“We’re Not Victims”:

Women’s Use of Violence in Their Intimate Relationships

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ABSTRACT

"We're Not Victims!": Women's Use of Violence in Their Intimate Relationships

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This doctoral research examines women who engage in or initiate violence in their intimate relationships. Through qualitative in-depth interviews with twenty-five women who were mandated to undergo treatment for intimate partner violence and participant observation of the support groups, I examined the reasons and justifications used by women to explain why they resort to violence as a strategy in conflict with their intimate partners. An integral part of this study was also the manner in which women reflect on, and shape their gendered identities, specifically as female perpetrators of intimate partner violence. The subsequent comprehensive analysis of the participant's narratives, depicts their experiences of IPV, illustrates how these women view their world and how violence mediates the manner in which they construct and shape their gendered identities. The narratives also highlight the limited discourse within which female perpetrators of intimate partner violence use to frame their behaviour.

This study situates itself within a body of literature that is polemical in nature and ideologically divided with respect to women's use of violence in their intimate relationships. On the one hand, intimate partner violence is understood to be heavily gendered and asymmetrical. This paradigm argues that a patriarchal and male-dominated society and culture sustains male violence against women and when women resort to violence toward a male partner, it is either reactive or in self-defence. On the other hand, proponents of gender symmetry consider intimate partner violence to be gender neutral where women are as likely as men to perpetrate violence. Gender is not considered a significant factor and when women commit acts of violence, they use similar motivations and justifications to men. This study situates itself somewhere in between these two perspectives, i.e. that women are as likely as men to perpetrate intimate partner violence but suggest that gender is a mediating factor.

The findings from this study reveal that women are capable of a significant level of violence and coercive control in their relations with their non-violent intimate partners. In contrast, self-defence or retaliation was not a causal factor in the participant's justification for resorting to violence. The narratives of the women in this study provide an essential insight into their subjective experiences of intimate partner violence, the manner in which women construct their gendered identity as perpetrators rather than victims of IPV, and the processes that result in their use of violence and aggressive behaviour. Therefore, although intimate partner violence is a human issue, a gendered response in the form of treatment, intervention, policy and protocol is required. This study provides evidence-based and empirical research that can serve to inform gender appropriate protocols for female perpetrators of IPV.

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the dissertation

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of family violence in North America. Although rates have decreased over the last ten years, it still remains a pervasive social problem with major public health outcomes. Moreover, the long-term impact of IPV is "linked to intergenerational violence and detrimental physical, emotional and economic impacts on victims, witnesses and society as a whole" (Burczycka and Conroy 2018: 56). The most recent General Social Survey (GSS) in Canada, which was carried out in 2014, revealed that during the past five years, a total of 342,000 women and 418,000 men self-disclosed as being victims of IPV (Burczycka and Conroy 2018: 5). Police reports for 2016 showed that there were 86,405 police-reported victims of IPV in Canada, of whom 57,796 were female, and 28,609 were male (Burczycka and Conroy 2018: 47). Many of these were victims of minor physical assaults such as pushing, shoving, or slapping and were not subject to major injury. However, in respect to severe injury, 6,838 females and 5,868 males [1]were victims of a major assault, which has been defined as "assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm" and "assault that wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the victim" (Burczycka and Conroy 2018: 47).

Given that only fewer than one in five of all victims of IPV report their injuries, accurate figures are likely to be much higher (Ibrahim and Burczycka 2016). In addition, since men are less likely than women to report IPV to the police (Dutton and White 2013, Ibrahim and Burczycka 2016), higher numbers of female victims are represented in police-reported violence than in victimization surveys such as the General Social Survey (GSS) (Beaupre 2015, Brooks et al. 2017, Sinha 2015). This is also reflected in the above quoted figures. However, in spite of the comparatively lower incidence of police-reported female perpetrated IPV, these statistics do show that the number of male victims who sustain major injury as a result of violence perpetrated by their intimate partner is significant.

Acts of violence by an intimate partner that include physical assault, harassment, threats,

[1] In the United States, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) (2015) confirm that 21.4% women and 14.9% men report experiencing severe violence by an intimate partner over their lifetime. See table for full results page 217. (https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/2015NISVSdatabrief.html).

sexual assault, threatening phone calls and intimidation are given special consideration under the Criminal Code of Canada. Section 718.2(a) (ii) of the Code makes it an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes when an offence involves the abuse of a spouse or common-law partner (Beaupre 2015: 4). However, unlike other criminal acts of violence, both victims and perpetrators often either consider IPV a private and personal issue and not a criminal act or perceive the violence as not being abusive (Mihalic and Elliot 1997). IPV is therefore both complex and unique because of the victim's possible emotional connection to the abuser and the often-cyclical nature of the violence (Sinha 2013). The manner in which IPV is internalized and defined means that victims of IPV are often reluctant to report the violence or injuries sustained, are less likely to press charges against the perpetrator and are often unwilling to leave their violent relationship.

Since the 1970's, a robust body of research has recognized that men and women are equally as likely, or that women are even more likely than men, to be perpetrators or victims of intimate partner violence (Archer 2000, Gelles and Straus 1988). However, regardless of this compelling evidence, the level of women's perpetration of IPV remains controversial and contested and to some extent belittled. Two groups guide this polarizing debate (Winstock 2011). On the one hand, family violence researchers claim gender symmetry in the perpetration of IPV, with both men and women equally likely to perpetrate violence (Straus and Gelles 1986: Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 2006) and on the other hand, violence-against-women advocates argue that IPV is gendered and predominantly male violence against women, with patriarchy implicated as the principal causal factor (Dobash and Dobash 1979, 2004: Tjaden and Thoennes 2000: Winstock 2007).

Some activists and researchers argue that by acknowledging female violence against men or the "battered-husband syndrome" as a serious social problem, funding allocated to shelters for battered women's or services provided to women will be reduced (Straus 2006). Echoing this concern, White et.al. argue that recognizing women's IPV does have serious public policy implications, "such a message is harmful in its potential to undermine empathy and public support for the plight of female survivors of male violence and to deflate the momentum of efforts to change the structural conditions that support violence against women" (2000: 694). However, acknowledging and theorizing women's capacity for violence should not be inconsistent with feminist objectives (Abrams 2016, White and Kowalski 1994). Deconstructing gendered assumptions of female passivity and their lack of power is congruent with feminism

and focusing on the sociocultural conditions and contextualizing women's use of IPV is critical in reducing IPV in general (Brush 2005). Victimization is not a zero-sum game and all victims of IPV, regardless of gender, should benefit from support and assistance (Brush 2005, McHugh et al. 2005). Synnott maintains that, "it is necessary, then, to consider this perspective of men's lives - and deaths - not to "out-victimize" women but to recognize our unique and shared adversities" (2009: 170, see also Straus 2009a). While women may be profoundly impacted by IPV throughout their lifetime, so may men.

Although a significant number of men constitute victims of IPV in general and almost a comparative number are victims of major assault, both the male victims and their female perpetrators have received little or no attention and few programmes exist to meet their specific requirements (Holtzworth-Munroe 2005, Stith et al. 2004). On the one hand, male perpetrators of IPV and their female victims have been comprehensively covered by existing IPV literature and research and benefit from extensive support services. On the other hand, however, male victims and female perpetrators struggle to find appropriate support or services (Abrams 2016, Pearson 1997).

Statistics confirm that IPV is the most common form of violence in general, specifically for female victims, accounting for 33% of the female victims of all violent crime (Burczycka and Conroy 2018: 41). Given the evidence, this study does acknowledge that female victims of IPV are more likely to be injured, experience greater fear and trauma symptoms as a result of IPV (Archer 2000, Caldwell, Swan and Woodbrown 2012, Hamberger and Guse 2002, Phelan et al. 2005). However, it has also been noted that male victims of IPV account for 18% of the male victims of all violent crime (Burczycka and Conroy 2018: 41). In 2014, and over the previous five years, a total of 5,868 male victims also experienced a major assault resulting in severe injuries perpetrated by a female partner. In spite of all the evidence, however, men's victimization and women's perpetration of IPV is contested and continues to be rationalized and accounted for, by references to self-defence or retaliation (Allen-Collinson 2009). As the data from this study demonstrates, rather than a unitary explanation for their violence, like men, women perpetrate IPV for a multiplicity of reasons and motivations.

This research is therefore driven by the literature on female perpetrated IPV that highlights a need for providing a contextual analysis and developing an understanding of the etiology of female violence (Dasgupta 1999, DeKeseredy 2006, DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2014, Dobash

and Dobash 2004). While there is a comprehensive body of knowledge on women who kill their partners and male violence against women, scholars and researchers, such as Dobash and Dobash argue, “to date, there has been very little in-depth research about women's violence to male partners and it is difficult, if not impossible, to consider this debate without such knowledge” (2004: 324). Evidence-based research about the nature of women’s use of violence in their intimate relationships is needed to inform those who implement policy and attend to resources for IPV. Although literature on violence by women does exist, there is, in general, a dearth of theorizing and qualitative data regarding women’s use of IPV.

I do not intend to add to the body of literature that questions gender symmetry in IPV or women's propensity for violence in IPV. I aim rather, to shed a much-needed light on not only the motivation and consequences of women's violence, but also on their subjective gendered identity as perpetrators rather than victims. In other words, this dissertation attempts to explore what motivates women to abuse their intimate partners; and by thus doing, indulging in a behaviour that is considered to be incongruous with feminine norms (Messerschmidt 2002). I locate this analysis within the emerging body of literature that positions women as agentic individuals, and suggest that we ought to redefine commonly held assumptions on male and female violence of IPV in general (Anderson 2005, 2013: Brush 2005: Frieze 2005: Morrisey 2003: Renzetti 1999, 2013).

This research is exploratory and is one of the first qualitative studies in North America to examine female perpetrated intimate partner violence through the use of in-depth, informal interviews and participant observation of support meetings for female perpetrators of IPV. For the purpose of this study, intimate partner violence (or IPV) is defined as the use of physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse within a heterosexual, intimate relationship. The findings of this study will be of use to researchers, counsellors, and policymakers who are interested in the design and implementation of treatment programs for female perpetrators, aimed at reducing the incidence of IPV.

Research questions and objectives

By conducting qualitative, informal, and in-depth interviews with twenty-five women mandated to attend a support group for female perpetrators of IPV and by observing the weekly support groups, I explore the following overarching research question:

- In what ways do women experience intimate partner violence as perpetrators of violence against their male partners?

And also two sub-questions:

- What are the motives, meanings, and justifications given by the women in their subjective narratives?
- How do these women's explanations for the acts of violence they commit against their intimate male partners contest or reinforce dominant sociocultural gender norms of femininity?

The participants' narratives depicting their experiences of IPV illustrate how these women view their world and how violence mediates the manner in which they construct their gendered identities. Few attempts have been made to investigate the ways in which women recount their actions and reflect on their gendered identities, specifically in the case of female perpetrators of IPV (Anderson 2007). Social and cultural gender norms about IPV construct women as passive and vulnerable victims, by arguing that violence by women is solely reactive, either in the form of self-defence, in defence of the child or children, or in retaliation, thereby denying women any form of agency (Lamb 1999, Morrissey 2003, Pearson 1997, Renzetti 1999, Sarantakos 2004, Straus 2006). However, the women who take part in this study offer accounts that contest prevailing views on IPV.

Traits of femininity such as passivity and nurturance are thought to be socially and culturally constructed (Burbank 1994, Scheper-Hughes 1992). Furthermore, these assumptions preserve gendered representations of violence and stereotypes of gender and contest women's capacity for their use of violence. Violent women are perceived as transgressing the boundaries of traditional gender norms. Notwithstanding the notion that feminist and sociocultural constructions of gender have developed into more complex and performance-oriented concepts, research on intimate partner violence continues to theorize gender within dichotomous categories (McHugh et al. 2005: 332, also see Anderson 2005, Brush 2005). White and Dutton refer to the dualistic nature of theorizing women's perpetration of IPV and claim, "…treating female violence as though it cannot be the equivalent of male violence is ultimately condescending to women. Women's equality means equal capacity for violence as well. It is time that the research evidence factored in to what are, at present, mere stereotypes about gender and violence" (2013: 114). Moreover, there has been a systematic failure to "take gender as a theoretical problem"

(Anderson 2013: 317) within research on the perpetration of IPV. Therefore, a further aim of this study is to explore how these women construct their gendered identity in spite of being the aggressor.

This study builds on the limited work that reveals the subjectivities of female perpetrators of IPV, yet problematizes the prevailing research that perpetuates the notion that women's IPV can be explained as primarily a result of self-defence or retaliation (Swan and Snow 2006). Rather than focus on which sex engages in more violence, this study sheds light on the subjective and a much-needed contextual analysis and understanding of women's violent actions within their intimate relationships, which reveals the gendered and complex nature of IPV. More significantly, according to McHugh and colleagues, reductionist explanations for IPV do not account for all women's experiences with IPV. They succinctly argue:

> "Against the conceptualization of intimate violence as a single truth or as a debate between polarized positions, and [we] reject either/or dichotomies as simplistic and not helpful…[that] limits our conceptual framework and results in tunnel vision. Rather, we conceptualize interpersonal violence as a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic aspect of human interaction that occurs in multiple forms and patterns" (2005: 323).

Gender plays a meaningful role in our everyday lives and the manner in which women experience IPV. Ferraro claims that current discourse and debate on women's use of violence in their intimate relationships relies on "outdated data and assumptions about masculinity and femininity that are unsupported by current and reliable sources" (2013: 146). With this in view, this study highlights the ways in which women maintain, negotiate, or resist normative social and cultural constructs of their gender in the expression of violence within their intimate relationships. Accordingly, this dissertation contributes to the emerging scholarship that interrogates women's motivations and justifications for their use of violence towards their intimate partners.

A woman's claim to victim status prevents her from assuming responsibility as a perpetrator and similarly can prevent her from seeking treatment and services that are analogous to those already provided for a male perpetrator of IPV. It is, however, critical to note that the primary intervention protocol for men, the Duluth model, which is based on male patriarchal values of power, control and domination, has been found to have little or no impact on their perpetration of IPV with high rates of recidivism (Bates et al. 2018, Straus 2014, Stuart 2005). According to Dutton and Corvo, "the Duluth model of cognition and behaviour is inaccurate and simplistic and fails to capture the true complexity of the multi-layered dyadic

interaction of individuals" (2007: 662). Moreover, there is the notion that patriarchal beliefs rather than motivations such as anger or jealousy are the basis for resorting to violence thus disregarding evidence-based knowledge and relying on one-dimensional explanations for IPV (Straus 2009b: 564). As my data reveals, the motivations and justifications for IPV are multiple and complex. Therefore, in order for service providers to have evidence-based knowledge to assist female perpetrators of IPV, this empirical study goes beyond the male perpetrator/female victim construct. Besides, even though women fail to inflict as much harm on their victims, they are far from harmless. Women are more likely to use weapons, such as knives or objects, to mitigate differences in size and strength or as in the experience of two of the participants in this study - pour boiling water over her partner, or use a baseball bat (Straus 2010).

McHugh et al. (2005) contend that not only research is limited by the polemics of the discourse related to women's use of violence but more significantly, so is the implementation of intervention and policy for female perpetrators (Hamel 2010: 82). This study acknowledges the manner in which male violence against women has reproduced and preserved the larger structural inequalities between men and women. Moreover, the data from this study suggests that gender is fundamental to understanding, and accounting for female perpetrated violence. With this in view, if we do not study women's acts of IPV and male victims, we risk reproducing patriarchal values and to re-inscribe normative gender scripts. Thus, by furthering our knowledge of the dynamics of IPV, specifically women's perpetration of violence within their intimate relationships, we not only highlight women's agency, but also offer families the prospect of living together in a violence-free environment and take a concrete step towards ending the intergenerational cycle of abuse.

Organization of the dissertation

This dissertation is organized into seven main chapters. In chapter two, I review the literature highlighting the polarizing debates and controversies surrounding women's perpetration of IPV in the current research. The emphasis is on the family violence perspective, the violence-against-women paradigm and gender as well as on the consequences and risk factors of female perpetration of IPV.

Chapter three offers a detailed description of the methodology and research processes adopted for this study. I outline the individual field sites, the population sample, and the data collection processes. Next, in line with grounded theory practices, I explain the data analyses that

forms the basis for the theoretical framework outlined in chapter five.

Chapter four interrogates and considers the reflexive challenges inherent to qualitative research and those aspects that impact the processes, such as gender, and the potential for emotional harm to both the participant and the researcher when studying violence. I also discuss the limitations of this study.

In Chapter five, I examine the theoretical framework for analysing the participant's narratives. Since grounded theory forms the basis for analysis in this study, I therefore discuss the relevant theoretical framework that connects the various, and significant concepts that emerged from the participant's narratives related to female perpetration of IPV.

In Chapter six, I introduce the participants and pay particular attention to their background information. I offer a comprehensive thematic analysis of the participant's narratives, including excerpts from the data obtained from interviews and participant observation of the support groups for female perpetrators of IPV.

Lastly, in Chapter seven, I discuss the significant findings that emerged from the research. This study also evoked many other questions related to female perpetrated IPV and avenues for future research.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a sensitive topic, fraught with controversies related to measurement, numbers, typologies, and ideologies. Particularly controversial is the issue of female perpetrated IPV. The literature therefore is representative of the often-polemical nature of this heavily debated issue. Accordingly, Ferraro, a notable feminist scholar and researcher, has been critical to scholars on both sides of the debate, many of whom, she argues, "rely on outdated data and assumptions about masculinity and femininity that are unsupported by current and reliable research (2013: 146). I attempt to integrate the literature and the key debates in order to provide an understanding of why having a broader knowledge of female perpetrators of IPV, based on empirical evidence is important.

In this chapter, I begin by presenting the ethnographic literature on IPV from an anthropological perspective. Secondly, I review the sociological literature on IPV and discuss the contrasting perspectives of scholars. On the one hand, the violence-against-women perspective suggests that IPV is primarily male perpetrated and therefore gender asymmetrical in nature. On the other hand, family violence scholars focus on violence against all members of the family unit but argue that women are as likely as men to perpetrate IPV and support the notion of gender symmetry. Thirdly, I discuss the Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) developed by Murray Straus and the controversies surrounding this scale, and present some of the data. Fourthly, I discuss the debate surrounding one of the most noteworthy differences between these two perspectives, i.e. the significance given by the violence-against-women scholars to self-defence as the primary justification for women's perpetrations of IPV. Lastly, this section gives an overview of the limited scholarly research with male victims of IPV.

Since the 1970's, the literature on male perpetrated IPV has been well developed and has a long history that documents and links women's abuse by men to the socio-political system (Dobash and Dobash 1992, George 1994, Straus 2006, Synnott 2009, Yllo and Straus 1990). This increase in the awareness of, and research into IPV, has resulted in a decrease in the number of female victims and a reduced tolerance of male violence against women (Cotter 2014). However, the politicization of IPV and the discourse associated with the "war against women"[2] is

[2] President Bush delivered a speech to the American Association of University Women on June 26th 1989, stating, "this war against women must stop" (Los Angeles Times, June 27th, 1989).

fundamental to problematizing the acknowledgement of women as perpetrators or men as victims, and limits our understanding of the dynamics of violence within intimate relationships (Graham-Kevan 2007a). For instance, violence-against-women advocates documented women who were beaten, severely injured and under the controlling behaviours of their male intimate partners, labelling them "battered wives". As a result, Leonore Walker's (1979) text *The Battered Woman* was one of the most frequently quoted texts of the 1980's (Frieze: 2005: 117). Sharon Lamb (1999), a leading scholar in feminist theory, posits that this narrow concept of IPV however has oversimplified a complex issue. She argues:

> "The act of labelling and the exercise of power to label or to call a deed a deed come not only from 'the patriarch' or from men. They are embedded in social relationships and also internalized in women including those who are victimized. This means that women are imprisoned in cultural constructions of their victimization imposed from within as well as without" (1999: 4).

This concept continues to serve to reinforce traditional and binary gender norms of women as passive, helpless and vulnerable victims of male violence (Abrams 2016, Russell 2013). Female violence or aggression against men, in contrast, has received less attention from academics and has commonly failed to integrate theory and qualitative data (Frieze 2005: 200, also see Renzetti 1999). As such, the prevailing discourse on IPV reflects a narrow interpretation of victim or perpetrator (Miller 2005). Therefore, when women reject the label of victim, as do many of the participants in this study, they have a limited language from which to claim their own identity or explain their experiences as perpetrators of IPV. There is a reluctance to acknowledge that, "women, too, are committing unlawful acts that are harmful to the targeted partner as well as [their] witnessing children" (Dowd 2001: 78). As a consequence, knowledge and theorizing on female perpetrated IPV is limited and detracts from providing the tools to develop appropriate services, intervention and policies that can better address IPV in general.

Anthropology and IPV

Margaret Mead's (1978) classic ethnography of the Samoan people, "*Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth For Western Civilization*", revealed that aggression and violence could be the domain of both the male and female. These traits were not the result of biological determinism but a product of culture. However, the discipline of anthropology has been critiqued for refusing to confront violence in the cultures they study, often claiming a relativist stance (Moore 1994, Whitehead 2004). More recently Whitehead argued

that anthropologists should move beyond their relative stance and engage with the "anthropology of experience", stating that:

> "Any study we make must clearly reach beyond the political and economic conditions under which violence is triggered, or indeed the suffering of victims and the psychology of its interpersonal dynamics. We now also need to focus on the role of perpetrators, their motivations and the social conditions under which they are able to operate. We need to redress any imbalance, in terms of focus, between victims and perpetrators" (2004: 2).

Although Whitehead (2004) refers to perpetrators of violence in different contexts, such as terrorism for example, the critique remains valid with respect to IPV; particularly with respect to the social and cultural conditions that shape our understanding of women's use of violence in their intimate relationships, and notions of perpetrators and victims. Bearing this in mind, the topic of violence has experienced a lack of theorizing across the social sciences (Moore 1994). The theories that do exist, such as power and patriarchy or female subordination, are used to frame male violence against women or wife beating but are problematic for explaining female violence (Adelman 2004). Anthropologists such as Strathern (1987) and Haraway (1991) have exposed the "awkward relationship" between anthropology and feminist thought, positing 'woman' as heterogeneous rather than a universal classification, thus leaving space for women who do not conform to traditional notions of femininity. To this end, Haraway argues, "There is nothing about being female that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state of being female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practice" (1991: 155). Following Haraways' notion of the heterogeneity and multiple femininities, the data generated from this study demonstrates women's various subject positions as perpetrators of IPV. This fluid construction of gender permits for diverse and nuanced cultural representations of being a woman and constructions of femininity, including those who challenge stereotypical gender representations such as the participants in this study, i.e. women who engage in IPV against their male partners.

David Levinson's seminal ethnography "Family in a Cross-Cultural Perspective" was the first comprehensive study of family violence from an anthropological perspective (Bernard: 1989). Levinson (1989) studied the Human Relations Area Files, an extensive bank of coded ethnographic material, for evidence of family violence. His cross-cultural study of family violence in three hundred and thirty primarily small-scale societies around the world discovered that while wife beating occurred in eighty-four percent of the societies in the sample, husband beating occurs in twenty-seven percent (1989: 31). Regardless of these findings, Levinson

provides a comprehensive ethnographic analysis of wife beating and child rearing practices but does not account for husband abuse, arguing that, "Not only is husband beating less common cross-culturally, but, in general, it occurs less often that does wife beating in those societies in which both are present" (1989: 31). Levinson's comment reflects the continued and prevailing understanding of female perpetrated IPV.

Although there is a burgeoning literature on violence in general, the anthropological literature on intimate partner violence is limited. Texts such as "Black Eyes all the Time" (McGillivray and Comasky 1999), "Colonizing Hawaii: The Cultural Power of Law" (Engle Merry 2000) and McClusky's (2001), and "Here our Culture is Hard: Stories of Domestic Violence from a Mayan Community in Belize" for example, all provide a nuanced analysis of IPV that situates violence against women within an historical and cultural context. Ethnographic studies and the emergent literature on domestic violence is often conducted within communities and cultures that have been impacted by colonialism, which, according to Adelman are "very much formed and informed by the U.S. battered women's movement of the late 20th century and by the contemporary global movement against gender violence" (2004: 136). Hence, anthropological ethnographic texts related to IPV, engage with the cultural construction of the "domestic" and "violence" and women's strategies of resistance. In doing so, they confront the issue of IPV with weighty, culturally charged terms such as 'the battered woman'[3] and 'battering', that are, in Adelman's view "fraught with preconstituted knowledge" (2004: 139). In this sense, IPV is defined as primarily male violence against women and does not account for female perpetrators of IPV nor those women who do not constitute the perfect victim, i.e. women who are weak, subservient and helpless (Adelman 2004). Indeed, the data from this study suggests that women perpetrators of IPV draw from this discourse, and their narratives demonstrate the manner in which their experience of IPV is shaped according to a victim framework.

Adelman (2004), in her journal article "The Battered State: The Political Economy of Domestic Violence" situates women's *battering* by their male partners to local structural inequalities such as the overwhelming number of women on social welfare. Adelman's political economy of domestic violence rejects individual pathology and cites cultural, historical and local context related to the "battering state"; state policies that support the traditional notion of the

[3] For a more comprehensive discussion on battered woman syndrome (BWS) see page 136.

family through a deficient welfare system, thus driving women who flee from violence back to their partners rather than have to live in abject poverty (Adelman 2004: 45). The political economy of domestic violence, although cogent, does not acknowledge the complexities and nuances of IPV and the experiences of individual victims and perpetrators, many of whom do not conform to the traditional binaries associated with the construct of male as batterer/female as passive victim.

The following ethnographic accounts of IPV, however, incorporate women's violence and thus offer a more robust theoretical framework. They encompass the viewpoints of Renzetti (1999) and Lamb (1999) that call for a framework for women's violence, which is not reductive of women as victims and which does not obfuscate binary norms such as victim/perpetrator. Burbank's (1994) seminal ethnography *Fighting Women: Anger and Aggression in Aboriginal Australia* contended that, in the Aboriginal context, women's violence is culturally sanctioned. With this in view, Burbank recognized the prevailing sociocultural gender stereotypes that normalize male aggression but prohibit women's violence and aggression. She contended that "women's overt aggression is, in some circumstances, a positive, enhancing act…when we deny women their aggressive possibilities, we potentially diminish their being" (1994: 1). In this specific cultural context, women goad their husbands into pronouncing divorce rituals through verbal and physical abuse thus revealing notions of agency and rational in their behaviour. Burbank's earlier study of three hundred and seventeen societies provided evidence of female violence and aggression in all world regions (1987: 73). Additionally, husbands were the victims in over sixty percent of cases (1987: 83). However, Burbank also speaks to the heterogeneity of women, reminding us that we know very little about human female aggression and claiming that, "in our study of aggression, we must recognize the range and variety of our subject and the consequent need for a multiplicity of perspectives" (1994: 170, see also Cross and Campbell 2011).

The call for a multiplicity of perspectives is echoed in the more recent ethnography by Sally Engle-Merry (2009) is "Gender Violence: A Cultural Perspective". Despite mentioning that men are also victims of interpersonal violence, Engle Merry fails to offer anything further on the issue. She does, however, provide significant ethnographic evidence that acknowledges women's victimization as a result of IPV, genital mutilation, rape and from other women in gay relationships. Engle-Merry ends her text by arguing that "A society that is free of violence

against women can happen only when it is free of other forms of violence as well" (2009: 186). This is accurate in the context of women-as-victims and also as perpetrators of IPV. Women can be injured during conflict when men are defending themselves from the violence inflicted by their female partner (Straus 2009b). Surely, apart from the personal injury suffered by women, violence is injurious to society and the community as a whole. For these reasons, all forms of violence should be attended to.

Also relevant to the topic of women's experience with IPV is Hautzinger's (2007) important study, *Violence in the City of Women: Police and Batterers in Bahia, Brazil*. Hautzinger's ethnographic account of domestic violence documents the local response to feminist principles that resulted in the subsequent creation of the first all-women police station Delegacias de Mulheres, or "DM's" in Bahia, Brazil. During the mid-1980's, rapid social change accompanied with more women entering the formal work force destabilized men's economic and social dominance. In her text Hautzinger (2007) presents her readers with ethnographic evidence and first-hand participant observation on interpersonal violence that is normally considered domestic and therefore private. The female police officers were ostensibly to deal more sensitively with the high numbers of women experiencing domestic violence. However, rather than engaging in dialogue between the couple, they dispensed physical punishment on the male batterers. Hautzinger explained the policewomen's violence as related to the dual subject positions as *women* within a traditionally male profession. She explains this juxtaposition," despite their identities as selectively masculinized workers, they have experienced feelings of powerlessness as members of the 'weaker sex'" (2007: 235). In the local context, notions of gender associate women with nonviolence or "justified defensive violence", and men with the illegitimate use of violence, which as a result, problematized the policewoman's use of violence (Hautzinger 2007: 191). The policewomen's identification as 'police' and 'violent', rather than 'women' and 'nurturing' also complicated their response to female victims, leading them to often blame the women for either precipitating the abuse or deciding to remain with their abusers (Hautzinger 2007: 223).

In Brazil, since culturally prescribed expectations of femininity shape how conduct is perceived, the policewomen's violent and abusive response is therefore problematic, particularly in respect to the role and purpose of countering domestic violence. Notably, a report from Rio de Janeiro, disclosed that female violence against men had increased by 100 percent in 2003 (2007:

210). Hautzinger also reported a surge of men seeking the help of the female police officers and pleading, "If you don't do something to make my wife stop hitting me, I'm going to end up hitting her back, and that would be a crime" (2007: 210). Hautzinger's ethnography attends to the juxtapositioning of women's propensity for violence and the "social and cultural ways in which violence disproportionately underwrites women's oppression", claiming that rapid change in gender relations can precipitate a violent response, from both men and women (2007: 45). The prevalence of violence in the all-women police stations was viewed as inappropriate female behaviour.

For Hautzinger, feminism of the nineties sought to examine the diversity of women's experiences rather than focus on essentializing femininity. Hautzinger concedes that those who study women's violence are often considered anti-feminist. She however, qualifies her work as "expressly revise[ing] such a dichotomy, claiming the concern with men's compensatory violence in response to men's losses and women's gains as an equally feminist preoccupation" (2007: 45, also see Abrams 2016). Indeed, the data from this study acknowledges the ways in which women, as perpetrators of IPV, contest notions of traditional constructions of femininity and engage in "border crossing". Moreover, following the likes of Strathern (1987) and Haraway (1991), Hautzinger recognizes that, with respect to violence-against-women, there is in effect an impasse, whereby feminism cannot afford to surrender its notion of women as a unified category, thereby "preserving one of the most critical tools for uniting women for political ends" (2007: 219). However, understanding the complexities of, and dynamics of IPV within intimate relationships, including female perpetrators and male victims of IPV will broaden our knowledge of this complex issue.

In their work, Burbank (1994) and Hautzinger (2007) emphasize how women contest and negotiate gender and engage in violence without employing essentialist explanations that end in either denying or trivializing women's violence. With this in mind, women are situated and theorized as agentic individuals. Hautzinger (2007) and Burbank (1994) documented the ways in which women resisted traditional notions of gender roles and norms. Indeed, Adelman claims that within anthropology, women's strategies of resistance "resonates so strongly in these domestic violence studies yet remains so little explored" (2004: 142). There are few anthropological references to women's violence, particularly as it relates to IPV. Burbank suggests that this resistance might stem from the disapproval in Western societies of female

violence, ethnographers might have judged the topic unsuitable for scientific examination (1987: 73). The present study explores those places where women use strategies of resistance, specifically the boundaries of their gender and with their narratives, and norms of victim/perpetrator within discourse related to IPV in general.

An overview – Gender symmetry versus gender asymmetry

As already discussed, the topic of female perpetrated IPV is contested and a heavily debated issue within the discipline. Accordingly, research and studies of female violence can be categorized into two perspectives, i.e. the violence-against-women standpoint and the family violence perspective (Buttell and Starr 2013, Dobash and Dobash 2004, George 1994, Yllo and Straus 1990). It is important to note that researchers who promote the former view of IPV are often referred to as "feminist researchers" (DeKeseredy 2011, Ferraro 2013, White and Dutton 2013). According to Ferraro, this perspective privileges men as the primary perpetrators and "have long argued that IPV is principally an outcome of patriarchy and one of the mechanisms that maintains gender inequality" (2013: 134). Therefore, on the one hand, the violence-against-women standpoint claims gender asymmetry in IPV and position women as the primary victims of male perpetrated violence. On the other hand, family violence researchers claim gender symmetry or slightly more female perpetrated violence (Archer 2000, Straus and Gelles 1986). A crucial difference between these perspectives exists in that while family violence researchers concur that women do sustain more severe injury from IPV, they also contend that male victims of female perpetrated violence exist and should be offered services and assistance comparable to those provided for female victims (Archer 2000: Gelles 1983: George 1994, 2007: Straus 2005, 2015).

According to the family violence perspective, the family is a system that can function to "maintain, escalate, or reduce levels of violence" (Gelles 2005: 36). All family members contribute to the balance of family relations and can be held responsible for violence within its structure, as evidenced, for example, by IPV, child, sibling, or elder abuse. Straus coined the term "marriage license as a hitting license" when research revealed that women were more likely to experience violence from an intimate partner than a stranger (Straus et al. 1980: 48). More broadly, social and cultural norms define the acceptance and socialization of violence that affect all individuals in the family; women, therefore, are as capable of violence as men and violence is

viewed as a human problem rather than a gendered one[4]. In the United States for example, the cultural acceptance of violence influences the manner in which couples use and normalize violence as a means of conflict resolution (Kurz 1998). Therefore, conceptualizing power as a causal factor in IPV is limited to the family structure, whilst broader structural and institutional inequalities such as the status of women are disregarded.

The Battered Husband, a profoundly controversial article published by Susan Steinmetz in 1978, was based on the scant empirical data available at the time. She wrote in her abstract, "Husband abuse is not uncommon, although many tend to ignore it, dismiss it or treat it with "selective inattention" (1978: 499). With her argument that the most underreported crime was husband beating rather than wife beating, Steinmetz's article piqued a heated and polemical debate that continues to prevail in the discipline. The publication of a further paradigm-shifting essay "*Societal change and change in family violence from 1975 to 1985 as revealed by two national surveys*" by Straus and Gelles in 1986 created a storm. Their principal conclusions revealed a significant finding about IPV in American families is that, "in marked contrast to the behaviour of women outside the family, women are about as violent within the family as men" (1986: 470) suggesting the perpetration of IPV as being gender neutral or symmetrical in nature. Additionally, over the ten-year period, while there was a decrease in male violence against women in the United States, female violence against men had risen (1986: 474). An often-cited reason for this decrease in male violence against women was a change in the balance of power within marriages, with women's increasing equality and access to opportunities for full-time paid employment which, for example, could result in less stress related to finances (Cook 2009, Straus and Gelles 1986).

Over this period of time, there was a proliferation of funding, services and shelters made available for battered women and treatment programmes created for male batterers. In fact, Straus and Gelles reiterate the neglect paid to male victims of IPV, stating that, "there has been no publicity, and no funds have been invested in ameliorating this problem because it has not been defined as a problem. (1986: 472). This might be the case, however, as Arnocky and Vaillancourt contend, male victims of female perpetrated IPV are unlikely to report their experience, due to feelings of emasculation, and stigma attached to the dissonance between

[4] Sibling abuse, child abuse, elder abuse also contribute toward the growing literature on family violence, however, the limits of this project is violence between intimate partners.

normative sociocultural expectation of masculine power and control and male victimization (2014: 707). Assumptions concerning gender norms impact IPV in general, and in spite of structural patterns of gender inequality, Ferrero claims that not all men benefit from patriarchal privilege therefore, "we cannot always assume that men hold a dominant position vis-à-vis their female partners" (2013: 146).

Critics of the family violence perspective, including prominent sociologists and feminists in the field of IPV, such as Russell and Rebecca Dobash, cite the gender-neutral approach that fails to consider women and their restricted access to power in the wider social and cultural context. Similarly, this study acknowledges the broad structural differences and gender inequalities in women's lives as a consideration of IPV in general, however, women should be held equally accountable for the violence they perpetrate in their intimate relationships. Theorizing or conceptualizing IPV through a gendered lens should not mitigate responsibility and justify violence used by women or men. Moreover, the attention given to victims of IPV should not be a "zero-sum game" (Kimmel 2010: 115).

Many of the studies related to women who use violence in their intimate relationships report that the primary, or "high on the list" justification for their behaviour is self-defence or retaliation (Buttell and Starr 2013, Caldwell et al. 2012: 127, Dasgupta 2002, Henning et al. 2003, Saunders 1988, Swan and Snow 2003). Self-defence is indeed a justification used for women's perpetration of IPV. However, as this study's findings show, it is but one of many reasons cited by the participants for resorting to violence toward their male intimates. This therefore suggests a more nuanced approach is required in theorizing women's use of IPV.

Key debates

The following is a presentation of literature and key debates in the field. The position of the current study's relevance to the literature will be interwoven throughout. This study interrogates the women-as-victims of male violence model and instead lists a plethora of reasons and motivations for their aggression; these include the desire to control, anger, jealousy, gaining attention and rarely, self-defence (Conradi et al. 2012: Dutton 2012: Hines and Douglas 2010: Straus 2009a, 2009b). Discourse and research related to self-defence as the primary justification for women's use of violence is both complex and heavily debated. Self-defence, as it is legally defined, i.e. the use of reasonable force, is determined when "the extent to which the use of force was imminent and whether there were other

means available to respond to the potential use of force" (Department of Justice DOJ Canada 2013). In most cases this does not competently explain women's use of violence, particularly in the case of incidences when there might not be an "imminent" threat (Dasgupta 2002). There exists an overlap between the definition of self-defence and retaliation that has important implications for intervention and legal consequences (Leisring and Grigorian 2016). According to Leisring and Grigorian, "many items of "self-defence" are vague, include retaliation, or measure self-protection more broadly than self-defence" (2016:951). Retaliation, on the other hand, can be an act of revenge due to a number of reasons such as jealousy or past abuse by a partner and has significant legal consequences (Hamby 2009).

Dasgupta (2002) conducted a study of the research related to women perpetrators of IPV in order to compare their reasons for using violence with those of male batterers. From the beginning, Dasgupta reveals biases in her research question, "First, are women who assault their heterosexual partners, particularly those who are battered themselves, different from men who routinely assault their partners?" (2002: 1368). Additionally, the researchers upon whom she relies for the conduct of her study, nearly all agree on the point that "women who use violence are battered themselves and use physical aggression to escape or stop this abuse" (Dasgupta 2002: 1378; also see Dasgupta, 1999: Dobash and Dobash, 1979, 1992: Hamberger, 1997: Hamberger et al.1994, 1997: Hamberger and Potente, 1994: Miller, 2005: Saunders, 1986). Although her study reveals women's motivations for violence as either self-defence or retaliation against a violent male partner, it fails to recognize or theorize those women who engage in violence against a non-violent male partner. The current study critically distinguishes between justifications of self-defence and motives, such as retaliation, through the voices of those who are engaged in, and experienced the violence at first hand, i.e. the women themselves.

Swan and Snow conducted a phone survey of ninety-five women who were violent toward their male partner and who were either attending a court mandated support group or were awaiting trial for assaulting their intimate partner. 61% of these women reported using violence in self-defence and were classed by Swan and Snow as "Abused Aggressors" because they disclosed an important level of violence inflicted on them by their male intimate partner (2003: 101). The conclusion they reached in this study suggests that, when women do use violence, it is in the context of reacting to their partner's violence (Dobash and Dobash 2004: Dasgupta 1999, 2002: Saunders 1986). Interestingly, as in the case with Dasgupta (1999, 2002), Swan and Snow

dismiss women's responsibility or agency and argue that "Female Abused Aggressors – even those who are very violent – still lack the patriarchal power structure that aids male intimate terrorists in achieving absolute control over their victims" (2003: 104). The data from this study with female perpetrators of IPV also challenges these gendered assumptions of women's lack of power within their intimate relationships and they explain the strategies they use to manipulate their male partners and control every element of their lives.

As this present study will demonstrate there are a multiplicity of motivations for engaging in IPV and self-defence is but one of the many. However, Stuart et al.'s quantitative study of eighty-seven women arrested for IPV and mandated to attend support groups found that, while self-defence was a common motivation, the participants in their study offered multiple and overlapping reasons for any act of violence (2006: 613). Unlike other studies on female-perpetrated IPV, Stuart et al. qualify their findings of self-defence, claiming that "One interesting finding from the study is that women who were victims of severe intimate partner violence were significantly more likely than were women who were victims of minor intimate partner violence to report self-defence as a reason for their violence perpetration" (2006: 616). Although the data from my study revealed only five of the twenty-five participants claimed self-defence as a justification for their IPV, nearly all of them had been victims of extreme violence in previous relationships. However, these participants then became aggressors and violent in subsequent relationships with non-violent partners for which they were arrested for IPV and mandated to attend support group meeting. As discussed further in this dissertation, this finding calls into question the classification of self-defence and retaliation. As a result of their analysis, Stuart et al. call for a more contextual analysis on women's motivations for their acts of IPV in order to capture the circumstances surrounding the women's acts of violence and their possible victimization (2006: 616). This present study provides the qualitative data that is perhaps lost in quantitative research on female perpetrated IPV and offers a contextual analysis of the reasons and motivations captured in this rich source of data.

Feminism is partially responsible for the social, economic and cultural shift that has transformed many women's lives, particularly in the developed world.[5] The politicization of the

[5] In 1970, women in the United States contributed 2-6% of the family income, today that figure is 42.2% with one-third of women filling the role as the primary breadwinner (Rosin 2012: 48).

women's movement has resulted in rapid social change and feminist scholars have been fundamental to the shift in attitudes and progress regarding male violence against women. This shift has often placed the oppression of women within society and culture and violence against women as its principal concern. Authors Dobash and Dobash argue, that during this period:

> "Numerous problems for women, including economic disadvantage and the use of violence against them, was becoming common currency in the women's movement. The new issue of the physical abuse of women in the home simply extended this knowledge of women's oppression beyond the more public spheres of wage work, safety in public places and the like and into the very heartland of private life, the family." (1992: 17).

This social change shifted IPV from the private sphere to being considered a public issue with criminal consequences. Moreover, a shelter movement was created alongside intervention, policy, and funds to offer services in order to meet the particular needs of "battered women". Paradoxically, an inadvertent consequence of the women's movement of the late 1980's and the creation of laws and policies related to IPV, has been the significant rise in arrest and prosecution of women for IPV (Buttell and Starr 2013: 122).

While some feminist scholars acknowledge that women are capable of IPV (Abrams 2016), they also maintain that gender should be central to any study of female perpetrated IPV and refer to patriarchy as the underlying cause (DeKeseredy 2011). Men are seen to hold social, economic, political, and cultural power over women; a hierarchical structure that is mirrored in their intimate relationships, and are seen to use violence as a strategy to maintain control and dominance within their heterosexual relationships (Dobash and Dobash 1979, Hines and Douglas 2010, Yllo and Bograd 1988). These scholars do not pay attention to men's experiences with women who use coercion and control in addition to physical violence as evidenced by Cook (2009) and Migliaccio (2002) in their narrative accounts of male victimization. The men's experiences with violent women, suggests that, like men, women *do* resort to controlling and coercive behaviours, in addition to using physical violence (Cook 2009, Dasgupta 1999, Hines and Douglas 2010, Ross and Babcock 2009, Sarantakos 2004). Indeed, the data from this study reflects the manner in which the participants engaged in coercive control and physical violence or threats of violence that instilled fear in their male intimates. Women ostensibly make up for any difference in size and stature by pre-emptive strikes, or through their use of objects and weapons to inflict injury (Busch and Rosenberg 2004: Schupe, Stacey and Hazelwood 1987).

Some feminist scholars, such as Susan Brownmiller, have critiqued the battered women's movements' attempt to undermine women's ability to wilfully engage in violence against their partners. Brownmiller contends that:

> "It must also cease to excuse every battered woman who engages in criminal behaviour, with the argument that she is, after all, merely a victim of patriarchy. The point of feminism is to give women the courage to express free will, not to use the "brainwashed victim" excuse to explain away the behaviour of a woman who surrenders her free will" (1989: 349).

More recently, third wave feminists do recognize the diversity of women and are distancing themselves from the focus on patriarchy and women-as-victims of male violence paradigm, and are moving towards a broader "focus on the complexities and interactive effects of social structure and gender" (Russell 2013: 3). This involves an acknowledgment of how gender advantages or disadvantages both men and women and as a consequence, influences how they experience the world (Ferraro 2013, Renzetti 1999). Renzetti suggests that, "documenting, denouncing, and acting to prevent men's violence against women does not require us to deny women's agency… [or from] take[ing] ownership of the tasks of researching and theorizing women's use of violence" (1999: 52, also see Ferraro 2013, Russell 2013).

Examining women as perpetrators of IPV indicates a cultural shift, leading White and Dutton to note, "Women's equality means equal capacity for violence as well. It is time that the research evidence factored in to what are, at present, mere stereotypes about gender and violence" (2013: 114, also see Renzetti 1999, Lamb 1999). With this in view, neglecting to recognize women's violence as a social problem, as possibly threatening and as harmful to family members as is men's violence against women, is to deny women agency which, according to Hird will subsequently "further silence female volition and gender stasis through the bolstering of differentiation" (2002: 26). According to Buttell and Starr (2013), without conceding women as agents who commit acts of violence for a diversity reasons, that can include self-defence, we not only deprive women perpetrators and male victims of the possibility to seek assistance but also the opportunity to construct gender appropriate intervention protocols designed for their specific needs.

Significant contributions

The most significant study and contribution to the understanding of women's IPV and support of gender symmetry is Archer's (2000) article entitled "Sex Differences in Aggression

Between Heterosexual Partners: A Meta-Analytic Review", now considered the "gold standard" for measuring gender differences in the perpetration of IPV (Dutton and Nicholls 2005). In an attempt to reconcile the two contradictory viewpoints that derive from violence-against-women and family violence research, Archer (2000) compared rates of perpetration of IPV by gender in over eighty-two studies. Archer found that, while men were more likely to produce injury, women were slightly more likely to initiate violence and report using violence more frequently than men (see also Straus and Ramirez 2007). Archer posits that the etiology for this anomaly might be that the, "strong norm of men not hitting women enables women to engage in physical aggression that might not otherwise have occurred" (2000: 667). With social and cultural norms that prohibit men's violence against women, there is a greater tolerance for women's violence against men. Indeed, Straus refers to the cultural norm permitting women to assault men under certain circumstances as "slapping the cad" and suggests that "this presents an implicit model of assault as a morally and correct behaviour to millions of women" (2005: 66). There is a plethora of studies that reveal a societal tolerance for female violence against men, but little support for male violence against women; seeing the latter as being criminal and more injurious than the former scenario (Follingstad et al. 2004, Hamby and Jackson 2010, Scarduzio et al. 2016, Simon et al. 2001, Sorenson and Thomas 2009, Straus et al. 1997, Taylor and Sorenson 2005).

In a more recent analysis, a qualitative and longitudinal study of nine hundred and eighty participants in Dunedin, New Zealand, Ehrehnsaft, Moffitt and Caspi (2004) expected to find mutual violence between couples, and that male-to-female violence would dominate clinical or severe violence. Instead, their research revealed surprising results, which showed that, mutual violence involved more women-to-man abuse and the clinical or more severe forms of IPV were not primarily male perpetrated, but involved both men and women at equal rates (2004: 267). The results of this study challenge the prevailing approach to IPV that positions men as the primary perpetrators of severe violence; an approach that is typified by the work of Johnson (1995) and his concept of intimate terrorism, which I will examine at length later in this section.

Women's perpetration of severe and deleterious IPV is often minimized with explanations of self-defence or retaliation against a more violent male partner (Dobash et al. 1992, Loseke and Kurz 2005, Pagelow 1983, Saunders 1988, Stuart et al. 2006). Yet studies that *do* confirm the presence of women who are violent toward a non-violent partner tend to negate self-defence as the primary mitigating factor in women's use of violence against men (Dasgupta 2002,

Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez 2006, Miller 2005, Pagelow 1983, Saunders 1988, Swan and Snow 2003). Additionally, fear of violence from their male partner was also found to be negatively associated with violence by women (Feibert and Gonzales 1997, Graham-Kevan and Archer 2005). These factors therefore represent critical challenges to the understanding not only female perpetrated IPV but also IPV in general.

Various studies find women's use of violence in samples measuring the prevalence of male violence against women (Dutton and Nichols 2005). For example, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000), in their National Violence Against Women Survey of 8000 women and 8005 men in the United States, found that 22.1 percent of women and 7.4 percent of men admitted to having been physically assaulted by an intimate partner during their lifetime. They also revealed that during the previous twelve months, about 1.3 million women and 835,000 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner in the United States (2000: 26). Tjaden and Thoennes concluded, "Given these findings, intimate partner violence should be considered first and foremost a crime against women" (2000: 60). Although male victims of IPV do sustain injury less frequently than female victims, research reveals that they do experience severe injury at high rates (Statistics Canada 2015), which can be very severe and life threatening (McNeely et al. 2001). With this in view, victims of violence should be offered support and services regardless of gender (McNeely et al. 2001, Straus 2009b).

There are cogent issues related to women's use of violence in their intimate relationships. Specifically, in suggesting that by acknowledging this issue, will reduce harm to women. In this sense, Straus (2005) has been criticized for victim blaming by suggesting that even minor or seemingly "harmless" violence carried out by women can result in them being severely injured by their male partner when violence escalates (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010). However, while Straus maintains that any prevention or discussion of IPV perpetrated by men should also include violence by women, he also acknowledges that the first priority in services and funds should be aimed at male violence against women because of mitigating factors such as greater physical injury and fear (Straus 2005: 67-69).

An evaluation of the literature related to women's use of IPV necessitates a response to critical perspectives within the field, specifically those conveyed by family violence scholars and feminist researchers and scholars. The key debates within the field of IPV relate to methodology, in particular the use of the Murray Straus' Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS), the manner in which

female violence is often moderated with explanations and justifications of female violence as self-defence and rooted in traditional gender roles, and the purported absence of male victims of IPV. These issues are intensely debated within the field of IPV and add layers of complexity that problematize the topic. As discussed, when women do perpetrate IPV, it is normally classified as self-defence against a violent male partner, considered trivial and less injurious in nature. In light of the evidence, however, while men do sustain injury serious enough to require medical treatment, and in significant numbers, why do men remain the invisible victims of IPV?

Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS), methods and sampling

Most quantitative studies that survey community or general population samples of IPV employ the CTS. Straus developed the CTS in the 1970's and has used it to measure gender differences in IPV, and its severity by cataloguing the list of acts used by a couple over a specific period of time (Straus 2005). The language used in the CTS normalizes the use of violence and the author claim is non-judgmental. For example:

> "No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read some things that you and your (spouse/partner) might do when you have an argument. I would like you to tell me how many times ... in the past 12 months" (Straus, 1999: 33).

Despite persistent critique and amid claims that the data produced by this method is misleading, flawed and used out of context (Dobash and Dobash 1992, Dobash et al. 1992, DeKeseredy and Schwarz 1998, Kimmel 2002, Kurz 1998, Stark and Flitcraft 1996, Yllo 1993), it remains the primary method of inquiry used by most quantitative researchers within the field of IPV, including those researchers who study violence-against-women [6] (Straus 1999). Critics of the CTS argue that it only measures the 'number of acts' leading to false assumptions of gender symmetry in IPV (Dobash and Dobash 2004: Kimmel 2010: Kurz 1998: Saunders 1988). However, Straus et al. stress that this is erroneous and contend, "the CTS is intended to be used in conjunction with measures of whatever cause, context, and consequence variables are relevant for the study or the clinical situation" (1997: 285). As such, the CTS can be used as part of a comprehensive methodological study on IPV.

[6] The difference between the GSS survey and the statistics quoted at the beginning of the proposal can be determined by the differing samples. The GSS surveyed a community sample and Statistics Canada reporting of 90,000 victims was police-reported victims of IPV.

Two of the CTS's most constant critiques, Dobash and Dobash, describe the CTS as an 'act-based' approach and contend that, "the exact nature and consequences of any 'act' cannot be solely through the knowledge that it occurred" thereby suggesting that both injury and context are essential to clarifying gender parity in IPV (2004: 329). The questions on the first version of the CTS did not provide for injury. Therefore, a playful slap by a female carried as much weight as being slapped and knocked down by a more powerful male; regardless of the context, both could be classified as severe acts of violence according to the CTS (Dutton and Nichols 2005: Kimmel 2002, 2010). In response to this critique, Straus developed the CTS2, adding questions relevant to the level of injury, sexual assault, verbal abuse and coercion. This, however, has failed to quell the critique levelled at the use of the CTS, even in its second version. DeKeseredy and Schwartz contend,

> "Many object to the "rank order" concept that some events (e.g., kicked) are automatically worse than others (e.g., slapped). Although the CTS2 speaks to part of this problem by including some measures of injury, many battered women claim that psychological and emotional terror is worse than much of the physical violence in some relationships" (1998: 7).

Indeed, quantitative methods, in general, do not capture the contextual variables of IPV, such as emotional or verbal abuse (Stuart et al. 2006). In spite of the continued debate on the failure of the CTS2 to capture the context for explaining acts of violence as well as the reasons or motivations for why women resort to violence, even its most persistent critics agree that "the CTS has been shown to have a certain degree of reliability" (Dobash and Dobash, 2004: 329).

The disparity in the perpetration of IPV by gender is seen as a result of studies that use quantitative data from crime statistic surveys that draw from shelter samples, police-reported cases of domestic violence and hospitals and studies that survey community samples. The former normally bias results towards male perpetrated IPV with women as primary victims; while the latter use CTS as a measure and reveal gender symmetry in IPV (Hamby 2005, Kimmel 2010). Kimmel challenges the validity of data from studies using the CTS and suggests that community samples and crime victim reports measure two very different behaviours. On the one hand you have, "violence as an *expression* of family conflict is somewhat less than symmetrical, but would include a significant percentage of women", and on the other hand you have, "violence that is *instrumental* in the maintenance of control—the more systematic, persistent, and injurious type of violence—is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, with rates captured best by crime

victimization studies. Over 90 percent of this violence is perpetrated by men" (2010: 118). However, the most recent indicators from Statistics Canada (Burczycka and Conroy 2018), which point to severe and injurious IPV sustained by male victims, serve to refute Kimmel's assumptions.

Kimmel does qualify men's use of instrumental violence in his discussion of gender symmetry in IPV. He argues that, despite patriarchy offering men access to power and control over women, at the moment they engage in control-motivated instrumental violence, "their experience is not an expression of power, but of its collapse" (2010: 115). Thus, men's violence against women is a result of re-establishing their gender role or normative gendered expectations (Kimmel 2010). The data from this study underscores the manner in which gender is central to the reasons and motivations associated with the perpetration of IPV. While men's violence serves to re-establish dominant gender norms, women's perpetration of IPV is considered a transgression of societal norms of femininity.

Studies using other methodologies to measure gender differences in IPV also reveal female perpetrated violence (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). For example, the General Social Survey (GSS) carried out by Statistics Canada in 1999 to detect family violence rates over a five year period, reveals an overall victimization rate of 8% for women and 7% for men, and found that women initiated violence as often as men (Centre for Canadian Justice Statistics (CCJS): 2000). The most recent GSS reported a reduction in IPV against women, but male victims remain unchanged (Burczycka and Conroy 2018). Moreover, Archer's (2000) meta-analysis of over eighty-two studies, which all employed varied methodologies, revealed women use violence toward a non-violent partner at higher rates than men and more women than men self-reported their use of IPV against their male partners. Echoing the GSS survey, women were also slightly more likely to initiate violence than men.

With this in view, the CTS and CTS2 scales, while not perfect, remain one of the most effective instruments for measuring rates of IPV. As already discussed the primary critique of this method argue that women's motivations are not taken into consideration. Dobash and Dobash posit "the number of acts perpetrated may be similar for men and women, but are the acts themselves also similar?" (2004: 330). In some respects, this research is a response to critique by the likes of Dobash and Dobash who posit that IPV cannot be understood through the employment of purely quantitative methods. They state that, "the exact nature and consequences

of any 'act' cannot be assessed solely through the knowledge that it occurred" (2004: 329). By providing a contextual and comprehensive analysis of women's acts of IPV, this research will offer a more nuanced understanding of IPV. In the next section I respond to some of the debates related to women's perpetration of IPV.

Justifications – Self-defence?

As a result of the work of feminists and violence-against-women activists in the field of IPV, women have been encouraged to report their victimization (Loseke and Kurz 2005). There is now greater responsiveness by social, legal, and welfare services that have created new methods for reporting. Methodology issues in data collection that skew the statistics toward gender symmetry are often blamed on the reluctance of battered women to participate in community surveys for fear of reprisal by a violent male partner (Loseke and Kurz 2005). However, it is also likely that male victims of female violence refrain from participating in surveys because of the shame, humiliation, and possible social stigma ascribed to male victims (Arnocky and Vaillancourt 2014, Graham-Kevan 2007a). Straus posits that for men, "there is the additional shame and reluctance stemming from the type of masculinity that expects 'real men' to be able to handle such situations, and that lead police to scoff or laugh at men who do file a complaint" (2005: 72). Male victims of IPV have yet to be offered the same consideration as women because their victimization is either repudiated or minimized, even by the men who are being abused (Arnocky and Vaillancourt 2014, Cook 2009).

There is overwhelming agreement by many researchers in the field of IPV that some women are indeed violent but the controversial issue is, how many and where are their male victims? (Kimmel 2010, Schwartz and DeKeseredey 1993). Pagelow posits, "There are some battered husbands, but there are not enough to match the exaggerated image that has been promulgated by some researchers and the mass media" (1992: 110). There is an "entrenchment" in the field of IPV where, in view of the complexity of the empirical data and plethora of literature available, it is no surprise that some continue to resist gender symmetry in IPV, preferring instead power-based theories, such as patriarchy that place women victims at the forefront (Hamby 2005). Hamby posits that we should be comparing partner violence with different sets of data that would include "incident data, sexual violence, injury, and be developed

through direct comparison of multiple methods, including perhaps real-time self-monitoring", in order to evaluate the magnitude and gravity of IPV (2005: 725).

Family violence data reveals gender symmetry, that half of all IPV is mutual, where an argument can get out of hand and the couple engage in minor acts of violence such as pushing, shoving or slapping; unilateral female initiated violence against men or male violence against women each comprising twenty-five percent. The latter half comprises of more serious or injurious violence against a non-violent partner and can include kicking, choking and attack with an object as well as threats, controlling behaviours and isolation of the victim (Straus and Gelles 1990: 57). Proponents of gender asymmetry provide data on IPV that depicts a different image altogether, citing predominantly male perpetrated IPV against women and few male victims.

Michael Johnson (1995) attempted to resolve the conflicting results and debate surrounding the two dominant perspectives for understanding women's use of violence IPV. Johnson's original typology categorized IPV into two main types; intimate terrorism and situational couple's violence, but was later expanded to include violent resistance, mutual violent control and separation-instigated violence. Johnson (1995) maintains that IPV is not a unitary phenomenon; very distinct populations were being studied and should therefore be evaluated differently. Kelly and Johnson explain:

> "Intimate terrorism and violent resistance are heavily gendered, and that situational couple violence is perpetrated about equally by men and women—and it is this pattern, combined with sampling biases, that explains the dramatic differences among various studies with regard to the issue of gender symmetry. Surveys, dominated by situational couple violence, show rough gender symmetry in perpetration. Agency studies, dominated by intimate terrorism and violent resistance, show a pattern of (primarily) male violent coercive control and female resistance" (2008: 291).

Intimate terrorism is a pattern of coercion and control where physical violence is but one facet of the controlling behaviours that instils fear and social isolation. Johnson (2010) originally categorized this type of violence as "patriarchal terrorism" but in order to acknowledge that some, albeit few, women as well as men do use coercive control and could not be explained by patriarchal domination, he substituted with the term, intimate terrorism. However, these controlling behaviours and violence are likely to escalate over time and considered to be almost exclusively perpetrated by men (Johnson 1995:5). Conversely, situational couple's violence or common couple's violence entails a conflict or argument that escalates into low-level violence or slapping and pushing and is normally associated with gender symmetry. In this case, the couple

will resort to violence as a means of controlling a specific situation (Johnson 1995: 4). Johnson also included a third category - violent resistance – that consists of a defensive response to severe violence, and which is used by many theorists to explain female perpetrated IPV (Johnson and Ferraro 2000, Walker 1989, Yllo and Bograd 1988). Mutual violent control consists of both partners engaging in violence and control tactics and according to Kelly and Johnson (2008), is rare. Separation-instigated violence reflects the violence that can occur as a couple are separating or divorcing and is a response to the experience and feelings associated with separation.

At first glance, Johnson's typology does appear to resolve some of the inconsistencies in the quantitative studies related to women's use of violence. Though Johnson concedes *some* women's ability to severely injure her intimate male partner, other researchers point out that his study focuses on female shelter victims and men from batterer programs, thus ensuring a bias against women as perpetrators of IPV (Archer 2009). Furthermore, common couple's violence is somewhat reductive and fails to disaggregate, particularly male victims of IPV, into a separate category, Johnson dismisses this category as no more than an argument that gets out of hand, even though it is the category that constitutes the majority of IPV victims and perpetrators and defines a type of violence that can very likely escalate. In a later article by Kelly and Johnson, the authors consider this dissonance and argue:

> "While more minor forms of violence are typical of Situational Couple Violence, it can escalate into more severe assaults with serious injuries. Thirty-two percent of perpetrators (men in the NVAWS data set) had committed at least one act of severe violence. Comparable data were not available for women. Severe violence in Situational Couple Violence is particularly likely when violence occurs more frequently (daily or weekly)" (2008: 486/487).

So in highlighting the problematic aspect of Johnson's categorization, the homogeneity of his categorization fails to capture individual difference in experiences and downplays the consequences of common couples violence. Although other typologies have been identified, such as Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994) typology, which categorized three types of IPV and fifteen sub-types and Swan and Snow (2006), Johnson's typology remains the most influential (Anderson 2009, Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010).

Johnson originally based his typology on existing quantitative data, rather than on original research that measured for control and coercion. Later, Johnson (2010) himself recognized a contradiction in the data from shelter sample in a study by Frieze (1970) (See also Meier 2015 for a critique of Johnson's typology). He not only found that over half of the women in the

sample could fall into the situational couple violence category rather than intimate terrorism but also that the violence was sufficiently injurious to warrant them seeking shelter. Johnson subsequently acknowledges that, "the data from the courts and shelter, however, surprised me. I had expected agency data to be heavily dominated by men's intimate terrorism and women's violence resistance, but there are considerably more cases of situational couple violence than I had thought there would be. Where did I go wrong?" (2010: 21). This is however not a new phenomenon; Erin Pizzey who created the shelter movement in the United Kingdom in the 1970's, recently claimed during a personal communication, "Of the first hundred women who came into my refuge, sixty-two were as violent or more violent than the men they left and they were violent to the children, no one would publish my findings" (Pizzey: 28/11/2016). IPV is not a 'one size fits all' issue but is complex, multi-faceted and subject to changing variables as evidenced by the divergent literature on IPV.

To date, Johnson has not explored the documented experiences of male victims of female perpetrated IPV (Cook 2009, Hines and Douglas 2010, Migliaccio 2002, Sarantakos 2004). Men do suffer from the psychological and physical impact of IPV but are not afforded the help and services offered to women (Cook 2009, Hines and Douglas 2010). The burden of proof however, is higher for men because it falls outside our notions of traditional gender roles (Hines and Douglas 2012: 32). While female perpetrators of IPV are seen as a transgression of dominant gender stereotypes, so are male victims. When men experience violence by their female intimates, they are feminized and as a result, their masculinity is spoiled or failed (Lafrance in press).

Hines and Douglas (2010) compared abused men who had sought assistance from a help line to a community sample. While the community sample was representative of common couples violence, the men from the help-line experienced violence by their female partner in keeping with intimate terrorism. The men in this study sustained more injuries than their female partners. Results from studies, such as Hines and Douglas (2010) and indeed the data from the present study that demonstrate women's injurious and deleterious violence toward their male intimates, challenge both Johnson's (1995, 2011) and Kimmel's (2010) claims of women's incapacity to perpetrate instrumental violence or intimate terrorism in meaningful numbers. Even if men are abused less frequently than their female counterparts, this does not mean that we can or should ignore the significant number of men who experience IPV. Laroche (2005) found that

when he tested Johnson's typology with results from the 1999 Canadian General Social Survey (GSS), this study revealed gender symmetry in the perpetration of IPV and intimate terrorism by women. Although women did receive more injuries during conflict, Laroche points out "the percentage of male and female victims suffering physical consequences in intimate terrorism was comparable" (2005: 12). In fact, 56% of the female victims and 34% of the male victims experienced intimate terrorism (Laroche 2005: 14). In addition, a more recent Centre for Disease Control's (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence survey found that 36.4% of women and 33.6% of men in the United States had experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner over their lifetime (CDC 2015, see table p. 217).

As such, reductive and essentialist arguments, such as that made by Saunders who argued that "an increased risk for victimization for women is likely to occur because of size differences and women's relative lack of experience with fighting", are detrimental to the notion and perception of women as agentic individuals (1988: 97). The women who participated in the current study refute such arguments; they contest their victim status and their experiences reveal a propensity for violence within their intimate relationships. To explain women's motivations for violence solely as self-defence and frame the likelihood of increased injury during conflict according to their inefficient fighting skills reduces the likelihood that women are perceived as capable of violence or causing injury toward their intimate partners (Straus 2009b: 563). This perpetuates the prevailing stereotype of women as fundamentally gentle and nurturing and therefore, as powerless and vulnerable victims in the face of violence. While there is validity in the size and strength differences between men and women that often leaves women with more injuries than men, women appear to use weapons to offset any disparities. Ethnographic evidence disputes Saunder's belief that women have no experience with aggression or fighting[7]. Moreover, explanations for women's use of violence in IPV are denied to men whose violence against women is nearly always considered instrumental and controlling (Graham-Kevan 2007b: Johnson 1995: Kimmel 2002, 2010: Morrissey 2003).

There are very few studies that use qualitative methods to provide a contextual analysis of women's violence against nonviolent male partners. The majority of studies are based on

[7] Burbank's (1994) seminal ethnography "Fighting Women: Anger and Aggression in Aboriginal Australia". Also Hautzinger's (2007) "Violence in the City of Women: Police and Batterers in Bahia, Brazil, an ethnographic account of an all women police station in Bahia, Brazil.

quantitative data or self-reports, many of which are now outdated (Dasgupta 1999, Ferrero 2013, Kelly and Johnson 2008, Kimmel 2010, Swan and Snow 2003). One exception however was Sarantakos' (2004) important contribution to the understanding of how women report their use of violence, specifically with respect to self-defence. By interviewing sixty-eight self-defined abused husbands, their wives, the couple's children, and the mother-in-law, Sarantakos (2004) was able to test the validity of the wives' justifications and motivations for their use of violence. Sarantakos found that while most of the wives claimed self-defence as a justification, "64% of the husband's mothers-in-law reported that the husband did not use [any] violence against his wife" and when challenged, the women changed their allegations of self-defence (2004: 281). Most of the women in this sample engaged in intimate terrorism, as determined by the sustained use of severe physical violence combined with controlling and coercive patterns of behaviour, which served to instil fear and feelings of isolation in the victims (Johnson 1995). Sarantakos' findings disputed arguments that claim self-defence as the primary causal factor in women's violence and provided further evidence that women can engage in severe physical violence that produces injury and elicits fear and anxiety in men; these effects normally being the consequences typically linked to violence against women (DeKeseredey and Schwartz 1998, Dobash et al. 1992, Kimmel 2010, Saunders 1988, Yllo 1993).

Other studies found that in addition to self-defence, women's motives for violence ranged from demanding attention, expressing anger, escaping abuse, to punishing the abuser (Dasgupta 1999, Kernsmith 2005, Miller and Meloy 2006, Stuart et al. 2006, Swan and Snow 2003). After documenting these motivations for women's use of violence, Dasgupta concluded that, "most of these women were focused on wrenching a semblance of control in their own lives and surroundings by the use of physical force" (1999: 217). This questions interpretations of women's motivations for violence as being structured on or around notions of victimhood, and which emphasize vulnerability and emotion, in contrast to men's motives that commonly aim to control their wives in an effort to restore their masculinity and patriarchal privilege. Whilst implicit gender norms and stereotypes perpetuate notions of women as the gentler sex and consequently minimize or deny women's violence, men's violence against women elicits no such caveat.

Similarly, in another study that examines 'context' from women's self-reports, Dasgupta reported that their personal motives for the use of violence towards a male partner ranged

from "reclaiming lost self-respect to saving loved family members and pets to establishing self-identity as a "tough" woman" (2002:1374). Significantly, contextualizing male violence against women does not afford men the same opportunities for denial when justifying or explaining their use of violence under any circumstances. Miller (2005) suggests that rather than perpetuate stereotypical gender constructs, reasons and justifications for IPV can be equally appropriated for either gender.

Patriarchy is but one factor that interacts with other causes of violence between couples (Dutton 2006). Literature that posits women as the primary victims of male perpetrated violence has encountered criticism, signalling a shift from the 'women-as-victims' paradigm to positioning women as agentic individuals (Brownmiller 1989: Lamb 1999: Morrissey 2003: Pearson 1997: Renzetti 1999, 2013). The term 'victim' has been both internalized and externalized by women and derives from a variety of sources that include not only patriarchy or men, but also from socio-cultural practices, and traditional gender relations (Lamb 1999: Renzetti 1999, 2013). Although women's violence contests the dominant paradigm of helpless victims, these texts reject the term "victim feminism" that connotes women as the perpetual victims of male domination, and contend that women should be recognized as perpetrators as well as victims (Renzetti 1999: 42).

In her text titled *The Challenge to Feminism Posed by Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships,* Renzetti writes*, "*the feminine woman is socially constructed as a natural victim…passive and respectable" thus prohibiting the notion of women as perpetrators of IPV against non-violent partners (1999: 49). With this in view, Renzetti also emphasizes the diversity of women as a group and posits, "the question must be raised, "What does the behaviour mean to the women themselves in this specific context? The answers to this question, no doubt will vary" (1999: 51). It is in this sense that the women's personal narratives provide a powerful context and meaning for, and perspective on their use of IPV. Significantly, the participants in this study reject outright the notion of victimhood and claim, "*We're not victims*".

Male victims – Where are they?

Men constitute the majority of homicide victims in Canada. Male victims, many of whom were killed by other men, an acquaintance, or someone known to them, accounted for 350 of the

505 homicides in 2013. However, out of the 68 intimate partner homicides in 2013, 12 were male (Cotter 2014). Although women constitute the majority of victims of intimate partner homicides, the number of women killed by their male intimate partners has decreased by half since 1993. Cotter suggests that this could be related to several factors, such as improved social and economic changes in women's lives and also "increased community-based support, resources, and services, [and] improved training of police officers" (2014:14). Significantly, arguments related to male intimate partner homicides assume women kill their partners in self-defence. Dobash et al. contend:

> "The evidence is overwhelming that a large proportion of the spouse-killings perpetrated by wives, but almost none of those perpetrated by husbands, are acts of self-defence. Unlike men, women kill male partners after years of suffering physical violence, after they have exhausted all available sources of assistance, when they feel trapped, and because they fear for their own lives"(1992: 81).

Considering the studies and research in the field of IPV that seek to minimize or deny women's violence[8], it should not be unexpected that men remain silent or downplay their victimization by their female intimates in fear of drawing disbelief, ridicule or culpability. Due to the way that female perpetrated violence causes stigma and disbelief, George refers to female perpetrated IPV and male victims as "The Great Taboo" (2007: 8). Female violence against a male partner represents the breakdown of stereotypical social norms associated with notions of gender, insofar as female violence and aggression transgress commonly held notions of femininity and defying the notion that a woman should not beat a man.

In many ways, men fail to meet the criteria of the social and cultural construction of a victim of IPV. Susan Steinmetz's (1978) ground-breaking article *The Battered Husband Syndrome* caused controversy and elicited much criticism that continues even today.[9] Steinmetz argued that men could suffer extreme, coercive and sustained abuse by their female partners, and were sufficient in numbers to warrant the title "battered husband syndrome". In her analysis of over fifty-seven families, Steinmetz (1978) determined that men were more likely to be severely

[8] See also Synnott, who, in his text, Re-Thinking Men (2009), argues that ignoring men's victimization, particularly their high death rate, although not necessarily by women, is taking a toll on men. Synnott posits, "The victimization of men is often either missed, dismissed or minimized. It is necessary, then, to consider this perspective on men's lives – and deaths – not to "out-victimize" women but to recognize our unique and shared adversities" (2009: 170).

[9] See also "Battered Data Syndrome: A Comment on Steinmetz's Article" (1978) by Pleck et al., who argue, like Pagelow (1983) that Steinmetz's use of the CTS scale in her analysis resulted in faulty claims and data.

injured by a weapon, remain with their violent partners for the same reasons as women (children, finances and fear), and were even more reluctant than women to seek support services or disclose their abuse to others. A study conducted by Harris and Cook (1994) on victimization, revealed that not only was male victimization considered less serious compared to female victimization, but men were perceived to be liable for their victimization.

With this in view, recently Lafrance (in press) provided a critical analysis of media representations of male victims of IPV. The popular singer, Pink's song "Please Don't Leave Me", is analysed and her lyrics revealed the manner in which she terrorized and physically abused her boyfriend, all of which are, according to Lafrance, "depicted in comedic terms: male victims of IPV are to be laughed at, and the spectacle of their victimization is to be excused and, ultimately, enjoyed" (2019: 24). Male victims therefore are considered humorous, emasculated and often blamed for their own victimization. Although my study does not include male victims of IPV, the participant's narratives referred to the ways in which their male partners were often isolated from friends and disbelieved during police intervention. Indeed, Hines and Douglas's study of female perpetrated IPV revealed that, during police intervention, there was less likelihood of an arrest when a male victim was involved and male victims were often ridiculed in the process (2012: 32). Under these circumstances, it is unsurprising that, in the prevailing sociocultural environment, men are reticent to seek assistance as victims of abuse or violence by their female partner.

Pagelow (1983) extended a critical response to Steinmetz in her article, "The Battered Husband Syndrome: Social Problem or Much Ado About Little". She argued that claims of husband abuse or "battered husband syndrome" were unsubstantiated and "much of the evidence put forward by the argument was taken out of context, data were added, altered or eliminated, and generalizations were taken as fact" (1983: 172)[10]. For example, because men do not report or

[10] Leonore Walker, on the other hand, wrote "The Battered Woman" in 1979, a year later, that received much attention and laid the groundwork and research material for the legal adoption of "The Battered Woman Syndrome". A defense used to catalogue a pattern of symptoms and signs a woman can experience after years of sustained abuse by her male partner. Battered woman syndrome also made this group of victims distinct from other victims of abuse in their behaviour, particularly 'learned helplessness" and the inability to escape from the violence. Of course those women who do not meet the culturally constructed standard of behaviour, fail to benefit from the legal exculpatory influence of battered woman syndrome; race, gender stereotypes and class could contribute to the exclusion of using battered woman syndrome as a means of establishing a defense for using violence, often fatal, against a male partner (Adelman 2004).

disclose their victimization, Pagelow argues that there is no way of knowing how many male victims exist and therefore data could not be substantiated to support "battered husband syndrome" (1983: 179). Despite acknowledging women's propensity for violence within their intimate relationships, Pagelow (1983) concurred that there were certainly some, albeit very few, males who might qualify as victims. She does however refute the term "battered husband" because men's experiences cannot be measured in the same terms as those of a battered woman in severity, injury or consequences. According to this framework of IPV, female violence is gendered in nature and reactive to male violence, therefore, treatment and services for women should reflect these cultural differences. As such, the Duluth model of intervention, based on notions of male privilege, domination and control of one's spouse, is used to treat both male and female offenders arrested for IPV (Buttell and Starr 2013). Concomitantly, in order to encapsulate notions of self-defence, the Duluth model of intervention and treatment offered to women also includes escape and safety measures. In contrast, Straus (2009a) posits that male victims as well as female victims are worthy of services and resources; men however also require assistance to escape serious violence within their intimate relationships comparable to those already being provided to women.

McNeely and Robinson-Simpson (1987) responded to Pagelow's allegations of false data, assumptions and the controversy surrounding male victims of IPV, with their article, *The Truth About Domestic Violence: A Falsely Framed Issue*. The authors highlighted the refusal to recognize female perpetrated IPV as an issue that continues to hinder social policies and legislation for male victims of IPV. McNeely and Robinson-Simpson (1987) argued that IPV is a result of societal structural and institutional inequalities that inhibit individual development. However, they argued that the inequality lies in the continued refusal to recognize men as victims of IPV in a "gender sensitive" and "politically charged atmosphere" (1987: 488). Women confront few consequences in a society or culture that continues to deny their capacity for violence as perpetrators of IPV, and instead perpetuates their victim status. They concluded that a more egalitarian society is "unlikely to be effective unless society realizes that domestic violence is a two-way street" (McNeely and Robinson-Simpson 1987: 488).[11] Both male victims

[11] A number of articles responded critically to McNeely and Robinson-Simpson's contention that women and men are equal in both victimization and power; citing faulty data and the failure to use a feminist lens in their analysis (Saunders 1988b). According to Saunders, McNeely and Robinson-Simpson (1987) do not consider the patriarchal

and female perpetrators of IPV are unlikely to receive the appropriate assistance and support as long as their status remains contested.

There is a small body of literature related to men as victims that refers to the extreme and hidden nature of men's experience with IPV. As already discussed, women's violence against men is not a recent phenomenon (George 2003, 2007). Despite the evidence that reveals men as victims of female violence, the majority of academics and scholars in the field of IPV either dismiss or question the data related to male victims of IPV (Pagelow 1983, 1992: Schwartz and DeKeseredey 1993: Steinmetz 1978: Walker 1979). Among the few published studies that use case studies of male victims to inform us of their experiences with violence by women within their intimate relationships, we have, studies by Bates (2017), Cook (2009), Hines and Douglas (2010), Hines et al. (2007) and Migliaccio (2002). Migliaccio, in his article "*Abused Men: A Narrative Analysis*" (2002) provides men's accounts of their abuse by their female intimate partners. In order to find similarities and difference, Migliaccio compared men's subjective narratives of violence by women to the experiences of abused women. He found that there were striking similarities in the accounts and that "the findings of this study suggest that the commonalities found in past research on wife abuse can be used in the analysis of husband abuse, regardless of the size and strength of the individual" (2002: 47). Migliaccio (2002) refers to the isolation, loss of autonomy, lack of self-esteem, severe injury, and reticence to leave the relationship; consequences normally associated exclusively with female victims of IPV.

Hines and Douglas (2010) implemented a large-scale quantitative investigation with a sample of over 300 men who sought assistance from a helpline for male victims of abuse and tested this sample against Johnson's intimate terrorism paradigm. Their findings repudiated Johnson's claim that intimate terrorism is carried out almost exclusively by men. The men in their sample experienced high rates and frequency of psychological, physical and sexual IPV, controlling behaviours and sustained severe injury (Hines and Douglas 2010: 54). Hines and Douglas argue that the men's accounts require consideration because "these men will have had to overcome several societal and internal barriers to seeking help and by this very factor are likely to be reporting legitimate concerns" (2010: 53). They cite legal, police and institutional responses

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structures and inequalities that underscore men's abuse of women and their subsequent victimization (Saunders 1988).

to the accounts, often including laughter, ridicule or scorn, as a barrier to the men reporting their abuse.

In his seminal text *Abused Men: The Hidden side of Domestic Violence*, Phillip Cook (2009) relied on many of the quantitative studies mentioned previously, particularly Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980), all of whom are much quoted throughout his text. However, Cook, a former journalist, presents case studies of abused men through which he provides a narrative analysis of their victimization. Cook's (2009) work offers a much-needed contextual and qualitative analysis of men as victims that exposes women's behaviour as coercive, controlling as well as in some instances, extremely violent. He argued that the violence perpetrated by a female partner diminishes the victims as men, in that they fear ridicule, and shame prevents them from revealing their experience of violence to others (2009: 65). Notably, by considering social and cultural factors that constrain men from hitting women, Cook contends that, "being physically abused by a woman, even though they were not supposed to hit back, was emasculating" (2009: 57). In contrast to Cook, Fontes (2006) sees this attitude more as chivalry, a patriarchal code that prevents men from hitting women even when they are the objects of abuse (see also Allen-Collinson 2009). There is social and cultural censure of male violence against women, whilst at the same time, public attitudes demonstrate an acceptance of violence towards men by women, i.e. "slap the cad" (Cook 2009: 136, Lafrance in press). Building on this work, Lafrance and Burns, in their analysis of media representations of male victimization, argue that, contemporary media "portrays[ing] men as though they are not real human beings who cannot be hurt" thus trivializing violence against men by women and challenging dominant norms of masculinity and femininity (2018:15).

My research is very much in line with Cook's notion of victim equality. Providing services for men as victims of IPV should not detract from female victims of male abuse, but should allow for services to be also tailored to the needs of male victims and for female perpetrators and their families (Cook 2009, Dasgupta 1999). Cook succinctly adds that:

> "The question of who is the 'most important' victim is a debate, however, that serves only to detract from providing effective and helpful services for both genders that must have as their goal changing behaviours. Through the hard work of the women's movement, things have changed for the better in many areas for both genders and for the battered women in particular. Equality, not victimology, should remain the hallmark of this movement. Ignoring or dismissing the very real needs of the male subjected to domestic abuse contributes to a cycle of family abuse for the next generation…It does the female heterosexual perpetrator, or the woman locked into a mutual combat role with a male, no good" (2009: 41).

Unlike family violence researchers who define IPV as gender neutral, Cook recognized gender as one of many factors that contributes to issues related to IPV. The reticence to accept men as victims of IPV or indeed women as perpetrators is gendered. Dutton, amongst others, outspoken proponents of women's use of IPV, accuses some researchers of misreporting statistics to enhance the number of female victims of male violence, thus concealing the male victim, and calls that the "woozle effect" (2006: 27). Like Straus (2009b), Dutton maintains that despite the extensive body of research and evidence supporting the prevalence of women's IPV, there is an agenda that can only be described as "dogma preservation" (2006: ix).

The ideology of the violence-against-women perspective permeates legal and policy structures at local and national levels, resulting in a reticence to acknowledge both women and men as victims and perpetrators of IPV (Dutton 2006, also see Machado et al. 2017). For example, Meier (2015), a law professor, argues that the controversy and typologies related to IPV serve to undermine those affected by violence and abuse, i.e. the families. With this in view, the impact is already being felt in the courtroom where judges refer to the rare nature of intimate terrorism and the implicit insignificance and mutuality of situational couple violence that purportedly predominates IPV. Stating his case, Meier argues, "The more nuanced and variable the categories become, the more the types intersect and overlap, undermining the very concept of distinct types and inviting mis-applications" (2015: 24). This current study sets out to illustrate how the chaos, turmoil and "messy nature of everyday lives" of those families affected by IPV complicate any general classification of perpetrators and victims (Dobash and Dobash 2004).

Feminist scholars and researchers alike purport that a gendered analysis is absent from studies of male victims of IPV and, as a consequence, the ways in which women and men embody gender ideologies and express their identity is not captured (Anderson 2013, Machado et al. 2017, Renzetti 1999, Yllo and Straus 1990). Scholars such as Kimmel, for example, suggest that men underreport their violence against women because it undermines their masculinity and highlights their lack of control over women (2010: 108). However, this also works for those male victims of IPV, as narratives of male victims of abuse demonstrate that for a man to disclose that his female partner is beating him, is humiliating. As already discussed, unlike female victims who report violence, male victims frequently elicit ridicule, hilarity and scorn (Cook 2009, George 2004, Lafrance in press, Lafrance and Burns 2018, Migliaccio 2002, Sarantakos 2004,

Synnott 2009). In a recent qualitative study of male victims of IPV, Machado et al. (2017) referred to the ways in which men experience secondary victimization when reporting the violence. Machado et al. contend that:

> "Being a victim seems to be coded as a female experience in Western society. Men experience serious difficulties when victimized in intimate relationships, both because of internal barriers they may have to address (men may perceive the help-seeking process as a threat to their masculine identity and have a fear of losing face) and because of the treatment received from professionals. These difficulties appear to be intrinsically linked to dominant gender stereotypes and double standards that affect society as a whole, and professionals in particular" (2017: 521).

Female victimization is deeply entrenched in the discourse related to IPV (Campbell 1993, Lamb 1999). The limited research with male victims of IPV reveal the unique challenges men face when they report or seek assistance as victims rather than perpetrators of IPV (Cook 2009, Machado et al. 2017, Migliaccio 2001, Sarantakos 2004). Therefore, rather than ask, "where are all the male victims?" (Pagelow 1983, 1992), given the current evidence that reveals female violence against men, perhaps scholars and researchers should be asking, "What prevents male victims from coming forward and disclosing their abuse?"

Summary

While academics and researchers contest and debate the extent of female violence against men, the failure to offer appropriate support or treatment programs for female perpetrators as well as support for male victims of IPV will continue. The literature on male violence against women is extensive and has been developed with a robust theoretical framework (Dasgupta 1999, 2002: Dobash and Dobash 1979, 1992, 2004: DeKeseredey and Dragiewicz 2007: Johnson 1995: Kurz 1998: Loseke and Kurz 2005: Yllo 1993). However, literature on women's perpetration of IPV is predominantly based on quantitative data that is often complex and polemical with little in the way of theoretical framework or problematizing gender (Anderson 2005, Renzetti 1999). While a few qualitative studies do contribute toward the understanding of female violence and male victimization (Cook 2009, Migliaccio 2002, Sarantakos 2004), others remain invested in simplistic explanations such as patriarchy (Hamel 2007), thus limiting the opportunity to develop theory, practice, and policies related to women's perpetrators of IPV. George refers to this as the "engineered invisibility" that dominates and constructs discourse on the perpetration of IPV and a reticence to perceive women as capable of violence (2004: 26).

Feminist scholars such as Renzetti (1999, 2013) and Lamb (1999) also call for a broader theoretical perspective that explains women's violence, and which is not reliant on notions of victimization or stereotypical constructions of femininity, such as vulnerability or submissiveness (See also Anderson 2005, 2013 and Gilbert 2002). Dichotomous gendered representations of IPV ignore the diversity within gender, thus preventing women from owning accountability for their behaviour that can include violence and aggression. At the same time, binary notions of gender that purport male strength and dominance alongside women's weakness as a reason for denying women's violence often go unchallenged (Allen-Collinson 2009, also Corvo and Johnson 2003). Studies should therefore focus on where women demonstrate agency in their lives and the ways in which this includes the possibility of violence against men. The data from this study will provide a much-needed context to the acts of violence by women against their male intimates, and also show the ways in which women construct their gendered identities in spite of being the aggressor; behaviour believed a transgression of gendered assumptions in relation to femininity.

The boundary between justifying and explaining women's perpetration of IPV and excusing their violent behaviour becomes blurred, with many scholars preferring to rely on assumptions of self-defence or patriarchy to account for their violence. While those in the field of IPV debate the existence or numbers of female perpetrators of IPV, the social and cultural context, the meaning these women give to their behaviour and the consequences of such actions offer a different image of their lives. Gender is complex and although individuals construct their gendered identity through social practices, we should also understand how gender is constituted and legitimatized through intimate relationships, social institutions, and indeed violence. Ethnographic studies should shed light on topics such as women's IPV with thick description, and circumvent the significant concerns that obviate current debates within the field of IPV related to women's violence. The current study privileges the voices of women and their subjective experience as perpetrators of IPV in order to provide empirical evidence-based knowledge that both highlights the need for, and contributes towards gender-specific treatments.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the context and meaning that women give to their perpetration of IPV. A secondary goal is to understand how female perpetrators construct or shape their subjective gendered identities. Therefore, comprehensive methodological preparation for research on violence which is considered sensitive research (Renzetti and Lee 1993) is crucial for both the researcher and the researched. Renzetti and Lee claim that research may be considered both sensitive and threatening:

> "a) where research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience, b) where the study concerned with deviance and social control, c) where it impinges on the vested interests of powerful persons or the exercise of control or domination, and d) where it deals with things sacred to those being studied that they do not wish profaned". (1993: 5).

This study with female perpetrators of IPV falls under each of the aforementioned points. Therefore, a methodology that would address not only the research question but also speak to the sensitive nature of the topic was therefore required.

Research design

Since there has been little qualitative research on this topic, as such I am acutely aware of the need for rigorous and sound research methods. This research draws from narrative methods as an inquiry of experiences "as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (Creswell 2013: 70), where narrative can be construed as a "metacode" for understanding meaning and context (White 1980: 6). Rather than imposing pre-existing notions or hypotheses of women's perpetration of IPV, the research is driven by the participant's own experience and privileges their voices. Bruner claims that "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing or not doing and so on" and therefore, narrative is framed as a "cultural tool kit", (1991: 4).

The decision to select grounded theory methods is based on attention to detail in data collection, constant data comparison, and analyses, as well as flexibility in the research processes. Grounded theory is inductive, thus allowing for theory and patterns to emerge from the data without relying on any particular epistemological or ontological stance (Glaser 2002).

Having said this, there is vigorous debate surrounding grounded theory, with respect to the reflexive process and the researcher's impact on the data (Charmaz 2000), versus emergent patterns and themes (Glaser 2002). The researcher's impact on the data is but one variable among many and, according to Glaser, "like all GT [grounded theory] categories and properties: it must earn its relevance" (2002: 47).

In order to prioritize and do justice to the women whose life stories form the basis for this research, I also employed feminist research principles. Traditionally, in the social sciences, and particularly within anthropology, there is the notion that we study the "other" and while doing so maintain a professional distance from the objects of our study (Behar 1996, Scheper-Hughes 1995). Oakley however contends that feminist practices required the social sciences to reconsider how we position the role of researcher and participants, stating that:

> "The mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (1981: 58).

Feminist principles of research call for a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and participant (Renzetti 2013). The researcher is therefore required to pay attention to issues of power, be respectful, and remain reflexive throughout the interview process (Gilbert 2001). In order to obtain a rich and complex source of ethnographic data, I therefore integrate participant observation of the support group meetings designed for female offenders of IPV with in-depth interviews.

On the one hand, feminist research methods privilege the in-depth interview as an invaluable tool for research that not only empowers women, but also enables them to reveal their life stories and possible hidden truths, enriched with thick description (Chatzifotiou 2000). On the other hand, participant observation in the support group meetings offered the opportunity to witness at first-hand the manner in which the women interact with each other, in the course of events that constituted the women's daily struggle to survive, through their anxieties, emotions, and violence. In addition, I needed to familiarize myself with colloquialisms or terminology[12],

[12] For example, the counselors and the women attending the support groups referred to their partners as SO's (significant other) rather than husband, boyfriend or their name. Some of the women used the same reference when talking to me during the interview and rather than ask for clarification, I understood their language. This afforded me somewhat of an "insider" perspective.

key issues, as well as to foster trust and a degree of empathy with the participants, in preparation for the interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

I was guided by Lewis et al's (2003) article, "Methodological Issues in the Exploration of Lethal Violence" where the integration of data includes information from case files. Case file reports compiled by social workers, police, probation officers, the courts and the counsellors based on their interactions with the participants, when integrated with in-depth interviews and participant observation, offered a window into their lives that perhaps would otherwise not have been opened. Case file material and in-depth interviews complement each other and according to Lewis et al, "can minimize the impact of the fallibilities, and narrow the gaps in knowledge" (2003: 52, see also Mayer 2015). Although I did not have direct access to the case files, following each interview and without breaking confidentiality, I discussed the contents of the case files with the counsellor supervising the participant. The data from these three sources, as guided by Denzin's conceptual model of "interpretive bricoleur", facilitates a more complex and holistic representation of the participant's experiences (2012: 82). Accordingly integrating the data from participant observation and in-depth interviews with information from the participant's case files permitted me to validate the narratives. Lewis et al. refer to the "dilemma" facing the researcher when case files reveal "alternative accounts" (2003: 61). With this in view, the narrative should in itself be considered authentic and offer a rich and meaningful window into the participant's experience and the significance they ascribe to them (Lewis et al. 2003).

Unlike quantitative methods, the in-depth interview affords the opportunity to probe more deeply and to clarify information, thus revealing more about the subjective and embodied lives of those we study. Similarly, in her qualitative study of childhood sexual abuse, Woodiwiss asserts that "we make sense of our lives, plan for the future and construct ourselves and our identities through stories …therefore, our stories are only ever partial" (2017: 15, see also Lee 2000). Narratives are not simply a reflection of reality or necessarily a direct account of lived experience but complex constructions. With this in mind and in order to avoid bias, I chose to consult the participant's supervising counsellor, who had access to her case file, after having completed the interview. For the most part, the participants offered truthful accounts of their experience as perpetrators of IPV and their narratives were corroborated. In addition, for many of the participants, their narrative revealed more violence and disorder than found in the case files. For the purpose of transparency, I do indicate within the analysis any dissonance or gaps in memory

between the participant's narratives, my observation of the support meetings, and the information revealed by counsellor based on the contents of the case files.

Qualitative methods commonly do not allow for broad generalizations (Mayer 2015). Rather, than question if research findings can be generalized, Kvale suggests that researchers should inquire if knowledge can be reproduced or transferred in the same context or relevant situation (2007: 126-7). One of the objectives of this study is to therefore provide empirical and evidence-based knowledge that will contribute to gender-specific protocols for female perpetrators of IPV. Blaikie suggests that if the sample being studied is representative in terms of applicable characteristics, i.e. "typical cases", then generalizations can be inferred from the research data (2010: 193). This clinical and homogenous sample of female perpetrators of IPV does offer a lens into the contextual nature of IPV that could be considered applicable in similar circumstances. Therefore, the rigorous data collection and analysis inherent to grounded theory methods, i.e. the interviews and participant observation, can reveal the specific contexts under which the participants in this study perpetrate IPV against their male partners thus facilitating transferability (Glaser 2002).

Mapping the field

I learned of OnTrack Inc. through reading a post on the Association of Domestic Violence Providers (ADVIP), a website for BIP's and researchers of domestic violence. The post was written by Leslie Kendall who is one of the counsellors and facilitators at OnTrack Inc. Leslie referred to the continued resistance to acknowledging female perpetrators of IPV as a social problem and the resulting limited treatment options available to them. After contacting the Director of OnTrack Inc, Dr. Rita Sullivan and then Ms. Kendall, I began by explaining the Doctoral dissertation, and my approach to the topic of female perpetrated IPV. I was then invited to conduct the study with their clients who are mandated by the court to attend their support groups. Recognizing the importance of this study and the need for a gender appropriate treatment protocol for this population, Dr. Sullivan and her staff offered me open and unrestricted access to their clients.

OnTrack Inc. is a non-profit family violence and addiction treatment centre based in Medford, Oregon in the United States. Medford has a population of approximately 80,000 people, of which 76.2% are Caucasian and blue collar workers. According to the US Census in

2015, 27.6% of the people in Medford live below the poverty level and Medford has over double the official rate of poverty in the US (City of Oregon 2017). OnTrack Inc. was founded in 1969. In addition to providing programs to address the mental, social, economic, and legal effects of addictive behaviour, it also offers domestic violence counselling and treatment, parenting, family therapy, and healthy babies programmes. It employs counsellors, psychologists, and legal staff specializing in areas of addiction and domestic violence that includes violence against men, women, youths, and children.

OnTrack's main premises comprise of a large building that houses administrative offices along with several counsellors' offices and meeting rooms. On the same street, and within walking distance of the main office, there are further buildings owned by OnTrack Inc. that also house counsellors and support group-meeting rooms. OnTrack also offers crisis housing for vulnerable families in Medford. In addition, there is the "Mom's" house[13], i.e. a residential treatment program, where women, who have custody of their children, have the opportunity to stay for a period of up to three months and benefit from a network of services. The services include addiction treatment, parenting classes, children's day-care, domestic violence counselling and anger management.

The various field sites in this study provided opportunities for participant observation, which include numerous support groups for female offenders of IPV and interaction between OnTrack staff and their clients[14]. In addition to the support group meetings, I also had the opportunity to observe the "intake meetings". After being charged with drug or IPV offences, the offenders are mandated by the court to attend treatment programmes at OnTrack Inc. During the intake meetings, offenders are evaluated by a counsellor who will then recommend an

[13] In relation to the OnTrack Inc. premises, the Mom's house was on the other side of Medford. It was a large house that at any given time could accommodate up to twenty-five women and their children. There were supervisors who remain on site. The children were in day care while the women attend classes, support groups or appointments (medical, probation officers, social workers for example). As well as observing the support groups that were held once a week, I also remained at the Mom's house to observe the women and hold interviews. It was perhaps the most challenging site because of the chaotic environment with respect to noise, people walking in and out of rooms and the presence of small children, some of whom were visibly traumatized. Women were continually arriving with their children and babies, some without (because of custody issues), often with only a plastic bag of belongings. There was limited space at the Mom's house and entrance was based on immediate need.

[14] This included observing and talking to the administrative staff during "quiet times", when clients were asked to take random urine tests and take lie detector tests as part of their mandatory participation in the support group meetings. A lie detector test was administered twice during the thirty-six-week support group period or if the counselor suspected the offender was lying, breaking a co-contact order for example. If either of these tests were positive, the client would be terminated from OnTrack Inc. services, their probation subsequently lifted, and a return to jail or prison to serve the remainder of their term.

appropriate treatment protocol and who works alongside the probation officers, social workers, and defence lawyers who are also involved in client care.

I was also invited to attend three family decision meetings (FDMs) where all service providers associated with a family are present. These include, for example, social workers from the Department of Human Service (DHS), counsellors and legal representatives. This site provided me with the opportunity to observe the dynamics of the couple, view reports from other treatment providers, and also witness the outcome for the family. The OnTrack counsellor and group facilitator I shadowed for much of the field research, Leslie Kendall[15] said that the FDMs are essential before making a final decision on the degree of supervision for the family. More importantly, she said, "It is difficult for them (the couple) to lie at these meetings because everybody's there and they can't get away with it". Following the FDM, the facilitator sends a summary of the meeting to all concerned departments in order to implement any changes in services or status.

I was, in addition, also invited to attend the monthly sessions of the Recovery Opportunity Court (ROC court). The ROC court was implemented as a result of declining state revenues and to offer felons the opportunity to avoid prison. Under Measure 57, which was drafted by Dr. Sullivan, the 2009 Legislature delayed implementing the mandatory minimum prison sentences for certain felonies, such as IPV, for a period of eighteen months (Oregon Courts 2017). Indeed, all the participants who took part in this study had been sentenced by the ROC court, which meant that, as one of the counsellors told me, *"they [the women] are either coming here or they're in jail*". After sentencing, offenders, counsellor/s and probation officers are expected to attend ROC court each month and report on progress. Failure to comply with the program or pass random urine tests and regular polygraphs ends in a return to prison or jail.

This collaboration between the criminal justice system and treatment providers, specifically OnTrack Inc. brings together numerous and diverse organizations for the purpose of facilitating a clean, sober and violence-free lifestyle in order that offenders can become

[15] Leslie was also my gatekeeper and facilitated my field research. She was supportive and very proactive in making sure I participated in the support group in addition to observing them. I was included in the check-in and check-out at each of the support groups and the women were encouraged to ask me questions. Both the women she treated and her colleagues held Leslie in high regard. Indeed, the trust and warmth Leslie showed toward me encouraged and facilitated the trust and rapport I enjoyed with the participants and other counselors at OnTrack Inc. Leslie consistently introduced me to people and places she thought would be of interest to the research project; thus opening the doors to the FDM meetings, ROC court and the Mom's house, all of which proved to be valuable and rich sources of data.

responsible citizens. The court is a positive step in encouraging defendants to take control of their lives and achieve their goals in a supportive environment. Having observed the ROC court when two of the participants in this study attended their monthly appointment, success in achieving personal goals and compliance with the program elicits support and encouragement from all involved, including the presiding Judge who was familiar with the offenders personal and past history. However, when one of the participants was caught driving without a license, she was forced, as a result, to return to jail for one month and to restart her participation in the support group meetings.

Population sample

The criterion for inclusion in the study was female, heterosexual, with having perpetrated at least one act of physical violence against an intimate partner and having been identified as a perpetrator of IPV. Although other forms of abuse are understood to have more impact, emotional or verbal abuse for example, physical violence is more likely to come to the attention of the local agencies, including the police and the Department of Human Services (DHS). The field research took place over a two-month period in the latter part of 2016.

Support groups

I attended several support group meetings every week, primarily those facilitated by Leslie Kendall. The women who are mandated to attend these support group meetings have perhaps been arrested on drug or alcohol charges and have also perpetrated IPV. Having said that, Leslie developed a weekly support group meeting for women who identify as both perpetrator and victim, after having witnessed that there are some women who do first experience IPV as victims. This meeting constituted one session among many others each week. The majority of women who attended Leslie's groups identified as perpetrators of IPV. Leslie's treatment protocol is called "Breaking Free" and is based on the twelve-step program inherent to Alcoholics Anonymous (personal communication October 2016). As well as accountability, the women also learn positive communication and tools for avoiding violence in situations of conflict with their significant other (SO). I also observed support group meetings facilitated by two other counsellors, Sheila and Andrea. The women who attend Sheila and Andrea's groups

are mandated to attend the Female Domestic Violence Alternative Program (FDAAP)[16], meaning that they have all been arrested as perpetrators of IPV and charged with assault. The FDAAP program insists on the perpetrator taking responsibility for their behaviour and so at each meeting, they are obliged to recount why they are there.

The participants who attend the FDAAP meetings and Leslie's groups are all mandated and committed to attend the thirty-six-week treatment program. The support groups are open-ended and you therefore had women joining and leaving the groups at different stages. The open-ended groups enabled women who, at later stages of enrolment, to offer a valued understanding, emotional support, and practical advice to new members. The groups allow a maximum of fifteen to twenty women and on a weekly basis; the group size would vary between eight and a full room of twenty women. I observed eight groups per week. If the women are unable to attend, they are obliged to give advanced notice and a valid, verifiable reason. If more than three group sessions are missed, their probation officer is notified and appropriate action taken. The consequences can be severe and result in them losing housing, custody of their children and/or returning to serve their jail or prison sentence.

At each support group meeting, Leslie would introduce me and allow me to explain the research project to new clients. I emphasized the significance of the women's life histories and experience as perpetrators of IPV placed them as experts in the field and their knowledge could shed a much-needed light on an important topic. Moreover, through sharing their experiences in a non-judgmental environment, they could empower themselves as valuable contributors to the research process.

The counsellors and group facilitators of the support group meetings that I attended insisted that I fully participate, in order that the women would get to know me. Therefore, along with the women, I was called upon to 'check-in' at the beginning, and 'check-out' at the end of each meeting. This meant I was also included in the discussions throughout the two-hour sessions. My prior experience in facilitating support group meetings with survivors of sexual assault provided

[16] The FDAAP is based on the program developed for men (DAAP) where treatment methods are founded on patriarchal principles of male privilege, power, and dominance. There is no parallel treatment program for women. Therefore, the pronouns on the handouts given to the female perpetrators are male (he) and women (she) are referred to as victims of male violence. Due to copyright issues there is no possibility of changing any of the information on the documents. One of the objectives of this research is to assist in providing an evidence based treatment program for women.

me with the skills to demonstrate active listening and 'paraphrase' thus ensuring that my response was correspondingly non-judgmental and supportive.

Nonetheless, I did struggle with personal questions and on how to respond to them. Feminist qualitative research practices advocate for emotional involvement and call for the researcher to reject objectivity and distance, in order to create a more equal relationship with their participants (Chatzifotiou 2000), while also acknowledging the challenges in the maintenance of boundary issues (Renzetti and Lee 1993). Gilbert (2001) highlights the problematic of boundary issues for researchers when examining sensitive topics. She states:

> "The combination of highly charged topics, an in-depth and long term contact with the phenomenon and the evolving emotional environment of the researcher's own social world may result in a lack of clarity or "fuzziness" in boundaries. These boundaries must be negotiated and renegotiated, an ongoing part of the research process, as a balance is sought between the dangers and benefits of being too far in or too far out of the lives of the researched" (p. 12).

Similarly, Chatzifotiou posits that although a researcher's self-disclosure could enhance the researcher/researched relationship, it could also be inhibitive and should be used cautiously (2000: 6). While I recognize the importance of the researcher using self-disclosure in fostering trust as required in feminist research (Oakley 1981), I also recognize that "blurring the boundaries" can have consequences for both the researcher and the participant (Dickson-Swift et al. 2006: 865). I refer more to this aspect of the researcher's challenges in the reflexive section when I talk about the challenges associated with sensitive research. However, through active listening, validation, and sharing empathy, I did successfully negotiate a safe environment for the participants to narrate their often-painful life histories and co-construct a close relationship with them based on trust and without judgment.

The interviews

The twenty-five female participants who took part in the interviews are all heterosexual[17], and Caucasian and from a low-income background. All the participants had perpetrated at least one physical act of violence with their male partner. The participants were aged between eighteen and fifty-seven years old, with the majority in their late twenties or early thirties. All of the women, except one, had at least one child. In addition to IPV, many of the participants had

[17] Three of the participants spoke of having engaged in same-sex relationships in the past. However, they were currently in heterosexual relationships. After some discussion, they maintained that they considered themselves heterosexual and not bisexual, or as Brenda commented, "*whatever that is*".

substance abuse issues, and some of them were mandated to attend treatment programs for drugs or alcohol.

The participants, at the time of the field research, were either living in crisis housing or living under supervision, and were therefore obliged to seek permission from the house manager/s when leaving the premises for anything other than attending their treatment programs. To facilitate this process and to recruit the participants for interviews, I met with the crisis home supervisor/s, including the manager of the Mom's house, and the support group facilitators in order to explain the research and outline the informed consent processes. Tisdall refers to the "hierarchy of refusal", where the researcher is obliged to work through various levels of consent before recruiting participants for their study (2003: 140). Consequently, after taking the time to seek approval and foster cooperation at each level, the participants who agreed to take part in the research were all granted permission to attend an interview.

With issues of safety in mind all interviews were, without exception, held on the premises of OnTrack Inc. and during office hours. Leslie offered me the opportunity of using the *listening room* for the duration of the field research, a space in which all the participants could feel comfortable because of its familiarity. This is a quiet space in the main building where individual counselling sessions and support group meetings are held. The room is organized for counselling purposes with a coffee table, a comfortable couch, and chairs arranged in a circle. However, with the parallels between qualitative research interviews with counselling or therapy (Gale 1992, Kvale 1996) and boundary issues in mind, I aimed to provide a clear distinction between the counselling setting that they were already familiar with, and the interview as a focus of research.

In qualitative research, the skills required are comparable to counselling and present challenges to the maintenance of boundary issues for the researcher (Dickson-Swift et al. 2006, Kvale 1996, Renzetti and Lee 1993). I am very aware of the ethical considerations related to "inviting intimacy" within the interview dynamic and indeed, the success of the interview can rest on the participant sharing something deeply personal and private (Birch and Miller 2000). Encouraging a participant to share their private and most intimate narratives that might trigger memories or feelings that are damaging can also place the researcher in a role that is beyond their capacity to respond to (Birch and Miller 2000: 200). With this in mind, rather than conduct the interview with the participant in the treatment circle or on a comfortable couch, I set up a table and two chairs facing each other with the recorder in the middle of the table. I therefore

endeavoured to reconstruct a more neutral space.

I am mindful of both the physical and emotional wellbeing of the participant and the researcher[18]. Not only is it crucial that other OnTrack staff were on the premises during each of the interviews for physical safety considerations; following the interview, it is essential for the emotional wellbeing of the participant that she be given the opportunity to talk with a counsellor.

Informed consent

Each of the interviews lasted between one and a half to two hours. In line with feminist research practices, I took the time at the beginning of the interview to fully explain the informed consent and the interview relationship. These concepts relate to critical issues, such as "the question of power, empowerment, rapport, and trust" (Chatzifotiou 2000: 6.2). Sensitive research guidelines are often attentive to ethical issues related to victims of violence and the potential for harm in recounting violent episodes (Crawford and Goodey 2000). Remembering the turmoil and the circumstances leading to violence can also trigger unwanted memories and emotion for perpetrators of IPV. Despite many of the participants familiarity with sharing their experiences in the support group setting and in my presence, I also made sure to further explain any potential harm that can be derived from the interview processes before signing a fully informed consent.

I am the sole researcher and will therefore not be sharing the data with another researcher or with the staff at OnTrack Inc. without the participant's agreement. The participants will remain anonymous[19]. Their names and any identifying markers such as the names of their partner's, children, or specific places mentioned in the narrative will be omitted or changed. I impressed upon the participant that informed consent is considered an "ongoing negotiation" (Tisdall 2003: 138), meaning that they could withdraw participation from the study at any time without judgment

[18] The researcher's emotional wellbeing was also of importance. I am reminded that, "as qualitative researchers, our goal is to see the world through someone else's eyes, using ourselves as a research instrument; it thus follows that we must experience our research 'both intellectually and emotionally' (Gilbert, 2001: 9). Leslie offered me the occasion to talk with her on a professional basis in order to debrief. However, participants were guaranteed confidentiality so I was therefore reticent to share their interviews with OnTrack Inc. staff. Even though Leslie would have access to most of the information, I was aware that the women revealed more of their life experiences during the interview than they shared with the support group and indeed with Leslie.

[19] I am also aware that anonymity is a fluid concept once the dissertation is printed. Within a small community and also with respect to the counselors, even removing identifying markers, their identity might be revealed as a result of their subjective narratives relating to their life history. When I broached this concern with Leslie, she argued that the clients at OnTrack Inc were numerous and that they were also a transient population. She felt that this would probably offset any concerns.

or any attempt to have them reconsider their decision. I explained that the participant had the right to refuse to answer a question or could ask me to change the subject at any given time. I also explained the limitations of informed consent and confidentiality with respect to them revealing information that included an intention to self- harm or to harm others. This meant my having to break confidentiality and inform OnTrack Inc. that, for the participant, would have far reaching implications beyond their continued participation in the study. OnTrack Inc. would subsequently terminate their services, resulting in their probation being rescinded and returning to jail or prison to serve the remainder of their sentence. In addition, their children if fortunate would remain with relatives or in foster care. Alternatively, in the worst-case scenario, they would live in a group home until their mother completed her sentence. Therefore, the enormity of this responsibility was omnipresent, resulting in me judiciously weighing the need to probe the participant for further information during the interview.

I sought the participants' agreement to record the interview at the beginning of each interview. I gave each participant a copy of the informed consent along with my contact information. I also elicited the participant's contact information with respect to sending them the link where they could access the dissertation if they so wished. In sum, I made all efforts to ensure that the participant knew their rights and responsibilities before beginning the interview. I would like to mention that after taking the time to explain the informed consent, none of the participants asked any questions nor did they show any concern about any of the issues related to their participation in the interview, confidentiality or anonymity. However, I might derive from the participant's lack of interest, that my participating in the support group meetings beforehand had already fostered a degree of trust. I recognize the complexities in conducting research with disenfranchised or marginalized groups and disparities in power (Oakley 1981, Warr 2004). I was therefore rigorous in explaining the informed consent.

Interview process

Despite framing the interview as semi-structured, I embraced the process as being more of a conversation (Gilbert 2001, Rubin and Rubin 2005). Each interview began with, "tell me a little about your childhood, and what lead you to this point in time". The participant's narrative and their life history would evolve naturally and often with little prompting. I was mindful of Reissman's (2008) notion that participants will often construct a response that is more meaningful

to them when the researcher releases control of the notion of the fixed interview. Reissman contends that "the interviewer's emotional attentiveness and engagement and the degree of reciprocity in the conversation" is more important than the wording of a question (2008: 24). Rather than interrupt the participant with a question or clarification during their narrative, I would wait for a break in their conversation. The questions were open-ended and I would paraphrase the issue that required clarification, as for example, "tell me more about that or give me a picture or example" [20]. I am comfortable with silences or emotion during which time I demonstrate empathy, respect, and most importantly, be non-judgmental. Realizing the participant's time constraints, I did not pressure them for a repeat interview because I would have the occasion to ask further questions or clarifications at the support group sessions.

I would end each interview on an upbeat note, either praising a participant's particular strength, their ability to overcome certain challenges in their lives, or remind them of future prospects. Rubin and Rubin suggest, after an emotional interview, "the goal becomes bringing the interviewee down [because] you don't want to leave interviewees exposed, but help them calm down and feel protected again" (2005:137). With equal importance, I would discuss the participant's plan for self-care techniques, many of which would already be familiar to them, for coping with flashbacks or the emotional toll that talking about sensitive issues might provoke. Alternatively, there was the possibility of talking with their counsellor. Forewarned that they would be talking about emotional issues and experiences, many of the participants scheduled their interview before their support group meeting, thus enabling them to talk in-group with the counsellor present. However, for those who did not, I made sure that they did not leave the interview with any level of distress or discomfort. A researcher's apprehension about exploitation, causing harm or exposing emotional trauma by their participant having to relive their violence, is a foremost concern with qualitative methods and ethnographic fieldwork (Gilbert 2001). This is very much magnified when researching those who live with violence (Chatzifotiou 2000).

In light of the concerns of noted scholars for recruiting participants for this topic of study (Dobash and Dobash 2004), I questioned my capacity to enlist any participants at all willing to talk about their experiences of perpetrating IPV. However, early on, and after the first two

[20] I used the interview skills I learned when facilitating group support meetings and working with survivors of sexual assault. Interrupting a survivor who is recounting their story can interrupt the thought and take them in a completely different direction. You might lose the emotion and thought processes important at that moment in time and significant information that would otherwise be missed.

interviews, I was aware that I would have more participants than first anticipated. The question of "how many" participants required for a study is heavily debated (Bryman 2012). If, like my sample, the group is homogenous and likely to share common views and experiences, Guest et al. recommend twelve interviews after which codes and themes remain unaltered (2006). In contrast, Charmaz maintains that smaller samples such as this might elicit a variation of themes but fail to "command respect" (2012: 21).

Given the resistance in acknowledging the existence of women's perpetration of IPV (Allen-Collinson 2009), at the outset of the study I was attentive to methods that will explicitly address the epistemological and ontological questions related to women's use of violence. Charmaz addresses this issue, by arguing, "The nature of the research topic can also foster increasing the number of interviews. Opening secrets, silences, and liminal spaces likely increase the number of interviews needed, as does studying an area which does not come equipped with a widely-shared language" (2012: 21). Although attentive to the issue of data saturation, I was also cognizant that existing codes and themes could be further substantiated with each subsequent interview.

I was invested in empowering these women with whom I had developed a relationship. Therefore, during the period of field research at OnTrack Inc. I was willing to position the women who fit the criteria and who requested to take part in the research, as worthy of listening to and validate them as valuable contributors to the study (Jansen 2015). Jansen calls attention to how a disenfranchised population can benefit from talking and participating in a qualitative research interview that "provides participants with possibilities of being in the world usually not present in their daily lives and that these alternative ways of being were experienced by them as more liveable" (2015: 30). Moreover, I maintain that the research interview, in addition to providing this study with a rich source of data, could also serve to improve the participant's feelings of "competency and agency"; feelings that are often unavailable to them in their everyday lives (Jansen 2015: 36).

Data – Transcribing, coding, and analysis

In order to preserve not only the layers of context and meaning of the data but also the integrity of the participant's experience, I made the decision to engage in the long process of transcribing the data myself, rather than subject the narratives to digital processing. Having

observed the women during support group meetings and conducted the interviews with them, I was confident that I could more competently interpret, analyse, and represent the participant's stories. I paid close attention to those "powerful insights" elicited during observation, that could be lost in a recording or pages of transcripts (Warr 2004). More succinctly put, Warr contends that research encounters are "embodied and situated events, and significant details are lost if we take away and preserve only the words people said" (2004: 579).

In transcribing the data without first "tidying up" the participant's narrative, I captured those moments when participants exclaimed or when they laughed, or alternatively cried when relating a difficult moment in their lives, thus "ensuring that layers of meaning are preserved" (Warr 2004: 581-2). The data is transcribed using the participants own words and colloquialisms, including fillers such as, "mmm's", "you knows", and "like", in order to maintain a sense of the language used in the narrative. Although I transcribed the interviews once the fieldwork was complete, I did listen to the interviews at the end of each day in order to ensure that I had not overlooked or failed to probe a particular issue. Whilst I was at OnTrack Inc., I could easily ask follow-up questions after group support meetings or ask the participant back for a further interview. I took field-notes throughout that catalogued the reflexive processes of participating in the daily events, including the interviews.

Once I had returned from the field but before transcribing the interviews, I listened to the recordings repetitively and integrated field notes that referred to interviews with specific participants and observation of the support group meetings. I coded the data following the "line-by-line" method, assigning significance to each line that teases out codes and themes from each subsequent narrative (Charmaz 1996, Glaser 2002). According to Charmaz, this method is common to grounded theory practices and can facilitate our interpretation of the data, conceivably taking the "familiar, routine and mundane [data] and make it unfamiliar and new" (1996: 38). In relation to the research questions concerning the motives and meaning the women gave to their perpetration of IPV and their subjective notions of gender, line-by-line coding permitted for a more critical and analytical examination of the data. It also simplified the identification and categorization of patterns and themes as they emerged[21].

[21] Reissman (2008) claims that some meaning is inevitably lost in transcription. More succinctly, Warr contends that "The power of an embodied voice" is amplified and "can deliver a sense of struggle, despair, or resilience" if the researcher pays close attention to data housekeeping issues (2004: 581). Therefore, although my decision to transcribe and code the data myself rather than employ digital assistance meant a lengthy process of highlighting, cutting and pasting then filing and re-filing, the resulting narrative and analysis offers the reader a nuanced and uncensored lens into the participant's worldview.

Researchers should pay attention to the decision-making process of transcription and to what can be considered data. In this sense, Hammersley (2010) argues that transcribing data is more than merely constructing the talk, suggesting that, "there is an important sense that both the strict transcription of words used and the descriptions of speakers' behaviour are aimed at capturing something that exists independently of the transcription process" (2010: 553). Therefore, by strictly transcribing the women's colloquialisms and describing the emotion within the narrative, I convey a more profound descriptive meaning that takes the reader beyond the participant's narrative.

For verification, I submitted the transcriptions to a colleague who independently coded the data and subsequently confirmed the classifications. I was then tasked with determining how to interpret the data, or what Reissman refers to as the significance of "fracturing" the data (2008: 74). Noted narrative scholars, Charmaz (2006) and Reissman (2008) both draw attention to the significance of the construction of the unit or themes for analysis and highlight the challenges inherent to determining the boundaries of the narrative. Reissman argues that narrative is often presented as bounded decontextualized excerpts, as "if they had been dropped from the sky" (2008: 62). Similarly, other scholars argue that the data generated from narrative is a joint process and analysis should contextualize this interaction between the researcher and participant (Briggs 1986, Roulston 2001). With this in view, in removing the narrative exchange, researchers dismiss the notion of reflexivity and according to Roulston, are in danger of producing "a naive and possibly 'romantic' reading of data generated in research interviews" (2001: 280).

This study is in line with Reissman's category-centred approach of grounded theory (2008: 62). Texts are treated as "discrete stories" with the objective of creating a set of themes that enable the researcher to theorize clusters of data (Reissman 2008: 41). Bounded narrative texts are analysed alongside similar thematic elements from other participants thus privileging the participant's voice and meaning (Glaser 2002). Moreover, in presenting the data in bounded excerpts, the participants are less likely to be recognized thus preserving ethical considerations for anonymity and confidentiality (Ackerly and True 2010).

On the one hand, the intention of grounded theory is to develop a theoretical analysis based on the data generated by the study (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This in turn, furthers the

development of "substantive" theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994: 274). On the other hand, while Charmaz agrees that grounded theory "provides powerful tools for taking conceptual analyses into theory development", she argues for a more constructivist approach that "aim[s] to develop rich conceptual analyses of lived experience and social worlds" (1996: 48)[22]. In line with the objectives of this study, I focused on providing a rich analysis of the participant's everyday lives that is empirically based, and which offers the foundation for creating a treatment protocol for women who perpetrate IPV. Therefore, theory and data interact at every level in order to provide a relevant and rigorous analysis that, according to Strauss and Corbin, can influence policymakers and the action they take (1994: 281). Taking into account also how disenfranchised many of the women are, I am grateful to the twenty-five women who made the time to take part in the interview process. The participants in this study were under pressure to attend daily support groups, appointments with the DHS, counsellors or probation officers, and having to cope with their often-chaotic everyday lives that include children. There were many others who came forward but could not be accommodated due to time constraints or who did not strictly meet the criteria[23].

The participants sought to offer their voices, experience, and knowledge to inform and reveal the subjectivities of female perpetrators of IPV, and thus became valuable contributors to the research processes. Jansen points out that the epistemological meaning of narratives allow for "situations where the dominant discourses lose their power in ways allowing clients to assume less troubled positions and where liberating and sustainable stories can be created" (2015: 37). Indeed, I acknowledge the moral and personal responsibility to reciprocate the trust and represent the participants in this study with integrity.

[22] Glaser (2002) responds to Charmaz in his article "Constructivist grounded theory"? Glaser argues that Charmaz has remodeled grounded theory and that the constructivist approach "corrects nothing that needs correcting" (2002: 33).
[23] Women continued to come forward to be interviewed up until I left Medford. Some of the women who came forward are being treated for certifiable mental health issues and did not fit the criteria. Those who did fit the criteria but did not have the time remaining to conduct the interview, I did offer to communicate through email. However, after leaving the field this did not materialize.

CHAPTER FOUR – REFLEXIVE CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

Reflexive considerations

Of critical importance to the research process is reflexivity, i.e. the process of creating a space for the researcher, the primary instrument of data collection (Oakley 1981), to become aware of and to be able to examine the impact of their biases, their worldview, and personal experience on the study. In sum, reflexivity, means "turning the gaze on the self "and critically examining the methodological issues encountered during the research process in order to encourage transparency (Shaw 2010: 235). In this section, I, by turning the gaze on myself, describe the three most significant issues that occurred during fieldwork in the hope of providing an understanding of the complexities of researching violence. Firstly, even with an experienced researcher and the most detailed systems and boundaries in place to avoid harm to both participant and researcher, when emotional harm does occur, it requires a renegotiation of those systems and boundaries. Secondly, I examine the problems inherent to researching a contentious and political topic such as female perpetrated IPV, including the difficulties of being denied access to participants by institutional gatekeepers. Lastly, I interrogate how my identity as a female, Caucasian and older researcher either limited or was of benefit to the research process.

This study, because of the sensitive nature of the topic, relied broadly on feminist methods of inquiry that not only seek to empower those who took part in the research process, but also to foster an awareness of the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched (Chatzifotiou 2000, Oakley 1981). Ruth Behar (1996), in her seminal collection of personal essays, "The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart", denotes the tension between anthropology as an objective science and of having to remain impartial with the subjects of inquiry, referring to those who study sensitive topics as "vulnerable observers" (1996: 101). Behar's text and observation of the position of the anthropologist became familiar to me throughout the field research. With a view to developing a rapport with the participant and provide a safe environment that would permit them to disclose some of their most intimate experiences during the interview process, it was essential that I communicated empathy and remained non-judgmental. This meant, throughout the process of data collection, I had to adhere to practices that would achieve a positive relationship with the participant, and which were non-hierarchical. They also required a consistent negotiating and renegotiating of boundary issues to

manage what Gilbert refers to as "the dangers and benefits of being too far in or too far out of the lives of the researched" (2001: 12). Despite my being aware of these processes, there were periods during the fieldwork when I struggled to manage these boundaries. This prevailed upon me to interrogate my ability to contend with the anguish expressed by several of the participants during the interviews. The following discussion both acknowledges the complex relationships between the researchers and the subjects with whom they interact with, and articulates the need for some level of training for those researchers attending to narratives of violence[24]. Indeed, several issues emerge during this study with female perpetrators of IPV that call for critical reflection.

Susan – code of ethics "do no harm"

Susan participated in one of the early interviews I conducted at OnTrack Inc. Although Susan is both a victim and a perpetrator of IPV, she is of interest to this study because of the ways in which, during the group support meetings, she presented herself as being quite shy and softly spoken, whilst at the same time, also voicing how she continued to feel very aggressive. At the time of the study, she lived in crisis housing with her child and was no longer with her partner. Therefore, when she approached me to ask if she could be part of the study, I did not hesitate to agree and made an appointment for the next Friday. Susan had little formal education, was sensitive and had a sharp sense of humour. She experienced extreme neglect in her family of origin and escaped into an abusive intimate relationship in her teens, before becoming the perpetrator in subsequent relationships. Susan's interview lasted nearly two hours. During the interview she cried intermittently, but since many of the participants in the study cried throughout, this alone was not unusual. I practiced active listening and empathy, which meant I paraphrased sections of narrative to ensure a correct understanding and when necessary, offered her words of comfort. Upon completing a particularly difficult interview I ended it, as with all the participants, on a positive note by referring to her strengths. Susan also showed me photographs of her child that elicited some light and positive moments. I also spoke in detail

[24] Having said this, I have had trauma training – years of experience in counseling and facilitating groups for survivors of sexual assault, training on suicide ideation and qualitative research on IPV, but found myself unprepared for the long-term and in-depth contact with the topic that Gilbert warns might impact "the evolving emotional environment of the researcher's own social world [and] may result in a lack of clarity or "fuzziness" in boundaries" (2001: 12).

about the types of self-care available to her, in the event of negative feelings emerging from the interview, which could include for example, calling staff at the crisis housing, speaking with her counsellor, taking walks, talking to friends or taking a bath. Susan confirmed that she was fine and that she was well aware of self-care techniques after attending the support group meetings. Overall, I am sensitive to the issue of leaving a participant or sending them off in a distressed state.

The next time I had the opportunity to see Susan was at the group support meeting early the following week. She looked very tired, detached and sat in her chair with her knees hugged to her chest. I said hello and she shrugged back. When the meeting began. Leslie, the counsellor, immediately noticed that Susan was not herself and inquired if she was okay. Susan explained that she had experienced a difficult weekend because the interview had exposed "*a lot about my life that sucks. Never put it together like that*". She cried and explained that, over the weekend, she was obliged to call the staff at the crisis housing to take her child for a period because she was distraught and unable to cope. Leslie spoke at length to her and the group about the cathartic potential of participating in this research but also warned them of its potential to provoke emotional pain by having to talk about their past and factors that they had not yet come to terms with.

Following the group support meeting, Leslie asked me how I felt, suggesting that we discuss the repercussions for participants having to speak at length about their lives and how I could respond to it. I noted in my field notebook,

> "*I am devastated, Susan is a mess today - what happened here? Need to sort this out – she is emotionally fragile and so am I. I cried. I didn't want to appear unprofessional to Leslie so I was not as open as I should have been with her. Need to reflect on the research, how much damage to these vulnerable women*".

I explained to Leslie that I was both devastated and shocked because I felt that I had taken all precautions to ensure her emotional well-being following the interview. Leslie confirmed her confidence in my capacity as a researcher with this vulnerable group. However, with a view to exercising caution, we agreed that going forward I would no longer conduct interviews with any of the participants on a Friday. Regardless of the self-care advice and routine, it was ill-advised to conduct any further interviews just prior to the weekend. The weekend is a critical period, during which the participants were emotionally vulnerable, and having to cope with the

additional anxieties of family life, without having the support of group meetings or counselling sessions. Also going forward, in addition to talking about self-care and rather than asking the participants if they understood them, I asked each participant to tell me about how they would respond to any negative emotions following the interview and then discussed their options. As a result, I did not have a repeat of this incident with any of the participants.

This experience shows how ethical issues can potentially arise during qualitative research even if the researcher is fully acquainted with the consequences of research on sensitive issues and aware of the moral responsibility for those who participate. Whatever the case, the researcher is obliged to respond to any distress that might arise during a participants' involvement in the research, which in this case, was brought on by participants describing the physical and emotional chaos of their intimate relationships. Notably, Dickson-Swift et al. refer to an absence of training and knowledge for those researching sensitive topics and their capacity to respond to the complicated issues and feelings triggered by an in-depth and personal interview. He suggests caution because "the reality is that many researchers do not feel adequately trained to participate in that level of debriefing and might, in fact, do more harm than good" (2006: 861-2). The emotional risks inherent in a feminist approach are well documented (Oakley 1981, Sampson et al. 2008), and suggest a need for specialist training (Sampson et al. 2008: 930).

This event with Susan demonstrated the ethical minefield inherent to research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, and obliged me to reconsider the ways in which I was contributing to already difficult lives. Indeed, continuous self-reflection and subjectivity are fundamental to the qualitative process. In her reflexive account of qualitative research conducted with women awaiting trial, Wincup contends that acknowledging the impact of research on those we interview can not only improve the research processes, but also encourage us to consider participants as collaborators rather than as "subjects or respondents or sources of data" (2001: 31). Indeed, by way of empowering the participants, I impressed upon them that the study very much depended on their expertise and knowledge.

Researchers are obliged to relate any physical or emotional safety concerns during the ethics approval process. I was fortunate that my application for ethics approval was granted by Concordia University without amendments, as a result of having had addressed all concerns related to having to interview a vulnerable population. Irrespective of my past experience with

interviewing and facilitating groups, Susan highlights the importance of adapting to changing circumstances and addressing problems quickly, in order to offset any unforeseen consequences for both the research participant and the researcher.

Sara – Researcher's emotional wellbeing

There has been little attention given to the emotional toll on researchers working with sensitive topics in qualitative research (Dickson-Swift et al. 2006, 2009: Gilbert 2001: Rager 2005: Samson et al. 2008). The interview I conducted with Sara exemplifies the potential for harm associated with narratives of violence, even when the researcher has extensive experience with those who experience and perpetrate intimate partner violence and survivors of sexual violence. Sampson et al. (2008) review the prevalence and potential for emotional risk for those researching sensitive issue and contend that emotional risks can, for the most part, be planned for. They also consider the consequences of "the unpredictability of emotional 'danger' and the extent to which researchers can be caught by surprise in emotional turmoils and dilemmas" referring to what they determine is "vicarious hurt" (2008: 930). The term "vicarious hurt" or "vicarious trauma" refers to both the transference of trauma and the reaction of the researcher to the content of the narrative or interview (Dickson et al. 2009: 72). Undoubtedly this resonates with the embodied response I experienced during Sara's interview. I was forced to delve deep in order to reflexively and subjectively interrogate why Sara's interview in particular had such an impact on me.

Sara was mandated to attend the FDAAP group after being charged with assault four, which is a felony. This was not her first time being charged with assault against an intimate partner and, as previously discussed, she had already lost custody of her children after choking them when they were toddlers. Her level of violence is severe and the counsellor and facilitator, Sheila, warned me against recruiting her for the study because of her extreme violence. However, Sara approached me after a group support meeting and asked if she could participate. I agreed and we set up a time for the interview. As a matter of physical safety, all interviews were held on the premises of OnTrack and in a private room where both the researcher and participant were visible to others through a window but could not be overheard.

Sara's interview began with her childhood and proceeded from that point. Sara witnessed her birth mother's abuse as a child, but was subsequently adopted. Although life with her

adopted family was uneventful, she voiced an acute resentment against her adopted mother based on a number of perceived grievances. One of these was the fact that she had custody of one of Sara's children. Sara proceeded to talk openly about violent episodes with three of her partners, all of whom were non-violent and two of whom she had married. Sara engaged eye contact with me throughout the interview, she smiled and laughed a lot and leaned in toward me. I felt very uncomfortable, both with her apparent enjoyment in the description of the violent episodes and her physical proximity. Sara spoke freely and openly about her violence and her intimate relationships, so there was no need to probe her during the interview, or indeed for the empathy and validation I offered other participants throughout their interview.

After an hour, Leslie knocked on the door and informed me that I had another appointment so I needed to end the interview. This was extremely unusual because I did not have another appointment and Leslie was aware of the confidentiality of the interview process. Even so, I took the time to end the interview on a positive note, advising on self-care and inquiring how the participant would respond to any unwanted emotion. Once Sara left, I sought out Leslie to ask her why she had ended the interview. Her response was "*I didn't like the way you looked in there*!" I wrote in my journal –

> *I screwed up the interview. This narrative was not different to others, not the first time I've heard this level of violence. I've heard worse, listening Victor talk about raping his wife (during the fieldwork with male perpetrators of IPV for my Master's) and didn't visibly react. I was just sitting there, wishing she would stop. I could barely listen to her and I hope she couldn't see how I was reacting to her. I maintained an active listening stance of nodding and responding every so often. When Leslie came into the room, I was relieved. I hope Sara didn't feel judged. What was so different here??*

Without breaking confidentiality, I spoke to Leslie about my reaction to Sara's interview. She said that it was a normal response to what I was hearing. She suggested I take the remainder of the day off to engage in some self-care techniques and start afresh the next day.

I had anticipated the manner in which the interview process could affect the participants and had developed some methods for dealing with them. I had not however prepared for the emotional impact that this interview would have on me, as a researcher. During sensitive research, the emotional management of self and the management of those who take part in the research is ongoing and fundamental to establishing a rapport that permits the creation of a non-

judgmental space for participants to share their life histories (Dickson-Swift et al. 2009). Given the sensitive nature of the research, I better prepared for the emotional impact the interviews might have on me by spacing out the interviews, going out for coffee breaks and talking to the staff of OnTrack. As already mentioned, I was totally unprepared for my reaction to Sara's narrative and her embodiment of the violence she had perpetrated, not only on her children but also on various intimate partners. Her aggression toward her mother was so demonstrably brutal that I was concerned for her safety[25].

After a measure of subjective and reflexive inquiry, there are two factors that emerge from this extraordinary response; the first is, as a mature researcher confident in my abilities to engage with participants, I was unfamiliar with feeling intimidated or powerless and that I had also lost control of the interview. In a subjective evaluation of my response to Sara, her bodily engagement with me by leaning forward and establishing direct eye contact throughout the interview, provoked an intense discomfort that inadvertently offered me a window of understanding of my critical attitudes towards the vulnerability of women. Berger's work, although with female victims of IPV, her reflexive positioning regarding abused women clearly resonates with my experience:

> "While cognitively I am well aware of the effects of being 'frozen to immobility' associated with the experience of abuse, there is that voice in me which refuses to accept, and is critical of abused women's 'submissive' position…I had to deliberately make myself aware of the possibility of these conflicting reactions may tint the way in which I hear, ignore, and overemphasize certain aspects and disregard other aspects of women's narratives" (2013: 228).

Lofland and Lofland (1995) posit the thought that often we undertake research on topics that resonate with issues in our own lives and which will therefore elicit an emotional reaction on our part (see also Dickson-Swift et al. 2009). Although IPV is not a factor in my life, I have been robbed at gunpoint and threatened with a machete during my time living in West Africa. I was physically uninjured. However, at a point in time following the attacks, I had an intense feeling of vulnerability and powerlessness, that I have never otherwise experienced. Dickson-Swift remind us that embodied responses similar to my experience with Sara, not only serve as reminders of the need to pay attention to how our choice of research can impact us emotionally

[25] I did talk to Sara's counselor Sheila, asking generally about Sara's relationship with her mother and without disclosing confidential information. Sheila confirmed that she often spoke harshly of her mother but was confident that Sara would not have the opportunity to act on her feelings.

but also "embodied responses ...are markers of meaning from which researchers can learn" and through taking the time to pay attention to these "physical and emotional aspects of research might be better prepared both to undertake the research and look after our own health while doing so" (2009: 68).

This experience demonstrates the ways in which we embody, often unintentionally, our own biases or experiences in interpreting the experiences of others. It also speaks to the continuous demand for reflexivity in our reactions. With respect to research and integral to this study, Mauther and Doucet argue that a fundamental factor in reflexivity is, "situating ourselves socially and emotionally in relation to respondents" (2003: 419). With this in mind, I sought the assistance of a colleague to review the transcript, and to code and review the use of this particular interview within the themes and analysis, in order to avoid any nuances inherent to the vicissitudes I had encountered during the interview itself. In this way, reflexivity compels us to come to terms with our limitations, and challenging us to improve the ways in which we represent those we interact with in our research (Anderson 1999). It is also worth noting that Sara remained oblivious to my reaction during the interview. Whenever we met afterwards, she would greet me warmly and regale me with what was going on in her life.

Researching a "taboo" topic: The perils of finding a field site

I would like to outline the challenges I experienced in negotiating access to my study population, i.e. the female perpetrators of IPV, as was mediated at various levels by gatekeepers. Although there is an increasing reflexive discussion on how researchers gain access to field sites and populations, there is limited knowledge generated in the literature (Reeves 2010). Indeed, given the consistent negotiation and re-negotiation at all stages of the research process during data collection, Reeves contends, "gaining permission to enter the field or contact participants is a very different matter to accessing them" (2010: 329). This was very much evident with my experience with formal gatekeepers who denied me access to their clients.

Finding a field site to conduct this research was one of the chief challenges I faced during the research process. When I initially designed this research project with domestically violent women, I anticipated some difficulty in recruiting participants because female perpetrated IPV is recognized as Malcolm George (2007) calls it, "the Great Taboo" and continues to be a matter for debate within the discipline of IPV. Therefore, at the beginning of the PhD program and to

offset any concerns I had with finding a population to participate, I immediately sought out a treatment facility in Montreal that offered group support meetings for women, primarily to provide support for anger management. After meeting with the Director, he offered me his full support once I was ready to begin the field research. Unfortunately, just prior to beginning the field research process and data collection, a new Director was appointed and the facility no longer offered support group meetings to violent women. As a result, I sent messages and made phone calls to numerous facilities in Canada and also in the United States but without success. Through further research into facilities for family violence, I located OnTrack in Medford, Oregon. I contacted the Director, Dr. Sullivan, and sent her the research proposal and supporting documents. With an appreciation of the importance of the topic and the objective of generating knowledge that could contribute to evidence-based practices for service providers, Dr. Sullivan and Leslie Kendall generously offered me access to their clients and support groups at the facility for the two-month period of the field research.

During this time, I had the opportunity to attend an ADVIP (American Domestic Violence Intervention Providers) conference in the United States that was aimed at Batterer Intervention Providers (BIP's). Here I sought to make contact with service providers who might also permit me to conduct research with their clients. I met a BIP based in Ontario who informed me that it would not be worth his job to have me interview his clients. He proclaimed that his Director would never approve and just by asking her, he would put his job at risk. I endeavoured to find out why. He informed me that despite offering group support and individual treatment for female perpetrators of IPV, they did not advertise this service because their funding derived from feminist-based organizations. He meant that their treatment practices were also based on feminist principles of treatment. I asked him to describe those practices – was treatment based on the understanding that women use IPV against their male partners in self-defence or retaliatory positioning women as victims rather than perpetrators of IPV? I asked him to explain the treatment offered at his facility, which was a government mental health service. According to him, male perpetrators receive sixteen individual counselling sessions or group support meetings. More significantly, he informed me that since there was no evidence-based research with female perpetrators of IPV, they had no idea how to treat women or how long the treatment should last, so it did not make any difference if they were offered two or twenty sessions. As a result, they had settled on four sessions for female perpetrators of IPV at their facility.

I spoke to another BIP based in Ontario and he agreed to contact me and arrange for me to visit once he had gained permission from the members of the support group. Although he had only one group support meeting for female perpetrators of IPV, he said he recognized the importance of the study. Later, he contacted me and I visited him and toured the facility. He introduced me to his group, all of whom immediately agreed to be interviewed and gave me their contact details. The next day, he called and said that after speaking with his Director, he was unable to offer any assistance to this project. I asked if I could meet with his Director and explain the project, that the study was based on feminist principles with the aim of providing empirical evidence that would contribute toward a gendered treatment protocol. I did not receive any further communication from him.

At the same time, another BIP from Ontario heard of my study and contacted me, requesting me to visit her because she was interested in participating in the study. She articulated her concern for female perpetrators treatment protocol options, telling me "*we are flying blind here, it's the women and their families who are the ones to suffer, they don't know where to turn*". However, before I could visit and after contacting her Director for permission, she informed me that I was denied permission to conduct research with their clients. None of the BIP's offered an explanation for the decision to deny my access to their clients.

I reflected on contacting those women who had already consented to participate in the study but took the decision that it would be morally and ethically erroneous to interview them without the permission of the gatekeepers involved. Bosworth, et al. describe similar challenges in seeking access to their study population of trafficked women with gatekeepers who refused them permission because of the "implications of research for potential funders" (2011: 777). Funding services for victims of IPV are similarly vulnerable. I am acutely aware that female perpetration of IPV is a controversial issue and as previously discussed, feminists have shaped discourse and knowledge related to IPV (Straus 2009b). Indeed, Bosworth et al. acknowledge the strategic role of institutional gatekeepers, arguing "when the population in question is vulnerable, advocates shape and structure the communication of their experiences, effectively controlling the way in which their stories are represented to the wider public" (2011: 776).

In retrospect, I recognize that I should have been more sensitive to the political nature of IPV funding practices and issues related to the hierarchy of gatekeepers within the local government mental health organizations. Regardless of this study's focus on female perpetrators

of IPV, directly presenting this qualitative research as being informed and guided by feminist principles to the program directors as the primary gatekeepers, rather than through the counsellors could have elicited a different outcome. This experience reveals the importance for researchers to understand the ways in which they negotiate institutional barriers in order to carry out their study and gain access to the voices of persons whose experiences we seek to understand (Bosworth et al. 2011).

Gender, age and status differentials

Subjective and reflexive examination requires me to interrogate how I, in terms of my gender, age and class, impact the research process. Acknowledging the ways in which we embody and perform gender as factors critical to the research process produces an understanding of the consequences to the relationship between the researcher/researched. The participants in this research were all women, Caucasian and from a working-class background. As a woman interviewing other women there should be an opportunity for a shared understanding, as an insider (Oakley 1981), or as Watts puts it "a form of kinship [that] enabled at least some measure of 'sameness' or 'connectedness'" (2006: 400). Perhaps this was evidenced in my ability to establish rapport with the participants, gain their trust and facilitate a non-judgmental space for them to share their narratives. However, the women I interviewed and interacted with during participant observation were also guarded with 'outsiders' as a result of their experiences with institution such as the Department of Human Services (DHS), the courts and numerous other organizations involved in their services. I was not immediately accepted as part of the group. This came shortly only after I was asked by one of the group members to participate in the 'check out'. This meant telling the group how I felt about the meeting, in the form of feedback, and giving my observations. I would offer a positive observation related to the group or a group member. From then on, I was expected to participate fully in the support group and was often included in their discussions.

My 'outsider' status was also made evident when I began observing the group support meetings, in the course of which I would introduce myself, my background and explain the research processes and my approach to the topic of research. For example, in keeping with the Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS2) used in quantitative studies of IPV, I explained that "No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other

reason" (Straus 1999: 33). As such, I would establish conflict as a normal strategy within intimate relationships, then I described the research project in detail. During one of the first group meetings I attended, Dorothy, one of the group participants, asked me, "*have you been a victim*?" I was taken aback but said that I had not, and enquired if this was an issue. She then exclaimed, "*I don't want to be judged by you*". I described my experience in qualitative research with male perpetrators of IPV and with survivors of sexual assault. I also impressed upon the group members that their experiences and voices were valued, confident that this would speak to their concerns. She did offer to take part in the research. Following the interview, I inquired if she felt judged and she responded by hugging me. Going forward, she was close and often shared her feelings and accomplishments outside the group when we met in the street. She also encouraged other group members to become involved, telling them, "*Lesley's cool, it's like having a conversation*". With this in mind, my gender was evidently secondary when compared to my being able to relate to their experience with IPV without judgment.

A further factor for consideration in the research processes is my age. Being an older person and a PhD student conducting research, conceivably afforded me a privileged status compared to the participants. While conducting field research for my Master's project in Nigeria with focus groups made up of male perpetrators of IPV, I considered my age had a positive impact on the interview process. In the African context, age is understood to assign seniority but with respect to a woman, it also positions her as an honorary male bestowing the privilege associated with being a man (Falola 2013). However, in the context of North America, age remains under-theorized (Lundgren 2012, Wenger 2002) with little consideration given to it and other generational boundaries in qualitative research (Grenier 2007). Now at age sixty-plus, I am considered a senior, a factor that might have facilitated gaining respect and assistance since the majority of the participants were in their late twenties and early thirties. Grenier (2007) suggests that age and generation impact qualitative research in terms of shaping a frame of reference and interpretation of events. That being said, Grenier conceives of both age and generation as fluid constructions that offer the opportunity for researchers and participants to transcend the "young/old dichotomy. As such, researchers may find that instead of an expected "generation" gap, the experiences between themselves and their participants overlap in unexpected ways, producing contrasts worthy of reflection, dialogue and exchange" (2007: 723). This was indeed my experience with the participants who took part in this study, all of whom shared their

childhood trauma and the most private and intimate aspects of their experience with IPV - as perpetrators, victims, or both.

Lastly, I consider my gender display or appearance as a fundamental but also as an initial barrier to establishing myself with the women in the support groups. Effort was made to dress and appear more casual than I normally did, but this did little to conceal the fact that I am from a different social status from the population I sought to engage in this study. Moreover, Leslie advised me before my arrival in Medford that OnTrack Inc. was situated in a notoriously unsafe area and in order to address safety concerns, I would not be walking by myself nor during my stay should I reside close to the premises. Leslie transported me to and from OnTrack Inc. each day. Therefore, I dressed casually. However, I also wanted to present my authentic self and so as per my normal everyday habit of attending to make-up and dressing my silver coloured hair, both of which draw comment on a regular basis. I did not want to change what essentially makes me "who I am", but did tone it down in order to avoid attracting attention while walking between the OnTrack buildings that were within fifty metres of each other on either side of the same street. In spite of this, I am confident in my ability to communicate genuine warmth that puts people at their ease and to seek connections through humour, more often than not directing it toward myself and more importantly, to revealing something about myself that can foster a common connection. There are constructive benefits of disclosure, such as fostering respect and feeling acknowledged for those who participate in qualitative research. Stuhlmiller, a qualitative researcher indicates, "even if the story is one of shame and remorse, the attempt to be understood rather than ignored, judged or discounted often enables the person to feel valued" (2001: 67). I believe that the substantial data gathered for this study was reflective of the authentic relationship I proactively sought to develop with each of the participants.

Summary

Conducting qualitative research considered "hygienic" or "proper", according to Oakley (1981), is a myth. As a means of engaging with our participants and with the aim of interpreting their world, "personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the recognition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (1981: 58). This involvement is subject to a reflexive inquiry that not only encourages transparency in the analysis or interpretation of the data but also reveals those factors or biases that may well influence the

study. I have provided an example of the impact that the narration of life histories had on the participants and the tangible measures taken by the researcher in order to avoid further unsettling outcomes. This demonstrates the importance of remaining flexible, or promptly reacting to challenges, with the interview process in order to maintain an ongoing awareness of safety measures to prevent emotional harm to both the participants and the researcher.

The issues highlighted in this section also point to gaps in the literature on qualitative research that should otherwise address institutional gatekeepers and access to participants, as well as on the manner in which age influences the relationships and the interview process. Consider Grenier's reflection on the positioning of the researcher and participant when she posits the thought, "considering that no two individuals can be matched along the lines of all social locations, perhaps learning occurs in negotiating the difference between researcher and respondent in cases where the commonality is social location rather than age or generation" (2007: 728) or indeed, gender, class or race. Positioning ourselves with respect to gender, age, class, race or religion can erect boundaries for, and limitations to, our research, but can also offer benefits or insights into relationships, thus providing us with a rich source of data from which to analyse the lives of those we study.

The positive relationships I nurtured with the participants was evidenced when, a few months after leaving the field, Leslie wrote to me and explained the impression I had left on those who had participated in this study. She said:

> *All the women you interviewed wrote in their exit letters to the group, that their experience in meeting you and being interviewed by you was a positive part of their journey. They learned a lot about themselves and they loved you. Even some of the friends you made in the support groups mentioned you.*

A year after leaving the field, I returned to Medford to present the findings of this research to the Judges from the ROC court, defence lawyers, local law enforcement, DHS and the staff at OnTrack Inc. The results of this study were well received and most of those who attended appreciated the quality of the data as well as the findings that would be incorporated into the intake process. I also had the opportunity to make contact with some of the participants. The participants who had remained at OnTrack Inc. gave me hugs[26] and we caught up with each

[26] Because of the nature of the topic, the bodily experiences of the participants and their issues with boundaries, despite me being a relatively tactile person, I was sensitive to initiating physical contact with the participants. This means I never touched the participant without them first initiating the contact. Normally when consoling or

other on the events of the past year. I shared the results of the study with them, and they provided positive feedback on the ways in which I had integrated their narratives. Some were doing well and continued to make progress. Sadly, one of the participants who had done so well for several years and served as a mentor for many of the other women in the group, had broken her probation and had returned to prison to serve the remainder of her sentence. During my fieldwork, I had developed a professional and warm relationship with the staff at OnTrack Inc, all of whom had offered their assistance. They had made sure that I not only had access to all the group support meetings but had also suggested that I attend, and that I was also given access to the ROC court, FDM meetings, and male support group meetings. All of this contributed to a rich and diverse source of data.

Regardless of the potential barriers I noted in this section, I established a positive relationship with a group of women who were, as a result of their life experiences, suspicious of others and who also had a plethora of emotional and physical boundaries. Through adapting and managing these factors during the field research, I succeeded in collecting a rich source of data. The challenges I encountered while gathering data from this population of female perpetrators of IPV, however, did not dampen my commitment to treat those who agreed to participate in this research with respect and dignity. I am reminded of feminist researcher and scholar, Carol Smart's (2014) reflection on not only being reflexive throughout the research process but also paying attention to attentiveness that permits for a deeper understanding of the objects of our research. She observes, "reflexivity is about the researcher, attentiveness is about the lives of those we research and arguably it is at the intersection of those two attitudes of mind that the research process begins to transcend a mere accumulation of tangible facts, recorded speech and observed actions (2014: 136). I had not expected to form any bonds with the women I interacted with. However, I did, and found that I both liked and admired them. They showed a warmth and generosity toward me during my stay in Medford that was totally unexpected. Their lives are complex, violent, chaotic, and 'messy', but the women who participated in this study embodied resilience and were hopeful for change.

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demonstrating empathy, I touch a person's arm to comfort them. However, with the participants in this study, I would seek permission in order to respect boundaries. Having said this, many of the participants did hug me when we met once I had established a closer relationship with them.

Limitations of this study

The limitations I have identified as inherent to this study are generalizability, lack of diversity, criteria of participation and social desirability. Each will be described briefly.

Firstly, the small number of participants will limit how this study can be applied to the general population. However, according to Kvale (2007), given the specific nature of the study female perpetrators of IPV, rather than expect to generalize the results of a study, expect to apply some characteristics to a similar population and under similar circumstance. On the one hand, their subjective notions of gender are just that - subjective. However, on the other hand, the analysis can offer a unique window into the gendered identities of women and violence in general, thus guiding protocol and practices for both the development of theory and treatment.

Secondly, there is a lack of diversity in this study, since all participants are Caucasian and from the same economic class. This represents a reflection of the demographics of Medford where, as discussed previously, over three quarters of the population are Caucasian and where there is an excess of poverty when compared to other regions of the United States. Going forward, extending the study to a more diverse population, to include other ethnic, social and indigenous populations will broaden the knowledge of IPV as a variable that intersects with gender, race, class, culture and religion for example.

Thirdly, I identified the following factors and limitations of the study early on but was unable to modify participation and integrate changes to the study without lengthening my stay in Medford, which would have created both personal and financial issues. I had not anticipated how interviewing participants at various stages in their treatment for the perpetration of IPV would impact how they internalized and embodied their behaviour. Although most of the participants were at the beginning or middle of their treatment, for those close to completion, their narratives were shaped by language and justification that I recognized was derived from counselling sessions. When this occurred, I would ask the participant to go back and think about their feelings and behaviours *before* entering treatment, and in general they could then relate to, and narrate what they were actually thinking at the time of the event. However, I would also recommend going forward to integrate the period a participant entered treatment, attending support group meetings and counselling sessions as criteria for participation and as a factor in the length of time required for conducting the research. This would mean, identifying and recruiting participants from the intake meeting and who were at the beginning of the intervention.

Lastly, since the narratives are based on self-reporting by perpetrators of IPV they were open to social desirability bias. The efforts of participants to present a more favourable image of themselves and in keeping with sociocultural norms, has been well documented (Crowne and Marlowe 1960). These two factors reflect the validity of the participant's recollection of their events and how they respond in a way that would elicit approval. Given that this study is an analysis of the participant's narratives and uses a social constructivist approach, the participant's recollection of events is representative of the individual's construction of their world and experiences. However, with respect to either presenting a favourable image of themselves or to the social desirability factor, their narratives demonstrate that these factors do not impact this study. By attending and observing the group support meetings over a two-month period of time, I was able to observe the participant's behaviours and comportment, their interaction with others and behaviours outside the interview structure. I could therefore, during the interview, question any behaviours in contrast to behaviours demonstrated in the "group", thus allowing for an open and honest dialogue. In this respect, social desirability did not present itself as a mediating factor in either the participant's narrative or with me during participant observation.

In conclusion, there are possibly other limitations I have failed to identify, but issues related to generalizability, diversity, criteria for participation and addressing social desirability clearly were likely shortcomings for this study and should be carefully considered in research on the topic of female perpetrated IPV.

CHAPTER FIVE – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The topic of female perpetrated IPV is controversial and continues to be debated within the field of domestic violence. Scholars refer to the dearth of studies related to female perpetrated IPV (Dobash and Dobash 2004, Holtzworth-Munroe 2005, Stith et.al. 2004, Straus 2012) and even more significant is the dearth of theory (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Laidler and Hunt 2001, Messerschmidt 2004, Schippers 2007). Currently, femininity is interrogated and theorized in either of two ways. Firstly, it is discussed in relation to men and "the role played in power in producing and legitimating masculine privilege" (Budgeon 2014: 321, see also Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Secondly, it is addressed in terms of an embodiment of masculine traits (Adler 1975, Halberstam 1998), particularly when referring to violent women. Women's violence is conceptualized as pathological, more as unnatural (Shaw 1995) or an anomaly (Faith 1993) rather than criminal. Messerschmidt argues that there is a lack of theory, "that does not belittle women and punish them intellectually for stepping outside the bounds of emphasized femininity: we require theory sensitive to how women/girls as women/girls occasionally commit violence" (1997: 68). Indeed, a theory that encapsulates the multiple ways women embody femininity, taking into account how gender is shaped through social interaction and specific social situations, class, race or sexual orientation, circumvents notions of women who engage in IPV as "bad", "mad" or "crazy". With this in view, women's violence within their intimate relationships can be theorized within the bounds of femininity.

The first objective of this study is to address the contextual elements of female perpetration of IPV, the motivations and justifications, and the meaning that the participants give to their violence. The second objective is to understand how female perpetrators construct or embody their subjective gendered identity as perpetrators rather than victims of IPV. This study is therefore firmly rooted in inductive methods and principles of grounded theory. Accordingly, the theoretical framework for this study is guided by the depth and quality of the data, which constitutes a rich source of ethnographic data that can be derived from participant observation and in-depth interviews with female perpetrators of IPV. In Strauss and Corbin's words, "data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. (1994: 23). In keeping with this tradition, a blending of current theories situate the data and, at the same time, strengthen and define this study as distinctive within the field of IPV.

Eighteen of the twenty-six participants in this study were violent towards their non-violent partners without ever having experienced IPV as victims. The remainder had been victims of IPV and had subsequently become perpetrators of violence against non-violent partners. The women who participated in this study however refuted the label of victim and argue "*we're not victims*". More significant were the ways in which gender functions to influence not only the manner in which they construct their identities but also the meaning given to their violence as perpetrators of IPV. The participants position themselves as either "*broken*" women, or alternatively, drawing from dualistic notions of gender. For example, Angela clearly summarizes the paradox associated with theorizing female perpetrators of IPV, she said, "*I cuss like a logger and I wear makeup… men can be aggressive, why can't I*", suggesting a disconnect concerning how the participants position themselves within current discourse. Thus, theory that highlights agency and gender is fundamental to the data generated in this study of female perpetrators of IPV.

Currently, violence is theorized within masculine norms of power and aggression as the standard for conduct (Messerschmidt 2004). According to some theorists, there is a reliance on masculine theories of offending (Renzetti 2013) and a failure to attend to gender. Rather, they argue that the modus operandi is to "add women and stir" (Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006: 31) and thus produce dualistic notions of femininity that pathologize female offenders as either "mad" or "bad" (2006: 30, see also Comack and Brickey 2007). Therefore, in an attempt to integrate the complex data generated on women's perpetration of IPV and their subjective gendered identity, this study draws not only from James Messerschmidt's structured action theory (1995, 1997, 2002, 2004, 2012), but also from Connell's (1987) concept of emphasized femininity and Schippers' (2007) stigmatized version of femininity, pariah femininity. This is done in an effort to rectify the issue of applying men-oriented and masculinity-based models of understanding to matters of women and femininity.

Messerschmidt's structured action theory builds on Gidden's (1984) notion of structuration as a conceptual framework for understanding offending and gender. This theory has roots in social constructionism as it applies to criminological concepts (Renzetti 2013). Structured action theory provides a basis for understanding women's perpetration of IPV and the fluidity of gender, exploring in which social situations females commit acts of violence and how these women contest the bounds of socially appropriate feminine norms (Messerschmidt 1995). Also relevant is Messerschmidt's interpretation of West and Zimmerman's (1987) notion of 'doing gender' that

encompasses accountability as its central thesis. The women in this sample are accountable to others on their gender performance. Their narratives reveal that they often fail to position themselves as women as a result of their violent behaviour and they are challenged by institutions such as law enforcement that leads to a failed identity thus constructing themselves as 'broken' women.

Messerschmidt's theory lends itself well to other social constructionist theories of gender. For example, Raewyn Connell's (1987, 1995) concept of emphasized femininity provides important links to the participant's idealized, unattainable and socially sanctioned model of gender. Similarly, Schippers' (2007) model of hierarchical femininities furthers Connell's and Messerschmidt's (2005) revised concept of gender hegemony by offering an alternative model for multiple configurations of femininity and on how hegemony more broadly shapes discourse on gender beyond theories of masculinity (2007: 86). These paradigms all contributed to providing an understanding of the data collected by this study. Rather than substantiating the data, these theories test the notion of how women who perpetrate IPV can find a space to construct a successful gendered identity.

Emphasized femininity

Connell (1987) theorizes relational and discursive models of gender by juxtaposing hegemonic masculinity as the idealized form of masculinity with emphasized femininity, the idealized other. Connell contends that hegemonic masculinity is not only idealized but privileges white, heterosexual, competition, aggression, and strength in men. This model of masculinity is also constructed in relation to women, often as a justification for patriarchy and women's subordination, but also in relation to various subordinate forms of masculinity (1987: 183). According to Connell, there is no corresponding construction of femininity, arguing that "femininity organized as an adaptation to men's power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance, and empathy as womanly virtues, is not in much of a state to establish hegemony over other kinds of femininity" (1987: 188).

Emphasized femininity denotes the broad range of feminine social norms that embrace passivity, submission, desire to attract male attention and traditional gendered patterns of behaviour and gender roles. Messerschmidt refers to these elements collectively as the culturally idealized form of femininity (2004: 42). According to Connell, central to emphasized femininity

is the notion of compliance, summarized as "the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men's desire for titillation and ego-stroking", in addition to a general recognition of marriage and childcare practices in acknowledgement of women's subordinate place in society (1987: 187).

Consequently, both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity shape an individuals' sociocultural behavioural attitudes and the subsequent actions deemed appropriate for their sex (Connell 1987, Messerschmidt 2004). According to Messerschmidt (1995), although hierarchies of power between women do occur, femininity remains subordinate to situationally specific forms of masculinity. In this sense, Messerschmidt argues, "femininity can be understood only as a relational construct" (1995: 173). Having said this, Messerschmidt and Connell (2005), in their article entitled "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept", revisited the static and often stereotyped concept of hegemonic masculinity. They argued that although emphasized femininity and its "focus[ed] on compliance to patriarchy" remained somewhat relevant, they are not reflective of the possible shift in gender hierarchies that "are also affected by new configurations of women's identity and practice" (2005: 848).

Rather than a stable or unchanging characteristic, gender is socially constructed and therefore a continuously changing and fluid concept that has become more multidimensional and complex (Budgeon 2014: 318). Consequently, it is critical that we examine how women negotiate gender norms in this changing context and the manner in which they accomplish or construct a gendered identity as female perpetrators of IPV, considered outside the bounds of idealized models of femininity. While the constructionist model of gender is intrinsic to this study, the participant's narratives both disrupt and embrace traditional notions of femininity inherent to this paradigm.

The participants rationalize the violence they inflict on their intimate partners and while experienced differently, all of the women embrace traditional notions of femininity such as romance, gender roles, and gender display. The data therefore demands a more nuanced theory that is inclusive of women's agency and the choices they make but also considers the sociocultural norms that restrict or constrain those choices. Structured action theory, developed by Messerschmidt (1995, 1997, 2002, 2004, 2012) and based on his ethnographic research with gang girls in the United States permits for a more robust analysis of the data.

Femininity and structured action

Messerschmidt explores gender and crime through structured action theory, asking "how and in what respects masculine and feminine practices are constituted in crime and settings at certain times, and how embodied masculine and feminine practices relate to specifically interpersonal assaultive and non-violence" (2004: 50). Messerschmidt's (1995) ethnographic account of femininity in relation to crime examines the social situations or structure[s] through which gang girls construct their feminine identities in light of engaging in criminal activities. The gang girls engage in behaviours such as violence and fighting, considered appropriate male conduct and outside the norms of their biological sex but normalized in the social context of the gang (Messerschmidt 2004). Moreover, within this social situation, girls construct and achieve a femininity that is sanctioned by others and within the bounds of their gender, as women (Messerschmidt 1995)

Normative conceptions of gender idealize male aggression and violence, while female violence is considered a transgression. When these girls engage in violence, robbery, and prostitution, they are, at the same time, reaffirming and deconstructing emphasized femininity (Messerschmidt 1997: 76). According to Messerschmidt, by being sexually available to male desire and engaging in typical gender display but at the same time being violent and sexually permissive, these girls "exhibit a unique fluidity of gender in which different gender identities are emphasized or avoided depending on the social setting" (1997: 84). However, these girls also ascribe distinctive meanings to their behaviour. That is to say that they embody and construct a feminine identity while "acting bad" (Messerschmidt 1995:183).

Messerschmidt contends that the notion of "bad girl femininity" captures the "salience and fluidity of gender construction" and situational participation in violence by this group of girls (2002: 463-4). Significantly, Messerschmidt reflects on the diversity of femininity and contends that:

> "Because women reproduce feminine ideals in socially structured specific practices, there are a variety of ways to do femininity. Although femininity is always individual and personal, specific forms of femininity are available, encouraged and permitted, depending upon one's social situation, class, race and sexual orientation. Accordingly, femininity must be viewed as *structured action* – what women do under specific social structural constraints" (1995: 172/173 author's emphasis)

With this in view, women's IPV can be theorized as something women do, as women. Gender does not influence the ways in which women are violent within their intimate

relationships but rather their violence can be considered their way of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987). Rather than acting like men, Messerschmidt argues that women and girls are "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987), specifically "in terms of activities appropriate to their sex category and in a specific social situation [i.e. the urban street gang]" (1995: 183). It is within this paradigm that women perpetrators of IPV also discursively situate their gendered identity. Their failure to conform to societal gendered expectations does not otherwise influence the ways in which they negotiate and produce a gendered identity (Messerschmidt 1995). In the context of the 'street', girls' violence is normalized and deemed as appropriate female behaviour. Messerschmidt hence contends that not only is "girl gang violence in this situation [is] encouraged, permitted and privileged by both boys and girls as appropriate feminine behaviour" but also "bad girl" femininity is both situational and context-bound within the domain of the street (1995: 182). Indeed, the criteria for "bad girl" femininity embody strength and power as a means for protecting their neighbourhood. Similarly, the participants in this study see their IPV as an appropriate response in conflict or to control their partner's behaviour, but in contrast to Messerschmidt's sample, they struggle to situate their gendered identity as feminine.

More salient to the current study, is that this sample of female perpetrators of IPV felt that their ability to achieve a gendered identity was challenged and they viewed themselves as "broken" women. Messerschmidt later expanded his theory to include notions of a failed gendered identity such as those experienced by the participants. He argues:

> "The constitution of masculinity and femininity through bodily appearance and performance means that gender accountability is vulnerable when the situationally appropriate appearance and performance are not (for whatever reason) sustained. Because the taken-for-granted gender of individuals can be challenged in certain contexts, gender is particularly salient…Such masculinity or femininity *challenges* are contextually embodied interactions that result in gender degradation – the individual is constructed as a "gender failed" member of society" (2004: 49).

The participants in this study embrace violence within the bounds of their intimate relationships in spite of women's violence being considered a transgression of emphasized femininity and societal feminine norms. Integral to Messerschmidt's (1995, 2004) structured action theory and based on West and Zimmerman's (1987) notion of "doing gender", is the element of accountability, in accomplishing or alternatively failing to achieve a successful gendered identity. Individuals choose, often non-reflexively, from a variety of situationally available gender practices that are accomplished via interaction with others (Messerschmidt

2004). Messerschmidt therefore emphasizes the fluidity of gender at the intersection of social structure, arguing "although we construct ourselves as male or female, we situationally embody masculinity and femininity according to our own unique experiences" (2004: 38). This model provides for female violence as a resource for constructing and accomplishing gender, albeit at the boundaries (Renzetti 2013). Renzetti argues that structured action theory embodies the multitude of femininities and agency that women "exercise in constructing these multiple identities – sometime highly constrained in their efforts and at other times pushing back hard enough at these constraints to create alternatives and bring about change" (2013: 56). Acknowledging the multiplicities of female identities and these women's capacity for violence within their intimate relationships, considered uncharacteristic of traditional femininity, offers a valuable insight into the diversity of gendered behaviour.

Female perpetration of IPV can be theorized as a resistance to social norms and according to Laidler and Hunt, provides a space for women from subordinate groups such as low economic status, to "demonstrate[ing] a sense of power in an environment that provides them with little status" (2002: 676). Moreover, this active space allows for an understanding of the diversity of experience, particularly as it applies to this sample of women as they attempt to resolve this tension, and position themselves as women and as perpetrators of IPV. The participants from this study are all from a working-class background, and so it may be that their notions of gender and the manner in which they embody gender might vary to those from a different social class.

Pariah femininity

The data generated in this study resonates with emphasized femininity and structured action theory but also accommodates Schippers' model of pariah femininity. Schippers connects not only structure but also the relational aspect of gender to the ability of some women to attain a successful gendered identity. This resonates with the data generated by the participants in this study whose perpetration of IPV disrupts normative notions that construct women as nurturing, compliant, and peaceful, thus resulting in an inability to position themselves successfully as 'women'.

Schippers (2007) not only builds on Connell's model of hegemonic gender relations, but also encapsulates the following: Messerschmidt's concepts of structure and agency; Butler's (1990) notion of performance and punishment for those who fail; and Goffman's (1963) concept

of a stigma or the spoiled identity. Although Connell (1987) maintains that gender hegemony is unavailable to women, Schippers argues that hegemonic femininity can exist, but only within social conditions of benefit to men, such as, for example, patriarchy. Therefore, Schippers suggests that to justify hegemony within femininity, the focus should instead be on the "idealized relationship between masculinity and femininity" (2007: 94). Put differently, it is not gender practices but gender ideals that are most significant. Further, characteristics defined as womanly, such as those valued in emphasized femininity that support and legitimate hegemonic masculinity and the subordination of women can thus be defined as hegemonic femininity (2007: 94). Conversely, those women who resist or contest the relationship between masculinity and femininity are labelled "pariah femininities" because they are "defined as deviant or stigmatized", typically because of the power to contaminate the idealized relationship between men and women (Schippers 2007: 95). Schippers conceptualizes pariah femininity as:

> "The quality content of hegemonic masculinity enacted by women-desire for the feminine object (lesbian), authority (bitch), being physically violent ("badass" girl), taking charge and not being compliant (bitch but also "cock-teaser" and slut), they are all necessarily and compulsively constructed as feminine when enacted by women; they are *not masculine*" (2007: 96)

As in the case of Messerschmidt's "bad girl" femininity, pariah femininity, although a transgression of normative construction of feminine behaviour, allows for violence to be considered as not crossing gendered boundaries and as being distinctly feminine. Fundamental to this study of female perpetrators of IPV and the manner in which the participants construct their gendered identity, is the aspect of resistance, i.e. deviance and disruption of gender relations and practices. Schippers explains further that, "the symbolic construction of pariah femininities, then, is a central feature of gender hegemony and, as such, central to the very real, material sanctions exacted on women who embody them" (2007: 96). Moreover, in this model of gender, Schippers (2007) considers a multiple of femininities, of which hegemonic femininity is dominant in relation to pariah femininity, structured within gender relations where femininity is always interpreted as subordinate to, and capable of disrupting hegemonic masculinity.

Although gender hierarchy and dualisms are reified, pariah femininity does provide a space for those femininities at the boundaries or for those that transgress gender norms. Put more succinctly, Budgeon in her examination of theories of femininity, argues that within this model of plural femininities, "the privilege of particular femininities is sustained not only at the expense of

other possible articulations but in relation of interdependence with those femininities which visibly mark the boundary of socially 'acceptable femininity" (2014: 326). With this in view, where hegemonic masculinity is conceptualized as a framework of domination over not only other masculinities but also femininities, hegemonic femininity is restricted to power relations among women (Pyke and Johnson 2003: 51). Also significant, Schippers' argument resonates with the negation of female perpetrated IPV and the continued failure to acknowledge women's capacity for violence. She states the following, "the symbolic construction of girl's sexual agency and ability and willingness to use physical violence as undesirable and deserving of sanction and social expulsion turns their potential challenge to male dominance into something contained and less threatening" (2007: 95).

The construction of femininity advanced by Schippers contributes to how women's violence is minimized and ignored and considered less injurious or egregious than male violence against women or, even to some, humorous (Dasgupta 2002, DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2014, Dobash and Dobash 2004, Miller 2005, Johnson 2011, Saunders 1988, Swan and Snow 2003). Schippers rightly argues that, "It is precisely because women often embody and practice these features of hegemonic masculinity, and because this challenges the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity, that these characteristics, when embodied by women, are stigmatized and sanctioned" (2007: 95). With this in mind, for Schippers, when a woman is violent, authoritative, or promiscuous for example, she is not masculine but constructed as both "feminine and undesirable" (Schippers 2007: 95). Pariah femininity is, therefore, a critical model in which to situate women who perpetrate IPV and to examine gender hegemony and gender relations.

Theories and female perpetrated IPV

There is a dearth of theorizing about women, gender, and violence in the social sciences (Messerschmidt 2004, Laidler and Hunt 2001, Schippers 2007). Indeed, a more dynamic theory that encompasses the multiplicity of femininities, the diversity, and hierarchy within a gendered feminine identity is called for - one that, according to Laidler and Hunt will "tease out the construction and negotiation of femininity where "bad girl" is but one of a multiple of alternative forms of femininities (2001: 660). Besides, Messerschmidt critiques current theorizing and contends that:

> "Abstract[ing] gender from its social context and insensitive to issues of agency, such perspectives mask the possibility that gendered patterns of crime may vary situationally, and that occasionally girls and women and men and boys engage in similar types and amounts of crime" (2004: 23).

The inclusion of women's agency, the social context, and the variation within femininities, can provide for a comprehensive examination of women who perpetrate IPV, as women, and without "changing their fundamental gender project" of "being a girl" (Messerschmidt 2004: 134/5). For the participants in this study, to accomplish a successful feminine identity is problematic for it would mean embracing discourse related to victimhood that symbolizes a lack of agency and powerlessness; an identity they consciously and persistently resist.

Rather than combining the theories, this study draws from and is informed by Connell's (1987) emphasized masculinity, Messerschmidt's structured action (1995, 1997, 2004) and Schippers' pariah femininity (2007), each of which have specific attributes that the data can engage with. Firstly, the participant's traditional notions of gender and gender roles resonate with Connell's construction of emphasized femininity. Secondly, women's IPV is currently theorized as a demonstration of masculine traits of aggression and anger or pathologizing women as "mad" or "crazy". With this in mind, an alternative understanding of female violence is required, and which, as Messerschmidt argues, is fundamentally one of many feminine ideals or identities practiced in diverse social situations, as for example, identities of mother, wife or the "bad girl". Significantly, Messerschmidt concludes that for the girls in his study, "the gang provides a milieu within which girls can experiment with, and possibly dismantle, the bounds of emphasized femininity" (1995: 185). Similarly, for the women who participated in this study, the motivations and for reasons used to justify their use of IPV, and the subjective notions of gender and the social structures that fail to acknowledge their violence will serve to interrogate or re-situate the bounds of femininity. Lastly, through her engagement with hierarchies of femininity and the manner in which certain female behaviours, such as IPV, challenges hegemonic masculinity, Schippers (2007) speaks to why women's violence is ignored or minimized.

Although the theories discussed here all sustain gender stereotypes and dualisms, they avoid reverting to constructing "women-as-victim" discourse common to some paradigms of women's perpetration of IPV (Renzetti 2013, Laframboise 1996). Thus, the diverse models of gender and criminal offending that capture the intersecting identities and complexity of the

everyday lives of women who engage in violence and can therefore resonate with the women who participated in this study (Comack and Brickey 2007).

CHAPTER SIX – NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Introducing the participants

Participant	Perpetrator	Victim	Childhood Experience	Children	Age
Beth	Yes	No	Witness	Yes	30+
Isabelle	Yes	No	Witness	Yes	20+
Rachel	Yes	Yes	Raped by stranger/Witness	Yes	20+
Jane	Yes	No	Mother Abusive	Yes	20+
Maureen	Yes	Yes	Sexually Abused by Brother and Stepfather/neglect	Yes	40+
Adele	Yes	No	Witness	Yes	20+
Anna	Yes	No	Mother abusive	Yes	30+
Dorothy	Yes	No	Sexually abused	Yes	30+
Susan	Yes	Yes	Extreme neglect	Yes	20+
Diane	Yes	No	Witness/Mother controlling	Yes	20+
Kay	Yes	No	Mother abusive	Yes	30+
Jean	Yes	Yes	Witness/Sexually abused	Yes	30+
Angela	Yes	No	Severe sexual abuse	Yes	30+
Ellen	Yes	Yes	Witness	Yes	20+
Brenda	Yes	No	Mother abusive/neglect	Yes	30+
Kylie	Yes	Yes	Sexual, physical abuse and mother abusive	Yes	20+
June	Yes	Yes	Mother abusive	Yes	20+
Linda	Yes	No	Witness/ raped by stranger	Yes	30+
Alice	Yes	No	Witness/mother abusive	Yes	30+
Teresa	Yes	No	Witness	Yes	50+
Sara	Yes	No	Witness/abusive mother	Yes	30+
Jennifer	Yes	No	Undetermined/Sexual abuse	Yes	50+
Lucy	Yes	No	Witness	Yes	18
Mandy	Yes	No	Witness	Yes	30+
Hayley	Yes	No	No	Yes	20+

Victims and perpetrators

The twenty-five women who participated in this study shared intimate accounts of their everyday lives with narratives that are rich and profound. They offer a glimpse into their lives and their experiences with IPV that reflect not only shared patterns of motivations and justifications for their behaviours, but also resonate with the complex and discordant circumstances in which they live. Each of the women agreed to be interviewed and share their narratives with the understanding that their experiences would contribute to establishing a gender appropriate protocol for the treatment of women perpetrators of IPV.

The in-depth interview was, for the most part, the first time these women had spoken about their lives holistically and systematically, thus giving them the opportunity to reflect upon how they arrived at this point in their lives. This failure to previously connect was especially evident when at the end of a particularly emotional life history and narrative, Susan cried, shaking her head and said, "*I've never put it all together like that, huh*". The women's narratives are unaltered. I transcribed their words using their grammar and colloquialisms in order to convey meaning and context as framed from the vantage point of their perspective. The names of the participants, places, relatives, and partners mentioned in the narratives have been given pseudonyms and the actual names of family or places removed so as to maintain confidentiality.

As previously discussed, the critical influence of feminist and violence-against-women activists effected a paradigm shift and IPV evolved from being a private family issue to a persistent social problem with the creation of shelters and social support for female victims. However, IPV is a multi-faceted issue, and unlike other forms of violence, the victim and perpetrator have had and, in many cases, continue to have a relationship, in spite of the violence that permeates their everyday lives. Women's perpetration of IPV problematizes the conventional construction of victim/perpetrator of IPV and disrupts the simplistic notion of women as passive and vulnerable victims of male violence. Indeed, over two-thirds of the women who participated in this research were not and had never been, victims of IPV. They stated categorically, "*We're not victims*" and disclose their violence against a non-violent partner. Their motivations were complex and multiple; they included anger, control, jealousy, not being listened to, their partner walking away, and retaliation for perceived wrongs against them by a previous partner.

Self-defence was commonly reported as the primary justification for women resorting to

violence in the intimate relationships (Babcock et al. 2003, Dasgupta 1999, 2002: Saunders 1988, Swan and Snow 2003). However, only four of the twenty-five participants claimed to use self-defence as a justification for striking their partner. A further seven participants were victims of abuse in a past relationship/s and acknowledged that they had become aggressors in subsequent relationships with non-aggressive partners. This questions the unequivocal model of victim and perpetrator in the context of IPV, suggesting that in some instances there was an overlap (Felson and Lane 2010, Jennings et al. 2012, Miller 2005).

There is a body of research that highlights the importance of understanding women's status as being both victim and perpetrator and in creating suitable treatment programs for them (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2014, Leisring, Dowd and Rosenbaum 2003, Miller 2005). Men, however, are offered no such concern in their treatment or services and are treated primarily as abusers. Hamberger and Potente (1994), in their influential study of women arrested for IPV, conclude that male and female perpetrated IPV show very different patterns. Despite agreeing that women can inflict severe and injurious violence similar to men, women's violence is evaluated as having a lesser impact than men's violence. Moreover, Hamberger and Potente argue:

> "Women tend to commit violence less frequently than do men, and for different reasons. Specifically, women tend to initiate physical assault motivated by a need for self-protection or retaliation of a previous assault by their partner. Men, in contrast, tend to identify control or punishment as the primary motivations for assaults on their partners" (1994: 59).

Challenging this assumption, the participants in this study revealed control and anger as their primary motivations as well as the will to hurt and punish their partners. Their male partners did sustain injury during conflict and according to the participants, expressed fear of their female partners' violence. These women's narratives shed light on the topic of women's perpetration of IPV through their life stories, which are at the same time compelling and brutally honest.

Often this was not the first time the participant had been charged with assault and attended the support groups for treatment in order to moderate their violent behaviour. For the most part, the overwhelming message that the women communicated through their narrative was the strong emotional connection they felt towards their partner and their children, as well as a willingness to preserve the family unit and work towards a relationship and life that was free from violence. With this in mind, the dynamic of the couple should be of primary importance, mainly where

children are concerned. A safe and secure family environment that is free from violence and chaos is fundamental to their well-being, mental health, the success of their future intimate and familial relationships.

The criteria for participation in this study was to have engaged in at least one incident of physical violence with an intimate heterosexual partner. Although there is a body of evidence that refers to the deleterious impact of psychological, verbal, sexual, and financial abuse, this type of abuse is difficult to measure and rarely elicits police involvement (Follingstad and DeHart 2000, Henning and Klesges 2003, O'Leary 1999). Indeed, one of the group participants commented on a past relationship, "*I'd rather he beat my ass than fuck with my head*". The participants described injuries they inflicted on their partner and injuries they sustained during a violent episode[s]. Altogether, six of the male victims required medical treatment for their injuries, one having sustained severe burns. According to the participants, many of the victims remained fearful of their female partner's violence and often felt threatened. Fewer than four of the participants required medical treatment for injuries sustained during conflict.

To kick-start each interview, I asked each participant to begin with their childhood, to talk about their relationship[s] and how they ended up at OnTrack Inc. I commence this section with the women's stories of their childhood and family of origin. I then present the motivations used for resorting to violence, the justifications, consequences, and subjective notions of gender.

Childhood experience – "*Every type of abuse, that's my mom"*

Nearly all the participants had some experience of childhood trauma in their life history:

- ➢ Seven of the participants experienced physical abuse by their mother.
- ➢ Nine participants witnessed their mother's abuse by a father or stepfather
- ➢ Six of the participants were sexually abused. Two of the participants sustained extreme and persistent sexual abuse from an early age until their teens and a female relative sexually abused another.
- ➢ Three participants experienced severe neglect that included lack of food and hygiene, little or no parental supervision and exposure to drugs.

I asked the participants to speak about their childhood and family of origin with the intention of putting them at their ease and creating a dialogue. Other studies with female perpetrators have alluded to anywhere between thirty to seventy percent of their sample having

experienced childhood trauma (Dasgupta 2002, Dowd, Leisring and Rosenbaum 2005, Hamberger and Potente, 1994, Kernsmith, 2006, Swan and Snow 2003, Swan et al. 2008). In spite of this, I had not anticipated that such a large number of the participants would have had a common childhood exposure to or experience of abuse. However, when several participants narrated their traumatic childhood experiences in their family of origin, this became an integral part of the dialogue. For some of the women, they had not spoken about their life history or associated their childhood experiences with their current issues within their family relationships. For example, Diane said:

> *growing up our home was chaotic. Dad was alcoholic, mom was controlling. Fought a lot screaming and yelling. We were witness to the lot, certain little things they would do to each other...we moved around a lot. I had to be the Mom*.

Diane also spoke about how her oldest daughter would take charge of her siblings, get them off to school and then clean the house and prepare meals when she returned from school. When I remarked that it sounded a lot like her description of her own childhood, she said:

> *but I didn't want her to have all that responsibility like I did. I never looked at it that way, yeah*.

For some of the participants, their mothers had been abusive toward them. For others, the mothers were themselves abused, were guilty of neglect or of just looking the other way while their children were abused. In a ground-breaking longitudinal quantitative study conducted with over five hundred participants to determine the impact of child abuse and childhood exposure to parental violence, Ehrensaft et.al discovered that in addition to the increase in the potential for intimate relationship dysfunction and violence, more specifically a mother's violence functions as a framework for the "physical expression of anger. This acceptance of coercive, power-based norms as ways of regulating conflict may have direct implications for young adults' means of conflict resolution with partners" (2003: 748). Several of the participants in my study connected the difficulties they had experienced in their intimate relationships with their childhood. However, many did not and recounted, in some instances, multiple failed relationships and the violence within those relationships, most of which was carried out in the presence of their children.

The participants in this study disclosed that little or no effort was given from preventing

their children from being exposed to their mothers' or parents' violence and conflict. Concern with the term "witnessing" abuse and its negation of the trauma felt by children who do not necessarily witness the abuse first-hand but hear or see the aftermath, has given way to specialists in the field of child abuse using the expression "exposure" to abuse (Wolak and Finkelhor 1998). Leslie, the counsellor and group facilitator at OnTrack Inc said, that in her experience, male victims of IPV tend to come from families where their mother had been abusive or where there had been dysfunction within a single parent family. In fact, Krueger et al. (1998) found that antisocial males and females are especially likely to partner assortatively with one another thus stressing the need for a broader understanding of IPV and the long-term impact on exposure to violence (see also Ehrensaft et al. 2003: 742),

A family should give a child comfort, security, and safety, all of which should come from both parents. Conversely, for the majority of the participants in this study and their children, it was however the contrary; the family home exposes them to violence and fear. Empirical studies reveal that children from violent families are more likely to experience intergenerational transmission of violence as either victims or abusers in their adult relationships (Gelles and Cavanaugh 2005, Holt et al. 2008, Margolin et al. 2003,). While exposure to violence does, in general, correlate with subsequent challenges in intimate relations, Gelles and Cavanaugh (2005) further dispute that it is the sole variable or factor determining behaviour. Holt et al. also argue that "children are not passive participants but active in constructing their own social world" (2008: 807) thus repudiating the impact of childhood trauma. While this is valid and many children exposed to trauma do not go on to become either victims or perpetrators of violence in their intimate relationships, the experiences of the participants in this study does suggest a link between childhood exposure to violence and their potential to engage in violence against their intimate partner.

Jane said that she had an abusive upbringing. Her parents were divorced, she said:

> *Mum was more the abusive one. She was physically abusive, she's manipulative, and she's emotionally abusive. Every type of abuse, that's my mom. She was abusive to us kids, my dad, her ex's, almost anybody who crossed her path that she had a problem with or didn't like.*

Anna's mother was also very abusive to her father and children. She said:

> *Dad kept us away from fighting, it was just the aftermath. Mum would drink and I would wake up to find a knife stuck in the wall or candleholders*

bent out of shape. She would fight and he would try to calm her, she was like 4'10" and he was 6'. My mum has always been hard. She attacked my husband physically. She would jump on him and attack him. Yeah once I had to leave with the kids because she was after me and I was like ahhhhh!!

Kay said that her parents divorced when she was five years old. She said:

my mother was pretty pissed off when he [father] got back from overseas with gonorrhoea and that, she's held on to it till this day. That is just my mad and pissed off mother. Left with us kids…my mother tried to work - pissed off - emotional and physical abuse with us. Raised us to be very seen and not heard, single file. She married stepdad, who was very abusive, belts. I blocked out a lot of that. We moved every year.

Susan spoke about the severe neglect she experienced as a child. Her mother was a drug addict and her parents divorced. She said there was no violence but she experienced:

a lack of caring, I think it was neglect because I wasn't taken care of; my hair, my clothes, hygiene. I never really had appropriate clothing, always dirty, never clean and I was not bathed very often. When I was fourteen my Mom let me do mushrooms and they were really scary. She let me do meth, I never really did it with her, but she gave it to me. So that's when it really began, yeah.

Rachel's stepfather abused her family and, as a result, her mother suffered:

She was hospitalised a lot. He kicked her a lot and there were a lot of times I thought she was dead.

She also recounted her sexual experience as a teenager and her confusion about what constitutes a healthy sexual relationship. She said

I was raped when I was fourteen by a guy I hooked up with but I had sex with a guy I really liked when I was fifteen. Happy to have had that…I was in high school, we dated for a year but he slept with my Mum. I was violent. He wasn't. I would take care of myself. I was aggressive. I felt I needed to protect myself.

When I asked Rachel to tell me about her need to protect herself. She replied that she connected the need to protect herself with her childhood experience of abuse and said:

I was never going to let anyone fuck with me like they did my Mum.

Linda also spoke about her parents, who were both professionals and functioning alcoholics. In her early teens, a stranger raped her at knifepoint but she said that had been "*reported and dealt with*". Linda was violent in all her relationships with non-violent partners

and in the presence of her children. She professed *that* was "*difficult*" and said:

> *there was a lot of violence; physical, emotional and verbal. We'd all go to our rooms or I'd protect my mom. A lot of times I'd have to put my mom to bed…I was very abusive to my family. Police called - I was physically violent toward my Dad. Got an assault four but he didn't follow it through…I bit him, punched him, kicked him and spat on him…In my younger days I had a real anger problem.*

Three participants referred directly to their childhood experience as a justification for their subsequent behaviour in adult relationships. Brenda said her mum brought them up because her father was in prison on assault and drug charges. Brenda was very abusive in all her relationships, and although violent in the presence of her children, claimed that she did not physically discipline them. She said her mother was:

> *present until I was seven years old.*

Following this, there was meth addiction and domestic violence. Her mother was mentally and physically abusive to her and her siblings, hitting and punching them:

> *she would beat the shit out of us*.

Brenda said that they were neglected, left for long periods without food and they moved frequently, kept "*losing their homes*". When talking about her first long-term intimate relationship, she claimed the fighting was bidirectional, but actually Brenda had become physically, verbally, and financially abusive in all subsequent relationships. She said:

> *it started with him at the beginning but I grew up and after seeing my Mum and Dad go through that shit, I wasn't going there*.

Ellen was also exposed to parental abuse but was vague about the experience. She lived with her grandparents because:

> *both my parents were on drugs and alcohol. Mum tried after I went back to live with her at twelve years old. She did the best she could, and I loved being with her. I was told that my dad hit my mom but I don't remember. He hit her but not us. I remember hitting my stepdad with a piece of wood to get him off her. I don't remember much. They divorced.*

The following participants experienced childhood sexual abuse and two of them had been repeatedly and persistently abused from the age of two or three years. An older female relative sexually molested the first participant when she was a child. Kylie said that she "*grew up mad and angry*". Her father committed suicide when she was seven years old. She was molested by a

female cousin and raped by another male family member when she was twelve. Her mother had been physically abusive to her and her siblings, and she remembered occasions when her mother used a whip on them. She attributed her "*high tolerance for pain*" to her childhood experiences. When she was fourteen years old and in her first intimate relationship, she discovered that she enjoyed both the violence and the pain that accompanied the violence. She would provoke her partners into violence:

I would hit him if he said something I didn't like. I would swing first.

Maureen told me that her mother remarried when she was six years old. Maureen and her siblings were left to fend for themselves in rented accommodation while her mother and stepfather moved to live in a nearby town. She said:

> *my stepfather sexually abused me, then I was sexually abused by my brother. My stepfather did it over a number of years until the age of twelve…he was in and out of the house. We didn't live with them, so the abuse happened until I was twelve when I finally left. I quit school at twelve. I slipped through the cracks. I don't know what happened. I would go back home to be abused every day. I let go of my past, being raped, being abandoned, being abused. I speak to her [mother] now and we have a relationship but it was hard.*

Maureen's first husband was very abusive towards her and her children. As well as extreme suffering physical abuse, while her husband went to work or stayed out drinking, Maureen was imprisoned in their apartment, often for days on end without food or supplies for her four children. Maureen did make the connection between her dysfunctional childhood experience and the reasons for why she subsequently stayed with her abusive partner for so long. She said:

> *the big thing is, I grew up and didn't have any parents so I wanted my kids to have a Dad. I didn't know it wasn't good for the kids to be around an unhealthy situation. I just stayed because I wanted my kids to have what I didn't have.*

Jean said that her parents divorced when she was two. Her mother remarried and her new stepfather abused her between the ages of five and twelve years of age. When Jean told her mother about the abuse, she did not believe her and the abuse continued. However, when Jean's sister spoke up about also being sexually abused, her mother divorced the husband and she and the children moved out. Jean said:

he [Stepdad] broke my ankle when I was two years old. I told on him

> *because he was selling drugs so he beat my mom with a twelve-gauge shotgun and put her in the bathtub. Me and my siblings saw it all and cried. He used to beat me and my sister. You know what my mum said? He was only trying to take your shoe off when he broke my foot. Yeah, but I was only two and he was pissed off. I feel like everyone has a chance. Takes a lot for someone to get to that point.*

Dorothy's mother was a heroin addict and her parents divorced. Her mother re-married with her paternal uncle. Dorothy was extremely violent with non-violent partners. She said:

> *I was five when she got together with my uncle, he's my blood father's brother. I think it all started then, the abuse and sexual molestation from my uncle. It really bothered me a lot because he was like the protector of me and I always felt like I was walking on eggshells. He was like moulding me because he was the one with the drugs…till then the molestation continued until seventeen and he gave me drugs.*

Alice explained that her single mother was an alcoholic who would physically and verbally abuse her and her siblings. Similar to other participants' childhood experiences, she said they moved frequently. She attempted to meet her father when she was ten years old but it "*didn't go well*". He was not a "*great guy*". After raping her mother, he later "*punched her in the stomach to try and abort the kid - me*". When Alice spoke about her relationships, she also commented on an assault charge. When I asked if this was the first time she was charged with a felony, she also made a connection between her current situation and her chaotic childhood, she said:

> *Hitting men? Oh, I've done that beforehand. I was not always the initiator. It was self-defence at the beginning. My uncle made me suck his penis when I was five years old so I was angry with men. That's where it's coming from. He was seventeen when he made me do that. My grandpa and both my uncles were sicko's, chimos*[27]*. Fucking chimo, I heard he'd abused his own daughter.*

Angela was a repeat offender and had been mandated to attend the support groups multiple times. When she first joined the support group, I was surprised by the level of support and advice she offered to the other women in the group that indicated a deep and intimate understanding of women's use of IPV. After the meeting, I spoke to her and told her that I was impressed with her

[27] According to Alice, chimo is "what we call a child molester".

ability to connect with the group. I explained the study and asked her if she would agree to an interview. She immediately agreed and told me about why she was attending the group *again*. Angela said:

> *My partner has just told me and my kid to leave after I beat the shit out of him. He said he can't take it anymore. I am totally fucked up but now I have a child and I want this to end. He [child] deserves better than this shit*

During her interview, Angela's turbulent history emerged. She was and is very violent with all her intimate partners. Angela's childhood was:

> *Not the greatest. My mom's been married seven times. Addicted to meth and alcohol. She worked all the time so I was left with her boyfriends. All seven molested or raped me. First time I was four and I didn't tell anybody until I was about eight. I remember going to the police station but nothing ever happened. I remember I told my mom about all of them but she didn't want to believe me. She picked the drugs over me so I just stopped telling her…She sent me to my Dad when I was twelve. He raped me and I had to have an abortion…That really damaged me and I ended up not trusting anybody. Hanging out with the wrong crowd, smoking pot – at least they paid attention to me…Granny and Grandpa, I stayed with them and they were hush-hush and didn't talk. I was broken as a little girl, didn't play outside until my mom didn't want me inside then she would lock me out…All of my mum's boyfriends hit her, beat her up. That was how I thought people should love…I put men down. I don't have any respect for men but I do know what they are capable of. I just hurt them before they touch me.*

Angela had a deep knowledge of why she engaged in violence. Although she laughed a lot and was open and honest about her behaviour, she also referred to herself as "*broken as a little girl*" and later "*broken as a woman*".

Jennifer's narrative revealed a complicated childhood, she said:

> *great childhood but things happened, I was sexually assaulted by my grandfather early on.*

Although her parents physically abused her siblings, she maintained:

> *not me but one day I took a knife to my father's throat. I don't want to dwell on my childhood*.

Jennifer was mandated to attend the FDAAP meetings and therefore obliged to disclose her violent behaviour at each group meeting. However, during the interview she consistently denied

being violent with her family and was one of the few participants who maintained that she was indeed a victim. Her husband was disabled and confined to a wheelchair. The day the police were called to her home, her husband was found tipped out of his wheelchair and both he and their adult son sustained injury.

Although childhood exposure to IPV was not initially an element of interest at the beginning of this study, the data generated from the interviews highlight the long-term risk to children and potential for violence within their future intimate relationships. Hamby et al.'s comprehensive quantitative study of children exposed to violence found a significant relationship between "witnessing parental violence with adolescent dating violence and statutory rape/sexual misconduct…the co-occurrence of so many forms of victimization calls for a more comprehensive approach to the needs of children and families" (2010: 741). The participants in this study support the notion of an intergenerational transfer of family violence. Echoing the findings of Ehrensaft et.el. (2003), their twenty-year longitudinal study conducted with over five hundred children revealed that the use of violent conflict resolution within their intimate relationship significantly increased with exposure to parental violence (2003: 751). While most violence prevention programs and, indeed the treatment of IPV, target men as the sole perpetrators of violence, Ehrensaft et al. affirm that "a striking finding was the absence of sex differences in predictors [exposure to childhood violence] of partner violence" (2003: 750). This suggests a requirement for all perpetrators of IPV, regardless of sex, to be included in the prevention and treatment of IPV.

In the next section, I analyse the primary motivations that are referred to by the participants within their narratives for using violence as a strategy for engaging in conflict with their intimate partners.

Motivations for the use of violence

Anger – "Sometimes I was just angry and wanted to hit him"

Ann Campbell, a prominent scholar in female aggression, defines anger as "an unpleasant or negative emotion that typically occurs in response to threat, disruption of ongoing behaviour or deliberate and unjustified harm" (2006: 239). However, the participant's narratives related to their feelings of anger are more in line with the common definition, "a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility" (Oxford Dictionary 2018). Despite the plethora of research

supporting the notion of there being few gender differences in respect to anger (Archer 2005, Archer and Mehdikhani 2003), there is the view that the manner in which women express their anger does differ (Campbell 2006). Campbell argues that women have more emotional and behavioural control because they are "less likely to directly challenge or attack their provoker" (2006: 240). The participant's narratives however directly challenge those findings. When I asked Leslie about her thoughts regarding anger and women's perpetration of IPV, she said, "the women use ways to push for violence and accelerate toward their anger - they provoke to get to where they want to be". Echoing Leslie's statement, in Felson et al.'s quantitative study of over thirteen thousand adolescent students measuring gender differences in provocation and aggression, they revealed that contrary to the aggressive male hypothesis, women in their intimate relationships are more likely not only to provoke aggression but are also more easily provoked into being aggressive (2015: 192).

In line with other studies, anger has been cited as one of the primary motivations for women's perpetration of IPV (Babcock et al. 2003: Dasgupta 2002: Hamberger et al. 1997: Hamberger and Guse 2002: Swan and Snow 2003, 2006: Thomas 2005). Twenty-one of the participants cite anger as one of the most frequent motivations for engaging in a physical altercation with their partner and five of them claimed to have extreme feelings of anger toward their partners. This was evident in their narratives. For example, Linda said:

> *we'd just had our first-born. He wanted to go out. I missed work and lost the job. I just hit him, a lot of chaos. I slapped him and ended up punching him. I had to be pulled off so I was really punching him. Sometimes I was just angry and wanted to hit him…I ran over his foot with the car when I was angry. I've thrown a knife at him and shot a pellet gun at him. The kids were around and I'm sad about that. Just to relieve my anger. I didn't care.*

Linda's response to anger is aggression and violence, both of which she feels she directs at her partner and is unable to control. Anger and loss of control is common in nearly all the women's narratives. Dana, a repeat offender who is mandated to attend the support group meetings five days a week[28], spoke about her recent trip to the family fun park with her partner and children:

[28] These groups are mandated for the women who are in crisis housing and as part of their rehabilitation, the counselor told me "these women are all here four days a week, otherwise they are in prison. They have been let out of prison and have to come to these groups otherwise they go back to prison".

> *I had to leave because I was so fucking mad. Is this normal that I get so fucking mad, going from 0-60 in a second? I don't even want to be with my kids. I know what I am capable of. I am really…I don't know what I'll do. Is it all right to say that? Everyone can make me so fucking mad.*

Dana's narrative exemplifies the participants' overwhelming feelings of anger and their attempts to control it under circumstances that many of us would experience as relatively ordinary. Furthermore, she is reticent to acknowledge her feeling of anger and violence, particularly with respect to her children. When Dana remarked, "*is it alright to say that*", she embodies the notion that women's violence is considered a transgression or as being outside the bounds of, in this instance, stereotypical ideals of motherhood. Thomas, in her cross-cultural study of women's anger and aggression in their intimate relationships posits:

> "Gender role socialization for femininity inculcates the ideal of the selfless, ever-nurturing "perfect mother" whose task is to help, comfort, agree, comply, understand, and promote relationship harmony. Women's anger is dangerous because it upsets the status quo. Expressing it forthrightly results in pejorative labels such as bitch, shrew, nag, scold, or castrator" (2005: 507-8).

Therefore, women endeavour to suppress their anger in order to avoid negative consequences (Thomas 2005). Dana's reflection speaks to her confusion as a mother who, giving expression to her feelings of anger and violence while spending a day with her children, problematizes the traditional gendered construction of the nurturing and protective mother. Culture informs us of conventional attitudes or behaviours that construct gender roles. A woman's gendered identity and work in the home have long been bound together in societal, cultural and subjective norms related to notions of gender (Letherby and Reid 2014). With this in view, Letherby and Reid contend that essentially "caring has evolved as a gendered concept" (2014: 3). In a support group meeting, one of the participants voiced challenges she faced in controlling her anger and subsequent violence against a non-violent partner; she said, "*I will punch him. I feel so aggressive and I don't know how to walk away or stop myself*". This contradicts much of the evidence that women's violence is in response to male abuse or in self-defence.

Susan Miller, a well-published scholar in gender and criminal justice, observed three treatment groups for women who had been arrested for IPV. She argues that, "Consistent with the

majority of research findings, the female offenders observed…demonstrate that most women who use violence do so to escape or stop abuse" (2005: 125). The women who participated in this study describe a very difference experience. Women's use of force is often minimized or dismissed because according to some scholars, women fail to instil fear, achieve power and control, or inflict serious injury on their male partners (Dobash et al. 1992, Miller 2005). However, the following excerpts from the participant's narratives elicit a very different picture of the consequences of women's IPV.

Angela was violent toward a non-violent partner and had been arrested multiple times on assault charges for domestic violence. Angela was violent in all her relationships and although small in stature, had injured her various partners over the years to the point they required medical attention for their injuries. She said:

> *I get so angry that I literally see red. I go deaf. I literally don't even hear myself. I would flip out, get very angry and by then my temper snaps. I punched him so hard once that I have fractured my hand from punching him in the back of the head.*

Angela spoke of an incident with a former boyfriend after he advised her that because she was late, the school called him and he picked up her children. She said she was furious because:

> *he had the nerve to question ME! I started beating him up after that. Nobody tells me what to do. He would push me but never hit me. Just little pushes because I don't yell from afar. I'm in your face. When people start saying something to me, I go from 0-10 in a heartbeat. I start clenching my fists then I start hitting.*

I asked Angela to tell me about another incident with a partner, she recalled:

> *After sex, he would play with my hair and be loving. I would tell him to stop and he wouldn't, he would keep trying to like, love on me. I would flip out, get very angry and by then my temper snaps. Like with him, I didn't give him time to understand that I'm getting angry. I'd tell him to get off me and push him but he wouldn't. So I'd say, "get off me you fucker" and he would think it was so funny. Then I'd end up hitting him. I've given him bloody noses and he tells me I didn't, but his jaw never used to pop like that before I hit him (laughing). Now it pops when he opens it.*

Teresa also spoke about her uncontrollable anger and how she had hit her partner with a baseball bat, she said:

> *I was pissed off. No one wants to deal with an asshole. I'd take it out on*

him and everyone. I would have killed him, my goal was to hurt him. I would have ended up in prison [if her daughter had not stopped her].

Diane admits to being aggressive toward a partner who did not fight back. Diane spoke about her anger and how:

> *I started the fight, I ended the fights. That's how it was done…One time we were fighting and he said something that really just struck me the wrong way and I just punched him in the face and he fell backwards. He pushed me onto the bed and I felt for sure he was gonna hit me back but he didn't. He never hit me back until the last six months or so. I think it was because I got really aggressive and violent and so strung out. My blood just boiled and I would throw stuff or hit the walls. Eventually he would be standing right in front of me and he'd get popped*[29].

Diane alluded to swinging a baseball bat at her partner earlier in the interview. I asked her to tell me more about that incident. She said:

> *There were a lot of times in my mind I thought I'm gonna take off on him and just start swinging and not gonna stop. I did take off on him a few times but he was not like, laying there on the floor in a pile of blood! A punch in the face would drop him because I guess I hit pretty hard. (Laugh). So I would punch him in his face on the side of his jaw and he would just fall to the floor. When he got back up, I would be ready for a fight. I just dropped you so I'm ready for a fight. Umm…I would leave him bleeding or maybe bruises but not needing medical help. I never left marks on him except scratching maybe.*

Diane cried frequently throughout the interview. At the same time through language and non-verbal behaviours such as shrugging her shoulders when recounting this narrative, or laughing and using the word "*popped*", she attempted to minimize her actions. I did ask her to qualify a "*pop*". She said it was more of a punch and as in the narrative above, she laughed. Diane did indicate during the interview that she was proud of her "*don't fuck with me*" attitude but also projected her shame at being violent with a non-violent partner, often reflecting, "*he doesn't deserve this*" and seeing herself as "*evil*". Diane's narrative draws from various elements of the discourse related to women's use of violence, that it is seen as somehow humorous, crazy,

[29] The participants used the word 'popped' frequently to describe how they hit their partner. The counselor, Leslie would remonstrate the women, arguing that by referring to their action as a 'pop', it minimized the action. She asked them to replace it with another word that more accurately described their action. Rather than judge the participant's behaviour or actions, I chose not to reflect on their choice of words but to describe it more clearly for me.

and less harmful than men's violence. Her tough demeanour also lends weight to research that views a person with a generally aggressive relational manner as more likely to engage in IPV (Bates and Graham-Kevan 2016: 16, see also Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010).

Echoing Diane, Brenda said she was violent with all her partners after her first boyfriend tried to control her. Her current partner was hospitalized after a recent fight with her when he was discovered bloodied and injured in their home. I asked if her current partner ever tried to retaliate or defend himself. She said, smiling:

> *you know honey, he might of tried but I wouldn't ever let him*.

During an interview, Brenda spoke about how the fights with her partners would escalate. She told me:

> *Sometimes I feel bad, like I made something out of nothing and the fight would escalate into a physical fight. I was always going to take it one step further than him. If he said something that hurt my feelings, I'd go one step further and rip him apart.*

Brenda told me about a previous partner who was unemployed for most of their relationship, she explained:

> *I'd be so angry. He was in charge of the house and I'd be working full time and the kids were getting older at this point. He was supposed to be assuming the stepdad role and he was just the worst cleaner and everything, like the first one (previous partner). He would just sit and play video games and the kids would tell me he didn't do this or that and the kids were changing diapers and fending for themselves. So I'd get pissed off. He'd start yelling and I'd beat the shit out of him. It was not as frequent as the first one, but god, he was just lousy.*

Sara has multiple arrests for IPV and all her partners are non-violent. Her first arrest followed an incident where she immobilized her then-partner by tying him to a chair and pouring boiling water over his genitals and legs, leaving him with severe injuries and burns to the lower part of his body. She later lost custody of both her children when they were toddlers because she choked them. When day care workers spotted marks on their necks, they contacted DHS and she lost custody of them. Sara had no unsupervised contact with them at the time of the study[30].

[30] The counselor informed me that Sara continued to write letters to her teenage children but they remained traumatized because of their persistent fear of her. Their memory of her violence remained and apparently each time they received a letter from her, the children shook and would not read them.

Sara's anger continued to impact her relationships. She said:

> *the only control I let him have is my anger meter rage – I tell him - watch my face and he has it down every day.*

Sara smiled and laughed throughout the interview as she spoke about moments of extreme violence. She was proud of her actions and feels that her actions are justified because of women's so-called passivity. She said:

> *I am doing it for all those women who can't stand up for themselves*.

Dorothy also disclosed extreme violence toward a non-violent partner. She cried sporadically throughout the interview when talking about how she had injured and hurt both her partner and child. She reflected on the event that ended with her being arrested. She said:

> *October, that's when I hit him. OK. That's when I got in trouble for it but I have hit him before. I still hit him a lot. I was angry and did not know how to express my anger you know…you know what is really sad, when I know I'm wrong. This is a scale from one to a hundred and I'm already angry at this point and I know I'm wrong. I just cannot go back. It always ends at a hundred...It's my way or nothing.*

The participant's narratives reveal how they vented their anger and the violence that erupted, often toward a non-violent partner. The women's violence was injurious, instilled fear, and in all but one instance was carried out in the presence of their children. Notably, Miller argues, "a woman's use of violence does not accomplish the same outcomes as man's use, such as creating greater fear, causing injury, and reinforcing his control over her" (2005: 126). The data from this study however refutes the assertion that women's violence lacks the capacity to injure, control or instil fear in their male partner. If indeed, we were to reverse the gender of the participant in these narratives, there would be little question of the victim's experience related to the level of fear, level of violence, injuries sustained, or the perpetrator's motives.

Diane expressed a lack of understanding as to why her partner did not respond to her anger and violence; even when punched to the ground and left bleeding and bruised he told her "*I love you"*. In Brenda's narrative she conceded to "*beating the shit*" out of her partner and would "*rip him apart*" when angry. Contrary to the majority of research findings related to women's perpetration of IPV, the data from this study revealed the women's motivation and the aim of their violence was to hurt their partner. They made no effort to position themselves as perpetual victims of male violence who resort to violence solely in self-defence (Dasgupta 1999, 2002).

Rather, they used violence as a means of expressing their anger and as Kay denoted, her "*pissed-offedness*". Although regretful and ashamed of her behaviour, Kay did not see anger as a loss of control but rather a means of controlling the situation. Her "*going full blown*" on her partner and their property, meant that the family could not enjoy any of the traditional holidays:

> *my not being OK about what was going on [Christmas, birthdays or Halloween], the best way I had to deal with it was to lash out. If it's not going to be how it should be, I am going to make this whole thing fucked up* (Kay asked to leave the room because she was overcome with emotion. She did however agree to continue the interview when she returned) …*I didn't know who I was, you get into that spot you have to ask how did this happen?*

Kay's narrative reveals the disappointment in her family in not meeting her expectations of what a perfect family should be. She felt her family did not reciprocate by supporting her to achieve this ideal. Her narrative resonates with the notion that when women perceive that they are being treated unfairly or disrespectfully, core values and principles are violated, leading to feelings of anger (Thomas 2005: 509).

Johnson (2010) refers to a women's use of violence as expressive in nature, an expression of anger, frustration and loss of control. Men, on the other hand, use instrumental violence that is motivated by control, instils fear, and is more likely to end in severe injury. Bearing this in mind, Johnson also contends that, "at the moments when they [men] become violent, they do not feel that control" (2010: 114). However, rather than being an isolated expression of frustration or anger, these women's narratives reflect their purpose, their control, the manner in which they coerce and the will to effect change in their partner's behaviour and to inflict damage; much of which resonates with Johnson's (2010) understanding of male perpetrators of intimate terrorism. Kay sought to control her partner but in that moment, also asked "*how did that happen?"* The anger and violence did represent a loss of control for the participants since they talked about "*flipping out*", "*my blood just boiled*" or "*I go from 0-10 in a heartbeat. I start clenching my fists then I start hitting*". However, there is a commonality in the narratives that, while they reflect a loss of control in that moment, they point to a pattern of behaviour. Essentializing women's perpetration of IPV as a mere emotional outburst both minimizes and trivializes the impact of their behaviour (Mills 2003). The women's narratives drew attention to the contextual factors that constituted their use of violence towards their partners; anger and control were common to

nearly all the participants in this study.

In contrast, Dasgupta's qualitative study of 32 women revealed how the majority of the participants use violence either in self-defence or retaliation against violent male partners. Dasgupta does not differentiate between self-defence and retaliation despite one of the participants in her study, Heather, injuring her partner with a knife then stating that she used violence as a means of feeling a bit more in control (1999: 207). With this in view, Dasgupta argues that "although all the women in this group admitted to having physically assaulted their partners, the motivation to terrorize or subjugate men did not clearly emerge from their narratives" (1999: 206). Dasgupta maintains that her study reveals the futility of comparing the consequences of "violence by and against women" and in doing so, reduces women's use of violence (1999: 212). Clearly the data from this study reveals that these women did seek to subjugate and terrorize their partner, Diane and Brenda, for instance, both referred to their experience as perpetrators, Diane *smiling* when she said, "*a punch in the face would drop him because I guess I hit pretty hard*" and Brenda, who admitted, "*I was always going to take it one step further than him*". The intent is to inflict pain on their partner and control through violence, threats and fear.

Jane spoke about the incident in which she was arrested for domestic violence and mandated to attend the women's support groups meetings (FDAAP)[31]. She said:

> *All I can remember was that I blacked out in rage. All I can remember is going in the garage and screaming and yelling at him and then the police showing up. I don't remember anything between there. From what the police report says, I bit him three different times. Why I bit him I couldn't tell you. I slapped him, I remember slapping him so I could get him to understand how mad I was. Um and it says I shoved him into a toolbox…but I screamed at him and called him some nasty things and accused him of nasty things. I listen to the 911 phone call and you can hear me screaming at him in the background. Kinda crazy.*

I asked her if either drugs or alcohol were involved:

[31] Female Domestic Abuse Alternative Program (FDAAP) meeting where the perpetrator has been arrested for assault and is mandated to attend the support group as part of their conviction. There is often a no-contact order in place and where the perpetrator is unable to see or contact her victim/s or children. This order can only be lifted at the discretion of the probation officer. The groups meet for 36 weeks and have random urine tests and polygraphs to ensure the perpetrator is maintaining her compliance to the conditions of her conviction. There are also monthly court appearances in which the perpetrator attends with their treatment providers in order to report their progress or lack thereof. Failure to maintain the conditions of her conviction results in a prison sentence (Jackson County 2017).

> *no, it's just a black out rage…I get to a certain point, when they say your blood boils, or you reach a certain temperature, I know I'm getting mad. When my hands start shaking, I know I'm getting mad.*

Like Kay, Jane's narrative reveals how violence was used as a means to communicate her anger. Moreover, they problematized a behaviour perceived as male and within a patriarchal power structure that supports men's abuse and the subjugation of women (Swan and Snow 2003). Most of the women who participated in this study rejected notions of victimization. Their narratives demonstrate the manner in which they struggle to construct themselves in the current discourse where "gender scripts still largely demand that wilful aggression is the province of men, not women" (Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez 2006: 326). More salient to this study, Mills posits that violence by women should be conceptualized in new ways, "it frees women to see themselves as much as agents as they are victims in the intimate sphere and opens up the possibility that women will reject traditional roles and experiment with new identities" (2003: 97). Rather than a casual outburst, the accounts of anger and the subsequent violence against their partners illustrate the frustration and control that forms a pattern of violence.

Kylie's narrative underscores the notion that violence is a choice, acknowledging the constraints that limit or structure those choices. Giordano et al. highlight structural issues in women's violence arguing, "actors make moves, but they do so within bounded territory, and a specific nexus of opportunities and constraints" (2002: 1004, see also Messerschmidt 2004). The generally acknowledged powerlessness of women is the reference point for contesting notions of women's IPV and limits the ability to consider women as wilful aggressors in their intimate relationships (Pearson 1997). As mentioned earlier, the women in this sample were all from a low-income bracket, some living in extreme poverty and many having experienced drug use in the past. Therefore, their anger could be conceived as deriving from or constrained by broader structural influences. For instance, Kay referred to her family's lack of funds or support and Brenda complained that her partner did not work, leaving her as the primary breadwinner. Nonetheless, ongoing structural issues and inequalities related to class, race, gender and sexuality concern and affect both men and women (Brooks et.al. 2017).

Research has generally focused on men and the manner in which they express their anger and aggression in IPV (Thornton et.al. 2016). Yet the narratives in this present study frame women as active agents who use violence to communicate their anger and instil fear in their

victims, rather than as helpless or passive victims. Considering twenty-one of the twenty-five participants said that their motivation for engaging in IPV was anger, suggesting that, as a predictor and mediator of women's IPV, anger requires further investigation and inclusion in treatment protocol for IPV. Anger and control are also clearly linked to motivation in respect to women's perpetration of IPV.

Control: "*I would want to control everything that's going on, even when he's having a shower"*

Twenty-one of the twenty-five women referred to the strategies they used to control their partner. Literature and studies on women's use of IPV minimize agency and the power to control or instil fear in their partner (Dasgupta 1999, Johnson 2000, Swan and Snow 2006). Indeed, Dasgupta maintains that women do not have the capacity to engender fear in men, arguing that, "this may be due to the fact that very few women can consistently back up nonphysical violence with the potential fear of severe physical violence" (1999: 203). However, studies of male victims of IPV reveal women's ability to isolate, abuse and control their significant others (Archer 2000, Brooks et al. 2017, Cook 2009, Felson and Cares 2005, Hamby 2009, Hines and Douglas 2010, Laroche 2005, Migliaccio 2002, Sarantakos 2004) and the consequences felt by their victims; i.e. fear, poor health and low self-esteem (Cook 2009, George 1994, Graham-Kevan 2007a, Hines, Brown and Dunning 2007, Migliaccio 2002). Given that control is a common motivation in studies of women's use of violence against their intimate partners, it should not be so easily dismissed.

Graham-Kevan and Archer define coercion as "controlling behaviours [can] include economic deprivation, jealous and possessive behaviour, insults and name calling, and threats and intimidation" (2005: 271). Coercive control, considered by some scholars as the central tactic used by male batterers to oppress, dominate, and instil fear in their female partners, is considered a pattern of behaviour not necessarily limited to physical violence (Dasgupta 1999, 2002: Johnson 2011: Saunders 2002). For decades, the gold standard for the treatment of male batterers, the Duluth model[32], has guided policy and practice related to violence against women.

[32] The Duluth Model is the primary treatment offered to male perpetrators of IPV. The treatment protocol is based on patriarchal notions of male power, control and domination, viewing male batterers as making a choice within sexist norms of society. The philosophy uses an interagency strategy to end the violence and is based on male

In essence, this model or paradigm is based on assumptions of male privilege, power and control (Buttell and Starr 2013, Dutton and Corvo 2006, Pence and Paymar 1993). More recently, and in light of gender symmetry in the perpetration of IPV, there is a call for more clarity on the relationship between gender and coercive control (Hamberger and Larsen 2015). Certainly, the data from this study would support this as a necessity, given the high number of women who engage in this behaviour.

Although nearly all the women spoke of control as an element of their motivation for violence, thirteen of them fulfilled the criteria for intimate terrorism. As has already been discussed, intimate terrorism is a pattern of behaviour of IPV and according to Johnson, is primarily male violence enacted against women and is defined as a form of intimate abuse that is not confined to physical abuse but includes "a larger pattern of power and control that permeates the relationship" (2010: 7). More specifically, Johnson states that intimate terrorism:

> "Involves the combination of non-violent control tactics, such as economic abuse, emotional abuse, the use of children, threats and intimidation, invocation of male privilege, constant monitoring, blaming the victim, threats to report to immigration authorities, or threats to "out" a person to work or family" (2011: 290).

Michael Johnson's (2011) typology of IPV includes four to five categories of which the most serious and injurious of which he classifies as intimate terrorism; a type of abuse that, according to Johnson, represents only a small part of all cases of IPV. The remainder of all other cases of IPV fall under the category of situational couples violence or violent resistance (Johnson 2011). Coercive control is a pattern of behaviour that influences all parts of the victim's life; their interactions with friends and family, their work, use of finances, and which diminishes their self-image and confidence (Hamberger et al. 2017). The following narratives clearly reflects women's potential to control and coerce their partners through violence or threats of violence. The narratives reveal intimidation, economic control, and manipulation to coerce and dominate their partner thus denying them any role in decision-making as a couple. Although Teresa spoke of her attack on her partner with a baseball bat and also indicated her control over his everyday life. She

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accountability and victim safety. There has been little evidence that this model works beyond the original control group with the likes of Dutton and Corvo argue that the Duluth Model "ignores factors such as poverty, stress, chemical dependency, anxiety, or the man's own lifetime experience of being victimized" (2006: 460).

said:

> *I would need to talk to him all the time, know where he was. Me and my controlling self…I would want to control everything that's going on, even when he's having a shower…no matter what he did I was on his ass. He'd say "hi how are you", I'd snap at him. He'd do the dishes and I'd go behind him and make sure they were clean. I gave him so much stress. I'd sit in the kitchen. I'd talk under my breath telling him what a lazy ass, no good person he was. Very hateful because I couldn't treat him right.*

Teresa referred to how her "*controlling self*" managed to reduce his self-esteem through her consistent negative emotional and verbal response to her partner's efforts to maintain their relationship. He told her that he "*felt like he was nobody*" because of her behaviour towards him.

Brenda referred to her partner's efforts to please her as:

> *never good enough...I'd belittle him and call him names…it became my show 100%.*

Dorothy described the event that resulted in her arrest for IPV and a no-contact order. This meant that under the terms of her arrest, she was not permitted to have any contact with her partner, either in person or communicating through phone, text, or email. She recounted that day:

> *I was just putting him down every day for what? (Crying). Anyway there was a football game and we had the speakers downstairs and I was upstairs. That's what I would do so he could have some peace of mind because I was always on him - everyday. So what happened was he turned the game on and I was watching him. I told him that if he treated me the way I treated him I would have left a long time ago. I knew what I was doing was not OK. So I was watching him from upstairs and he was waving at someone across the fence. I was like what are you doing? He was like nothing, so I'm like OK and just blew it off. That's what I did, just blew it off because I did not want to cause a fight and then I would just wig out and I would be wrong and I did that a lot. So I went downstairs and I could not find him. I went outside and my child's slide was next to the fence so I'm like (calls his name). I was calling him and I was really mad. He didn't answer. The front door was locked so he'd jumped over the fence and gone somewhere. That made me more upset. I jumped the fence and some bars fell. So in my mind maybe he had put it there to hear me jump over the fence. In my mind, I don't know, the guy is really scared of me. I remember one time, I had a knife and I was gonna stab him, you know because he was lying to me. Although, I don't know...he started running out of the house because he was so scared (Laughing). But it's not ok, he was scared for his life!! Anyway, that day I was calling him and there's a path where I could see ahead and I'm like screaming (calling his name) because I*

> *could not see him. Later I see him sitting on the grass but he couldn't have been there all the time otherwise I would have seen him. I walked back and forth calling his name, yelling for him and he wasn't there. I had one of those metal poles in my hand and I'm like what are you doing? You know and I went to him and I still had the pole in my hand. I went to hit him on the ankle and legs with the pole and he was looking at me like I was stupid. I'm like "what are you doing?" So I went to hit the grass and the last time I just hit him on the ankle…yeah, I didn't break his leg with the lead pipe which I thought I did but it was sprained pretty bad. He went to the hospital.*

I asked Dorothy to tell me about the decision-making process in the relationship. She said:

> *It was my way or nothing. That's what he gave me. He would come home from work, give me his money and we'd be fine. As in, I'd pay the bills and this is what I'd want and we'd be fine, OK! He'd say "whatever you want".*

Ostensibly if Dorothy's partner followed her rules he could avoid conflict. Similar to Brenda, Dorothy said, "*whatever he did could, would never be good enough*". The data confirms a link between women's aggression, violence and controlling behaviour towards their male partners. The data therefore, contests the notion that physical violence and coercive control is exclusive to male perpetrators of IPV. This throws into question the patriarchal model of power and control that is fundamental to the treatment of, and discourse on, IPV in general (Graham-Kevan and Archer 2005, Saunders 1988, Stark 2009, Walker 1989). In their study of ninety-five women who used violence in their intimate relationship, Swan and Snow claim that women, "even those who are very violent - still lack the patriarchal power structure that aids male intimate terrorists in achieving absolute control over their victims" (2003: 104). Claims such as these fail to take into account the experiences of the women themselves who assert that they are not victims, thus challenging traditional gender roles and notions of domestic power structures.

Participants such as Angela, for example, refer to her use of threats and violence to control her partner. Angela said her current partner was:

> *passive and lovey. Don't cuddle me. I'm like a guy, I just want sex and that's it, no touching just sex. He's cuddly and too needy. I'd tell him to back off and he thought it was cute and funny. I would beat him down for it, hit him and break his spirit for it*.

Angela controls her partner through threats of violence. When I asked her if she thought her behaviour could be frightening to her partner, she said:

> *not really but when I raise my hand, my current boyfriend flinches. That's how bad I'd abuse them. I'm like - really? You're flinching? He's like, but you hit me all the time! But sometimes I just threaten him*.

Angela is petite and she engaged in appropriate gender display such as makeup, long coiffed hair, and dress. She was articulate and self-aware. Angela acknowledged her ability to elicit fear in her non-violent partner through force and intimidation, particularly when she reminded me that she had:

> *punched him so hard once that I have fractured my hand from punching him on the back of the head*.

Angela said that she would get her own way through pressuring her partner. She explained:

> *I would beg him to stay home from work because I missed him. We would argue until I had talked him into it then get mad because he'd stayed home and start bickering at him. He'd get tired of it, who wouldn't? Then he'd start telling me to shut up or be quiet. I would literally throw a fit. Nobody tells me what to do.da..da..da…Then he would try to leave because I wouldn't stop. Then I would jump on his back and block the door. He wouldn't touch me but try to get me off his back. I would start, don't touch me, how dare you touch me. Then I'd swing at him.*

Angela's threats of violence were validated despite her small stature. The subjective narratives of the women in this study and their experiences as perpetrators of IPV contest the traditional notion of the passive and submissive female victim, which refutes women's agency and their active role in the dynamic of violence in their intimate relationships. Miller, in her account of gang girls in the United States, contends that if we ignore women's use of violence:

> "It means that these women are not given the space to be fully human…refusing to grant the complex realities of women's lives – good and bad – means we too end up circumscribing their agency, and the result is a narrowing view of our ability to fully appreciate and understand their experiences" (2001: 14).

Stark (2009) also intimates that coercive control is primarily the domain of men and is supported through sexual discrimination and structural inequalities that form the basis for women's entrapment. Indeed, structural inequalities do exist, but this alone cannot adequately account for why women engage in patterns of violence and coercive control. Women who use violence are not a homogenous group and their lives are complex and multifaceted. Diane's narrative reflects not only her control over her partner both physically and emotionally, but also

her thought processes related to how she would use this to manage conflict. She said:

> *It was me belittling and being really mean all the time with him for no reason. If it wasn't going my way, it wasn't going any way. If we were in an argument, it wasn't over until I was done (laughs). If you wanted to walk away - yeah right, get back here… Until I was done fighting, until I was done arguing, until I was over it, until I got sick of it or bored with the fight it was not done. I started the fight, I ended the fight. That was how it was done…Looking back on things, it was me who had the power and control in the relationship…I used to tell him, "what, you can't hit me back you little bitch" I would just belittle him for not hitting me back. Although it sounds crazy, why wouldn't you just hit me? I just made your nose bleed. Like what's wrong with you? When we were done fighting and stuff, he would be like, "I love you".*

In line with Tedeschi and Felson, and as evidenced by the data, coercion is a behaviour that individuals engage in as a result of thought out and goal oriented decisions, rather than as an impulsive reaction (1994: 210-11). Diane's narrative reveals not only emotional and verbal abuse but also the decision to follow it up with physical violence if she failed to achieve the desired goal of getting her partner's attention.

Current paradigms struggle to shape women's violence as normative beyond their victimization, thus contesting the ways in which some women demonstrate agency and have the capacity to coercively control their male partners (Miller 2001). Instead, they perpetuate the notion that aggression and violence remain within the province of male behaviour (Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez 2006). The failure to acknowledge the strategies of control and the violence women use is not only anti-agentic in nature and essentializes gender differences but also prevents women who profess to use violence against their partners from seeking support and assistance to minimize their behaviour as perpetrators, and not victims of IPV. In the case of one of the participants, she was forced to repeatedly profess her culpability to the police before they assisted her partner who was lying on the floor unable to get up. She said:

> *I told them it was me not him, he didn't do anything. Help **him** not me, he was the one lying on the floor not me.*

The women's narratives refute notions of victimization since they did not view their IPV as a product of male oppression or domination. Similar to data generated by other scholars, these women contested victimhood, perceived by them as being weak, vulnerable, and powerless (Adams 1999, Miller 2001, Seamans et al. 2007). It is therefore possible to interpret their

experience as agentic and viewed as rational individuals who were exercising control over their lives through violence against their male partners, in much the same way as men use violence against women (Kruttschnitt and Carbone Lopez 2006: 322).

The characteristic of coercive power and control is embedded in the women's narratives. Brenda spoke of her control in her relationships, she said:

> *In the beginning it [decision-making] was joint but as time went on and I had the control, he depended on me more for his habits and me who was cleaning, paying the bills, looking after the kids. We didn't have a car so who was making sure we had rides everywhere? Everything relied on me so I took full reign. Then the little time he tried to step out, I wouldn't let him, it wasn't good enough. Sometimes it really wasn't good enough. It became my show 100%... yeah, he's a piece of shit, lousy. I told him all the time, I'd belittle him and call him names…even when he worked, I earned more. I expected him to come give me his money and I'd let him have some. I was a 100% bitch*.

Brenda also explained the conflict that ensued when her then-partner lost his job:

> *When we got our pay cheque and I realized what happened, I beat the shit out of him until he ran out of the trailer. Last time I saw him he was running away from me. That's the last time I seen him.*

Both Teresa and Beth relentlessly attacked their partner's self-esteem. Beth told me she would:

> *tell them they're wrong all the time. Tell them their fucking lazy, put them down all the time. I have this expectation of who they're supposed to be or what they're supposed to do, they could never live up to it*.

Although violence was part of the dynamic, coercive control and psychological abuse also served to continually undermine the self-worth of the women's partners and produced fear and a pattern of abuse practiced by these women in their perpetration of IPV (Henning and Klesges 2003). Compared to physical violence, psychological abuse is understood to have a more deleterious impact on emotional functioning and self-esteem (Henning and Klesges 2003, O'Leary 1999). Johnson (2010) argues that coercive control is fundamental to distinguishing the types of IPV and that characterizes intimate terrorism. Notwithstanding Johnson's assertion that this type of violence is primarily male perpetrated, some studies, albeit only a few, do reveal that women are as likely as men to use coercive and controlling behaviours that can be defined as

intimate terrorism (Dobash and Dobash 2004, Felson and Outlaw 2007, Graham-Kevan 2007b, Hines and Douglas 2010, Ross and Babcock 2009).

Thirteen of the participants in this study did manipulate their partners and practiced coercive control in their intimate relationships that fit the criteria of Johnson's (2010) typology of intimate terrorism. The women did, at the same time, acknowledge a level of shame and embarrassment for their behaviour, Angela said:

I was ashamed, I never wanted anyone to know I was, like, evil.

Diane and Kay commented:

We were monsters!

Diane also challenged me (laughing):

so you could not imagine me pulling a baseball bat on someone?

Diane's attitude led me to believe that she also embraced her violence and her capacity to control her partner.

Isabelle told me:

I was always the bad one, the crazy bitch because I know how to stand up for myself.

Isabelle, Diane, Kay and Angela's narratives all suggest identification with discourse that vilifies women's violence. Isabelle's narrative encompasses the notion that because she does not fit the passive victim narrative, as a violent woman she is considered "crazy" and "bad", or the "other" (Comack and Brickey 2007, Pearson 1997). Sjoberg and Gentry's (2007) theorizing about women's violence is particularly salient to this study. They argue that violent women:

> "Defined within the monster narrative are not real women because they are described as both actually evil and psychologically broken, two facets which the ideal types of womanhood in gender norms exclude. Monstrous violent women are thus pathological and therefore neither they nor their gender are responsible for their actions" (2007: 41).

Under this framework, pathologizing women's violence as "mad", "bad" or "monstrous", distances them from their actions and suspends accountability, all of which is reflected in the subjective identities that they perceive as "*broken*". Brenda's narrative reveals the tensions in constructing violent women as "mad" or "bad" because the violence is only one aspect of their lives. Brenda worked hard in order to support her children and indeed said that she fought on their behalf when her partner was seen to be neglecting them. According to Comack and Brickey, while these discursive constructs have some resonance with women's accounts of

violence, they "fail to capture the complexity of their lives. Because identity is fractured and multiple, violence in the lives of criminalized women cannot be rendered plausible by simply imposing a master status template" (2007: 5). Unlike men's violence against women that is considered "natural" and the "norm" (Comack and Balfour 2004), these women conceptualize their use of IPV as abnormal and as transgressing gender norms (Campbell 2006, Miller 2001). The narratives reveal how the participants constituted themselves in discursive categories such as *mad, bad or evil* in trying to make sense of their world (Comack and Brickey 2007, Pearson 1997). The data suggests that violent women challenge idealized gender stereotypes and gender norms that serve as evaluative frameworks available to individuals in constructing their identity (Morrissey 2003, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). Indeed, these women struggled to situate their violence within the narrow sociocultural discourse that not only contests their capacity to commit violence (Hird 2002, Morrissey 2003) but also discredits them as women and as rational beings (Pearson 1997, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007).

Rachel spoke about her control issues. She warned her partner that if he didn't come home, she would think he was cheating on her. She said:

> *I'd blow up his phone, wouldn't stop calling. It hurt me. He'd come home and I'd push him, sometimes I punched him, called him names and he's just walk gone out. I would just go crazy. Yeah, then anytime he'd fall asleep, I'd check his phone and texts. I'd be on him. I start screaming and hit him. I would thrash him pretty much. (Laughing). Once he showed up and he tried to leave because I started in on him. I took the driver's side mirror off and smashed it in his face with it. He had scratch marks up and down him*

Maureen also spoke about how she controls her partners' movements:

> *I had to know where he was, what he was doing and stuff like that. I would ask, I wonder what he's doing, where he's at, who he's texting. So it was more me being aggressive. I would check his phone. He would not lock it. I believed him, I knew he wasn't lying but it was comfortable for me the way we lived*

Maureen was the victim of abuse in her first relationship, her partner was extremely violent and controlling. However, in subsequent relationships, Maureen initiated conflict and violence. She said:

> *there's a lot of times he did not fight back and he would like cry - please stop hitting me.*

Similar to many other studies of female perpetrators of IPV, in their study of thirteen women who perpetrated IPV, Seamans et al. (2007) found that most of their sample had been victims of violence in previous relationships. Although the data gathered from this study contradicts their findings, their analysis does resonate with those women who, after experiencing violence as victims, then become aggressors in their subsequent relationships. Seamans et al. surmise that their sample responded with violence to nonviolent partners because they were:

> "Damaged goods or merely resilient and resourceful, they learned from their past violent relationships that sitting back and taking it did not stop the violence. These women entered their current relationships near the ends of their ropes, with little tolerance for enduring abuse…these women had internalized a commitment to not being victims" (2007: 56/57).

This speaks directly to the few women in this sample who, after being severely victimized in their previous relationship, chose to aggress and control subsequent intimate partners even when those partners were not violent towards them. Male violence against women or male batterers remain unchallenged and constitute the norm, while female violence is trivialized or denied leaving women with very little recourse for their actions. The data from this study underscores the problematic and complexity of not only women's perpetration of IPV, but IPV in general. While there is some support to justify women's violence from the position of previous victimhood, it is not the entire story. As Hird argues, if we are to reject women's capacity for violence, in this sense "women forever remain only the responders to male agency, even if that response is resistance in the form of action" (2002: 109).

Kay was nervous about the interview and asked if she could join another participant and friend, Diane. When Kay arrived for the interview, she brought with her six full pages on which she had written about her experiences. She said she didn't want to forget anything. However, after a while, she relaxed and spoke to me without referring to her pages of dialogue. She told me about her conflict with her husband, she said:

> *He worked a few hours to keep his job but it was me who provided and made the money. I took the upper hand. Oh yeah. I said to him - you can't even keep the house clean on top of me putting in my eight hours. I have to come home to this? And that ultimately let me get out of control. I had the upper rank…I didn't care about his feelings or what he wanted, it was me first even before my baby. I just stopped giving a shit about anything. I would just go full blown…Yeah, a man's supposed to control everything, have the higher hand but it was me who was the boss, had the upper hand, power and control - had a full blown power trip, made me feel powerful*

but nearly blew my head off and had to put the pieces back together.

Kay said her fights escalated:

> *one time*, *we'd be getting ready for a family picture, we're all gonna be a happy family, smile, perfect. I'd pinch and hit to get their attention quickly…I'd be pushing, slapping, hitting and pinching my husband and kid…DV (domestic violence) got worse. Fights more frequent – at least weekly*.

Kay and her husband continued to make every effort to remain together and, at the time of the study, lived in crisis housing with their child. She said she still struggled with her feelings and they referred to mediation "*a lot*" but she remains hopeful for her future and that of her family. Kay's narrative reveals a tension between maintaining traditional gender roles and her need to exert power in her relationship. On the one hand, she situated her discussion by subverting the patriarchal framework where her husband should have had the power and control within the relationship. On the other hand, she reverted to traditional notions of gender when she narrated the consequences of exerting what is considered male power; as a woman it was too much for her – *nearly blew my head off*.

Sara spoke about her second relationship and the subsequent behaviour that resulted in a further arrest and charge for assault. She said:

> *He asked me to move back again (after a break up)…I said, if we are getting back together please wear a ring. That's when things went haywire. I should have known better than force him to wear a ring. I told him, OK if you're going to live in this house, sleep, eat, you need to wear a ring - nope. So the constant argument of trying keep the ring on, I felt betrayed. I felt like what the hell. He would like take it off and put it back on and I started to notice little things like, the passenger seat. I noticed the ring in the consul. So I said, are you serious? So one night I got really upset in the morning and smashed his TV, his plants and anything I could lay my hands on, I got so fed up. I wound up in jail, again…yeah, I gave him a punched black eye…yeah, I was held accountable for what I did. Wasn't right but I needed to be on my own again.*

The women's narratives depict the controlling and coercive behaviour the women engaged in with their intimate partner. The participants exhibited elements of verbal, emotional, and financial abuse that can also include physical abuse as a means of controlling their partner's movements, in respect to who they saw and what they spent, all of which impacted their everyday lives. Angela, Dorothy and Teresa acknowledged their partner's fear and the impact

that their violence and abuse had on them. Their partners were left with long-term physical trauma, low self-esteem and emotional angst as a result of their violence and abuse. These findings challenge the notion that women's violence does not equate with men's in terms of consequences, severity or frequency (Bates and Graham-Kevan 2016). Moreover, the data substantiates women's capacity to inflict deliberate and injurious violence in their intimate relationships, providing evidence-based knowledge that contests the view that women's perpetration of IPV is without consequence (Dasgupta 1999, 2002: Dobash and Dobash 2004: Swan and Snow 2003).

Sexual coercion

According to the GSS, female victims of intimate terrorism experience a high level of sexual abuse and humiliation and largely perpetrated by males against females (Ferraro 2013). Sexual aggression is believed to be uncommon in women (Feder and Henning 2005, Russell and Oswald 2001). With this in view, few studies inquire the ways in which female perpetrators of IPV use their sexuality within their intimate relationships (Ferraro 2013). Toward the end of each interview, I asked all the participants if they could tell me if they ever insisted on sex with an unwilling male partner. Most of the participants were embarrassed and responded negatively, often looking away from me. Ferraro suggests that shame and discomfort are inherent to men's accounts of sexual violence and in her qualitative research with battered women charged with crimes, she encountered a similar response, explaining "I always wait until late in the interview to ask about sexual abuse and women find this aspect of their abuse the most difficult to discuss" (2013: 144). Indeed, this was my experience with the participants in this study; where they were willing to speak about their experience with physical violence, discussing their sexuality was more problematic. At the end of her interview, Isabelle disclosed that she pressured her partner for sex. However, Isabelle explained:

> *I would start fights. I'd be looking through their phone for anything. If they're not saying I love you, I'll pressure them. If I'm not having enough sex, I'll pressure them for sex so I can get my needs met. If they're not taking care of the baby when I want them to or helping me out with what I need, you know, I'll blow up…I would take off sometimes, I'd start a fight and start yelling, chump, piece of shit, spoilt baby, bitch. I'll go and punch him, punch his TV to break it, break stuff, throw something…I forced sex you know. I would pressure…this is hard…I don't know…yeah, I would want it and I would get angry. I would cause a fight and sometimes he'd*

> *just say no but I'd do that anyway. Even if I didn't reach the satisfaction, I'd get the satisfaction of knowing that they were being intimate with me when I wanted it.*

Isabelle's narrative demonstrates her intention to dominate her partner rather than enjoy an intimate moment with him. Sexual violence is a key factor in the identification of a male batterer, however, academics have been reluctant to acknowledge the term "female batterer" or, indeed, the "battered male" (Pagelow 1992) fundamentally not only because women ostensibly lack the power to control their male partner physically and emotionally but also through sexually abusive behaviour.

Another of the participants, Angela disclosed that she also pressured her partner for sex. Angela said:

> *I demand sex then I turn over…I just want sexing that's it, no touching just sex. He's cuddly and too needy. I'd tell him to back off and he thought it was cute and funny. I would beat him down for it, hit him and break his spirit for it*.

Clearly, both Isabelle and Angela fulfil the criteria for coercive control that includes emotional, verbal, physical and sexual abuse of their partners. Isabelle acknowledged the coercive factor when she used words such as "*pressure*" and "*force*" in respect to her strategy. In one of the few studies on sexual coercion and women, Russell and Oswald query "when women utilize these strategies do they realize they are being coercive?" (2001: 113). It is evident from Isabelle and Angela's narratives that they are aware of the strategies they use to achieve their objectives; their actions are a choice. Russell and Oswald's study determine that, unlike men, women's motivations for sexual coercion are not influenced by power and domination. Instead how they approach their intimate relationships proves to be fundamental to their sexual aggression (2001: 114). Clearly, Isabelle used power and control as a means of sexual coercion. Angela was dismissive of her partner and looked only to have her needs met. Only these two women acknowledged their sexual aggression, this was an insufficient sample from which to draw any conclusions. However, coercion remains a significant factor in understanding women's use of IPV, particularly in respect to the sexual component of coercion and control that is believed to be unique to male batterers.

Gaining Attention: "***don't walk away from me!"***

Twenty of the participants referred to violence as a strategy in gaining their partner's attention. Being ignored by their intimate partner was a causal factor in twenty of the twenty-five participants narratives for resorting or initiating violence, specifically when their partner attempts to walk away from them or distance themselves from the conflict. In line with Archer's (2000) ground-breaking analysis that revealed support in over two hundred studies that women initiate IPV more frequently than men, the participants in this study did initiate violence with their intimate partners and for a variety of motivations. For example, when I asked Angela to give me a picture of a disagreement between her and her partner. She said:

> *being laughed at; not being listened to; being called crazy and having to repeat myself…I am so used to chaos I'll start it if it's not there…if he tried to leave, I would barricade the doors, jump on his back, beg him not to leave and that I would change. If that didn't work, I would start beating up on him. It's like a cycle. I would beg him to come back, I was sorry then it would happen again. I did feel bad, I felt small, but it would just keep on happening*.

Sara spoke about her third partner:

> *too much silence with the third so yeah, I wrecked his car. They said it was incredible I did all that. Normally a grown man can't throw or pull a door off. One day I got really mad. I'm like, you know I am fed up with you just coming home and shutting down and going straight to your computer. So it was funny as hell, but not funny to him. I took everything, computer, monitor and threw it into the front door. It all broke all that stuff. He's like, I'm out of here*. *He crawled back to me. We started over*.

Sara was arrested for criminal damage and assault. Once again she was mandated to attend the FDAAP meetings. When Sara disclosed her violent behaviour to the group, I learned that, in addition to the violence she disclosed during the interview, she had also attempted to run over her partner with the car during this dispute.

Angela referred to not only how she would start conflict to garner attention, but also to the cycle of violence. Sara's description of her violence also reflected a cycle or pattern of violence but Angela related directly to discourse from the battered woman syndrome; Lenore Walker's (2009)[33] important contribution to the understanding of the emotional response and impact of

[33] For a more complete discussion on Walker's battered woman syndrome (BWS) and learned helplessness, see page 136.

IPV on women who, in this paradigm, are the predominant victims of this type of assault. Walker defines the three stages in the repetitive cycle as beginning with the building up of tension, the physical conflict then "loving contrition" (2009: 91). Although Walker (2009) fails to apply this cycle of abuse to women's perpetration of IPV, the stages were observable in Angela's narrative.

Emma, who I met during her intake meeting, presented herself as quiet and shy. She defended herself as not "*really understanding what happened and how she got to this point*". She was arrested, charged for assault on her partner and his mother and mandated to attend the FDAAP group. She described the events that led her to OnTrack Inc. She said she woke her boyfriend to talk to him and when he pushed her away, she said:

I lost it…I started pushing and shoving him.

Emma punched her partner's mother when she attempted to pull her away from him. Her partner called the police and she was arrested because both her partner and his mother sustained minor injury during the event. I later had the opportunity to observe Emma when she attended the support group meeting for the first time. Her introduction to the group revealed much more violence during the altercation than she had spoken of at the intake meeting. She admitted to kicking, hitting, and punching her partner and his mother, as well as kicking in doors and destroying property. Emma did not agree to an interview. However, as time progressed, within the group she became more comfortable, less shy and more talkative. She also revealed that this was not her first time initiating IPV with a partner. She told the group:

I don't like being ignored.

Adele spoke about conflict with her husband and said that she usually started it because:

> *he's not violent…It's usually me, I'll hit him, push him and hit him and hit him and he'll like, defend himself, after you know not being able to do anything after I'm hitting on him. He'll defend himself, push me away, you know, whatever, but it usually starts with me. If he walks away, I'll follow him and close him down - I don't like that - don't walk away from me!*

Alice also described an incident with her present partner where she initiated conflict to get his attention:

> *he was always on his phone with video games and stuff. Like this (demonstrates the action of playing a video game) all the time, just on it and I'm like, I'm here trying to hang out with him. And so I had my legs crossed like this, I had my foot like this (sticking out). So I said I'm gonna*

> *kick that phone out of your hand because I'm trying to communicate with him. He's like, what? So I go boop (kicks the phone). And he's like, stumbling, like with it and he kicked my shin. To this day he's like, you kicked the phone out of my hand! But he caught it. I was dumbfounded, like I stopped. I was staring at him and I popped him in his thigh. So he popped me in the arm twice as hard. So I said OK. I got up and started yelling at him and said 'why the fuck are you hitting me? So he gets up, all his 6'3" and me 5'1". I love it when guys get in my face like, I'm a big badass man. So I kinda have to huff and puff to get to his level. He put me in a chokehold to stop me getting in his face, and I'm like really?? So I grabbed his metal pot pipe and started hitting his head and telling him to get the fuck off me…I got up picked my bicycle up and fucking threw it at him. I got out because I was ready to…and I'm not a weapon grabber, I have my own weapons (shows me her fists). That's how I always think. I never hit their balls. If he thinks he can hit a woman… not that I got hit first.*

Alice spoke about an incident when a boyfriend walked away from her in a public place:

> *he got in my face. You don't get all aggressive with me then walk away. I tried to get him to come back and talk it out like a real man. So he pushed me to the wall and put his hands on my throat, next thing there's people trying to get me off him. I had him on the ground. You don't lay your hands on me.*

Alice's partner was one of the few who would retaliate when she engaged him in conflict. She was also generally violent and had been charged with violence at various points in time. Adele also referred to the fact that after years of taking her abuse, her partner had started to defend himself. There is scholarly support for arguing that men are socially and culturally conditioned to avoid hitting women; what is commonly referred to as chivalry (Conradi and Geffner 2009: Dutton 2006: George 2007: Lafrance 2018: Straus 2006, 2012). This was evident in this study, with the majority of the partners being nonviolent and not retaliating even when physically abused. However, when men do retaliate, women are at risk and more likely to sustain injury through violence; this being a critical reason for addressing female perpetrated IPV (Felson and Cares 2005, Straus 2005).

I asked Anna to tell me about the first relationship in which she became violent. She spoke about how her then boyfriend would refuse to see her after a fight until she had calmed down. She told me she would continue to damage property until such time as he paid attention:

> *he was the first one I loved and I could not let it just be. I would need to get more out of him…he would just leave and I would like, I would try to climb*

> *in through his window when he wouldn't talk to me, I would wreck his car sometimes. If I found a number, I would slash his leather seats with a screwdriver.*

Linda claimed that her partner did not listen to her. She said:

> *he wouldn't hear me until I'd scream and hit him. Then he'd sit up and listen. Sometimes I was just angry and wanted to hit him…sometimes I'd hurt my hand*.

Rachel was violent toward all her partners. She said:

> *Well, one of the times I hit him, I kept screaming at him. He did something that pissed me off. I kept screaming at him, he called me a cunt so I hit him. He pulled me down and I just looked at him and he stopped. He'd never put his hands on a woman so I started with "Oh you put your hands on a woman punk", so he left the room. I'd antagonize him to get a reaction. If I didn't get it, I'd keep on until I got it. We were together three years. I told him I'd wallop your ass, I told him*.

Anna, Linda, and Rachel's partners did not respond to their violence. Rachel provoked her non-violent partner into violence in order to gain his attention, and ridiculed him when he finally did with "*you put your hands on a woman!!*" Anna wreaked havoc with her partner's property until such time as he paid her the attention she sought. If the roles were reversed and her male partner was the aggressor in this incident, the violent response would be socially legitimized as self-defence.

June was a victim of abuse in her first relationship but subsequently hits her non-violent partners. She explained it was:

> *just frustration. Didn't really want to inflict pain. Just getting their attention. Hear what I'm saying*.

Both these explanations fail to explain why IPV by women is ignored or minimized (Straus 2009a). June was a victim of IPV in a previous relationship. Thus, her explanation for violence towards her male partners clearly refutes a women's lack of agency in the perpetration of IPV. Moreover, if we argue zero tolerance for male violence against women, how do we go about applying this to female perpetrators of IPV? (Kernsmith 2005)

Teresa spoke about the lack of attention she received from her partner, she said:

> *we are doing better, but like today, I lay into him. He doesn't show me any*

affection. I've had enough. We ended up in the bedroom and I went at him again. He ended up in the closet and he quickly got me on the bed holding me down, not trying to hurt me but keeping me away.

I asked Teresa if her partner ever fought back or defended himself. She told me about another fight she had with her partner:

> *I don't remember why exactly but I must have tried to hit him or something 'cos he told me to knock it off. At that point he threw me on the ground. He'd never hit me but his face got close to mine and I hit him in the face. That's what I do. I start it with my mouth. I keep on 'cos he shuts up and just stops talking…He shuts down…I still have problems with yelling (after attending the support group), if you don't hear me the first time I'll just get louder until you hear me. He's the total opposite. He shuts down. As soon as I start yelling he puts that wall up and that makes me madder because I will just yell some more. I have very little patience and stuff. He is very patient and says 'you don't need to yell, can we just talk please?' That makes me even madder…Sometimes I would be like bah (she punches the air). If he walks away, I'll follow him and close him down - I don't like that - don't walk away from me*!

Dorothy spoke of her partner's lack of attention that would "*set her off*". Dorothy would deprive her partner of sleep until she got his attention. She explained:

> *That's the thing, he never left, he'd never called me a bad name, never called me bitch, never called me a slut. Mostly he stayed real quiet which made me even madder. I was angry that he wouldn't even talk to me. When I was mad, I would kick him and hit him - Don't go to sleep, I don't want you to go to sleep. Talk to me. So I was hitting him and threatening him, using intimidation on him, breaking things*.

Rachel explained:

> *We were fighting one time and I slapped him. I'd antagonize him with punk, baby and he'd walk away from me. He hurt me walking away so I just hit him to antagonize him. Don't you walk away from me!*

Anna said:

> *I would do things I felt bad for but wanted him to know it. He would just take it or argue and that made me mad because he was not accepting it. He walked away a lot, he did a lot of walking away…I jumped on his back and started punching him*.

Linda explained:

> *sometimes he didn't hear me and he'd leave all the time…He never really hit me…I bit him, punched him, kicked him and spat on him. Like he'd leave and I'd still be angry. Sometimes I wouldn't want conflict and I'd just let him go…Yeah…I would try and control him and not let him leave, then we'd get verbal then the threats.*

These narratives leave no doubt as to the initiation and context of the violence. Not 'being listened to' was construed as a primary motivation for these participants to engage in violence with their intimate partners. The violence they used to get their partner's attention rather than have them walk away and avoid confrontation escalated their frustration. Similar to this study, Seamans et al. (2007) found, in their qualitative examination of thirteen domestically violent women that their experience of childhood trauma could be a justification for engaging in violence when they feel ignored, leading them to surmise:

> "Looking at the bigger picture, perhaps these women were particularly prone to becoming affronted by their partners disregard because of their own childhood abuse and neglect. The messages of unworthiness these women internalized as children may have set them up for being particularly reactive to partners who neglect or ignore them. For the women in this study, when their partners shut down and ignore them, it pours gasoline on the fires of their insecurities, setting up spirals of escalating rage and violence" (2007: 62).

In part, this is of relevance to this study given that the majority of the participants experienced childhood trauma, either directly as victims or as witness of the abuse. However, for the women, gaining their partner's attention remained one of the many motivations for their IPV, Seamans et al's (2007) analysis cannot account for the multiplicity of motivations they used, such as control and anger, by the women in this sample. All the same, it does offer a possible window into why the women's frustration might erupt into violence in the specific context of their intimate relationships. Thomas, in her study of anger and power, contends that, "Not being listened to is perhaps the epitome of powerlessness" (2005: 506). Not being listened to, might therefore have greater relevance to this sample of women. Coming from a low income status or living in poverty allowed these women little access to power as a resource in their everyday lives. Therefore, when their partner walked away, it further diminished them.

Studies reveal that when men are violent in their intimate relationships, it is for reasons for control and punishment (Campbell 2006, Hamberger and Potente 1994) and with respect to women, it is for reasons of self-defence or retaliation (Dasgupta 2002, Dobash and Dobash 2004, Swan and Snow 2003, Worcester 2002). However, in line with a number of other studies, the

data revealed in this study that women do engage in violence in order to censure their partner's behaviour, for, in this case, not listening to them or for walking away during conflict (Olson & Lloyd 2005, Seamans et al. 2007, Stuart et al. 2006, Weston et al. 2007).

Gaining a partner's attention was so prevalent as a motivation for violence in Olson and Lloyd's study of women's perpetration of IPV that it was "particularly insightful in explaining women's motives for aggression" (2005: 615). As a result of the male partner's attempt to withdraw from conflict, Olson and Lloyd argue that, the women feel that they are not being listened to, therefore, "changing the label for this pattern simultaneously shifts the perception from women being the party primarily responsible for the communicative climate within a relationship to one that relocates men into an agentic position as well" (2005: 615). Here, the women's response with violence is somewhat justified because of their partner's decision to leave or as with many of the participants in this study, avoid conflict or their partner's violence. Thus women reduce responsibility for their use of violence by suggesting that their partner provoked the violence by leaving and blaming the victim for the incident.

Jealousy: "*I **thought he'd cheated on me so I called him a piece of shit and slapped him with my fist across his face, punched him"***

Seventeen of the participants disclosed their trust issues with their intimate partners. Either the participants would accuse their partner of cheating on them, or they would be accused of cheating. The consequences for their intimate partner remained the same either way. In most cases, the participants would punish their partners for their perceived indiscretion. Although the mistrust was sometimes valid, how do we measure the response to a perceived hurt? Moffitt et al.'s comprehensive analysis of the perpetration of IPV suggests that rather than jealousy, "negative emotionality" and "pre-existing characteristics such as approval of the use of violence, excessive jealousy and suspiciousness, a tendency to experience intense and rapid negative emotions, poor behavioural control" are to a greater degree predictive factors in women's perpetration of IPV (2001: 65). Although there is an element of poor behavioural control and negative emotionality, there is also a basis for mistrust between the couple for some of the participants or their partners. Having said this, this study is in line with the many other studies that found jealousy to be characteristic of women's perpetration of IPV (Bair-Merritt et al. 2010, Caldwell et al. 2009, Stuart et al. 2006, Whitaker 2014).

Clarifying jealous behaviour is perhaps important in understanding the women's motives for violence. Some of the participants, like Lucy, did have reason to be suspicious of their partner. However, many did not, which suggests that jealousy is a fluid and subjective concept (Flynn and Graham 2010). When women engage in violence against their intimate partner as a result of jealousy, is the threat to their relationship real or perceived? Or rather, is jealousy internalized as an aspect of the individual's personality? (Flynn and Graham 2010). Angela and Dorothy, for example, had themselves pursued affairs outside their current or primary relationship. Suspicion was generated by the fact that if they could be unfaithful to their partners without them knowing about it, their partners could understandably do the same to them. For several of the other participants, there was no basis for their jealousy and their adverse behaviours, such as "*blowing up*" their partner's phone and controlling funds and their partner's movements. When this however did not assuage the negative feelings, the participants explain how they resorted to violence.

Although Lucy was the youngest participant, she initiated violence in her relationships and is one of the few participants in this study who disclosed her abuse towards her child. Lucy spoke about her partner's cheating and their jealousy issues. She said:

> *I wanna know who he texts all the time, I wanna know who he's talking to, who he's seeing, I wanna know who he's on Facebook to. I wanna know where he's at. If he's lying to me I get really upset and angry and then I get really violent. I do check his emails his texts. If he has a lock on it then I know he's hiding something. I go over everything to see what he's hiding. Then he goes off at me, says I'm overreacting but he's cheated in the past. So how do I know how to trust him? He would get upset and angry if I was upset and angry but we'd get to that point and I would start hitting him first and when I'm really violent, he would just hold me until I calm down to restrain me to keep me from hitting him. The first year we were great we were happy, we were up each other's butts 24/7…I don't know, I don't know what happened. I think it's the first time he cheated that it turned me into an angry psycho person and then he repeated this pattern all the time and I would just go off all that time. He said that he was not going to be beat all the time and would say he would get me back, be a man and not get beat on.*

Lucy's narrative points to the stereotypical social and cultural notions of the victim/perpetrator in IPV. Her partner reiterates the negative association between being "a man" and at the same time a "victim" of female perpetrated IPV, in other words, a woman should not beat a man. By initiating violence, Lucy compromises not only her feminine identity but also her

partner's masculinity (Cook 2009, George 2007).

In the past Isabelle's partner had been unfaithful to her. Similar to other participants, Isabelle's jealousy manifested itself with her surveilling her partner's phone and calling him repeatedly to find his whereabouts. She explained:

> *I went through his phone and he is trying to get it back from me so I punched him and threw his phone into the garden. I thought he was cheating…I'd blow up his phone. I had a new baby and was a hot mess. After a couple of years, I got really destructive, I'd break up stuff, pictures, frames…Once I found out he was cheating on me, I punched him and made his lip bleed. I kicked him in the lower area too but I blackout when I get that angry. Another time I punched him, I wanted to hurt him, I was hurt myself. I'd got to college but I moved in with him, then he went off and started sleeping around. I just wanted to hurt him badly, I got joy out of it…He was pissed and packed up my stuff but we got back together…told me not to do that again but….*

Adele spoke about her lack of trust because they had both engaged in affairs outside their relationship. I asked her to tell me more about why and when it started. Adele said that:

> *it started when I started feeling like I couldn't trust him anymore. He would leave for three days at a time…A lot of times he was leaving just to get a break. I know that and we both slept with other people so that trust was gone on either side…He would get back and I would just na na na na na…and I never believed any of his stories or anything he would tell me.*

Lucy, Isabelle and Adele had reason to disbelieve their partners and legitimized their feelings of jealousy. Although this did not justify their violence, their sentiment was not baseless. For the following participants, jealousy was unsubstantiated but still mediated their behaviours toward their intimate partner. The participants' own conduct formed the basis for their actions and insecurities.

Although Dorothy's partner gave her no reason to believe that she was being unfaithful, she recognized that jealousy was consuming her. She described her feelings:

> *I left for California because I just breathed him. I couldn't work, I needed to know where he was and what he was doing all the time. I didn't have no life. I needed to know what he was doing, if he was cheating on me…Then I leave and three days later, I have his passwords and stuff, looking at his stuff, doing too much. I found some emails with him inviting some girl to our house that I worked so hard for…He's really sneaky with his phone. Overtime I use the computer, it has to be rebooted. You have to start over. I thought - what are you hiding from me?*

Dorothy's partner denies having an affair but later revealed that he is addicted to porn, she said:

> *that's OK, that's fine but don't find or look for these girls here because this is what's gonna get you hurt around me. I told him that, you know, because he was being sneaky. You know, with my sister, I slept with her baby's father and I have a lot of guilt…If I can do that to my sister, why wouldn't he do that to me.*

Angela's partner would consistently accuse her of cheating. She told me that she had in fact slept with some of his friends, but did not appreciate being "*interrogated"*:

> *I got tired of it, so I would hit him and call him stupid and names. I remember one day him being on the ground and I was just kicking him in the ribs, spitting on him and just being so disrespectful. I just knew he would go and leave me alone.*

Dorothy, Adele and Angela's feelings of jealousy originated from personal experience, contributing to a sense of insecurity and serving as a justification for suspecting that their partner could ostensibly be unfaithful to them. The comprehensive quantitative analysis conducted by Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) revealed that compared to their male partners, women exhibit just as many controlling and jealous behaviours, which could include physical violence (see also Felson and Outlaw 2007). The participants in this study demonstrated their capacity for jealousy and control but also considered their personal insecurities as motivating their actions.

For the following participants, jealousy emerged from their personal insecurities and ended in the "negative emotions" referred to earlier (Moffitt et al. 2001). Linda said jealousy impacted her relationship, but she is aware that her own insecurities influenced her behaviour and actions. She described how:

> *anything he did was never enough, never good enough. I'd accuse him of stuff, cheating. I'd assume he's be cheating, I'm not enough for him…One time I'd started a fight, a squabble, I was pushing him and hit him a couple of times and stuff.*

Echoing Angela, Linda's jealousy underscores feelings of insecurity and she attempts to push her partner away. Because the accusations were baseless, the partner's ability to claim their innocence failed and ended in violence. Diane also understood that her partner gave her no cause to suspect him. However, this did not prevent her from permitting her feelings of jealousy to

overwhelm her. She said:

> *I would obsess over it, tracking his time and where he went. How long it should take, if it took longer then… Or if you had this amount of money, I would track his spending down to the penny. If it was a quarter off, I would freak out - what the fuck were you doing - go freaking psycho (laughing) and these issues came out, I didn't even know where they came from…I'd find myself so many times looking like a freaking idiot because I was wrong and he'd prove it to me. He'd say you need to stop but that would just make me more angry…don't you tell me I'm wrong, then it's going-to- be-ON… (laughing) it wouldn't turn out very well for him.*

Rachel spoke about how her jealousy would erupt in rage:

> *I thought he'd cheated on me so I called him a piece of shit and slapped him with my fist across his face, punched him. He just walked out. He'd come home and I'd push him, sometimes punched him and called him names and he'd just walk out. I'd warned him to come home otherwise I thought, he's cheated on me. He'd come home and I would just go crazy, I'd blow up his phone, wouldn't stop calling. It hurt me…He's never yelled at me or hit me, he buys me stuff. He's older and sexy and it sucks that he's in jail right now. He loves my kids. His Dad died and he got into drugs again. He started selling again and got busted. He sold drugs for this girl so I thought he cheated on me.*

Kay said her violent behaviour gave her some relief:

> *I went straight back to work, did not know how to interact with my baby or my husband. I had some jealousy issues with that. My way of showing them love was lashing out at them. You know to get attention or if I needed something. I'm like, what the hell, what's going on with this - very aggressive…I had a little bit of suffocation. Made me feel better to also shout and argue. It was psychobabble, not making sense, checking his emails and texts*.

These narratives revealed the rage that accompanied jealousy. The participants referred to their behaviour as '*crazy*' or '*psycho*' revealing how they considered their behaviour irrational and at the boundaries of feminine norms of conduct (Campbell 2006). Similarly, McHugh and Frieze (2006) distinguish the irrationality associated with how jealousy escalates in the context of male violence against women, explaining that "the abuser's concern for the wife's whereabouts becomes a form of surveillance, and the batterers are often described as evidencing severe and delusional jealousy" (2006: 130). Correspondingly, the data in this study suggests that jealousy was also an element in women's perpetration of IPV, resulting in an escalation of behaviours,

which included surveillance of communication devices, their partner's movement and time, and when these measures fail, ended in violence. Jealousy is thought to be strongly associated with women's perpetration of IPV and incorporated within a pattern of controlling behaviours (Caldwell et al. 2009).

The following participants explain their response when they learned their partner had in fact cheated on them.

Teresa took responsibility for her partner's behaviour. She said:

> *I treated him like crap and he cheated on me…he cheated on me and I went after him with a bat. We had made a deal that if either one was going to step out on each other, we'd tell them. He didn't do that. I found out and he felt like he'd been set up. I confronted him and he denied it. I got home and took my bat out of the car and went in swinging. My kid got in between us. I'm glad she did now because I was gonna kill him and he's big and could beat the shit out of me…I broke his toe he said. I kicked him in the balls as hard as I could then I kicked him in the ass out of the garage. That fucker, fucking…why would he do that?*

Sara spoke about her first relationship when she suspected her partner of being unfaithful to her, ending in her arrest for assault:

> *there was this girl and jealousy came into the picture. I did not know how to handle jealousy. I took it out on him. I tied his arms up, I poured boiling water. I was just like on fire, mad. I wasn't taught properly how to have decent relationships (Laughing). That day I was charged with my first crime.*

When I asked Sara if her partner was injured, she demonstrated little empathy or interest:

> *No, hospitalized yeah. I didn't leave him like in a wheelchair or anything. But when I went off on him, I felt betrayed.*

In fact, Sara divulged at a group meeting that, in addition to pouring boiling water over him, she also hit him with a hot iron. I asked Sara about her third husband, with whom she had been arrested for property damage and IPV. She observed that her partner had removed his ring, an issue that had proven to be a source of anxiety for Sara in the past, she said:

> *I was trying to teach him a valuable lesson that there are women out there who do not deserve to be deceived…I don't care if they are sluts or bitches, we don't deserve to be treated like this.*

I asked her if she had encountered jealousy with other partners, she said:

> *Yeah all the way through, yeah he did the same thing too. He [third] didn't*

cheat on me but he was giving me the signal that he was going in that direction [taking his ring off].

The data supports women's propensity for violence in their intimate relationships when they feel insecure or jealous. Bearing in mind, whether or not suspicions were substantiated, the participant's acrimony and jealousy toward their partner manifested in violence – one with a baseball bat and the other with boiling water. In a laboratory-based scientific investigation to test the myth of female passivity, Richardson discovered no sex differences with aggression. Notably, the results confirmed "repeated and consistent revelations of the error in the myth. Although we initiated this lengthy program of research with a premise consistent with the myth of female passivity, the results revealed our error"(2005: 245). Unsurprisingly, although the participants in this study also rejected stereotypical notions of female passivity and vulnerability, they revealed a propensity to resort to violence, not only as a response to conflict, but also to perceived hurt.

The data shows that women are motivated to use IPV to mediate their feelings of jealousy or insecurity in their relationship, regardless as to whether the feelings are warranted. The violence that the participants inflicted on their intimate partners was injurious and the women's subjective narratives demonstrated the gravity of their actions. Rather than question women's capacity to instil fear in their intimate partners (Dasgupta 1999), this study acknowledges and supports the notion that women's perpetration of IPV is sufficiently serious to not only elicit fear, but also to control their male partner's behaviour (Capaldi et al. 2012, Cook 2009, Felson and Pare 2005, Hines et al. 2007, Laroche 2005, Migliaccio 2001, Sarantakos 2004). Jealousy is but one of many motivations for women to engage in IPV, given that the meaning and context of women's violent behaviour is complex.

Disrespect and provocation: ***"I punched him out a couple of times when he disrespected me"***

The data reveals that sixteen of the twenty-five participants referred to disrespect or provocation as a motivation for resorting to IPV. As referred to earlier, Richardson's (2005) study of sex and aggression revealed no sex differences in aggression. With this in view, rather than just being passive victims of violence, women react strongly to provocation and are "active participants in aggressive interactions"(2005: 245). Indeed, the participants in this study, disclosed the context and the degree to which they provoked their partners to violence. Some

participants explained that they sometimes felt that their partner manipulates them or will "push their buttons" to becoming violent, this being an element in the discourse related to male violence and referred to as victim precipitated or simply as blaming the victim (Straus 1997). Also a factor, is the manner in which the participants responded with violence when they felt there is a lack of respect directed towards them, which in of itself could be regarded a provocation (Felson et al. 2015).

I observed an exchange between several of the group members prior to the beginning of a support group meeting for women who were the primary aggressors in their intimate relationships. One of the women spoke about the difficulty in avoiding violence because there were "*triggers everywhere*". The other women agreed, and one said that a powerful trigger was when "*he disrespects me*". Another of the participants spoke about her feelings and subsequent behaviour on the weekend when her partner took the children to his "*new chick's*" house. She said that she felt disrespected and unable to control the situation and said, "*I am a total bitch, I threw a cell phone at him*". Another woman responded "*yeah*, *if he's pointing me in the face, I'll break his damn finger*". Another countered, "*messing my husband up, if he does that* [point his finger in her face] *I'm gonna mess him up good. I can run after you. I is big but I'll fucking get ya*". There was a lot of laughing and acquiescing with each other on the topic of disrespect.

Consistent with the "myth of female passivity" (Richardson 2005), this group of women also called into question notions of vulnerability. Similarly, Felson et al.'s exceptional study of aggression and provocation found that contrary to stereotypical notions of male aggression, women proved to be more easily provoked into aggressive behaviour while men require more provocation to use violence because "the norm of chivalry discourages men from using violence against women and encourages women to use violence against men (2015: 192, see also Bettencourt and Miller 1996, Winstock and Straus 2011). Certainly this could account for why many of the participant's male partners did not respond or retaliate with violence. Indeed, Rachel's partner told her that he would never put his hands on a woman. Diane asked, "*why wouldn't he hit me*" when she would often try and fail to provoke her partner into retaliating against her. With this in view, Hines et al. argued that men are at a disadvantage because "female abusers are able to use a system that is designed to aide female victims of domestic violence" (2007: 71). Women are not subject to the same limits on their behaviour (Hines et al. 2007, Kurz 1993) as a result of societal prohibition of male violence against women and tacit support or

tolerance for female perpetrated IPV (Cook 2009, Harris and Cook 1994). Boys are socialized to refrain from hitting girls under norms of chivalry, all of which serves to limit male aggression toward women but fails to prevent female perpetrated violence (Bates et al. 2014, Felson and Cares 2005, Felson 2002)

The family decision meeting (FDM) for Jean and her partner shed light on the challenges facing treatment providers of IPV. Both Jean and her partner engaged in some level of violence. Jean, in her narrative, argues that her violence was in self-defence. Viewing the dynamic of the couple, the overlap of the victim/offender status became evident once Jean's partner spoke about her abusive behaviour. Felson et al. (2015) reminds us that interpersonal violence is complicated and suggests that both the victim and the offender require further consideration. They contend that, "It takes two to tango, an idiomatic expression reflecting a common-sense principle often ignored in the violence literature: Most violence stems from interpersonal disputes in which the victim has engaged in at least some type of provocation" (Felson et al. 2015: 181). Specifically, in the context of IPV, referring to the behaviour of the victim, one has to be aware of the potential for "victim blaming". In the case of Jean and her partner, scrutinizing her behaviour as part of a dyadic relationship remains crucial to healing the family. Without assigning blame to the victim or reducing the offender's accountability for their violence, in respect to IPV, Felson et al. articulate the view that "the role of the victim in the social interaction preceding the physical attack is particularly important" (2015: 181).

Even though Jean was one of the few participants who claimed that she engaged in violence in self-defence, her FDM revealed an alternative interpretation. Significantly, nearly half of all women arrested for IPV claimed their violence was a result of their partner's provocation or of being pushed over the edge (Stuart et al. 2006: 617, also see Leisring 2011). The data revealed that over half the women in this study claimed that they felt disrespected, were provoked to violence by their partner, or that they themselves provoked their partner. The following narratives further demonstrate how the communication style of the couple should be considered[35].

[34] The family decision meeting (FDM) is a meeting that includes the couple and family service providers, i.e. social workers, counselors, support group facilitators, lawyers etc…I asked Leslie what these meetings meant. She told me that "it was the only place the couple could not lie. Everyone is there to call them out on everything they report and directly question both the couple about their progress or problems".

[35] Leslie and I discussed how female victims of male perpetrated IPV continuously found themselves as victims in their relationships. Leslie believes that, in her experience, it was not uncommon to find men perpetrating IPV in

Diane referred to her belief that her partner provoked her into being violent considering he was aware of her "*short fuse*":

> *men know what buttons to push 'cos women are more emotional and sensitive. They know what button to push to get us to that point where it's physical. Not saying men make us hit but in a way they kind of know. This is where manipulation comes into play. He'd try to piss me off. The only way I know how to deal with it was to get physical.*

Diane's narrative also draws from essentialist discourse and gender stereotypes in IPV, where in the event of a woman striking her partner, there is the connotation that he must have done something to deserve it. Referring to women as emotional and sensitive also appeals to the women-as-victim discourse where her violence is uncontrollable and expressive rather than instrumental (Johnson 2010).

At least one third of women claimed that they were violent because they were provoked (Stuart et al. 2006, Leisring 2011, Winstok and Straus 2011). Winstok and Straus (2011) contextualize provocation in hypothetical situations and examine the tendencies to escalate aggression with their study of two hundred and eight Israeli couples. Results reveal that three quarters of their sample of women would respond violently if their partners physically provoked them, compared with only just over half the men. Winstok and Straus explain this disparity highlights the differences in societal norms related to IPV, suggesting that society view women's perpetration of IPV as "understandable, pardonable and sometimes humorous" (2011: 3602). Evidenced also by the very public assaults by women reported in the media, as for example when Elin Nordegren allegedly assaulted her husband Tiger Woods or when Lorena Bobbitt cut off her husband John Bobbitt's penis, these acts of violence by women elicited humour and disbelief rather than condemnation (Scarduzio et al. 2017). Indeed, if the gender of the victim were female, the response would be very different. With this in view, Scarduzio et al. examine gender stereotypes and intimate partner violence, thus revealing:

> "Female's use of violence was usually attributed to provocation from the male partner, which is evident in a comment by a participant that "The guy obviously started it". These perceptions of female perpetrators cast female violence as a response rather than an initiation. In addition, they reveal that participants used internal attributions such as "he

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relationships with female victims, having never engaged in violence in previous relationships but violent with a partner who had been a victim in past relationships. She discussed the need to address their communication style in order that female victims of IPV could engage in relationships where conflict did not perpetually end in violence. Currently this is not encouraged because of the issue of "victim blaming". Having said this, Leslie, in her groups with female victims of violence, does encourages them to learn how to communicate their feelings in a positive manner in order to move forward and improve their future relationships. (personal communication, 12/10/16).

> did something he wasn't supposed to do" to describe the behaviour of male perpetrators, and external attributions such as "she was provoked" to describe the behaviour of female perpetrators" (2017: 101).

When Diane explained that she felt manipulated by her partner to engage in violence, she echoed the discourse that diminishes accountability of female perpetrated IPV. Suggesting a link between how men and women explain and justify why they resort to IPV, Diane rationalized that her partner knew how to "*piss her off*", a reason also offered by men who perpetrate IPV against their female intimates (Anderson and Umberson 2001, Hines et al. 2007, Lambo 2005). The societal response to women's IPV, however, differs.

In the following narratives, the participants referred to feeling disrespected or responding to a perceived hurt or grievance. Kylie spoke about an incident with a previous partner; how she would hit him if he said something she did not like. Unlike other participant's, Kylie's partner would retaliate but she divulged that she enjoyed the pain and violence. Her narrative reveals the complexities of IPV and its perpetration:

> *I would hit him if he said something I didn't like, I'd swing first! One time, I told him he could just leave. He said I'm not leaving you're nothing but a 'ho. So I said, say what you want to say and I hit him. He tried to hit me so I hit him again…I punched him out a couple of times when he disrespected me. He was really hurt and mad. I needed that response…he was acting like I wasn't there so I thought - I'm gonna make you see me - I would sit on other men's laps to get something out of him.*

Brenda spoke about feeling disrespected in a same-sex relationship in high school[36]. She said:

> *I had a relationship with a couple of girls. This one girl was only interested in me for sex so when she told me that, it hurt my feelings. We had words at lunch and the principal sent me home. I returned after school and beat the shit out of her…She did need medical treatment and there were charges - assault with a deadly weapon because I kicked the shit out of her face with steel toe boots on.*

[36] Heterosexuality was a criterion for participation. I therefore discussed their sexuality prior to interviewing the participants. Three of the women disclosed that they had engaged in same-sex relationships in the past. Upon discussion with them about their sexuality, all of them said they identified as heterosexual and not bisexual or homosexual. Kylie said her same sex relationship was when she served her prison sentence for assault four. Jean said, "I was just curious". Brenda said "I fall in love with the person, if I wasn't married I'd be in love with anyone. If someone wants to label me that's fine. Lot of sexual stuff I haven't done with a woman, like oral sex. I've been a receiver of, but not done it". All were currently in heterosexual relationships. I have included Brenda's narrative because her motivations for resorting to violence were similar in essence to her discussion of her violence against her male partner.

Alice spoke about a previous partner who she felt had disrespected her but often her violence would spill out to the general population:

> *he called me a man-beater. He was verbally abusive and I'd feel backed into a corner. He'd say cunt, bitch. He'd say cunt so many times in a row and I'd be sitting on the couch like this (shows me how she sits with her legs folded under her), then I'd just get up and cold-cock him in his face…After I punched him, he got me in a choke hold to try to calm me down and stuff but I'm just like a fighting rat…once I punched him right here [shows above eye] and he had a cut right here [side of eye]. Not bad. We'd fight weekly - verbal and emotional stuff as well but physical. I'd call him a cunt, I'd just let go. If a man attacked me in the street, I'd go for his junk. His names never hurt me so I just turned them on him or hit him.*

Beth spoke about her relationships and how conflict evolved when she felt her partner disrespected her. She said:

> *I always had a boyfriend…I'd get this fuck you I don't care attitude. I would just lash out. Nobody messes with me. I would get physical…I have never been afraid of being hurt. One guy, I just socked him in the face. We were arguing back and forth. I just got pissed at him and socked him. He was disrespecting me and I hit him, hard. I made him bleed…no [injuries], he was bleeding but…he might have tried to defend himself but I was just laughing. He just said "what the fuck", but I just laughed at him.*

Disrespect or responding to a perceived slight was identified as a correlate in women's use of violence (Kernsmith 2005, Kruttschnitt and Carbone Lopez 2006). Despite finding disrespect as a motivation for violence in nearly half the sample of female participants in her quantitative study of female perpetrators of IPV, Kernsmith however concludes that women's violence is primarily a result of self-defence, revenge or retaliation (2005: 178). Significantly, the quantitative nature of Kernsmith's (2005) study does not permit for asking the participants why they felt disrespected, which might have elicited a very different response and conclusion. This therefore very much highlights the requirement for qualitative studies that contextualize motivations such as disrespect or hurt feelings.

In the following narratives, the participants referred to the ways in which they provoked their partners into conflict. Isabelle explained:

> *I would like, take off sometimes. I'd start a fight and start yelling…chump, piece of shit, spoilt baby, bitch. I'd go and punch his TV to break it, break stuff, throw something. Once I got in his face, we were driving. I tipped a*

drink over him. We had to stop and I kicked the shit out of his car. He had disrespected a friend of mine.

Adele said that since attending the group support meetings, she no longer wanted to hit her partner but anger remained and she still yelled verbal abuse. She said:

He told me not to call him stupid so if I wanted to push his buttons I would call him stupid…he would always tell me, why do you disrespect me in front of people? Why do you talk to me like that in front of people? I don't see that, I don't see the other people. I don't care if they're there, I'm gonna tell you how it is - I don't care. But he won't do that, he'll wait until later which is good. I wish I had that in me to wait until everyone's gone to have that conversation. I'm like, I don't care, I do it right now. I don't care how many people are watching us.

Susan said that she would deliberately provoke a fight:

I would antagonize him, call him names to try get him to hit me so I could be violent with him. I knew I could stop with him so I felt I could be violent…because if the cops got involved I wanted to be safe so he'd have to hit me first.

Rachel also spoke about how she would provoke arguments:

I'd antagonize him to get a reaction. If I didn't get it, I'd keep on until I got it. We were together three years. I told him I'd whoop his ass, I told him.

Kylie was in a relationship that was abusive but explained that:

I didn't want it to go this way, I have a big heart and wanted it to work. After a year or so I started to do things to provoke him so I could start a fight and hit him…I would go and see other men and tell him. I wouldn't keep nothing from him. Or I would take off with my siblings and party or I would just sit and tell him something that would make him mad. If he hurt my feelings, I would provoke him to try hit me where I would beat up on him…He got dropped a couple of times but never need to go to the hospital.

In a previous same-sex relationship Kylie engaged in similar behaviours:

I would provoke her until we got physical…yeah, I would punch her and use my whole weight hitting her. I choked her a couple of times and I would grab her and go off. I would try to hold her back and restrain her…It was like pay attention or else. She'd try to piss me off saying she'd get with someone else. So I'd say, really, you want to? Then I'd grab her and choke her. Nothing bad [injuries] just bruises and like scratches.

Provocation, i.e. being either provoked or disrespected as a motivation or reason for

engaging in IPV, speaks to the complex and dyadic nature of IPV and thus supports the notion that it "takes two to tango" (Felson et al. 2015). Although women's violence is understood to be comical or less significant than men's violence against women (Winstok and Straus 2011), the data generated in this study speaks to the seriousness of female perpetrated violence. I asked each of the participants if their violence was a source of humour to their partner or other persons who were aware of their partner's position as male victims of female perpetrated violence. Most said that their partners took them seriously and did not find their violence humorous. Jane did refer to her partners' friends finding it funny that a woman was beating on him and that they laughed at him. She said that she felt sad about the fact that, as a result, he no longer saw his friends.

As discussed, according to some studies, and as compared to men, women are more likely to hit back after being provoked (Leisring 2011, Straus and Gelles 1992, Stuart et al. 2006, Winstok and Straus 2011). Bearing this in mind, Dutton and Nicholls assert that women's propensity to "hit back" underlines the problematic in recognizing the "assertion that women are more afraid of male violence than the reverse" (2005: 688). The participants in this study did not perceive any limits on their behaviour and were not afraid to engage in violence, whether through provocation or ostensibly from being provoked by their partner. Labelling women as helpless victims or citing 'victim blaming' as reasons for ignoring women's IPV is reductive and fails to address IPV as a complex social problem where women or men can equally be perpetrators, victims or both.

Justifications for the Use of Violence

***Retaliation and Self-defence – The Overlap*: "no-one's going to hurt me again, so he's the one who's paid for it".**

A client living at the Mom's house with her children told me that her partner had tried to kill her by driving their car into a tree. She sustained deep injuries that required a steel pin in her hip and knee. She said she only fought back when she could not take any further abuse. Maureen, another participant, who had become an aggressor in subsequent relationships, suffered extreme and persistent abuse from her first husband and partner. He would lock her and their children in their apartment for days at a time and would sometimes knock her unconscious during conflict. She explained that she finally fought back after having been left in the apartment for days without food and diapers for her children.

Both these events have clear implications of self-defence and would have mitigated legal proceedings if they had been charged (Leisring and Grigorian 2016). However, the legal definition for self-defence is to "protect oneself from imminent bodily harm", whereas retaliation is retribution for a perceived wrongdoing by a partner (Leisring and Grigorian 2016: 949). The first participant was protecting herself from further physical abuse but when Maureen engaged in violence in order to leave the apartment, could it also be considered as self-defence? The difference between retaliation and self-defence is fuzzy, and many researchers fail to make a clear distinction between each of these motives and combine characteristics of each of them when exploring women's motives for their use of IPV (Leisring and Grigorian 2016). Both the participant from the Mom's house and Maureen, engaged in what Stuart et al. (2006) refers to as "never again mode", which refers specifically to these women who "have a history of severe violence victimization, and they use violence to decrease the odds of further victimization and to prevent others from hurting them again" (2006: 616). However, although this pertains to a small number of this sample of participants, most of them do not fall into this category of perpetrator.

Recommendations for a treatment protocol contend that self-defence and retaliation are factors in over sixty percent of women's perpetration of IPV (Kernsmith and Kernsmith 2009: 343). The argument of self-defence as the primary motivation for aggression in women has serious implications for the treatment of female perpetrators of IPV, because it does not permit for accountability on the part of those women who seek services specifically for their violence. On the one hand and as a rule, the treatment protocol designed for male batterers does not give them the opportunity to explain the reasons for engaging in violence against their female partners, because there is an expectation of accountability and zero tolerance (participant observation of male batterers support group and conversation with group facilitator, Sheila November 2016). During police intervention, women on the other hand, often have to defend their non-violent partner and strenuously claim that they are the perpetrators of IPV and their male partner is the victim. Diane explained the last time the police intervened, even though her husband was on the floor, she still had to convince them that he was not the perpetrator:

I just kept yelling at them [police], it's not him! It's me, it's me.

Self-defence is referred to by many researchers and scholars as the principal motive for women resorting to violence, with most claiming self-defence in 46% - 79% of the studies (Bair-Merritt et al. 2010: 185, Hamberger et al. 1997, Henning et al. 2005, Kernsmith 2005, Saunders

2002, Stuart et al. 2006, Swan and Snow 2003). Notwithstanding, self-defence as a primary motive for women's IPV is however a matter of debate within the field. Saunders (2002), for example, accuses researchers of skewing results by failing to inquire about self-defence and for excluding acts of violence that should be considered self-defence. At the same time, Saunders emphasizes his assertion that female perpetrated IPV is primarily in self-defence and does not constitute a social problem (2002: 1441). In fact, Bair-Merritt et al. more recently conducted a review of women's motivations for IPV and found that out of 144 studies, only three did not ask women about self-defence (2010: 185). Only five participants in this study referred to self-defence as a justification for violence towards their initial partner and all had become primary aggressors in their subsequent relationships (Ellen, Maureen, Kylie, Jean and June). In order to avoid bias in the participant's responses, I did not ask them if they had ever had to defend themselves but thoroughly interrogated their subjective interpretation of events related to their experience with IPV.

While self-defence might have been the initial reason for resorting to violence in a relationship that was clearly abusive, these five participants had also become the aggressors in subsequent relationships, mostly with non-violent men. While researchers such as Kernsmith and Kernsmith assert that batterer intervention professionals ignore that "most female aggressors are simply reacting to a consistent course of previous victimization", they do perpetuate the notion that women are incapable of IPV as perpetrators and thus preserve the women-as-victims discourse related to IPV (2009: 346). The participants in this study rejected this claim and proclaimed that "*we're not victims*". With the majority of them asserting their capacity for violence, principally with non-violent partners. Given the high degree to which other studies report that women use IPV in self-defence, the data revealed in this study is a crucial element and contribution towards widening our understanding of IPV (see also Kelly 2003, Sarantakos 2004). As already stated, out of twenty-five participants, five experienced abuse as victims of violence by former intimate partners after which they themselves became primary aggressors in subsequent relationships.

Jean spoke of an altercation with a previous partner:

> *he had his arm around my neck. He would grab me and yank me around. He had my bag so I bit him to get my bag back. I had the phone in my hand, the kids were screaming so I called 911. He had grabbed me up and yanking me around and I bit his shoulder. I was afraid to fight back but I*

> *think my PTSD kicked in from that previous relationship and I reacted…Now that I've learned that I shouldn't be fighting back, not the best way. Until I get my ass kicked, of course, then I'll fight back. I have been through a lot because of my bad choices. It takes a lot to make me mad to be pissed off - How many times are you going to poke the balloon before it pops? When I'm sitting there being tampered with…once I actually put a knife to his throat. This was after he held me against a wall. He was sleeping and I held the knife to his throat…He woke up and I said you're lucky I didn't kill you right now. I was crying and very upset. I was like, how could you do this to me? It just made things worse.*

Jean's narrative clearly supports Stuart et al.'s (2016) 'never again mode' when she referred to her analogy of the balloon that finally pops. After years of persistent abuse by various intimates, including her stepfather, Jean retaliated. In the next excerpt, Jean described the incident that ended with her being arrested for IPV. Although she referred to self-defence, Jean herself is unsure if the event qualified as an imminent threat. I asked her to tell me about how it had started. She said:

> *he'd say you're a horrible mother, get up off your ass. I would tell him he's lazy. I'd say I'm taking the kids and run for the door. We'd be fighting at the door and I got a kid in my arms. He would take my phone, it's got everything and he's locking me out of the house…we both had bruises you know. I'd bit him, <u>self-defence</u> I think…I needed to get myself out...He had his arm around my neck. He would grab me and yank me around. He had my bag so I bit him to get my bag back.*

Jean was subsequently arrested because her partner had several visible bite marks. The police evaluated his bite marks as worse when compared to her scratches and bruises. Both partners, however, were mandated to attend batterer support groups by the Department of Human Services (DHS) because their children were considered 'at risk' as a result of their violence[37].

As narrated above, Maureen's first relationship was abusive. She told me that she tolerated the abuse:

> *until one day I ended up fighting back because I was so tired of being beat up. So I just ended up fighting back…that's when I ended up hitting him, because he tried locking me back in and I hit him. That was the first time I*

[37] Keeping in mind, I attended Jean's family decision meeting (FDM) where she and her husband were present. Following the meeting, Jean's treatment providers agreed she failed to disclose the extent or context of her abusive behavior towards her partner. She had also failed to reveal this in her interview. Although, she referred somewhat fleetingly to an indictment of negligent homicide when she was 15 years old. I asked her to tell me more about it. She laughed and said that she had been driving under the influence and had crashed the car. Her boyfriend was injured but his 6-year-old brother, who was in the car at the time, died as a result. Jean also told me that she was currently attempting to have the indictment expunged from her record but to date was unsuccessful.

hit back because I needed something for my child…he knocked me out, yeah.

I asked Maureen to talk about her current relationship where she was now the aggressor:

We did a lot of name-calling and a little bit physical, not like the one before but pushing and stuff like that. I think it was because I came in with a lot of baggage from the other relationship…with the first one, there were several times when I, like when we would be mmmm, when I would hit him before he hit me, because I knew it was coming so I hit you first, so let's get it over with. There were several time like that where I was the aggressor. I knew it was coming so lets go. I am not going to give you the satisfaction of knocking me out first before I try to defend myself, lots of slapping or pushing…yes, he had bruises but never really needed to see anyone. I know I can hit really really hard and I know my limits. It's horrible to say but I just wanted to surprise him, maybe stop him before he hit me. It was, "Oh she's not going to let me just hit her!" And it worked... [with the current partner] there's a lot of times he did not fight back and he would like cry, please stop hitting me. I think about it and it's horrible [she is sobbing]. It's definitely not an excuse but it's like, I almost felt my whole life that I had to defend who I was because I did not want to get beat up.

Here she was obviously referring not only to her first intimate relationship that was abusive, but also her experience of childhood trauma. Maureen was repeatedly sexually abused by her stepfather and physically and sexually abused by a male sibling from the age of six until she left home at eleven years of age. Maureen's childhood trauma and the violence she experienced in her first relationship provided the template upon which she subsequently structured all intimate relationships. Her violent behaviour in the current relationship did not constitute self-defence or retaliation. Both Maureen and Jean's narratives exposed the complex issues related to IPV and that can, for some, obscure a clear distinction in the perpetrator/victim model. Maureen engaged in what she saw as pre-emptive strikes to avoid situations that had the potential for abuse but ended in victimizing a partner who, for the most part, did not respond to the violence. Did Maureen's behaviour constitute self-defence when there was no impending danger? In addition, should Maureen be considered a victim even when she was now a perpetrator of IPV and as a result, avoided responsibility for her actions?

Leonor Walker (1979) contextualized this dynamic and coined the term "battered woman syndrome" (BWS), "learned helplessness" and defined the "cycle of abuse" that continues to resonate in contemporary notions of IPV. Walker (1979) argues that the emotional impact on

female victims of IPV is devastating and results in post-traumatic stress disorder thus diminishing their ability to respond to conflict. In fact, Walker maintains that the most common risk marker for becoming a victim of IPV was and continues to be "simply being a woman" (2009: 6). The central tenet of BWS excludes any consideration of women as perpetrators of IPV except in circumstances of self-defence (Walker 2009). Hird, a leading scholar in the discipline of IPV, succinctly argues, "the problem with BWS is that it invokes an "a priori" association between masculinity and violence. BWS suggests that women are incapable of violence under normal circumstances and helpless victims" (2002: 94). Learned helplessness is a coping strategy that forms the principal explanation for why women stay with their abusers even under continuous abuse that threatens their life. Of significance to the discourse related to IPV, is that BWS continues to be used in criminal defence of women who have killed their partners (Dutton 1996, Ferraro 2003, Walker, 2009).

Critiques argue that the BWS model perpetuates women's violence as pathological, preserves gender dichotomies (Pearson 1997), categorizes women as helpless and vulnerable victims of male violence, and also limits IPV as a unitary phenomenon (Dutton 2006). In addition, BWS has proven to be ineffective as a defence, unless the female offender appropriately represents the ideal image of a helpless victim; i.e. white, passive, and vulnerable (Ferraro 2003). Ostensibly, Maureen and Jean would be considered poor candidates for BWS. Although both are Caucasian, they can be intimidating and they quarrel and fight back. In all, they fail to elicit any compassion as passive or vulnerable victims of male violence. BWS continues to influence social and cultural understandings of IPV and functions to accommodate traditional notions of femininity (Ferraro 2003: 125). Ferraro critiques the exclusionary and unitary construction of BWS stating,

> "It endorses those notions and establishes boundaries between "real" battered women and others who may be battered but are viewed unsympathetically by courts and juries because they violate these boundaries. Women who are strong, competent, aggressive, and sexually active do not correspond to the imagery connoted by "learned helplessness." (2003: 125/6).

The persistence of BWS is congruent with dominant views of IPV and perpetuated, according to Ferraro, by scholars, activists and legal witnesses who misrepresent gender norms associated with notions of IPV (2003: 126).

June's first partner attempted to kill her before she finally left him. She said:

the more I questioned him [she thought he was taking drugs], the fighting

> *began. He hit me once, kinda like, I didn't fight with him for a long time. Another time, I was left by myself all day and it was Mother's day, he said he'd be back in a while but he didn't come back until late. When he got back I started a big fight with him. I had an idea he was using. I hit him because I was angry, he had taken my car. Both my eyes were black by the end of it and I woke up on our front porch. That kinda started our cycle of abuse.*

I asked June to tell me about the conflict in a subsequent relationship. She said:

> *We were fighting and he hit me once. I didn't have the same fear of him. I kinda knew he would not hit me back. I mean I hit him and he never hit me back*.

June, like, Maureen and Jean, experienced abuse as a victim before becoming the primary aggressor in her relationship with non-violent men. However, in her narrative, June spoke to the discourse related to BWS and 'victimized woman' when she referred to the cycle of abuse. This points to the limited framework within which women have to make sense of their violence (Comack and Brickey 2007). June was mandated to attend the FDAAP support group because she was arrested for IPV, committed towards her current partner with whom she was engaged to be married. She alleged that she hit him, that he was not violent and would never hit her back. June, echoing other participants in this study, was secure in the knowledge that their partners would not react to their violence. As discussed earlier, males are socialized to avoid hitting females (Fiebert and Gonzalez 1997, Miller and White 2003), it is considered unmanly and the chivalry aspect constructs men as the stronger sex with women as vulnerable, thereby requiring their protection (Archer 2000, Felson and Cares 2005, George 2007, Miller and White 2003, Straus 2006). Lehrner (2011) in her study of women's use of IPV, frames this as a double standard that women use to their advantage and freely engage in IPV, calling it "a universal taken-for-granted in the social fabric – that men are not allowed to hit women under any circumstances" (2011: 74). Despite the prohibition on men's violence against women, women do not face the same stigma when perpetrating violence against their male partners.

June and Maureen's experience underscores the call for research into women's IPV because, regardless of who initiates the violence, women can sustain more injury during conflict (Dasgupta 1999, Dobash and Dobash 2004, Kruttschnitt and Carbon-Lopez 2006, Straus 2006, Straus and Ramirez 2007). The following narratives demonstrate this assertion. However, it

should be qualified that many of the women in this sample were also capable of inflicting harm on their male partners, some of whom were afraid, sustained injury and had been hospitalized. Although she was now the aggressor in her subsequent relationship, in her first relationship, Susan was a victim of extreme abuse. She said:

> *I would get paranoid that he would cheat on me and I'd cry. I would make him choke me, well not make him but I would not stop and let him breathe. I had no boundaries. I am still working on boundaries today. I would get choked, I kicked him in the balls one time and I ended up punched in the face…Oh my, the time I kicked him in the balls mmm. I was sitting in a chair and he kicked it over. I lifted his chair up and then he pushed me down and started kicking me in front of people. I just get so angry and so….I always know that if I let go or if he did, one of us would end up killing the other…you know I would have gotten so much more abuse if I didn't run so fast. When I hit him, that was my go-to thing, run. Because if he caught me I was done for…I try to take my part in it, I would just yell.*

Kylie was extremely violent and she was also a victim of abuse by her former partner. As previously discussed, Kylie disclosed that she enjoyed both the pain and conflict. Prior to our interview, she had just moved from the Mom's house into her own apartment with her child and was therefore happy to be independent. However, I was aware from observing the group support meetings, that she was also relatively fragile at this point in time[38]. She said of her first relationship:

> *after a while he would just hit me and hit me. He was bigger than me, about six foot and muscles. I couldn't take the beatings no more so I started fighting back or I'd have my (relatives) beat him up…Even when I was laying next to my (child) he would just hit me. So I started hitting him back. I stabbed him a couple of times. Like I mean he was crazy, he'd shot at me*

[38] I ended Kylie's interview after just thirty-five minutes because it was very traumatic in content and emotional. Kylie sobbed throughout and I took the decision to end the interview regardless of her willingness to continue talking with me. Before this interview, Kylie had been very difficult to contact, had failed to turn up at an agreed time, and cancelled the interview twice. I was aware that it was improbable that a second interview would take place. However, I took into consideration her recent move from the Mom's house into an apartment and the fragility of these women's lives. In the group support meeting, Kylie had already shared her concerns and the challenges she experienced over being alone and solely responsible for her child who had behavioral issues. I was not prepared to continue with an interview that relived so many traumatic memories, and then send her home alone to her child without support. I ended the interview and we spoke of self-care strategies. I was aware that she had further activities at the Mom's house throughout the remainder of the day. I was therefore confident that she had support if she required it. I also spoke to the director of the Mom's house, Amanda, suggesting that she speak with her to confirm that she was OK. I did have the opportunity to see Kylie a few times after the interview in the group support meetings at the Mom's house. She reported that she sought assistance for her child's behavioral issues and although she was doing well, she was also finding life alone difficult.

> *and hit me in the head with his boots…So I started retaliating because I thought it would make things better…I didn't want it to go this way, I have a big heart and I wanted it to work. After a year or so I started to do things to provoke him so I could fight and hit him…We were beating up a couple of times a week. He was beat up or I was beat up. I had to go to the hospital a few times and he got dropped a couple of times but never needed to go to the hospital. He wasn't frightened, he'd hit me and I'd go get a knife but he is so big it did not stop him…it was really bad. I was gonna end up dead or I was gonna kill him. Anger was just so built up…I would fight back. I wouldn't just curl up. I'd punch and kick. Whatever I had to do.*

Another participant mandated to attend the support group as a result of her perpetrating violence against a nonviolent partner disclosed in-group:

> *my last husband was mean to me but after two other domestic violent relationships, I'm fighting back. I hate being mean but I am angry. Am I broken?*

This narrative reiterated the anger and hurt transferred to subsequent relationships. Moreover, the despair and confusion that the participant felt about her violence when she asked the group, "*am I broken*?" Apart from notions of victimhood, female perpetrators of IPV lack the framework to comprehend or explain their behaviour. Dasgupta acknowledges this disconnect and argues that "men and women do not enjoy the same cultural and institutional validations for using violence in intimate relationship…sociohistoric factors that endow male violence against women with approval and authority also infuse it with cultural power that is absent from women's equivalent behaviour" (1999: 218). Men do not enjoy the same consideration when arrested for IPV against their female partners. In fact, after arrest and when mandated for treatment for IPV, it is proscribed to ask men if they have ever been victims of violence (personal communication with counsellor for the men's support group, Sheila)[39].

[39] I was invited to attend several sessions of the men's support groups. Although many of the men mandated to attend these groups were violent and abusive, I identified three of the male intimate partners of the participants I interviewed. None of these men had been violent toward their female partners but were arrested because the police were unable to identify the primary aggressor. The counselor, Sheila, explained that she was aware of their situation but they were prohibited from asking the men if they had ever been victims because of accountability and zero tolerance for violence. There was no such prohibition for women arrested and mandated to attend the support groups. An exception was the FDAAP meeting where the women were under the same obligations as the men's groups. As already discussed, the handouts given out to the women construct men as perpetrators and women as victims of IPV. Due to copyright issues, OnTrack Inc. cannot change the handouts to reflect women as perpetrators of IPV or men as victims. As discussed earlier, this underscores the importance of not only developing a gender-inclusive language for IPV but also providing evidence-based empirical knowledge that can contribute to an appropriate treatment protocol for female perpetrators of IPV.

The following narratives are representative of mutual violence where both partner engaged in violence. Johnson (2010) refers to this category of violence as situational couples violence, and in being the most prevalent and least deleterious when compared to intimate terrorism. These narratives highlight a dissonance in the typification of situational couples violence that can evidently also end in extreme violence and injury, particularly for women.

Ellen spoke about how her partner was "*shocked*" when she fought back. She said:

> *I was tired of being hit so I just hit back. Our fights got worse but it didn't stop me from fighting back…I would call him a piece of shit, piece of shit-father, no good to anyone. He called me a bitch and a whore…Now I'm done with being hit, you hit me I'm going to hit you back.*

Teresa told me that in her first relationship:

> *I would start some of them [fights] too. I'd go down to the bar and punch him in the face... I felt I needed to defend myself.*

I asked Teresa to tell me about her second relationship where she was now the primary aggressor. Teresa revealed that she felt that she had "*driven him away with my [her] anger toward him*" because she hit her partner for perceived wrongs. She said:

> *we are doing better but like today, I lay into him. He doesn't show me any affection. I've had enough…I feel resentful and hateful toward him - that made me do what I did. I pretty much made him feel like he was nothing, almost to the point of him doing drugs. He felt like he was worthless…no-one's going to hurt me again, so he's the one who's paid for it.*

I asked Alice to explain how a violent situation would begin[40]. She said that she was defensive and didn't like the following:

> *name-calling, putting me down and making me feel stupid. He [former boyfriend] would complement me a lot, tell me he loved me five times a day. Once is enough. I got it - you trying to convince yourself? That's what I was thinking and how I was processing. Telling me I'm beautiful on one of my worst days. You know, you mocking me or something? So I don't accept compliments very well…He said I'm a down bitch and he knows I'm*

[40] I interviewed Alice at the Mom's house and did not have the opportunity to meet her before the interview. I felt that, compared to the other interviews where I had the opportunity to observe the participants in group and meet them, this contributed toward her being visibly tense throughout the interview. Although she sat back on the couch in the small room in which all the interviews were conducted, she continuously flexed her hands and made fists with them. Like many of the participants, she was small in stature. However, Alice's narrative revealed that she was also generally violent, having been arrested and charged more than once for Assault four, a felony. She also made it clear during the interview that she was ready to change and "get my kids back". She had children who had been in foster care in the past but were currently living with their father.

down for physical violence so watch what you sayin' to me.

Alice referred to her first relationships. She said:

> *hitting men, oh, I've done that before. That was when, mm, I was not always the initiator. It was self-defence in the beginning. My Uncle made me suck his penis when I was five so I was angry with men. That's where this is coming from. He was seventeen when he made me do that. My Grandpa and both Uncles were sickos….Then there was the first time a guy laid a hand on me. I put my boot on him and knocked him through the fucking closet. Told him-you don't do that again… another one slammed my arm in the door and said, "oh my gosh I'm sorry" and it was on from there. I pushed him down the stairs. We would wrestle a lot…he didn't fall all the way down [the stairs] …another one was verbally and emotionally abusive. If I were to strike him, he would strike me back…he was older than me and he tried to be my boss [laughing]. No one can boss me around. Look where I am!…I don't like being told what to do - politely ask me.*

Alice demonstrated the inherent difficulty in violent relationships where communication is complex and often the motives for violence are nuanced. Of the five participants who claimed self-defence or in Kylie's narrative, retaliation, four had become abusers in their subsequent relationships. Ellen engaged in situational couples violence that was bi-directional, i.e. where both the partners engaged equally in a low level of violence. Having said that, and evidencing the complexity of IPV, all the participants in this section had been arrested for IPV and were mandated to attend the support groups.

The participant's narratives clearly convey the potential for overlap of victim and perpetrator status. Although the participants had become the aggressors in their relationship, the trauma from their former abuse had lead them to this point where they no longer tolerated the possibility of being a victim. The data is representative of the "battered woman" narrative that continues to pervade the literature on IPV (Walker 1979). However, these participants did not adhere to the victim framework because of their capacity to exact retribution for past trauma with violence. Miller calls this the "paradox of women's violence", thus acknowledging the dissonance between violence used in retribution and violence used in self-defence (2005: x- ix). Following Dasgupta (1999), Miller (2005) claims that women's previous victim status should be taken into account when contextualizing women's perpetration of IPV.

Notably, Teresa and Alice both said that they would not be "*bossed around*" and were extremely violent with their current partners; Teresa says that her violence and abuse had lead her

partner to "*feel worthless*". June hit her current partner because, unlike her previous partner, she was confident he would not hit her back. Given the above accounts and the paradoxical nature of women's violence, it remains a subject for debate as to whether they should be treated as victims or perpetrators, and fully accountable for the violence they perpetrate on their non-violent partners.

Women's seemingly unprovoked violence when they are not in imminent danger can, according to Miller, be explained by conceptualizing a victim's hyper-vigilance that precipitates a more reactive response to stressful situations as a result of their abuse (2005: 27). This rationalization could be pertinent in respect to Maureen's narrative where she conveyed how she continued to *defend herself* in situations of conflict. For many of the other participants, however they fully acknowledged their violence against nonviolent partners who they knew would not retaliate. In contrast to Miller, empirical studies conducted with battered women suggest that the stereotype of the fearful, passive and traumatized victim can be deceptive (Babcock et al. 2008, Jacobsen et al. 1994, Taft et al. 2007). Rather, Babcock et al. found that the more severely battered and traumatized women "tend to be angrier at their mates. Other researchers have also found anger among women experiencing partner abuse to be implicated in PTSD" (2008: 815). This is pertinent where constructions such as BWS and stereotypical notions of feminine behaviour continue to form the dominant discourse that govern services, policy and treatment of IPV, and ultimately results in the exclusion of female perpetrators and male victims of IPV.

In contrast to the present study, Miller's study of female perpetrator's support groups determined that only five of her ninety-five participants were wilfully aggressive. It concludes that the remaining ninety were defending themselves or their children from an abusive male partner. Ultimately, therefore, Miller suggests service providers take into consideration factors such as, "the gendered difference in the motivations behind and the result of violence [that] are important to consider when assessing blame" (2005: 126). Given the data gained from this study, Miller's conclusion equally serves as a requirement for both men and women arrested for IPV.

Regardless of the findings, support for providing intervention based on and for a women-centred protocol that embodies feminist ideals, resonates with the majority of studies with female perpetrated IPV. For example, Busch and Rosenburg (2004), in their study of women arrested for IPV argue that, "women may need intervention, but not as batterers. Treatment should focus on their victimization and provide them with the psychological tools and material resources to leave

their abusive relationships and to avoid subsequent ones" (2004: 56). Indeed, women's experience of abuse in their relationships does provide a critical dimension to women's perpetration of IPV. However, the data that emerges from this study suggests that earlier experiences of abuse do not provide for a comprehensive portrayal of the nature of female perpetration of IPV, and of women who inflict serious and injurious harm on their non-violent partners. The majority of participants in this study, most of whom perpetrated IPV toward a non-violent partner, contested arguments that women's perpetration of violence does not rise to the same levels or inflict the same fear and consequences, as men's violence against women (Dasgupta 2002, DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2014, Dobash and Dobash 2004, Miller 2005, Johnson 2011, Saunders 1988, Swan and Snow 2003).

Saunders (1988) argues that self-defence and retaliation are indistinguishable. Similarly, in their quantitative study of one hundred and twenty-five motivations for women's perpetration of IPV, Weston et al. argue that, "women [may] perceive self-protective actions as more retaliatory than self-defensive" (2007: 1063). One of the participants in this study Kylie, argued that her actions were in "*retaliation*" because she fought back and had indeed initiated some of the conflict. On the other hand, it was clear that Maureen acted in self-defence in order to stop her abusive husband from locking her in the apartment without access to food and supplies for her children. Notably, according to Alice, because she had been sexually violated as a child, she justified her current behaviour as being in "*self-defence*" even though she inflicted more injury on her partners during conflict, "*knocking him through the fucking closet*" and "*pushing him down the stairs*". Continuing the narrative of women using violence primarily in self-defence perpetuates the myth of women as passive victims of male centred violence, and silences those who maintain, like another of the participants, Diane, "*we're not victims*!" Epistemology and research reflect both the complexity of IPV and the current boundaries or limits to our understanding of women's subjectivities and their motivations for why they perpetrate IPV.

The participants in this study contest self-defence as being the common and primary motivation offered for women's perpetration of IPV. We should therefore, at the very least, interrogate those studies that conclude that self-defence is the overarching motivation for women's IPV. Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) for example, in their review of the literature on female perpetrated IPV, found that nineteen out of twenty-three studies listed self-defence as the main motivation for violence. Sarantakos' (2004) qualitative study of female perpetrated IPV, covering

sixty-eight couples and their families, not only found no support for self-defence but discovered that, in over eighty-seven percent of his sample, the women made false allegations against their male victims. With this in view, Sarantakos concluded, "equally questionable is the taken-for-granted notion of men as the natural perpetrators of violence and of women as the victims of DV and the practice of using women's accounts as the only credible source of information about DV that informs social policies" (2004: 293). Indeed, the narratives of those few women in this study who did refer to self-defence as a motive for their violence highlight the necessity for a more nuanced approach to women's violence, given the complex dynamics inherent to intimate relationships.

Some of the participants revealed how they used violence in order to manipulate the system, by often provoking their partner, in order to justify their violent acts and to avoid arrest.

Susan said:

> *I'd make him hit me first so when the cops come I can tell them he hit me first.*

Maureen said that she would never hit her partner in public in order to avoid being held accountable during police intervention. Some of the participants revealed that they threaten their partners with losing custody of their children, and in one case, a participant deliberately and baselessly accused her partner of sexually abusing one of their children and then retracted her accusation. Hines et al. recognize the potential for manipulation in a system that fails to acknowledge women as perpetrators and men as victims of IPV, arguing that:

> "Female abusers are able to use a system that is designed to aide female victims of domestic violence. Thus, some female perpetrators of IPV manipulate their husbands because they know that the system is designed without the abused male's experiences in mind, and that more often than not people will not believe or take seriously these men's victimisation" (2007: 71).

Indeed, several of the participants acknowledged the lack of consequences and institutional tolerance of their violence that reflect stereotypical sex differences in the perpetration of IPV. An example being disbelief of a woman's capacity to inflict injury because of her small stature. Angela and Anna, both of whom were extremely violent, admitted that the Judge did not charge them with assault four precisely because they were petite. Jane and Diane, in spite of their partner's visible injuries, were persistently asked by the police attending the call, "*what has he [partner] done*?" before accepting that they were indeed the perpetrators and not victims of IPV.

Blame the Victim – "I would throw stuff or hit the walls. Eventually he would be standing right in front of me and he'd get popped"

The narratives reveal a notable lack of empathy and acknowledgment by some of the participants for the impact or consequences of the violence they inflicted on their partners. Inherent is the notion of "victim blaming" by some of the participants. If gender was indeed reversed and it was a violent man narrating how his female partner broke her arm, for example, "*she broke her elbow when she fell against the wall*", the impact would be substantial (Lambo 2003)[41]. Rather, these participants reveal the disconnect between their violence and the consequences, instead blaming the male victim for their part in the violent episode.

Diane said:

> *I would throw stuff or hit the walls. Eventually he would be standing right in front of me and he'd get popped…like, men know what buttons to push.*

Kay spoke about how her husband precipitated some violent episodes:

> *I run over him [husband] with the car, it was an accident - it's his fault…It's his fault that he got in the way when I just flung something across the room…I was aiming at him. I'd throw cell phones, wires, cigarettes. Not trying to take him out but to get his attention…it was like a snowball effect. He's try to stop it, get a six-pack and try to calm me down but I'd think he didn't care. Piss me off more, him being scared of it escalating.*

Anna told me:

> *I was more aggressive…lots of drama. He was always, poor me and smashing plates. He tried to trap me. I remember a cop telling me that if I put my hands on him again I was going to jail. I thought I would be smart so I head butted him. Well, I didn't put my hands on him - no hands. Once I got him in the face with my head.*

The participants displaced responsibility for their violence on to their partners. Anna was proud that she outsmarted the police and not directly laying hands on her partner, but by striking him with her body. Anna because of being petit was therefore seen to be vulnerable or defenceless. Culturally shared and gendered beliefs influence how we understand female bodies

[41] The Private Domain is a qualitative study I conducted with male perpetrators of IPV at the McGill Domestic Violence Clinic as part of my undergraduate degree, Honors in Anthropology (BA). The male participant explained how his wife had broken her arm when she fell during an argument. In fact, records revealed that he had thrown his wife across the room and she broke her arm when she hit the wall.

to be more vulnerable because of their smaller size and perceived lack of strength (Allen-Collinson 2009, Hollander 2001). The participants in this study consistently challenged the notion that women were inherently weaker and less likely to inflict more harm than men, who were considered to have an advantage, in view of their size or power. With this in mind, studies suggest that women are more likely to use weaponry in order to make up for their lack of power and size compared with men (Dasgupta 1999: Dutton et al. 2005: Dutton and Nicholls 2005: Ehrensaft et al. 2004: Henning et al. 2006: Hines et al. 2007: Jennings et al. 2012: Straus 2005, 2009a). Dasguptpa points to women's physical limitations in disseminating fear in their victims, arguing "only when women picked up weapons, guns, knives, and household objects did their partners become temporarily afraid" (1999: 210). Most of the participants in this study also successfully use their bodies as weapons in physical conflict.

The tacit affirmation of women's weakness and vulnerability contributes to the negation of women's IPV, and as a consequence, the opportunity to avoid being held accountable or taking personal responsibility for their perpetration of IPV. With this in view, gender relations that subordinate femininity to masculinity forms the basis for gender hierarchy and social norms related to IPV. According to Schippers:

> "Femininity includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance. Even if a few women and men actually embody these characteristics in relation to each other, the symbolic relationship established through these hierarchical complementarities provides a rationale for social practice more generally…The symbolic construction of girls' sexual agency and ability and willingness to use physical violence as undesirable and deserving of sanction and social expulsion turns their potential challenge to male dominance into something contained and less threatening" (2007: 91/95).

Clearly not all women are capable of the level of violence required to instil fear in their male partner. However, over half the participants in this study can, and do practice coercive control, a pattern of behaviour that does not always include violence but that requires the threat of violence in order to sustain fear and alter the behaviour of the victim.

Jennifer was charged with a number of felonies, one of which was for domestic violence against her partner who was disabled and wheelchair bound. She said:

> *I was tired of hearing the same frickin' words, I'm in pain, whining - tired of the bullshit…whatever he said was a bunch of bullshit. That's how I got here…Yes, one of the felonies is because I scratched him and he's disabled. I had so many problems because I resented him so much.*

In this event, Jennifer's husband was found on the ground with his wheelchair on top of him. Her grown-up son also sustained minor injury during this incident. Jennifer minimized her part in the violence throughout the interview, arguing that her husband had her handbag and that she had only reached over him to get her bag from him when he fell over. Jennifer's narrative appeared to contrast with her disclosure to the group, which I observed. With the aim of having a better understanding of Jennifer's perpetration of IPV and her behaviour, I spoke to her counsellor, Sheila, without breaking confidentiality. Sheila informed me, "*Jennifer is very violent toward her husband and family. She has had to restart this program more than once because of her recidivism and failing her lie detector tests*". Jennifer sought to distance herself from her behaviour and her husband's disability. She suggested that he had more mobility than he had let on and also owned a gun. Having said this, Jennifer had been arrested for assault a number of times.

Dorothy was extremely violent towards her partner and overall she accepted responsibility for her actions. In this narrative, she suggested that her partner had a level of accountability, reflecting the complexity of the rational in relationships that experience IPV:

> *his Mum was really angry at me for hurting her son. He's not taking any blame for himself. 'Cos he's the victim of me hitting him but he also has a lot to do with why I react the way I did. If he made me feel more secure, not sneaky on the phone or doing everything, you know what I mean...A lot of times I felt I should not have to say sorry - your wrong. You know what I mean. You're lying to me and I'm trying and I need help. That used to make me so mad - I need help - again no - you need to take responsibility for what you're doing, he was never wrong. Like I said, he wouldn't yell, wouldn't hit me, basically do everything I asked - not straight away but he would do it.*

Dorothy asked to leave the room because she was sobbing. When she returned I confirmed that she was all right. I also reiterated that she could discontinue the interview at any time and that she could speak with Leslie, if she found that recounting her experiences was difficult. She affirmed her desire to continue the interview and that she would be attending the support group following the interview. Dorothy said that she missed her partner and although she had a no-contact order in place and could not communicate with him[42], she held out hope that they would

[42] Dorothy revealed that, regardless of the no-contact order, she had communicated with her partner by text. She wanted to resume their relationship but said that he was scared of her violence and "did not want to live like that again". This presented an issue for me regarding confidentiality because she was breaking an order mandated by the

reunite as a family. She said:

> *my life, things I've done is sometimes, like, too much, yeah*.

In order to resume the interview, I paraphrased her last comment about her requiring more from him and needing him to share in the responsibility for her actions. She said:

> *a bit weird but yeah. It's the thing I did. Couldn't let him breathe.*

Dorothy, after leaving the room and having had time to reflect on her experience, agreed that her violence was "*the thing I did*" thus acknowledging her behaviour. Her narrative not only revealed the contradictions and tensions inherent to the participant's relationship but also more broadly, the complications of accepting responsibility and being held accountable for their perpetration of IPV on a male partner.

In the following narratives, the participants attributed blame to their partners for "*setting them off*" or "*pushing their buttons*" and as a result, for their perpetration of IPV.

Angela said:

> *I felt shame about [my] behaviour. At the time I wasn't accountable. It was always their fault. If they didn't make me angry I wouldn't hit them.*

Isabelle said that her partner was:

> *frightened about setting her off…I could be a bit psychotic at times. He knew how to push my buttons and what to say to set me off.*

Beth said:

> *I think I really got that 'don't fuck with me' attitude a while ago. I didn't realize how physical I was until recently. I always blamed them. It was their fault for pushing my buttons or making me mad.*

Similarly, for the following participants, they hold their partners responsible for their violence towards them. In contrast to the previous narratives, it is the partner's perceived ineptitude or being the source of stress that elicits violence. Brenda was the primary breadwinner in her family and, as a result, she expected her husband to take over the household duties while she worked. When she returned home from work, the children would report that he had not taken

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court. I asked her the last time she had communicated with him. She said that it was two months prior. Since the contact had occurred well before we had met and Dorothy said that she had no further contact with her partner since, I did not report her. I was aware of the severe consequences related to breaking the no-contact order – termination of her services at OnTrack Inc. and a return to court.

care of them, provided them with food, cleaned their trailer home or changed diapers, but had played video games throughout the day. Brenda spoke about an event when she arrived home to find the trailer a mess, and the children unkempt. She was so enraged that she beat her partner and left him in a "*bloody*" state. The police were called. She said:

> *They didn't take me but I probably should have went to jail that time. I did beat the shit out of him. In my head he deserved it. He was a piece of shit.*

Jane was also the primary breadwinner and felt that she shouldered too much of the responsibility for the family and consequently, the stress. Like Brenda, she also complained about her partner's failure to assist in their everyday lives:

> *he put all the stress on me. I had the stress of working. I was working one hundred plus hours a week, hmm. I was doing most of the parenting because he was new to it, so to speak. He wasn't adjusting very well to it and I was doing all the chores around the house. I was paying all the bills. I was doing e..v..e..ry..thing. I was so stressed out and I was busy making sure they had everything they needed. I never took care of myself, never…Now he tries not to yell at me or you know, cause problems to prevent me getting to that point again. So it's nice to know he's trying but...*

Jane contended that her partner endeavours to deflect her anger in order to avoid further violent episodes. She also revealed in her interview that her partner was afraid of her but "*doesn't flinch anymore when I raise my hand*". Similar to other participants, the responsibility for the violent episodes rested with her partner and *his* ability to manage their behaviour.

Angela said that she, her partner and her baby entered into crisis housing as a result of her in-laws reporting to the Department of Human Services (DHS), and her propensity for violence and both her and her partner's suspected drug taking. While in crisis housing, Angela became violent with her partner and he tried to block her from leaving the apartment. She said:

> *one day he was blocking me trying to stop me leaving with the baby in his hand. I kicked and pushed him. He told on me and I got kicked out of the housing. Had to move into the mission so I got loaded. He had betrayed me. He got to stay with the baby.*

Angela failed to accept responsibility for her violence, even though her baby was present and also in her partner's arms while she was physically struggling with him. Angela was immediately required to leave the crisis housing and temporarily lost custody of her child. Leslie told me that, although the perpetrator might not be charged for IPV or assault, if a child was

present, they can be charged with child endangerment or child abuse. She said that losing custody of their children had more far-reaching consequences for the female perpetrator than if they were arrested for IPV. Even when they regain custody, they were perpetually under supervision and monitored by the DHS (personal communication, Nov. 2016).

Angela blames men in general for her violence towards them, suggesting that her violence is pre-emptive. She said:

> *when I get mad I just scream and yell, I don't care who's there. I put men down, I don't have any respect for men but I do know what they are capable of. I just hurt them before they touch me.*

When I first met Angela she impressed me with her ability to communicate a profound understanding of her violent behaviour in the group environment. She could justify and acknowledge her part in the dynamic with her intimate partners and in her violence, so accepting the blame for her behaviour. With this in mind, the last part of her narrative is in contrast to her previous accounts, now revealing a disconnect between her perpetration of IPV and personal responsibility. For some female perpetrators of IPV, drawing on the "victim' narrative can serve to justify the choices and decisions they have made thus far (Comack and Brickey 2007). Angela's life history, as a victim of repeated sexual abuse from early childhood and continuing to early adulthood, and the continuous violence she had metered out to her male partners over the years resonates with Comack and Brickey's conclusion in their study of violent female offenders. They contend that "the women's experiences of violence - both their own and that which has been directed at them - have had a long-lasting impact on who they are" (2007: 27).

The participants in this study, for the most part, were accountable and took responsibility for their IPV. However, as evidenced by the narratives, they also disseminated some of the blame on their partner's behaviour. In similar studies of male perpetrators, however, women were also held responsible for their own victimization by the justification advanced by their partners (Anderson and Umberson 2001, Lambo 2003, Scarduzio et al. 2016). In contrast to male perpetrators, female perpetrators did, for the most part, acknowledge their violence and could more readily communicate their acts of violence, when compared to male perpetrators of IPV (Bair-Merritt et al. 2010, Dasgupta 1999, Dutton and Nicholls 2005, Swan and Snow 2003). Most of the participants in this study also recognized their capacity to inflict harm and injury through their perpetration of IPV, often against non-violent male partners.

With this in view, the problematic inherent to women's perpetration of IPV is observable on several levels. Firstly, it's failure to be recognized as a serious social problem (Dutton and Nicholls 2005, Saunders 2002). Secondly, the minimizing of its impact of women's use of IPV and continued denial by scholars (Straus 2012), and lastly, by suggesting women are incapable of such violence. On all three levels, the perpetration of IPV is reduced to sex differences rather than a gendered issue (Sorenson and Taylor 2005, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). The participant's narratives speaks to, and informs each of these issues suggesting that, indeed, female perpetration of IPV should be considered a significant social issue deserving of funds, services, policy and appropriate intervention.

Russell's comment on female offenders is salient. She contends that reductive discourse on women's perpetration of IPV is representative of "heterosexist beliefs [that] can help explain why female to male perpetrated violence is often overlooked. It can also shed light on why male perpetrated IPV is considered more serious and blameworthy than IPV perpetrated by females" (2018: 194). The participant's subjective narratives illustrate the ways in which they draw from social discourse on IPV and how their violence disrupts these stereotypical gender norms. As a consequence, it serves to both discourage female perpetrators of IPV from accepting responsibility or being held accountable for their transgression.

Consequences – police and arrest

Since nearly all the participants in this study have a history with police intervention, I asked them to tell me about their experience with the police. Their narratives reveal the problematic associated with arrest policies related to female perpetrated IPV. Also revealed are the stereotypical norms and discourse that both law enforcement and the participants draw from during intervention. Arrest policies for IPV deviate between dual arrest and primary aggressor policies in different jurisdictions in the United States. Hirschel and Buzawa assert that the police arrest under the following parameters provided by the legal system, in essence, they "Arrest for a breach of the criminal law requires that a police officer satisfy the required evidentiary criterion—probable cause—that the offender at a particular time committed a particular act (usually physical harm or threat of physical harm in domestic violence cases) for which he or she is to be held responsible" (2002: 1456). Dual arrest does resolve the problematic in assessing the primary aggressor but ends in a non-violent men partner being arrested and mandated to attend a support group for violent offenders (Hirschel and Buzawa 2002). Since IPV is inherently political

by nature, Hirschel and Buzawa concede that in some jurisdictions, "current political and/or organizational pressure may discourage officers from arresting women as aggressors and, unsure what to do, the officers may arrest both parties" (2002: 1460, see also Buzawa and Buzawa 2003).

On account of these skewed policies and in echoing studies of male victims of IPV (Bates 2017, Migliaccio 2002), the most recent GSS survey reports that men are unlikely to report as victims to the police because they are unhappy with how the police handled them under previous circumstances (Ibrahim and Burczycka 2016). There is a body of evidence that reviews police response to male victims, which often denies them assistance and instead, arrests them or removes them from the home, both of which consequently leave the female perpetrator in situ with the children (Cook 2009, Hines and Douglas 2012, Migliaccio 2002). Gender stereotypes contribute towards the police and indeed other institutions, supporting the notion that violence against women is more serious than violence against men (Bates et al. 2018, Scarduzio et al. 2017, Winstock 2017). As already discussed, women's perpetration of IPV is minimized and denied and elicits a higher tolerance for female violence than male violence against women (Lapierre 2002). Bates et al.'s (2018) most recent quantitative study of gendered perceptions of IPV contends that gender stereotypes that privilege the male perpetrator and female victim construct, prevents any progress in understanding the needs of all victims and perpetrators of IPV regardless of gender. More salient, Bates et al. contend:

> "It is disappointing to see that efforts of awareness training within the last decade may not have impacted considerably on how we generally perceive male victims of IPV, with negative stereotypes still prevailing. This failure creates lower societal concern surrounding male victims, and thus compounds the stigma that they experience and the likelihood of them reporting IPV" (2018: 11).

These prevailing beliefs impact not only men's reporting of IPV for fear of not being believed and being mocked (Bates 2017), but also services and intervention aimed at women as perpetrators. For example, a participant mandated to attend the FDAAP support group spoke of an altercation that ended in her injured partner being arrested by the police, even though she was clearly the primary aggressor. She said:

> *I pulled out a chunk of hair and I punched him and bit his tit. Took a chunk out of it. He was charged.*

The police are less likely to make an arrest when the victim is male (Buzawa and Buzawa

2003, Hirschel and Buzawa 2002) and according to Jones and Belknap, male victims are "more than three times as likely to be part of a dual arrest couple than those individuals identified as female victims" (1999: 255/6). Indeed, when I had the opportunity to attend the male support groups, I met the partners of several of the participants, all of whom were nonviolent and victims of female perpetrated IPV. When I inquired why they were in a male batterer's group, Sheila told me that she was aware they were not violent but since they were mandated to attend the group, they were obliged to take part. However, while this statement does reveal the complex issues related to IPV and the problematic in identifying the perpetrator or victim of IPV, it does not simplify the complicated nature of arrest policies[43].

In the following narratives, the participants explained the circumstances under which the police were called during an altercation. In each incident, the male victim was asked to leave the premises, cautioned, or arrested regardless of their visible injuries. The participant's narratives also add some weight to the assertion that gender stereotypes and norms influence police response to IPV (Conradi and Geffner 2012, Dowd 2001, Winstock 2017).

Adele said:

> *I have never denied my part in it but one time the cops were called, he was arrested…definitely, between me and a big guy [her partner]. They didn't ask – he must have done something to deserve it.*

Linda said:

> *yeah, one time I started a fight. I was pushing him and hit him a couple of times - stuff like that. Like I told the cops, it was my fault because they would just assume it was his fault, that he'd started it. I went to the refrigerator, I was mad. I had the blender on top. It fell down and hit me so they accused him of hitting me but it was the blender. He went to jail that time. They're like, we're not going to believe that. We were yelling and screaming and someone called the cops. It's a flawed system like that. It was me.*

Rachel's narrative encompassed the prevailing attitudes toward women's perpetration on IPV. Moreover, she did not categorize her behaviour as violent, reflecting broad generalizations and current discourse of IPV. She explained, [laughing]:

[43] While observing the FDAAP support groups, there was one participant the counselor agreed was also a victim of male perpetrated IPV but was arrested because she had inflicted some level of injury as a result of her defending herself.

> *once he showed up and he tried to leave because I started on him. I took the driver's side mirror and smashed him in the face with it. He had scratch marks up and down on him to where the cops stopped him down the road and like, what the hell happened to you? They were like, is everything OK? They threatened him with going to jail and he said, me go to jail, I'm the victim! They came up the road and they knew me and said, what happened? I told them he'd let some bitch drive my truck – "So you beat his ass?" I said, pretty much and they said "why so violent?" I said I wasn't violent, I was just being loud and proud. They said, you need to go in the house…they knew that I worked and stayed clean. My SO [significant other] was mad, he told them he was the victim. He told me, I nearly went to jail for you hitting me and I didn't do shit to you.*

Similar to previous narratives, the police are not inclined to believe or take seriously women's perpetration of violence, even when the women themselves demonstrate agency and like Rachel, with reference to her partner, conceded to "*beating his ass*".

Angela said her partner never retaliated but would hold her in an effort to protect himself. Like Rachel, Angela's narrative also highlights the gendered aspect of arrest for IPV and how the actual victim is the perceived perpetrator. She said:

> *police were called but he'd already left. They asked me if I as OK but he'd already gone. They thought it was him and said to call us if he comes back. I just said we'd had an argument. I was ashamed, never wanted anyone to know - I was like evil…yeah, another time they [neighbours] did call the cops but they just thought it was him. That time, they told him that if he did this again they'd take him away. They never even looked at me. I'm small and I never say anything so I get away with a lot. They never assume I would do anything. I just keep quiet…I never got aggressive with them [police]. I would cry and I never lied, always took responsibility. I was always honest.*

Angela's narrative draws from a diversity of discourse and stereotypes related to female perpetration of IPV. She implicitly recognized that her behaviour was not conducive to femininity when she referred to herself as both "*evil*" and "*ashamed*". Sjoberg and Gentry, in their text on women's violence, "*Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*" argue that while motherhood precludes violent women from responsibility because they are women, the monster narrative precludes women from accountability for their actions because they are flawed as women (2007: 37). More explicitly, violent women within the monster narrative are defined as:

> "Not real women because they are described as both actually evil and psychologically

> broken, two facets which the ideal-types of womanhood in gender norms exclude. Monstrous violent women are thus pathological, and therefore, neither they nor their gender are responsible for their actions" (2007: 41).

Angela's narrative emphasized the monster narrative, when she declared that she did not want others to realize that through her violence, she was "*evil*". As a consequence, this discourse displaces women as perpetrators of violence, not only diminishing agency but also "their very humanity by stripping them of rational thought" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 41). Several participants referred to themselves as "*broken*", and Diane called herself both "*evil*" and a "*monster*". These negative constructs have an impact on a number of levels; firstly, the manner in which the perpetration of IPV is broadly understood as a male domain, secondly, the shifting accountability for women who do perpetrate violence, and lastly, the limited and often critical discourse from which the participants subjectively shape their notions of IPV and gendered identity.

Angela also indicated how she was "*small*", would "*cry*" and "*just keep quiet*", all of which permitted her to avoid accountability when faced with police intervention. These factors also framed Angela as a "good victim" deserving of sympathy, all of which are inherent to traditional notions of IPV (Miller 2005). This however is problematic, because not all women conform to the gendered notion of "good victims (i.e. nice, delicate, passive and white)" (2005: 11). Those who are insolent, less submissive, or aggressive tend to come to the attention of the police and are more likely to be arrested (Miller 2005). Alice, for example, who was aggressive and Rachel who said that she was "*loud and proud*" represent a "bad victim" because they were brash and aggressive and, therefore, more deserving of punishment (Dasgupta 2002).

Two of the participants spoke of how they manipulated the conflict in order that they could escape arrest. Susan and Maureen revealed how they would intentionally provoke their current partners since, if their partner's hit them first, they could offer justifications for their actions that were consistent with notions of traditional female victims and male perpetrators when faced with police intervention. Susan said:

> *if the cops got involved, I wanted to be safe so he'd have to hit me first*.

Indeed, their perpetration of IPV against a male partner would not be queried if their partner complied and hit them first. These narratives expose the complexity inherent to IPV and the problematic the police experience when attempting to identify victims and/or perpetrators

during intervention. Both participants not only attempt to conform to the "victim" discourse on IPV but also endeavour to fulfil the notion of a "good victim" in order to avoid arrest (Miller 2005). Maureen also stated that she would never hit her partner in public so that she could maintain her innocence, saying that:

> *for me I would not want to go to jail with a witness*

The participant's narratives draw from essentialist discourse on IPV where female perpetration and offending is closely linked to their victimization. Chesney-Lind, a feminist criminologist who has written widely on the topic of female offenders contends that victimization is inherent to female offending and notably, "best explains women's involvement in crime" (Chesney-Lind and Faith 2000: 27). The following narratives demonstrate how women's violence has fewer consequences than male violence, even when children are put at risk.

Alice told me that even though she was arrested for assault, the judge did not consider her capable of such actions against her partner. She said:

> *nearly got a measure 11 [44] once but the judge didn't believe it…that I was being abusive to my SO [significant other] in a vehicle. Police officer observed it and pulled us over. Because it was in front of my child, I could have been charged with a measure 11 but it was dropped…might have been a couple of times the cops were called on me and my SO. After the last time he kicked me out and I ended up here [Mom's House], I'm keeping my hands to myself.*

Kay also endorsed the notion that an arrest would have been made if gender were reversed. She said:

> *This one time [police were called] when my child was a baby. My husband, mmm, I was pissed off about something and threw some chairs at him while he was holding [the baby]. He called the police. He didn't want to call the police but he wasn't getting through to me, just pissing me off more. He didn't want me to be taken away, just have them settle me down…They told me to settle down and go to bed…Definitely if it had been the other way round, they would have removed him.*

Brenda confirmed that, although her partner was clearly injured, it was he who was asked

[44] According to Oregon State Government (2017), "Oregon voters approved Ballot Measure 11 in November 1994 to apply mandatory minimum prison sentences to certain crimes against persons committed on or after April 1, 1995, with no possibility for any reduction in sentence, such as for good behaviour". In Alice's case, she was arrested for assault and under measure 11, had she been found guilty, she would be sentenced for a minimum of ninety months.

to leave the premises. She said:

> *Cops were called a couple of times. They would take him or ask him to leave. I'm like - I'm the aggressor but I never told them and they didn't ask who started it…Yeah… the one time they were going to take me, he was sitting there drinking and he was coming down and he was all bloody. They wanted to take me. He was belligerently drunk and spouting off at the mouth so they made HIM leave. They didn't take me but I probably should have went to jail that time. I did beat the shit out of him…they just left without arrests. Helped me out not taking me. I think that they should have been called a lot more than they were, but they didn't know me or who I was…times with both of us with lumps on our faces, how could they see, mmm…I could have ended up in jail, could have, should have.*

Jane's partner called the police when she had a "*blackout*" rage. Despite the fact that her partner was very visibly injured, the police asked her if "*he hit you at all*". When the police arrived Jane explained that:

> *they approached me and asked me if I knew why they were there. I said, I know exactly why you're here. I just kinda spat it all out and told them everything that happened. They went down and talked to [partner], then they came back and that's when they put me under arrest. [They let her call relatives before putting her in handcuffs]…they knew [it was me] because of the way the phone call went [911 call]. They asked me, did he hit you at all? I said he didn't touch me. I told them it was my fault and I was wrong for it. We went down there and they took pictures of his bite mark which were pretty bad. They didn't break the skin but they were pretty crazy. Not as bad as somebody who could be biting somebody but … [shrugging shoulders]…I could see him [partner] balling his eyes out. I know that was not his intention. He didn't want me to go to jail, I know he didn't. He had tried, because there was no body cam footage, asking them, what if I move to a friend's house so she doesn't have to go to jail. This is her house. I don't want her to go to jail. They said not right now, can't do that right now. So off I went. I spent four hours in a holding cell and I hated it. I was by myself and had nothing else to do but get lost in my thoughts. I couldn't do it.*

Female perpetrators of IPV are held to a different standard than men (Dowd 2001, Lapierre 2002). Despite female perpetrators openly acknowledging their responsibility for the violence, law enforcement and other professionals are more willing to believe that the male victim provoked their partner in some way; a belief that some of the participants were willing to take advantage of, by either provoking their partner into a conflict or by maintaining the depiction of a "good victim" in order to avoid arrest (Miller 2005)

Dorothy spoke about the incident during which she was most recently arrested. Echoing other participant's narratives, the police also asked her if he, her partner, had hit her; even though her partner was visibly injured after she had attacked him with a lead pipe. She said:

> *they [police] actually didn't treat me bad. I think because I was honest about it and didn't fight them. When I was telling the police about what happened in October, you know, that I thought he was cheating on me, they said, he hit you? I said no. I was just honest. And the police were kind of on my side because he [partner] told me the neighbours had called the cops on me but he [policeman] said, no - [partner] called the cops on you. At that moment in time, I was like, I wonder why you did what you did? Why you do so little and I take it out of proportion. But in that moment I had a kind of clarity. I'm not crazy. Otherwise, why would he say the neighbour called the cops, when he called the cops.*

I asked Dorothy if, in her opinion, it was possible that her partner was frightened of her. She said:

> *yeah probably*.

Dorothy's confusion was more about what she perceived to be her partner's lying about having called the police than her being arrested. She was reluctant to acknowledge that he was fearful of his life and of her. Dorothy's disbelief that her partner might be frightened of her was predictable since discourse and research related to women's perpetration of IPV suggests that they are unlikely to instil fear or injure their partners (Archer 2000, Dasgupta 1999, Dutton and Nicholls 2005, Hamberger and Guse 2005, Johnson and Ferraro 2000, Russell et al. 2016, Straus 2014, Stuart et al. 2006, Worcester 2002). Having said this, there is an increasing body of work that suggests that the psychological impact of female IPV on their male victims is salient (Hines 2007: Hines and Douglas 2010, 2012: Lapierre 2002: Leisring 2011). Significantly, Lapierre challenges the sexism inherent to IPV and succinctly demands "if we argue that these women, who do not receive any physical injury, are nonetheless victims, then why do we fail to make the same argument for men?" (2002: 26).

It is critical to listen to the voices of women who perpetrate IPV and work towards transforming discourse, particularly the narrow explanations from which they contextualize their subjective notions of the violence and which guides practice. Acknowledging a broader range of choices than the 'victim' narrative or more precisely, the 'good victim', can allow those women, who have the capacity to inflict harm on their loved ones, to frame their violence as perpetrators.

The current limited discourse, to the contrary, permits them to maintain a 'safe' distance from the consequences of their actions.

Gender – "Little warriors with dresses on"

Women as Perpetrators of IPV

The women who participated in this study were mandated to attend the support group meetings for a period of 36-weeks. Once completed and during their last week, they were obliged to write, what is referred to as, an 'exit letter' to be read out to the group. During one of my first meetings, Julia read her letter to the group describing the progress that she had made in her personal life during the time she attended the group support meetings. What caught my attention was her depiction of the women in the group, saying that she considered them all "*little warriors with dresses on*". Warrior has a positive connotation and, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2017), is defined as "a person who fights in battles and is known for having courage and skill". The participants in this study were warriors and their everyday challenges include, for example, childhood trauma, poverty, anger, and class discrimination. After the meeting, I asked Julia what she meant by this and she said:

> *I've come a long way and it's been a fucking fight every day, so...*

Julia considered the women heroic in dealing with "*all the shit*" of their everyday lives. In addition to stressing the women's strength, Julia did not lose sight of stereotypical feminine norms however by referring to their gender display, wearing "*dresses*". This statement spoke to how the women positioned themselves in terms of gender, the meaning they gave to their situation and the manner in which gender norms influenced female perpetrators of IPV.

Gender is a set of practices that organize people into distinct categories. Ridgeway and Correll compare gender to other systems of difference and inequality, such as those based on race and class, arguing that "gender involves cultural beliefs and distributions of resources at the macro level, patterns of behaviour and organizational practices at the interactional level, and selves and identities at the individual level" (2004: 510/11). Cultural beliefs based on gendered stereotypes constitute the basis for difference and inequality and shape discourse. Moreover, the social arenas where these gendered cultural beliefs are played out are of significance and profoundly structure our understanding of IPV (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, Kurz 1993).

Gendered norms portray women as passive, emotionally sensitive, vulnerable, and nurturing while men exemplify power, dominance and control (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, Richardson and Hammock 2007). Scarduzio et al. suggest the paradox of gender associated with the perpetration of IPV is that "men are rarely sufficiently masculine and women are frequently overly feminine" (2017: 103) thus gender should be considered central to not only sociocultural perceptions of victims and perpetrators of IPV, but also as critical for the intervention and prevention of IPV. Current intervention protocol for male perpetrators of IPV, normalize male violence while female violence is essentialized and thus conceived as a deviation from feminine norms (Abrams 2016). Contemporary research suggests that while gendered stereotypes have remained relatively stable since the 1980's, those related to femininity show an increase in stereotyping when compared to masculinity (Haines et al. 2016). In other words, sociocultural norms are less likely to shift in respect to notions of femininity as evidenced by the unwavering attachment to women-as-victims and the refusal to accommodate or reify the boundaries of feminine norms to incorporate diverse behaviours some of which, female perpetrated IPV for example, may be considered as transgressions.

With this in view, the pervasive and frequently unsubstantiated notion that women are less aggressive than men is integral to the denial of women's perpetration of IPV (White and Kowalski 1994). Burbank's comprehensive study of women's aggression in over three hundred societies from the Human Area Files discovered a high level of domestic aggression by women in nearly all world regions (Burbank 1987: 73). Moreover, in sixty percent of those societies, men were the victims of female perpetrated violence (1987: 83). Gendered stereotypes are inherent to contemporary social relations, hegemonic in nature and embody a normative and broad depiction of the everyday lives of men and women (Fiske et al. 2002). The participant's narratives reveal and embody the essentialist nature of traditional and stereotypical notions of gender, while at the same time reifying boundaries to mediate their gendered identity as perpetrators of IPV.

In spite of the robust body of literature and studies that reveal similar rates of male and female perpetration, IPV is framed as predominantly male violence against women (Kelly, 2003, Straus 2012, Winstock 2017). Society, policy and research focus on and construct men as perpetrators and women as victims of IPV, thus abnegating women as agentic individuals capable of perpetrating abuse and violence against their intimate male partners. Considering

women as perpetrators of IPV may serve to undermine feminist explanations for IPV that rely solely on patriarchal values and male dominance (Dobash and Dobash 2004, Kelly 2003), but more significantly will acknowledge the full diversity of women's lives and experiences (Abrams 2016). While it is worth noting that feminism is diverse and not all feminists refute women's perpetration of IPV, radical feminism[45] remains invested in patriarchy or male power and privilege as the basis for all social relations, women's structural inequalities and their victimization (DeKeseredy 2011). Abrams, a feminist scholar and lawyer, argues that female perpetrated IPV belongs in feminist theory, thus by expanding the gender-specific framework of IPV to address female perpetrators of IPV is critical in deconstructing stereotypes and will offer "women full agency [that] includes the autonomy to make bad decisions, even criminal ones" (2016: 316). With this in view, the data from this study will confirm and, as a result advocates situating violence and aggression within a continuum of women's gendered identities rather than the prevailing and limited spectrum of femininity.

There is also a valid concern that acknowledging female perpetrated IPV and male victims, will result in competition for attention and funds, which are currently assigned to combat and provide for female victims. Providing services for men as victims of IPV should not detract from female victims of male abuse, but should allow for services to be also tailored to the needs of male victims and for female perpetrators and their families (Cook 2009, Dasgupta 1999). The prevailing reluctance to acknowledge women's capacity for IPV has long-term concrete consequences, such as limiting knowledge and empirical evidence-based practices that could contribute toward an appropriate treatment protocol (Dowd 2001). Also resulting in its perpetuity through intergenerational transmission with children exposed to family violence; and potentially harms those that the current practices seek to protect, i.e. women.

Despite similar rates of perpetration of IPV by women and men, gender remains fundamental to explanations and theory associated with violence by women. A gendered approach allows for a broader and more robust understanding of the complexities inherent to IPV. Anderson contends that gender extends beyond individual characteristics and "exists in the larger societal expectations for behaviour and in the ways in which men and women are differentially situated within social institutions" (Anderson 2005: 863). While traditional notions of gendered behaviour rely on sex differences that are in fact insignificant with respect to IPV

[45] Radical feminism is also referred to as dominant feminism (Abrams 2016).

(Richardson and Hammock 2007), social relations and the institutionalization of gender impacts the epistemological and ontological attention given to women as perpetrators and men as victims. In addition, to date there is no data on how women perpetrators of IPV construct their gendered identity (Anderson 2005). In essence, while the context, motives, and justifications can contribute towards a broader understanding of women's perpetration of IPV, interrogating how they construct a gendered identity as perpetrators of IPV rather than victims will add nuance to this empirical knowledge and should be central to the development of gender specific intervention models of treatment.

Gender-specific treatment protocols for IPV – "I didn't know where to turn until I found this place and the group meetings, no one would believe me".

Most of our knowledge about IPV and the current treatment protocol for women relies largely on empirical data from studies of male batterers (Kernsmith 2005, Straus 2009a). The primary treatment for male batterers, the Duluth model, frames IPV solely as "misogynist men [who] assault women in order to maintain their dominance" and "sexist oppression" (Felson 2006: 21). The Duluth model of treatment is based on gendered notions of power and control that, together with physical and sexual violence, contribute toward the patriarchal social structure that informs and permits men to control and dominate women (Kelly 2003, also see Pence and Paymar 1993). According to this model, women are considered as being incapable of such violence. One of the group members told me that she repeatedly sought intervention or treatment, as a perpetrator of IPV, without success:

> *no one would believe me, that I was the one being violent. They (social services) kept asking me if he beat me or if I was defending myself. I kept telling them that it was me, not him, he'd never hit me. I didn't know where to turn until I found this place and the group meetings.*

This narrative is representative of the challenges women face when they seek assistance as perpetrators rather than victims of IPV. Women's violence is considered, even subjectively as witnessed by the participant's own narratives, a departure and transgression from their socially prescribed gender roles and norms (Dasgupta 2002). The reluctance to acknowledge female perpetration of IPV not only silences women's voices but also ignores the arenas where women demonstrate agency, in their private lives (Renzetti 1999, White and Kowalski 1994).

I observed the FDAAP support group meetings, where female offenders who are arrested for IPV are mandated by the courts to attend for a duration of thirty-six weeks. The treatment is based on the Duluth model and women are given weekly handouts on advice and behavioural tools, albeit directed towards a male [he] perpetrator and female [she] victim. Due to copyright laws, the language on the handouts cannot be altered to reflect a female offender or perpetrator (personal communication with Sheila, the FDAAP group facilitator). This factor alone highlights the critical requirement for empirical studies that contextualize women's perpetration of IPV and contribute towards a gender specific protocol for treatment designed for women where they can be accountable for their actions, reduce their violent behaviour as perpetrators.

I also observed the "Breaking Free" groups facilitated by Leslie Kendall and to which women are also mandated to attend, either by the courts or as part of the protocol subscribed to by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Completing the treatment programme will enable the perpetrator to recover or retain custody of her children. Leslie designed the treatment protocol for these groups, and although based on healing and alcohol anonymous twelve-step program of recovery, female perpetrators remain accountable for their violent behaviour. Normally batterer intervention providers (BIP's) for female perpetrators however, are encouraged to focus on issues related to victimization, oppression and safety measures rather than accountability (Abel 2000, Hamberger and Potente 1994, Henning, Jones and Holdford 2003). Comack and Brickey explain that feminist discourse has re-constructed and indeed labelled the "violent woman" as the "victimized woman", maintaining that, "her violence was not of her own making but a response to her ''victim'' status under conditions of patriarchy" (2007: 8). Anti-agentic statements of this kind not only further subjugate women but also sustain stereotypical gender norms that serve to position women as helpless requiring protection. As evidenced by the participant's narratives, women's victim status continues to shape discourse and subjective notions of a socially approved gendered identity.

How do women experience IPV as perpetrators? – "we were monsters"!

In order to grasp a subjective understanding on how women embody gender as perpetrators of IPV, I asked the participants simply to explain how they are themselves as women, and as violent women. Overall, this question posed the greatest challenge for the participants to work through because most of the ways in which gender mediates our identity and lives, is difficult to

articulate. Despite gender being a significant feature in our everyday experiences, gender is also largely an unconscious and automatic process. Ridgeway and Correll posit that gender is ubiquitous and unlike many other social differences, "gender goes home with you in that people are more likely to have relatives and share a household with adults and children of the other sex" (2004: 512). When the participants did think about the complex ways and meaning they gave to being a woman and engaging in violence, their narratives produced a rich source of data that revealed the complex ways in which gender significantly impacts these women's experiences of IPV.

In general, the participants in this study drew from traditional gender roles and gender display that correspond with traditional feminine characteristics, one of them being, for example, that women should be passive. More importantly, all but two of the participants articulated their rejection of the notion of victimhood. Maureen's narrative is salient because she revealed the link between IPV and femininity; that by adhering to stereotypical notions of femininity, such as being quiet and passive, gives rise to victim status. She said:

> *I'd get beat up, I would get abused. People say that I am intimidating and they don't know how to take me. I am not that quiet and passive pushover that gets you beat up. I love to put makeup on and dress up, present myself as a woman. Embrace all sides of me - being a woman and strong. I would like to be able to let my guard down a bit. I keep some up for my own safety. I am a feminine woman, that's me!*

In her first long term relationship, Maureen was a victim of her husband's abuse. In subsequent relationships, she initiated violence to the point her partner asked her to "*please stop hitting me*". She also said that her violence was carried out in private in order that she could avoid other people witnessing her actions and in order to maintain a feminine identity in the eyes of others. She said:

> *I would never let anyone see that [violence]. I would never hit him in front of anyone else. For me I would not want to go to jail with a witness and there was still that feminine part of me that didn't want people to think - God she's a brute.*

There are a number of elements to Maureen's narrative. On the one hand, she embraces her femininity as a strength, including stereotypical notions of femininity and gender display such as wearing makeup and dressing up. On the other hand, her narrative resonates with feminist

discourse of victimhood that corresponds with traits such as weakness and vulnerability, i.e. traits that she felt left her susceptible to abuse. Maureen's narrative revealed both the fluidity and tension that constituted a gendered identity; embracing her femininity but also keeping her guard up to manage her boundaries or to keep her safe but also to be there accountable to others. West and colleagues (1995, 1987) argue that gender is socially constructed and individuals draw from cultural patterns or rules. Gender is something they 'do' and is accomplished through social interaction. According to West and Zimmerman:

> "Accountability is fundamental to "doing gender" and it is the responsibility of the individual to manage their gender display, they contend that doing gender consists of managing such occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate or, as the case may be, gender-inappropriate, that is, accountable" (1987: 135)

As evidenced by Maureen's narrative, if her violent behaviour were revealed or witnessed by others this could impact her feminine identity and she could ostensibly be perceived a '*brute*', a masculine attribute. In such terms, the expression of gender is heavily regulated and held to account by others (West and Fenstermaker 1995, West and Zimmerman 1987).

Also evident in the narratives is the notion of "emphasized femininity", a paradigm that reaffirms traditional gender constructs (Connell 1987). Connell, who coined the term, posits that emphasized femininity is defined as:

> "One form [of femininity that] is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this 'emphasized femininity'. Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation". (1987:184/185)

It is the form of femininity that is culturally idealized and legitimated through its appeal to men, giving prominence to sexual desirability but that also stresses elements such as subordination, compliance, vulnerability and motherhood (Connell 1987: 188). The participants related to these ideals of emphasized femininity, while at the same time, contesting and transgressing its boundaries. I asked Maureen whose approval was she looking for when she said she did not want to be considered "*a brute".* She said:

Other people, myself, men mmm.

Maureen tacitly resisted any challenges to her femininity and sought accountability. Maureen's narrative is a clear example of the complexities of mediating a gendered identity

through violence. Her narrative exemplifies gender as "something an individual "does" rather than "is" and implicit is the aspect of accountability (Ridgeway and Correll 2004: 516, West and Zimmerman 1987). Maureen initiated violence with her current partner, an act considered inappropriate for a woman but paradoxically she also endeavoured to maintain her femininity, through for example, her gender display and gender appropriate behaviour. Generally, violent women are juxtaposed against idealized gender stereotypes and norms, and characterized as an anomaly or explained as a transgression (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007).

Adam's robust qualitative examination of gender in the school playground found that the school age girls in his study embodied their femininity as a strength, in spite of being aggressive and fighting with others. Accordingly, Adams contends, "in fact, [the girls] view females who allow others to control them, as not being 'womanish' or 'not being woman enough'; thus to be silent or to become a victim of someone else's aggression is considered by them to be abnormal behaviour" (1999: 135). According to this framework, women actively embody notions of emphasized femininity while, at the same time they shape it to make sense of their own lives. Similarly, in his study of gang girls in the United States, Messerschmidt argues, "these girls situationally 'act bad' through fighting, yet they do not change gender" (2002: 469). Fundamental to both Adams (1999) and Messerschmidt's (2002) nuanced approach to gender analysis is that women are not simply 'doing gender' but that there is also the element of how gender is embodied; the gender display associated with a womanly appearance for example.

Angela's assessment of her behaviour speaks to the fundamental sex differences and gendered expectations that she felt prevented her from being acknowledged as a woman who embodied her gendered identity in terms of gender display, but also who rejected traditional behavioural norms associated with a feminine identity. She was aggressive and violent towards all her intimate partners. She said:

> *Women should be fancy and not cuss, but I do all that. I cuss like a logger but I wear make-up. I know a lot of women who cuss and hit and get angry…boys can come on aggressive, why not girls?*

Angela's narrative encapsulates the nuances inherent to the controversy related to acknowledging women's capacity to initiate IPV against their male partners. She failed to understand why violence and aggression, considered inherent to male behaviour was valued, but considered deviant when perpetrated by women. Sjoberg and Gentry claim that gender norms

function as an "evaluative framework for people trying to make sense of the world", therefore, when a woman is violent, she "acts outside of the ideal-typical gender role assigned to them, that person is open to criticism not only for their behaviour but for the gender transgression involved in its perpetration" (2007: 7). Indeed, the following narratives symbolize essentialist notions of femininity and their inability to be accountable to others as women or achieve a successful feminine identity as a result of their IPV, instead referring to themselves as "*broken*".

Broken Women - "I feel like I'm broken as a woman"

The participant's narratives reveal the tensions and contradictions inherent to their use of IPV, i.e. how they embody and position their identities as violent women. Their accounts revealed how their subjective identities were fragmented or as Rachel said "*I feel like I'm a broken as a woman*". Indeed, the term "broken" was a recurring theme in the narratives associated with their position as perpetrators of IPV. The participants were unable to situate themselves within idealized and stereotypical constructions of gender; violence disrupted and constrained their gendered identity. Since society provides violent women with a very narrow discourse within which to situate themselves (Hird 2002: 108), these participants locate and contextualize their behaviour in terms of the prevailing image of the paradigmatic victim (Goodmark 2008: 113). The women's accounts revealed the contradictions and confusion they encountered when constructing their identities. Jane explained her experience of being arrested for IPV:

> *the intake officer at the jail called me a pretty rude name and told me that I didn't know how to treat my man and that made me feel like I was right back down at the bottom. I felt like somebody's shoe being stepped on for the longest time. I cried to myself and said "why did I do that to him, he didn't deserve that". That's not something a woman is supposed to do to her man. That's not how she's supposed to treat her husband. I broke who I was, completely broke who I was…I was under the impression, because [boyfriend] was doing it for me, he did everything for me. So I was under the impression that a woman was supposed to be catered on and that's what I had gotten used to.*

Inherent to Jane's account is the inability to frame the violence within what is considered appropriate for her prescribed gender role. The narrative indicated that she considered herself '*broken*' as women and in the eyes of the arresting officer, she demonstrated this through her

inability to fulfil her role as a woman and look after her partner as traditional gender roles dictate. Society struggles to accommodate violent women leading Dasgupta to posit the thought that, "Societies [that] believe in the stereotype of feminine passivity and tolerance... may perceive a woman who uses violence against her intimate partner as 'unnatural,' 'freakish,' and 'criminal by nature' and deal with her accordingly" (1999: 214). Society and culture reject notions of women's use of violence within their interpersonal relationships and instead adheres to stereotypes that portray women as passive, nurturing and perpetual victims; a view more consistent with traditional notions of women and femininity.

The following narratives clearly demonstrate the problematic in how these women construct a feminine identity that includes violence. Often the rhetoric includes disseminating violent women as "*crazy*", "*bitches*", or "*evil*" emphasizing the anomalous nature of their behaviour in relation to their subjective gendered expectations. Similarly, in their study of women incarcerated for their use of violence, Kruttschnitt and Lopez contend, "some have pointed to the need society has for abnormalizing women's violence, arguing that to view violence by women as normative endangers traditional scripts about women's appropriate place in society and gendered social boundaries" (2006: 322, also see Gilbert 2002). Indeed, women's violence is minimized and their responsibility negated through justifications of self-defence, or alternatively, demonized for transgressing gender typical stereotypes. Accordingly, there is a failure to conceptualize women as agentic individuals that can account for the complexities of how gendered identities are constructed and maintained through violence (Kruttschnitt and Lopez 2006, Morrissey 2003, Miller 2001).

In the following narratives, two participants engaged in an exchange about how it felt to be a woman and also a perpetrator of IPV. Diane commented (laughing):

> *I think it's 50/50. I think some of us see it as, I don't know mmm. Society says that we're victims but we're not. I know some people see it as intimidating or funny that you beat up on your husband. Some people see me as kind of a bitch. I'm not going to mess with you! I feel bad, there's a lot of dirt bag things I did.*

Kay:

> *but that is the way women are supposed to be - timid and quiet, do what we're told, you know. Not go berserk or lash out. That's not the way we are.*

Diane:

> *that goes with being an alpha female, we're strong women. It takes a lot*

of hard work to look in the mirror every day and know you have harmed your husband and kids. It is really hard.

Kay:

yeah they would say a guy has a lot of responsibilities, he's stressed out, but us?

Diane:

Yeah, they talk in a condescending manner. We're called crazy bitches but a man is just letting off steam.

Kay:

yeah a man has to control everything, have the higher hand but it was me who was the boss, had the upper hand, power and control. Had a full blown power trip! Made me feel powerful and blew my head off, then had to put the pieces back together again…now I'm all nurturing, at peace, instead of off- the-handle and psycho.

Kay started crying and said:

we were monsters! To say and know you were acting in such a way, that you're evil and mean and it becomes your normal. Women are more emotional and sensitive, so men know what buttons to push to get us to the point where it's physical.

The narrative exchange not only reflects the contradictions regarding notions of gender and violence but also clearly highlights the participant's tacit understanding of the rules associated with their gender role. On the one hand, Diane spoke about being an *alpha female*, highlighting strength, power and character. On the other hand, Kay referred to her current state as *passive* and *nurturing*. Diane drew from discourse that suggested women's violence is *emotional and sensitive* and therefore uncontrolled when comparing with the instrumental violence of men (Johnson and Ferrero 2000). Although the women positioned themselves as strong and agentic, they also relied on traditional constructs of femininity to justify behaviour, which was perceived as being anomalous for women. Significantly, the participants positioned themselves - *evil, mean* and *psycho,* in line with dominant societal notions of women and violence (Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez 2006, Morrissey 2003, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). With this in view, Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez posit that theorizing women's use of violence "consistently reveal[s] that the portrayal of women's violence is one that either pathologizes and neutralizes women's responsibility for their actions or demonizes them because they fail to conform to gender stereotypic expectations" (2006: 325, see also Messerschmidt 1997). Each of these

rationalizations served to minimize violence, ignore agency and accountability in relation to women's perpetration of IPV.

Diane shifted the blame for her violence to her partner and justified her actions with the comment, "*men know what buttons to push to get us to the point where it's physical*". The narrative underscores the dualistic nature of representations of violent women, juxtaposed as dangerous and evil while at the same time, nurturing, vulnerable and sensitive. Indeed, these women's experience mirrors the tensions in contemporary scholarship on women's use of violence (Miller 2001). Notions of biological determinism shape acceptable behaviour according to sex, leading Sjoberg and Gentry to theorize women and violence as "Narratives of monster, mother and whore [that] have fully othered violent women", instead depicting violent women as "a product of faulty biology or faulty construction" (2007: 13). The participant's narratives reflect this dissonance when they framed their subjective gendered identity, as perpetrators of IPV, as being "*broken*", "*evil*", or "*monsters*". Moreover, the data from this study highlights the inconsistencies in scholarly literature. On the one hand, indicating the ways in which men's violence is normalized and inherent to masculinity but on the other hand, through its engagement in IPV, a feminine identity is contested or seen as transgressing normative gender expectations (Pearson 1997).

Also revealed, is the dissonance between prevailing social and cultural gender scripts that depict women as emotional, sensitive, nurturing and peaceful in nature and the subjective gendered identities of the women who participated in this study and perpetrate IPV. Diane, for example, was not much taller than five foot but in her depiction of a fight with her husband who is well built and over six-foot tall, she flaunted her physical strength. She said:

> *I did take off on him a few times but he was not like, laying there on the floor in a pile of blood! A punch in the face would drop him because I guess I hit pretty hard.*

Diane's narrative also reflects the women's ability to inflict injury on their significant others without the need to resort to the use of weapons in order to mitigate differences in size. The fluid and complex nature of gender is emphasized when incorporating into the analysis the ways in which these women, who engage in IPV, construct or draw on the specific notions of femininities that shape their gendered identities and indeed their justifications for violence. Messerschmidt points out that when women are violent they are "engaging in violence

authentically as women [and girls] and as a legitimate aspect of their femininity" (2002: 465). The accomplishment of gender is shaped by structural inequalities such as gender, race and class. While the participants acknowledge agency, rationality and choice, as perpetrators of IPV, they also struggle to construct a gendered identity within dominant social norms. For female perpetrators of IPV, "bad-girl femininity" allows for an alternative space where they can construct and normalize their feminine identity rather than draw from an aberration of gendered stereotypes.

Femininity? – "Oh yeah, I fight like a guy. I am not a nice fighter"

The narratives in this section inform how the participants internalize and are influenced by the dominant discourse on gender or traditional notions of femininity. As violent women, their identity is mediated by their violence and notions of gender that resist the dominant discourse and draws on male ideals of strength and power to describe their subjective experience as women perpetrators of IPV. The manner in which they constructed their feminine identity and positioned themselves as female perpetrators of IPV is complex. The problematic is reproduced within their narratives. Through their perpetration of IPV, women both adhere to and reject simplistic or stereotypical notions of gender, thus drawing from the limited range of possibilities available to them.

Richardson's research with sex differences in aggression concludes that not only are women active participants in direct and indirect aggression in their personal relationships but also perhaps, as women, we "*let our guard down* in terms of expected or appropriate sex-role-related behaviours when we are angry with familiars" (2005: 246). I am reminded of Maureen's account when she reveals "[I] *would love to let my guard down but I keep some up for my own safety*". The participants drew from traditional notions of gender roles, those that encompass passivity, romance and nurturing or motherhood with the recognition that these traits equally made them vulnerable. They therefore preferred instead to also draw from the dominant discourse related to masculine strength and power.

Jean's narrative reveals this paradox. She insisted that her husband should cosset her as a wife and mother, that he should be the "man" and the primary breadwinner who protected his family but that he should also treat her as an equal. Jean said that they were experiencing economic hardship and this was an issue in her relationship with her partner. Jean blames him for

his inability to provide. Jean said:

> *I was financially secure, I was comfortable and well looked after, we had money. A family should be about love, reassurance for children and ourselves. Communication and appraising – he should tell you you're doing a good job, you're beautiful, a bracelet with the kids names on it, a rose I picked off the sidewalk. We should be equal, our opinions together. If they are different, we should compromise… when I met [husband] he didn't have any responsibilities, we didn't have kids. He has responsibilities to look after us now we have kids.*[46]

The multifaceted and complex ways these women shaped their gendered identities is integral to explanations of their use of IPV. For some scholars, IPV is considered a human condition rather than gendered (Straus 2009a, Winstok 2011) and an individual's gender does not predict perpetration of IPV (Anderson 2005). However, with this in mind, explanations and treatment of women who engage in IPV require us to pay attention to gender and the broader sociocultural conditions that impact them. For instance, nearly all the women in this sample have primary custody of their children regardless of the fact that they were the violent partner.

While the accounts I have already discussed here draw on stereotypical notions of femininity, the following narratives draw on stereotypical constructions of masculinity. Their narratives point to traditional notions of masculinity such as, for example, being the primary breadwinners, sexually aggressive, a source of strength and power or protecting and supporting their family. While Jean spoke about her desire to be indulged romantically by her husband as a wife and mother, she said that her husband also alluded to her aggression and behaviour as being masculine. She said *[Laughing]:*

> *Now he says I have a lot of testosterone, yeah.*

The following narratives draw attention to not only the inherent paradox related to the constructions of gender, but also the contradictions in how the participants negotiated a gendered identity as perpetrators of IPV and the manner in which they navigated their everyday lives.

Teresa said:

> *I want someone to look out for me and protect me…Oh yeah, I fight like a guy. I am not a nice fighter, I would break your nose open…I don't feel*

[46] Interestingly, at the family decision meeting (FDM) when I had the opportunity to observe Jean and her husband interact, he complained that she did not contribute to the family income, spent money indiscriminately, and was consistently angry with him. He cried throughout his narrative. Jean, on the other hand, sat with her chair turned away from him, she did not look at him nor touch him. At the conclusion of the meeting the facilitator, a social worker, suggested that Jean work on her communication skills, by being less blunt for example.

> *good about myself but I'm not gonna sit here and beat myself up over it. I'm just gonna move forward and make myself a better person…I don't think I look my age and I look after myself. It's not pretty but I have come a long way. I want to be better. How dare I do this to him, beat him up-verbally and emotionally.*

Teresa embodied notions of traditional femininity and masculinity, wanting to be protected as a woman and enjoyed her gender display but at the same time professing to fight like a man. Her narrative revealed the conflict she felt as a woman, arguing that she felt shame about her behaviour toward her partner but proud of the way she looks. On the other hand, Brenda was clear on masculine traits but failed to 'do' femininity, as she says "*whatever that means*".

Brenda said:

> *sometimes I feel like the dude for longer than I'd like to admit. Yeah. I had all the responsibilities a dude would have. I'd like to be a whimsy, feminine, given chocolates and taken out to dinner. There's not a lot of romance going on. God, I'm not like that. I'm not a victim, maybe when I was young and stupid…Now with this husband, I've changed. I love him but I still don't feel feminine whatever that means.*

Similarly, Angela constructed her identity based on male characteristics of control and sexually aggression. Although she was cognizant of what constituted femininity, her behaviour was inappropriate for a woman but consistent with her notions of how men should act in relation to women. She said:

> *I have always worn the pants in the family so I feel like I take the male role, even with sex and demanding sex then turn over. I keep the money and control the money. So I don't know, I have always controlled…Shouldn't be there [violence] and as a woman I don't feel like I should be so aggressive.*

In the following narratives, Alice and Angela not only related their gendered identities to notions of masculinity relying on strength and violence, but also indicated that they protected their significant others and provided for them.

Alice said:

> *if a woman is going to lay her hands on you like a man, she better expect it back like a man. I've been hit real good, two black eyes and I laughed about it. I didn't deserve it but I hit first and got it back! I just try to own my space and be confident, finding out who I am. I am a caring person. If you are under my care, I'll protect you at all costs. I am a good friend and I'll listen, you know... My husband says I'm a down bitch and he knows*

> *I'm a down bitch for physical violence. When we're out at bars, he gets so sloshed I have to protect him so he's good with me being a down bitch. He knows I've got his back. I don't feel big and powerful but I try to stop it happening, try to protect him.*

Sara has previously relied on violence in all her relationships. Her notions of gender were complicated:

> *Yeah, I see myself as a man, but now I'm a man who can love without hurting them. In my relationships, I'm the male..OK..so let me explain something, I have never felt like a woman, I feel like a man, fight like a man, talk and walk like a man. I feel like a man inside, my anger is like a man. My new boyfriend, he accepts a strong woman…the third one didn't accept my strength. This one is nice. I feel good, I-feel-good! I feel like I can provide for this one.*

These narratives resonate with attributes defined as masculine, such as protecting their family and being the primary breadwinner as well as violent and aggressive. The women refer to dichotomous representations of gender that shape subjective meanings of violence and their embodiment of gender ideals. The participants also reflect confusion as to what it really means to be a women or how they negotiate their identity. For example, Brenda said, "*I still don't feel feminine, whatever that means*". The notion that the female offender is an inversion or that violence is an inherently masculine trait is not new (Lombroso and Ferrero 1900). Adler, in her text "Sisters in Crime" argued that the women's movement had improved women's lives but women were now engaging more in violent behaviour and as a result were "cutting themselves in for a bigger piece of the pie", they were now becoming more like men (1975: 29). More recently, Cui et al. (2013) found that a possible explanation for women's perpetration of IPV was that they are feeling more empowered. According to this model, women construct their gendered identity in an attempt to reconcile their perpetration of IPV with normative models of gender, i.e. those models that frame women as passive vulnerable victims in need of protection and those that equate men with strength, power and violent aggression (Dasgupta 2002, Anderson 2010).

The participants feel they are judged on two levels, i.e. by their violent behaviour and by their inability to successfully measure up to 'being a woman' in the current and limited sociocultural context. Brenda and Angela reflected that they would have liked to be looked after and be seen as "*whimsy*" or "*fancy*". Since they failed to frame their behaviour as feminine or from stereotypical constructions of femininity, they therefore referred to masculine attributes for

which violence and aggression are deemed appropriate behaviour (Lloyd 1995). As mentioned earlier, inherent to the narratives is the concept of 'doing gender' that depicts gender as a fluid, multifaceted social construct considered specific to the context in which it is enacted and held accountable by others (West and Zimmerman1987, Messerschmidt 2002).

For some of the women in this study, 'doing gender' in the context of their intimate relationships can mean not only being the provider and protector but also being violent towards their intimate partner for a variety of reasons. As Brenda observes, she feels like she is "*the dude*". Violence then, is seen as a natural outcome within the dyad of her relationship and can be rationalized by the likes of Alice and Sara as, "*fight[ing] like a man*". Indeed, Messerschmidt (2002) argues that gang girls embody their femininity, their subject position as girlfriends and as mothers and display their gender through makeup, dress and sexuality. However, they also practice gender in specific social situations as, in this instance, in the context of the gang violence (2002: 464). In the following excerpts, the participants embraced their violence and at the same time, felt shame. For example, Dorothy's said:

> *there's two sides to that [her violence]; there's the side that's yeah, bad ass, you know what I mean. Then there's the other side, a piece of shit, you don't do that to people you love. So it's, mmm, to make myself feel better it feels good but it's not OK to hit because if you were to hit me the way I hurt him all the time, I would have left already.*

Dorothy failed to understand why her partner remained with her when she continues to be abusive towards him. Her narrative revealed some implicit commonalities related to victims of IPV and why they remain with their abusers in spite of the violence.

The following narratives shed some light on the participant's notions of motherhood. Beth was the primary breadwinner. Her partner looked after their child while she worked, a position she said she felt more comfortable with. She said:

> *I love who I am. I love myself but I wish I hadn't taken so much out on people. I'm glad I don't have to be at home, he does that and he's better at it.*

Kylie, on the other hand, changed her gender display to negotiate traditional notions of motherhood in dress and behaviour more consistent with feminine ideals:

> *I'm not a victim, I fought back and enjoyed it. I liked the fear…I guess I grew up like a boy. I had brothers, all men around. I was just a boy, a*

tomboy. Now I dress like this (skirt, t-shirt, makeup, and hair done) and once I became a Mom, I started dressing differently and acting differently.

The narratives conveyed the struggle of constructing their gendered identity both as women and as female perpetrators of IPV. Their subjectivities denote women who transgress societal gendered expectations rather than reproducing male gender norms. According to the data from this study, when these women are violent, they are not just acting like men (Dasgupta 1999) but they are also resorting to violence as an authentic and legitimate aspect of their femininity (Messerschmidt 2002: 463).

To conclude, the data serves to debunk gender stereotypes related to IPV. The narratives reveal gender to be multi-faceted and complex constructions when women mediate their gendered identities through violence. The participants constructed their gendered identities by drawing from the dominant discourse as related to societal norms. With this in view, the participant's narratives revealed the tension between their subjective gendered identities and the manner in which women's perpetration of IPV is understood as a deviation from societal traditional gender scripts. They viewed themselves as "*broken*" women or *evil, monstrous* and *psycho*, but also drew from dualistic and stereotypical notions of femininity related to gender role and gender display. The participants in this study refuted victim status, and in turn, discourse related to women as passive and nurturing. The participants embodied strength and use of force as fundamental to their subjective gendered identity, while at the same time drawing from the limited models available to them or to which they could relate their experience as perpetrators of IPV and as women.

Theoretical models for women who are violent within their intimate relationships are limited and are primarily based on male violence and which normalize men's violence and demonize women (Belknap 2014). With this in view, Abrams (2016) critiques the continued politicizing and theoretical impasse of IPV in general, and argues that by studying women perpetrators of IPV, we can expand the domestic violence movement. More specifically, "it would move beyond the limited masculinist frame dominating domestic violence, beyond the pathologized and marginalized frame depicting women abusers, and toward a more inclusive movement (2016: 288). In this sense, this present study does provide a framework, which moves beyond dominant gender scripts that shapes masculine and feminine conduct, as described by the persons who experience IPV, the women themselves.

Thus, by failing to address the gendered experiences of female perpetrators of IPV, not only do we essentialize women but we also reinforce patriarchy and sustain those gender stereotypes that construct femininity as passive and nurturing. Lafrance further cautions that, "essentialism is the engine of patriarchy" (in press: 4). All in all, we limit the potential for explaining and creating a broader understanding of this social problem and IPV in general.

Summary – **"*when she was good, she was very, very good indeed, but when she was bad she was horrid*". *(Longfellow, 1992: 513).***

As evidenced by the data, the "political blind spot" referred to by Abrams (2016) continues to have an impact on how we view IPV at various levels. This is particularly the case with respect to the failure to provide services and appropriate treatment protocol for women who perpetrate IPV. The data from this study reveals that female perpetrators, similar to male perpetrators of IPV, are a heterogeneous group and engage in violence for a variety of reasons and motivations (Dowd 2001). In contrast to other studies on female perpetrated IPV, few of the participants in this study resort to IPV as a result of self-defence. The data does reveal, however, an overlap between victims and perpetrators of IPV that can be relevant in terms of a treatment protocol for IPV, not only for female perpetrators but also for men who engage in IPV. The majority of the participants engaged in IPV against non-violent partners with several of the women disclosing the manner in which they manipulated their partners into hitting them, in order to avoid arrest. They therefore drew from normative constructs and discourse related to IPV, which discounts female perpetration of IPV, and which therefore fails to hold them accountable or responsible for their actions. In view of this, female perpetrated IPV is liable to lead to fewer consequences, primarily because the violence is perceived as being less severe and injurious, not only in respect of its impact on sociocultural norms, but also in terms of the response by institutions, such as the police and justice systems.

The data indicates a disconnect between the participant's subjective gendered identities and traditional notions of femininity. It reveals the manner in which these participants constructed their identities as perpetrators of IPV, rather than its victims. The participants, by referring to themselves as "*broken*", "*evil*", "*monsters*" or as "*the dude*", transgress feminine norms and are ostensibly unable to construct an alternative space as agentic, autonomous and rationale women who, under certain conditions and contexts, used violence against their intimate partners.

CHAPTER SEVEN – DISCUSSION AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion

Contrary to previous studies on women's IPV that have quantified their findings, or as DeKeseredey puts it, provided "crude counts of behaviour" (2006: 1080), this study sheds more light on both the context and subjective gendered identities of the perpetrators themselves. The main area of enquiry guiding this research was - the ways in which women experience intimate partner violence as perpetrators of violence against their male partners. In pursuing this line of enquiry, two sub-questions were also addressed; the first question was the motives, meanings, and justifications given by the women in their subjective narratives; and the second sub-question focused on the explanations given by the women for the acts of violence they committed against their intimate male partners contested or reinforced dominant sociocultural gender norms of femininity. In order to answer these questions, this doctoral research used qualitative methods of inquiry to interrogate women mandated by the court to attend support group meetings for female offenders of IPV.

Similar to other research, the data generated by this study concludes that female perpetrators of IPV are a heterogeneous group who resort to violence as a strategy in their conflict with their male partners. They do so for a diversity of motives, of which anger, control and jealousy were referred to by the participants as the predominant reasons. Rather than reify notions that when women perpetrate IPV when they are emotional, irrational or out of control (Pearson 1997), the data suggests that IPV is a choice acted on by rational and agentic individuals.

There are however also profound and disparate findings revealed in this study that will be addressed in this section. In contrast to other studies, for example, the data revealed self-defence to be an insignificant contributing factor for the participant's violence. Over half the participants could be considered "intimate terrorists" and therefore capable of not only controlling their male partner through fear but also through threats of violence (Johnson 2010). Another significant area of enquiry is childhood trauma, all but one of the participants had either directly witnessed abuse, been abused themselves either sexually or physically or suffered extreme neglect.

Through interrogating the participant's subjective notions of gender, the data reveals that their subjective identities reinforce dominant discourse on feminine norms of behaviour that are

consistent with female perpetrators of violence. They negotiated their feminine identity and violence in terms of "*monster*", "*evil*" and "*crazy*" and "*broken*". Consider Diane for example who, when asked how she experienced being a woman and a perpetrator of IPV, said:

> *we were monsters! To say and know you were acting in such a way, that you're evil and mean and it becomes your normal. Women are more emotional and sensitive*

Through juxtaposing male and female norms of behaviour, several participants contested paradigms that embody traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. Consider, in this respect, Angela's narrative "*I cuss like a logger and I wear make-up, boys can be violent, why can't I"*. The implications are significant because they illustrate how the participants mediate their perpetration of IPV with a feminine identity in ways that both reproduce and contest the prevailing gendered discourse on IPV. Knowledge of how female perpetrators of IPV reproduce gender norms can benefit the development and implementation of prevention and intervention programmes for IPV.

One of the primary motivations the participants offered their time and narrating their traumatic and very private experiences, was simply to contribute to the knowledge of female perpetrators and thereby assist in developing guidelines for a more successful intervention, in the hope of improving other women's lives and those of their families. The participants exercised agency and power in their claim, "*we're not victims*" while also speaking to the turmoil that their actions inflicted on their intimate partner and the impact they had on their children. With this in view, I am invested in the ethical representation of the participants, particularly in ensuring that this study contributes to a gender appropriate treatment protocol, which will engage with the epistemological outcomes and furthers the understanding of this critical issue. Gair and Luyn, in their robust text on sharing qualitative research, maintain that authentic narratives shape epistemological outcomes, thus "enable[ing] those in the broader community with 'common wounds' to gain strength, comfort and affirmation, and enable those with no exposure to the insider experiences to gain heightened awareness (2017: 4).

By examining the participant's reasons and justifications and their subjective notions of gender as perpetrators of IPV, this concluding section will interpret the way we label and view female perpetrators of IPV and in turn, how this reinforces dualistic gender stereotypes. Moreover, this provides a critical understanding of how these factors serve to prevent female

perpetrators from pursuing services and obtaining concordant intervention for their violence against their male intimate partners (Straus 2009b, Scarduzio et al. 2017).

Treatment protocol?

Half the participants in this study could be considered as "intimate terrorists" (Johnson 2010), i.e. they exhibit a pattern of controlling and coercive behaviour that can incorporate different acts of abuse, such as physical, emotional, verbal, threats of violence and financial abuse. This behaviour can result in negative outcomes for not only their intimate partners but also for their children. The remaining participants engaged in minor assaults that are considered less harmful and as having fewer deleterious consequences (Dutton et al. 2005). However, even minor acts of violence perpetrated by women leave them at risk of becoming a victim of assault, as a result of severe retaliation by their male intimate partner (Felson and Cares 2005, Straus 2014). As discussed earlier in this study, current intervention and treatment protocol for women perpetrators of IPV are inadequate and based on male models of violence, which use notions of power, domination and negative attitudes concerning women (Dutton et al. 2005). Research has shown that BIPs also have little or no impact on male perpetrators' attitudes toward women or IPV, and have high rates of recidivism (Dutton and Corvo 2006, Straus 2014, Stuart 2005). Similar to men, women are a heterogeneous group who can and do perpetrate IPV for a variety of reasons, all of which should be taken into account for the purpose of intervention.

The data results in several of the following important outcomes that are, not only relevant for a gender-specific treatment protocol and intervention, but which also provides a critical and subjective understanding of female perpetrated IPV.

Self-defence

The first outcome refers to the relatively very low number of participants who claim self-defence as a justification for their perpetration of IPV. Only five of the twenty-six participants cite that they use violence in order to mitigate or protect themselves from imminent abuse. The prevailing discourse related to female perpetrated IPV relies heavily on notions of victimization, in spite of compelling evidence that contradicts the widely held view that women's IPV is solely a result of self-defence or the defence of children (Dutton et al. 2005, Henning et al. 2003, Hines and Douglas 2010). To the contrary, the data therefore shows that self-defence is only one of

many diverse motivations for resorting to IPV. The question therefore arises, how can male violence continue to be portrayed solely in terms of power, control and dominance when female violence is also prevalent and according to the majority of participants in this study, practiced not in self-defence?

Coercive control

Secondly, there is the issue of coercive control. Over half of the participants engaged in this specific pattern of pervasive violence, which may not necessarily include physical force, but still induces fear and results in behavioural changes in their intimate partners. Johnson (2010), as has already been mentioned, refers to this category of violence as intimate terrorism but, echoing other scholars, determines that women are incapable of instilling the fear or force associated with this type of violence (Dasgupta 1999, Saunders 2002). Rather than perpetuate gender scripts that portray men as the sole perpetrators of severe and injurious IPV, intervention and treatment protocols for female perpetration of IPV should also reflect the propensity of women for this type of IPV. A recent quantitative study of female perpetrated IPV carried out by Swan et al. perpetuates the myth of a woman's powerlessness, arguing:

> "The root cause of women's aggression is not the need to exert power and control over partners…Women may also be more likely to commit IPV to fend off the domination of a partner who is trying to control them… Another aspect of the social construction of gender as it affects aggression is that men usually have more power to directly assert dominance and control in relationships than women, who typically are of lower status" (2012: 1060-1)

This narrow view of female perpetrated IPV is not reflected in the data and self-concepts expressed in this study. Half the participants in this study control their intimate partners through physical, verbal, psychological and financial abuse and as a result, challenge essentialist notions of gender and IPV. While there is a dissonance in status in terms of the broader societal context, dominance of either the female or the male within intimate relationships is less evident (Dutton and Nicholls 2005). From the family violence perspective both men and women can affect power equally within the family unit (Kurz 1993). Moreover, in countries such as the United States and Canada, current generations no longer hold traditional views of gender stereotypes of male dominance within their intimate relationships. According to Dutton and Nicholls "less than ten percent of US couples are male dominant" and "this generation is the most female violent in the studies presented" (2005: 700).

The pervasiveness of coercive control exercised by the participants and the lack of support for violence used for the purpose of self-defence as revealed in this study, also reflect the disparities in the way we continue to view IPV. This is particularly relevant to still explain IPV as resulting from predominant male domination and control or as a reflection of a patriarchal or sexist society (Bates et al. 2018, Dutton et al. 2005). These beliefs however continue to impact the intervention and treatment of female perpetrators of IPV (Straus 2006). In terms of treatment, Dutton et al. correctly argue that "there is little doubt that prior victimization and trauma" is relevant for male as well as for female abusers, but that, "treating women's symptoms resulting from victimization experiences exclusively is likely to be insufficient strategy for reducing women's use of aggression" (2005: 21). Currently, the capacity for female perpetrators of IPV to coercively control their intimate partners has gone largely unrecognized by existing treatment and prevention programs.

Childhood trauma

Thirdly, is the issue of childhood exposure to trauma and violence. Nearly all the participants had been exposed to some form of childhood trauma, resulting from either by witnessing their parent's IPV, physical abuse, sexual abuse or extreme neglect. While other studies of female perpetrated IPV have noted this as a factor (Dutton and Nicholls 2005), this study differs in identifying the overwhelming proportion of participants who have experienced this form of trauma. An extensive body of research does consider childhood trauma as a significant factor in both the perpetration of IPV and, as a result, its intergenerational transmission (Capaldi et al. 2012, Ehrensaft et al. 2003, Hamel 2007, Stith et al. 2000). In general, the intergenerational transmission of IPV is a predictor for future IPV perpetration by both men and women. However, childhood sexual abuse and abuse by mothers has, in particular, been found to increase the likelihood of women becoming perpetrators of IPV (Babcock et al. 2003, Capaldi et al. 2012, Dowd et al. 2005, Heyman and Smith 2002, Kernsmith 2006, Swan and Snow 2006). In this respect, the research has resulted in two approaches that have relevance to prior exposure to, or experience of, childhood violence. The one approach relates to violence as a learned and normalized strategy used in conflict resolution, and the other approach views it as a form of trauma. Both these approaches are relevant and should be addressed in treatment for perpetrators of IPV (Hamel 2017).

The majority of the participants acknowledged that they did not have a good template upon which to form their relationship style because of their prior exposure to their parent's violence or other forms of childhood abuse. Considering that all the participants who took part in this study had been exposed to some form of childhood trauma, there is a need for perpetrators of IPV to attend to healthy styles of communication within their intimate relationships that can circumvent physical or other forms of violence and abuse.

Gendered identity of female perpetrators of IPV

Fourthly, the participants in this study were asked to consider how they would identify themselves as perpetrators of IPV and as women. The participant's subjective notions of gender were examined in an effort to understand the significance of gender in female perpetration of IPV (Anderson 2013). How these women reconciled their violence with notions of femininity is revealed in the degree to which the participants self-identify as "*broken*" women, "*crazy*", "*psycho*" or "*monsters*", thereby reflecting a parallel with societal discourse on violent women (Pearson 1997, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). The participants conveyed a limited and borrowed conceptual framework with which to rationalize their use of violence as perpetrators, rather than victims of IPV.

Messerschmidt (2012) states that the response of others to an individual's actions, such as a woman's perpetration of IPV, is crucial to achieving a positive gendered identity. Furthering this argument, Messerschmidt articulates Goffman's (1963) notion of a spoiled identity with his claim that,

> "whether or not it [social action] is judged accountable is highly important to our sense of self. Embodied accountability is vital to an individual's situational recognition as a competent social agent. If an individual's embodied appearance and practice is categorized by others as "failed", that degradation may result in a spoiled self-concept" (2012: 43).

This suggests that the women's experience as perpetrators of IPV rather than as victims prohibits them from accomplishing an appropriate subjective gendered identity, in which femininity is reified around notions such as nurturing, vulnerability, and passiveness. This study therefore serves to disrupt dominant discourses and binaries that reify dualistic sex differences, principally as they apply to prevailing conceptions of perpetrators and victims of IPV. Changing cultural stereotypes and expanding the discourse related to IPV can influence those

persons who experience this social problem and that encourages them to seek assistance as either female perpetrators or male victims without stigma.

Implementing a zero-tolerance policy on all forms of the perpetration of IPV, rather than normalizing men's aggression and pathologizing, minimizing or denying, female perpetration of IPV, can serve to inform and encourage both victims and perpetrators to seek assistance and services. This does not, however, constitute a gender-neutral response since, each gender embodies distinct challenges that should be acknowledged. Espinoza and Warner accurately summarize this line of thought on the polarization of gender and IPV in scholarly research by arguing:

> "Interests and wellbeing of both genders must be equally acknowledged but with consideration of uniqueness. By recognizing all victims' adversities as significant, we all cultivate enhanced appreciation for each gender's experiences and foster more efficacious policies and accessible resources. More gender-specific, yet simultaneously gender-inclusive, prevention, education, training, and treatment programs must be developed and piloted. This means embracing all IPV-relevant causes, despite gender, yet also acting on awareness of gender-specific experiences" (2016: 963).

It is also significant that, regardless of their personal experience with childhood trauma, none of the participants made any effort to protect or shield their children from witnessing the IPV. One of the participants reported being physically abusive to her child, and several of them spoke of physically fighting with their intimate partner while holding a child. All the participants reported that they perpetrated IPV in full view of their children. Not only does the perpetration of IPV by the women in this study disrupt boundaries of normative femininity that construct women as vulnerable and peaceable, but failure of the women themselves to protect their children contests essentialist ideals of women as being inherently warm and nurturing (Hird 2002).

In this dissertation, I did not incorporate the impact that the participant's perpetration of IPV had on their children because this aspect of their narrative does not directly contribute to the research questions. Their narratives do however, demonstrate the importance of recognizing female perpetrators of IPV as a social problem in general. Some participants mentioned that their children already exhibited signs of trauma. For example, Lucy's child had behavioural issues and wet the bed; Dorothy said that her son visibly "*shuts down when I get a bit red in my face, like he can read my mood*"; Sara had tried to choke her children when they were small, so she now communicated with her children through letters. She observed that they refused to see her even though they were now in their teens. The counsellor told me that Sara's letters to her children re-

traumatized them each time she communicates with them, to the extent that they physically tremble and were unable to read them (Personal communication, Sheila 2016); Kylie's child, a toddler, mimicked her previous partner, calling her a "*fucking bitch*" and would often physically attack her. Brenda's teenage child was already experiencing physical violence within her intimate relationship. This aspect of a perpetrators' life history should indeed be addressed during intervention and treatment programmes, with respect to *all* perpetrators of IPV regardless of gender.

There is an overlap in the motivations and justifications for female and male perpetration of IPV (Dasgupta 1999). However, recognition of gender-specific concerns is crucial to the response to this serious social problem. In her ethnography on female youth violence, Ness discusses the problematic of responding to the needs of female offenders; that despite violence being essentially a human endeavour, it should be viewed simultaneously as both gendered and ungendered (2010: 140). Similar to Messerschmidt is the notion of accountability or as Ness calls it, sanctions:

> "How to factor in gender without explaining too much or too little by it. While the needs and desires that drive male and female aggression often have shared origins…the gendered organization of these shared origins (how they are internalized and expressed) is closely linked to the range of behaviour options that a particular community sanctions with regard to each of the sexes" (2010: 145).

Presently female perpetrated IPV is perceived as being less serious, often humorous, and subject to fewer prohibitions than male violence against women (Hines et al. 2007). This emphasized the need for discourse related to female perpetrated IPV to therefore reflect data from studies where women who perpetrate IPV discursively disrupt stereotypical portrayals of IPV. With this in mind, I argue that there is a requirement for a gender appropriate protocol for female perpetrators of IPV for guiding treatment, intervention and policy (Conradi and Geffner 2012). This should be based on scientific and evidence-based research conducted with those persons who also actually experience the problem directly, i.e. female perpetrators of IPV themselves. By this I mean that rather than reverting to deterministic sex differences related to the perpetration of IPV, we should acknowledge gender in terms of both the broader societal conditions and individual sociocultural norms that provide the structure and boundaries that either constrain or limit behaviour (Comack and Brickey 2007, Hird 2002). Women are more likely than men to live in poverty and to be given custody of their children (Anderson 2013). In

fact, several of the participants in this study were primary breadwinners, thus creating financial difficulties for the family when mandated to attend support groups during busy work schedule. Most were unskilled workers in positions that had a high staff turnover and therefore did not have the opportunity to demand time off to attend the support groups over a thirty-six-week period. Services and treatment should be scheduled around work and childcare responsibilities thus permitting the women to attend meetings and continue supporting their families.

That being said, accountability and responsibility for those women who do initiate violence against non-violent intimate partners as well as identifying coercion and control by women, all require a pragmatic response in which IPV is "viewed as a zero-sum game" (Espinoza and Warner 2016). Nearly all the participants in this study desire a continued relationship with their male intimate, albeit without the conflict. Therefore, the following conclusions can tangibly contribute towards a gender appropriate treatment protocol and intervention that can assist women in healing their relationships with their intimate partners, thus reducing the trauma that their children are exposed to and enable them to, unlike their parents, establish future intimate relationships.

Break the taboo

The topic of female perpetration of IPV is controversial and inherently political in nature (Renzetti 1999, Straus 2009b). It is debated among scholars and lay people alike who have an interest in advocating between men's or women's rights (George 2007). Considering that the issue of female perpetrated IPV was first revealed as a major social problem in the 1970's, and that despite the large body of evidence that challenges the dominant narrative of IPV as being predominantly a male problem, the polemic and debate on this issue remains[47] (Archer 2000: Straus 2009b 2012). A noted British scholar of IPV, Dr. Malcolm George refers to female perpetrated IPV as the "Great Taboo" because it breaks two important societal narratives; those that proscribe women as capable of violence thus breaking the boundaries of stereotypical feminine norms and those that interrogate that a man can be beaten by a woman (2007: 8). The

[47] As discussed in chapter four, the political nature and stigma attached to female perpetration of IPV impacted this study in terms of finding a site for the study. Directors who claimed that it would impact their funding shut down those counselors who agreed to have me observe and interview their clients. Moreover, many of the treatment centers do not publicize their treatment of domestically violent women (Personal communication – ADVIP conference 2016).

data from this study, and the open and honest narratives of the participants, reveals the parallel relationships between these two societal views.

Keeping in mind the manner in which Isabelle disclosed her will to hurt her partner, she said "*I just wanted to hurt him badly, I got joy out of it*". This reveals the agency and rationale that shape the women's choice to engage in violence with their intimates, and that represents not only a break with feminine norms of behaviour as vulnerable and passive, but also their will to inflict harm on their male intimates (and enjoy it) rather than defending themselves from abuse. The data is profound, revealing how the participants situated themselves as perpetrators of IPV, rather than its victims. There is the element of empowerment as conveyed in the participant's narratives. Consider for example, Diane's comment that, "*we're alpha females*". While sociocultural norms trivialize female perpetration of IPV (Anderson 2005), these participants argued that their IPV is of consequence and more emphatically, for the majority of them, meant that, "*we're not victims*". Accordingly, developing a gender-inclusive language and broadening paradigms associated with IPV to include female perpetrated IPV, can profoundly shape epistemological understanding and discourse.

This study provides a rich theoretical analysis of women's perpetration of IPV that integrates subjective individual experiences and societal factors, in order to conceptualize the gendered nature of female perpetration of IPV. It thus provides evidence that women's perpetration of IPV does represent a serious social problem that is detrimental to, not only the women themselves and their male victims, but also to the long-term prospects for their children. Some scholars and researchers argue that IPV should be regarded as a human condition rather than gendered (Straus 2009b). This data however supports the view that *female* perpetrated IPV should and can be taken seriously, while recognising and incorporating gender-sensitive concerns for intervention, treatment protocol, policy and practice. Pearson, in acknowledging the imperative to understand the use of violence by women as a basis for gender appropriate treatment and services, therefore emphatically argues, "we need to accept female violence as a possibility so that violent women can receive help if necessary. Women have virtually no access to anger management counselling, sex offender therapy, child abuse prevention programs, and prison security – all because we won't concede their fundamental agency" (1997: 238). The data highlights the necessity to acknowledge women's perpetration of IPV as an important social

problem requiring a response that will improve the lives of families living with violence perpetrated by wives and mothers.

Summary

In conclusion, I would also like to address a question that was posed after I presented this research and the findings at both the ADVIP conference and the International Conference on Family Violence and Childhood Trauma in July 2018. The study was well received and for the most part, questions related to similarities between the female participants' behaviour and male perpetration of IPV. The question that resonated most with the importance of this topic came from a well-known academic in the field of IPV. He asked me – "*we have been taught to hate men because of their violence against women, what are we supposed to think now*?" After careful reflection, my response was, "*I think that what this study reveals is that we should understand IPV as a social problem that is not specifically a gendered issue, but a human issue that requires a gendered response*".

Avenues for further research

A number of avenues for future research have emerged from this study. The first and most significant, I would suggest, is to include couples in the research in order to interrogate the subjective accounts from each perspective, the male victim and the female perpetrator of IPV. Next is the requirement for further research with a more diverse sample in order to understand the impact of intersectionality on female perpetration of IPV but also to interrogate the current rise in male victims of IPV in both Quebec and Nunavut. The overwhelming number of participants, twenty-four of the twenty-five women, who experienced childhood trauma and are perpetrators of IPV suggests that further inquiry in this area is required. Lastly, given that most of the participants in this study have custody of their children in spite of them being the aggressors in their intimate relationships, further examination of mothering with respect to female perpetrators of IPV is suggested. I discuss these important areas that have been revealed as future research in the following section.

Attending the FGM's in which couples attended revealed how couples interacted and the differences in which each partner viewed their relationship. Conducting research with couples that experience female perpetration of IPV and male victimization would elicit specific data and

knowledge on the dynamics of the couple and reveal, from each partner's perspective, the conditions under which violence occurs. Several of the participants in this study did recount the deleterious impact their violence has on their male partner. Notably, Dorothy's narrative discussing her violence toward her partner and her confusion in understanding why he remained with her in spite of her abusive behaviour. She says:

> *Then there's the other side, a piece of shit, you don't do that to people you love. So it's, mmm, to make myself feel better it feels good but it's not OK to hit because if you were to hit me the way I hurt him all the time, I would have left already.*

Dorothy's narrative parallels discussion related to female victims of IPV, interrogating their reasons for remaining with their male abusers (Abel 2001). Similarly, she fails to understand why her male partner remains with her in spite of the violence and how she continues to hurt him, saying, "*I would have left already*". Highlighted here are implicit commonalities between male and female victims of IPV. Research suggests that female perpetrated IPV has less of a toll on their male victims (Dasgupta 2002, DeKeseredy 2011, Saunders 2002). However, current research has focused on men as perpetrators and women as victims (Anderson 2005), thus leaving the question of the impact of female perpetrated IPV a relatively under-researched but deserving topic of further inquiry (Arnocky and Vaillancourt 2014, Cook 2009, Migliaccio 2002).

Although the dynamic of the couple is integral to IPV, this has not, to date, been a focus of scholarly attention because of the problematic of interviewing a couple where violence is an element of the relationship (Winstock 2011). However, it can be done, as long as safety measures are engaged and strict supervision is exercised and, in order to prevent and account for emotional and physical harm to both the participants and researcher alike.

Given the lack of diversity in the participants who took part in this study, I would suggest seeking in future, a more diverse group which would further engage elements of intersectionality. For example, recent statistics in Canada show that while there has been an overall decrease in IPV, there has been more of an increased prevalence of IPV within indigenous populations. Specifically, amongst the Nunavut, the statistics show a ten percent increase in male victims of IPV. It is also worthwhile noting that Quebec also experienced an increase in male victims of

IPV with a five percent increase over the past five years[48]. While circumstance prevented me from conducting this study in Canada, I would suggest that there is a need for future research into female perpetrators of IPV both in Quebec and in the Territory of Nunavut, in order to interrogate the specific rise of male victims in the two regions.

While exposure to childhood trauma is not within my purview as a social scientist, the study revealed an overwhelming number of participants who, as children, either witnessed abuse, or were themselves subject to physical or sexual abuse and/or severe neglect. Therefore, the impact of specific types of childhood trauma and the relationship to the perpetrator of the violence or trauma could shed more light on the connection between childhood trauma and female perpetration of IPV in general.

Also relevant but not discussed in this study is the notion of mothering and motherhood for female perpetrators of IPV. While the consequence of mothering on female victims of IPV is covered in the literature, little is understood about the relationships between notions of motherhood and the perpetration of IPV by women. Most of the participants in this study still retained custody of their children in spite of being perpetrators of IPV. As previously discussed, none of the participants made any attempt to shelter or protect their children from witnessing their violence or ensuring their safety. Accordingly, a broader knowledge of the manner in which this population of women embodies mothering is essential.

While many possibilities exist for future research on this population of female perpetrators of IPV, emphasis should be put on empirical research that works towards important social and cultural changes with respect to open discourse that recognizes the serious nature, causes, and consequences of female perpetration of IPV. By acknowledging women as rational agents in their perpetration of violence against their non-violent intimate partners, contributes to a better understanding of the overall topic of IPV.

[48] (https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54893/02-eng.htm)

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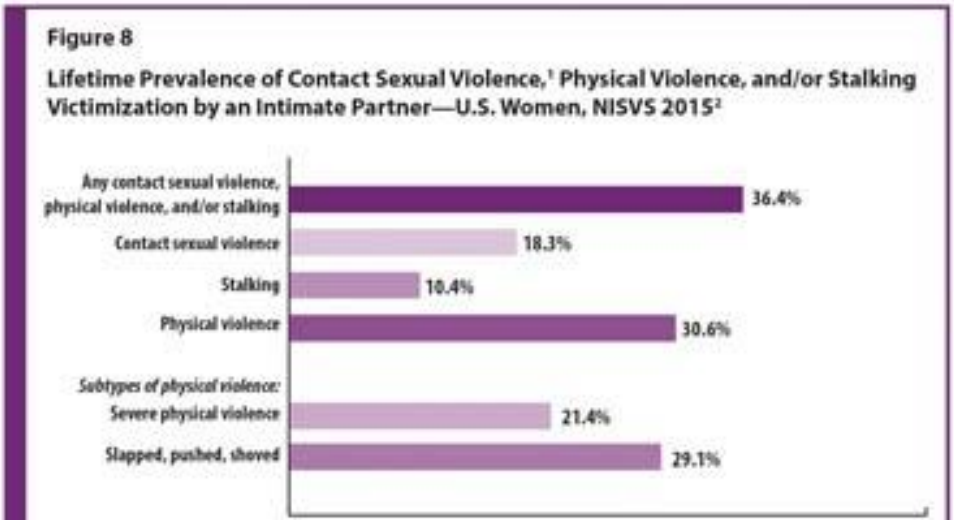
TABLES – CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL (2015)



(https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/2015NISVSdatabrief.html).