that's too bad, but this is who I am and I shouldn't change for other people", and "She [another mother at the daycare] reminded me a lot of my friends that I had [before]. She had a lot of problems and she expected everyone to bend over backwards for her and feel sorry for her. She would solicit sympathy as much as she possibly could
and I realized I don't like people forcing me to feel a certain way about themselves. I don't like the emotions to be forced. "If I want to feel something or do something for you let me do it because I decide to and I want to, not because you expect me to." Melanie's self-determination in her relationships with others seems to be related to her efforts to sort out her boundaries with others. In speaking of the same woman who she met at her son's daycare, she said, "Then I realized that I didn't like her and I didn't want to be friends with her and that was hard for me....It felt kind of good though to realize that I don't have to be friends with everyone and I don't have to like everyone." Melanie also described getting a clearer sense of her boundaries in relation with her sister; she began to realize that she was her son's mother and not her sister's mother.

Melanie described supportive relationships that she has now that seemed related to her tendency to be more self-determined in her relationships. She said, "It is like we (her and another single mother) are almost on the same growing level and it is nice to call her and...I felt really good when she called me and she was just bawling and she just needed someone to talk to and I just realized how far we had come since I had met her because I didn't tell her what to do I just told her 'Well you know what you have to do'. It was nice that I could help her and I could cheer her up and make her feel better but she didn't expect me to give her advice necessarily. We both realized that I didn't need to give her advice because she already knew what she had to do and we both knew. It was really good."

Consistent with being more self-determined in her relationships, Melanie described a general acceptance of other people. She indicated that she can like the good things and the bad things about people and can accept them for who they are. Despite her acceptance of others, Melanie indicated that she often has trouble understanding others. There is a sense, however, that the belief that she can't understand others may be changing. She said, "I still feel like that now (that she doesn't understand other people). I should be able to figure anything out or understand anyone. But actually now it is coming where I am starting to understand people a little bit better, and I can't figure out anyone...because you can't. When I think about how confusing it must be for someone to try to figure out me and some of the things I do, I know I would never be able to make any sense of it. So I realize that is the same with other people. I stopped a long time ago, trying to figure out people. Before I got married I stopped trying to figure out other people because you just can't." Her use of self in reflecting on others is obvious.
In addition to her belief that it is difficult for her to understand others, Melanie seemed to express a belief that others are unpredictable and are capable of hurting her. However, she indicated that others could hurt her only if she allowed herself to care for that person. Melanie's self-reliance was evident. Furthermore, Melanie also seemed to express a belief that others cannot be relied on or depended upon. For example, she said, "Because people change so much, they keep changing so much. I am not sure what it is like to have a really long-standing relationship with a friend...I don't know if people do that or what it is like. The friends I have right now are really good friends...sometimes it is kind of scary, I almost don't want to hang out with them too much because I don't want to come to depend that much on them because they may not always be there...But in a way you get used to it and it is OK because then you'll have other things..." Again, her self-reliance was obvious. Consistent with her self-reliance, Melanie expressed a belief that others are replaceable. However, this belief appears to be changing. She said, "It sounds kind of cold, but I am really thinking that friends are replaceable. And now I am beginning to think maybe some of them aren't replaceable. But there will always be someone later on to fill that function. No matter where you go you are going to find people to fulfill those needs, so most of my friends are replaceable."

Related to her beliefs that others are not reliable was her experience of disclosing the sexual abuse. People's responses to Melanie's disclosures of abuse seemed to have left her with a belief that others would not protect her. She described going to her mother when a teenage boy abused her and indicated that her mother did nothing. As well, she indicated that her mother was frequently in the room when the abuse by her uncle occurred. Again, she indicated that her mother did nothing. Melanie also described another time she disclosed being violated by some boys who chased her and her sister and grabbed at their bodies. Again, nothing was done to ensure Melanie's safety and protection. She described the responses of others like this, "I couldn't believe that that happened or that anyone would do that and I went and told my friend's mother about these boys and they didn't do anything and I told this other guy's mother, and nobody did anything. I told my mother and no one did anything and I just couldn't believe it. So of course I felt like I didn't have anything to do about it..." It seems that Melanie's experience of others not protecting her may have led to her viewing herself as ineffective in stopping or preventing further abuse.

Melanie indicated that the experience of sexual abuse seemed to color over everything in her life in terms of her relationships. Her marriage seemed to be
prominent in her mind. She explained that her marriage at such a young age was related to the sexual abuse as well as to her mother's strict control. She said, "I'm not sure, it [the sexual abuse] seems to color over everything, like as far as my relationships. A big thing that has affected me is how my relationships have just changed my life. I got married at sixteen and...just all the things that have happened to me. My mom's orientation didn't help either, I wanted to get married and get away."

Melanie indicated that the sexual abuse left her with a belief that others, specifically men, would violate her. She said, "I don't know about now, but I remember feeling uncomfortable with some guys and wondering about how other people saw relationships...I remember when we moved to [name of a city], one of my uncles, he had two daughters, and I remember seeing one of them sit on his lap and thinking... just thinking I wouldn't feel comfortable like that. I wondered if he did the same things that my uncle had done to me....I wondered how it felt like to be safe because I realized it was safe for her. I wondered what it was like." She explained that this fear and belief that men would violate her generalized to other significant relationships in her life. In talking of her brother, she explained, "I remember when I was about ten me and my sister and my brother were in my parents' hotel room and they were there too. We had a tickle fight and I remember feeling uncomfortable with that, you know, him touching me and stuff because I was afraid he might do something." In the feedback session, she indicated that her experience of the men who were close to her was that they wanted sex from her. In the initial interview, she said, "So of course I felt like I didn't have anything to do about it [when boys chased her and her sister grabbing at their bodies] and I just had this idea of what was expected of me and what men were interested in for me....Like my boyfriend was always proposing sex to me... I was like twelve! And it was all around me." As she described her marriage, it seemed that this was another experience which confirmed her belief that all the men in her life wanted from her was sex. During the feedback session, Melanie indicated that she now realizes that some, but not all, men use sex as a replacement for achieving intimacy with others. She explained further that it continues to surprise her when she hears a man talking about a woman he likes for reasons other than just sex.

In terms of her relationships with men, Melanie explained that before her healing she dealt with men in a sexual way. She said, "As far as dealing with men, I am used of that being on a more sexual level....I have been friends with guys, in fact all my life most of my friends have been guys. But then in most other situations it has been in a
sexual way...." As well, Melanie indicated that she developed a belief that men could fill a void for her and that she could look to them to get the attention she desired. She said, "(talking about compartmentalizing people) like a boyfriend would be someone I would tell everything to, to be my best friend, but then that would be the person that I would have sex with too. If it was just a friend, I may tell them everything too, tell everything to them but not as much because I wouldn't expect it because I wasn't in a sexual relationship with the person. It is hard to explain. A boyfriend, just because they were your boyfriend, this was their role. Individual attention, that is where you got it from....," and "I think a lot of it was that is how I got attention when I was younger and I was used of getting my individual attention that way. If I was going to have individual attention from a guy it would have been in a more sexual way than it should have been." She also indicated that she maintained a belief that in order to keep a man in her life, she had to have sex with him. She said, "...being alone and lonely and thinking that the person that fills this attention, this void, is a boyfriend. In some ways the feeling that to keep him I had to sleep with him, because I was always being pressured for sex.

Melanie described views of herself in relationships with men now that seem to be in ongoing change. She seems to be struggling with distinguishing between 'good' men and 'bad' men as determined by their intentions. She appears to be sorting out how to be with 'good' men and what to expect from them. She indicated that her past has left her ill equipped in terms of her relationships with men now. She said, "sometimes it is hard because sometimes I am not good at predicting all of the good stuff because I haven't been there! And sometimes other people are easier to deal with, like in relationships, guys that are just trouble. It is easier to deal with trouble than with someone who is really nice because that's really difficult. I just don't know what to do with one of those", and "I am not used to knowing where to stop and I have to really trust them and what if they don't care and well, what if I don't stop, but I should have. If it is a really nice guy I want to keep the relationship nice...and controlled. It is just scary to try and get to know someone that I might actually like (laughs). It is really frightening. Whereas some guy I just think is a jerk and...I'll like him but I'll get over him and it is no big deal (laughs)." She explained that she would be hurt more by a man that she expected would treat her decently than by one that she didn't expect much from. She said, "I think I am afraid of letting myself be vulnerable, like telling them things about myself, like that's me and accept it. But I am afraid of letting them get too close to me and being vulnerable...because it would be a whole lot harder to be hurt by a nice guy who I would
expect not to hurt me than by someone who I expect to hurt me....It doesn't hurt because I expected it." Again, her views of others as unpredictable was evident in her struggle to sort out how to be in relationships with men. Finally, Melanie indicated that she can now have non-sexual relationships with men. She said, "now I am just getting to ...being able to talk to people and have a good friend as a guy that I would talk to like I used to talk to my boyfriend without him being a boyfriend... or flirting."

Despite being able to relate with men in more nonsexual ways now, Melanie indicated that it is more difficult for her to identify with men now that she is aware of some of the barriers that women in our society face. As Melanie begins to identify more with women, she seems to experience more difficulty with developing relationships with men. She said, "in university...I realize that I've started hanging out with girls more and identifying with them more than with the guys. We can still be friends now but there is still kind of a barrier there {with men}, it is harder for me now "{to be friends with men}. However, as with her views of her relationships generally, Melanie expressed a desire to not shut herself off completely from men. She seemed to see herself as cautiously giving men the benefit of the doubt. She said, "well the way I see it is...they {men who, she clarified in the feedback session, may not have good intentions} are people too and they have hurts too and to totally shove them out and not be nice to them, how would they ever meet anyone, like nice people or to see what it is like to be with people who are understanding and caring? So I don't see me totally shutting them out, but I see me protecting myself." Melanie clarified in the feedback session that her stance of cautious trusting also applies to her relationships with women.

**Pivotal experiences.**

Melanie described a corrective experience that she had with a man that seemed pivotal in her changing views of herself in relationships, particularly in relationships with men. She indicated that this man allowed her to have a say in the relationship and accepted her for who she is. As well, she indicated that he did not pressure her for sex. In describing her relationship with this man, she said, "even though I ...hadn't really totally come into myself but I was changing, but he was changing too and doing about the same thing with himself and he just was so nice to...say anything to. He just really accepted me, whether he agreed with me or not", and "That is one thing that is really important right now with my friend last year because I can say no and it's perfectly fine with him. He wouldn't pout or whine. It was really important to me because I had never
actually slept with anyone before that I had actually wanted to."
Shannon

Shannon is a university student in her twenties. She described herself as an extremely high achiever both as a child and an adult. She excels at most of what she does. She was raised in an intact family until the age 14 years at which time her parents divorced. Her father was an alcoholic and was very emotionally and physically abusive with all 3 children, but mostly with Shannon's eldest brother. She has two brothers; one older and one younger. Shannon was sexually abused by her older brother at 7-8 years of age. The abuse involved intercourse and lasted 2-3 years. She disclosed this abuse to her uncle (by marriage) at age 12 and then this man sexually abused her. This abuse involved fondling and occurred on one occasion. She was mildly physically abused and severely emotionally abused and neglected as a child. Shannon indicated that it was impossible for her to separate out the impact of the sexual abuse from the impact of the other types of abuse she experienced as a child.

Shannon disclosed the sexual abuse to a social worker on several occasions and to family members. She was not believed by her family and no action was taken by the Department of Social Services. Shannon explained that the reactions to her disclosures had a more damaging impact on her than the actual experience of sexual abuse. She felt that the negative reactions magnified the impact of the sexual abuse. A recent investigation that Shannon undertook revealed that the Department of Social Services could not locate her file.

Shannon's representations of self.

One of the ways that Shannon identified the abuse as having impacted her views of herself was in her belief that she was to blame for the abuse happening. Shannon believed that she 'let' the abuse happen and that she should have done something to stop it or prevent it from happening. She believed that somehow something about who she was brought on the sexual abuse. She said, "...I was just convinced that...there had to be something wrong with me. I was eleven years old and I thought I was simply a sexy little girl....I couldn't understand why this kept happening. I must have been doing something wrong..."

Shannon described herself as someone who was extremely competent. She excelled at most of what she did and took on the role of mother in her family of origin. In
the feedback session, she elaborated on her achievement-oriented behavior. For example, she explained that she tried to keep her home life, in which she felt like a failure and felt she had no control over events that happened, separate from the rest of her life. She explained further that she tried to compensate for her feelings of being a failure and lacking control by being extremely functional and competent in her activities outside the home. In the initial interview it became apparent that these discrepant views of herself seemed to cause Shannon some confusion regarding who she really was. Attempts to integrate her views of herself as a victim into her views of herself as competent and strong were apparent. She said, "I think about the abuse, I felt a lot of guilt, like I should have done something. I let this happen or I let that happen and now I'm acting like I'm some sort of a victim. I always blamed myself and said 'You always think you are so strong and you let all of this happen.'" Seeing herself as weak for 'letting' the abuse happen and as strong when she was 'able' to stop it became apparent in the interview. For example, she said, "I used to look at myself as so weak and all these other things, but I wasn't", and "When I was strong enough to stop it though, I did. I turned threats around on him {brother}...".

The dilemma of integrating 'letting it happen' into her sense of herself as a competent person also seemed to be apparent in her use of metaphor with respect to the sexual abuse. Initially she saw herself to be like a prostitute; that is, someone who exchanged sex for the things that she needed. Again, her sense of responsibility for allowing the abuse to happen seemed paramount. For instance she said, "A lot of times I felt like a prostitute because I knew why I was sometimes letting these things happen. If I needed to feel loved or these other things, it may feel horrible, I knew I shouldn't be doing it, but you let things happen to get things that you need. And in some cases it was simply to be behind a locked door and be away from your drunk father...and you do it. When I was strong enough to stop it though, I did." However, later, while in therapy, she began to construct a different view of herself in relation to the sexual abuse. Rather than seeing herself as someone who let the abuse happen to meet her needs, she described seeing herself as having little choice but to comply. She saw herself as imprisoned. She said, "he (therapist) used one (metaphor) about a prostitute and I didn't like that. I didn't like to think of it that way. I looked at it like a prison - you are caught in this prison and you have no choice. As a child your home is your prison." At this point in her healing, it seemed that Shannon began to externalize the sexual abuse as something which
was out of her control; thereby rendering her inability to stop the abuse irrelevant. She now sees herself as behaving in ways which were necessary for her survival.

Related to Shannon’s belief that she let the abuse happen were feelings of self-contempt and hatred. For example, she described herself as once ‘hating that little kid’ (herself as a child). In the feedback session, she elaborated on her feelings of self-contempt. For instance, she described hating herself because she was ‘weak, needy, and a victim’. In the initial interview, she indicated that she identified with men because she did not want to be like a woman - weak and needy. She explained that she took on traditionally male characteristics to gain a sense of control and to protect herself. She said, "I've acted more like a male than a female ... aggressive... domineering, aggressive, the stronger one... the more forceful one, and the one to take care of everything...I guess maybe I modeled myself after a male because those were the ones that were the biggest threat to myself."

In the feedback session, Shannon indicated that she believes that the sexual abuse as well as other violating experiences inhibited her from developing her ‘true’ personality as a child. In the initial interview, she indicated that as a child she was not able to develop the more nurturing and caring characteristics that she has since developed because of a need that she had to protect and guard herself from others. As a result, Shannon saw herself as a mean and horrible person who was hurtful to others. She said, "After therapy I was amazed to find out that I wasn't this mean horrible person, that I actually was very nice and able to love and nurture people and I had never been able to do that before." She also seemed to see herself as inherently bad. She said, "...finally I realized that they didn't do it (sexually abuse her) because they hated me or that I was just born a bad person which is something that I also believed for a long time." As well, as a result of the abuse, Shannon felt she was marked, mutilated, and incomplete. She said, "...all these horrible, horrible, horrible things happened...I am marked, I am mutilated in a way. I didn't feel I was whole. I was missing all these things that other people had..." Somehow, it seems that Shannon perceived the experience of sexual abuse to taint her in some fundamental way.

A final and central impact of the sexual abuse that Shannon talked about was an internal struggle of doubting her perceptions of what had happened. In talking of her experience she said, "But I knew, part of me knew I wasn't lying, but part of me said but I must be because there is no way so many people could be wrong." Not being believed by others had a major impact on Shannon and she indicated that in some ways that was the
worst part of the abuse. She believed for many years that she was exaggerating the significance of the sexual abuse and that she was 'crazy'. She said, "It's hard to convince yourself of that {that you're not crazy} when...your parents and all of the people you look up to and trust are saying, 'No, you're the one with the problem'." She described how not trusting her perceptions of reality went beyond the experiences of sexual abuse. For example, in the feedback session she explained that she began to think differently as a result of not being believed and being blamed for the sexual abuse. In the initial interview, she reported, "I...never believed myself in anything I did. I was always second guessing. If I had an argument or disagreement with somebody I would always come home and second guess what had happened and maybe this didn't happen or maybe I wasn't sick or maybe..." She clarified in the feedback session that she also began to blame herself and felt responsible for almost everything negative that happened, such as feeling responsible at 7 years old for not noticing that she had run out of asthma medicine.

Shannon has created many new and more self-affirming views of herself. Through therapy Shannon was able to realize the impact that the sexual abuse had on her and through this seemed able to reconstruct a new view of herself in relation to the abuse. She said, "{in therapy}...I realized the dramatic impact, the bad impact it did have but at the same time I was able...cause for so long I hated that little kid. I was able to say this kid was a wonderful little kid." She identified that her views of herself as responsible for the sexual abuse happening were protective and that she needed to let go of them to heal. She said, "You train yourself to think one way for so long to protect yourself and it takes you a long time to be able to let that go." Self-acceptance and self-love were paramount in her descriptions of herself now. She said, "so I am able to feel some pride in myself and it feels really nice." Her new views of herself seemed related to her integration of the sexual abuse. She said, "I have fully accepted what happened. I don't feel ashamed anymore...", and "...I can say to myself now that I was sexually abused and not feeling like I'm committed some kind of sin." She also reported no longer feeling like she is lying or exaggerating when she discloses that she was sexually abused. It was clear that she no longer sees herself as a victim. She said, "I think everyone has that choice {to heal}. ... You can be a victim for the rest of your life or you can get over it and get on with your life and take what you can out of it {being sexually abused}...and build what you can from there."
A view of herself now as someone who does have some control over what happens to her and someone who is strong and capable was obvious. She said, "I had no say over it when I was eleven but I do have a say now. I am an adult. I am independent and I do have a say and that is definitely one thing that has changed." As well, she has clearly identified that she has gained some tremendous strengths through coping with the abuse. For example, she said, "we can try to pull good things out of bad situations. I learned to be very, very strong. I am one person who you will never see crack in a crisis." Again, her integration of the sexual abuse into her sense of herself is clear.

In addition to seeing herself differently, Shannon began to understand the coping efforts that she used during the abuse differently. In describing this new understanding she said, "I mean the situation I was in, I had very little choices. I decided to make the best of it [using sex to get things in relationships with men]." With her new understanding of herself and the way she coped with the abuse, she seemed able to let herself off the hook for being abused. She said, "[one day after therapy]...I finally understood. I could finally let myself off the hook and stop blaming myself. I finally understood it wasn't my fault. I did the best I could and I was this extremely resourceful smart little girl who did what she had to do." Through therapy she was able to actually go back and experience herself as a child; something that she was not able to do before. Once she was able to 'feel' her 11 year old feelings, she was able to begin liking herself.

In addition to liking herself, she identified being able to take care of herself and protect herself. She said, "I've learned to nurture myself and take care of myself and love myself and really feel good about myself for the first time and it feels really, really good. I think I really let myself off the hook...", and "...now I can protect myself when I...see I am in a bad relationship or something that is making me feel bad [or] someone that's...putting me down, I say to myself 'You are a good person, you don't have to put up with this and...it is better for you not to see these people' because I don't want to hurt myself anymore either." She explained that as she takes care of herself more, the part of her who is still a little girl and who experienced the sexual abuse can go to sleep. She said, "Now the little girl realizes that she has got someone who is going to take care of her....Someone who is not going to let these things happen to her anymore. She has kind of been able to go to sleep." As well, Shannon seemed to be suggesting that her ability to take care of herself now is related to her trusting her perceptions. She said, "I have a lot of other choices...I can at least now recognize what's dangerous and what's not. I have
become empowered." She indicated that she continues to work on trusting and believing herself. Shannon's active involvement in her healing is obvious.

Finally, Shannon continues to work at no longer seeing herself as a mean, horrible and crazy person. She appears to do this by engaging in activities which will confirm her new views of herself. She said, "...that's part of the reason I did want my name on that is because I don't have anything to be to be ashamed of....I shouldn't feel bad about this." In the feedback session, she also indicated that participating in the study was a way in which she could disclose the sexual abuse without experiencing the usual negative feedback from her family. As well, she informed me that although the exercise of reading through the narrative was painful as she revisited memories and feelings, it was also extremely validating for her to see her experience written down. She reported that the initial interview reaffirmed for her that the sexual abuse did actually happen, that it was as horrible as it felt, and that someone believed her and validated her for telling her story.

**Pivotal experiences.**

The main impetus in Shannon's healing process seems to have been an intense desire for change, both within herself and her life more generally. In speaking of her healing process, Shannon said, "I said '... I am coming in (to therapy) and I am not going to leave until this is done, [so] I can go ...to bed and to sleep at night and not see these things and not go through this every four months and to be able to shower without no one else sitting in the room and guarding the door for me.'" This desire for change and pushing of herself to create change is reflective of Shannon's active involvement in her healing process. In describing herself right before therapy, she said, "I was kind of giving myself I guess a little therapy and coaching all the way through, saying 'You are not so bad' or 'You are doing this because of this'..." A recognition that she was not feeling healthy and a concern about repeating unhealthy patterns in her relationship with her husband seemed to be the motivating forces for change with Shannon. In the feedback session, she explained that the physical distance from her family and the support that she received from her husband also facilitated her process of change.

Shannon's desire for change seems to have enabled her to seek out validation of her experience in various ways. She articulated that validation of her experience from others was one of the key factors in her healing. She said, "... I wanted to know that I was [sexually abused] and I never had anyone say...'You were' and some things were so so
obvious." She looked to books as well as to people in seeking out this validation. Validation of her perceptions enabled her to move on in her life. She said, "When I went into therapy I just wanted somebody to tell me that I had every right to feel angry...and all these things that I never had. It was really a luxury to have someone say 'You have every right to feel mad and you have every reason to be screwed up right now' and after I had that, then I was able to stop dwelling on it and to go on and say 'OK, I felt bad, now I've had someone say 'That's okay', now I'd like to start feeling good.'" In the feedback session she clarified that validation from her therapist enabled her to acknowledge that she was not exaggerating the sexual abuse, which, in turn, enabled her to begin feeling her feelings regarding being abused. Shannon identified further that seeing her therapist feel badly about what had happened to her enabled her to begin to feel badly for herself.

It became evident in the initial interview that in seeking out validation of her experiences, she was also able to reduce her feelings of isolation and differentness. She said, "...I thought I was just damaged, and I was able to see other people (through readings) who felt the same way and at the same time got over it and had healthy relationships and that's the part I wanted to see... is what happens next", and "I'm not the only one. I didn't even have to talk to them, just to read about their experiences and read about their feelings and how their families treated them....I though 'Oh! This is exactly like me. I'm not crazy. Oh thank God!'." Again, Shannon's active involvement in her healing is obvious.

Shannon also described experiences she had that seemed central to her healing. For instance, she identified disconfirming her views of herself as responsible for the abuse in therapy by revisiting herself as a child. She described an age-regression experience that she had at home in which she actually relived some of the feelings that she experienced as a child. She indicated that she felt physically smaller and was very confused throughout this experience. Her husband informed her that her facial expressions looked like those of a child. She said," Then I actually kind of was able to go back and feel the things that at the time it just wasn't safe to feel (her 11 year old feelings)." In the feedback session, Shannon described reading an excerpt from a childhood friend's journal which said, 'Shannon and W tickled each other's bums'. She explained that reading this confirmed for her that the sexual abuse did actually happen. As well, through this reading she began to appreciate her child-like naiveté which helped her to view herself as less accountable for the sexual abuse.
Shannon also seemed to disconfirm her views of herself as responsible for the abuse through experiences in her current relationships. For example, seeing her younger brother enabled her to see herself as a child and appreciate her vulnerability. She said, "I blamed myself for that {not being able to see through her uncle}. But then I have a brother who is 11 years old and I look at him and I think...would I expect him to see that? Would I expect him to make those choices and to have done something? No. A 21-year-old maybe, but not an 11-year-old. I wouldn't have expected that of him and I shouldn't have expected that of me." Shannon explained that once she began viewing herself through 11 year old eyes rather than through adult eyes, she was able to gain some empathy for herself.

**Shannon's representations of others and relationships.**

Shannon described an apprehension that she had about people in general. She indicated that betrayal was a common experience for her that came to cloud her perceptions of others. She was betrayed not only by her brother and uncle, who abused her, but also her mother and father, who disbelieved her when she disclosed the sexual abuse. She was also betrayed by mental health workers who failed to do anything once she had disclosed the abuse. She said, "betrayal was a big theme for me. I was betrayed by my best friend, my brother...", and "I had been betrayed by my mother and all these people."

Shannon saw herself as defensive in her relationships with other people. She indicated that her defensiveness was the result of a belief that others would attack her. She said, "I remember even saying things like, ...'Don't even try hurting me because I will get you before you think about it' ...[that's] the kind of things I would say. I was so...defensive...I was waiting for someone to hurt me....I was just waiting for the bomb to fall." This view of herself in relationships with others was so paramount that when she began therapy she wanted to buy a gun because of fears of what her family would do as a result of her disclosing the sexual abuse. She described herself as paranoid at this time and in the feedback session identified that these fears were the result of her unresolved feelings regarding responses to her disclosures as a child. She indicated that her expectations that others were going to attack her were so strong that she saw herself developing into a hurtful person in efforts to protect herself. She reported, "I was so worried about getting hurt...I was so busy hurting everyone else so that they couldn't get to me first."
Another example of her views of herself as a mean person was her belief that others would judge her if they got to know her because she was so horrible. She indicated that this view of herself with other people interfered with her ability to form meaningful relationships. She said, "Interpersonal things, I was horrible, absolutely horrible. I could have really good relationships with people on a very casual basis, but any deeper...I was always afraid that if I let people get too close they would find out what a monster I was....That was my real fear - let them get too close and they're going to find out what a horrible, horrible person you are."

Shannon identified ongoing changes in her views of herself in relationships with others. She reported being increasingly able to set boundaries with other people in an assertive manner rather than in a hostile way. She said, "Every time I meet a man I mention my husband. If a guy sits by me in class and visits, I can't help it. I am still a little worried but at least now I am not rude to them....I am giving them a chance but I'm still setting my own boundaries and saying 'This is what feels safe to me' but...I'm not going to jump on you and attack you before you even say 'Hello' to me anymore, but my boundaries are still - you can't come any closer than this right now until I get to know you better." Related to her ability to set boundaries in her relationships with others more assertively, Shannon described herself as being more self-reliant in her relationships with others. She said, "I've learned that I don't have to depend on someone else to be happy....it's my responsibility to make myself happy..."

Shannon identified a tendency to seek out validating relationships and end those relationships which are no longer validating as evidence of changes in her views of others and relationships. She said, "I surround myself with people that will validate my feelings. I will no longer surround myself with people who are counting my failures. I am going to stay with the people who are going to count my successes" and "...I found more than anything, I've been cutting more relationships out of my life than I've been bringing in. I'm really careful now who I do pick and choose and I think a lot of that is because I am more confident now. I am not willing to settle with abusive people because I need someone. So I actually have fewer relationships now than I ever did." It seems that Shannon has learned how to discriminate between people who are good for her and those who are likely not good for her.

Not only does Shannon seem able to trust herself more in relation with others, she also seems more able to trust that others will likely not hurt her. In speaking of her views regarding people generally, she indicated that she is now able to see people at an
individual level rather than classifying them as all bad. She said, "Now I can turn around and not see it like everyone is against me, but split up and look at the individual person and say, 'well this person has some real big problems here'..." Being more able to trust seems to have freed Shannon up in her relationships with people in general. For example, she described herself as not being so harsh and as giving people the benefit of the doubt more often upon meeting them. Shannon seems to have begun using her experiences of being sexually abused to help her develop new representations of others and relationships. She said, "...I think I have gained a lot of understanding about a lot of people and I have learned to be very gentle, very...considerate, very aware of my feelings and other people's feelings because...I know what it feels like to feel hurt and alone and all those other things. I think it is made me very sensitive too..."

Shannon described an acceptance of others, particularly her abusers and family members, that she did not have before. This acceptance seems central to her healing. She explained that she has been able to place people in the context of what was happening at the time of the sexual abuse and, as a result, has gained a greater understanding of their behavior. This seems to have enabled Shannon to get beyond her feelings of anger. She said, "I think I'll always be a little angry but I think therapy has helped me to see the whole picture instead of just that one little part....To see what was happening to my Mom and to see what was happening to everybody involved and it helps. It doesn't make what they did better but it helps to ease it a little for me. It helps me to at least try to understand it a little more." In talking of her brother who abused her, she said, "We are starting over {she and her brother}...therapy has made me realize that, like for my brother, he was a child too, he really didn't understand what he was doing and I have been able to forgive him." Despite her acceptance and understanding, she is now able to see her abusers, particularly her uncle, for what they were at the time they abused her. She said, "I have changed, I guess, now to the point where I am not afraid anymore and I think by doing that, you realize that the people who abused you for those years, they are pathetic, they are weak people and you don't see that, I don't think, until you go into therapy, but they are."

Although she has identified significant changes in her representations of others and relationships, she also identified ongoing struggles. She described herself as more willing to take risks in relating with others, but indicated that she is still very cautious in doing so. She said, "...The casual ones are fine, but...letting people get to know me deeper is tough. I guess it's just hard to let people see that other part of you when you've
been, I guess attacked so many times. You're just very cautious about who you show yourself to." Also, Shannon continues to struggle with the belief that people may judge her about her history of sexual abuse if she lets them get close to her.

Shannon seemed to make a clear distinction between her views of women and men, and she explained that she really had negative views of both groups before her healing began. She said, "There was probably a lot of really good people out there, I simply just didn't give them a chance....Instead of seeing them as people, I saw them as men or women. And I actually kind of viewed both groups negatively." She explained that women were people that she clearly did not want to identify with. She indicated that she saw women as weak and as victims. She said, "I always saw women as kind of weak and pathetic and needy and those were all the things I didn't want to be anymore...", and "...women were greedy and weak and victims..." Shannon seemed to make a link between her views of women and her experience of sexual abuse. She elaborated on this link in the feedback session. For example, she indicated that her views of women as weak and needy stemmed directly from her views of her mother as a result of her mother's lack of response to the sexual abuse as well as other abuse that was going on in the household. She explained further that she needed her mother to be strong and supportive but only felt betrayed by her passivity and submissiveness. Also in the feedback session, she indicated that she began to project her views of herself as weak and needy and her views of her mother as weak and needy onto all women. Shannon identified that her identification with men was an attempt to disconnect herself from the weakness that women represented to her.

In addition to viewing women as weak and attempting to disassociate herself from them, Shannon expressed feeling different from other women because of the sexual abuse. She felt that her feelings of being different interfered with her ability to open up with women and develop meaningful relationships. She said, "...all the women I knew had lived, compared to me, sheltered lives. None of this had ever happened, they wouldn't understand and I was scared that they would think the same things I thought about myself, like horrible, horrible things and why would I want them to know that..." Again, her fears of being judged as a mean and hurtful person were paramount. She described her relationships with women as shallow. She said, "The friendships that I did have with women were usually, I don't know, shallow I guess, nothing, nothing too deep... I just simply couldn't talk about it {the sexual abuse} with my friends."
Shannon identified that she continues to struggle with developing relationships with women. For example, she indicated that she can form casual relationships with women but wished that she could form deeper ones. She still seems to see herself as relatively isolated from women. For instance, during the interview she expressed a wish to be in a support group of women and hopes to develop some meaningful relationships with women when she moves in the Spring. Also, she expressed a wish to meet some women like herself; women who have been sexually abused as children. Despite her struggle in this area, she also seems to see herself as open in relation with women. She said, "Women I am pretty open [with]... I'm able to relax and feel comfortable... I am able to...act interested in them more {than men} ... [like in asking] tell me about yourself."

Shannon was easily able to identify the impact of the sexual abuse on her views of men. She said, "I hated men...I did. I was extremely prejudiced against all men. Sooner or later they were all going to screw up and I was just convinced of this. I was convinced that they all had one thing on their mind. No one had any respect for me..." She identified that her early experiences with men made it difficult for her to trust men in general. She said, "...the two men that I trusted most, I thought more of them than I did my own father, had done this. So I stopped trusting men, all men altogether." In addition, Shannon indicated that being raped at 17 years old and seeing her father have an extra-marital affair when she was 14 years old confirmed her views of men as untrustworthy, objectifying, and ruled by their sexuality.

Despite regarding all men as untrustworthy and in contrast to feeling alienated from women, Shannon described herself as able to talk with men more than with women specifically about the sexual abuse. She said, "Even the men who I was letting these things happen with, I was able to talk to them about the abuse and other things where I just couldn't with {women}." In spite of her ease in talking with men and trusting them, Shannon also described herself as being more hostile in her relationships with men than with women. For example, she explained that she was harsh and domineering in relationships with men. She said, "I mean that's what I would do. I would come off as harsh right away so men had it very clear right from the beginning that there was to be no fooling around." Furthermore, she indicated that she used men as parents in a way that she did not use women. For example, she said, "All my boyfriends played the role, as my brother did, of the parents that I never had..." Finally, Shannon carried a belief that in order to maintain her relationships with men, she was required to have sex
whether she wanted to or not. She said, "I honestly believed too for a long, long time, that you simply had to do that [have sex] to maintain a relationship...it was a duty. You paid your dues that way. You had to do that or no man would ever stay with you at all and that simply isn't true."

Shannon identified that the sexual abuse had a dramatic impact on her sexual relationships with men. In addition to feeling obligated to have sex with the men that she was having relationships with, she identified that the only way she could relate was through sex. She said, "...the only way I could relate was with sex and that would have been exclusively with men." Just as she described using sex to get the things that she needed during the abuse, she also indicated that she used sex to get the things that she needed in her later life, such as to smooth things over in relationships. She said, "...when I needed something [in relationships with men], if I had to pacify somebody or get something from somebody, if I needed something, whatever it was, I used sex to pacify, to smooth things over, to get things I needed." She also indicated that she used sex to get the practical things that she needed that her parents could not provide for her, such as being taken to a doctor's appointment.

In the feedback session, she explained that her views of her body were affected by the sexual abuse as well in that she believed that she always had to look good (i.e., be slim) so that she could continue to get the things, through sex, that she needed. She identified herself as having a lot of guilt regarding her sexuality and indicated that this interfered with her sexual life as an adult. For instance, she described difficulties that she experienced in her sexual relationship with her husband. She said, "[after having sex with husband] ...it was just a horrible, horrible feeling. It was just overwhelming. It just felt like I lost somebody." Extreme loneliness after having sex was one of the feelings that Shannon identified as stemming from the sexual abuse. In the feedback session, she clarified that once she realized that she had been having sex in the past to get the things that she needed from others, she then began to question her motives for having sex with her husband. She explained that this caused her much guilt and grief.

Shannon's representations of women and men seem to be in ongoing change. They have become significantly expanded, particularly with respect to men. She described projecting her views of men as untrustworthy onto her therapist. She said, "I was worried for the longest time that Dr. (name) was going to do something. But I made myself keep going and [I said] ...'you can't blame him for what everyone else has done'." She went on to say that in therapy, "I finally realized that they [men] don't all think the
same, they are not all bad people." Shannon used all of the significant relationships that she had with men to disconfirm her views that all men were untrustworthy. She said, "Dr. (name) didn't screw up yet and my step-father and neither did my husband so maybe he is one of the ones that won't either. So now I just have two classes, I don't just have bad. I have possibly good and possibly bad, which is a big jump from just bad..."

Like her views of herself in relationships with others generally, Shannon seems to see herself as less harsh and more open with men now. She said, "I don't feel I have to do that anymore (be harsh with men). I can be personable and friendly and confident and open without worrying about someone." Shannon continues to struggle with issues in this area. For example, although she sees herself as being more trusting in her relationships with men, she also described herself as cautious. She indicated that her beliefs that men will hurt her are still with her. She said, "I'm not as willing to do that with a man (act interested) because I'm still all scared everyone is going to take it the wrong way." She also indicated that she has nightmares about her step-father doing sexual things to her when he and she have made a significant connection. Despite her fears, Shannon identified that, "at least now I'm not calling them rapists before they do it (laughs)."

Finally, Shannon described changes in her sexuality. She seems to have recognized that she does not have to comply to having sex just because someone else wants it. Again, she seems to have a much clearer sense of her boundaries in relation with other people. She indicated that in contrast to numbing out her feelings during sex as she did as a child and adolescent, she is now able to feel them. She said, "...now I can actually enjoy it and relax and again for the first time I can actually feel what's happening. The same thing...with the shower."

**Pivotal experiences.**

Shannon's active involvement in her healing again became evident in her description of how her representations of others and relationships changed. She described herself as wanting changes in the way that she related with others, such as not wanting to be hurtful and wanting to be more trusting. Like her representations of self, Shannon went through and continues to go through a process of reconstructing her representations of others and relationships. She described many experiences that she had with others that seemed to enable her to disconfirm her views of others. These changes seemed more specific to her views of men than of women. For example, Shannon was able to disconfirm her views of men as all bad and out to get her through her experiences
with other men, such as with her therapist, her step-father and her husband. In
speaking of these experiences she said, "...so he especially(therapist)...I was able to
trust after that and my husband too and my step-father. And seeing them...at least when
the one side was arguing...every single man in your life has done this to you, somebody
else was saying well no wait now, there is three of them who haven't so...three to three
here, it's a tie so...it could go either way with this one. So I think it was positive male
influences as well." Another example of this process can be seen in her description of
her therapy. She said, "I'm linking that (changes in views of men) a lot to having found
some positive role models for men...something to show me that they are not all going to
hurt me. They are not all going to want to have sex with me. That men can actually
maintain platonic relationships. So therapy was a big part because Dr. (name) was male
and I had to trust him..... The scary things was [that] I had to start trusting him the way I
trusted my uncle right before my uncle molested me....I think that was the really, really
tough part...because when I...confided in him, then immediately after it [the sexual
abuse] happened....I guess I was scared by telling Dr. (name) these things [that] he was
going to become aroused. ...So...he was the really important one because I was able to
trust him and not be violated....That was the main thing....I think he taught me too how to
make a friendship and I had never really made a real one before." Shannon explained that
she chose to stay with a male therapist specifically to disconfirm her views of all men as
bad and untrustworthy. She said, "I saw that it was a man (therapist). It was
Dr.(name), and I said 'I am going to make myself stay with him because he's a man,
because I've got to trust somebody someday. It might as well be now'."

Also, she indicated that some of her experiences with women that she worked with
enabled her to disconfirm her views of women as shallow and needy. She said, "I've
worked for large corporations in other cities in the summer and there I found very, very
positive female roles and I have really cherished... I've actually had very good
relationships with these women. I've really cherished these relationships and missed
them when they have been gone. I almost felt when I came back some of my self-esteem
that I felt there left too because they helped boost that up as well, which was nice."

Finally, Shannon seemed to identify her relationship with her husband as central
in helping her to disconfirm her representations of herself as a mean and horrible
person who was hurtful to others. She said, "...so it was safe long enough (with
husband) for me to be able to take down my wall, and I was actually amazed to find out I
wasn't a really mean, domineering person."
Marilyn

Marilyn is a woman in her fifties who recovered memories of sexual abuse by her grandfather 2 years ago. She was raised in an intact family and has one brother. Marilyn reported that the sexual abuse involved her performing oral sex on her grandfather. She indicated that it began at 4 years of age and was ongoing for approximately 3-4 months. Marilyn also reported one incident of sexual abuse by her brother when she was 9 or 10 years old and he was 13 years old. This sexual abuse involved fondling and occurred on one occasion. She has never disclosed these incidents of sexual abuse to her family members. She reported that for a year after remembering the sexual abuse, she oscillated between admitting that the abuse actually happened to denying it. She now reports accepting that the sexual abuse happened and is presently attending a female survivor's group to deal with issues concerning the abuse. Marilyn reported that she was mildly physically abused, severely emotionally abused, and moderately neglected as a child. She indicated that her marriage at 18 years of age was a way in which she got away from her family. Marilyn reported that her former husband was extremely emotionally abusive to her. She was married for 22 years. She is currently divorced and has grown children.

Marilyn's representations of self.

In many instances, the way in which Marilyn described the sexual abuse as having impacted her views of herself was not different from her description of her views of herself at the present time. This is likely due to the fact that Marilyn only recovered memories of the abuse two years ago. She is currently very actively involved in developing an awareness of the ways in which the sexual abuse had an impact on her. Another complicating factor for Marilyn in outlining how the sexual abuse impacted her representations of self was the co-existence of much emotional abuse, both as a child and in her marriage as an adult. Specifically, Marilyn indicated that it was difficult for her to disentangle the effects of the sexual abuse she experienced as a child from the effects of her abusive marriage of 22 years. She said, "I guess for me...[it] is really hard to say now what of this...is a result of the abuse as a child and what is the result of things in my marriage. And my marriage was abusive. Not extremely physically abusive but very emotionally...abusive." In the feedback session, Marilyn added that the deaths of two of
her children as well as the death of a friend and a boyfriend had a significant impact on her and are intertwined with the impact of the sexual abuse and other abuse she experienced. She used the image of a tumbleweed in the wind to explain how she sees the impact of early experiences of loss, such as the sexual and emotional abuse, influencing later experiences of loss, such as deaths and emotional abuse in her marriage.

Much of Marilyn's definition of herself now seemed to be in relation to the sexual abuse she experienced and her efforts to understand the impact that it has had on her. She explained, "I see certain things in pictures and my way of explaining things was that there's a circle and that's me and inside that circle is all the abuse issues. But around this circle are all these other circles and they're all intertwined and they're intertwined with the big circle, which is me, and I visualize this as being wire. And this wire is stretching and some of these circles have kind of opened up a bit...and they've sure loosened and they've opened and I think what's happened is that I've been working on different issues and it's just made me... [for example] when I do something really positive, I really...feel...good about myself. ...I could never find anything good about me [before]...[now] I can even pat myself on the shoulder and say 'you did a good job!'" Working through the issues regarding the sexual abuse seems to have freed Marilyn up to acknowledge the good in herself. In the feedback session, she indicated that the circles continue to open up as she continues to grow. For example, she explained that as the 'false messages' that she received about herself and others as a child leave, she is increasingly able to see herself as a nonjudgmental person. She explained further that the 'good' in her can now come out.

In working through issues regarding the sexual abuse, Marilyn indicated that she has been experiencing many body memories. One body memory that she described as being particularly disturbing for her is a choking sensation that she experiences. She also described a fear that she has of things being close to her mouth which seemed related to both the choking sensation and to her feelings that she needs to have a sense of control. She said, "I've had other feelings...memories that have come as feelings - the choking is very much [like this]...I've always had a lot of trouble with choking...but once...the memories from the abuse started to come...I just don't want anything near my mouth. ...I can't even sleep with...my blanket. I like to have...the blanket up over part of my head but it's always down. I'm very cautious of where it [lies], it's never over my face. ...I don't like anything too close to my face. My granddaughter comes and jumps on me and
hugs and kisses me and...I'm fine with that because there's no threat there. ...If it's something where I'm just not quite sure [then it's a problem]."

In addition, Marilyn indicated that before she recovered memories of the abuse, she frequently engaged in self-injurious behavior as well as dissociative behavior which she now sees as related to the sexual abuse. In speaking of the self-injurious behavior, she said, "I can see now where some of the issues that I've been dealing with in the last little over 2 years, how they were so close to surfacing when I was in this relationship with this fellow that I was talking about before. A lot of the things that were happening, that were going on in my life then, like the suicide thoughts, the part where I would literally get so frustrated...that ...I would lay in my bed and I would just bang[my hands]. I didn't know what to do. The pain was so bad and I would just bang my head, my arm, my hands on the...headboard of my bed....The tops of my hands were bruised..."

Marilyn elaborated on her tendency to dissociate in the feedback session. For example, she indicated that before her healing began, she would frequently dissociate in uncomfortable interpersonal situations, such as when someone was expressing anger. She reported that in the past, she believed that her dissociative behavior was evidence of the fact that she was going crazy. Marilyn explained further that as she now becomes increasingly more clear on the boundaries between herself and others, she is more able to 'stay present' in these interpersonally threatening situations. She indicated that she had experienced even more change in this area since the time of the first interview.

In the initial interview, Marilyn indicated that there were times in the past in which she literally could not talk. She now feels that this 'inability' to talk was related to her not having the proper support system in place. Working through issues regarding being sexually abused with supportive others has become a central part of Marilyn's life over the last two years. She explained that working through the issues related to being sexually abused is taking precedence over other issues that, although related to the sexual abuse, are not direct effects of it, such as her desire to lose weight.

The sexual abuse seemed to have an impact on Marilyn's feelings of self worth. For example, she explained that she received messages that she didn't count and that she was not important. Marilyn indicated that she also received these messages in situations that did not involve her being sexually abused. In talking specifically of the sexual abuse, she said, "I think it had a big part to do with the fact that I thought that I was unimportant...that I didn't count. Nobody would believe me...That would be probably the biggest...part of it." Marilyn indicated that she continues to struggle with feelings of
self-worthlessness. She said, "I was threatened that nobody would believe me anyway
{about the sexual abuse} so...that's the way I've always felt. Nobody would believe me.
What have I got to say...I feel like I don't have anything important {to say}. That's where
like I was telling you...when I first saw the paper ...that you had sent to mental health
{about the research project}, it was just like 'oh, I want to do this' but I thought, 'well I
don't have anything to say, like ...what could I possibly say that somebody...else could
benefit from'."

Consistent with her feelings of self-worthlessness, Marilyn also described
feeling different as a result of the sexual abuse. She said, "I know I always felt as a child
that I was different. There was something different about me...but I never knew what it
was. It was just that I felt...almost like I was an alien or something...I was just really
really different...", and "I have been different all my life and I think that's because I was
the one who was abused and that does make a person different." Marilyn explained that
she felt 'marked' as a child, although at the time she did not understand why she felt that
way about herself. She attributed those feelings to being sexually abused. Like her
feelings of low self-worth, Marilyn continues to struggle with feeling different. For
example, she indicated that a few years ago, when she began having flashbacks and
memories of the abuse, she experienced severe panic attacks. She explained that these
panic attacks made her feel extremely different from those around her because of the
attention that it brought to her. Although Marilyn indicated that she still feels different
from others now, she explained that it is not an isolating type of difference like that she
experienced as a child. She said, "It was an isolation type of a difference {as a child}
whereas now I'm different but I'm still accepted as an individual. People still accept me
even though I am different. And in a lot of ways I'm not different than other people."

As Marilyn begins to feel more self-worth, she seems increasingly able to assert
herself. She said, "...I think I've come far enough that it's okay...I said to the group
yesterday, I felt like if you used words that I couldn't understand,...I could say...I don't
understand this. But that would be something that would have been impossible for me to
do before. It would still be hard but...it's something that I feel that I can do because I'm
feeling that I'm important enough and I don't have to have a degree behind my name to be
important." In the feedback session, Marilyn explained that she observed even more
changes in this area since the first interview. For example, she said that she can now
more comfortably confront people and express her anger rather than directing it toward
herself, as she has done in the past. In the initial interview, she indicated that although
she is feeling more self-worth and is more able to assert herself in order to meet her own needs, she struggles with regarding herself as selfish. She said, "[see yourself as selfish?]
A bit (laughs). Just a little bit, (laughs)...Very self-centered...because I'm doing a lot of analyzing [of myself]..."

Despite feeling selfish for regarding herself as important, Marilyn indicated that she now has an acceptance of herself. Her acceptance of herself is evident through affirmative messages that she gives herself. She said, "...I'm trying to reprogram the tapes so I'll talk to myself and...I'll say ...that's okay Marilyn...and sometimes I'll say...'you're not a bad person because of this' which...I feel sort of ...funny when I'm doing this because it's a fairly new thing to me. But I guess it's really important ....I really want to be the best person I can..." Also, Marilyn explained that having time alone is now very important for her whereas in the past, she frequently did everything she could to ensure that she would not be alone. She said, "...I like to be alone now, whereas I didn't when I was a child. But I'm very comfortable, in fact ...I'm almost possessive of my time alone. Like just don't interfere with me when I am just doing nothing." It seemed evident that Marilyn now likes her own company and often strives for the times when she can be alone. In the feedback session, Marilyn clarified that these changes have only occurred in the last year. Also in the feedback session, she explained that in addition to feelings of low self-worth, the sexual abuse and other forms of abuse had an impact on her perceptions. For example, she identified not being aware of what constituted abusive behavior until after she left her marriage and started healing.

It seemed that Marilyn's self-concept was one of vulnerability and being violated. For example, she talked about being controlled during the sexual abuse and how important it is for her to not feel controlled. She said, "I'll do anything to sabotage a relationship if I think that that person's trying to control me because my abuse was control. My grandfather controlled the whole family..." It seemed that Marilyn attributed feelings of needing to be in control to having been sexually abused as well as to other violating experiences in which she felt out of control, such as when receiving electro-convulsive treatment for depression. She explained that needing to have a sense of control has been an issue for her over many years and that she continues to struggle with it. She said, " the control from both sides [her needing to be in control and not having others control her] has been an extremely big thing for me...I need to know at all times what is happening to me. ...I have to be in control of me and that's why I have been so upset with myself and [have] been very very hard on myself for such a long time
because I would cry...I would start talking and I just would cry and I would blubber all over ...[and] the tears just flowed and flowed. And W used to say to me 'Can't you say two words without bawling?'...In spite of trying to be so much in control of myself, this was an area of my life that was totally out of control." Being hard on herself and suffering from depression are things that Marilyn indicated that she is beginning to change in her life. She did not attribute feelings of depression and being hard on herself to the experience of sexual abuse as a child.

As a result of working through her abuse, both sexual and other kinds of abuse, Marilyn identified that she is continuously growing and changing. She said, "...I'm at the place now too where I can talk about it and it's okay because I didn't ask for what happened to me. ... Basically all my life, I haven't asked for the hurtful things that have been done to me.....I guess it's the fighter, good old German blood (laughs). I got that fight in me and I've got enough...I guess I'm feeling good enough about myself now that I've got to keep plugging at this. There's no going back now cause ...I've come too far to turn around." She expressed a desire to keep on growing. She said, "...I can see where I've come and I'm not content to sit here, I want to keep growing..." Being a fighter is central to Marilyn's views of herself as surviving and growing. She said, "I'm a very stubborn person. I'm a fighter. I'm a fighter! That's why I'm still alive 'cause I'm a fighter...." Seeing herself as central in her healing is evident in Marilyn's descriptions of herself as a fighter. Finally, learning about herself seems to be central to Marilyn's self-growth. She indicated that she feels that she now understands herself. Part of learning about herself seemed to be allowing herself to feel her feelings, especially anger. She said, "I'm learning a lot more. A lot about my feelings, trying to...express them", and " I've been learning to deal with the anger..." In the feedback session, Marilyn indicated that in reading the narrative, she recognized the tremendous growth that she had experienced since the first interview which occurred a few months prior to the feedback meeting. For example, her growth had been so evident to her that at times she felt like she was reading someone else's story. She said, "It is exciting to know that I've made changes again or am still changing and it gives me a boost to keep working away and getting better."

Participation in the study seems to have been a very validating experience for Marilyn.
Pivotal experiences.

As indicated earlier, Marilyn's representations of self are in ongoing change. She identified herself as well as others as central in her healing. In speaking of herself, Marilyn said, "...even the last couple of months, I have fought...I make myself go out of my apartment everyday, regardless of what the weather is like....[Even] if I just go across the alley to the coffee shop....There's always people coming in there and sometimes I'll just take a book and go over and have a coffee and sit there and read...It's a different atmosphere. I'm not sitting and feeling sorry for myself." She described herself as a fish swimming upstream; again a view of herself as a fighter. Part of being a fighter for Marilyn has involved her ability to reach out to others in times of need. Also, being able to express her feelings, often in talking with other people, seems to have been central in Marilyn's healing. She said, "I talk! ...That's been an outlet for me - talking and crying! I have cried buckets of tears! Buckets of tears! ...I haven't cried a lot lately but ...that almost seems...funny. It's almost like I feel at times like I need to sit down and have a really good cry again (laughs) because I'm missing it. (laughs). ...I know that there's been times where I have probably blurted out all sorts of things to total strangers but it's just ... that I've got it off my chest. I've always been a person to talk a lot."

In addition, Marilyn identified that dealing with her marriage first was essential to her being freed up to deal with the sexual abuse. She indicated that getting out of the situation with her husband made it possible for her to meet people who showed her she was of value. She said, "I think I first had to be taken out of the situation that I was in....I saw quite a few psychiatrists...when I was in my marriage ....I don't think that I could deal with it in that situation. I think I had to be removed from that in order to have people come around me that valued me first...."

Finally, it was obvious from Marilyn's statements that she regards others as central in her healing. She talked about various people in her past that have been pivotal in teaching her self-care and acceptance. She said, "I've stepped out and I think part of it's been just the fact that it was either I'd take the risk and reach out to somebody or I go crazy! Or kill myself! Because I know I have gone through several bouts of the suicide type things, not where I've actually done anything....I think if there hadn't been friends looking after me...at the time I maybe would have just because everything...was so black! Like it was just totally hopeless!" Also, Marilyn indicated that therapy, and most especially group therapy, has been pivotal in her healing in terms of getting validation.
and feedback from others about herself. She described the group as a safe place in which she has been able to question her views of herself as stupid and as not good enough. And finally, Marilyn identified that her faith has been central in her healing. She said, "my like faith has always been a very important thing to me and I believe that that's been a keeping power within me to keep me going."

Marilyn's representations of others and relationships.

As with her representations of self, Marilyn seems to be currently identifying how the sexual abuse has impacted her representations of others and relationships. It seemed that the sexual abuse was central to Marilyn seeing herself as worthless and others as violating. For example, she talked about 'allowing' others to abuse and control her and not being able to stand up for herself. She said, "I could be used and abused....I would...let people make fun of me [and] use me, and I wouldn't say anything. I wouldn't stand up for myself. It was kind of like - here's a pile of dirt, somebody needs to clean it up. Well Marilyn will do it, she doesn't care anyway", and "I think it (the impact of the sexual abuse) was the allowing people to control me." Marilyn indicated that her needs went virtually unnoticed because of a belief that she must attend to others' needs first. She said, "I know in the past I would just give and give and give and give and not think about myself at all. And if I would ever, I mean if you think of yourself, you're being so selfish...and...heaven forbid you can't be selfish!" Difficulty asserting herself was also evident in her sexual relationship with her former husband. She said, "I had no self-worth even as far as that (sex) was concerned. I didn't like it. There was a lot of things...when I think back in my marriage and especially when W would be drinking and if there were other people around. It was always...he would be touching me inappropriately in front of people....I always felt like I was, I had to put up with it. I couldn't say anything but I hated it! And I hated myself because I put up with it."

Related to Marilyn's feelings that she did not learn how to stand up for herself in relation with others, she indicated that she continues to struggle with assuming responsibility in her relationships when things don't go smoothly or when the relationship ends. She said, "I guess the saying is true you have to be a friend if you have friends. I have lots and they change....As the situation changes, [friends change] and that used to really bother me because I thought I was doing something wrong....I've been able to let go of that because my life changes and their life is changed." As well, she explained that she is currently trying to change a pattern that she has of 'carrying'
others in her relationships. She is now looking toward developing more reciprocal relationships in which both parties are equal in their giving and taking. She said, "You get into a relationship of any kind and if somebody else is quite draining or demanding, ... that's very difficult. ... It is! ... I feel like I've got to carry the person and I don't ... want to do that. I guess I've been under such a weight for so many years that now I ... want somebody to be along side of me ... I want to be really valued." Particularly important for Marilyn is to develop a reciprocal relationship with a man.

Marilyn explained that she expected others to treat her badly. It seemed that she attributed the development of this expectation to experiences of sexual abuse as well as to other experiences of violation. She said, "I didn't expect people to treat me good. I was a very lonely little girl. I felt very isolated. I had very few friends. I guess there was a lot of things that happened that I just expected to be treated bad and I think that's [the] message [that] went through into my marriage and it was just reinforced." Marilyn's identification that her experience of abuse, sexual as well as other abuse, set her up for more abuse later in life was evident in other statements as well. She said, "... My abuse was control. My grandfather controlled the whole family. Everybody worked for him. It was a complete ... dictatorship.... So I went from one control to another control and I'm finally at a stage where there isn't anybody controlling me... unless I let them control me.... I want to be stronger and... I don't want to have somebody kind of pushing me around... even if it's in a nice way", and "Once the abuse in the marriage started, of course it was the same old cycle - ... I didn't count.... It wasn't that easy to get out of.... I don't know if I would have gotten out of it if he hadn't finally said he was going to go." In the feedback session, Marilyn identified that her feelings of low self-worth as a child made it difficult for her to elicit respect from others. As well, she noted that as she feels better about herself, her relationships also get better because of her unwillingness now to settle for being abused and mistreated.

Marilyn continues to struggle with having others control her in her relationships. She indicated that even a few years ago she found herself in a relationship in which her male partner was controlling of her. She explained that she continues to struggle with defining what is controlling behavior in relationships. She said, "I can get myself into a situation very quickly where people control me and then I start to get resentful and sometimes I don't know how to get myself out of it" and "I will shun very quickly, or shy away very quickly from anybody that tries to control me. WOOOW, that's a bad one for me! And it's become almost like an obsession... I don't want to be a taker but
I want it to be an even pull, like...a tug of war ...like an even pull between the other person and myself." Again, Marilyn's desire for reciprocal relationships in her life was evident.

Marilyn described other ongoing struggles that she has in relationships with others. She outlined difficulties with being nontrusting as well as too forthcoming with others. In speaking of her difficulties trusting, Marilyn indicated that she has trouble trusting that others will believe her. She said, "I'm very cautious about trusting. I feel that sometimes people don't believe me. Like I have to explain and explain and explain [laughs], almost explain something to death before I feel that people are believing me." This seemed to be connected to her being told as a child that no one would believe her about the sexual abuse if she told. She also indicated difficulties trusting in general. She said, "Like I can open [up] and talk very freely but to really get to know what's in the very core of me is kind of like...I'll hold back ...in order to protect myself. ... I'm getting better with that because I'm starting to understand myself more but...there's always that caution. It's almost like there's two people...inside of me..." The centrality of her self-awareness in her healing process is again evident.

Despite feeling a need to protect herself with others, she also explained that she has a tendency to tell people too much about herself too quickly. She said, "...it makes me almost feel like I've exposed myself too quickly....I try and put up my guard and there's been times in my life where I have done [that], where I've really...put the walls around [so] nobody can get close but that's more uncomfortable because I need people." Marilyn indicated that exposing herself too quickly leaves her with a sense of not having control; something that she is currently struggling with. She said, "It's almost like I feel there's a part of me that I don't have control over and then it would come out in ...I would ramble. I tend to tell people too much too quickly sometimes. I'm getting a little better at that but it's almost like I'm transparent right from the start." It appears that Marilyn may be struggling to reach a balance between protecting herself and trusting herself by taking risks with others.

In spite of Marilyn being cautious of others and sometimes expecting them to violate and control her, she explained that there are many people in her life who have been and continue to be very supportive of her. This seems consistent with Marilyn's identification that others have been central in her healing process, specifically regarding her views of herself. Marilyn explained, "I really wonder if I would have been able to make it through everything...I always had somebody there...well I probably didn't
see it at the time but I have since been able to see that there's always been somebody in my life closely... enough to me to still accept me for what I was...

In addition to others always being there, Marilyn indicated she has been able to reach out to others in times of need. However, she also explained that there have been times when she did not reach out to others. It seems that Marilyn has experienced the most difficulty reaching out to others when she has been very depressed.

A large part of how Marilyn described herself seemed to be in relationships with other people. For example, many of her descriptions of herself centered around interacting and engaging with others. She said, "I tend to be a little bit of a bubbly person most the time....There's times when I'm not like that but I...can talk to people....I can strike up a conversation with a total stranger" , and "I'm basically a very lively, outgoing, talkative type of a person and ...quite bubbly...." Consistent with Marilyn's self-growth, she seemed to describe herself as much more self-determined in her relationships with others now than she saw herself in her life previously. For example, as she struggles with developing herself and asserting herself with others, Marilyn has been able to disconfirm the belief that problems arise in her relationships because there is something 'wrong' with her. In addition, she has been able to set clearer boundaries between herself and others. She said, "Because I've been on my own and I've been able to sit back and look at what was happening. And then...with the therapy, that's really helped me to see who I am and to see who the other person is....And what they're doing and that their issues are their issues, and [that] they're not mine", and "I've been doing that (setting boundaries) the last little while and I'm finding out that most people are okay with it." In the feedback session, Marilyn elaborated on her sense of her self-other boundaries. For example, she described her boundaries as flexible now rather than rigid as they had been in the past. She indicated that now her boundaries will change depending on who she is with and what the situation is, whereas in the past they were more rigid and less influenced by who she was with and the type of situation she found herself in.

In keeping with seeing herself as self-determined in her relationships, Marilyn identified a balance between being able to accept from others and being able to give to others. In speaking of accepting from others, she said, "I have learned slowly over the years to be able to accept those kinds of things (others giving to her). It still brings tears to my eyes..." In giving to others, Marilyn explained that she often draws on her own experience and tries to give others what she has received from others in the past. She said, "with one of the gals in our group, she's going through a really bad time and she
was taking all these people's phone numbers and I looked at her and I said, 'Can I have your phone number so that I can phone you because', I said, 'if you're anything like me, when you're having a really really bad time, it's so hard', cause I know ...when I'[m] really down, I cannot, I can't force myself to pick up that phone and phone somebody. But if somebody phones me [then that's different]. And so I did. I phoned her several times during the week just to make sure that she was okay because I want to do for other people what some people have done for me and I know what it's like." One of the other ways in which Marilyn identified that she gives to others is by really listening to them when they speak. Again, being listened to and valued was something that Marilyn felt she had received from others.

Consistent with trying to really listen to others, Marilyn indicated that acceptance of others has become very important to her and is something that she has learned throughout her life. Her relationships with significant others seemed to have been central in her developing acceptance of others. She said, "I have learned to, not just age, there's a lot of other things. I guess I've gone through a lot of struggles and part of it was because of W's drinking and...that's one area I don't have a lot of tolerance with people. But you know it also taught me, somehow and I haven't got this all figured out,...but it taught me somehow that I need to...look beyond what the person is doing and look at the person and I try to do that....So I can accept people. I don't have to agree with what everybody does but I can still accept and love and appreciate the person."

Finally, Marilyn indicated that although she is much more self-determined in her relationships now than she was in the past, there are times when she reverts to older patterns of interacting. For example, Marilyn explained that she struggles with not feeling sorry for herself. She noted that she once used 'feeling sorry for herself' as a way in which to draw people closer to her, albeit unsuccessfully. She said, "For me to feel sorry for myself - that means that I just... don't want anybody to know that I'm not 100% that day or that I'm hurting, be it emotionally or physically. I just don't want to talk about it so I don't want anybody intruding. But there's a part of me that's saying 'please come and find out what's wrong with me'. That's the best way I can explain feeling sorry for myself...I'm fighting it...[before] I would sit there and then if nobody phoned, then I would get angry, 'You really don't care two hoots about me because why aren't you phoning?' " Marilyn explained that she is trying to change this pattern and be more direct in her relationships with others.
Pivotal experiences.

Marilyn described two events that seemed central in the changing of her representations of others and relationships. First, she described a relationship in which she felt valued and listened to. Marilyn explained that this experience of being listened to and valued enabled her to learn how to listen to others. She said, "He [former pastor] has no idea what he taught me. I have tried to put that into practice with everybody since then because it helped me so much that I tried to listen, to really make an effort to listen [to others]."

Also, Marilyn described a therapeutic exercise which enabled her to realize the boundaries that she can put in place between herself and others. She said, "I never realized I had a boundary, [or] that I needed to have one until we did one of the exercises in one of the groups at Mental Health....They gave us a string....As much string as what we needed to make our boundary and our safe zone....I had this string...a little ways out in front of me and I thought well that's okay. But ...I was sitting near the coffee pot and two of the ladies came to get coffee, and they stepped across that string! And I could have killed them! It was like all of a sudden...that string on the floor became a big thing to me... I think that that really helped me to say ... when I'm talking to people sometimes...I've said, 'would you mind standing over there instead of standing here because ...I just need to feel safe?'...."
Rita

Rita is a professional woman in her thirties. She was raised in an intact family in which there were 9 children. She was sexually abused by her father at 11 years of age. The abuse involved fondling and digital penetration and lasted for 1 year. She was also sexually abused at the same time by her older sister. This sexual abuse involved fondling and occurred for approximately 2 months. The sexual abuse by her father stopped when Rita told him to stop it. In the feedback session, she explained that she stopped it just prior to it escalating into vaginal penetration. She did not disclose the sexual abuse by her father to her mother until approximately 18 years after the abuse stopped. She did disclose the sexual abuse by her father to a girlfriend at 14 years of age and to her first husband when she was married at 16 years of age. Rita indicated that her father was an alcoholic and that she was moderately physically abused as a child by both parents, but mostly by her mother. Also, she reported that she was severely emotionally abused and neglected as a child. Finally, she described her first husband as an alcoholic who was emotionally unavailable for her throughout their marriage. She married again at 32 years of age. She reported that this man was extremely physically and emotionally abusive to her throughout their two year marriage. She now lives with a man that she described as different from the kind of men that she has been accustomed to. She has grown children.

Rita's representations of self.

Like many of the other women interviewed, Rita indicated that it was difficult for her to separate out the effects of the sexual abuse from the effects of other kinds of abuse that she experienced. She explained that due to the neglect and general chaos in her family-of-origin home, she parented many of her younger siblings. In talking of the multiple forms of abuse she experienced, she said, "Sometimes it's hard for me to separate the sexual abuse from everything else that was going on because there was so much other abuse going on....It was all combined." She explained that the experience of sexual abuse, as well as the general chaos in which she lived as a child, left her ill-prepared for dealing with the world. For example, she described having skewed concepts about what was normal and what was abusive. She said, "I just started looking at different things and it kept coming back to my home life....I knew it wasn't normal, but I
didn't have a whole lot of other contacts, like friends and stuff so I didn't know what was normal and what wasn't normal. My friends that I did have, their parents were just as dysfunctional ...." In working through issues regarding child sexual abuse as well as other abuse she experienced in her adult relationships, Rita explained that she now has very clear ideas of what kinds of behaviors are abusive. This awareness, in turn, seems to have influenced the types of relationships that Rita is finding herself in now as opposed to the past. She is currently finding herself in mutually satisfying and nonabusive relationships.

Despite the overlap among the effects of different kinds of abuse experienced by Rita, she indicated that she experienced much guilt regarding the sexual abuse. She reported that she and her siblings were quite emotionally and physically neglected and that she found the sexual abuse to be comforting. She explained that she felt loved when she was being sexually abused by her father and that because the abuse felt 'good' to her, she experienced much guilt. She said, "There was so much other crap going on in the household and so much pain....I think that it just generally felt good [the sexual abuse]....The other side of it was the guilt....It wasn't right....something was wrong." She indicated that Catholicism also played a significant role in the amount of guilt she experienced regarding the sexual abuse. In addition to her guilt regarding feeling comforted by the sexual abuse, Rita indicated that she felt a sense of responsibility for somehow not being able to protect her sisters if her father were to abuse them as well. She said, "One thing that really ....stuck in my mind a lot was that I kept it to myself and I had four other sisters and my biggest fear was [that] because I didn't speak up, they got abused also....Maybe that's why I care-tok so much too because...on this one issue I didn't look after them so I'm going to on everything else." It seemed that Rita compensated for the guilt she experienced regarding not 'protecting' her sisters by taking care of them in other ways, such as in parenting them.

Rita's self-concept seemed rigid and unforgiving. She explained that she maintained a standard that she must be perfect at all times and that she must be able to cope eloquently with all things. When Rita was inevitably unable to live up to these standards, she described a process whereby she would berate herself. She said, "I used to judge myself harshly, quite harshly. ...Every little mistake I ever made I would internalize it and every now and then I would bring them all out and beat myself up with them ....Because I wasn't allowed to make mistakes...." In the feedback session, she
explained that she was quite severely criticized by her mother while growing up and that she began to criticize herself in the way that her mother had criticized her.

Rita's unforgiving standards for herself also seemed prominent in her confusion regarding what 'type of girl' she was. She struggled with seeing herself as a 'good girl' who did all that was expected of her on the one hand, and seeing herself as a 'bad girl' who was sexual on the other hand. In talking of her confusion, she said, "It was wrong (being sexual). You were a slut....You were a bad girl if you did things like that and your reputation [was ruined]....You were going to go to hell. And I was always the good girl - good marks in school, teachers always liked me, always doing things for people, ...keeping the house clean, keeping the family together, being...the mother I guess almost in the family and always the one who would give the positive strokes in the house..." It seemed that Rita struggled to integrate 'being sexual' as a result of being sexually abused into her desire to be a 'good girl'. The struggle between regarding herself as a 'good girl' or a 'bad girl' was evident later in Rita's life as well whereby she felt that she continuously 'betrayed' herself by having extra-marital relationships and by getting divorced twice.

Rita's self-concept that she must be perfect at all times seemed related to feelings of low self-worth. For example, the belief that she had to be prefect was so strong for Rita that she indicated that if she were to admit that she made a mistake at any given time, then she would also have to come to terms with the fact that there was something fundamentally wrong with her. Her feelings of low self-worth were apparent in her current views of herself as well. For example, she explained that she often feels that she doesn't deserve happiness and that there should always be conflict in her life, particularly in her relationships.

Rita's struggle with feelings of self-worthlessness were apparent in other ways as well. For example, she explained that she still berates herself at times, but that generally she has been able to stop beating herself up verbally. She said, "...I don't do that anymore {beat herself up for mistakes}....It's OK for me to make mistakes now and it's OK for me to admit that I'm wrong." A development of tolerance for herself was evident. Although Rita does not berate herself verbally like she used to, she identified that her difficulties with eating seem to be a form of punishing herself. She said, "It doesn't happen hardly ever in that way {beating herself up verbally} [anymore]....[But] I beat myself up I think in other ways, like eating, over-eating. I'll do that...if I'm feeling unloved or uncared [for]...or lonely, that's when I eat. Or if I have made a
mistake at work...or something like that then I will come home and I'll be ticked off at myself and I'll eat." Rita explained that she sees a direct link between her difficulties with her weight/body image and the experience of sexual abuse. She reported being afraid to really look good and indicated that she continues to work to understand the difficulties she has with taking care of her physical self.

Despite her ongoing struggles with feelings of worthlessness, Rita explained that she likes herself now and makes conscious efforts to tell herself this. She said, "sometimes I have to remind myself, I'm a good person. In fact ...I feel the best when I can get up in the morning and tell myself 'You know, you are a good person, I really like you'." An example of Rita liking herself and taking pride in herself was her refusal to declare bankruptcy after her former husband did and left her with all the debt from their marriage. She said, "I could have filed for bankruptcy too but that wasn't who I was....I just couldn't do that..." In the feedback session, Rita explained that honesty is a quality that is very important to her and something that she associates with herself. Consistent with liking herself are efforts toward self-care that Rita talked about in the initial interview. For example, she identified now being able to care for herself and not just for other people. She said, "I buy myself gifts now, where I used to buy everybody else gifts. I still buy other people gifts, but me too.... I look after myself in that way."

Rita's definition of herself now seemed to center around growth, development and change. In describing her growth, she said, "I remember a time when aware was...my favorite word...because I felt like I was so in the dark before....The more I learned and the more aware I became,...the stronger I got....The growth is incredible." She explained that her growth and development have given her much meaning in her life. She said, "What gives me meaning? My job, my relationships, my children, myself....I have a lot. I've come a long way and I think I have a long way to go....There's so much that I want to do that I haven't had a chance to do..." In the feedback session, she elaborated on the things that she feels she has. For example, she indicated that she has good friends, a loving family, a good job, and intelligence. She identified that maturing and taking responsibility for herself have been pivotal in her development. She said, "I've grown up, taken responsibility for myself, that was an important thing for me. Learning how to take responsibility for me and to admit to my mistakes..." Rita indicated that her willingness to admit her mistakes and take responsibility for herself are related to easing up on herself and allowing herself to be imperfect.
Rita has been and continues to be very actively involved in her healing. She explained that she read a lot about sexual abuse before becoming aware of survivor groups and that she confronted her father before getting actively involved in any groups. Now, she continues to be aware of where she is at in her healing and is able to identify what she needs to continue her healing process. She said, "I'm at ... the point where I don't want to get involved with a lot of people who are in ... the early stages because ... I've already been there and I want to move forward. I don't want to keep going backwards." Rita's desire to move forward in her healing was obvious at other points in the interview as well. For example, she explained that the sexual abuse is not as much a focus in her life now as it has been in the past. She said, "You kind of go through the stage ... when you are working on your stuff [and] you blab ... everything all the time, just to get it all out because it's all new ... and you want to talk about it all the time. I'm at the point now where I don't [talk] so much." In the feedback session, she indicated that periodically her frustrations with her weight and eating bring her back to dealing with issues of the sexual abuse. She explained further that she experiences much anger in response to having to continue to deal with issues related to the sexual abuse.

Rita's integration of the sexual abuse into her sense of herself was evident. She indicated that she has developed a strength of self by working through issues regarding being sexually abused as well as other family-of-origin and marital issues. She said, "I wasn't like that [strong] before, but now I [am] [able to confront father].... I've done a lot of therapy. I've been to Al-Anon and I've been to Adult Children of Alcoholics and I've been to the domestic abuse program because my second husband was physically, mentally, emotionally - everything abusive you could possibly get, ... and to an adult survivor of child sexual abuse program. I have had to do some work on [lots of areas in my life].... It's made me stronger. ... I think the relationships have made me stronger and living through what I've been [through] with my second husband [has] made me strong." Through her healing, it appears that Rita has become empowered. She said, "I have choices. People have choices. That's what I've learned. That's a big one that I've learned."

**Pivotal experiences.**

Leaving her first husband and entering therapy seemed central to the beginning of Rita's healing process. For example, it was at this time that Rita began to become aware of the impact of the sexual abuse on her. She said, "I never knew how much it had affected me (the sexual abuse) until I ... left my husband and ... started into therapy..."
Rita's active involvement in her healing was evident in her descriptions of the changes in her representations of self. She used this interview process as a way in which she could actively engage in her own development. She said, "I hope I never stop [growing]. That's why I'm here actually. I felt that this would be one more way of helping me to grow and maybe helping others too..." There were other examples of Rita pushing herself to do things that result in her feeling better about herself. For example, she described giving herself affirmative messages and forcing herself to see herself as competent by behaving in competent ways.

Finally, Rita indicated that receiving validation from others has also been central in her healing. In particular she described a process whereby seeing that other people liked her enabled her to begin liking herself. She said, "[the] groups I found exceptionally good because you get a lot of feedback....I learned that I was an OK person. People liked me and that was really kind of good because when I realized that then I could like myself too. It was easier to like myself when I started seeing what other people saw."

**Rita's representations of others and relationships.**

Rita indicated that the abuse had an impact on her relationships in general. For example, she explained that she had no boundaries in her relationships with others. She said, "I didn't know there were boundaries. I didn't have any boundaries. People could...walk all over me basically. There were no boundaries. It's the fact that I was abused." She also explained that in the past, she often violated other people's boundaries, such as in hugging them without their implicit or explicit permission. Consistent with not being aware of her own and others' boundaries, Rita explained that she frequently trusted too easily in her relationships. She said, "For some reason, I don't know why, after [all] the abuse I was still very, very trusting of people. I was almost, naive, I guess was the word, naive. People could do or say almost anything and I would believe them....I would have no reason not to believe them. ...I could be used and abused. It just didn't matter what it was because no matter what, if somebody wanted [something from] me and they told me a story, I'd believe it." In the feedback session, she identified that she believed that being a trusting person meant that she was a giving person. Being a giving person is an ideal that Rita struggled to live up to throughout her life. In the feedback meeting, she identified that the belief underlying her tendency to trust too easily is a hope that people are basically good and that the world is a good place to live.
Rita explained that she continues to struggle with trusting others too easily. She said, "I have a tendency to always want to believe the best about people. I trust too easily sometimes.... Not so much anymore but... it's so much easier for me to believe the best instead of the worst.... It's hard for me to believe that he (ex-husband) is manipulating me so strongly ..." In the feedback session, Rita explained that her tendency to trust too easily has been most prevalent in her beliefs regarding men and heterosexual relationships. For example, she indicated that she held a belief throughout her life that 'a knight in shining armor would come and sweep her off her feet' and that she often indiscriminately trusted men as a result of maintaining this belief. She indicated that she now recognizes that this is fantasy and not reality.

Rita explained that she is generally less trusting of others now than she has ever been. She indicated that experiences of betrayal over time have accumulated to the point at which she is no longer as willing to trust so quickly. During the feedback session, she questioned whether she is now more discriminate about what she reveals to others rather than being simply less trusting. For example, she acknowledged having learned that she does not have to open up to everybody and tell intimate details of her life.

Although Rita indicated that she tends to trust too easily for her own liking, she also explained that she continues to have difficulties with meeting people. Her difficulties seemed related to her feelings of low self-worth. She said, "The difficulty comes from not feeling good enough. [I'm] afraid to open my mouth and say the wrong thing and I'll be laughed at." Rita explained that she is actively trying to change this view of herself as unworthy in relation with others by forcing herself to engage with people. Rita's growth was evident in other respects as well. In spite of her feelings of low self-worth, she indicated that she is now able to reach out to others when she is having difficulties. Her ability to reach out to others when she is in need seems to be evidence of her healing. She said, "Under stress now I usually let somebody know. I talk about what's going on with me and so people know what's going on at work, at home, wherever I am..." Despite her ability to reach out to others, Rita expressed fears of others judging her and 'stabbing her in the back' that seemed to be based on past experiences in which she felt judged and betrayed. She said, "I don't do that as easily either [reach out to others]. When I'm [dealing with issues], it's not as easy for me to pick up the phone and say 'This is what's going on with me'. I'm afraid of being judged...still."

Also, related to her feelings of low self-worth, Rita explained that the sexual abuse left her feeling unlovable and with a belief that she was not good
enough for others. She said, "The sex of the sexual abuse really screwed up my sexuality big time - what's right and what's wrong and a lot of confusion [and] difficulty with relationships with men,...difficulty trusting, not believing that I'm lovable unless... I'm perfect ... and I never was so...", and "It (not being perfect) meant that I wouldn't be loved or cared for. It meant that I wasn't good enough, that people wouldn't like me." She indicated that she felt worthless in relationships with others generally but that these feelings were particularly prevalent in relationships with men. She said, "There was a time where I didn't believe I was worth anything. I was very, very shy as a teenager and as a child. I was really afraid of men... to the point where when I'd walk down the street, if there was a man walking towards me I would cross the street rather than have to walk by him. I always walked with my head down....[I] didn't have a lot of friends in school and... just generally didn't feel good enough about myself or anything that I did." Again, her self-concept that she must be perfect and her sense of worthlessness were evident.

Rita struggled to determine whether her feelings of being unlovable were the result of the sexual abuse per se or what she saw as her mother's unprotective stance. She said, "It's hard for me to get close to people and I don't know if that's... related to the sexual abuse or... betrayal of my mother because she was supposed to be protecting me and I never ever felt loved or cared for by her. It was difficult for me to feel loved or good enough to get close to people." She indicated that seeing herself as unlovable often results in her sabotaging her relationships. She said, "It's like I don't deserve having it (a good relationship). It's like it's really good here and I'm going to sabotage it..." In the feedback session, she indicated that her struggle with her weight is sometimes related to her fears of being unlovable which, in turn, are related to her attempts to sabotage her relationships. For example, she indicated that sometimes when she overeats, she tells herself that her partner will 'have' to love her whether she's fat or not and that if he doesn't, she will simply leave the relationship. The belief underlying Rita's attempts to sabotage her relationships was evident in the initial interview when she said, "I don't believe someone really good could love me and want me in their life so I try to sabotage it (the relationship)."

In spite of her tendency to trust too easily and her feelings of low self-worth, Rita indicated that she has learned to set limits and boundaries with
others in her life. She said, "There are boundaries now. I know what's acceptable and what's not acceptable, what's ok for me and what feels comfortable or doesn't feel comfortable. And I am able to let people know..." Setting limits and boundaries with others in her life seems to have generalized for Rita as she talked about many different relationships in which she has and continues to do this. Somewhat related to Rita's ability to set clear boundaries in her life are her efforts now to take care of herself and not just other people. She explained that she does this by ensuring that her needs are being met in her relationships. She said, "Now it's me getting my needs met too. In the past it wouldn't be... My needs didn't matter... I am realizing that... I have needs and it's OK to ask for them to be met. So that's the part that I do still have some trouble with sometimes. [I'm] working on it." She explained that maintaining her positive qualities of being able to give to other people while still getting her own needs met is a challenge that she is now faced with in her relationships. She said, "There were parts about me that I still liked from before that I didn't want to get rid of and I thought it was OK for me to be giving, but to do it for choice because I enjoy it, not because I feel like I have to do it..."

Rita explained that she tries to be nonjudgmental and accepting of others now. This seemed related to her development of tolerance for herself and her increasing self-acceptance. She said, "People choose to be in situations for whatever their reasons are and that's just the same as I chose to be in that situation with B [ex-husband who was abusive] for as long as I did... Some people might have judged that but I did what I had to do and I try to see that in other people. I...try [not] to judge them... They do what they... have to do for now." She indicated that she has met many people who had difficult lives, such as drug dealers and prostitutes, and that she has learned how to accept them as people who are struggling just like herself.

Related to her efforts to accept people for who they are, Rita expressed an understanding of her sister and her mother that has enabled her to forgive them for abusing her. She said, "I understand her [sister] a lot better. I understand why there was all that pain and why she was so abusive... I mean she just, like you said, coped with it (being sexually abused) in different ways...", and "my mom was an abuser too but I can forgive her now because of all the mechanics of
the family and all the craziness that was going on. [In] trying to cope...she...abused [physically and emotionally], I think, to deal with it."

Rita articulated very clearly that the experience of sexual abuse by her father led to her associating love and sex. This, according to Rita, had many negative effects on her relationships with men. She described how the association between love and sex developed. She said, "there is so much going on there. My dad was never available [emotionally or physically] because he was an alcoholic. So when he did start abusing me sexually, I associated love and sex.... I was finally getting some attention from this man..." She explained how this experience influenced the way that she saw herself in relation with men. She said, "the only time I was good enough was when he [father] was touching me and stuff like that....He wouldn't have anything to do with me otherwise", and "one thing...that I learned during the sexual abuse was that I have to be a sexual person to be loved..."

Rita indicated that the association between love and sex led to her having many extra-marital affairs in which she would search for someone to love her. She reported that she frequently confused being used with being loved. Of the men that she slept with while married, she said, "men that I slept with outside of the relationship - I was being used....I didn't realize that at the time. but that's what was going on. My [inner] child was saying to me that I was being loved, but I was really just being used." Rita explained that she believed that if a man gave her attention then it meant that she must have sex with him. As well, she indicated that once she had sex with a man, then it followed that she must care for him and that he must care for her. She said, "the other thing that grew out of that was, this one is tough for me, I became a very sexual person. Slut wasn't actually the word but I had some sexual relationships within my marriage....I realize now, I didn't know then except that I felt a lot of guilt, it was related [to] my husband never being there [emotionally or physically for me, I didn't feel loved]. ...I would get some attention from a man and...when I got that attention...it felt like he cared for me and then I had to give myself sexually. ....If I gave myself sexually, I must care for this person. I had one heck of a time dealing with all of that." As with her representations of herself, guilt and confusion seemed prominent in Rita's views of herself in relationships with others.

Furthermore, Rita reported that the abuse had a lasting impact on her views of herself in relationships with men in other ways. She explained that her feelings and fears of being unlovable transferred quite directly from her relationship with her
father to her relationships with men. She said, "Feeling loved...It was that whole man thing.... I wasn't a real person unless I had a man in my life" and "If I spent all my time with that person and just gave all my love to that person, they will love me." She also indicated that getting validation from men regarding her self-worth was very important. She said, "I used to flirt a lot with men. It was always with men. There was always a lot of men around me. I was more comfortable with men because when I flirted I got the attention..." In the feedback session, Rita indicated that in an attempt to disconfirm her belief that she needs to be with a man to be worthwhile, she sometimes forces herself to do things by herself, such as go to a bar or to a movie.

In addition, Rita described losing herself in many of her relationships with men and indicated that this is something that she continues to struggle with. She indicated that her upbringing in general, of which the sexual abuse was a part, set her up for more abuse in her relationships with men. She said, "All or most of my relationships in the past have been give, give, give, give, give and totally lose myself in the relationship. I take responsibility for that, I do that all to myself. ...Of course in an abusive relationship, the partner will take that and use it...but I felt that that was the way to be loved." She identified that her relationship with both her father and mother set her up to marry an abusive man at the 16 years of age. For example, outside of learning to associate love and sex through her relationship with her father, Rita indicated that her first husband was like her father in many ways. According to Rita, he was an alcoholic who was completely physically and emotionally unavailable for her. Likewise, Rita indicated that there were also similarities between her first husband and her mother that were not simply coincidental. Like her mother, Rita experienced her first husband as excessively critical of her. It seemed that being unaware of what was abusive and what was normal behavior may have led Rita to develop relationships in which she felt a sense of familiarity. Unfortunately, what was familiar in relationships for Rita was abuse.

In terms of her relationships with men now, Rita indicated that she is more self-determined and tends not to lose her sense of herself as easily. She said, "In a relationship [now], I am not willing to accept not having my needs met just to be in a relationship. In the past I would have done that. My needs would have gone by the wayside just so that I could be in that relationship." A clearer sense of herself in her relationships with men was particularly evident in Rita's descriptions of her relationship with her new partner. She said, "It's OK for him also to go out hunting with the boys or if he wants to go on a field trip, he loves photography, if he wants to go on a
field trip and I'm working or [I] can't go, or [if] he just wants to go by himself...it's OK....I think that's important...to be myself and not be a part of him." Also apparent in her relationship with her new partner is her tendency not to caretake as much. She said, "With all of my growth I've been able to find somebody I don't have to look after. [Somebody] who will look after himself and who chooses to look after me in some ways and...I look after him too in some ways but because I choose to and fun things [and romantic things]...to do for each other...healthy stuff." She described this relationship as very reciprocal. In the feedback session, Rita indicated that her feelings of being self-determined in her relationship with her partner have increased even more since the first interview. For example, she explained that they have been experiencing some difficulties since the first interview but that she has been able to come to the realization that she will 'live' if the relationship ends. A solid sense of herself in relationships with men is new for Rita.

One area that Rita continues to struggle with in her relationships with men is in feeling unloved. She explained that the belief that she is unlovable in relation to men is evident in her relationship with her partner. She said, "I can trust him with some things but not with others. It's hard for me to trust that somebody would love me, unconditionally and to believe that....I had some struggles with that with P because I mean he loves me and I can see it in so many ways but deep down inside I don't think he [really does]....[I think] something is not right here, something is going to happen, he's too good. ...It's hard for me to trust." Despite her ongoing difficulty with trusting that her new partner loves her, Rita indicated that he is a different kind of man than what she has been accustomed to in the past. She described him as patient, fairly communicative, self-sufficient and giving. It may be that Rita's relationship with her new partner is serving as a corrective experience for her in which her views of men as controlling and as users are being disconfirmed.

In addition to the impact on her views of men, Rita explained that the sexual abuse had an impact on her views of women. In response to a question about the impact of the abuse on her views of women, Rita said, "Women are weak. Women get used..." She indicated that her views of women as weak and as victims are changing. She said, "Women, I realize, are much stronger than I thought they were....There are a lot of women out there with good education and good jobs looking after themselves and not just looking after a family..." It seems
that as Rita develops herself, as in furthering her education and in not always looking after others, she is more open to meeting women like herself.

Rita is now finding herself at a point in her life at which she would like to develop healthy relationships with women. Consistent with her efforts to maintain a sense of herself in her relationships with men, she identified that she feels a need to have a healthy relationship with a woman outside of her relationship with her partner. Also, she indicated that other relationships with men don't fulfill her in the same way that relationships with women do. She said, "I haven't found it (a good relationship with a woman) yet, but I'm still looking. ...I think it's important to have relationships outside of my partner [or men in general]. ...Men are nice and I have some really good friends who are men but...it's not the same." Rita indicated that she had a friend who passed away about a year before the interview and that she has been struggling to develop another fulfilling relationship with a woman since this time. She explained that one of the reasons that she became re-involved in a survivors' group was for the purpose of meeting women. However, she has been having some trouble meeting women who she feels are at the same spot as her in their healing. She said, "It just seems that most of the women that I've been meeting lately have been in that situation too (at an earlier spot in their healing) and I've chosen to stand back from it and so I think that's part of it {difficulty forming relationships with women}.

**Pivotal experiences.**

As with her self-growth and development, Rita sees herself as central to the changes in her representations of others and relationships. She explained that her active involvement in changing her views as well as her ability to focus on herself have enabled her to change in this area. In talking of how she was able to change her beliefs that she needed a man to be a person, she said, "I've done a lot of work on that in the last while and before I met P I decided that I was going to date and I wasn't going to get emotionally involved with just one guy. So I dated probably four or five different guys and got to know them on different levels and decided what was OK and what wasn't OK....Then when I met P, well he was like everything that [I had been looking for]. ...So when I realized that, I stopped dating the other guys and then we went on from there. So that was good for me too." Rita also indicated that focusing on herself in her relationship with her partner and asking herself why certain things are difficult for her has enabled her to put less
pressure on the relationship. In turn, it seems that Rita is beginning to view herself as more lovable in this relationship.

Finally, Rita indicated that acceptance has also been central to her healing. For example, she explained that accepting others has enabled her to gain respect from others which has been very significant for her. She said, "You get so much too [when you accept others]...You get respect and caring from the other person too and...it feels good. I feel good when somebody can accept me for who I am [as I try to accept them for who they are]." In the feedback session, Rita indicated that accepting others for who they are enables her to understand herself more and, in turn, ease up on herself when making mistakes. Furthermore, in the initial interview, Rita explained that the relationship between accepting others and self-acceptance also works the other way. For example, she claimed that her self-acceptance seemed central in her being able to accept others and view others differently. She said, "I'm much less judgmental and much more accepting [now] because when I looked at myself and realized that I was far from perfect ....I made choices that weren't always good for me but I made them for whatever reasons at the time and I can accept that other people do the same thing. So I'm much more accepting of others."
Kathryn

Kathryn is a professional woman in her forties. She was raised in an intact family in which there were 5 children. Kathryn was sexually abused throughout her childhood and adolescence by different people. She was sexually and emotionally abused by a group of neighborhood children on the school playground from the age of 6 to 12 years. This sexual and emotional abuse then continued (by the same group of children) on the school bus between the ages of 12 and 14 years when Kathryn and her peers began going to a different school. This abuse occurred many times and involved the other children touching Kathryn and making comments and jokes at her expense.

Kathryn was then sexually abused by one of her brothers when she was 17 years old. He was 12 years old when he began abusing Kathryn. This abuse involved fondling and occurred over a period of 5 to 7 years. Kathryn was then raped by this same brother at 25 years of age in her home. Kathryn also reported a one-time incident of sexual abuse by her cousin. Kathryn's age and the degree of intrusiveness of this abuse was not explored in the interview.

Kathryn disclosed the sexual abuse by the neighborhood children at age 7 years to her parents. She reported that her parents believed her but that the action they took to stop it (i.e., talking to the main perpetrator's parents) was ineffective. She explained that, in fact, the abuse by these children got worse at this point. Kathryn disclosed the sexual abuse by her brother to her parents and to workers at a mental health clinic at age 25 years. Again, Kathryn indicated that her parents believed her but did not effectively support her. They maintained that she should put the past behind her and rejoin with her brother in a new relationship. She reported that although her brother admitted that the sexual abuse had taken place, he did not take responsibility for it. According to Kathryn, he continues to deny the significance of the sexual abuse.

In addition to the experiences of sexual abuse, Kathryn reported being mildly physically abused and moderately emotionally abused by her parents as a child. She explained that she experienced her father as a very controlling man while she was growing up. She indicated that her mother as well as her and her siblings were controlled by her father. Kathryn has been in therapy to deal with issues regarding the sexual abuse for approximately 10 years. She continues to struggle with its impact on her.
Kathryn's representations of self.

Kathryn indicated that the sexual abuse had an impact on her feelings of self-worth. For example, she described having no sense of herself as a worthwhile person. She said, "...not having self worth and not believing you are anybody because you've been abused by a group of people and then your brother..." Her feelings of worthlessness seemed evident in her general approach to life. In speaking of her job specifically, she said, "[Before my healing began] I had no dreams, I had no goals, and I was there to do a job and that was it." Kathryn regarded her lack of goals and dreams to be reflective of her feelings of low self-worth. Consistent with her feelings of worthlessness, Kathryn explained that as a result of the sexual abuse, she kept hidden and withdrawn and consequently had no voice. She said, "I think it [the sexual abuse] kept me hidden...[and] very withdrawn and into myself...", and "I just wouldn't talk about it [the sexual abuse]. I never ever said anything to anybody....I didn't have anything to say and so I just kept everything inside." Kathryn indicated that her withdrawn and hidden stance were related to her 'keeping the secret' that she had been sexually abused. It seemed that keeping the abuse a 'secret' was related to Kathryn feeling different from others around her. For example, she said, "I think back then, I really felt that I didn't have anything to offer anybody because...I couldn't talk about anything....Of course I never had any relationships or anything and so I sort of felt that I was a little different...." She explained that 'keeping the secret' was the most damaging part of the abuse for her. She said, "But it all boils down to this: 'it's a secret'...you don't tell secrets!... I think that's the most damaging part of [it]... - if you tell this is going to happen."

In addition to being an impact of the sexual abuse, Kathryn explained that keeping herself hidden also served to protect her. She indicated that she kept herself hidden both emotionally and physically. For example, she explained that she learned to hide herself emotionally early in life when the sexual abuse that she experienced on the school playground got worse after she disclosed it to her mother. She said, "I did not feel good about myself. I did it [did not voice opinions or let others know what was happening] more to protect myself because I knew...if I said something my father would be mad....Then of course my experience with that one time [when] I did say something and the abuse got worse, well what's the point, you know. So everything was just sort of accepted." Her desire to hide herself was also manifested physically whereby she would curl up in a ball to prevent further sexual abuse by her brother. She identified that she
also used this behavior later in life to deter attention from others. She explained, "... In order for my brother not to get at me, I would roll up into a ball. And so when I went to a bar,... I always hid myself [by crossing my hands and curling] up over the table, and trying to hide from it. ...It was just a real realization {currently} for me to see that [I was doing that]."

Another way in which the abuse had an impact on Kathryn's feelings of self-worth was in her tendency to doubt herself. She reported that questioning and doubting herself is something that she currently struggles with. She said, "I find because I don't know everything, that I can't remember everything that happened, I question myself a lot.... - did that happen or didn't that happen?...I feel like....it really did happen but, I don't know, it's too bizarre to really have happened. ...So you get doubting yourself."

Finally, Kathryn indicated that as an adult, she became a workaholic in an attempt to compensate for her feelings of worthlessness. She said, "I didn't really realize it [that she was withdrawn] until I started therapy....I compensated for it by being a workaholic and I was taking university classes and studying and all that kind of stuff as well." Kathryn's job seemed central in her definition of herself and she explained that she sought help when she became unable to function at work.

Kathryn has experienced much change over the years during which she has been actively healing. In contrast to not having a voice, Kathryn explained that she very much has a voice and a presence now. She no longer hides herself. In speaking of her voice, she said, "I realized how much the abuse played in that {hiding self} and that everything was secret. Everything was held right in. Once I got rid of that I could feel how much...better I felt inside by voicing my opinion....People don't down you for voicing your own opinion, some do but for the most part, people don't. You just feel so much better than keeping it inside and getting stressed out ", and "Sometimes it takes a lot to build up the strength to do it {voice opinion}...but ...[at] staff meetings and stuff like that, I can ...If I've got something to say I'll put it in whereas years ago I would have said nothing." In the feedback session, she clarified that she now voices her opinion most of the time but that she still struggles with this sometimes. In the initial interview, she noted that others have also noticed that she has found her voice. Consistent with having a voice, Kathryn described a process of 'coming' into herself and developing feelings of worth regarding herself. She said, "...first... becoming myself and trusting myself to make my own decisions and then just gradually working from there.... I do have some self worth and building on my self-esteem."
Although Kathryn has begun to feel worthwhile, she also indicated that she continues to struggle in this area. For example, she said, "It's ... probably one hundred percent better than five years ago but I still have a hard time believing in myself and accepting that what I've got to do or what I am doing or saying is important." An example of Kathryn's struggle with her feelings of self-worth is a desire to be a different type of person. She indicated that she would like to be more confident and more comfortable with herself socially. As well, she explained that she has a hard time internalizing positive messages about herself. She said, "I just sort of downplay them {the positive things that people say about her}...that's fine and dandy for how you see me in this respect but you don't see me in the real world all the time. Because those people don't follow me around all over." Finally, Kathryn explained that she continues to struggle with suicide.

Relationships seemed central to Kathryn's struggle with suicide. For example, she reported that thoughts of suicide are most prevalent for her when she thinks about her sexual difficulties and how these interfere with her ability to develop a relationship with a man. On the other hand, she explained that it is her meaningful relationships that keep her from acting on her suicidal thoughts. She said, "at those times {when struggling with relationship issues} I really question why I am here. It goes up and down but it is not...as prevalent as it was, say even four or five years ago. [Then it] was a day and night thing...to be dead and...I know inside, even though I've got plans on how I would like to do it, ...I couldn't do it, because I couldn't hurt my nephews and my nieces...Until they grow up a bit that's the way it is....[Is] life is worth living? I don't know ... [I] play it one day at a time." In the feedback session, Kathryn made it clear that at this time, she does not feel that life is worth living.

In addition to her feelings of self-worth, Kathryn's self-concept seemed to be impacted by the experience of sexual abuse, as well as by her relationship with her father. Her views of herself as a victim became evident in one of her descriptions. She said, "...not having self worth and not believing you are anybody because you've been abused by a group of people and then your brother and...then having your father who is controlling on top of that....So of course well, who am I? I am just somebody that falls into the traps of being abused and...so I obviously don't have any sense to make a proper decision {for herself} and dad is going to do this for me, so why do it?" A link between Kathryn's feelings of self-worthlessness and her views of herself as a victim was evident. During the feedback session, she clarified that she was very controlled by her father throughout her life until about 10 years ago when she began to receive therapy.
She added that over the past 10 years, she has increasingly been able to break free of her father's control. She now sees herself as not being controlled by him that much.

Furthermore, the experience of sexual abuse appeared to be very central in Kathryn's descriptions of herself. She said, " Anything that I've ever dealt with in therapy, or I've had a hard time with ultimately stems back to the abuse and... the curling up, the hiding myself, the feeling of not being any good.... Everything just always seems to stem back to ...when I was a child, this is what happened." Like her descriptions of becoming unable to function at work, Kathryn described herself as 'falling apart' at one point in her life. It seemed that she began exploring the impact of the sexual abuse at this time. She said, "I think it [the sexual abuse] kept me hidden. [It] kept me very withdrawn and into myself until such time that I fell apart and started looking at how it was impacting me..." A final way in which Kathryn viewed herself as a result of the abuse involved her sexuality. Kathryn indicated that the sexual abuse has prohibited her from developing the sexual side of herself. She said, "because of my sexuality,... that's just a...word. It's not part of me (laughs) and I just have a very hard time dealing with any man's body." During the feedback session, Kathryn added that in addition to having difficulty dealing with the male body as a result of the sexual abuse, her struggle with her weight also interferes with her ability to see herself as a sexual person.

Finally, Kathryn indicated that the abuse had an impact on her physical self. She explained that as a result of the abuse, she cannot have children. Kathryn discovered this approximately four years ago when she was planning to become a single parent. She explained that she loves children and that this has been an immense loss for her which she continues to struggle with. She said, "[I'm dealing with it] off and on. The spring is the hardest for me because everybody comes out and everybody has a family and kids... playing and what have you. That's normally when I get depressed. It's not lasting as long anymore. I think I am just starting to accept it. That's the way it will be.... Other people's kids do satisfy that (longing). ...My younger brother and sister-in-law have let me do that with the kids..." Kathryn's ongoing progress in her healing was apparent.

In addition to the experience of sexual abuse per se being central in Kathryn's definition of self, she indicated that her healing is central too. For example, she views herself as a changed person as a result of dealing with her feelings regarding the abuse. She said, " I am not the same person that I was ten years ago, at all! ...I know what happened to me. I know how it has influenced me and I have worked through that." For Kathryn, healing seems to be a process over
time and she continues to undergo changes. She identified different stages that she has and continues to go through. For example, she indicated that she worked through many different issues regarding being sexually abused as a child in her relationship with her supervisor at work. She explained that at one time, she hated him and that he reminded her of her brother. However, at another time, she believed that she was in love with him. She said, "...my department supervisor... I've gone through I don't know how many stages with him already - finding him very abusive, feeling that he is like my brother and yet at the same time, like right now, I have no real set feeling for him....At one time I couldn't stand to look at him, I couldn't stand to talk to him....I've gone through these different stages in the last couple years....At one point, I thought ...I was in love with him.... Then I found out that really ...was not [the case]. " Also, Kathryn recognized that some issues become more prominent for her at certain times more than other times. She said, "I don't know where that's [confronting abusers] really at. Sometimes it becomes an issue for me, sometimes it doesn't. But I can't really do anything about that (the sexual abuse on the school grounds and bus as a child)."

Other ways in which Kathryn's healing process seemed to be prominent in her definition of herself is in her desire to speak out about her abuse. A desire to speak out about her abuse seemed related to her gaining a voice. She said, "I would like to go public....I want my voice heard....What I would really like to do is talk to kids and...to enforce in them that if something is happening to you to tell somebody and it doesn't have to be your parents.... [I would like to] tell people my experience and that I just feel that it is very...important in today's society because there is so much of it." Kathryn's view of herself as now having a voice was apparent.

Making a contribution to survivors' healing on a broader level is also something that Kathryn indicated that she wants at this point in her life. She talked about a time when she addressed a group of physicians and psychiatrists about her experience as a survivor. This experience seemed very significant for Kathryn in terms of her feeling that she had contributed to women's healing on a broader level. Her desire to contribute to survivors' healing more globally was also prominent in her decision to become involved in this research project. For example, she explained that she used the interview with me as an opportunity to contribute to others' healing. She said, " I feel that anything that I can give to anybody to help them is valuable. ...That's how I sort of look at this (participating in this research project), is someday, somebody will be ...
reading some of these things to help them deal with people and...it's important." Kathryn indicated that becoming involved with Big Sisters is another way in which she feels she can contribute to making children's lives better. However, she indicated that she is struggling with getting the energy to commit herself to becoming a Big Sister.

In addition to seeing her healing as a process that evolves over time, Kathryn also seemed to regard her healing as a priority over other issues in her life at this time. In particular, Kathryn indicated that although she would like to lose some weight, her healing is more important at this time. She said, "I just decided that...I couldn't (deal with issues regarding weight). I couldn't deal with everything and what is more important right now and the weight wasn't number one. And so I just decided that I have to learn to deal with it...I can't dwell on it."

Finally, as a result of her healing over time, Kathryn seems to be coping differently with difficulties in her life at this time than she did in the past. She explained that she is not dwelling on things as much as she used to. She said, "Whereas normally I would just stew and stew and stew and stew about it, but I know I am handling those kinds of things a lot better (having an accident with her new car)." Some of the ways in which Kathryn identified herself as coping differently include talking more about what is going on for her and taking care of herself by taking sick days at work when she is beginning to feel depressed. Also, she indicated that she is returning to playing music; an interest which had always been a release for her in the past.

**Pivotal experiences.**

Kathryn identified herself as central in her healing. In particular, Kathryn attributes the beginning of her healing to her ability to 'tell the secret'. She explained that she had a gut feeling at that time in her life that all of her distress, or what she refers to as the time when she 'fell apart', was related to the experience of sexual abuse. According to Kathryn, she was able to begin healing when she let professionals know what had happened to her as a child. She said, "I came to this ugly conclusion that if I just let them know what happened to me, that maybe they will be able to help me. ...I didn't know how or anything but I had some gut feeling that it was related to the abuse. So I spent a Sunday afternoon on the balcony, crying my heart out and writing and then...my appointment was the next day. I threw it on the secretary's desk and ran out." In addition to 'telling the secret', Kathryn indicated that she pushed herself to work through issues related to the sexual abuse she experienced as a child in her relationship with her
supervisor at work. She said, "Oh it was really hard to begin with...[and] somebody's bright idea was, well can't you change supervisors?...I could've probably made a stink about it and do it, but at the same time I was learning as I was going through this and I thought...this probably won't be the only time in my life that I'm going to come across this....If I escape it now, how am I going to learn to deal with it? Somehow I've learned to accept him....He's my supervisor and he will not control me and I don't appreciate some of the things he says and whatever, but so be it."

Kathryn also identified that validation from others has been central in her healing. She noted that seeing the impact that her sexual abuse had on others around her, such as her brothers who did not abuse her, served as validation for her that the abuse really happened. She said, "it's not that it's totally affected just myself. It affected him [oldest brother] with his daughter. It affected my younger brother in seeing my [middle] brother abusing me and in...his feelings and that stuff. ...So it hasn't just affected myself....They have been there to sort of validate that it happened and...that ...it has affected them..." Also, she indicated that friends, therapists, and books have been essential for her healing in terms of validating her perceptions and enabling her to see that she is not alone.

**Kathryn's representations of others and relationships.**

Kathryn indicated that the sexual abuse had an impact on her relationships in general. Specifically, she explained that she was prevented from learning how to have relationships. She said, "{difficulty developing relationships?} I'm really not sure, the only thing that I can...associate it to is...my earlier life of not being the same as everybody else, like we talked about earlier. And partly because of my physical disability and the abuse that was going on at the time. I sort of was withdrawn into my own world and so I never really learned to...have relationships. It just wasn't part of me and I wasn't part of all the other kids that I went to school with."

As with her representations of self, the impact of the sexual abuse on Kathryn's representations of others is ongoing. For example, she indicated that as a result of the sexual abuse, she maintains a belief that others will betray her. She has expectations that others will betray her by abusing her and by talking about her behind her back. She identified that experiences of being betrayed in the past, such as being sexually abused, set her up to now expect that others will betray her. She said, "All the events of abuse play into trusting people... Like do I trust this person or are you just going to abuse me
too, to get what they want?", and "I guess what I am afraid of is ...that they will... agree
with me...at that instance but as soon as they are talking to somebody else they will [say]
'Oh God, is she way out to lunch'." Kathryn identified that her belief that others will
betray her interferes with her ability to form relationships because of difficulties she
has with trusting others. She said, "the trust issue plays a lot bigger ...role in people
that have been sexually abused. From my own experience,... if you were betrayed before
by people, then who can you trust [now]? ...I think the trust issue is more pertinent
than with the people that haven't been abused because they don't really know what the
lack of trust really is."

It seemed that Kathryn's difficulties with trusting others may be related to a
belief that others will betray her as well as a belief that she does not have anything to
contribute in her relationships with others. She indicated that once she gets to know
someone a bit, however, she can begin to open up and trust more. She said, "Once I know
people, ...once I feel comfortable around somebody [and] feel that I can trust people, then
I don't have any problems. But in unknown circumstances...I am quiet because I don't
think that I have anything to contribute to anything." Kathryn's experience in disclosing
the abuse may also be related to her difficulties trusting others. Her experience was that
others were ineffective in stopping the abuse and in supporting her. She said, "I think
partly too, the early abuse, when I was about six years old, I did tell mom and not that
she didn't believe me because they (parents) did try and do something about it but I felt
that it got worse instead of better ..." During the feedback session, Kathryn indicated
that her feelings regarding not being supported as well as those around the sexual abuse
having escalated after she disclosed it to her parents are becoming manifest in her life
presently as she struggles to work out some conflicts at work. For example, she
explained that she went to her supervisor regarding some issues with co-workers. She
indicated that she is now expecting the problems at work to escalate as a result of her
action to stop them.

In addition to her difficulties trusting herself and others, Kathryn indicated that
she was controlled by her brother who sexually abused her right up into adulthood. It is
likely that this also had an impact on her ability to trust and develop relationships with
other people. She said, " I still kept very controlled by the brother that abused me...He
was in business for himself and I felt that I had to do his books or else he would do
something to me...[I was] very controlled [by him]...I didn't want to do any of it, but felt
that I had to."
Kathryn explained that she continues to struggle with having difficulties developing relationships. In particular, she identified difficulties that she has in initiating conversation with people. She explained that this is something that she is currently addressing in therapy. She said, "My question to P (therapist) today is 'OK, when you go into a group of people that you don't know, what do you do?'...Because I was just dumbfounded. I have no idea what to do." When asked what she does do in these situations, Kathryn explained, "I usually just go in a corner and hope that maybe somebody will come talk to me. I can't approach anybody. I just feel...very out of place....As far as going out and just meeting people, I just can't."

Kathryn indicated that one of the things that may be blocking her from developing the skills that she feels are necessary to develop relationships with others is the fact that most of her relationships are with people who have also been sexually abused. She explained that in these relationships the focus is on people's experiences of sexual abuse to the exclusion of other things. Although acknowledging that this has been validating for her, she expressed dissatisfaction with her relationships because of the exclusive focus on issues of sexual abuse. She said, "The contact with...my friends that have also been abused...like it's just a good validation. But I think I am getting beyond that point now where I want to occupy my mind with more healthier stuff....That's why I am getting frustrated with not having "real" relationships." A desire to move on in her healing, beyond focusing on the sexual abuse and its impact, was evident in Kathryn's descriptions of some of the difficulties in her current relationships. For example, she said, "I think that (talking about issues regarding being sexually abused) was good for the time being that I was dealing with it ....I needed those type of people in my life. But I think I am sort of getting past that now where I don't need that ... as much...But it's scary because then I have to start learning how to function again in another manner." Despite her obvious healing, Kathryn indicated that she is unsure of how to relate on issues other than sexual abuse. She said, "Now, it's sort of OK, how do other people act in the real world. Because not everybody has been abused. I don't really know", and "it's not that I am out of touch with a lot of stuff,... it's just that I don't know how to talk about them....So I just don't talk about them."

In addition to wanting relationships based on things other than her own and others' experiences of sexual abuse, Kathryn indicated that at times her healing interferes with her relationships. She said, "The center of my life is trying to get me together and so I concentrate on the things that are giving me problems and try to work
through them... I know one particular person, a person I went to Florida with, she has a hard time accepting that I'm still, ten years later, working on these issues. And even though I try and say to her 'Yeah, maybe some people have taken less time but did they work full time while they doing it?'... Because [most people] that I know haven't worked while they are dealing with it."

Despite her difficulties with relationships, Kathryn acknowledged the growth that she has experienced in this area. She said, "Years back it was not existent at all. Now at least I've got myself into some relationships,... even though it seems to center around one common theme type thing. But... ten years ago, I had no relationships with anybody really and I was very much inside myself. So it has come far..."

Her growth was also evident in her changing views of others. For example, she indicated that her views of others as abusive and controlling are beginning to change. She said, "I have sort of realized that not everybody is manipulative and controlling and judgmental, that there are some decent people in this world..." Kathryn attributed the ongoing change in this area to therapy. She said, "Therapy. Finding out, or really realizing the effects that the abuse played on my mind and that my mind saw everybody the same and that really they aren't the same." In the feedback session, Kathryn identified that relearning, both through being educated and through her experiences with others in group therapy, enabled her to begin viewing others differently.

Kathryn talked about a number of people that are supportive of her in her life generally and in her healing specifically. In talking of her youngest brother, she said, "My youngest brother is right there with me.... Part of it is when he was just a toddler [he] saw a lot of it and until I revealed it to the family he thought it was just a dream he had.... So it brought a lot of things out for him too. And so... he knows what happened or a lot of the stuff that happened so... [I] think he is coming from a different perspective too." Kathryn indicated that she has also experienced support from a past lover as well as from therapists and other women in the groups that she has attended. She indicated that although they offer her support by identifying positive qualities that she has, she experiences some difficulties with internalizing the positive messages.

In addition to her views of others changing, Kathryn's views of herself in relationships with others also seemed to be changing. For example, she described herself as self-determined in her relationships with others now. Specifically, she indicated that she does not allow others to control her anymore. In the feedback session, she clarified that she is able to stop others from controlling her
most of the time. She went on to say in the feedback session that she now recognizes that she becomes quite depressed when she is feeling controlled by someone else. As well, she indicated that she is now more able to communicate her dissatisfaction with feeling controlled. In speaking of her relationship with her father in the initial interview, she said, "All of a sudden I am not allowing him to control me and he can't handle that." Also, she explained that she is able to voice her opinions and wishes to her family members, even when they differ from those that are expected of her. She said, "My parents have a hard time with it because they can't handle the change....I can tell them now that 'No, I don't think that is right'....I could question him (father) on that (his interpretations of her being selfish) whereas years ago I could never have...said anything." Her ability to be more self-determined in relationships seemed to generalize beyond her relationships with her family members. Of her supervisor at work, Kathryn said, "I still think that I would hate to be his wife because I think he is very controlling and abusive but I am not his wife so I don't have to worry about that. And I [try not to] allow him to control me at work."

Another way in which Kathryn seemed to be self-determined in her relationships with others is in her ability to set boundaries with others, particularly her family members. Most of the boundary setting that Kathryn described was with her family with respect to her brother who abused her. In particular, Kathryn reported that she will not attend family gatherings at which her brother is planning to attend, except at Christmas time. She said, "I have allowed one day a year to be with family for my mother's sake basically....So one day at Christmas time I will be with him. I don't have anything to do with him, but I am physically in the same place. ...I think because I have agreed to do that they (family) think that, 'she'll come around and she will do it the rest of the year'... But I won't! ...They talk to me about him and that kind of thing and I just try and get on to other conversation....Now when I talk about family, I won't include him....I know this weekend I did that a few times and I was just waiting for mom to say 'Well what about him'?" Kathryn also indicated that given that her brother has not taken responsibility for the sexual abuse and has refused to get treatment, she sets very clear boundaries with him when she does see him. She said, "W (brother) came into the dining room and I was still wrapping Christmas presents....He tried to get a conversation going with me and I just
answered, uh huh, yeah, you know…. I never really made contact with him and I
didn't ask him questions." She reported that in this situation her brother finally
left the room and that she did not talk to him for the rest of the evening.

Consistent with Kathryn being self-determined in her relationships with
others, she described an ability to give to others as well as to reach out to others.
Kathryn described meaningful relationships in her life in which she freely gives
herself. In particular, she described a relationship with one of her nephews that
brings her much meaning because of similarities in the way that they experience
the world. Kathryn described this nephew as ‘mentally slow’. She said, "I can
understand what he is going through, being different from everybody else....I can
help him when he gets older. ....I think that is a big part of my life, being there
for him." Kathryn also indicated a newly developed ability to reach out to others
when she is in need. She said, "I ...feel the more I talk about it, the better I feel
about it.... And...the more I talk about it, the more I realize, yeah it wasn't my
fault. Yes, there was nothing I could do. ....Whether it be a current situation or one
quite far off. ....I know I am starting to handle my stress a lot better too....", and "I
think that (not taking responsibility for things that are out of her control) partly
comes from talking too.... Letting it all out whereas before everything was always
inside of me."

Despite being self-determined in her relationships with others, it seemed
that Kathryn, at times, may also be unassuming in her relationships. For
example, in talking of a long-term relationship with a friend, she said, "like for
years now I don’t ask for too much because I know she has got so much going on in
her life. But I know that if I really did need her she would be there."

Kathryn indicated that the abuse had an impact and continues to have an
impact on her relationships with men. In particular, Kathryn described
difficulties with her appearance and her sexuality in relation with men. In terms
of her appearance, Kathryn indicated that her problems with being overweight
have served to both protect her from men and alienate her from them. She said,
" I've always been...sort of overweight. I've never been...thin or anything like
that. So I think it all has to come from...the abuse and thinking that....if I'm fat
then maybe they won't touch me. They won't abuse me anymore...that type
of...thinking. And it's just...gone up now into relationships and being in a
relationship and not being able to deal with the male body and thinking, well good
this is one real way I can deal with it, by not being noticed I won't get involved”, and “As far as like heterosexual relationships, even though ... I say to myself that body appearance doesn't matter and all that kind of thing, I still would like to be thinner. But I don't want to be noticed either.” Ambivalence regarding relationships with men seemed apparent.

Kathryn indicated that although she would like to have a relationship with a man, she is unable to at this point in her life because of difficulties that she has with sex. She said, "I want to have a relationship but I know I am not ready for it. A man's body freaks me out. ...Especially the penis. Just the thought of a penis just makes me freak....It just really, really bothers me....So I know that until I can come to grips with it and I cannot feel threatened by his body, that I can't have a relationship. So why really try and get into one?... It [the sexual abuse] does have a big impact on me and it's all, the whole thing is from the abuse."

Kathryn explained that she had a relationship with a man in the past for quite a few years, however, her difficulties with sex made it impossible for the relationship to continue and grow. She said, "And Z (former lover) was very patient, very understanding. I told him right off the bat what had happened, where I was at with it and he was very, very understanding and very, take your time sort of thing. But as the years went on I could see how he was getting frustrated and then I became frustrated and... it just started falling apart."

Also related to her experience of sexual abuse was Kathryn's belief that her role as a woman was to please men. She explained that in her early twenties she was in a relationship with a man who was very sexually and emotionally abusive to her. It seemed that her belief that she was there to please men kept her from identifying his behavior as abusive. She said, "I think I was in my early twenties when I first started having a relationship....Once I got into therapy I saw how it was very abusive as well. Mind you I learned a lot from it. I felt very uncomfortable with it ....At that point I was still in the belief that I was a woman and I was there to please my man. Whether I enjoyed it or had any feelings toward it or was blanked out or whatever, that didn't mean anything.... I think he sort of used it to his advantage....He was also seeing another woman at the same time too and I couldn't [deal with it]....I put my foot down and I said OK one or the other and that's it and he wouldn't make a decision so I did." Although Kathryn indicated that she believed her role was to please a man, it seemed there was a limit at which
she would no longer tolerate being overlooked and violated. In the feedback
session, Kathryn noted that the sexual abuse left her with skewed ideas of what
was a healthy, normal heterosexual relationship and what was an abusive
relationship. She explained further that she believed that abuse and control was
an expression of love. She went on to say that the abusive relationship that she
found herself in her early twenties would have been repeated several times if she
had entered other relationships simply because she was unaware of what
constituted abuse. She explained that although the relationship that she had with a
man a few years ago was not abusive, she now identifies his behavior as
controlling. Her growth is obvious.

Pivotal experiences.

Kathryn explained that a supportive relationship that she has with her
younger brother and his wife has enabled her to set firm boundaries with other
members of her family regarding her relationship with her brother who abused
her. She said, "I think ... I would have had a really a hard time if my youngest
brother and sister-in-law weren't so much of a support for me. But they backed
me in everything....They don't have [much] to do with him either and yet those
two brothers were really close [when they were younger]....It has really affected
their life....So I think it would have been a lot harder if all my family would have
been against me."
Elsie

Elsie is a professional woman in her late 30’s. She was raised in an intact family and is the oldest of three children. She experienced sexual abuse twice in her life. The first time was as a young child by her grandfather. Elsie reported that this abuse involved digital penetration and was ongoing from as early as infancy to 6 years of age. She disclosed this abuse to her parents at age 4 or 5 years of age and was disbelieved and punished. Her grandfather died when she was 6 years old. Elsie was sexually abused for the second time at age 15 years by someone outside the family. She reported that this abuse involved vaginal penetration and occurred over a period of two years. Elsie indicated that she was mildly physically and emotionally abused as a child and that her mother was addicted to valium while she was growing up. Finally, Elsie lived common-law with a man who physically and emotionally abused her. She is no longer living with this man.

Elsie’s representations of self.

Much of Elsie’s description of self centered on her healing from the sexual abuse. She made a clear distinction about the way she was before and after her healing began. For example, Elsie described a period in her life in which she was not aware of the sexual abuse and its impact. She explained that she entered therapy before recovering memories of the early sexual abuse and that therapy enabled her to recognize how the abuse was impacting her. She said, "...Going through the process of therapy has, to answer your question, strongly influenced the way I see the effect of the abuse because I was so caught up in the effects of the abuse and living them out and living out that pattern, that I couldn’t even see [them]." Although she remembered being sexually abused at 15 years of age, she indicated that she did not define this as abuse because she felt responsible for the abuse happening. Therefore, when she entered therapy, she was also unaware of the impact that the later abuse had on her.

One of the ways in which Elsie’s lack of awareness was manifested was in what she referred to as ‘running from herself’. She kept extremely busy and therefore did not have time to reflect upon her past. She said, "I was extremely active, I was very, very active. I was on twenty seven committees.....I taught full time and...at one point I went forty some days without spending anytime at home because I was at meetings. I was away
every weekend at workshops. I was active. It's called running. I have considered a lot of those years just to being lost years....I ran so much from who I was and what I was. I ran in different ways and one of those ways of running was a workaholic and in volunteering. I have always been extremely active in volunteer work until the last few years."

Elsie also explained that she became a heavy smoker and made attempts to starve herself before she began to actively heal. One of Elsie's abusers was an avid non-smoker and she indicated that she took up smoking as a way to protect herself. She indicated that she also struggled with monitoring her alcohol consumption at this time. It seemed that Elsie saw these addictive behaviors as related to her experience of sexual abuse in several ways. First, she identified that they were both an effect of and a way of coping with the abuse. They seemed to offer protection and safety on the one hand and worked to reduce her self-esteem on the other. Also, she indicated that these addictive behaviors kept her from feeling her emotions; another way in which she may have ran from herself. She said, "I know that [alcoholism] is an addiction that I could easily develop if I would ever let myself, and that's been a way of coping....It's part of the whole package of learning - ...not wanting to feel. Starving myself for years was a way to cope." She explained, "I worked very hard at not feeling anything that went on for all those years." Elsie indicated that she continues to struggle with dealing with her emotions. However, she explained that she has learned more adaptive ways of coping over the last four years.

Elsie indicated that once she went into therapy, she began to become aware of the sexual abuse and its impact on her. Of particular significance for Elsie was identifying some of the beliefs that she maintained as a result of the abuse. She said, "...The biggest thing was getting into therapy. That has made the most difference for me. And actually coming to identify what it was that I believed, what it was that I was acting on and whether or not it always has to be like that or whether or not... things could be changed and turned around.... Come to trust and learn to...defend myself and to let people in." Other beliefs that Elsie identified included that she was to blame for the sexual abuse and that others were untrustworthy and out to hurt her.

Elsie continues to define herself in relation to her healing from the sexual abuse. Her concept of herself as a survivor of child sexual abuse who is actively healing was evident. She said, "I suppose I use the term survivor for those people who are actively dealing with issues around having been abused. It's kind of a stage and I know that at times I move into what the terminology out there calls warrior. I am not comfortable with that term....I don't define myself as that but I do know that I am still at the place
where a large part of my self definition has to do with feelings of the abuse", and "I mean it will always be a part of who I am....This healing journey will also be a part of who I am."

Elsie continues to identify the impact that the sexual abuse has had on her. For example, she explained that she continues to uncover memories of the earlier abuse and that one of the reasons that she is on leave from work is to deal with the feelings that arise from the new memories. Her desire to move beyond the stage of recovering memories was evident. She said, "I think it [leave this year] is more [to] explore, see what's there,...what the memories are because unfortunately the memories will come whether I want them to or not. So give myself the time and space that I need to know what they are and to work through them and move on." Elsie identified in the interview that as a teacher, she needs to be available for the children she teaches and she feels she cannot do this while struggling to integrate memories of the abuse. For example, she indicated that she frequently loses her sense of herself as an adult when uncovering memories. She said, "...I find that whenever I have a batch of new memories, it takes some time for me to get back to knowing who this person called Elsie really is...because quite often when I have the memory I go back to the feelings that I had and those feelings are that of shame, of guilt, pain... I'm feeling very vulnerable and it takes time to get from being a young child in that position to being an adult who has friends that she can trust and people in her life who are not going to hurt her..." Taking leave from work seems to be an example of Elsie's efforts to take care of herself.

In addition to losing a sense of herself while recovering memories, Elsie indicated that she frequently loses a sense of herself when she is empathizing with other people. She indicated that this often happens in her therapy groups. She said, "I've used this skill {empathizing} at times in groups and it's been fairly helpful for some people but at the same time, ...when they are done, ...I am aware that that's their stuff. I am aware that it is not my stuff, [that] it has nothing to do with any abuse I've had. But it takes me like five minutes to get back into myself and know who I am again and know what my needs are and know what I am feeling...[to] know if I am wiggling my toes. I have to make sure it's my toes and not [someone else's].... It takes me time to get back to myself again." Elsie referred to the experience of losing a sense of herself as fragmentation. She said, ""Fragmentation. I'm not sure what it is you want to know about it, because I don't know what other people's experience of it is. ...People tell me things ...that they don't change inside when these things, certain things happen, which amazes me because I have always
assumed that people do that. ...I lose my sense of who I am quite often and when I regain it quite often it is different than I had been before."

In speaking of what she referred to as fragmentation and dissociation, Elsie explained that at times, her sense of self changes. She said, "As a survivor, I dissociate very well. I have certain sets of characteristics that go with being dissociated that aren't there when I am not dissociated." She explained that sometimes she changes from being a mild and nurturing person to a person who wears army boots so that she can [figuratively] stomp all over others if they attempt to get close to her. Elsie identified that at the times when her sense of herself changes, she frequently feels the need to dress differently and has different allergies. She also noted that people have told her that her body posture changes and that her eye color darkens. However, she disagreed with a doctor who diagnosed her with multiple personality disorder and indicated that she does not have amnesia for the times when she feels like a different person. Rather than becoming a different person, Elsie sees the change in herself as one of degrees; that is, she sees her self-characteristics on a continuum and indicated that sometimes she is more one way and that other times she is more another way. When asked about what she thinks facilitates the change from being nurturing to defensive, Elsie speculated that the changes occur when she is feeling threatened in some way. She said, "I believe but I am not certain. I suspect, I think, probably the change comes from when I am feeling threatened, frightened and when it reaches a certain level of intensity...and that can be almost anything....It can be anything from getting stuck in a car wash to the way the snow is falling to somebody asking me a question that feels really scary." She explained that she continues to learn more about the changes in herself. In trying to sort out the issues in this area, Elsie expressed an acceptance of her struggle. She said, "Anyway...to me it doesn't matter if I'm...I mean I have some post traumatic stress syndrome symptoms and possibly atypical dissociative disorder and possibly MPD but that's how I deal with it. I have to get sicker to get better." During the feedback session, Elsie clarified that it has been people in the medical profession that have told her that she will need to get sicker before she gets better. She indicated that she typically does not describe her experience using this kind of language.

In addition to integrating newly discovered memories and seemingly discrepant parts of herself, Elsie appeared to be struggling to integrate the sexual abuse into her sense of herself in other ways. For example, she described a struggle that she is having in developing tolerance. In making meaning from her experiences of sexual abuse, it
seemed that Elsie came to the conclusion that [part of] what enables people to abuse other people is intolerance; that is, an inability to allow others to be who they are. She indicated that she has trouble differentiating between tolerance and acquiescence. The role of sexual abuse in this struggle was clear. She said, "I guess part of it comes from the old belief that intolerance is [part of what's] at the root of most abuse....And I struggle with that a lot because often...I have trouble sorting out when it's turning my eyes from what is actually abusive and harmful and what my role is in that and what is tolerance and acceptance and what is acquiescence. Where those lines are is a really tough one for me....My own background, the strong influences were those ones that were trying to mold me into someone," and "I see intolerance as a lack of willingness to see the other person as [their own person]....Intolerance gets in the way of seeing people as they are and ...part of my basic belief in humanity, I have this little optimistic belief that if people see each other as they really are, they can not harm them or abuse them in those ways, you know? So, if I can not see people fully as they are, I am more at risk to be harmful to them to a lesser perspective." It seemed that Elsie may be struggling with integrating her history of sexual abuse, in which she recognizes that intolerance was a part, with her own potential to be intolerant of other people. Also, it seems that Elsie is working to maintain some hope in human kind. During the feedback session, Elsie clarified that in addition to intolerance, she believes that power and control are at the root of most abuse. She identified that if she were to be abusive to someone it would be because of her tendency, at times, to be intolerant of others.

Elsie also seemed to be struggling to integrate the losses she continues to experience as a result of the sexual abuse. She said, "I suppose if I would, could be a different [person]...I mean the ideal one is if I could be a different person I would want to be somebody who was never abused....I would like to be somebody who was loved and cared for and grew up in a healthy happy family that was kind of like the Walton's....I want my children to lead a good life. ... I wouldn't like them to have to spend years and years dealing with garbage. And I would have liked to have been able to have kids." Elsie indicated that her feelings regarding not being able to have children as a result of the sexual abuse is something that she continues to deal with. She indicated that as with other areas of her life, there was a time when she was unaware of the impact that not being able to have children had on her. She is now beginning to explore this.

Elsie indicated that her spirituality has been and continues to be important in her healing. She explained that her spirituality gives her hope that there is goodness in the
world. She said, "they [spiritual experiences] sustain me and nourish me and give me hope that...that there is goodness, that there is meaning, that the world doesn't have to be quite as chaotic and unjust and inhuman as it may seem at times. That there is a possibility, that there is hope. It can be easy to get into despair (laughs)." Through her spirituality, it seems that Elsie may be rebuilding her basic beliefs about the world and the people in it. This parallels her struggle with tolerance. Finally, Elsie described what she is striving for in her healing process. She said, "I would like to be more stable. I would like not to have mood swings. I would like not to get...to experience...all the stuff, shame and guilt and panic attacks and all that kind of stuff. You're free of that."

Elsie saw a clear relationship between the sexual abuse and her feelings of self-worth. Specifically, she indicated that she regarded herself as ugly, dirty and stupid as a result of the abuse. She said, "I don't think it's had a very positive influence, I'll tell you that much. ...As a result of being abused I grew up believing myself to be dirty, ugly, and I had no, I believed that I had no skills. I believed I didn't have the right to be alive. I believed I was stupid. I grew up with a lot and...I still struggle with a lot of stuff." Elsie made a link between hating herself and seeing herself as ugly and unappealing. One way in which Elsie's lack of self-worth seemed to be manifested was in her tendency to keep to herself and away from others. She said, "I never used to have any relationships. Well, I wasn't aware that I did. I was in my own little world and they were all out there. So I just kind of interacted with people. I didn't really have relationships with them", and "They [friends] always saw me as being very strong, very independent, [and a person who] didn't talk much about themselves." Finally, Elsie also described feelings of shame and guilt in relation to the abuse. She said, "I was still at the place where it was never abusive because it happened to me so it was all my fault and I deserved it." She felt responsible for the sexual abuse which happened when she was 15 years old. She said, "I think what enabled me [to remember the earlier sexual abuse] was when I started dealing with the stuff that I did remember and when I dealt with that in therapy then I came to understand that I was not totally responsible and it was not my fault that things happened to me....Once I worked through a lot of that self-blame and that guilt and shame around from the time I was fifteen on, then I also started remembering the younger stuff.

"She indicated that she has never recovered a memory of abusive events for which she did not feel responsible. She explained that her therapist has helped her in her struggle to see herself as not to blame for the sexual abuse.
In addition to actively working to integrate the experiences of sexual abuse into her sense of self, Elsie explained that her feelings of self-worth are changing. She said, "Those views (that she is ugly, dirty and evil) have changed a lot and they do come back once in awhile. Especially, ...I was aware last night that I had been really pushing myself too hard this last week and I had a little talk with myself about if I don't sit down and find some time for myself I will be back there again in another week. I'll be back hating myself." As she struggles with gaining feelings of self-worth, she explained that it is difficult for her to internalize positive messages about herself that she hears from other people. She said, "I believe that people are sincere when they tell me (that she is not socially inept). I just have trouble...taking it in. I have trouble accepting that my view of reality may not have been the exact way." Also, Elsie indicated that she continues to withdraw when she is experiencing difficulties. Her tendency to spend time alone at these times seemed related to her feelings of self-worth. She said, "(when withdraws when having difficulties) I tell myself how horrible all these people are out there and then I tell myself how horrible I am. It's really not an effective way of dealing with situations (laughs). I have a big sign that says 'If you find yourself in hole, stop digging'. I dig a lot of holes sometimes..." During the feedback session, Elsie clarified that 'digging holes' involves her catastrophizing and engaging in a lot of negative self-talk. She explained further that she does not do this nearly as often as she has in the past.

Another example of Elsie's increased feelings of self-worth seemed to be in her ability to take care of herself. Her ability to take care of herself seemed evident in her decision to conduct the interview in her home. She said, "See your questions aren't that threatening because I know that I don't have to answer them....It happens more often in therapy appointments when I am wanting to do it and I push myself ...to answer things that are hard. ...The pace gets too fast...That's part of why it's at my place. I can go to the washroom. I can get coffee. I can move around."

In keeping with her increased sense of self-worth, Elsie described a view of herself as strong-willed. She described herself as a 'shit disturber', that is, a person who fights for what she believes in. Elsie described herself as someone who is self-determined, particularly when it comes to issues that are important to her. She described ways that she has reacted to situations that are illustrative of her tendency to be strong-willed. She said, "I have a very strong sense at times of what I think is right
and what I think is not right. [A] sense of justice I guess, fair play. And if I see a move going on that I think violated [someone], i'm not known to be quiet about speaking my mind. I have been known to stand in the director's office and pound on his desk and say, 'you cannot cut these programs and you cannot do that to these kids and that's it!' And I have been known to yell at the police when they say 'We won't intervene with this kid because it's not life-threatening' and I'm screaming at them. ...I do those kinds of things." During the feedback session, she clarified that extreme reactions like those she discussed in the initial interview are not common-place for her. In any event, her strong sense of what is right and what is wrong seemed related to her hope that there is meaning and goodness in the world. She indicated that others also see her this way. She said, "...actually the two words that come to mind that people say about me are integrity and honesty and I don't back down and stubborn is a word that comes to my mind. I've always been stubborn. And I use my stubbornness on behalf of my friends as well as [the] kids, as my director knows (laughs) and as social services in the north knows. So that's how they would see me. But it is a pretty strong sense of loyalty," and "OK, close friends, they see me as, well they tell me they see me as being a very loyal and caring person who does not hesitate to speak her mind..."

Pivotal experiences.

First, Elsie identified her hard work as central to the changes that she has experienced in her representations of self. She said, "...It's not as if my therapist told me this, [and] then I believed it. ...I have worked through my stuff with a therapist who is supportive and understanding but not imposing his beliefs and judgments.... It's my work that has enabled me to get out and I have seen a therapist who has supported me in that but he has not done the work and he has not told me this is abuse and this isn't and this is..." She indicated that one of things that she gained in therapy is learning how to feel her emotions. In turn, she explained that learning to feel enabled her to begin understanding herself and feeling better about herself.

Elsie also identified that others have been pivotal to the changes that she has made. In particular, she indicated that she has been able to use her relationships with others in ways that have enabled her to identify her own struggles. She said, "What I really like to do though is get on the phone and talk to everybody. Talk everybody's ear off about it until...talk to one or two people about what's going on. That seems to take a lot of the pressure off and helps me to see where I'm stuck and what's keeping me stuck,
if I have a chance to talk." Also, Elsie indicated that her experiences with others in
groups has enabled her to see herself as not responsible for the sexual abuse. She said,
"Hear[ing] other people...[in] groups and hear[ing] how and see[ing] how it affected
them (enabled her to see herself as not responsible)."

Elsie indicated that the stages of healing have been important for her. In
particular, she indicated that dealing with the feelings of shame and guilt
regarding the abuse that happened at 15 years of age enabled her to uncover
memories of the abuse that happened during her early childhood. Also, Elsie
identified that getting out of a relationship in which her partner was abusive to
her enabled her to begin to feel better about herself. She said, "I was in a fairly
abusive relationship. I was in my 20's. Getting out of that helped a lot to give me
some self-confidence and some belief in myself." And finally, Elsie explained that
getting positive feedback through going back to the work force and going back to
school enabled her to begin feeling better about herself. She said, "Anyway, so that
helped (getting back to work) and going back to university helped and doing well at
university. My first two years of teaching I really, really enjoyed and that
helped. Well especially my first year. My first year was a hoot. I have fantasies
that I can go back and re-live that. It was wonderful and I really enjoyed it."

**Elsie's representations of others and relationships.**

Elsie indicated that as a result of the abuse, she maintained beliefs that
others were untrustworthy and would hurt her. She said, "It [therapy] allowed me
to start differentiating. ...I was not consciously aware that I felt people weren't
trustworthy....There was some belief that all people underneath were this way...",
and "I also believe that there are people in the world who want and who are aware
of the people who don't have protection and they take advantage of you." Elsie
explained that her views of others as untrustworthy and hurtful are changing. She
indicated that identifying her beliefs regarding others helped in her attempt to
move beyond them. She said, "I thought all people were like the people who hurt
me and I thought that I couldn't forget myself. So when I learned that not all
people had the basis of hurting me, I mean even when I became aware that I was
operating in that frame, it helped a lot to get past it." Elsie also identified that
experiences with others who did not hurt her or betray her enabled her to begin
seeing others differently. She said, "As I got to know other people and to know that
time and time again they've showed me that they were not interested [in hurting me]. They were interested in helping me and supporting me and caring about me and all these weird and other wild concepts, that I think must have come out of a book somewhere. It certainly changed when I came to believe that some people are trustworthy and some people aren't and some, a lot of people are somewhere in between..."

Consistent with seeing others as untrustworthy and hurtful, Elsie identified that one of the ways in which the sexual abuse impacted her relationships with other people was in her maintaining a defensive, guarded stance toward others. She said, "I was extremely defensive. I saw myself as a porcupine. The surface was fine and everybody could know the surface but anything underneath and I kept well guarded and I was very sarcastic if anybody tried to get close." She described herself in relation to the world like this: "There wasn't a safe place. Then I was at the stage where I didn't realize it wasn't a safe place....I was feeling inside as if I needed to live in a rural cave with my machine guns up to keep the world from attacking, you know? ...Even though I didn't do that, I did that emotionally." Despite her guarded and defensive stance, she indicated that she could be superficially engaging with others, particularly others she knew. She said, "Years ago, I didn't have very many close friends and the few I did didn't know much about me. They would have seen me quite differently. ... I was the life of the party. I always had a joke. I always had a story and it was always a hoot."

Furthermore, Elsie explained that the sexual abuse she experienced as a child set her up to experience more abuse in her relationships as an adult. For example, she indicated that her ability to recognize abuse in her adult relationships was impeded. Likewise, Elsie noted that the sexual abuse she experienced as a child was related to her staying in abusive relationships as an adult as long as she did because of a belief that she could not defend herself. She said, "I was in relationships...where those messages were repeated....I didn't have the belief that I had the right to defend myself....I didn't have the belief that I could defend myself....I believe that that had some influence on my ending up in those kind of relationships and staying in them as long as I did....But I am not taking responsibility for those actions..." Elsie indicated that the experiences of sexual
abuse as a child were related to her not believing that she had any options other than staying in a relationship in which her partner was abusive.

Elsie continues to struggle with feeling that she needs to defend herself in her relationships with others. She indicated that she still has and uses her porcupine self. The use of imagery was prominent in Elsie's descriptions of herself in relationships. She said, "my part that wears army boots is related to my porcupine self. The one that doesn't want to let anybody get close and if people get in my way I'll stomp all over them with my army boots." Elsie's willingness to reflect on herself was apparent as she talked about feeling defensive in the interview. She said, "I mean it's not a major sense of feeling defensive (in the interview) but I am aware that there is some defensiveness in the way I'm answering. I am hearing it come out that I'm responding from a slightly defensive posture. See, I'm normal, don't tell I'm not normal (laughs) .... Everybody does this, everybody does that...I didn't think normal was all that exciting. (laughs) I have no idea what to attach it to (laughs)." When asked what it would mean to get close to others, the belief behind Elsie's defensive stance in relationships became apparent. She said, "It means that people know my weak spots and they can take advantage of that. I know that these are all irrational, magic beliefs, which at times were true but aren't anymore. ...Sometimes they could be true..."

Related to her defensive stance in relationships, Elsie indicated that she continues to struggle with issues of trust and taking risks with other people. In talking about how others see her, she said, "They say 'you have trust issues' (laughs) 'You have problems trusting people and you don't trust that people are what they are on the surface?' Oh well, OK, so I have still more work to do. They also would see me as being somebody who...struggles to trust and to take risks with people....I have said to friends, 'I would far rather ... be cross examined... for three days than I would to ask somebody to hold me.' ...That is a much easier thing for me to do. Some event of risking intimacy is still really hard and really a struggle." Again, Elsie identified her underlying belief in saying, " I have a belief [that] if I let you in you will betray me. If I get close to you, if I tell you my story, you will invalidate me. ...I've learned that they are the similar basic beliefs that I functioned on for a good many years and I am trying to change....I am aware that I, I check things out."
An example of Elsie checking things out was in her decision making process to become involved in this research project. In talking about whether she experienced the interview as a risk, she said, "It would be harder if you were my mother (laughs). ...I don't really feel it as a risk. One because, two people who know you have vouched for you ...I checked you out (laughs) and D H (research supervisor), do you know D H, is she to be trusted?...So I feel comfortable...and the other thing is that we're not in any kind of a relationship where I need to be careful [about what] I say..." Finally, in talking about her experience in the interview, Elsie explained that she typically experiences less difficulty trusting associates and people who she does not have close relationships with than she does with those she cares about. She said, "You can't abandon me and reject me because...[I'm not a friend?] Right, then it would be hard to talk to you. It's easier for me to trust people...with certain information. To trust people like my director or my principal or a stranger on the bus, which is what some people do, than the people close to me. And I know that that is also an old pattern that I have tried very hard to break, assessing what is really safe and what is really not, probably a little more risky." In spite of experiencing difficulties trusting others, Elsie indicated that she can and does reach out to others in her life now. She said, "Usually I go talk to them and ask to work it out and talk it through, unless they are people I don't know." In the feedback session, she identified that she is more able to both assess and take risks with others when she is feeling more integrated and stronger. She added that it is at the times when she is feeling fragmented and more vulnerable that she is less able to accurately assess and take risks with other people.

Elsie outlined a number of difficulties that she struggles with in relationships. First, she indicated that she has a belief that she is socially inept, despite contradictory information that she receives from others around her. She indicated that she experiences difficulty developing relationships and initiating conversation with people she does not know. She said, "I think I never meet my own expectation that I will be competent and smooth and polished and ask for what I want and say the right thing and...I need the book with the right things in it someday...if you ever find it, I'd appreciate knowing about it. ...I usually feel that I have fallen short of what I should and yet I hear from people that I handle situations well and I usually feel like I haven't handled situations at all well, that I
said the wrong thing or did the wrong thing." Again, her difficulty internalizing positive messages about herself was evident. She identified the beliefs and fears that underlie her views of herself as socially inept. She said, "A fear of rejection and not knowing what to say. Not knowing how to approach people....Feeling I have no skills...socially inept!", and "Nobody would want to talk to me. I'm totally useless....What if they tell me to fuck off and die. Basic insecurity kinds of stuff."

Other difficulties that Elsie indicated that she struggles with in relationships include a belief that others experience her as intimidating and a tendency for her to be clingy and overly nurturing, particularly when she is nervous. She explained that invading other people's space is something that she struggled with much more in the past. She said, "I think that strangers probably would have seen me about that time, like five or ten years ago, the same way. Probably not very respectful of other people's space, and I'm aware of that." Elsie connects what she sees as her clingy and overly nurturing behavior to the way she saw her mother interact with others. In speaking about a current situation in which she found herself behaving in this way, Elsie said, "I wouldn't call that nurturing. That's not true nurturing (laughs). That's just being a fuss-budget....That's being silly. It had a connotation of silliness around it. I was feeling uncomfortable in the situation with the nurse and instead of keeping my mouth shut I just went into this little prissy spiel. It's hard to pick up hand motions on that thing (tape-recorder)isn't it? (laughs) I just, I act like my mother somehow." She explained that having her own space and allowing other people to have their own space has become very important to her.

Consistent with her belief that intolerance is one of the things at the root of all abuse, Elsie identified a struggle that she is encountering in accepting others for who they are. She identified that she has trouble accepting others who do not take responsibility for their actions. She said, "I can't tolerate others when what I see as not taking responsibility for themselves and their actions." Also, Elsie indicated that she has trouble accepting people who are intimidating and hurtful to others. She said, "The struggle for me (with accepting others)...comes from the fact that I judge people sometimes....There are some things that I can hold conflicting view points on, and there are other things that I have much more trouble [with]....I'm having trouble coping with people who I see acting in ways that are intimidating....When I see their actions or their words as being hurtful to
others, I have trouble accepting that and really sitting down and listening to what they are saying instead of reacting to what I hear them [saying]....That's a struggle." Her willingness to reflect on herself in this struggle was evident. She said, "When I do the empathy thing, it's with people who usually are talking about some pain they had or are looking at trying to discover whether they have been stuck and how to get past that. When I have trouble accepting people who I perceive as being intolerant, which makes me sort of intolerant. [jokingly] I hate intolerant people ..." Elsie's willingness to reflect on herself was also evident in her description of intimidating people. She said, "Usually that difficulty comes more when I see them acting hurtful or when they are putting down other people or putting down me or really using sarcasm which is something I watch because I know that some people find me [that way] too. ...Which doesn't fit for me [others finding her intimidating] but it helps me to understand some of where other people who are being intimidating may be coming from."

In terms of her struggle with accepting others for who they are, Elsie indicated that she wants people in her life who have similar values to her. However, at the same time, she also noted that she has many relationships in which her values differ from the other person. She said, "It makes it easier for me to develop a relationship with people who have similar values, and yet I know that I have very close friends who have very different values", and "So I guess similar interests, and yet I hate to use that term. I'm more adaptable than it sounds. [jokingly] I want people that think like me and act like me and look like me and walk like me and talk like me...No, I have a wide variety of friends....It's a quality thing." Elsie's ability to accept differences between herself and others was evident in her description of her relationships with men. She said, "I mean I have friends who are, male friends who are big, tall, intimidating and have totally different viewpoints on a whole lot of things and they call me deary besides and we care about each other and we respect each other and we respect each other's right to be different and it's meaningful. " The main ingredients that Elsie identified as central to healthy relationships are valuing each other and treating each other with respect. For her, these ingredients seem to override differences in values.

Finally, in spite of the difficulties that Elsie identified having in relationships, she also indicated that she has some very good relationships. Of her relationships, she said, "Fortunately I picked friends who are patient (laughs).
They give me time to get out of these holes I dig myself into”, and “I mean that's one of the things I feel the luckiest [about]. I have a lot of close friendships." In contrast to not being able to integrate positive messages about herself from others, the feedback she gets from others is consistent with Elsie's view of herself as loyal. She said, "I've lost very few friendships as an adult. One I lost by moving away, the other one was the fact of death....Anyone else I've had a strong friendship as an adult, we still have a friendship, it may change but it's still a relationship. Like I said loyalty is big on my list (laughs)," and "OK, close friends...well they tell me they see me as being a very loyal and caring person..."

Elsie articulated views of men that were distinct from her views of others in general. For example, she indicated that initially she tends to view men as more untrustworthy than women. She said, "The gender comes in when I am starting to get to know people. I tend to be more cautious around a male than I would around a female. But once I get to know people then it doesn't become a factor." However, Elsie indicated that through therapy, she has learned to ask for what she needs in her relationships with men. In the feedback session, she clarified that she can also do this with women. In any event, it seemed that she now has some very satisfying relationships with men. She said, "Although usually with men, well with any of the men who are close to me, we have sat down and we've had the 'I'm a survivor, these are the things that are important to me, and I need you to know that...if you do these certain things like come up behind me and grab me or try the royal bumps on me or something, it will damage my ability to trust you and I will be less open with you physically because those are very scary things for me', so we've had the little tune 'em in and round 'em up routine, and they listened."

Pivotal experiences.
As with her changes in her representations of self, Elsie indicated that both herself and others have been central to the changes in her representations of others and relationships. In speaking of herself, she described a job in which she was required to work with people that enabled her to begin seeing herself differently in relationships. It seemed that through this work experience, she began to see that she could work 'with' other people and, in turn, began to see herself as less socially inept. Also, Elsie identified that her ability to take chances with her therapist enabled her to begin seeing herself differently in relationships. She said, "It feels like new glasses. I got new glasses
(laughs) ...in the therapy I had, I learned to take some chances and see things could be different." During the feedback session, she indicated that through practice in therapy, she learned to ask for what she wants and needs in her relationships with others. And finally, Elsie indicated that positive experiences with others who were supportive and caring enabled her to begin seeing that all people were not untrustworthy and out to hurt her.
Summary of narratives

Child sexual abuse affected the women's representations of self in multiple ways. The dominant themes found across women regarding their representations of self included: a) low self-worth; b) lack of knowledge of self; c) confusion about female identity; d) distorted body image; e) disrupted sexuality; and f) biased perceptions of the world. The women's representations of others and relationships were also affected by experiences of child sexual abuse. The dominant themes found across women regarding their representations of others and relationships included: a) disrupted relationships with men; b) revictimization; c) disrupted relationships with women; and d) distorted and generalized representations of others. A summary of the dominant themes and how they relate to the impact of child sexual abuse is presented below.

Representations of self, others and relationships.

One of the most frequently noted impacts of child sexual abuse involved feelings of self-worth. All of the women indicated that they felt worthless, altered, flawed and/or different as a result of the sexual abuse. As well, many of the women internalized responsibility for the sexual abuse by attributing its occurrence to something inherent to themselves. Self-blame frequently resulted in feelings of guilt, shame, and self-contempt.

While all the women reported damaged self-esteem, how this was manifested behaviorally differed for different women. Some women internalized their feelings of low self-worth and became passive and unassuming, while others externalized their feelings of low self-worth and presented with a more dominant interpersonal style. Independent of differences in behavioral manifestations, interpersonal cycles developed
which made it difficult for the women to disconfirm their views of themselves as worthless.

The women who internalized their feelings of low self-worth typically felt 'undeserving' in relationships and were consequently unassuming in their relationships with others. For example, Marilyn indicated that as a result of the sexual abuse and other violating experiences, she felt unimportant and as if she 'didn't count'. Her feeling of being unimportant made it difficult for her to assert herself. Consequently, she often felt that she was taken advantage of by others. She noted that because she expected to be taken advantage of, it did not seem unusual or even noteworthy when it did happen. Marilyn appeared to internalize and generalize the sexual abuse in such a way that her maladaptive representations of self were continuously confirmed and reaffirmed.

Like Marilyn, Kathryn seemed to assume a position of submissiveness in her relationships by 'hiding' herself and not voicing her opinion. Her tendency to keep herself hidden, both physically and emotionally, was a way to protect herself. While this strategy was initially adaptive in terms of protecting her from her perpetrators, she generalized it to her interactions with all people and continued to use this strategy after the abuse had stopped. Her difficulty with voicing her opinions and thoughts seemed to confirm her belief that she was worthless and had nothing to contribute in her relationships with others.

In contrast, Shannon's interpersonal style seemed to be a projection onto others of the way she felt about herself. She indicated that she had contempt for herself for being "a weak victim". She appeared to protect herself from her self-contempt by being interpersonally hostile. This worked to reinforce her self-contempt. Other people frequently responded to her hostility with rejection and/or hostility, thereby confirming her belief that she was unlikable.
Christine reported that she became very gregarious and accommodating to the needs of others in an attempt to cope with her feeling of low self-esteem. She worked hard to be likable and accepted. She described developing a 'false self' which consisted of her always smiling, performing, and entertaining others. Christine was reinforced for behaving in these ways by others and came to believe that her 'false self' was necessary to compensate for her worthlessness. Her efforts to hide her 'true self' through entertaining others with her 'false self' seemed to impede the development of self-acceptance.

Difficulty with integrating positive feedback about themselves seemed to be further evidence of feelings of low self-worth and maladaptive interpersonal cycles for some of the women. Those women who as children were able to obtain positive affirmation outside of their families-of-origin, such as from teachers or through involvement in organizations, seemed more able to integrate the positive feedback about themselves as adults. In contrast, those women who as children did not have the opportunity to seek out validation outside of their families-of-origin tended to continue to experience difficulty with integrating positive feedback about themselves as adults. For example, both Elsie and Kathryn indicated that they continue to struggle with integrating positive feedback about themselves. They both indicated that they tend to overlook or distort information that they receive from others which could potentially disconfirm their views of themselves as worthless.

While all the women reported feeling bad about who they are, they also noted significant struggles with knowing who they are. Sexual abuse interfered with the women's knowledge of themselves in multiple ways. Some women experienced difficulty integrating multiple aspects of self (e.g., strengths and weaknesses, negative and positive emotions). As a result of the development of elaborate defenses to cope with the abuse, many developed a 'public or substitute self' and cut themselves off from their
emotions. As well, some women felt that how they behaved, thought or what they believed was determined only by the expectations and needs of others. This led them to feel estranged from their own needs and wants.

Both Shannon and Rita became very achievement-oriented as a way to gain self-esteem. While this was an adaptive coping strategy at the time that the abuse was occurring, it resulted in some confusion about who they 'really' were. Shannon struggled to integrate her views of herself as weak (for letting the abuse happen) versus competent and strong (for doing well in school and extra-circular activities). Rita struggled to integrate her views of herself as a 'bad girl' (for "being sexual" with her father) versus a 'good girl' (for her scholastic achievements and tendency to nurture others).

Elsie also described perceiving two distinct aspects of self that she developed to cope with being sexually abused. She described one aspect of self as mild and nurturing and the other as guarded and defensive. Her description of these 'two selves' suggested that she had not yet been able to integrate these traits into a coherent sense of self. As noted above, Christine also described developing a 'false self' to cope with the abuse. Melanie reported developing a 'peripheral self' which changed to meet the needs of others and served to protect her 'core self' from others. Elsie, Christine and Melanie all described feeling estranged from themselves as a result of these coping strategies.

Other ways in which the women became estranged from themselves were evident in their attempts to cut off from their feelings. This involved not only feelings about the sexual abuse but also about themselves. Some of the ways in which the women were able to maintain distance from their feelings was in keeping themselves really busy and in not spending any time alone. By surrounding themselves with activities and people, they were able to keep their feelings at bay. Other women described abusing drugs and alcohol and/or developing eating difficulties as ways in which they attempted to contain their
feelings 'below the surface'. Others developed 'tough exteriors' to defend against their feelings of vulnerability.

For many of the women, experiencing the feelings associated with being sexually abused seemed pivotal in coming to know themselves more fully. For some women, merely experiencing and expressing their feelings as adults enabled them to become more aware of themselves. Many of the women indicated that they were able to do this through feeling validated by other women in the groups that they attended for women who had experienced sexual abuse as children. For other women, age-regressive experiences in which they actually felt as though they were small children reliving their feelings of vulnerability were reported as ways in which they came to identify the impact of the sexual abuse on them. Feeling their emotions about being sexually abused, in turn, seemed to enable them to integrate the cut off parts of themselves, such as their experiences of themselves as powerless victims. These age-regressive experiences were reported as part of the healing journey encountered in individual therapy.

In addition, for some women, self-injurious behavior seemed related to attempts to integrate aspects of self. For example, Marilyn and Melanie indicated that injuring themselves was a way in which they could get the pain that they were feeling as a result of the sexual abuse outside of themselves. Injuring themselves, according to these women, enabled them to 'see' and/or experience the pain that they had denied themselves from feeling earlier in their lives. Both of these women explained that their self-injurious behavior made them feel 'grounded' and in touch with themselves. For these women, self-injurious behavior was developed long after the abuse had stopped and did not become a pattern over time.

For other women, self-injurious behavior was developed while the abuse was occurring and became a pattern over time. For example, Christine's self-injurious behavior seemed to be an attempt at self-preservation. She noted that inflicting pain on
herself enabled her to become desensitized to pain. This enabled her to defy her father because she felt no pain while he physically and/or sexually abused her. This was a way in which she could preserve a sense of herself as someone who had control over what happened to her - she could 'not' experience the pain that was being inflicted on her. Having some control over these events in her world enabled her to feel some self-worth. However, despite her attempt at self-preservation, she reported that becoming desensitized to pain later interfered with her ability to take care of herself. For example, in the process of becoming desensitized to pain, Christine became out of touch with her body sensations and feelings and, as a result, did not attend to her physical and emotional needs. For instance, she was unaware of bodily cues such as needing to go to the bathroom or needing to put on more clothing to be warm. Therefore, although self-injurious behavior may have been adaptive initially, it became maladaptive for Christine.

Finally, many of the women indicated that their behavior, beliefs, and expectations were determined by what others thought their behavior, beliefs and expectations should be or should not be. Some women suggested that being other-determined took the form of ingratiating themselves to others. They indicated that they frequently struggled to meet the needs of others at the expense of their own needs. In contrast, other women indicated that they deliberately set out to defy others. Whichever form being other-determined took, these women typically described losing a sense of themselves through this. In discussing their processes of healing, they talked about a search for self in which they increasingly began to identify their own needs, beliefs and wishes, particularly in relation to other people. Especially salient for many of the women was a struggle to sort out their self-boundaries with others. Becoming more self-determined in relation with others seemed to be a behavioral manifestation of increased self-awareness.
The child sexual abuse also seemed to impact the participants' identification of themselves as women. Some women believed that 'all' women were weak, needy and vulnerable. They struggled to disconnect themselves from being female in an attempt to preserve a sense of themselves as 'strong'. For example, Shannon explained that she projected all of her own feelings of being weak and needy and vulnerable and her negative views of her mother onto all women. She made sure that she did not behave like this. She indicated that she became very 'male-like' - independent, aggressive, and domineering. By identifying and associating with men, she indicated that she was able to avoid dealing with her own vulnerabilities. Christine also explained that she identified quite strongly with her brothers in an attempt to deny her femininity. She explained that she wanted to be strong and powerful like the men in her family and not weak and submissive as she perceived her mother and herself to be. This seems to be another example of how difficult it was for many of the women to accept and integrate the multiple aspects of self.

For other women, their femininity was affected in other ways. It became very circumscribed and limited to their sexuality. They developed the view that their only important role as women was to please men sexually. Regardless of whether the women attempted to reject their femininity or endorse a constricted and other-determined view of themselves as women, their basic views of women were that they were weak and victim-like.

Most of the women indicated that as a result of the sexual abuse, they experienced difficulties with eating and with their body-images at some point in their lives. These difficulties seemed related to efforts to avoid their feelings about being sexually abused as well as defenses they developed to deal with their feelings of low self-worth as a result of the sexual abuse. For example, Elsie indicated that her eating difficulty enabled her to avoid feeling her feelings about having been sexually abused. For her, not
eating numbed the pain she felt inside. Christine indicated that she would frequently binge in the middle of the night and later came to recognize that she was doing this as a way in which to avoid feeling unsafe in her bed. Rita's difficulties with eating seemed related to her feelings of low self-worth as a result of the sexual abuse as well as other damaging experiences. She explained that her tendency to overeat was related to a desire to punish herself. For example, if she made a mistake at work, she would frequently go home and overeat. Punishing herself seemed to have been a result of internalizing the negative messages that she received about herself by her perpetrators and other significant people.

In addition to struggling with eating difficulties, many of the women described struggles with their appearance. Many of the women became preoccupied with their appearance while others did everything they could to be physically unappealing. For Christine, an 'obsessive' preoccupation with her appearance enabled her to feel some worth about herself. Shannon indicated that the preoccupation with her appearance and weight was a secondary impact of the sexual abuse. She came to believe that the only way she could relate and get the things that she needed was through sex. In order for her to continue to get the things that she needed, she believed that she had to be physically appealing so that she could use sex as a medium of exchange.

In contrast to Shannon and Christine, Rita , Elsie and Kathryn identified physical attractiveness as one factor that they believed contributed to the occurrence of sexual abuse. These women described becoming disconnected from their bodies and their physical appearance in an attempt to reduce their feelings of responsibility for the sexual abuse. Elsie explained that she attempted to hide her herself by wearing bulky clothing and by not attending to her physical appearance. She believed that this would enable her to conceal her sexuality and reduce her responsibility for being sexually abused.
Similarly, Kathryn made a direct connection between being overweight and hiding herself from men. She explained that she maintains a distorted belief that if she remains overweight, men will not sexually abuse her. According to Kathryn, her weight keeps her from becoming involved with men. This way of coping seems to have become maladaptive for Kathryn as she now wants a relationship with a man. Kathryn continues to struggle with feelings of ambivalence about 'making' herself appear physically attractive to the opposite sex.

Finally, Rita indicated that she is currently struggling to sort out the connection between her body-image and feelings of responsibility for the sexual abuse. She questioned whether the weight she gained after the birth of her first child and her ongoing struggles with her weight are related to not wanting to be sexually attractive.

Sexuality was another core area that was impacted by child sexual abuse. Some of the women indicated that one of the things they lost through the sexual abuse was going through the normal developmental stages regarding their sexuality. For example, Melanie and Shannon both indicated that as far back as they can remember, they always regarded themselves as sexual. As well, Rita indicated that during her adolescence she experienced much confusion over what was appropriate sexual behavior and what was inappropriate. Her father/perpetrator insisted at the time that he was abusing her that she not be sexual with boys her own age. In addition, Christine indicated that due to her premature exposure to sexual behavior, she was deprived of experiencing the normal feelings and sexual activities as an adolescent. For Kathryn these effects have been long term and she continues to struggle with her sexuality. She is now unable to view herself as a sexual being and avoids all forms of sexual interaction.

In addition to the disruption in the normal developmental stages of sexuality, sex became a coping strategy and a way for some of the women to get their nonsexual needs met. This was achieved in different ways by different women. Christine indicated that
she used sex to gain power over men. While this may have been an attempt to preserve a sense of herself as strong and powerful, it often resulted in her feeling revictimized. She explained that she got herself into many sexual relationships which had no meaning for her. Also, her lack of boundaries contributed to her feeling revictimized over and over again as she would engage in sexual activities in which she felt degraded and dehumanized. Shannon also indicated that she used sex to get the things that she needed, such as nurturance and practical things, like being taken to the doctor. This behavior often lead to feelings of guilt and self-doubt, especially once she became involved in more long-term and meaningful relationships.

In addition to the impact of the sexual abuse on their views of themselves, it had an impact on their perceptions of the world. Some women came to question their perceptions of reality in general as a result of the denial and minimization that they experienced in response to their disclosures of the abuse. For example, Shannon explained that her ‘thinking’ began to change as a result of being disbelieved and she began to constantly doubt whether her perceptions of reality were accurate. For instance, if she were ill, she would question whether she was just ‘imagining’ it. As well, if she had a conversation with someone, she would go home and question whether she had actually said what she remembered saying. Shannon described her self-doubt as crippling and pervasive. Similarly, Kathryn explained that she struggles with self-doubt as a result of responses to her disclosure of the sexual abuse. Kathryn indicated that because she can’t remember everything about the sexual abuse and because what she does remember is so bizarre, she frequently questions whether she was abused at all. She also described her self-doubt as pervasive and generalized.

Furthermore, many women questioned their perceptions of the sexual abuse, such as in doubting whether what they had experienced was abusive. These women indicated that what went on at home ‘seemed’ acceptable to everyone and, as a result, they
came to believe that sexual abuse was normal. The belief in the normalcy of abuse seemed to generalize beyond the specific experiences of sexual abuse for many of the women. For example, many of the women indicated that the normalization of sexual abuse set them up for a lifetime of abuse because their perceptions of what was normal and what constituted abuse were so distorted. The distorted perceptions resulted in many of the women not being able to identify when they were being violated in their adult relationships.

All of the women discussed many ways in which the sexual abuse had an impact on their views of men and of themselves in relationships with men. As a result of living in patriarchically organized families, many of the women indicated that they regarded the men in their lives as 'powerful and strong', and the women as weak, passive and controlled by men. As mentioned above, in an attempt to associate themselves with 'stronger and more powerful people', many of the women indicated that they formed closer relationships with men as compared to women. Some women explained that they felt more comfortable with men and confided in them more because they got the kind of attention from men that was familiar and that made them feel loved. Also, many women came to associate their worth in relation to men with their sexuality. They came to believe that the way to get the kind of attention they wanted from men was to be sexual with them. These beliefs resulted in sexual revictimization for many of the women.

Despite their stronger affiliations with men as opposed to women, many of the women maintained the belief that men, as a group, were controlling, abusive, and objectifying of all women. Some women applied these views only to specific men in their lives, while other women generalized them to their interactions with all men. For example, Melanie’s views of men as controlling and abusive were limited only to the men with whom she had significant relationships. She came to believe that all men who were close to her were only interested in her for sex. She indicated that she felt on guard
around the significant men in her life, such as her brother and boyfriends, because she expected that they would violate her sexually. Her experience that many of her boyfriends did 'demand' sex from her served to reinforce this belief. In contrast to Melanie, most of the participants' views of men as sexually violating became generalized beyond the specific men in their lives. They came to expect that the only thing that all men wanted from women was sex. Their repeated experiences of sexual revictimization served to reinforce this belief.

Other beliefs that the women indicated they learned through the sexual abuse which set them up for more abuse in their relationships with men included that they were required to change themselves and that they needed to accept the unacceptable. As well, they came to believe that they were essentially defenseless in relation to men. Furthermore, some women indicated that through the sexual abuse they gained distorted perceptions of what love was. One woman came to associate love and sex and was continuously revictimized as a result of searching for love through sexual encounters with strangers. Other women, like Christine and Kathryn, explained that they came to associate love with abuse and violence and, as a result, were continuously revictimized in their adult relationships with men. Being in these relationships made it difficult for them to break the association between love and abuse. Likewise, some of the women explained that their past experiences with men in which they were violated left them ill-equipped to understand and be in relationships with men who were nonabusive. Many of the women indicated that leaving male partners who were abusive to them and having positive experiences with other men were central in the gradual change in their views of men and of themselves in relationships with men.

In addition to their views of men and themselves in relationships with men, the sexual abuse had an impact on the participant's views of women and of themselves-in-relation with women. As mentioned earlier, some of the women explained that they
tended to generalize their views of their mothers and themselves to all women and began believing that all women were weak, needy, and victim-like. As discussed above, many of these women defended against being female, and in their minds weak, by disconnecting themselves from other women.

The histories of child sexual abuse led some women to see themselves as different from other women. Underlying this belief seemed to be a fear that other women would judge them because of their histories of sexual abuse. As a result of feeling different and fearing judgment, many of the women kept their sexual abuse a secret. They indicated that as children and adults their relationships with girls and women were significantly impaired as a result of not being able to share these secret parts of themselves. For many of these women, being in groups for female survivors of child sexual abuse was a pivotal experience in reducing their feelings of differentness and self-blame.

In addition to the impact of the sexual abuse on their views of and relationships with men and women, many of the women indicated that they generalized their experiences of violation and betrayal by their perpetrators to their interactions with all people. These women came to believe that all people were hurtful and untrustworthy. This often impaired their relationships. For example, Shannon and Elsie developed a hostile interpersonal style in an effort to protect themselves from the untrustworthiness and hurtfulness of others. In contrast, Kathryn, who also believed that all people were the same (i.e., hurtful) and that no one could be trusted, withdrew from others and kept herself isolated. As a result, she indicated that she did not acquire the skills necessary to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

Marilyn tended to be unassuming in her relationships with others. She indicated that as a result of the sexual abuse, she came to expect that other people would treat her disrespectfully and would take advantage of her good nature. She indicated that her sense of worthlessness reinforced this expectation because her lack of assertiveness made it
difficult for her to behave in ways which would elicit respect from others. This, in turn, made it difficult for her to disconfirm her beliefs that all others would disrespect her and take advantage of her.

In contrast to those women who maintained beliefs that all others were untrustworthy, Rita indicated that she tended to trust indiscriminately. Rita explained that she equated trusting others with being a 'good' person. As mentioned earlier, through her experiences of sexual abuse, Rita struggled to see herself as a 'good girl'. In addition to striving to be a 'good person', Rita indicated that trusting others enabled her to maintain a belief that others were benevolent and that the world was a good place. For Rita, then, trusting others indiscriminately served as an attempt to preserve a sense of herself as worthy, others as benevolent, and the world as a safe place.

In addition to the experiences of sexual abuse per se, shaping the women's beliefs and expectations about others, reactions of significant others to disclosures of the abuse played a role in how the women came to view others. Melanie's experience of the unpredictability and unreliability of others whom she had disclosed the abuse to became generalized to all of her interactions with others. To deal with her expectation that others would be unpredictable and unreliable, she became increasingly self-reliant. Although adaptive at the time, her self-reliance became maladaptive later in life because it made it difficult for her to disconfirm her belief that others were unpredictable and unreliable.

Difficulties with disclosure were evident in adulthood for other women as well. Some women described a struggle between wanting to pronounce their experiences of violation but not wanting to overwhelm others with these experiences. These women seemed to be attempting to integrate their past lives with their present lives. The struggle seemed to be between maintaining their self-integrity (i.e., no longer being silent about their experiences) and integrity in their relationships (i.e., respecting that
their histories may be disturbing for others and may serve to distance others from them).
4. Discussion

While the current study represents a small sample of women who were sexually abused as children, the expectation that child sexual abuse has a negative impact on women's representations of self, others and relationships was supported. As well, the expectation that the women would describe interpersonal patterns which arose out of their experiences of abuse and which became generalized beyond the experiences of child sexual abuse was supported. The discussion begins with describing how the findings of the present study relate to other literature in the field. The overlap between the findings in the present study and Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) Traumagenic Dynamics Model of child sexual abuse will become evident. Next, I will discuss the implications of the current project for future research. In the final sections, I will discuss the limitations of the current study and some of the clinical implications.

Representations of self, others, and relationships

The women in this study articulated multiple ways in which the experience of child sexual abuse had an impact on their representations of self. Their descriptions involved behavioral, cognitive and affective aspects of self and included areas such as self-esteem, self-concept, beliefs and perceptions about self, and interpersonal behavior. This is consistent with current research and theorizing which emphasizes the multidimensionality and complexity of self-definition and experience (Markus, 1990; Mahoney, 1990; Neimeyer, 1987; Harter, 1990; Strauman & Higgins, 1993). This is in contrast to much of the research on child sexual abuse which typically addresses only unidimensional aspects of self at one time.

All women in the present study indicated that their feelings of self-worth or self-esteem was an area which was adversely affected by child sexual abuse. Consistent with Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) model of the impact of child sexual abuse, feelings
of stigmatization were prominent for all of the women. For example, all of the women indicated that they felt altered, flawed, and/or damaged as a result of the sexual abuse. Many of the women attributed responsibility for the abuse to something inherent in themselves and this left them feeling guilty, shameful and full of self-contempt. As well, many described feeling different from others. Some of the women indicated that they experienced difficulty integrating positive feedback about themselves which would disconfirm their beliefs of themselves as worthless. Thus, feelings of low self-worth often became solidified and entrenched over time. These findings are consistent with a recent study by Ornduff et al. (1994) who found that children who had experienced child sexual abuse had difficulty making realistic attributions of self and others, as assessed by the TAT.

These findings are also consistent with theoretical literature which suggests that the experience of interpersonal trauma often shatters the belief that the self is worthy (Janoff-Bulman, 1985; 1989; 1991; 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; 1990b; 1992; Epstein, 1985; 1991). According to McCann and Pearlman (1992; 1990a) the need to maintain esteem for oneself is one of the core areas that is often disrupted by interpersonal trauma. What was interesting in this study was that women not only manifested their feelings of low self-worth in ways which are stereotypically associated with feminine behavior (i.e., by being submissive and unassuming in relationships or by being gregarious and accommodating to others), but some women also reacted in what might be considered more stereotypically masculine ways (i.e., protecting their self-esteem through hostility and aggression). This challenges some of the research (Carmen, Reiker & Mills, 1984) which suggests that women tend to deal with their feelings about being sexually abused by becoming more passive, while men tend to deal with their feelings by becoming more aggressive. As Price (1993; 1994) indicates in clinical discussions of the impact of incest on self-
identity, some women tend to identify with the position of the powerless victim while others tend to identify with being in the powerful role. Both processes of identification are efforts to deal with the experience of being violated and women behave in interpersonal ways which will enable them to maintain their respective self-identities.

The women's self-concept was also affected by child sexual abuse. This was most commonly manifested through a lack of knowledge about the self. Consistent with Herman (1992), the elaborate defenses which the women constructed to cope with the sexual abuse (e.g., developing 'good' and 'bad' selves and 'strong' and 'vulnerable' selves) as well as their difficulties with regulating their emotional experiences (e.g., cutting off their emotions) frequently led to a lack of self-knowledge and difficulty integrating multiple aspects of self. As well, certain aspects of self, such as achievement, were overdeveloped by some women to compensate for negative feelings that they had about themselves. These coping strategies left many of the women unsure as to who they really were.

The impact of child sexual abuse on the women's self-concept was also evident in their identification of themselves as women. Again, consistent with Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) model, feelings of powerlessness were central to the women's self-definition and were frequently associated with their views of themselves as women. Many of the women indicated that they came to identify men as powerful and strong, and women as powerless and weak as a result of the sexual abuse that they experienced. To defend against their own sense of powerlessness and weakness, some of the women attempted to disconnect themselves from their femaleness by cutting themselves off from other women and by identifying with men. For many of these women, this often resulted in a lack of self-knowledge. For these women, it seemed that child sexual abuse disrupted the integration of a core defining feature of their personalities - their gender. This process appears similar to what Herman (1992) calls self-fragmentation. It is
also consistent with McCann and Pearlman (1990a) who suggest that needs for power and independence are often disrupted through experiences of interpersonal trauma.

Finally, the finding that women struggled with their identities as women as a result of attempts to defend against feelings of powerlessness which they associated with femininity challenges Janoff-Bulman's (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1987) theorizing on this issue. Janoff-Bulman (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1987) predicts that men are likely to experience more difficulty integrating experiences of child sexual abuse into their views of themselves as men because of the discrepancy between our cultural beliefs about sexual victimization and our cultural stereotypes of masculinity. Although this study did not compare women and men and so cannot speak to how child sexual abuse may impact upon gender-identity differently for women and men, the current findings suggest that women do have struggles in this area because of a desire to view themselves as powerful (i.e., not victims) and/or because of a tendency to regard themselves as different from other women. It may be that the impact of child sexual abuse on gender-identity may look differently for women and men but that both groups experience difficulty in this area. Further research is needed to address this issue.

In addition, consistent with Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) model, child sexual abuse impacted upon the women's sexuality. This was evident in their sexual self-concepts as well as in their sexual behavior. For many women, their views of themselves as sexual beings developed prematurely. For some, sexuality became the central defining feature of who they saw themselves to be, particularly in relation to men. Many believed that they were required to be sexual with men even when they did not want to be. In contrast, other women coped by denying their sexuality and avoiding sexual relationships.

Furthermore, many of the women indicated that their beliefs regarding their own sexuality (e.g., the lack of control they had over it) and their subsequent sexual
behavior (e.g., engaging in sexual activities which left them feeling degraded and humiliated) were related to them being sexually revictimized over and over in their adult lives. Also, through their experiences of child sexual abuse, some women seemed to learn to use sex to get their nonsexual needs met. Again, this behavior frequently resulted in revictimization. The impact of sexual abuse on the women's views of themselves as sexual beings was also evident in their struggles with body image and physical appearance. Some of the women became preoccupied with appearing sexually attractive as determined by cultural norms, while other women deliberately avoided being attractive because of a fear that this would bring on further sexual abuse.

Finally, consistent with theoretical formulations in the field (Janoff-Bulman, 1989; 1992; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; 1990b; 1992; McCann et al., 1988b; Summit, 1983), the women's perceptions of reality were affected by the sexual abuse. Many of the women indicated that they began to question their perceptions of reality as a result of the reactions of others to their disclosures of the sexual abuse. Also, many of the women began to question the reality of the abuse as a result of it being normalized by their perpetrators and others. Some of the women indicated that they became paralyzed in their lives as a result of not being able to trust their own perceptions of the people and events around them. As a result of not trusting their perceptions of reality, it seemed that many of the women became increasingly estranged from themselves and determined by the needs and wishes of others. As well, not trusting their perceptions seemed related to some of the women being revictimized. McCann and Pearlman (1992; 1990a; 1990b) suggest that these kinds of difficulties are reflective of a disruption in the individual's meaningful frame of reference.

There was also evidence to suggest that representations of others and relationships were affected by the sexual abuse. For many of the women, the experience of child sexual abuse seemed to shatter their beliefs in the benevolence of both specific
and generalized others. This is consistent with theoretical literature which indicates that the experience of trauma may shatter the belief that others are benevolent and that the world is a safe place (Janoff-Bulman, 1985; 1989; 1991; 1992; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; 1990b; 1992; Epstein, 1985; 1991). Consistent with McCann and Pearlman (1992; 1990a) needs for trust/dependency and safety seemed to be disrupted for the women in this study.

Not surprisingly, some women indicated that the experiences of child sexual abuse by significant male figures resulted in them believing that all of the significant men in their lives were going to hurt and abuse them. Most women, however, did not stop with the significant men in their lives but rather came to believe that all men were going to hurt them and abuse them. In addition to the disillusionment regarding the benevolence of men as a generalized group, some of the women expressed disillusionment regarding the benevolence of all people. Consistent with Finkelhor and Browne's (1988) model, experiences of betrayal by perpetrators as well as other significant people were central for all of the women and served to shape their representations of others and relationships. For example, some of the women indicated that their experiences of the untrustworthiness, hurtfulness, and unpredictability of significant others early in their lives became generalized to their interactions with all people later in their lives. These findings are consistent with a recent study by Elliott (1994) who found that women who were sexually abused as children showed repetitions of maladaptive dynamics found in early relationships with untrustworthy others, as measured by the Object Relations Scale.

Interestingly, many of the women's relationships with women were negatively impacted by child sexual abuse. The impact of sexual abuse on the women's relationships with women seemed to be mediated through their views of themselves and specific women as well as through their generalized views of women. In terms of their representations
of specific others, many of the women talked about their experiences of feeling betrayed by their mothers. Some of the women came to view their mothers as weak and passive. This seemed related to their perceptions that their mothers were ineffective and/or unable to stop the abuse. Many of the women expressed some resentment toward their mothers and wished that their mothers could have protected them more effectively when they were children. Cultural beliefs regarding the benevolence and protectiveness of mothers may be especially sensitive to disillusionment through experiences of child sexual abuse. These findings are consistent with Herman's (1981) earlier research.

Furthermore, many of the women indicated that they generalized their views of their mothers and themselves as weak, passive, and victim-like onto all women. As mentioned earlier, in an attempt to disconnect themselves from their 'femaleness' (i.e., their own weakness and vulnerability), some of the women cut themselves off from women. Not only did they not identify with other women, they tended to have few female friends. In addition, some of the women indicated that they maintained a belief that they were different from other women because of the sexual abuse. They feared that other women would judge them harshly if they found out about their histories. Consequently, many of them kept their experiences of sexual abuse a secret from other women. This secrecy, in turn, impaired their ability to fully and authentically connect with other women. Isolation from other women is a common impact of child sexual abuse noted in the literature (Herman, 1981). For many of the women in this study, it seems that self-estrangement and isolation from women may have been a result of the defenses that they developed to deal with their feelings of powerlessness, differentness, and stigmatization. Unfortunately, it seems that the ways in which they defended against these feelings ultimately resulted in increased feelings of disempowerment and low self-esteem.
In contrast to their difficulties in relation with women, many of the women indicated that they had strong affiliations with men. Some of the women indicated that they obtained 'love and comfort' from men which was familiar in terms of what they had experienced when the sexual abuse was occurring. As noted above, the identification with men seemed to enable some of the women to deny what they regarded as the 'weakness of their femininity'. For some women, then, the experiences of child sexual abuse by significant male figures led to an identification with men in an attempt to feel loved and more powerful. The identification with men for these women seemed to be a defensive reaction similar to the defense 'identification with the aggressor'. This defense mechanism ultimately became maladaptive for the women because it served to impede their connections with other women and, as a result, the identification of themselves as female. As well, it seemed to result in generalized distortions of what love and personal power were.

It is interesting to note that many of our cultural stereotypes about women's relationships with women and men parallel the dynamics often apparent in the coping efforts of women who have been sexually abused as children. That is, the notion that women have difficulties with other women (i.e., find them to be 'catty' and have trouble trusting them) and are more able to trust and relate with men take on a new meaning when placed in the context of child sexual abuse. The sexual violation of girls and women by men may lead them to become estranged from themselves and other women. As well, it seems related to an effort to connect more intensely with men in an attempt to achieve a sense of personal power and acceptance.

Despite their stronger affiliations with men, many of the women described being revictimized by men throughout their lives. Ambivalent feelings toward men seemed central for many of the women. It seems that vulnerability to repeated revictimization may have been a result of the experience of child sexual abuse becoming a part of the
women's operating schemas, as outlined by Herman (1992), Finkelhor (1990), Roth and colleagues (Roth & Lebowitz, 1988; Roth & Newman, 1993) and McCann and colleagues (McCann & Pearlman, 1990a; 1990b; 1992; McCann et al., 1988b). That is, many of the women described beliefs, perceptions, and views of men and of themselves in relationships with men which set them up for revictimization.

Many of the women indicated that through the experiences of child sexual abuse they developed views of themselves as worthless and others as hurtful. They indicated that these views of self and other led to the expectation that they would be mistreated by others in their relationships. This seemed to be especially prevalent in heterosexual relationships. That is, many of the women indicated that it seemed 'normal and familiar' to be in relationships in which they were mistreated by men. In fact, many of the women indicated that as a result of the normalization of child sexual abuse, they were often unable to identify abusive behavior. Furthermore, many of the women indicated that as a result of the negative reactions to their disclosures of sexual abuse, they tended not to trust their perceptions of what was abusive and what was not. Consequently, when they found themselves in relationships in which they were hurt or violated, they did not seem to view this as unusual or unacceptable. In turn, their experiences in relationships in which they were hurt or violated seemed to reinforce their views of themselves as worthless and their views of others as hurtful. Although perpetrators of abuse are always accountable for their actions, vicious interpersonal cycles like this seem to have made it difficult for the women to disconfirm their maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships. In turn, these generalized and, hence, maladaptive representations of self, others and relationships set them up for further experiences of revictimization. Repetitions of maladaptive dynamics found in early relationships with untrustworthy others are consistent with the findings of Elliott (1994).
The findings regarding revictimization are consistent with van Buskirk and Cole (1983) who found that women who reported histories of incest frequently found themselves in relationships which confirmed their negative expectations of men as well as their basic beliefs of themselves as worthless. Their beliefs regarding themselves and relationships made it difficult for them to become involved in self-affirming relationships and the kinds of relationships they found themselves in made it difficult for them to disconfirm their maladaptive beliefs regarding themselves and relationships. Armstrong (1990) also found a connection between maladaptive representations of self which were formed out of early abuse and later revictimization.

The women in this study talked about the specific beliefs about self, others and relationships that they thought set them up for more abuse in adulthood. The beliefs that the women identified as being related to the experiences of revictimization include that: 1) as women, their role was to please men sexually and otherwise, at whatever costs to themselves; 2) all men are only interested in women for sex; 3) abuse and violence are a part of being loved; 4) love and sex always go together; 5) one must accept the unacceptable in relationships with men; 6) one must change the self to accommodate the needs of others, especially men; and 7) one cannot defend oneself against the abusive actions of others. Not all of the women maintained all of these beliefs but each of these beliefs was articulated by one or more of the women.

Bowlby's (1973; 1988) theory of attachment seems to capture the difficulties that may arise for women who have been sexually abused as children by significant figures. Consistent with Bowlby's theory, the sense of familiarity gained through situations in which the women were revictimized may have provided some security, even though the situations were unpleasant and sometimes life-threatening. A recreation of the past was evident for the women in this study not only in situations of revictimization, but in everyday interpersonal interactions in which they continuously
reaffirmed their maladaptive representations of themselves, others and their relationships. For example, the women indicated that they were distrustful even with people who had given them no reason to believe that they would betray them.

Implications for further research

As outlined by Cole and Putnam (1992), precise conclusions about the effects of child sexual abuse are difficult to make from the current empirical research because much of this work suffers from conceptual and methodological limitations. For example, much of the current research uses symptom checklists or global rating systems that do not permit an understanding of the constellation of symptoms or the underlying dynamics of symptomology that may result from child sexual abuse. Much of the current research investigates unidimensional aspects of self, such as self-concept or self-esteem, at one point in time and does not provide an understanding of the development of complex and specific symptomology. This research has typically not addressed individual differences in the impact of child sexual abuse. Rather, it has attempted to offer a view of the "average" female survivor of child sexual abuse.

The methodology used in this study has permitted a broader and richer look at these issues by investigating the impact of child sexual abuse on multiple aspects of self, such as self-esteem, self-concept, beliefs and perceptions regarding self, as well as interpersonal and behavioral aspects of self. For the seven women interviewed, wide individual variation in the impact of child sexual abuse was evident. For example, all of the women reported that child sexual abuse had an impact on their representations of self. However, the exact areas of "self" which were affected and the ways in which the impact was manifested varied across women. It is likely that a symptom checklist or global rating system would not have captured this individual variation.
These findings can inform future research employing methodologies other than the approach used here. For example, studies employing paper/pencil measures may incorporate questions that assess multiple aspects of self rather than unidimensional aspects of self. This may provide a richer and more accurate picture of the impact of child sexual abuse than many of the current questionnaires used in self-report studies. Also, future research may be more informative if it employs methods of assessment that parallel the multiple aspects of self described by the women in the current study. For example, in addition to self-report methods which may more effectively assess cognitive aspects of self, behavioral and experiential methods of investigation, such as role play and observation, may more effectively assess affective and behavioral aspects of self. As well, behavioral and experiential methods of investigation may enable an investigation of representations that exist beyond a verbal and conscious level.

In contrast to much of the current research, the current study allowed an individualized look at the impact of child sexual abuse. While all women indicated a negative impact on their representations of self, others and relationships, how that was manifested behaviorally was often different across women. Similarly, the same behavior often had a different meaning across women. For example, many of the women indicated that they became isolated from other women as a result of the sexual abuse. Some women explained that this was related to an attempt to deny their own weakness which they associated with femininity. Other women indicated that they felt different from other women because of the sexual abuse and kept their distance to protect themselves from feelings of low self-esteem and fears of being judged. Another example included self-injurious behavior. For some women, self-injurious behavior was related to attempts to externalize their feelings associated with being abused and was a one time occurrence which developed long after the abuse stopped. For another woman, self-injurious behavior developed at the time the abuse occurred and came out of a belief
that the self deserved to be hurt. For this woman, it became a long-standing pattern over time and an attempt at self-preservation. A questionnaire simply asking about relationships with women or self-injurious behavior could not assess these more idiosyncratic and complex underlying dynamics. The findings in the current study suggest that incorporating methods of investigation in future research that assess the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences of child sexual abuse may provide more fruitful information about the impact of child sexual abuse. This is consistent with the recommendations of other researchers (Roth & Lebowitz, 1988; Roth & Newman, 1993; Silver, Boon & Stones, 1983). It seems that assessing the meanings that individuals may attach to their experiences of child sexual abuse may be essential for accurate interpretations of data. Qualitative methods seem most appropriate for this task.

As mentioned earlier, much of the current research typically assesses the effects of child sexual abuse at one point in time. The qualitative approach used in the current study permitted an investigation of the impact of sexual abuse across time. Many of the women discussed changes in the impact of child sexual abuse over time. For example, many of the women indicated that they were left feeling weak and powerless at the time that the sexual abuse was occurring. However, some of these women indicated that as they coped with having been sexually abused over the years, they began to see themselves as strong and resourceful. In addition, other women indicated that achievement-oriented behavior that they developed to feel better about themselves at the time the abuse was occurring eventually led to a lack of or incomplete self-knowledge later in their lives.

These findings suggest that the impact of child sexual abuse is an ongoing phenomenon that changes over time and with new experiences. Therefore, investigations of the impact of sexual abuse at one point in time are likely limited with respect to
increasing knowledge in this area. Future studies may assess the impact of sexual abuse more effectively and accurately if they incorporate questions and methods which will enable an examination of the impact of abuse over time. Longitudinal research would offer the most accurate account of the impact of child sexual abuse over time.

In addition, future studies would be more informative if they utilized methods that go beyond the current study in terms of its reliance on self-report accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse. For example, some of the women indicated that although they believed that they were worthless and undesirable, other people often informed them that they did not experience them in these ways. Obtaining perspectives about the impact of child sexual abuse from different people may be more informative. For example, future studies might involve: examination of archival data (i.e., police reports; analyses of journals, letters, and/or diaries; records of social services investigations or therapeutic interventions); retrospective accounts of individuals who have experienced abuse as well as the accounts of other significant people in their lives at the time of the abuse; and self-reports of the effects of child sexual abuse on individuals in their current lives as well as reports of significant others. Also of interest would be to obtain an understanding of how and why changes occurred in the impact of child sexual abuse over the years. This may enable the detection of risk and resiliency factors that may foster or impede the healing process in women who have experienced child sexual abuse.

How long-lasting changes in individuals' representations of self, others and relationships come about is an area that needs further attention. This study was an initial step in beginning to understand how changes in these areas come about. Further research may be more informative if it uses observational investigation of individual and group therapy sessions in addition to asking women about their understanding of the changes in their representations of self, others and relationships.
A final contribution of the current study includes the findings regarding revictimization. A qualitative investigation enabled the women to articulate many beliefs and perceptions of self, others and relationships that they felt were influential in them being revictimized as adults. Understanding the process underlying revictimization for women who have been sexually abused as children is an area that needs further investigation (Wyatt, Guthrie & Notgrass, 1992). The more that is understood about the beliefs, values, experiences, and perceptions that may underlie women's difficulties in identifying abusive situations, the more we may be able to help women avoid revictimization. As well, this knowledge may aid in the development of prevention programs for children.

Limitations of current study

One of the limitations of the current study involves the skewed sample of women who were interviewed. All of the women were or had been in therapy focused on issues of child sexual abuse. As mentioned earlier, Stiles (1991) cautions against recruiting people who are in therapy to be participants in research investigating clinical phenomenon because of the possibility that they may merely reiterate their therapists' views. According to Stiles (1991), the researcher would be unable to determine with certainty which views were authentically held by the participants and which may have been adopted from their therapists. Therefore, it would be impossible to validate the theories regarding the specific clinical phenomenon being investigated.

Due to the in-depth and sensitive nature of the interview and feedback session in the current project, the benefits of recruiting individuals in therapy were believed to outweigh the costs. That is, the participants could call their therapists if they needed to after revisiting painful and sensitive issues in the interview and feedback session. However, to address the concern that participants might simply reiterate their
therapists' views of the impact of child sexual abuse, questions such as, "How do you think therapy has influenced the way you view the impact of child sexual abuse on your perceptions of self, others and your relationships?", and "How have other activities or experiences, like reading self-help books, participating in self-help groups, media coverage, or any other significant life experiences influenced the way that you view the impact of child sexual abuse on you?" were asked of all participants.

All of the women identified that therapy and other therapy-like experiences, such as self-help books, aided them in identifying the impact that child sexual abuse had on them. Many of them indicated that before they began therapy, they were unaware of how child sexual abuse impacted upon them even though they felt distressed much of the time. In addition, many explained that therapy and other therapy-like experiences enabled them to see that they were not to blame for the sexual abuse.

All of the women believed that therapy as well as other therapy-like experiences did influence the way that they came to view the impact of child sexual abuse on their views of self, others, and relationships. However, the rich detail and varied accounts that the women provided in response to questions posed in the interviews suggested that they were not simply reiterating their therapists' views or views presented to them in other ways, such as through books or the media. For example, the detail and unique examples that the women offered about their experiences suggested that if they had 'borrowed' language or ideas from their therapists, they had done so in such a way that they had internalized it as a part of their own experiences. As well, the degree of elaboration in the feedback meetings suggested that the women were speaking from their own voices and not simply adopting their therapists' views. Also, the varied accounts of the impact of child sexual abuse from the participants suggest that they did not merely reiterate their therapists' views. That is, the five women who were participating or had participated in group therapy for female survivors of child sexual abuse were recruited
from the same mental health facility and many of them had participated in groups with
the same facilitator(s). The women’s varied accounts suggest that they had internalized
the information that they may have obtained through therapy in such a way that it
became a part of their own experience.

Finally, the women did not typically use a lot of psychological jargon in their
explanations of how sexual abuse had impacted upon them and their views of others and
relationships. Statements, such as self-worth or incomplete knowledge of self, came
from my descriptions of the women’s experiences rather than from the women
themselves. Again, this suggests that the women were sharing how they understood
their experiences from their own perspectives rather than from perspectives that may
have been imposed upon them by therapists or others.

Despite the benefits of gaining insight into the impact of child sexual abuse from
the women who experienced it, as outlined in the introduction, some may argue that the
current study is limited by the self-report nature of the investigation. Epstein (1973;
1985) argues that representations of self, others and the world exist at a preconscious
level and cannot be adequately assessed through self-report methods. Given that the
present study was assessing verbal (and therefore, conscious) and not nonverbal and/or
preconscious representations, this is not an issue. However, it is likely that
representations of self, others and relationships both exist at and can be assessed at
verbal (i.e., conscious), nonverbal (i.e., behavioral), and preconscious (i.e., defensive)
levels. Therefore, due to the self-report nature of investigation, the present study does
not offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse. A
comprehensive understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse would need to involve
an investigation of representations that exist at verbal and conscious levels as well as
those existing at nonverbal and/or preconscious levels. As outlined above, it would be
helpful for future research to augment self-report investigation with other forms of investigation.

Finally, consistent with other research (Briere & Elliott, 1983; Briere, 1992b), all of the women indicated that the effects of sexual abuse on their representations of self, others and relationships were intertwined with the effects of other kinds of abuse that they experienced as children and as adults and that it was difficult or impossible to separate out the effects of various kinds of abuse. For example, one woman indicated that messages that she received about her unimportance and worthlessness while being sexually abused by her grandfather paralleled the messages that she received from her parents while growing up. Likewise, this paralleled the messages that she remembered getting from her former husband who she described as emotionally abusive to her. Another woman explained that the sexual, physical, and emotional abuse that she experienced by her father was all essentially the same - his abuse of power in relation to her. Child sexual abuse is only one of many factors that may impede the development of adaptive representations of self, others and relationships. Although this study has offered an idea of some of the ways in which child sexual abuse can impact representations of self, others and relationships, it has not aided us in gaining knowledge about the impact of child sexual abuse separate from other kinds of abuse.

Clinical implications

Given that child sexual abuse affected the women's representations of self, others and relationships in multiple ways and on multiple levels (e.g., cognitively, affectively and behaviorally), effective therapeutic interventions directed at long-standing change may need to involve components that parallel the multiplicity of effects. For example, therapeutic interventions which involve cognitive, affective, and behavioral/
interpersonal components may most successfully address the multiplicity of effects of child sexual abuse.

Two areas that seemed central for many of the women in their healing processes included their views of and relationships with men and women. In terms of their representations of men, many of the women indicated that positive experiences with men, such as male therapists and partners, enabled them to begin viewing men in less restrictive ways. For example, having positive experiences with men enabled them to consider that some men could be hurtful and others could be nonhurtful. Through these relationships, some of the women indicated that they began to cautiously trust men and, in effect, disconfirm their views of men as all hurtful and abusive. Unfortunately, experiences of revictimization by men later in life seemed to delay many of the women in reconstructing their views of men. Further research is needed to explore which women may benefit from having a male therapist and at what point in the healing process this would be most beneficial. Also, the attributes of male therapists that may facilitate healing in female survivors need to be explored. One woman in this study indicated that the fact that her male therapist did not become aroused as she told him about her sexual abuse was very significant and corrective for her. It is likely that clear sexual boundaries between male therapists and female survivors are particularly crucial for therapy to be therapeutic. Further research in this area may point to a need for more specific training of graduate students in the areas of boundaries between therapists and clients, particularly those with histories of child sexual abuse.

Another experience that many of the women identified as central in their healing processes was leaving abusive male partners. They indicated that this enabled them to get the support that they needed to begin healing from their experiences of child sexual abuse as well as other violating experiences. These factors are important to consider when working with women who were sexually abused as children. It may be that healing
is delayed and/or impeded when women are involved in situations in which they are being revictimized in various ways.

Another of the experiences most often mentioned by the women as conducive to long-standing change in their representations of self, others and relationships was group therapy with other women who had experienced child sexual abuse. Isolation from other women and, in effect, from themselves, was a prominent impact of child sexual abuse for the women in this study. Many of the women indicated that participating in groups for female survivors of child sexual abuse enabled them to begin viewing themselves and women differently. Hearing other women's stories validated their own experiences and enabled them to feel less different from other women. They indicated that they learned that not all women are weak and passive and that not all women were going to judge them for their histories of child sexual abuse. Through their group experiences the women were able to become less estranged from themselves and other women by connecting with women who had similar experiences. This speaks to the importance of the experience of universality in the group process as outlined by Yalom (1985).

Despite the change processes that many women identified from participating in groups for survivors of child sexual abuse, some women identified becoming stuck in the healing process as a result of being in groups which consisted only of other women who had experienced child sexual abuse. These women indicated that being surrounded only by other women who had experienced child sexual abuse left them little room to develop relationships, skills and interests outside of their histories of child sexual abuse. It may be that there is a threshold in the healing process in which being surrounded by other women who have been sexually abused and in which the focus is on the impact of sexual abuse may be counterproductive for some women. It may be that many of the groups for survivors of child sexual abuse do not adequately deal with the
difficulties encountered in the later stages of healing when women typically begin to define themselves less in relation to child sexual abuse and their healing from it and more in relation to their constructions of their new lives.

Further research is needed to explore at what point in the healing process women may no longer benefit from group experiences which are focused on issues related to child sexual abuse. Research is needed to identify what kinds of therapeutic services might be most helpful in the later stages of healing from child sexual abuse. This draws attention to the need for more complete services for women who are surviving from the interpersonal trauma of child sexual abuse. Connecting women in the later stages of their healing to other groups and organizations may aid them in their reconstruction of more adaptive representations of self, others and relationships.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings in this study suggest that the women's fundamental beliefs in themselves as worthy, others as benevolent, and the world as meaningful were disrupted by their experiences of child sexual abuse. The women reported multiple ways in which child sexual abuse had an impact on their representations of self, others and relationships. As well, they developed representations of self, others, and relationships that became generalized beyond the specific experiences of child sexual abuse. In turn, these generalized representations of self, others and relationships became maladaptive over time because they interfered with the women's ability to entertain information that would disconfirm them. That is, the generalized representations guided the women's behavior in ways that led to the exclusion of experiences which would disconfirm their distorted perceptions and beliefs.

The women's descriptions of their representations of self, others and relationships as a result of the sexual abuse fit with a relational model of self-
development as outlined by various theorists (Bowlby, 1973; 1988; Cole & Putnam, 1992; Epstein, 1973; 1985; 1991; McCann & Pearlman, 1992; 1990a; 1990b; Sullivan, 1953). Consistent with these theorists, the women maintained beliefs and behaved in ways which seemed to allow them to maintain consistency in their representations of self, others and relationships. It is believed that consistency and integration of one’s theories regarding self, others and the world serve a survival function for people because they provide a sense of security and familiarity for interpreting events (Bowlby, 1973; 1988; Epstein, 1973; 1989; Josephs, 1991; Price, 1993; 1994; Singer & Salovey, 1991; Sullivan, 1953). Despite providing familiarity and security, representations can still be maladaptive if they become inflexible and generalized beyond situations in which they were first developed.

Consistent with Herman’s (1992) formulations, the women in this study were at various stages in their healing from child sexual abuse. For example, some women were striving to attain safety in their lives while others were in the midst of grieving the losses they experienced as a result of the sexual abuse. Finally, other women were attempting to reconstruct their views of themselves, others and relationships in light of their past experiences.

Despite the variability in where the women were at in their healing, all of them indicated that growth, development and change were central in their explorations of the impact of child sexual abuse. The overriding need for consistency and integration in their theories of self, others and the world seemed evident in the women’s descriptions of the gradual process of change and growth that they experienced and continue to experience in their healing journeys. For example, some women indicated that as they began to have positive and nonabusive experiences with men, they gradually began to entertain the idea that not all men were going to hurt or abuse them. However, some of the women indicated that they were unsure as to how to relate to men who treated them
with respect and dignity and continued to learn this as they encountered more and more of these situations. For these women, they needed to disconfirm their views of all men as hurtful and abusive and learn new skills to relate with men who were not interested in hurting them.

The findings suggest that effective therapeutic strategies for women who have experienced child sexual abuse may need to involve components which parallel the impact of child sexual abuse (i.e., cognitive, affective, interpersonal and behavioral). Also, given that consistency in representations of self, others and relationships serve a survival function and are therefore slow and adaptively resistant to change, it may be important for the therapist to clearly understand the underlying dynamics of specific symptomology and the defensive structures developed to maintain consistency.

Unlike other current empirical research which employs symptom checklist and global rating systems, the approach used in the current study offered an integrated and more complex look at the impact of child sexual abuse by assessing in each woman: a) multiple representations of self, others and relationships; b) the impact of sexual abuse over time; c) the unique underlying dynamics that may be associated with particular sequelae specific to child sexual abuse. The limitations of the current study involve the skewed sample of women (i.e., women who have participated in therapy) and the self-report nature of investigation.

Future research will likely be more informative if it assesses the impact of child sexual abuse: a) on multiple aspects of self, including the underlying dynamics; b) using multiple methods of investigation (i.e., including investigating representations that exist on verbal, nonverbal, and preconscious levels); c) over time; and d) with larger groups of women who have not participated in therapy to deal with issues related to child sexual abuse.
It was obvious from talking with the women in this study that they were all actively healing from experiences of child sexual abuse. All of them looked toward a day when they would define themselves less in relation to the abuse they experienced and their healing from it and more in relation to their new views of self, others and relationships. All of them showed a resiliency and determination to get beyond the negative and hurtful experiences that they had endured as children. Many of them had constructed positive meaning from their negative and hurtful experiences. Their strength and unwillingness to remain victims speaks to the resiliency of the human spirit. My experiences with them have confirmed my belief that the human spirit can and does prevail against the worst of atrocities.
References


Appendix A

Inclusion/exclusion criteria for recruiting participants

The inclusion criteria included the following:

1) age of onset of abuse may vary from 3 to 16 years (may include women who experienced abuse before the age of 3 years as well, as long as the abuse was ongoing until 3 years)

2) the abusive experience can consist of being treated as a sexual object (i.e., being forced to pose for pictures in sexual ways), observing the perpetrator engage in sexual activity such as masturbation, and other sexual activities such as fondling or penetration

3) the number of perpetrators may vary from one to several (only one of which must be a significant male figure)

4) the length of time the abuse occurred may range from one incident to numerous times over many years

Generally, the participants were women who had enough distance from their experience(s) of child sexual abuse that they could speak about its impact without re-experiencing the associated pain. Typically, these women were in therapy for some time and had dealt with their issues regarding child sexual abuse in some depth.

The exclusion criteria included the following:

1) women who are not in the beginning stages of actively recovering memories of child sexual abuse. In other words, the participants' involvement in the project was not the first or second time that they disclosed the abuse to someone else

2) women currently in crisis

3) women who are actively psychotic (may include women who have experienced a psychotic break in the past but not those who are currently experiencing a psychotic episode)

4) women who are using dissociation as a major coping strategy (This fits with the distance criteria noted above. I wanted women who had integrated their memories and associated affect of the abuse to a point at which they could discuss the impact of the abuse without affectively re-experiencing the pain to an overwhelming degree and without dissociating)
Appendix B

Semi-structured interview*

How would you describe yourself? Examples (what kind of person do you think you are? Imagine that you are developing a friendship with me, what things would I come to know about you in our friendship)

How are you different from the kind of person you would like to be? Were there ever occasions when you were the kind of person you would like to be?

How would you describe your views of your body? Was there a time when you may have felt differently about your body?

How would you describe others? Examples. Were there times in your life when you would have described others differently?

What makes it easy or difficult for you to develop relationships? How do you first approach meeting people? How do you relate with people generally? Examples.

What makes relationships last? What makes them break up? Describe a relationship of yours that lasted a long time and one that didn't.

When you feel hurt by a significant person in your life, what do you do? Describe a time when you encountered a problem in a significant relationship, what happened? Was there ever a time when a similar problem occurred in a relationship and you dealt with things differently?

In what ways do you think the experience of child sexual abuse has influenced your views of yourself? Examples. (your views of your body)

In what ways do you think the experience of sexual abuse has influenced your views of others? your relationships with others? the way you relate to others?

How have your views of yourself changed over the years? How do you understand these changes?

How have your views of others (your relationships, the way you relate with others) changed over the years? How do you understand these changes?

In what ways has therapy influenced the way you view yourself? In what ways has therapy influenced your views of the impact that sexual abuse has had on you?

In what ways has therapy influenced the way you view others/your relationships? In what ways has therapy influenced your views of the impact that sexual abuse has had on your perceptions of others/your relationships?
Has there been other information (e.g., self-help books, media coverage) or experiences (e.g., workshops, self-help groups) that you have been exposed to that may have influenced your views of the impact that sexual abuse has had on your perceptions of yourself and others?

Are there any other areas that I could have asked about that would help me to understand the impact that sexual abuse has had on your views of self, others and relationships?

* It is important to note that these questions guided the interviews and were often not asked verbatim as they appear here.
Appendix C

Sections of an initial interview

(early in interview)

I: How would you describe yourself Elsie?

R: I'm a woman, Ok, how do I define myself, a woman, a survivor, a lot, a lot of my self definition is being strong. Umm,

I: What's the meaning that you attach to your survival?

R: I suppose I use the term survivor for those people who are actively dealing with issues around having been abused. It's kind of a stage and I know that at times I move into what the terminology out there calls warrior, uhh, I am not comfortable with that term. Uhh, but I don't define myself as a that but I do know that I am still at the place where a large part of my self definition has to do with feelings of the abuse.

I: Mmm hmmm, so this is sort of a stage that you described, how you are surviving the abuse, dealing with these issues. Was there a stage before this?

R: Mmm hmmm.

I: What was that stage?

R: Before I started dealing with the abuse? How would I see myself or what would I call that stage?

I: Both.

R: I was extremely active, I was very, very active. I was on twenty seven committees, yeah, I taught full time and I uhh, go, I went at one point, at one point I went forty some days without spending any time at home because I was at meetings, I was away every weekend at workshops, I was active, it's called running. Umm, I have considered a lot of those years just to be lost years, ...ch...I ran so much from who I was and what I was. I ran in different ways and one of those ways of running was a workaholic and in volunteering. I have always been extremely active in volunteer work until the last few years.

I: So when you describe yourself as running away from who you are and who you thought yourself to be umm, what, what was that?

R: What I thought myself to be ?

I: Mmm hmmm.

R: Oh, I thought myself to be dirty, ugly, I believed that I didn't have the right to be alive. I had to earn it by working, uhh, taking care of others. Rescuing was a
miracle to ... ch... umm, I was extremely defensive umm, I saw myself as a porcupine ... ch... the surface was fine and everybody could know the surface but anything underneath and I kept well guarded and I was very sarcastic if anybody tried to get close.

I: So people getting close to you was ...

R: Oh, it was terrifying because then they might find out what I was really like and I believed that if anybody ever found out what I was really like, then I had to die because I was so ugly and evil and dirty and that's what I believed.

I: Mmm hmmm. How has that changed?

R: I only believe that about ten percent of the time (laughs)... those views have changed a lot and they do come back once and awhile, especially, I mean I was aware last night that I had been really pushing myself too hard this last week and I had a little talk with myself about if I don't sit down and find some time for myself I will be back there again in another week, I'll be back hating myself.

I: That's a sign for you? that you are...

R: When I get really tired it is usually a sign that I, that I am heading towards that, if I get really tired and burnt out, I end up back in... I hate myself.

I: Is part of umm, your leave (from work) this year, an effort to deal with these issues?

R: I've uhh, I first started remembering the abuse probably... four years, four years in June and I took the following [work] year off and did a lot of dealing with the memories and umm, talking about June, I'm not quite sure how I made that June but I did it. I took the following year off, I felt I'd dealt with it all, you know well, it was hard and there was still going to be stuff but I could go back to [work] and get my life together and went back for two years and found that last year was just horrible. It took everything I could to get through the end of June so I decided to take leave again because I was aware that I had a whole lot of memories that I haven't even dealt with, that were coming. So that's what I am doing this year is processing a whole new pile of stuff and, I also had a diagnosis last year as being multiple personality disorder, I do not believe that diagnosis. I believe that when I am working and under a lot of stress that I need to... that, that I know that everybody compartmentalizes parts of themselves, that I have to work very hard not to fragment myself and it becomes almost a fragmentation as to compartmentalization but it is not multiple personality disorder, uhh, but it could be if I forced myself to keep working when I wasn't in a place to be working. I could make myself develop it in order to cope. So, that was also part of the reason I took leave was to try and reintegrate some of that kind of stuff and deal with the new memories without the pressure of working because I do find working with young children, many of whom have been abused and neglected, and I, that it is very, very difficult and it is almost guaranteed that if I have a new memory one day, the next day I will go in and some kid will come up to me and start reporting abuse.
I: Is that right hey?

R: It's almost (laughs), it's almost guaranteed that uhh... and I need to be as a (profession), I need to be in a place where I can be there for them. So, it was time to take some time off again and do some more stuff.

I: Mmm hmm, mmm hmm, I'm wondering if you can talk to me a bit more about the fragmentation that you described?

R: Mmm hmm, well, as a survivor, I dissociate very well. Umm, and I have certain sets of characteristics that go with being dissociated that aren't there when I am not dissociated. Umm, fragmentation, I'm not sure what it is you want to know about it, because I don't know what other people's experience of it. I mean people tell me things ...ch...that they don't change inside when these things, certain things happen, which amazes me because I have always assumed that people do that, that uhh, I lose my sense of who I am quite often and when I regain it quite often it is different than I had been before. And I don't know, I don't know how to explain it, I mean I know one of the things that...I know one of the times it happens, if I am listening to somebody talk about their stuff, their abuse, a crisis they've been in whatever, when they are talking, I can feel their pain within my body and I can feel where the stuck spots are and I can suggest ways that might help to move it. I have a future as a therapist if I could ever get my stuff together (laughs).

I: ya.

R: And I've used this skill at times in groups and it's been fairly helpful for some people but at the same time, then it...when they are done, I mean I am aware that that's their stuff, I am aware that it is not my stuff, it has nothing to do with any abuse I've had, but it takes me like five minutes to get back into myself and know who I am again and know what my needs are and know what I am feeling, know, know, you know, if I am wiggling my toes, I have to make sure it's my toes and not, you know...it takes me time to get back to myself again. I thought everybody did that and I was quite surprised when I found that people don't have their own sense of their identity usually go away to that extent when they are empathizing with someone else. Umm, in that instance it is one I can control, when I am (working) and under a lot of stress or times when I am under a lot of stress, I have to focus very hard that I keep control, that uhh, I keep control of that, to me that's fragmenting. Umm, so I have different characteristics that I say, these are the (profession) and when I am walking to (work), I consciously focus on having those characteristics and when I walk home from (work) I consciously focus on letting go of them and being the person I am when I am home. So that's, that may be very much like other people compartmentalizing, I don't know.

I: When you talk about this year, wanting to integrate, what does that mean?

R: I hate the term integrate, I use it because it's the term that's used and I am always reminded of Trudy chasing her 2, 4, 6, 8, we don't want to integrate, (laughs)(referring to the book, "When Rabbit Howls"). I guess having a stronger ...ch... and I find that whenever I have a batch of new memories, it takes some time for me to get back to knowing who this person called Elsie really is, like how
much was...because quite often when I have the memory I go back to the feelings that I had and those feelings are that of shame, of guilt, umm, pain, very, feeling very, I'm feeling very vulnerable and it takes time to get from being a young child in that position to being an adult who has friends that she can trust and people in her life who are not going to hurt her, so it's...I hate the term process. Can't do this without process (laughs) Process is for cheese. So it's all part of the process...I don't know if that answered your question.

I: Mmmm hmm yeah, this is, umm, I think really difficult stuff to talk about because our words don't really capture the meanings.

R: And part of is it that I start talking and then listen to what I am saying and then decide if I'm making sense or not. I don't think, I'm not in the process today of thinking before I speak.

I: Mmmm hmm that's fine.

R: I sometimes do that too, especially when I am working, dealing with authority.

I: So this year is a time for you to, umm, I don't know what word to use, to umm, claim these parts of yourself? to....

R: I think it is more explore, see what's there, see what is there. You know, what the memories are because unfortunately the memories will come whether I want them to or not. So give myself the time and space that I need to know what they are and to work through them and move on. And it is also a time, it's also, the other reason I am on leave is to decide whether I want to continue as a {profession} or whether I want to make a career change...

I: So you talked about umm, I think, if I'm understanding you correctly, you talked about being sometimes different in different situations...so you do see yourself as different in different situations?

R: Mmmm hmmmm but I think that's normal.

I: Mmm hmmm, I do too.

R: I'm still angry at the doctor for diagnosing me as being MPD.

I: Hmmmm...How do you see yourself as different, like what would I see in different situations?

R: Well the two parts that scare me, the two parts that I don't like about when I'm different because they help to support other MPD diagnosis is that my...I need to wear different blouses and my allergies change.... Except I do not have amnesia....Umm, what would you see differently...people have told me that my body posture is very different and my eye color darkens and...ch... umm, my voice gets uhh, softer or stronger voice, my age sounds very different sometimes when I am talking. And a lot of it is just my stance, my attitude my....I'd go from being a scifi gentle nurturing type person to wearing army boots. ...ch...
I: Is that part, the army boot part, is that your work self, the self that you take to your work?

R: No, no, my part that wears army boots is related to my porcupine self, the one that doesn't want to let anybody get close and if people get in my way I'll stomp all over them with my army boots.

I: So, what around you, sort of facilitates that happening?

R: It...what around me...Okay, well it varies according to what I need to do, like whether I'm at work or at church or skiing or camping, I mean...and it also depends on the people who are around me. Umm, I'm more defensive with members in my family and much less defensive with close friends. ...ch... see I'm really liking that word normal this afternoon (laughs) I'm feeling defensive, Ok...

I: You're feeling defensive in this interview?

R: Yeah, I mean it's not a major sense of feeling defensive but I am aware that there is some defensiveness in the way I'm answering, I am hearing it come out that I'm responding from a slightly defensive posture. See, I'm normal, don't tell me I'm not normal (Laughs) yeah. Everybody does this, everybody does that...I didn't think normal was all that exciting. (laughs) I have no idea what to attach it to (laughs) Anyway so that...I mean to me it doesn't matter if I'm...ch... like that's in the bottom, I mean I have some post traumatic stress syndrome symptoms and possibly atypical dissociative disorder and possibly MPD but that's how I deal, I deal with it. I have to get sicker to get better.

I: And these are just...

R: Labels.

I: Labels that we construct to understand things that...

R: Yeah, and I refuse to make my illnesses fit their labels.

I: And they don't, people's experiences don't fit those labels. So at times then when you are...Tell me more about your porcupine self.

R: I don't think it was...ch... it, what changes is the amount of degree with different people. I don't know how I would change, that's part of learning...ch... is to figure that out, is what does uh, trigger a change uhh,

I: So you see this on a continuum?

R: Mmm hmmm, and I believe but I am not certain, I suspect, I think, probably, uhh, the change comes from when I am feeling threatened, frightened and when it reaches a certain level of...ch... so, and that can be almost anything.

I: So it's not dependent on necessarily the situation that church... friends, ...ch...
R: It can be anything from getting stuck in a car wash to the way the snow is falling to somebody asking me a question that feels really scary...ch...

I: How are these questions for you?

R: See your questions aren't that threatening because I know that I don't have to answer them and because, it happens more often in therapy appointments when I am wanting to do it and I push myself to do...to answer things that are...ch...that the pace gets too fast you know...

I: Yeah...

R: That's part of the why it's at my place, I can go to the washroom, I can get coffee, I can move around.

I: Hmmhmm. Are you different from the kind of person that you would like to be?

R: I've always thought of that question on my own, if I could be different who would I be? Umm, how am I different from the kind of person that I would like to be? I would like to be more stable, I would like not to have mood swings umm, I would like not to get...to experience the, the...all the stuff, shame and guilt and panic attacks and all that kind of stuff. You're free of that.

I: How has that changed from any other time in your life?

R: Well it's certainly gotten much easier to deal with, uhh, in the last four years. I didn't even used to know I was having a panic attack, I just ran. And now when I have panic attacks I can stop and breath through them and they are not too bad but...all of the things are easier to deal with since I have been in therapy and dealing with this stuff, but they are still there and I would like them to go away. So, I, I suppose if I would, could be a different...I mean the ideal one is if I could be a different person I would want to be somebody who was never abused and I would like to be somebody who was loved and cared for and grew up in a healthy happy family that was kind of like the Walton's and you know...I want my children to lead a good life. You know, I wouldn't like them to have to spend years and years dealing with garbage. And I would have liked to have been able to have kids....there is too much uhh, damage from the abuse.

I: What's that like for you?

R: I get extremely angry at insensitive people who have explained to me how, "you know you really should get married and have a family". Sometimes that makes me, sometimes I'm sad about it and sometimes I'm angry about it and sometimes I'm...ch...at least I don't have to worry about (laughs) birth control and pill related diseases and all the other things that are going on, so it's a mixture.

I: How long have you known this, that you can't have children?

R: Since I was twenty four, so eighteen years.
I: So it has different meanings...

R: I used to think it didn't affect me at all, I didn't care, I could have cared less, it's just it happened, these things happen to people, ...ch...

I: And as, as you get older?

R: Oh, once I got into therapy (laughs) it probably had an impact on me that I did kind of push away.

(midpoint in interview)

I: Given your experiences with other people throughout your life, what makes it easy or difficult for you to develop relationships?

R: I never used to have any relationships, well, I wasn't aware that I did. I was in my own little world and they were all out there, umm, so I just kind of interacted with people, I didn't really have relationships with them. Umm, it makes it easier for me to have relationships with people if we hold some common interest and if we hold some common attitudes. I find it very difficult to be close to people I consider to be bigots (laughs). Umm, of course I guess we define the term...I also have been working on that. I don't like people who judge other people (laughs), right, I get to judge, nobody else can. Umm, I guess some of the same, and it's not, it doesn't match and yet it does, is it people, it makes it easier for me to develop a relationship with people who have similar values, and yet I know that I have very close friends who have very different values ...ch... It makes it easier if there is a sense of openness, I find it difficult to get to know people who are concerned primarily with acquiring possessions, or with achieving success in business and those are not areas I'm interested in, most of the friends that I have are working in the area of humanities or education or most of the friends that I have relationships with are wrapped up in some kind of volunteer work, or do something. Umm, ...ch... so there, there's people are concerned about people and people who are honest about their own stuff and the way they are with their own stuff and I don't like people who are not willing to admit or believe that they have anything to do with ...ch... I usually don't get along very...I usually don't get very close. ...ch...

I: You mentioned earlier when we were talking about how sometimes how it was difficult for you to get close, particularly with the close people in your life, and uh, some of that, if I am understanding it right is, is based on, sort of a...maybe a built in expectation or view that betrayal may happen in close relationships?

R: Mmm hmmm.

I: How does that...does it, I guess, factor in here?

R: Yeah, and I approach the question from the assumption of, it's going to be hard for me to develop a relationship, so I am more likely to do it with people who have these characteristics, it's easier. Umm, I have a belief ...ch... if I let you in you will betray me, if I get close to you, if I tell you my story, you will invalidate me, and I've learned that they are the similar basic beliefs that I functioned on for a
good many years and I am trying to change but umm, I am aware that I, I check things out. I proceed with caution and I am quite Ok with having lots and lots of acquaintances without having to walk the moon, close friends are very special little circle for me and you've got to earn your way in (laughs) people have to, the same as I have to earn my way into other people's close friends and it takes time and I am quite willing to be checked out and to have people saying "When you said that, what did you mean" and "I heard this and do you mean that and excuse me, you said this and I know it and if I screwed up then I am responsible for it and I'm responsible for trying to work it out and I am responsible to negotiate and I am responsible to compromise" all those kinds of things are things that are part of relationships.

I: How do you first approach meeting people?

R: How do I first approach meeting people...
I don't know, they are just kind of there (laughs).

I: Say if you were at a party...

R: Ok, I'm at a party.

I: ...a social setting...

R: Mmm hmmm.

I: And there is people there that you don't know, what would go on, what would happen that night?

(tape ends)

R: What I want to do is just sit in the corner and observe people, oh I like watching people I find, just watch and see what people do and try to figure out how somebody can get home quite often. Umm, but since I very seldom go to parties and functions alone, oh, and actually that's not true, that's if it's really a social, social...if it's a social setting and yet it's people I feel comfortable with, I may not know these people but I know that we have something in common, like a feminist gathering or something.

I: That's different?

R: Yeah, I'm much more open about going around and talking to people and if I go with someone else I also go around and talk to people because I don't want the person I'm with to have to look after me, so... Yeah I tend to circulate, chat with people and then move on.

I: Is it difficult for you to initiate conversation or to meet?...

R: Yeah, I have to force myself to do that, it's not something that I would...I enjoy it usually when I do, but to get myself over the hump of "I can't do this" and to get out and get...
I: So, what's that about, that hump, that hesitation?

R: Nobody would want to talk to me, I'm totally useless, uhh, you know, what if they tell me to fuck off and die, umm, basic insecurity kinds of stuff, yeah.

I: Fearing rejection?

R: And also...a fear of rejection and not knowing what to say, not knowing how to approach people, like feeling I have no skills to do...socially inept.

I: that's the way that you experience yourself?

R: Oh yeah, I'm a clutz yeah. There's no doubt about it.

I: Umm, how do you think you relate with people, generally?

R: How do I think I relate...it's all there, I think, I think I never meet my own expectation, uhh...

I: Which is what?

R: That I will be competent and smooth and polished and ask for what I want and say the right thing and...I need the book with the right things in it someday...if you ever find it, I'd appreciate knowing about it. Umm, yeah, I usually feel that I have fallen short of what I should and yet I hear from people that I handle situations well and I usually feel like I haven't handled situations at all well, that I said the wrong thing or done the wrong thing.

I: Hmmhmm

R: I hope you realize I've already done four years of self-esteem work, you should have seen me four years ago (laughs)

I: So things have changed?

R: Yes, yes, yes...four years ago I wouldn't have even gone to a social gathering.

I: So it sounds like it is difficult for you to accept disconfirming evidence?

R: Uhh, yeah. I mean I accept it, I believe that people are sincere when they tell me I just have trouble, I have trouble taking it in, I have trouble accepting that my view of reality may not have been the exact way.

I: Umm, so, in terms of meeting people, first meeting people, was it ever different for you?

R: It's also helped that I have taught and been on lots and lots of committees because I had to do it.

I: ..ch... So was it different before?
R: Oh yeah, umm, I was known as being very quiet. I was always very quiet, I was a book worm. I would far rather sit at home and read than do anything that involved people. Umm, I have had people have to talk me out of the car to go to a party where there were people I didn't know. I would hang on to the steering wheel and just beg, don't make me, please. You know, ...ch... that have always been really tough to get out and to be with people and to work with people. That's why I think, when I said about, you know, when I started working back at the [place of work], when I moved back to Saskatchewan, the job I had in [province] as [position at place of work], that I got a lot of positive comments from my boss and a lot of, he gave me a lot of responsibility and had a lot of faith in my abilities and that really helped. But I had to because I was [title of position at work], you know, that was part of my job... I had to, to work with people and found that I could do it. And then working in jobs where I was interacting with people on a job level and finding I could do it, and I may not have been the centre of attention but I wasn't also totally ignored or rejected. It's something I've built slowly in the last ten, fifteen years.

I: So there was also a period in your life before where you, umm, I can't remember, where you were a hoot? Is that how you described it?

R: Oh yeah well that was the last ten fifteen years, yeah right, yeah.

I: So this was a different time?

R: And that, that is only with people that I know, that's people that I know, Ok, that's people that I feel comfortable with that I can laugh at, that side out where I be kind of a party animal and tell these absolutely outrageous stories. Do imitations.

I: So you are really different with people that you know?

R: Yeah, they see much more of the wild side. Mmm hmm.

(later in interview)

I: How do you think the experience of sexual abuse has impacted the way that you view your self?

R: I don't think it's had a very positive influence, I'll tell you that much and as a result of being abused I grew up believing myself to be dirty, ugly, umm, umm, and I had no, I believed that I had no skills. I believed I didn't have the right to be alive, I believed I was stupid. I grew up with a lot and you know, I still struggle with a lot of stuff ...ch... And it always felt good how I saw myself in relation to other people, because I grew up believing that other people could not be trusted and I could not defend myself and that I believed that other people did not have my best interests at heart and that it was something they had no control over. I could be walking down the street and all of a sudden, whoa, I'm just going to get it cause, which growing up a woman in this society helps to reinforce, I mean I realize that, it was not simply from my own personal abuse, it's the stories and the experiences of others. Umm, but, I did not believe that it was possible for there to be a safe place for me, that has lots of implications.
I: What are they?

R: There wasn't a safe place. Then I was at the stage where I didn't realize it wasn't a safe place, I mean I didn't, I was feeling inside as if I needed to, to live in a rural cave with machine guns up to keep the world from attacking, you know? I even though I didn't do that, I did that emotionally, you know.

I: So that other people wouldn't hurt you?

R: Other people were always threats...

I: How do you think these view of, of yourself and others changed over the years?

R: Well, until my late twenties they just kept getting worse umm,

I: Can you just talk about that for a minute, when you say they kept getting worse...?

R: Well, I was in relationships that, where those messages were repeated.

I: How do you understand that?

R: How do I understand what?

I: Being in relationships where you, those messages kept being repeated?

R: What part of it now, like what do I understand about my being there or about?....

I: Well I guess what I am looking at is that, are you making a connection between your abuse which you experienced as a child and relationships that you had as an adult in your twenties?

R: I believed that I didn't have, I didn't have the belief that I had the right to defend myself, and I didn't have the belief that I could defend myself, umm, and I believe that that had some influence on my ending up in those kind of relationships and staying in them as long as I did, and, but I am not taking responsibility for those actions so... But I also believe that there are, there are people in the world who want, and who are aware of the people who don't have protection and they take advantage of you and you are frightened and I was one of them. And that is not to mean that I am not willing to be responsible for my actions but I won't be responsible for theirs.

I: So the messages that you were given as a young child...

R: That didn't happen.

I: Right, mmm hmmm, made it more difficult for you to see what these people looked like.
R: And it certainly, it made it more difficult for me to see or believe that I had any other option....If I didn't believe that I was capable of sustaining myself economically, it's really hard for me to walk out of a relationship when I am a thousand miles away from my family and friends and believe that I cannot support myself. Starvation just really...

I: So then in your late twenties, things started to change?

R: Mmm hmm, that's when I got out of that relationship, and getting back into the work force and slowly built up some self-esteem but I think the biggest, the biggest thing was getting into therapy, that has made the most difference for me and actually coming to identify what it was that I believed, what it was that I was acting on and whether or not it always has to be like that or whether or not, you know things could be changed and turned around and everything. Come to trust and learn to, to, to, you know, defend myself and to let people in.

I: Umm, Tell me about your experiences in therapy...

R: It didn't always have to be ...ch... I had corrective experiences ..ch...(laughs)
You mean my other experiences were incorrective, yeah, yeah...it feels like new glasses, I got new glasses (laughs) ...ch... Disconfirm
...ch... yeah, so in therapy I had, I learned to take some chances and see things could be different.

I: How did that have an impact on you?

R: I suppose the biggest one that it, it started me to want to start exploring to understand who I was. I mean, I worked very, very hard at not feeling anything that went on for all those years and so in therapy I learned to feel and I learned to understand and I learned to understand correctly what was going on, and uhh, what I was feeling, all I was feeling was how it felt to me to touch something or be angry or whatever. I was all mixed up when I went in. So it certainly affected how I viewed myself because I started to get to know myself and I have to admit that the more I got to know myself and the more, the more I experienced or felt what was going on, in general my self-esteem went up a lot. I felt a lot better about myself, I felt stronger and more capable, that was different.

I: How did that, how did that relate to the way that you viewed other people?

R: It allowed me to start differentiating, like to say umm, yeah, I, I was not consciously aware that I felt people weren't trustworthy and because I wasn't, I assume that I'm there, that that there was some belief that all people underneath were this way and I never quite made the connection that I would be that way underneath too and if everybody else was, it was Ok for me to be like that. And because I wasn't, I was different.

I: To be what then....

R: That was a side...you {interviewer} weren't supposed to get that, umm, I thought all people were like the people who hurt me and I thought that I couldn't forget myself so when I learned that not all people had the basis of hurting me, I
mean even when I became aware that I was operating in that frame, it helped a lot to get passed it, but as I got to know other people and to know that time and time again they've showed me that we're not interested in hurting me, they were interested in helping me and supporting me and caring about me and all these weird and other wild concepts, that I think must have come out of a book somewhere. Umm, it certainly changed when I came to believe that some people are trustworthy and some people aren't and some, a lot of people are somewhere in between and so...

I: So as you developed a more clear sense of who you were, you began to get to know yourself, trust yourself, you were able to differentiate more so with people who you trusted...

R: Yeah, the first three months in therapy I just kind of reeled from the shock realizing how many sub-conscious beliefs I have, things that I was running from, I should have known that once I became aware of them ..ch.. then they kind of make sense....they didn't make a lot of sense in all kinds of ways, and I didn't remember yet. I started therapy before I started remembering, I didn't have any memories yet, I didn't have anything to attach it to and I was still, the stuff that I did remember, I was still at the place where it was never abusive because it happened to me so it was all my fault and I deserved it.

I: What enabled you to remember?

R: I think what enabled me was when I started dealing with the stuff that I did remember and when I dealt with that in therapy then I came to understand that I was not totally responsible and it was not my fault that things happened to me uhh, that once I worked through a lot of that self blame and that guilt and shame around from the time I was fifteen on, then I also started remembering the younger stuff. I needed to do some of the older, that doesn't work because older as in I'm older or newer as in closer to me, anyway, more adult stuff.

I: Was that, was that less close to your view of yourself?

R: Yeah, I didn't think so at the time but looking back, yeah.

I: How has therapy influenced the way that you view the impact of the abuse on both yourself and others?

R: I'm having trouble in therapy now because I'm having, I'm caught up into all this false memory stuff. The process of going through therapy has strongly influenced me and my therapist has influenced it to the extent that he has continued to insist that it was not my fault that it was not my fault that I was abused, even when I tried to explain to him why it was, umm, over and over and over. It had to be my fault, I did this, I dropped this, I said this...umm,

I: So you struggled with umm, taking responsibility?

R: Oh, it was always, always, always ...ch... I don't think I've ever had a memory or, the stuff that I did remember or the stuff that was repressed that I later
remembered, I have never come to any of that without believing that it was totally my fault and my responsibility.

I: Now you are able to put aside that sense of shame?

R: Yeah, and it's taken long, hard work and usually all, actually usually all it takes is to see anybody else I know in that situation and say "It's their fault" and I (laughs) can say, "No it isn't". But it's much harder to do that with myself, but yes, uh, but going through the process of therapy has, to answer your question, strongly influenced the way I see the effect of the abuse because I was so caught up in the effects of the abuse and living them out and living out that pattern, that I couldn't even see them. And going through that process helped me to get enough perspective and enough distance and to come ...ch... that's what I was doing most of the time, acting out or reacting.

I: So the process of therapy, what did it do?

(Tape ends)

R: Going through that...because it's not as if my therapist told me this, that then I believed it, it's as I have worked through my stuff with a therapist who is supportive and understanding but not imposing his beliefs and judgements, except when he tries to get away with it, which usually has nothing to do with this false memory stuff. Umm, uh, it, it's my work that has enabled me to get out and I have seen a therapist who has supported me in that but he has not done the work and he has not told me this is abuse and this isn't and this is...

I: You've had to define all that yourself through talking?

R: Yeah, through getting to know myself and to understand myself and, and hear other people and you know, and groups and hear how...and see how it affected them.
Appendix D

Abuse and Life Circumstance Questionnaire

Participant #

Date:

Instructions: Unless otherwise indicated, circle the best response(s) to each category of information below or fill in the blank.

1. Your living arrangement as a child
   a. intact family
   b. separated/divorced: lived with mother ______ father
   c. blended: lived with natural mother ______ father
   d. single parent, never married
   e. adoptive family
   f. other

2. Your family's socioeconomic status when growing up
   a. high
   b. upper middle
   c. middle
   d. lower middle
   e. lower
   f. extreme poverty
   g. don't know

3. The number of children in your family of origin were (are):
   girls: _________   boys:

4. You were _________ in birth order.

5. Were you ever in foster care as a child?
   a. no
   b. yes: How long?
       At what age(s)
6. Were you ever physically abused as a child?
   a. no
   b. yes

   If so, please rate the severity of the abuse by circling the appropriate choice
   mild moderate severe

7. Were you ever emotionally abused (e.g., humiliated, embarrassed, criticized, or made to feel your perceptions of reality were incorrect when they were in fact accurate) as a child?
   a. no
   b. yes

   If so, please rate the severity of the abuse by circling the appropriate choice
   mild moderate severe

8. Were you ever neglected (e.g., emotionally ignored, did not have basic emotionand/or physical needs met) as a child?
   a. no
   b. yes

   If so, please rate the severity of the abuse by circling the appropriate choice
   mild moderate severe

9. Did any of your caregivers ever abuse alcohol or other substances over an extended period of time while you were growing up?
   a. no
   b. yes   If so, who

10. Is there a history of psychiatric disorder in your family?
    a. no
    b. yes   If so, who

    psychiatric disorder(s)
11. At what age did the sexual abuse occur/begin?

12. For how long did the sexual abuse take place?

13. Approximately how many times did the abuse take place?
   a. one time
   b. several times (2-10)
   c. many times (11+)

14. Length of time in treatment for abuse throughout life? (if more than once, indicate all times separately)

15. In which therapy activities have you participated in throughout life? (check all that apply)
   a. individual
   b. family
   c. marital
   d. survivor’s group
   e. group for mothers of survivors
   f. other
   g. don’t know

16. Did you participate in therapy as a child regarding issues of the sexual abuse?
   a. no
   b. yes for how long?
   c. don’t know

17. Type of sexual abuse experienced (check highest level)
   a. very intrusive (e.g., penetration of any body cavity by penis, finger, or object)
   b. intrusive (e.g., fondling, rubbing penis against individual)
   c. less intrusive (e.g., offender exposing self, offender leering or making sexual comments/jokes at expense of you, offender taking pictures of you in the nude or in sexual poses)
18. Were you abused by more than one offender?
   a. no
   b. yes, several consecutively (e.g., father, then step father)
   c. yes, concurrently (e.g., father and brother during the same time period)

19. Approximately how old was (were) the perpetrator(s) at the time of the abuse?

20. What was (were) the relationship(s) between yourself and the perpetrator(s)? Circle all that apply
   a. friend of family
   b. father
   c. step-father
   d. foster father
   e. adoptive father
   f. mother's common-law partner
   g. mother's partner, not common-law
   h. grandfather
   i. uncle
   j. brother
   k. cousin
   l. other

21. Outside of the sexual abuse, how important was your relationship with the offender?

   Not at all important  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  Very important
22. What was the quality of your relationship with the offender before the abuse? Circle all that apply

a. loved
b. liked
c. disliked
d. hated
e. intimidated
f. ambivalent
g. neutral
h. don't know
i. other

23. What was the quality of your relationship with the offender after the abuse? Circle all that apply

a. loved
b. liked
c. disliked
d. hated
e. intimidated
f. ambivalent
g. neutral
h. don't know
i. other

24. To what extent do you think the abuse violated your perceptions of the perpetrator?

not at all  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 completely

25. What was the offender's stance on the abuse at the time of the abuse?

a. denial
b. admitted abuse took place but didn't not take responsibility
c. accepted responsibility
d. don't know

26. What is the offender's stance on the abuse now?

a. denial
b. admits abuse took place but does not take responsibility
c. accepts responsibility
d. don't know
e. offender deceased
27. Was the abuse ever disclosed?
   a. no (if no, skip questions 28-34)
   b. yes to whom (list all)

28. If abuse was disclosed, how was this done?
   a. spontaneous disclosure
   b. prompted disclosure
   c. unintentional disclosure
   d. don't know

29. How old were you at the time of first disclosure?

30. What was the (were the) response(s) to the disclosure?
   a. belief and effective action
   b. belief and ineffective action
   c. belief and no action
   d. disbelief
   e. don't know
   f. other

31. What happened as a result of the disclosure? Circle all that apply
   a. individual removed from her home or setting where abuse occurred
   b. offender(s) removed from the home
   c. offender(s) denied access to child
   d. investigation by D.S.S.
   e. charges laid
   f. offender(s) convicted
   g. offender(s) incarcerated
   h. offender(s) acquitted
   i. don't know

32. Did you ever recant the disclosure?
   a. no
   b. yes why?
   c. don't know
33. What was (is) non-offending parent's (or parents') reaction to disclosure?
   a. immediately believed individual
   b. uncertain until investigation completed
   c. uncertain until someone else convinced her and/or him
   d. still uncertain
   e. disbelief and then belief
   f. disbelief
   g. still disbelief
   h. don't know

34. Approximately how many people did you disclose the abuse to before action was taken to stop it?
    ___________ people

35. What is your relationship with the offender like now? Circle all that apply
   a. love
   b. like
   c. dislike
   d. hate
   e. intimidated
   f. ambivalent
   g. neutral
   h. nonexistent
   i. offender(s) deceased
   j. don't know
   k. other

36. Rate the extent to which you blamed yourself vs. the offender for the abuse at the time of the abuse:
    self 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 offender
    at the time of the disclosure:
    self 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 offender
    at the present time:
    self 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 offender
37. Rate the extent to which you blamed or were angry at the non-offending parent(s) in relation to the abuse

at the time of the abuse:

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38. Have you ever been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder?

a. no
b. yes

If so, please list the psychiatric disorder(s)

39. How long have you been in therapy with your current therapist?

40. What were your presenting concerns at the beginning of therapy?

41. What was it like establishing a therapeutic relationship with your therapist?
42. What are (were) the main themes/issues in therapy?

43. Do you have a supportive relationship(s) outside of therapy?
   a. no
   b. yes with whom (list all, for e.g., spouse, friend, co-worker)

44. Have you experienced difficulty establishing satisfactory relationships?
   a. no
   b. yes If so, what are the issues that come up

45. Have you ever been married/lived common-law?
   a. no
   b. yes how many times?

46. Are you currently in a spousal relationship?
   a. no
   b. yes

   If so, rate your satisfaction with the relationship

   not at all satisfied            completely satisfied
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

47. Have you ever had any children?
   a. no
   b. yes how many? ______________ age(s)?
48. If you live (have lived) with a romantic partner, does (did) that partner have children who:
   a. reside(d) with you full time
   b. reside(d) with you part time
   c. did(does) not reside with you

49. Have you ever been divorced/separated?
   a. no
   b. yes how many times?

50. Have you ever been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused by an adult partner?
   a. no
   b. yes What was done about this?

51. Was your mother (female caregiver) sexually abused as a child: no yes
    as an adult: no yes

52. Was your father (male caregiver) sexually abused as a child: no yes
    as an adult: no yes

53. Have you ever had children who were sexually abused?
   a. no
   b. yes by whom

54. What is your current socioeconomic status?
   a. upper class
   b. upper middle class
   c. middle class
   d. lower middle class
   e. lower class
   f. extreme poverty
55. What level of education do you have?
   a. less than highschool
   b. highschool
   c. college diploma/trade
   d. post secondary degree
   e. advanced post secondary degree

* In the therapist version, the word "you" was replaced with "this individual".
Appendix E

Informed Consent for Participation in the Study

I have been informed and clearly understand that the purpose of this study is to investigate women's understandings of the impact of sexual abuse on their views of self and others. I understand that I will be interviewed by Lynn Corbett about my views of self and others and about how I think the experience of child sexual abuse has had an impact on these views. I am aware that this interview will be audiotaped for the purposes of coding. Also, I have been informed that I meet with Lynn Corbett a second time to discuss her understanding of how I feel the sexual abuse has had an impact on my views of self and others. I know that I have the freedom to disagree with her if I feel her understanding does not accurately fit the way I understand these things myself.

I have been informed that all information obtained from me and about me will be kept confidential and will be recorded by my first name only and an assigned number. I have been made aware that all information will be kept in a safe place to which only Lynn Corbett will have access. I have been informed that I may terminate my participation in the study at any time and that my participation in the study is in no way related to the therapeutic services I am currently receiving.

Finally, I am aware that this research project is Lynn Corbett's doctoral dissertation which partially fulfills the requirements of a Ph.D. degree in clinical psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. Therefore, I understand that others may read the final manuscript which will include excerpts from the interviews that I participated in. Also, I have been informed that, for the purposes of coding, other researchers will have access to the information obtained from the interviews. I understand that the individuals who will have access to the information obtained from the interviews are ethically bound to keep that information confidential. I have also been made aware that pieces of the manuscript may be published in a professional journal at a later time.

I am aware that Lynn Corbett's research supervisor is Dr. Deborah Hay and that I can reach either Lynn Corbett or Dr. Hay at the University of Saskatchewan at 966-6661 if I have any questions or concerns at any point during my participation in the study. I have been informed that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I have been informed of all of the above and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature

Researcher's signature

Date
Appendix F

Informed Consent Regarding Name Usage

I have been informed that I have a choice of whether to have my first name or an alternate pseudonym used in the written manuscript of this research project. It has been explained to me that this is a personal choice and will have absolutely no bearing on my participation in the study. I know from my discussion with Lynn Corbett regarding this matter that some individuals may choose to use their first name because they feel it is a way in which they can speak out and make their experiences known while others may choose to use an alternate pseudonym as a way in which they can continue to protect themselves from possible risks. I am aware that parts of the manuscript may be published in professional journals and therefore available to the general public at a later time. I understand that the use of my first name might make it easier for someone reading the manuscript to identify me and that it is possible that the perpetrator(s) of my abuse and other people I know may read it and identify me. I understand that this may have negative implications for me. For example, it is possible that in identifying me, someone may want to contact me about the information that I shared in the interview. Finally, I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I fully understand the risks involved in having my first name used in the written manuscript of this research project. I also understand that I have a free choice not to use my first name because of the potential risks for my safety. It is my decision to use my first name and I understand that Lynn Corbett is in no way responsible for any events that may arise because I consented to having my first name used. I understand that once I have consented to this and once the manuscript has been submitted for publication that I cannot change having my first name used. I would like Lynn Corbett to use my first name in the written manuscript of this research project.

Participant's signature

Researcher's signature

Date
OR

I am aware of the risks involved in having my first name used in the written manuscript of this research project. I have decided not to have my first name used.

Participant’s signature

Researcher’s signature

Date
Appendix G

Informed Consent Form for Abuse and Life Circumstance Questionnaire

I have been informed that part of this study may involve my therapist filling out a questionnaire about the sexual abuse I experienced as a child. I know that this questionnaire will also include questions about my life circumstances, both currently and as a child. I understand that the purpose of my therapist filling out the questionnaire is so that I do not have to discuss the details of the sexual abuse that I experienced as a child in the interview with Lynn Corbett. Therefore, I know that it is not necessary for me to discuss any of the details of the abuse I experienced in the interview but that I may do so if I want to. Also, I have been made aware that I may fill out the questionnaire with my therapist if I wish to but that it is not necessary for me to do so. Finally, I have been made aware that I may fill out this questionnaire by myself if I do not want my therapist to fill it out on my behalf. I have been informed that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I agree to have my therapist fill out a questionnaire regarding details of the sexual abuse I experienced and general information about my life circumstances, both currently and as a child.

Participant's signature

Researcher's signature

Date

OR

I do not agree to have my therapist complete a questionnaire regarding details of the sexual abuse I experienced and general information about my life circumstances, both currently and as a child. However, I wish to fill this questionnaire out myself or with my therapist.

Participant's signature

Researcher's signature

Date
Appendix H

Meaning units coded as representations of self

Self-estrangement

Difficulty with feelings.

...for so many years I just pushed everything away and just had a wall around me.(page 39, 2071).

...But I know that (alcoholism) is an addiction that I could easily develop if I would ever let myself, and that's a way of coping, I mean it's part of the whole package of learning, you know, not wanting to feel. Starving myself for a year as a way to cope...I'm not depriving myself, I'm depriving myself...ch...hurting myself. In many ways it seems to help to relieve stress.(page 54, 2877).

I have a lot of trouble with feelings, it's scary!(page 15, 784).

I suppose the biggest one that it, it started me to want to start exploring to understand who I was. I mean, I worked very, very hard at not feeling anything that went on for all those years and so in therapy I learned to feel and I learned to understand and I learned to understand correctly what was going on, and uhh, what I was feeling, all I was feeling was how it felt to me to touch something or be angry or whatever. I was all mixed up when I went in. So it certainly affected how I viewed myself because I started to get to know myself and I have to admit that the more I got to know myself and the more, the more I experienced or felt what was going on, in general my self-esteem went up a lot. I felt a lot better about myself, I felt stronger and more capable, that was different.(page 43, 2271).

Ran from self/kept busy.

I was extremely active, I was very, very active. I was on twenty seven committees, yeah, I taught full time and I uhh, go. I went at one point, at on point I went forty some days without spending anything at home because I was at meetings. I was away every weekend at workshops, I was active, it's called running. Umm, I have considered a lot of those years just to being lost years,...ch...I ran so much from who I was and what I was. I ran in different ways and one of those ways of running was a workaholic and in volunteering. I have always been extremely active in volunteer work until the last few years.(page 5, 226).

Well it's certainly gotten much easier to deal with, uhh, in the last four years. I didn't even used to know I was having a panic attack, I just ran. And now when I have panic attacks I can stop and breathe through them and they are not too bad but...all of the things are easier to deal with since I have been in therapy and dealing with this stuff, but they are still there and I would like them to go away. (page 13, 664).
Before that time I was usually quiet ...ch...and I had a spell about ten years ago, I was one of those people that ...ch...I ran around and I baked for the bake sale and I was on the church board and I was on the co-op board and I volunteered at the library and I made soup and fresh bread every Monday morning and ...(laughs) and did my laundry and kept my house and I just was...just no personality at all. Well very little that I can discern. Umm, just kind of typical.(page 21, 1091).

Self-concept

Survivor.

I'm a woman, Ok, how do I define myself, a woman, a survivor, a lot, a lot of my self definition is being strong. (page 4, 193).

I suppose I use the term survivor for those people who are actively dealing with issues around having been abused. It's kind of a stage and I know that at times I move into what the terminology out there calls warrior, uhh, I am not comfortable with that term. Uhh, but I don't define myself as a that but I do know that I am still at the place where a large part of my self definition has to do with feelings of the abuse.(page 4, 200).

Where, where those lines are is a really tough one for me {between tolerance and acquiescence}, when you know that my own background the strong influences were those ones that were trying to mould me into someone, I mean it will always be a part of who I am and this healing journey will also be a part of who I am. I mean I don't think I will ever be complacent about the abuse of kids, I don't think it's a matter of "Well these things happen you know".(page 39, 2081).

Self worth

Self as ugly/dirty.

Oh, I thought myself to be dirty, ugly, I believed that I didn't have the right to be ...ch... I had to earn it by working, uhh, taking care of others. Rescuing was a miracle to ...ch... (page 5, 249).

Oh, it {people getting close} was terrifying because then they might find out what I was really like and I believed that if anybody ever found out what I was really like, then I had to die because I was so ugly and evil and dirty and that's what I believed.(page 5, 263).

I have certainly struggled with my physical appearance, umm, part of what happened to me is that, because I have always believed myself to be ugly and unappealing or, if I thought I was, I might be appealing, that terrified me, that I've always tried to, most of the time, I've tried to look non-threatening, dowdy. So umm, and part of your question is reinforced by the, all the stuff in the media, that I believe that I could never measure up so I wouldn't try.(page 27, 1407).
Pretty directly connected (how views of body related to her views of self), when I hated myself I also thought that I was ugly and if I were physically attractive then it would only make it my fault that anything had happened to me or... but most of the time I just thought I was ugly, uhh, fat, blobby, ugly... until five years uhh, at one point I was hospitalized around eighty-seven pounds I was not diagnosed with anorexia that was before, I was around 20 years old, Umm, that was around the time when I was 18, it used to be one of my favourite ways of coping when things went wrong, I just couldn't eat. Umm, so how I was feeling, and how I was feeling about myself crossed over and how I felt about my appearance, but slowly, that's been one of the slowest ones to turn around is to believe that I'm not as ugly as I thought I was and my body is not as ugly as I thought it was. (page 27, 1423).

I don't think it's had a very positive influence, I'll tell you that much and as a result of being abused I grew up believing myself to be dirty, ugly, uhh, uhh, and I had no, I believed that I had no skills. I believed I didn't have the right to be alive, I believed I was stupid. I grew up with a lot and you know, I still struggle with a lot of stuff... ch... (page 40, 2131).

Shame/guilt/at fault.

... I find that whenever I have a batch of new memories, it takes some time for me to get back to knowing who this person called Elsie really is, like how much was... because quite often when I have the memory I go back to the feelings that I had and those feelings are that of shame, of guilt, uhh, pain, very, feeling very, I'm feeling very vulnerable and it takes time to get from being a young child in that position to being an adult who has friends that she can trust and people in her life were not going to hurt her... (page 8, 417).

Pretty directly connected (how views of body related to her views of self), when I hated myself I also thought that I was ugly and if I were physically attractive then it would only make it my fault that anything had happened to me... (page 27, 1423).

they (subconscious beliefs) didn't make a lot of sense in all kinds of ways, and I didn't remember yet. I started therapy before I started remembering, I didn't have any memories yet, I didn't have anything to attach it to and I was still, the stuff that I did remember, I was still at the place where it was never abusive because it happened to me so it was all my fault and I deserved it. (page 44, 2343).

(what enabled her to remember) I think what enabled me was when I started dealing with the stuff that I did remember and when I dealt with that in therapy then I came to understand that I was not totally responsible and it was not my fault that things happened to me uhh, that once I worked through a lot of that self blame and that guilt and shame around from the time I was fifteen on, then I also started remembering the younger stuff. (page 44, 2356).

I'm having trouble in therapy now because I'm having, I'm caught up into all this false memory stuff. The process of going through therapy has strongly influenced me and my therapist has influenced it to the extent that he has continued to insist
that it was not my fault that I was abused, even when I tried to explain to him why it was, umm, over and over and over. It had to be my fault, I did this, I dropped this, I said this...um, (page 45, 2392).

Oh, it was always, always, always...ch... I don't think I've ever had a memory or, the stuff that I did remember or the stuff that was repressed that I later remembered, I have never come to any of that without believing that it was totally my fault and my responsibility. (page 45, 2407).

Ongoing struggles with self-worth.

Nobody would want to talk to me, I'm totally useless, uhh, you know, what if they tell me to fuck off and die, umm, basic insecurity kinds of stuff, yeah. (things she says to herself in social settings) (page 32, 1704).

I believe that people are sincere when they tell me (that she is not socially inept), I just have trouble, I have trouble taking it in, I have trouble accepting that my view of reality may not have been the exact way. (page 33, 1760).

Pretty directly connected, when I hated myself I also thought that I was ugly and if I were physically attractive then it would only make it my fault that anything had happened to me or...but most of the time I just thought I was ugly, uhh, fat, blobby, ugly...until five years uhh, at one point I was hospitalized around eighty-seven pounds I was not diagnosed with anorexia that was before, I was around 20 years old, Umm, that was around the time when I was 18, it used to be one of my favourite ways of coping when things went wrong, I just couldn't eat. Umm, so how I was feeling, and how I was feeling about myself crossed over and how I felt about my appearance, but slowly, that's been one of the slowest ones to turn around is to believe that I'm not as ugly as I thought I was and my body is not as ugly as I thought it was...it's starting to change but it's not all the way changed. (page 27, 1423).

so that that gave me some belief that maybe I wasn't as stupid as I thought I was. Socially inept but not stupid. (laughs) (page 22, 1137).

And passing is ninety five percent, in my little world. For me to pass I need ninety five, except for when I need ninety nine (laughs). I asked somebody once to rate me on a scale from one to ten as a friend and I said to her...she started to answer, I said "That's a set up question because anything below twelve is a failure" (laughs). Yeah, I do those things, yeah. (page 22, 1173).

because most of the time I felt like a total failure as a human being, well some of the time. Umm, that feeling is still there but...if I am not certain what I'm doing, it's hard for me to hear that people think that I know what I'm doing. I at times still subscribe to this school, if I can do it anybody can do it and there is nothing special about doing this because it's an attribute I have. (page 20, 1035).

I only believe that about ten percent of the time (laughs)(that if people get close she will have to die because she is so ugly, dirty and evil) (page 6, 272).
Uh, yeah, those views (that she is ugly, dirty and evil) have changed a lot and they
do come back once and awhile, especially, I mean I was aware last night that I had
been really pushing myself too hard this last week and I had a little talk with
myself about if I don't sit down and find some time for myself I will be back there
again in another week, I'll be back hating myself.(page 6, 277).

When I get really tired it is usually a sign that I, that I am heading towards that, if
I get really tired and burnt out, I end up back in...I hate myself.(page 6, 288).

* These meaning units are from the same participant whose interview was
included in Appendix C.
Appendix I

Meaning units coded as representations of others

Representations of men

Hatred/distrust of men.

{being raped at 17}... was just another... my dad had an affair when I was 14 and all these things just kept confirming {her views of men as untrustworthy} and every time it would happen and I had trusted someone and you know, and some of the time you would say, "see, like were you that stupid? You knew this was going to happen..." Part of me would say, "I don't feel sorry for you, you deserved this, like how could you..." (page 35, lines 1871).

{in therapy}...I realized how severe and militant my feelings about men were... (page 54, lines 2853-2854).

I think from when I was abused and I think this was the hardest thing for me to deal with, was after that all my relationships changed. For one thing I learned to hate all men... (page 8, lines 430-431).

...the two men that I trusted most, I thought more of them than I did my own father, had done this. So I stopped trusting men, all men altogether.(page 9, lines 477-480).

I mean I hated men. And I did, I was extremely prejudice against all men, sooner or later they were all going to screw up and I was just convinced of this. I was convinced that they all had one thing on their mind, no one had any respect for me... (page 15, lines 758-763).

...as soon as you start trusting them they are going to do it.(page 18, lines 938-939).

... men as these people who just thought about sex and that was it and had no regard for people's feelings and treated them like objects. (page 54, lines 2862-2865).

... I did have this attitude before where all men were assholes... (page 35, lines 1854).

I was convinced my teachers were looking at me {in highschool and university}... I was convinced they were going to try and make a move on me...I was scared somebody was looking at me.

Representations of men changing.

And say you know, "Ok, {therapist} didn't screw up yet and my step-father and neither did my husband so maybe he is one of the ones that won't either. So now I just have two classes I don't just have bad, I have possibly good and possibly bad, which is a big jump from just bad, so...(page 37, lines 1949-1955).

...I guess the main thing is being able to trust {therapist} and my husband has just showed me that you know, not all men are bad. (page 20, lines 1064-1066).
...I don't hate all men anymore. (page 17, lines 906).

{in therapy learned to} apply my anger, my feelings appropriately, you know, to the right people instead of you know, every guy who walked in the door wasn't my uncle and then I finally realized that they don't all think the same, they are not all bad people (page 54, lines 2875).

... it is nicer when you can trust the other half of the population (page 20, 1070).

{in therapy} I finally realized that. They {men} don't all think the same, they are not all bad people.(page 54, lines 2880).

Representations of women

Women as weak and needy

I always saw women as kind of weak and pathetic and needy and those were all the things I didn't want to be anymore... (page 46, lines 2449-2452).

...women were greedy and weak and victims... (page 54, line 2862).

Representations of women changing.

the only positive things I have seen in women are things I've read and that sounds really really sad... (page 46, lines 2436-2438).

I feel really strong about strong women, you know women who have the power themselves and who have spoke out and you know, and stand up for women... (page 46, lines 2460-2463).

I saw them as professional women(women she worked with), you know, confident and strong and believed in the same things I did... (page 47, lines 2489-2491).

besides women I've read about or umm, read about or seen on TV, I haven't had any real positive women role models. (page 46, lines 2457).

Representations of others in general

Betrayal/everyone is bad.

...I had someone I could confide in and I went to see social workers and between them and my family, they convinced each other that it never happened and I made up the whole thing and I was forced to live in the house with my abuser for another eight years, I guess. Nothing did happen after that but I was still there and the fact that I had been betrayed by my mother and all these people... they tried to call it all sorts of other things to ease it for themselves (page 4, lines 180).
betrayal was a big theme for me. I was betrayed by my best friend, my bother... (Page 8-9, lines 431-433).

...I guess the thing that hurt the most was when I finally was able to confide in someone, it was my uncle because I loved him more than...I looked up to him like I looked up to no one, he was the only one who seemed interested in me going somewhere and you know... and the night that I told him about that, later on that night he molested me...and just really bad timing. (page 9, lines 462-470).

...I thought, you know, I am twenty years old, I'm you know, I'm not dumb, I know that everyone is not bad... (page 16, lines 839-841).

There was probably a lot of really good people out there, I simply just didn't give them a chance to... instead of seeing them as people, I saw them as men or women. And I actually kind of viewed both groups negatively. (page 54, lines 2856).

Now I can turn around and not see it like everyone is against me, but split up and look at the individual person and say well, this person has some real big problems here... (page 51, lines 2729-2733).

**Representations of specific others**

**Abusers and significant others.**

I have changed, I guess, now to the point where I am not afraid anymore and I think by doing that, you realize that the people who abused you for those years, they are pathetic, they are weak people and you don't see that, I don't think, until you go into therapy, but they are (page 4, lines 166-172).

I have been able to forgive him (brother)... (page 40, lines 2131).

I think I'll always be a little angry but I think therapy has helped me to see the whole picture instead of just that one little part, you know to see what was happening to my Mom and to see what was happening to everybody involved and it helps, it doesn't make what they did better but it helps to ease it a little for me, it helps me to at least try to understand it a little more. (page 6, lines 282).

... they did it because they were screwed up themselves you know. (page 6, lines 304).

I've lost a lot of respect for my Dad, I've also lost a lot of respect for a lot of them (page 7, lines 364).

You know I look at my uncle now and I think anybody can see that this man is sick, ... he is one of those cases where it is not even hard to believe that he would do this, he's just a really, he should be locked up, he is just an absolutely sick man (page 18, lines 953).

We are starting over (her and her brother)... therapy has made me realize that, like for my brother, he was a child too, he really didn't understand what he was doing and I have been able to forgive him (page 40, lines 2122).
And I am no longer afraid of him, he is very very pathetic (her uncle) (page 41, lines 2156).

...just simply accept them [family members] for how they were, you know, they weren't going to change (page 44, lines 2350).

He [father] never is going to try to understand what happened and I've just I've learned finally to accept that, that he isn't going to change.(page 8, lines 406).

He [father] is not going to change, I have accepted that... (page 28, lines 1503-1504).

She is not going to be a mom, like the kind of Mom I want to be there, but I can accept {that} (page 30-31, lines 1612).

my parents are really weak and pathetic people and I have been able to accept that....They are just simply not capable of it {parenting} (page 40, lines 2134).

I've learned to accept that my mom is weak and my dad is never going to be a father and these things were hard things to accept, but I am really glad that I did.(page 40, lines 2149).
Appendix J

Meaning units coded as

representations of relationships

Relationships with men

Relationship with father(perpetrator)repeated later in life.

Well, I do think it {sexual abuse} has influenced me immensely! Um, I think it was also part of a lot of other abuse. Um, that I have discussed earlier. And it wasn't separate. And it was all experienced um, and then reexperienced in other relationships. Um, and I feel that it has um made me discard my, or it did at that time made me discard my sense of um unique um contribution, or my uniqueness in terms of importance in this world. I never felt that um of course, I thought that virginity was overrated, um, which in some respects I think it is! Um, however, what I lost out of that was the notion of the gift of intimacy that I um could give my intimacy to myself and to someone else in a very um special way. I had no notion of that whatsoever!(page 55, lines 2927).

I did make sure in a way, not not that I knew it but there were people in my life that hurt me, there was always someone that hurt me {connects to father hurting her}.(page 59, lines 3150).

And almost all my relationships with men were extensions of it {her being sexually abused by her father} um I would meet men who would you know find me sexually attractive and would think that they were pretty hot stuff and I would enjoy ah putting them down, denying that the type of persons that I would choose were perhaps, one guy was in a wheelchair !...A lot of the people that I had sex with were tragedies in a way personally that I had no personal connection with, there was no need to have sex with them at all so that was something that was obviously from , some of my others were all to do with the first one {father}, all all the...men were to do with ah {my father} in some ways. It was either because of that that I was behaving the way I was, that I was connecting the way I was.(page 81, lines 4353).

The others that have been in my life have been almost repeat performances of Dad, a lot of similarities. I feel now that this man that I married, I was almost going to say the poor man, but you know, this individual that I married is almost as an individual insignificant! That I feel that if it hadn't been him, it would have been someone like him. I honestly believe that um I wouldn't have thought anything else was love. I would have identified that kind of abuse with love. And I mean let's face it, that was imprinted pretty young, all this I love you, I love you, I love you as he's hurting and hurting and hurting. And then seeing it all my life , every part of it, the violence and the enmeshing and the mess of it all and still being very functional in society and having reason to think that they were accomplished and so on, we were really not scum of the earth! You know, this we were elevated! (page 81, lines 4327).

Well I mean I ended up with a guy who was very very similar {to her father}. Who would just shred me and I'd you know, felt that I could love a situation into the right place with
my immense amount of power as a rescuer and as a you know (laughs) lover, sort of thing. I could be the most loving and take it all! I didn't know there were things that were unacceptable that I didn't, and those would be unacceptable in any case from any one and would therefore deter you from the relationship. I didn't know that! (page 51, lines 2701).

The self had to be changed for others/accept the unacceptable.

I don't have the um driving desire to change that I really was the definition of my life for so many years, to just change into whatever it was that somebody needed me to be in order to be acceptable, you know? (page 26, lines 1356).

I was taught to accept the unacceptable (especially in relation to men). And I accepted it! In fact, I I not only accepted it, I remembered it and I forgave it! I told myself I forgave it {abuse by husband})...(page 51, lines 2718).

Well I mean I ended up with a guy who was very very similar {to her father}. Who would just shred me and I'd you know, felt that I could love a situation into the right place with my immense amount of power as a rescuer and as a you know (laughs) lover, sort of thing. I could be the most loving and take it all! I didn't know there were things that were unacceptable that I didn't, and those would be unacceptable in any case from any one and would therefore deter you from the relationship. I didn't know that! (page 51, lines 2701).

And ah my concept was that we just I just keep trying , I had to keep trying, keep trying {in her relationship with husband}, and I just hadn't tried hard enough. It was something I must have missed. There was something about me that had to be changed(page 7, lines 350).

The self had to be changed...To the point where and I felt enthusiastic about those changes (laughs). I was right into doing whatever it was I had to do to make this marriage work, including quitting my job...but when you're in an abusive situation it's not an accurate perception of the scene and I didn't see actually until ah my family doctor had examined me... I was quite naive um absolutely naive! It was astounding for a woman who travelled all over the world um I would wide eyed, sit across from my doctor and say you know, "my husband was under an awful lot of stress at work and um this wasn't his fault that he had strangled me, I mean after all I had burned the broccoli that night, he had been under so much pressure at work and then I burned the broccoli and then how can anyone stand that? Of course one thing led to another and the next thing you know ah I was strangled (laughs) you know, passing out from being strangled". And he basically woke me up um by saying that ah that this was going to damage the children. (page 7, lines 370).

I was, you know, very optimistic. I felt there was nothing I couldn't do with the amount of love I had in me and that was the thing I was going to love everything in the whole wide world into the right shape and the right place, it was going to be a radiance and a glow, an irresistible magnetism and I was wonderful because I had all of this in me... I think that concept is actually a little um skewed and I didn't realize it. It was one of my survivor techniques. I didn't know that but it was something that I had worked hard at. My Mom did too, it was I was really modelling her um, you know, if you just try enough and just love enough and just this enough, then everything will work out fine. And no matter what is
being done, no matter how unacceptable it may seem at that moment, you can forget it, you can forgive it instantly, it's over, and pretend like it never happened and you go on fresh, and you're fresh again, and you're fresh again, fresh again, so it's amazing how much you can go on day by day, um forgiving and forgetting. (page 13, lines 658).

I don't think he (husband) really thought that I was ever going to have a backbone. I was so much of a pleaser. And I see myself now as just being like a dog waiting for him to stroke my head so that I could wag and that would be my existence then would be, you know, verified but it was, I was really really to that level by the time the marriage was over... (page 14, lines 729).

Associate love and violence in relationships with men.

...it was a lot of sick, what I now realize as the cycle of abuse, cycle of violence (her marriage). I didn't realize that at the time. I just thought it was an exciting up and down relationship, passionate and um (laughs) a lot like...I had seen a lot of that in my home (in parent's relationship and when her father was abusing her). And um but I thought this was the way it was really. I didn't, I thought this was real love. (page 4, lines 187).

The others that have been in my life have been almost repeat performances of Dad, a lot of similarities. I feel now that this man that I married, I was almost going to say the poor man, but you know, this individual that I married is almost as an individual insignificant! That I feel that if it hadn't been him, it would have been someone like him. I honestly believe that um I wouldn't have thought anything else was love. I would have identified that kind of abuse with love. And I mean let's face it, that was imprinted pretty young, all this I love you, I love you, I love you as he's hurting and hurting and hurting. And then seeing it all my life, every part of it, the violence and the enmeshing and the mess of it all and still being very functional in society and having reason to think that they were accomplished and so on, we were really not scum of the earth! You know, this we were elevated! (page 81, lines 4327).

Sexuality

Abuse set her up for more abuse/no boundaries.

so this child sexual abuse gave me a very callous um, I had no knowledge of my um, gentle, like my own vulnerability or anything like that. That was absolutely taken from me, I just was almost tough as nails with regard to sex. You know they could basically fuck me any which way and it wouldn't matter to me, I wouldn't care if I'd, you know, it just didn't matter! And it was like um, too bad because it was more and more abuse. (page 56, lines 2993).

I always did expect to have a good sexual life in my relationships with men, I wanted to and felt it was important, um it was extremely important in our family, That was a major thing, was ah you know, it certainly the most important thing in any relationships between a man and a woman as far as I knew when I grew up, um it was a constant theme and I certainly realized it was my job to please sexually. (page 47, lines 2497).
...and I was really great at pleasing, I thought I was probably better than anybody else ah, in terms of sexual options that would be perfectly alright with me or anything, although I wasn't fortunately put into a situation where I had to do anything like whips and that sort of thing, there's no sadistic stuff I've ever done but um, ya, Thank God I never had that experience cause it would have been even more damaging to me, terrible but I probably would have. It was not as though I had any boundaries or anything, it just didn't come up. Thank God. But I mean, as far as any kind of penetration is concerned or any amount of anal or oral or anything else - I mean I had no problem with any of it! It's like, um, I don't like now any anal intercourse but I can remember as a young woman um asking my doctor matter of factly and calmly if that was, you know if there were any medical problems with that. Um I saw his face and I saw he was surprised at how blaze I was being, and I basically thought oh he's a bit of an uptight prude, obviously not liberal, you know? (laughs). (page 47, lines 2506).

I was really um boundaryless in my sexual life but I expected to have a good sex life and I did. That was one thing I had, I had orgasms without difficulty and my Mom had told me that this is what you do is when you're partner is coming in you know if they were in the bathroom, you ah masturbate until you peaked then you're going to be ready for whatever they do. You'd be more into it. So she trained me to, you know in certain techniques that most mothers don't tell their kids. I didn't know that. (page 48, lines 2530).

I I practised also casual sexual relationships, um and felt no guilt. None! Um, I didn't even think it was uh unusual, I thought it was um my prerogative as a woman, to have as casual as any man and um somehow in that I lost my um I had no, I never developed the realization of my own, um you know the real beauty and the really marvellous intimate connection that can happen between two people in a very meaningful way. And I have discovered that with my present partner and its a very beautiful thing. (page 56, lines 2963).

**Power over men.**

I liked men. I felt comfortable around men. I've always had a skill with men, ah course I didn't realize how much of it was sexual and how much of that was working as a dynamic and ah just the little comments, I was always so good about that, ah innuendos and jokes and ah I was one of the best! And now, I just find that completely pitiful but at the time it was a skill I had developed but ah my relationship with men now is more cautious, ah less trusting than it was, I was I had to have a sense of power over men with sex. Um, whether it be my casual conversations, my party repertoire, or whatever it's called when you you know do the little flirtatious and slightly lewd conversation, cocktail conversations kind of thing um if it would make you obviously attractive to men in that way, ah I was good at that. And it came very naturally and then if I felt like indulging myself I had no reason not to in most circumstances um and I felt triumphant in that, somehow power, that was one way I was more powerful um but it was really kind of foolish...I don't feel powerful regarding that at all[now]. I think that's um a false notion which was only useful for a very brief time in my life, it didn't serve me well. (page 83, lines 4467).

And almost all my relationships with men were extensions of it {her being sexually abused by her father} um I would meet men who would you know find me sexually attractive and would think that they were pretty hot stuff and I would enjoy ah putting
them down, denying that the type of persons that I would choose were perhaps, one guy was in a wheelchair!...A lot of the people that I had sex with were tragedies in a way personally that I had no personal connection with, there was no need to have sex with them at all so that was something that was obviously from, some of my others were all to do with the first one (father), all all the...men were to do with ah (my father) in some ways. It was either because of that that I was behaving the way I was, that I was connecting the way I was.(page 81, lines 4353).

I always did, like when I was a [job title] it was mostly women, and I got along really well with them, I liked women. So I liked women all along, worked well with them, but I felt powerful with men in the past.(page 84, lines 4502).

And I also feel vulnerable because of my sexual abuse and the fact that it's not a secret, that I'm discounted more easily than when I was a um basic sex object and I was a babe you know? That gave me a lot more um power over these jerks basically (laughs).(page 84, lines 4516).

Relationships in general

the people that I surround myself with now are very very different from the people that I have surrounded myself with in the past before I got therapy. For example, I was really caught up in what I call triangular relationships, ah, I don't know if you're familiar with that concept? Victim, persecutor, rescuer? I liked being the rescuer um instead of a victim, that made me comfortable to feel that I was a rescuer. And ah I used to feel that I was good that way. Ah I would really really want to be helping other people to a nuisance level, you know (laughs), not that I realized it at the time. I didn't even know about that. But I saw myself in this triangle thing and almost every relationship in my life was on a point, well I couldn't think of one that wasn't.(page 45, lines 2373).

Self-determined in relationships now.

I guess knowing...how I'm meeting my own needs through that relationship. I know that now, I know what my needs are and so I know that certain relationships meet certain needs. They don't have to ah meet all of my needs.(page 37, lines 1977)

I would say now my relationships are not triangular at all. Ah they all are on the presumption that we have personal power, that each individual has personal power, so I don't need to rescue anybody at all, they can rescue themselves, and so can I and I certainly wouldn't be a victim to anybody. I have something unfortunate that happened to me ah I don't see myself as a victim, um, which doesn't mean that I couldn't be mugged or something but um I would handle that in such a way that they would be accountable, um.(page 46, lines 2427).

MY own desire, my own change(makes relationships end). like I don't have perpetual relationships with something that doesn't add to my life. I don't have any relationship if something doesn't add to my life....(page 52, lines 2761).

So therefore, when someone else thinks differently, do I need to feel um furious, or degraded, or humiliated? Ah Like I had to really think all of that through and realize why
I didn't. I didn't have to feel degraded (for having different views than others).(page 53, lines 2837).

I don't need to test everybody today in my life ah in respect to my family of origin um at all! My family of origin is not something that's always in my thoughts, its hardly in my life, I have a life, you know? (page 82, lines 4403).

You know I still think of them (family) of course, but it's not in terms of decisions that I make regarding other relationships or or regarding myself(page 82, lines 4411).

Ongoing changes of self in relationships

I get to be who I want to be now. I am! You know? Its, well I'm not perfect, but then again I basically think I like who I am and I'll keep working on certain things you know, that I'd like to refine as life goes on, I'd like to think that I made a small improvement here and there....Oh, like I realize now it still is tough when people don't necessarily um like me, that's okay. You know? It is something that's still hard to take because I like being liked, you know? Um, and I probably do work at it a little harder than a lot of people do. I'm still not really, I'm not really comfortable with being not liked, it still is tough to take but I'm starting to realize now that if people don't like me that might be their problem. You know? Let's face it. Maybe they're even having a bad day, um, something might be wrong in their life, ah they're not receptive to someone who's feeling great. (laughs), you know? And I tend to see it more in terms of not what's wrong with me but the possibility that something might not be right for them.(page 26, lines 1356).

Pivotal experiences

Proper love - corrective experiences.

They [partner's family] loved me, ah and it was obvious. V [partner] loved me and that was less obvious to me because I really didn't trust that really in some regards. I liked it and it felt safe with V but I didn't really realize , it's taken me years in many respects to have that develop um that's got to be significant you know being loved properly (laughs). Not being criticised when there's you know, obviously every human being has plenty that you could be criticize.(page 88, lines 4704).

I've had proper love I would say...being accepted by Vs parents so readily when here I was a a separated woman with 3 little preschoolers and their son is falling in love with me. And I mean think that shows a lot of what they're like as a family that I would have been so readily accepted and loved by them.(page 88, lines 4688).

I got that and then you know when you're loved you can start feeling loveable, it's easier isn't it...(page 88, lines 4725).

Getting out of that ah abusive marriage um having V sort of teach me how to stand up and not be abused on the telephone for example if my ex phoned me over and over , I would I would be on the phone , I would be listening to it, I would allow it! I didn't even know that I could put the phone down and not listen to this if this is what you've got to say, I'm not
listening to abuse, this sort of thing, basically V had to tell me to say "Fuck off", I can now say it (laugh)(page 88, lines 4734).

I went over to Holland and met with some people that were really truly ah spiritual and living their love of God in their life and they just loved me and had me live with them {experiences that influenced her views of self and others and her views of the impact of the abuse}(page 86, lines 4611).