An Exploration of Young Adult Women's Experiences of Using Physical Aggression in Intimate Relationships: A Phenomenological Study

Kayla Adams

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ABSTRACT

Both men and women use physical aggression in intimate relationships; however the research examining the many nuances of women's use of physical aggression is sparse in comparison to the research available on men. Because little is known about the motivations and contextual factors leading to women's use of physical aggression in comparison to men, theories of violence and offender treatment programs that were developed for men are being used to understand and treat women. This is problematic because research suggests male and female aggressors differ in some very important areas. The present study used transcendental phenomenology to explore the experience of young adult women's use of physical aggression in intimate relationships. From the interviews with eight women, five themes were discovered: altered state, observations of self as someone else, others not seeing authentic self, moving towards ideal self, and managing connection/disconnection. Implications for counselling and future research are discussed.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Intimate partner violence and the movement to end violence against women has increasingly captured public attention over the last 25 years and rightly so. This public attention has resulted in the establishment of women's shelters, anti-domestic violence programs, support groups and lobbying of the justice system to hold perpetrators of intimate partner violence accountable. However, with public attention focused on violence against women, the fact that men are harmed by violence as well is often left out of the spotlight. Backlash against the movement to end violence against women has brought to the public's attention the fact that women are also violent with their intimate partners, and according to survey data, women's violence also needs attention:

The challenge is to take violence by women seriously without losing sight of the fact that the patterns of male and female violence within adult intimate relationships are usually very different, often happen within different contexts, and generally have very different consequences and that both the violence itself and the barriers to ending violence are related to societal inequalities (Worcester, 2002, p. 1392).

Significance of the Research

Both men and women use violence in their intimate relationships. The collection of scholarly articles demonstrating that women use violence to varying degrees in their intimate relationships now approaches 200 (Archer, 2000; Archer 2002; Fiebert, 2007; Straus, 2004). Women's victimization experience is a highly researched topic (Bonomi et al., 2006; Dugan & Apel, 2003; Hazen & Soriano, 2007), but there are few published studies on women's violence in intimate relationships. The lack of research is problematic as some evidence suggests that women are aggressive partners in intimate relationships just as often as are men.
(Archer, 2000). Additionally, women are being arrested for domestic violence now more than ever before (Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Martin, 1997; Miller, 2001; Swan & Snow, 2002). Yet, we know very little about the motivations and contextual factors leading to women's violence. Since we know very little about these women in comparison to men, theories of violence and offender treatment programs that were developed for men are being used to understand and treat women. This would not be problematic if male and female aggressors did not differ on key characteristics such as motivations, functions of violence, tactics, contextual factors, predictors, and risk factors; however, research suggests that male and female aggressors differ in some very important areas (Feder & Henning, 2005; Kernsmith, 2005; Phelan et al., 2005; Ward & Muldoon, 2007).

There appears to be a growing trend towards young women either becoming more violent as perpetrators or learning that violence is an effective way to retain their personal power (Worcester, 2002). Younger women have been found to be more likely than older women to be both the perpetrator and victim of intimate partner violence (Stets & Henderson, 1991). Morse (1995) also found in his longitudinal study that intimate partner violence was highest in both males and females when the sample was between the ages of 18 and 24 years old and decreased as the sample aged. Sorenson, Upchurch, and Shen (1996) had similar findings and stated that the "risk of marital violence appears to be inversely related to age: rates of violence and injury during the past year were highest among those under 20 years of age and lowest among persons who were 50 or more years old" (p. 39). As Worcester (2002) states, "if girls are learning that it pays to be violent, this raises important issues for the anti-violence movement" (p. 1411). Conducting research with these young
women to determine the meaning of violence for them could be crucial to decreasing violence in our communities.

Documentation shows that women are more negatively impacted by intimate partner violence than are men (Mihorean, 2005). According to the 2004 General Society Survey in Canada, 44% of women versus 19% of men, reported injury as a result of intimate partner violence. Overall, 13% of female victims sought medical attention while only 2% of male victims required this intervention. Results of the 2004 General Society Survey also indicate that in approximately 25% of relationships, the violence was serious enough that the victim feared for his/her life. Women were found to be three times more likely than men to fear for their lives (34% vs. 10%) and also three times more likely to require time off from their daily activities as a result of the violence (Mihorean, 2005).

Houry et al. (2008) compared scores on the Women's Experiences with Battering Scale (WEB) of both males and females who disclosed intimate partner victimization, perpetration or both. The WEB is a tool used to determine an individual's level of victimization and battering. A high WEB score (over 20) is indicative of experiencing high levels of abuse. These authors found significant differences between intimate partner violence victims' gender and WEB scores, with 27.1% of female victims versus 6.3% of male victims receiving high (over 20) WEB scores. Women who disclosed both intimate partner victimization and perpetration were also more likely than men who disclosed both behaviors to have high WEB scores (45.9% of women vs. 29.2% of men), while no differences were found between male and female perpetrators. These results indicate women who experience intimate partner violence encounter higher levels of abuse of power and control and fear than do men. It is interesting to note however that the WEB has not been
normed on men. Adaptations have been made to the original questions to make them applicable to men and the tool has been used with male populations. Despite these adjustments, it remains to be determined if findings based on the WEB are valid with male populations.

Although male perpetrated violence has more serious consequences than female perpetrated violence, it is important to study female perpetrated violence to develop interventions to minimize intimate partner violence in general. Worcester (2002) states, "In addressing the issue of women using force, counting the violence should never be the goal so much as looking at the meaning and consequences of violence in people's lives" (p. 1391-1392). Considering the literature reviewed thus far, it is clear that research has clarified that women do use violence. What remains unclear is the meaning of violence for young adult women who use violence at higher rates than other populations of women and the nature of their gender specific treatment needs.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

Although research has been conducted to count, categorize, and determine risk factors for women's use of violence in intimate relationships, few studies have been conducted that explore women's interpretations of their experiences of using violence in their intimate relationships. Miller and Meloy (2006) examined women's interpretations of their experiences, but limited their analysis to categorizing the women's behavior. Seamans, Rubin, and Stabb (2007) discovered that women's violence occurred in the context of current or historical victimization. I could not locate any literature that examined the meaning of physical aggression for young women. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, I explored the experiences of young adult women who use physical aggression in their
intimate heterosexual relationships in order to help inform gender-specific interventions for
intimate partner violence. The central question guiding this research was: What is the
experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships for young adult women?

Location of Self in the Research

For the majority of my life, I held the belief that women were physically and
emotionally harmed in abusive relationships and their only defense was leaving the
relationship. During the last year of my undergraduate studies, I was introduced to a
different perspective on intimate partner violence - that women are also physically
aggressive. At this time I was taking a course in intimate relationships and the teaching
assistant gave a lecture on communication dynamics in intimate relationships. This lecture
really struck me and piqued my interest in the communication and other dynamics within
physically aggressive relationships.

A few years later, as I began a practicum placement for my master degree, I
encountered some clients who were currently, or had previously been, involved in physically
aggressive relationships. I was amazed to discover that in some cases these women justified
both their and their partner's actions as the only way to solve conflict or as a demonstration
of love. The stories these women shared with me solidified my interest in intimate partner
violence, and specifically how women experience this phenomenon.

Although my experience with the phenomenon of intimate partner violence is limited,
I still approach this research with some biases and assumptions. One assumption I hold is
that the context in which women use physical aggression is very important, and different
from the context in which men use physical aggression. One of the contextual factors that I
believe to be important to a woman's use of violence is her current and previous relationship
dynamics and her partner's use of physical aggression. I hold the belief that women who use physical aggression in intimate relationships most often do so in the context of their own historical abuse as well as possible current abuse. A final assumption I hold is that women who are referred to treatment as the result of their use of physical aggression have different treatment needs than those of men who are referred for treatment.

**Summary**

Women are choosing to use violence in their intimate relationships and one can only speculate on the various reasons for selecting this option. The research suggests that women who use violence have been at the receiving end of violence and abuse throughout their lives and may have learned that violence is an effective way to maintain control in their lives (Seamans et al., 2007; Worcester, 2002). The purpose of this study was to build on our current understanding of the experience of using violence, specifically within the population of women ages 19 to 40, and hopefully to inform counselling practice for women in this situation. Chapter One of this document has introduced the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research question. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature in the subsequent areas: gender symmetry in intimate partner violence, characteristics of women who perpetrate violence, and women's experiences of using violence in intimate relationships. Chapter Three provides the philosophical basis for this study, clarifies relevant terms, and describes the methodology to be used. Chapter Four details the results of this investigation including the themes that arose from the data. Finally, Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings, identifies the limitations of the present study, highlights implications for counselling practice, makes suggestions for future research, and presents my personal reflections on the research process.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

There is no shortage of discussion in the literature regarding the controversial issue of female perpetrated, intimate partner violence, especially the highly charged issues of "who hits first, who hits more often, and who presents a real threat of harm to their partners" (Dutton, Nicholls, & Spidell, 2005, p. 2-3). This debate over the seriousness of female perpetrated violence has raged since the 1970s when the results of the 1975 National Family Violence Survey in the United States were first published. Despite over 30 years of research and increasing rigor in research methods, the dispute continues (Saunders, 2002). Some researchers argue that the two sides of this debate focus on two distinct forms of couple violence (Johnson, 1995): common couple violence and intimate terrorism. Johnson (1995) describes common couple violence as a relationship dynamic whereby conflict occasionally intensifies, resulting in minor forms of violence. This form of violence rarely escalates into serious or life-threatening forms. Patriarchal terrorism or what is now known by its gender-neutral name, intimate terrorism, is a type of relationship in which violence is simply one of many tactics used to control one's partner (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003). If Johnson's typology is true, the following literature review focuses primarily on studies that would fall under the category of common couple violence, primarily due to methodological limitations. Specifically, surveys and university samples do not elicit enough responses of the less common form of violence, intimate terrorism, to discuss these findings at length.

The purpose of this literature review is to provide the reader with an understanding of the research conducted to date on gender symmetry in intimate partner violence, characteristics of women who perpetrate violence, and finally, the scant literature on women's experiences of using violence in their intimate relationships.
Gender Symmetry in Intimate partner Violence

Over the past thirty years, a growing number of studies have published results supporting the argument that women perpetrate intimate partner violence at rates similar or equal to those of men. Fiebert (2007) maintains an annotated bibliography of studies demonstrating that women use violence as or more frequently in intimate relationships than do their male counterparts. This annotated bibliography now contains 196 such references. Archer (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of sex differences in physical aggression in heterosexual partners and found that women, slightly more than men, used one or more acts of physical aggression and used such acts more frequently. Archer conducted a second meta-analysis in 2002 and found that women were more likely than men to throw something at their partner, slap, kick, bite, hit, and also to hit with an object.

The results from the 1975 National Family Violence Survey in the United States were the first to demonstrate that women use violence at rates similar to those of men. Straus (1980) analyzed a subset of the data obtained pertaining to violent couples and found that in 49.5% of cases both the husband and the wife engaged in at least one violent act, while only men were violent in 27.7% of cases and only women were violent in 22.7% of cases.

Straus's (1980) findings have been supported by subsequent research involving community samples in the United States. Stets and Henderson (1991) found women were more likely to use physical aggression than were men (40.0% vs. 21.9%). These women were twice as likely as their male counterparts to use minor aggression and six times more likely to use severe aggression. Morse (1995) also found higher rates of female-to-male assaults than male-to-female assaults and Sorenson et al. (1996) found that in most situations involving physical violence, both partners were aggressive.
Very similar findings have also been documented in Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. In Canada, women have been found to use violence at rates equal to (Kwong, Barholomew, & Dutton, 1999; Mihorean, 2005) or higher (Bland & Orn, 2006; Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988) than those used by men. Equal rates of men and women report perpetrating violence in the United Kingdom (10% and 11% respectively; Carrado, George, Loxam, Jones, & Templar, 1996). In a study conducted in New Zealand, Magdol et al. (1997) reported higher rates of female perpetrated than male perpetrated violence with 37.2% of women and 21.6% of men reporting engagement in some form of physical violence. Finally, in a recent study Fergusson, Horwood and Ridder (2005) found that the majority of domestic violence was mutual: 90% of those reporting victimization also reported perpetrating acts and 94% of those reporting perpetration reported victimization as well.

Researchers have been examining partner violence in college/university samples for approximately the same length of time as they have been investigating the phenomenon in community samples. Steinmetz (1981) conducted a study to determine the rates of marital abuse in university student populations in six different countries: the United States, Canada, Belize, Finland, Puerto Rico, and Israel. This author found that in each society the percentage of husbands who used violence was similar to the percentage of wives using violence. The major exception to this finding was in Puerto Rico, where twice as many husbands as wives used violence. Similar findings have been documented at various colleges/universities across the United States (Katz, Kuffel, & Coblentz, 2002; Sack, Keller, & Howard, 1982; Thompson, 1991).

Not only does intimate partner violence, as reported by college/university samples, appear to occur at approximately the same rates whether perpetrated by men or women, it
also appears to be highly reciprocal. Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher, and Lloyd (1982) found that 68% of individuals self-reporting involvement in premarital violence stated the violence was reciprocal in nature. Bernard and Bernard (1983) found very similar results: 21% of women indicated they had been abusive to a partner and of these respondents 82% indicated a partner had also abused them. Of the men, 15% stated they had been abusive towards a partner and of these respondents, 77% indicated they had also been abused by their partner.

In addition to these findings of equal or reciprocal violence, a few authors have documented higher rates of female than male violence in college/university samples (Breslin, Riggs, O'Leary, & Arias, 1990; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991). In both studies, almost twice as many females as males reported perpetrating violence in their intimate relationships.

When one looks at incidents of spousal violence reported to the police, a very different picture arises. In Canada in 2004 there were approximately 28,000 incidents of intimate partner violence reported to the police (Ogrodnik, 2006). Of the incidents reported, 84% of victims were female, and 16% were male. Using the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Ogrodnik (2006) has noted other gender differences regarding perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Specifically, it was found that male perpetrators are more likely than female perpetrators to repeatedly abuse their spouses.

In summary, the literature reveals that women in both community and college/university samples report using violence in their intimate relationships. Large numbers of women who use violence are involved in mutually violent relationships; however, women are the only perpetrator of violence in some relationships as well. The
picture becomes much less clear when police statistics are added to the mix. These statistics suggest that the majority of police reported domestic violence occurring in Canada is perpetrated by men, with less than a quarter of reported abuse being perpetrated by women. While Mihorean (2005) reports that 6% of men and 7% of women in Canada experience intimate partner violence, she also found that for both women and men it was more common to report "less serious" forms of violence (i.e. threats, hit with an object, object thrown at him/her, being pushed, grabbed, shoved or slapped). Women, however, are more likely than men to experience more serious forms of violence such as being beat up, choked, or threatened with or had a gun or knife used against them (23% of women vs. 15% of men).

Now that the research on the prevalence of women's violence in intimate relationships has been examined, the discussion will turn to a review of the literature that analyzes characteristics of women who use violence in their intimate relationships.

**Characteristics of Women Who Perpetrate Violence**

Knowing prevalence rates does little to inform us about the phenomenon at hand - women's use of violence in intimate relationships. To better understand intimate partner violence, and more specifically violence used by women, partner aggression needs to be examined in context.

This discussion of the characteristics of women who perpetrate violence in their intimate relationships will summarize the literature in three pertinent areas. These areas are motivations and attributions for using violence, contextual factors giving rise to women's violence, and individual and family level risk markers that distinguish women who use violence in their intimate relationships from those who do not.
**Motivations and Attributions for Using Violence**

Soon after the publication of Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz's (1980) findings from the 1975 National Family Violence Survey in the United States, which found that women used violence against their partners at rates similar to men, a controversy erupted in the field. Up to this point, men’s use of violence had been attributed to social-political constructs that allowed men to exert control over women by any means possible. Dasgupta (1999) explains this perspective well:

> Intimate violence does not occur in a vacuum. It is nested within the sociocultural context of a nation and is maintained, as well as supported, by its structures. Religion, law, art, socialization patterns, education, economy, gender roles, and belief systems of a society legitimize men's violence toward women (p. 200).

Up to this point, intimate partner violence had been envisioned as a male perpetrated problem, one that occurred in a social-political context that supported such behavior. So, where does female perpetrated violence fit into this theory of intimate partner violence? Early studies (Saunders, 1986) examined the motives behind violence used by battered women and found that 75% of women labeled as battered used some form of nonsevere violence as identified by the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). Fifty to 60% of women in Saunders' (1986) sample also engaged in behaviors classified as severe violence (kicked, bit, or hit with fist and hit or tried to hit with something). Eight percent of these women admitted to beating up their partners or using a knife, and 12% had threatened their partners with a knife or gun.

This group of women reported that self-defense was the most common motive for their use of both nonsevere and severe violence. About 40% of the women who used severe
violence and 30% of the women who used nonsevere violence reported that all of their violence was in self-defense, while about 30% of the women who used severe violence and 23% of the women who used nonsevere violence stated that all of their violence was fighting back. Three percent of women who used severe violence and 11% of women who used nonsevere violence said that much of their violence was initiated by them. Saunders (1986) points out that the concepts of self-defense and fighting back seemed to be merged for this group of women. In this case, women using violence as a form of self-defense or to fight back against their partners fits with the above mentioned theory of intimate partner violence. What does not fit, however, is the small percentage of women who stated that they were the first to strike in their relationships. It should also be noted that these women were provided with only three possible motives: self-defense, retaliation, or first strike.

In an attempt to expand the study of motivations for using violence in dating relationships, Follingstad et al. (1991) examined 495 college students from the University of South Carolina. These authors found that female perpetrators of relationship violence reported using force in retaliation for feeling emotionally hurt more frequently than male perpetrators who reported such motivations. Women were also more likely than were men to report that they were wishing to show anger through physical aggression and to use aggression to gain control. Male perpetrators were more likely than were women to state they used force because of jealousy and in retaliation for being hit first. Follingstad et al.'s findings are interesting because there is no mention of self-defense or self-protection. In fact, they were unable to complete the chi-square analyses for these motives because the expected cell sizes were so small. Only two men and four women selected "to protect oneself" as a motive.
Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, and Tolin (1997) also examined self-stated motivations for intimate partner violence; however, their study was conducted with 66 women and 215 men who were court referred for evaluation prior to participating in the women’s and men’s domestic violence counselling programs in Wisconsin. The motives the participants stated were sorted into sorter-selected categories by male and female sorters who had no experience with domestic violence. Overall, the findings suggested more differences than similarities in the types of motivations provided by male and female perpetrators. Both males and females used violence to control their partners, express anger, and force communication. Females were more likely than males to report using violence to defend themselves from direct attack, to escape from a direct attack, or to retaliate for prior physical or emotional abuse. In contrast, males reported violence motivations primarily related to domination and physical control, punishment for unwanted behavior, coercive communication, coercive power, control of verbal behavior, and coercive emotional control.

In a sample similar to that of Hamberger et al.’s (1997), Barnett, Lee, and Thelen (1997) found that the frequency of abuse over four categories - verbal, psychological, threat, and physical - did not differ significantly by gender. However, men and women's attributions for the use of violence were quite different. While men reported significantly greater use of all forms of abuse to frighten their partners, to get their own way, and to show who was the boss, women were significantly more motivated to use all forms of abuse to protect themselves.

Consistent with previous research, Hamberger (1997) found the most frequently stated reason for using aggression among women arrested for domestic violence was self-defense/protection (24 responses fit this theme). A large proportion of women also stated
they used aggression to express feeling/tension, to stop nagging/get other to shut up, to retaliate for previous assaults, and to get their partners to talk, attend, and listen/do something.

In yet another community sample, Dasgupta (1999) examined the intended function of women's acts of violence in 32 women who had either been self-referred, arrested, or court-ordered to treatment or educational programs for abusers. According to Dasgupta, although the women shared many motivations for using violence in their relationships, the reasons can all be summed up under the theme of self-protection. The following motives were gleaned from the interviews: "I wanted him to stop abusing me", "I wanted to stand up for myself", "I wanted him to pay attention to me", "I wanted to get some control over the situation", "I wanted him to take some responsibility", "I wanted him to respect me", "I wanted him to pay for his behavior", "I wanted to hurt him because he threatened my family", and "I am tough" (p. 206-209).

Olson and Lloyd (2005) asked a college sample of 25 women who self-reported using a range of aggressive tactics during conflicts with their male partners to define initiation and why they were motivated to behave aggressively. These women gave, on average, three reasons for their aggression, thus their motives for behaving aggressively were typically complex. In the conflicts described by the participants, the four most common reasons given to explain their own aggressive behavior were based on psychological factors (46.4%), rule violations such as dissatisfaction with partner's behavior (36.2%), to gain attention and compliance (33.3%), and restoration of face threat (e.g., use of aggression to restore face) (23.2%). Similar to Follingstad et al.’s (1991) findings from a college/university sample,
self-defense was noticeably absent from the motives cited. If fact, self-defense was only cited once as a motive in the 69 conflicts described.

In an attempt to better understand gender differences and similarities in attitudes, motivation, and context among a group of males and females who have used violence in their intimate relationships, Kernsmith (2005) conducted a cross-sectional survey of 125 (53% male and 47% female) English speaking participants in batterer intervention counselling from seven agencies in the Los Angeles area. Kernsmith (2005) found that men reported using violence when their partners were nagging them (40%), when their partners started an argument or started yelling at them (32%), or when they were under a lot of stress (28%). Women most commonly reported using violence when they did not get the respect they deserved (48%), when they felt their partners were trying to control them (37%), or when their partners were not listening (30%). Getting back at a partner for hurting them emotionally was the most common motivation reported by both males and females (22% of males and 42% of females). Self-defense (17% of males and 29% of females), expressing anger (10% of males and 29% of females), and stopping a partner from doing something (15% of males and 21% of females) were commonly reported by both men and women. Women were more likely than males to report using violence in response to previous abuse, and to report this motivation more frequently, than to exert power and control. No significant differences were found between men and women in reporting the use of violence in self-defense; however, females were significantly more likely than males to report using violence to get back at or to punish their partners.

In a similar study across the United States, Stuart et al. (2006) aimed to replicate and extend the findings of Hamberger and colleagues by examining arrested women's reasons for
perpetrating partner violence. These researchers also aimed to examine whether women who were victims of severe partner violence were more likely to use violence in self-defense than were women who were victims of minor partner violence. The sample consisted of 87 women who had been arrested for violence and court-referred to batterer intervention programs in Rhode Island. The most common reasons for perpetrating partner violence were self-defense (38.7%), to show anger (39.4%), to show feelings that could not be explained in words (35.3%), because of stress (36.5%), because of not knowing what else to do with the feelings (35.2%), to feel more powerful (26.1%), and because the partner provoked violence (38.9%). The severe violence victims reported that 45.9% of their violence perpetration was in self-defense in contrast to minor violence victims reporting that 27.1% of their violence perpetration was in self-defense. Examining a similar population to that studied by Stuart et al. (2006), Ward and Muldoon (2007) used incident reports and intake interviews with women who were court referred to a batterer intervention program to answer two questions: (1) what tactics of violence and abusiveness do women employ against their male partners, and (2) what strategies shape their violence and abuse. Female violence was observed in 81% of the incident reports and psychological abuse was used in 72% of reports. The authors identified four strategies of violence from the incident reports: resistance, retaliation, punishment, and enforcement. Thirty-three percent of the women resisted the violence and abuse of their partners with violence. Thirty-five percent reacted to conflict in their relationships with punishment, and 33% reported violence in retaliation to their partners' abuse. In over one-half (51%) of the incident reports, the women's violence was characterized by enforcement. These women used enforcement in two ways: to make their partner do something and to pursue, defend, or protect something. The authors state that
women arrested for domestic violence do not resemble their male counterparts in that women's strategies for using violence seem to arise out of anger and fear rather than out of a need for control.

Weston, Marshall, and Coker (2007) examined women's motives for perpetrating intimate partner violence among a community sample of low-income women in Dallas, Texas. Of the 580 women interviewed, almost half of the women had not perpetrated any type of violence in their current or most recent relationship. Of the 263 women who had perpetrated violence, most had not used severe violence. In general, physical intimate partner violence appeared to be mutual, with few women reporting sole perpetration. Of the fourteen broad domains of motivations examined, the following motives were found to be significant: partners' negative behaviors, increase intimacy, personal problems, retaliation, childhood experiences, situation/mood, and partners' personal problems. Self-defense was not selected by this sample. Rather, retaliation was the clearest motive. These authors suggest that women may perceive their self-protective actions as retaliatory rather than self-defensive. The mean values for all motives was quite low, which suggests other motives are likely more important for these women.

Finally, in a sample of 411 college women, 35% of which experienced both victimization and perpetration of dating violence, Amar (2007) also found various motivations for women's use of intimate partner violence. The most commonly cited reason for perpetrating dating violence was fighting back or retaliation with 54% of the women indicating this was their motivation. Participants also reported acting in self-defense (52%), striking before being attacked (44%), striking without provocation (37%), in addition to anger (17%) and in response to things the partner said (7%).
In summary, intimate partner violence has in the past been attributed to social-political constructs which allowed men to exert control over women by any means possible (Dasgupta, 1999). Under this theory of violence, violence perpetrated by women was rationalized as self-defense. Although some research does suggest women use violence in self-defense, this is not the only motivation cited in the current literature. Women offer a wide range of motivations for using violence, including self-defense and retaliation for previous abuse. But women also report that they used violence to express themselves, gain control, get respect, show emotion, and get their partners to pay attention, to name a few.

The motivations articulated by women are similar to those cited by men, but differ in important ways as well. The motives given by women seem to arise out of fear and anger rather than out of a need for control, which is often stated as a motive by men: "In short, although women may have more varied motivations for assaulting their partners than self-defense and retaliation, few result in prolonged power, supremacy, and domination over their male partner" (Dasgupta, 1999, p. 202).

**Contextual Factors Giving Rise to Women’s Violence**

A consistent finding in the research is that women who use violence in their intimate relationships do so in the context of their own victimization. Twenty-five years ago, Bernard and Bernard (1983) found that in a sample of college men and women in the United States, 21% of women indicated they had been abusive towards a partner, and of these respondents, 82% stated they had also been abused by a partner. Sack et al. (1982) also found that there was a strong association between being a victim of violence and engaging in violent behavior among college students at a large mid-Atlantic university. Findings such as these have been duplicated numerous times in student populations (Cate et al., 1982; Henton, Cate, Koval,
Lloyd, & Christopher, 1983). Lewis, Travea, and Fremouw (2002) reported that 53% of undergraduate women who had experienced dating aggression reported bi-directional aggression. Similarly, Orcutt, Garcia, and Pickett (2005) found that the majority of undergraduate women who were involved in violent relationships engaged in bidirectional violence.

Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) replicated these findings in a community sample, but with a lower rate of reciprocity. In their sample of heterosexual couples in the United States, Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) reported that of the couples reporting any violence, 37.5% indicated mutual violence. Sorenson et al. (1996) reported similar findings, with over 40% of married couples using violence in their relationships in the United States, indicating that both partners are aggressive. Magdol et al. (1997) found that 41% of women who were perpetrators of severe violence were also victims. Other researchers (Fergusson et al., 2005; Kwong et al., 1999; Morse, 1995) have also found that in community samples, the vast majority of violence is mutual.

In a study of 52 women arrested for domestic violence, nearly half of the women (49%) reported being battered in a previous relationship (Hamberger, 1997). Consistent with research in other populations of women who use violence, previous victimization is a common contextual factor leading to these women's use of violence in their intimate relationships. While examining data collected from the probation files of men and women arrested and mandated to attend treatment for domestic violence in northern California, Busch and Rosenberg (2004) found that 24% of women were able to demonstrate to the police that they had been victimized in the incident preceding their arrest. In a sample of 108 women who had used physical violence against a male partner in the past six months
recruited from a court-mandated program, health clinic, family court, and local domestic violence shelter, Swan et al. (2005) found results consistent with those summarized above. These researchers report that all but six of these women had experienced either physical or sexual abuse at the hands of their partners in the previous six months. Of 199 couples associated with the military who were mandated to attend a treatment program for domestic violence, 83% of the couples engaged in bidirectional violence (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995). Finally, Stuart et al. (2006) found that women mandated to attend a batterer intervention program in Rhode Island reported perpetrating fewer violent acts than they received. These women reported perpetrating an average of 24.2 acts of physical violence, but being the victim of an average of 33.9 acts. It is clear that regardless of the population being studied, many women who use violence in their intimate relationships do so in the context of their own victimization.

Although women may use violence in the context of their own victimization, the forms of violence they use are not always equivalent to those used by their male partners. In a study of 52 battered women seeking help from one of five shelters in the Midwestern United States, Saunders (1986) found that 75% of the women engaged in some form of minor violence. Over half the sample used violence that is categorized as "severe" by the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979): kicked, bit or hit with fist, and hit or tried to hit with something. Additionally, 8% of the sample admitted to beating up their partners or using a knife, and 12% threatened their partners with a knife.

Along similar lines, Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) found that women drawn from a community sample engaged in the following violent acts at rates twice those reported by men: kicked, bit or hit the other with a fist, and threatened the other with a knife or gun.
Sorenson et al. (1996) also found that women in a community sample were more likely than men to report hitting, shoving, or throwing something at their partner in the last year. Data from the National Youth Survey in the United States suggests that women were significantly more likely than men to engage in assaults where they threw something at or slapped their partners, as well as more severe assaults where they kicked, bit, or hit their partners with a fist, and hit or tried to hit their partners with something. Prevalence rates for such acts by women are at least twice as great as those for men (Morse, 1995).

Kwong et al. (1999) studied a community sample of adult residents of Alberta, Canada and found that men and women reported using each specific act as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979) at similar rates with the exception of slapping and kicking and hitting or biting, which women reported more frequently than did men. Across the various studies reviewed, women seem to consistently report using the same forms of violence: kicked, hit or bit their partners, and hit or tried to hit their partners with something.

An inadequacy in the literature is that studies do not fully describe what is meant by "hitting" or the other forms of violence measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). Being hit in the face is more serious than being hit on the arm and being hit with a closed fist is often more damaging than being hit with an open hand. As the literature does not articulate these differences, it is unclear how and where women are hitting men and it is a possibility that men and women hit in different ways.

In more recent years, researchers have begun investigating who is responsible for starting the conflict and who initiates physical force in the dispute. Data from the National Youth Survey in the United States (Morse, 1995) suggests that both men and women agree that if they are not jointly responsible for starting the conflict then men are responsible for
initiating the conflict. However, both men and women attribute more responsibility for
initiating physical force during the fight to the women. Different findings are reported by
Kwong et al. (1999) who also studied a community sample; however, their sample was in
Canada. These authors found that both men and women saw themselves as the initiator of
violence more frequently than they saw their partner as the initiator. Again, contradictory
findings are reported by Fergusson et al. (2005) from the Christchurch Health and
Development Study. These authors report that women are more likely than men to report
initiating physical assaults, with 34% of women and only 12% of men reporting they initiated
the physical assault.

Fiebert and Gonzalez (1997) directly examined what proportion of intimate partner
violence was initiated by women in a college student population. These authors found that
the proportion of violence initiated by the female was dependent on age. Of the women
between the ages of 20 and 30 years, 32% admitted to initiating violence with their male
partners, while only 24% of women above the age of 31 years indicated they had initiated
violence. In contrast, Olson and Lloyd (2005) found that women believed they had initiated
the aggression in the majority of the conflicts (54%), their partners initiated aggression about
one third of the time (36%), and the aggression was mutually initiated in 10% of conflicts.

In a sample of women arrested for domestic violence, Hamberger (1997) found that
22% of the sample reported initiating violence 100% of the time, 37% stated their partners
initiated violence 100% of the time, 55% reported that their male partner initiated violence
more than half the time, and approximately 33% reported they initiated violence more than
half the time. Equal rates of initiation were reported by 12.5% of the women. Hamberger
(1997) also investigated which partner started the pattern of violence in the relationship.
Fifty-one percent of women reported that the pattern of violence was started by the male partner, and 27.4% of women reported they initiated the pattern of violence. In the remaining 21.5% of cases it was unclear who had started the pattern. From the research reviewed, it appears that both men and women initiate violent incidents in their relationships; however, in over half of relationships in which violence occurs the pattern of using violence was initiated by the male partner, with a female initiating the pattern in a much smaller percentage of relationships.

A few studies have found a link between intimate partner violence and substance use prior to the violent incident. The link between substance use and intimate partner violence will be discussed in further detail in the following section, but there are some findings regarding alcohol use applicable to the discussion of contextual variables giving rise to intimate partner violence. Stets and Henderson (1991) investigated the link between alcohol use and intimate partner violence and found that general drinking patterns do not predict patterns of involvement in verbal or physical altercations. However, drinking prior to a conflict significantly increases the likelihood of one using and receiving physical aggression to resolve an altercation. Similar findings were documented by Busch and Rosenberg (2004) while examining the probation files of men and women arrested and mandated to attend treatment for domestic violence. These researchers found that 67% of women and 78% of men appeared, according to police, to be under the influence of a substance at the time of their arrest for domestic violence. Ehrensaif, Moffitt, and Caspi (2004) also found similar findings. Individuals involved in intimate partner violence were intoxicated by drugs or alcohol in approximately 50% of incidents for the clinical group and 35% of incidents for the non-clinical group.
Women's use of violence appears to occur in situations involving many variables. Women who use violence in their intimate relationships typically are involved in mutually aggressive relationships, use both minor and severe acts of aggression, and are under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the incident. In these highly conflictual relationships, women are more likely than men to report injury as a result of intimate partner violence and are also more likely than men to require medical assistance. Although both men and women end up cut and bruised as a result of these conflicts, women are more likely to report severe injuries such as fractured or broken bones (Mihorean, 2005). Amar (2007) notes that women who do use physical aggression in mutually aggressive relationships may be at increased risk of injury. In her study comparing female victims of intimate partner violence who are also perpetrators with victims who are not perpetrators, she found that of the victims who reported perpetration of violence, 49% reported injury as compared to 21% of women who did not report using violence. In other words, women who fight back more than double their odds of being injured during a physical altercation with their partner.

*Individual and Peripheral Risk Markers for Violence*

Research has found associations between using violence in an intimate relationship and a number of socioeconomic, demographic, personal and familial factors. Intimate partner violence is found across all socioeconomic groups; however, it is more prevalent among lower socioeconomic classes (Dowd, Leisring, & Rosenbaum, 2005; Sorenson et al., 1996) and younger individuals. Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) found that younger couples had three times the rate of intimate partner violence than that reported by middle-aged or older couples. Problematically, such factors are not able to fully explain intimate partner violence. Additionally, many individual level factors such as social learning, personality
traits, attitudes towards violence, and behavioral problems have been linked with intimate partner violence.

The idea of modeling or social learning has been implicated in the field of intimate partner violence as a cause of aggression. The research in this area suggests that exposure to violence in childhood, either directly or indirectly, is linked to later perpetration and victimization; however, it does not account entirely for the phenomenon. Bernard and Bernard (1983) studied abuse among college men and women and found that 73% of men who used violence had experienced or observed abuse in their families of origin and 74% of these men used the same form of abuse on their partners that they had observed. Similarly, 50% of women who used violence against their male partners had experienced or observed abuse in their families of origin, and 77% of these women used the same form of abuse they had observed in childhood. In a similar population, Breslin et al. (1990) found that women’s self-reported aggression was significantly related to their reports of any interparental aggression. In a one-year longitudinal study of a student population, White and Humphrey (1994) discovered that the best predictor of physical aggression towards an intimate partner was the past use of physical aggression, along with family violence and past victimization.

Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, and Silva (1998) found in a longitudinal investigation of the health, development, and behavior of a birth cohort in New Zealand, that family conflict and harsh discipline during middle childhood and negative family relations and family conflict in adolescence were associated with the perpetration of partner abuse in women.

Contradictory results were found by Lewis et al. (2002) in a sample of undergraduate students enrolled at West Virginia University. These authors found that females who were involved in bi-directional aggression were more likely than non-violent women to have
witnessed their fathers physically assault their mothers. However, the females who were the only perpetrators of aggression in their relationship did not report significantly more intraparental violence.

In a study very similar to that of Magdol et al. (1998), White and Chen (2002) also found that women with a history of childhood victimization reported higher levels of intimate partner violence perpetration than did women without such a history.

In a sample of abused and neglected children and a matched control group followed prospectively into young adulthood, White and Widom (2003) found that significantly more women who had been abused and neglected as children, as compared to controls, had ever hit their partners and hit first more than once. Even after controlling for demographic variables known to be associated with intimate partner violence (age and race/ethnicity), childhood abuse and neglect was a significant predictor of ever hitting a partner for both men and women. According to White and Widom (2003), women in their sample who had been abused and neglected in childhood showed rates of intimate partner violence perpetration approximately twice as large as national estimates in the United States.

Fang and Corso (2008) also examined the direct relationship between childhood physical abuse and/or neglect and later intimate partner violence perpetration in a nationally representative sample of adolescents followed into young adulthood (National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health). Additionally these authors examined the indirect effect that childhood maltreatment has on later intimate partner violence perpetration through the presence of youth violence. After controlling for variables known to be associated with intimate partner violence perpetration (e.g., family poverty) these authors found that being involved in violent behavior as a adolescent increased the likelihood of intimate partner
violence perpetration by 7.78% for women. Additionally, for women, being neglected as a child not only had a positive and significant direct effect (6.46%) on adult intimate partner violence perpetration, but also a positive and significant indirect effect on adult intimate partner violence perpetration through its effect on adolescent violent behavior. In regards to childhood physical abuse, these authors found that being physically abused as a child had a positive and significant direct effect (7.96%) on young adult intimate partner violence perpetration for women.

Kaura and Allen (2004) also found parental violence to be a strong predictor of dating violence perpetration in a sample of undergraduate students in the United States. However, these authors found that only violence experienced from the opposite gendered parent was a significant predictor of dating violence. For men, only mothers’ violence predicted dating violence perpetration, and for women, only fathers’ violence predicted dating violence perpetration.

Finally, in a study of participants in a batterer intervention program, Kernsmith (2005) reports that respondents reported high levels of exposure to family violence. In fact, only 2.9% of the sample reported no prior victimization in their families of origin. Sexual abuse and physical assault as adults were also common experiences for both males and females, although females were significantly more likely than males to report these experiences.

In an examination of the role gender and gender orientation play in the way intimates manage conflict in their relationships, Thompson (1991) found that a masculine gender orientation predicted involvement in dating violence for both men and women in a sample of undergraduate university and college students. Similarly, White and Chen (2002) found that
women who adhere to a less traditional gender role orientation report higher rates of intimate partner violence perpetration.

Ehrensaft et al. (2004) found that abusive women scored similarly to non-abusive women on all but one personality scale - the aggression scale. Abusive men, on the other hand, were distinguishable from non-abusive males by a number of personality characteristics. These authors concluded that female perpetrators of intimate partner violence are no more pathological than other women, but they are more aggressive.

Twenty-five years ago, a group of researchers examined attitudes towards premarital violence in two populations: university students (Cate et al., 1983) and high school students (Henton et al., 1983). In both studies the researchers found that, although neither group condoned violence in intimate relationships, both men and women who had been involved in abusive relationships had more favorable attitudes towards premarital violence than individuals who had not been involved in abusive pairings.

Lewis et al. (2002) found that both victims and perpetrators of relationship violence scored lower than non-violent controls on the Agapic love style, which is a selfless, all giving love. In this student population the majority of individuals involved in intimate partner violence were involved in bi-directional violence, so it is not surprising that both perpetrators and victims scored lower on measures of self-less, all giving love since some victims were also perpetrators and some perpetrators were also victims.

In an investigation of the link between beliefs about aggression and physical aggression to partners, Archer and Graham-Kevan (2003) found that there was a significant correlation between holding instrumental beliefs about aggression and women reporting perpetrating aggressive acts on the Conflict Tactics Scale. There was also a significant
correlation for women between instrumental beliefs and injuring a partner. A second attitude linked with the perpetration of intimate partner violence is relationship-power dissatisfaction. Kaura and Allen (2004) found that dating violence perpetration increases as relationship-power dissatisfaction increases. Dating power satisfaction has the same predictive power for men and women.

While studying an unselected birth cohort followed since birth, Magdol et al. (1997) found that at the age of 21 years perpetrators and victims of severe intimate partner violence were more likely than those not involved in violence to report more symptoms of alcohol dependence and to report having used a variety of different illicit drugs. These same individuals scored significantly higher than non-violent individuals on all mental health and criminality scales. With the same population, Magdol et al. (1998) found an association between the following measures of problem behavior and subsequent physical abuse to a partner by women at the age of 21 years: adolescent conduct problems, aggressive delinquency, and substance abuse. The longitudinal correlation found between current partner abuse and past adolescent substance abuse provides evidence that reliance on drugs and alcohol often precedes partner abuse, a conclusion that was difficult to make from retrospective self-reports.

In another longitudinal study, the Christchurch Health and Development Study, Fergusson, Boden, and Horwood (2008) found very similar results to those reported by Magdol et al. (1998). These authors found that higher levels of intimate partner violence perpetration, by both men and women, were associated with early aggressive behavior, conduct disorder at ages 15 to 18, alcohol abuse/dependence at ages 15 to 18, illicit substance abuse/dependence at ages 15 to 18, major depression at ages 15 to 18, and anxiety disorder at
ages 15 to 18. White and Chen (2002) also found that problem drinking is significantly related to perpetration of violence for both men and women and that partner drinking is also a significant predictor of female perpetration and victimization.

In a comparison of hazardous and non-hazardous drinkers in a sample of women arrested for violence and court-referred to batterer intervention programs in Rhode Island, Stuart et al. (2003) found differences in these two populations. Relative to the non-hazardous group, hazardous drinkers reported significantly greater frequency of perpetration of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse toward their relationships partners and also reported causing more injuries.

While analyzing data from Wave 1 of the National Survey of Families and Households in the United States, Anderson (2002) found that even after victimization was controlled for, depression in women was significantly associated with violence perpetration. In their longitudinal study of adolescent and young adult development, White and Chen (2002) also found a link between negative affect and higher rates of intimate partner violence perpetration. In a comparison of men and women arrested, convicted, and placed on probation for assaulting an opposite sex intimate partner, some differences emerged in regards to the mental health of the two populations. Female offenders were more likely than male offenders to score in the clinical range for delusional disorder, major depression, bipolar disorder, somatoform disorder, and thought disorders. Females were also more likely than males to show evidence of compulsive personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, and borderline personality. In the female population, 95% of the sample had elevated personality subscales on one or more personality measures as compared to 69.8% of the male population. These findings seem to suggest that mental illness is more likely to be
associated with female's violence than male's violence. Fergusson et al. (2005) also found a connection between mental illness and violence. These authors found adjustment problems in adolescence and an early onset of psychiatric disorder to be antecedent factors in domestic violence perpetration.

Violent couples are found in all socioeconomic and age groups. However, Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) found that younger couples had three times the rate of violence in their relationships than that found in middle-aged or older couples. Young age has been linked to intimate partner violence perpetration repeatedly over the past 20 years (Anderson, 2002; Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988; Carrado et al., 1996; Sommer, Barnes & Murray, 1992; Sorenson et al., 1996). Individuals under the age of 30 years consistently report rates of violence exceeding those of older adults. For example, studies have found that the incidence of violence perpetration by women was higher in the less than 35 age group than any other age groupings (Carrado et al., 1996; Sommer et al., 1992). A slightly different finding was documented by Stets and Henderson (1991). Consistent with previous research, these authors' findings show that younger daters were more likely than older daters to use both minor and severe physical aggression, but this effect disappeared when the low socioeconomic status of the younger individuals was taken into account. In an American study, Sommer et al. (1992) found that in addition to young age, the only other demographic variable associated with violence perpetration was race: respondents of non-white ethnicity (Hispanic and African American) reported higher rates of intimate partner violence.

Other researchers have linked various other demographic variables to the perpetration of intimate partner violence. In their study of a community sample, Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) found that violence occurs more frequently among cohabitive couples than among
those that are married and that childless couples have higher incidence rates of violence than couples with children. Women who were employed full-time outside the home were somewhat more likely than women who worked part-time or were homemakers to report perpetrating violence. Their findings seem to contradict findings reported by other researchers. Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) speculate that full-time employment makes women less economically dependent on their male partners and thus less vulnerable to abuse. Sorenson et al. (1996) investigated patterns and gender differences in intimate partner violence in a nationally representative sample and found that compared to respondents whose highest education was a high school diploma, those individuals who had less education were significantly more likely to report physical violence in response to marital arguments. They also found that respondents whose annual household income was less than $25,000 were more likely to report physical violence than those individuals with higher annual household incomes. Magdol et al. (1997) and Magdol et al. (1998) also linked intimate partner violence with higher rates of unemployment and lower levels of education than those achieved by a control group. White and Chen (2002) also found that a lower level of education was associated with higher rates of intimate partner violence perpetration among women.

Magdol et al. (1998) identified some additional demographic variables linked with perpetration of intimate partner violence. They found that the absence of a biological parent in adolescence was a predictor of women's later perpetration of partner abuse. Similarly, as compared to women who do not become involved in abusive relationships, Ehrensaft et al. (2004) found that women who became involved in abusive relationships as adults experienced more caretaker changes in childhood and spent more years with a single parent.
Consistent with the research reviewed, Dowd, Leisring, and Rosenbaum (2005) found that women in treatment for domestic violence tended to be of low socioeconomic status, had dropped out of high school prior to completion, had children at a young age, and had few job skills. Similar to the findings of Ehrensaft et al. (2004), Dowd et al. found that the majority of women in treatment for domestic violence were raised with at least one parent absent, and a large proportion were raised either by relatives, in foster care, or in institutions. These authors speculate that these childhood disruptions could be attributable to high rates of parental substance abuse, interparental violence, and childhood physical and sexual abuse.

Women's Experiences of Using Violence

Very little research has been done to examine women's experience of using violence. Dasgupta (1999) interviewed 32 women who had either been self-referred, arrested, or court ordered to treatment or educational programs with the aim of expanding our understanding of women who use violence. Her result indicated that almost all the women in these programs were currently, or had previously been, abused in an intimate relationship. The majority of the women also indicated that they had been involved in many abusive relationships and had learned to strike preemptively to avoid the anticipation of waiting for their partners to strike them.

Miller and Meloy (2006) observed women enrolled in domestic violence programs for six months and sorted the women into three groups: generalized violent behavior, frustration response behavior, and defensive behavior. Generalized violent behavior accounted for about 5% of the women. This group of women used violence in many circumstances, not only against their intimate partners. According to these authors, these women cannot be labeled batterers as their violence did not establish or reestablish control.
over their partners. The women used violence in response to an immediate incident with minimal consequences. The second category, frustration response ("end of her rope") behavior, accounted for 30% of the women in the domestic violence programs. These women often had long histories of victimization either at the hands of their current partners or in previous relationships. They reacted violently when they could do nothing else to stop the abuse. Similar to the findings of Dasgupta (1999), this group of women often struck preemptively to avoid the anticipation of their partners striking them. For this group of women, their violent acts did not change the power dynamics of their relationships nor alter the abuse. The women's use of force suggests they were following a script in which they had learned to use force as a reaction to conflict; violence was a last resort. The final group of women was characterized by defensive behavior. This category accounted for 65% of the women. Women in this category used violence as a means to escape a current or anticipated violent episode at the hands of their partners. They used violence in self-defense or to defend their children from a violent attack they knew was coming. These women had long histories of victimization and felt that they had no other option but to fight back.

Seamans et al. (2007) conducted a recent study of women's experiences of using violence in their intimate relationships. These researchers interviewed 13 women who had sought counselling at urban battering intervention programs about their feelings, attitudes, and behaviors regarding their violence: "The violence these women perpetrated did not spring from the blue—for most of them it was just another chapter in a lifetime of experience with violence and abuse" (Seamans et al., 2007, p. 52). Nine major themes were identified: childhood abuse, prior partner violence, current partner violence, retaliation for emotional abuse, violence and children, asking for help and not getting it and the mandatory arrest
policy, power and control, violence motivated by the need to be heard, reaching a breaking point, and posttraumatic stress disorder and dissociative states. All of the women experienced child abuse in some form or another: "Beyond the numbers, women's stories of physical abuse at the hands of their parents varied in severity, from occasionally being struck with a belt as 'discipline,' to being traumatized and terrified" (Seamans et al., 2007, p. 52). In addition to physical abuse, almost all of the women also experienced psychological abuse or neglect as children as the majority came from chaotic homes with parents involved in crime and drugs/alcohol or parents too overwhelmed by their own lives to care for their children. Their victimization carried on into their adult lives as most women in this study reported that they had been physically abused by previous partners. This group of women learned from their previous experiences that sitting back did not stop the violence. Many entered their current relationships in a state Miller and Meloy (2006) referred to as "the end of her rope" with little tolerance for abuse of any form. According to Seamans and colleagues, many of the women in this study used violence not only in self-defense but also because they refused to see themselves as victims. These women used violence in retaliation for both physical and psychological abuse.

Seamans et al. (2007) found an unexpected relationship between violence and children. Thirty-five percent of the women discussed their violence in the context of the birth of their children. Having children added to the stress these women were already enduring and pushed them to their breaking point. Many of the women sought out help from friends, family, and the police, only to be turned down or arrested. With no support, the women were left with few options.
Over half the women in this sample reported their partners used many tactics to control them, including financial deprivation, isolation, monitoring their behavior, and threatening pets, children, and other family members. In contrast to their partners, control was rarely a goal for these women. A large majority of the women reported being moved to violence when their partners refused to talk to them or ignored them. Finally, over half of the women reported losing control, and some apparently dissociated when they became violent as they did not remember their violence.

Summary

Quantitative surveys of nationally representative samples, college/university students, and clinical samples have all demonstrated that women use violence in their intimate relationships to varying degrees. The research in this field is plagued by contradictory findings with college/university samples suggesting women use violence at rates similar to or higher than those of men and police reports stating women are predominately the victims of intimate partner violence. An examination of the motivations women provide for their violence reveals that women use violence not only in self-defense, but also for expressive and instrumental means. Women often appear to use violence in the context of their own victimization, often under the influence of drugs and alcohol. As is clear from the literature reviewed, much of the available literature on intimate partner violence contains reports of quantitative approaches that quantify the experience and identify those at risk. Although important, these approaches fail to describe the experience and understanding from the perspectives of and in the language used by the women who use violence in their intimate relationships. The present study begins to fill this gap. Chapter Three will discuss the philosophical basis, clarify terms, and describe the methodology for the present study.
Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology

According to Creswell (2005), qualitative research is suitable for research problems in which little is known about the phenomenon of study and more must be learned from individuals familiar with the experience. The selected research question, what is the experience of young adult women who use physical aggression in their intimate relationships, lends itself to phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of the lived experience or the life world. "The 'life world' is understood as what we experience pre-reflectively, without resorting to categorization or conceptualization, and quite often includes what is taken for granted or those things that are common sense" (Laverty, 2003, p. 4).

The approach followed in this study was transcendental phenomenology, which focuses on describing experiences without the influence of the researcher's own perspectives on the phenomenon so that a fresh point of view is obtained of the phenomenon (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007). "Meaning is the core of transcendental phenomenology of science, a design for acquiring and collecting data that explicates the essences of human experience" (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 2). Transcendental phenomenology was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this research project as I was searching for an understanding of the meaning of these participants' experiences. In addition to the previously mentioned reason, transcendental phenomenology was also selected because Moustakas (1994) clearly outlines systematic procedures and detailed data analysis steps for the researcher. As Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) point out, these clearly outlined steps are ideal for less experienced researchers, which I am. The transcendental approach of using systematic procedures is also consistent with my own philosophical view of balancing both
the objective and subjective approaches to acquiring knowledge and using detailed and rigorous steps to data analysis.

This chapter includes further clarification of phenomenology through a discussion of the conceptual framework of transcendental phenomenology and methodology as well as explanations of terms, participant selection, research procedures, data collection and analysis, methodological rigor and ethical considerations.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is not only a research method often employed by qualitative researchers, but also a philosophy (Dowling, 2007). Edmund Husserl is credited with developing phenomenology (Laverty, 2003; Wertz, 2005). However, its origins can be traced back to the work of Kant, Hegel, Descartes and others (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Hegel was the first to articulate the concept of phenomenology. "For Hegel, phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

According to Dowling (2007), there are as many styles of phenomenology as there are phenomenologists and these styles fall into various schools of phenomenological thought. Although these schools of thought have many commonalities, they are also distinct. The result is many perspectives spanning various paradigms including positivist, with the work of Husserl, to post-positivist (Merleau-Ponty), interpretivist (Heidegger) and constructivist (Gadamer) - all being considered phenomenology (Dowling, 2007).

The present study follows the work of Edmund Husserl [1859-1938], Husserl's phenomenology assumes that an unbiased description of the subject matter is the starting
point of scientific knowledge (Wertz, 2005). Unlike other theorists, Husserl rejected the
concept of Cartesian dualism - the idea that objects in the external world exist independently
from the individual (Groenewald, 2004). The main focus for Husserl was the study of
phenomena as they appear to consciousness (Koch, 1995; Laverty, 2003), or the world as
lived by the person, not reality as separate from the person (Laverty, 2003). Researchers
applying Husserlian or transcendental phenomenology are concerned with the lived
experiences of people who have encountered or are involved with the issue being researched
(Groenewald, 2004) and the meaning of this experience for these individuals (Koch, 1995;
Laverty, 2003). The life-world or lived experience, a Husserlian concept, is not readily
accessible to us because it often constitutes information that is taken for granted or
considered common sense. The task of the phenomenological researcher is to return to these
taken-for-granted experiences and re-examine them to bring to consciousness the essences or
determining factors of the phenomenon of study (Koch, 1995; Laverty, 2003). This
recognition that experience is the ultimate ground and meaning of knowledge is central to
Husserl's phenomenology.

*Conceptual Framework*

Transcendental phenomenology is intimately connected with two key concepts:
intentionality and intuition. According to Moustakas (1994), intentionality refers to
consciousness, the process where the mind is directed to the phenomenon of study. Dowling
(2006), states that intentionality is the belief that every conscious act is associated with some
object and implies that all mental acts have meaning. This conscious awareness of the
phenomenon is the starting point for increasing one's knowledge, because by directing one's
attention one can develop a description of that particular reality (Laverty, 2003). Each
conscious act is directed toward something, be it real or imaginary, by intentionality. Every intentional experience is comprised of a noema and noesis. The noema is not the real object, but rather the phenomenon as it appears in consciousness, our perception of the object, which varies based on the vantage point of the perceiver. The noesis includes the acts of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging. Each of these acts is embedded with meanings that are hidden from consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). The essential function of intentionality is the working out of the noema-noesis relationship, the textural (noematic) and structural (noetic) dimensions of phenomena and the determining of meanings and essences of phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

The second key concept associated with transcendental phenomenology is intuition. Spiegelberg (1994) describes intuition as the act in which a phenomenon is explored and considered directly. The aim of intuition is to produce solid and true judgments regarding the object being attended to (Moustakas, 1994). For Husserl, intuition is the first step in deriving knowledge of human experiences. Through the intuitive-reflective process all things become clear via a transformation of what is seen.

**Clarification of Terms**

**Young Adulthood**

The concept of young adulthood is not clearly defined in the literature. Some researchers consider the adolescent years as the beginning of young adulthood, while others mark the beginning of young adulthood at the age of majority, 19 years of age in British Columbia. The end of this developmental stage is also unclear with the end point ranging from the early 30s to 40 years of age depending on the researcher. Erikson (1993) states that the stage of life known as young adulthood occurs between the ages of 19 and 40, hence, for
this study, young adulthood was defined as beginning at the age of 19 and ending at the age of 40.

Physical Aggression

For the purposes of this study, only physical aggression will be considered as intimate partner violence. The behaviors that will be accepted as forms of physical aggression are taken from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The behaviors that meet this criteria include the following: threw something at my partner that could hurt, twisted my partner’s arm or hair, pushed or shoved my partner, grabbed my partner, slapped my partner, used a knife or gun on my partner, punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt, choked my partner, slammed my partner against a wall, beat up my partner, burned or scalded my partner on purpose, and kicked my partner. To be consistent with previous research (Magdol et al., 1997), for an individual to have been a perpetrator of physical aggression, she will have reported engaging in any of the construct related behaviors taken from the Conflict Tactics Scale, Form R (Straus et al., 1996) during the past 24 months.

Intimate Relationship

At the simplest level an intimate relationship is one in which intimate interactions occur on a regular and predictable basis. There is a history of repeated intimate interactions and each partner in the relationship can count on and expect intimate interactions with the other at acceptable intervals. Partners have warm feelings towards each other that over time would develop into more enduring affection, regard, or love for the partner that would persist even when the partners are in conflict. These people also share time and activities together in a positive way (Prager, 1995).
For the purposes of this study, only heterosexual intimate relationships were explored. Consistent with previous research, an intimate relationship is defined as a relationship with a romantic partner that has lasted at least one month (Magdol et al., 1997).

**Participants**

The criteria for inclusion in this study were that participants were: (a) female, (b) between the ages of 19 and 40, and (c) had used some form of physical aggression against a male intimate partner within the previous 24 months. Eight women between the ages of 21 and 40 years who had used physical aggression in their intimate heterosexual relationships volunteered for the study. The mean age of the participants was 32 years old. Six participants self-identified as Aboriginal and two identified as Caucasian. The highest level of education completed varied widely amongst the women with one women completing elementary school, one with some high school, two completed high school, two had some university/college, one participant had completed college, and one chose not to complete the demographic questionnaire. Finally, the majority of the participants had an annual household income of under $10,000. Other demographic factors such as relationship status, relationship length, and number of children are included in Table 1.

Four participants were single, three were cohabiting, and one participant chose not to complete the questionnaire. The majority of the participants had been in more than one relationship in the past 24 months and relationships lasted from three months to 22 years. Additional information about participants' relationship history is provided in Table 2.

**Procedures**

*Recruitment and Informed Consent*

The participants were recruited via posters (Appendix A and Appendix B) that had
Table 1

**Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Carolyn</th>
<th>Jackie</th>
<th>Veronica</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Josephine</th>
<th>Molly</th>
<th>Sunny</th>
<th>Amber</th>
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<td>40,000-49,999</td>
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</table>

*note Veronica chose not to complete the questionnaire*
## Table 2

### Relationship Information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Carolyn</th>
<th>Jackie</th>
<th>Veronica</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Josephine</th>
<th>Molly</th>
<th>Sunny</th>
<th>Amber</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-habiting</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># in last 24 months</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length (in years)</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.58</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.916</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td># Involving violence</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Involving mutual violence</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Involving partner-only violence</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Involving participant-only violence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*note Veronica chose not to complete the questionnaire*
been distributed to a variety of women-focused agencies in a midsized city in British Columbia, Canada as well as the University of Northern British Columbia or through an advertisement that appeared in a local newspaper (Appendix C).

Interested women contacted the researcher by phone and were screened to determine if they met the inclusion criteria (Appendix D). A face-to-face interview was scheduled with those women who were interested in participating and met the inclusionary criteria.

At the time of the interview, the participant was provided with an information sheet (Appendix E), informed consent form (Appendix F), community counselling resource list (Appendix G), demographics questionnaire (Appendix H), physical aggression questionnaire (Appendix I), and a participant contact form (Appendix J). Prior to data collection, participants read the information sheet, signed the informed consent form and filled out the participant contact form. The contact form was necessary for arranging follow up interviews for further data collection and verification purposes. After the completion of the interview, participants were asked to complete the demographic and physical aggression questionnaires. Participants received $30 cash at the beginning of the interview as compensation for their involvement in the study.

Data Collection

The present study utilized the data collection method suggested by Moustakas (1994). According to Moustakas (1994), "typically in the phenomenological investigation the long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question" (p. 114). The phenomenological interview is an informal and interactive process through which the researcher aims to gather a comprehensive account of the participant's experience of the phenomenon of study.
Moustakas (1994) states that phenomenological interviews often begin with a brief social conversation or meditative activity to facilitate the development of a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. This type of conversation preceded data collection as it is the interviewer's responsibility to create a climate in which the research participant feels comfortable and will respond openly, honestly and expansively. Examples of social conversations that occurred include discussion regarding the ease/difficulty participants had getting to the interview location, weather, and participants' reasons for volunteering to participate in the study. Following this opening, I asked the participants to take a few moments to focus on the experience, moments that impacted them greatly or increased their awareness of the phenomenon, and then describe the experience as fully as possible. In phenomenological research the researcher may develop interview questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the phenomenon at hand in advance; however, these may vary or not be used at all during the course of the interviews as participants shared their stories of the experience being investigated. In the present study I asked questions adapted from Moustakas' (1994) general interview guide (Appendix K); however, the interview was flexible and follow up probes were used to clarify each participant's experience. At times follow up probes were necessary to keep the interview on track and to focus in on the meaning of the participant's experience. An example of a follow up probe used to highlight the meaning of the experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships is:

"What was your intention? What were you trying to do?"

All interviews were audiotape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a transcriptionist to ensure each participant's experience was captured authentically. The transcriptionist signed an Oath of Confidentiality (Appendix L) when hired. Up to two interviews for data
collection and data verification purposes were scheduled with the participants. All of the interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the women and occurred at the counselling lab located at the University of Northern British Columbia.

The methodology of transcendental phenomenology is comprised of three core processes that facilitate the search for knowledge: epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation.

Epoche. The epoche process occurs prior to data collection while transcendental-phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation occur during data analysis. Moustakas (1994) describes epoche as a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to avoid the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving the world. When one engages in epoche, the everyday, ordinary understandings, judgments and manners of knowing are set aside and the phenomena are re-examined in an original, naive and open manner. Epoche does not question or doubt everything. What is doubted are "scientific 'facts,' the knowing of things in advance, from an external base rather than from internal reflection and meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). With our prejudgments, biases and preconceived ideas set aside, we are able to approach whatever appears in our consciousness with openness and only that which enters consciousness in a novel manner has any validity in determining truth (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) suggests that prior to the interview the investigator engage in the epoche process to set aside past associations with the phenomenon, understandings, facts or biases, in order to minimize the chance these ideas will direct or impact the interview in some manner. To engage in the epoche process I reflected on my previous experiences, judgments and preconceived ideas prior to each interview. I set aside any application they
might have to this research by disconnecting myself from these memories. This process was repeated until I felt a sense of closure. As I moved towards receptiveness, I was able to concentrate more fully, and to listen to each participant's story without influencing the participant's experiences with my own habits of thinking, feeling, and seeing. At times during the interviews I noticed my preconceived ideas floating back into my mind and coloring the way I heard the participants' stories. When this occurred I simply observed my judgments, set them aside, and refocused on the participant. To aid the epoche process, I kept a journal in which I journaled prior to and after each interview. This journal contained observations, notes, and reflections I made regarding myself and the participant during the interviews. For example, prior to interviewing the first participant, I noted in my journal that I was both nervous and excited. I also noted that I was unsure how the interview would progress and I was worried that the participant would not attend as I had two participants before this participant not attend. During the interview I noticed that I was worrying about the "richness" of the data and whether or not I was using leading questions. I was also aware that the participant's story was really impacting her and I. Regarding the participant, I noted in my journal that the participant presented with sad affect. Throughout the interview she sat with her legs crossed, body leaning forward and tightly held a tissue. At the end of the interview she cried about the violence she had inflicted on her partners. I noted in my journal that speaking about her experiences seemed very difficult for this participant and appeared to drain her of energy.

Data Analysis

The final two core processes that facilitate the search for knowledge in transcendental phenomenology - transcendental-phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation -
occur during data analysis. After all of the interviews with the participants had been conducted and transcribed, I analyzed the data using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data. This process is comprised of seven steps in which the researcher engages with the complete transcription of each participant.

*Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction*

The first step in which to engage when analyzing data using Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data is horizontalization or recognizing that every statement contains equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Each horizon of the research interview adds meaning, clarifies the situation in which the experience occurs, and illuminates the thoughts and feelings associated with the experience. To achieve horizontalization I listed every expression that was relevant to the experience being investigated. Next, I reduced and eliminated some expressions to determine the invariant constituents. To determine which expressions are the invariant constituents, I tested each expression against the following two requirements: (1) "Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding it?" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) and (2) "Is it possible to abstract and label it?" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). If both these conditions were met the expression was identified as a horizon of the experience. Redundant, vague and overlapping expressions were eliminated and those that remained were the invariant constituents of the experience.

Related invariant constituents were grouped together under a thematic label and these groupings became the core themes of the experience. Once the core themes were identified I validated the identified themes by checking the invariant constituents and their related themes against the complete transcription of the research participant’s experience. If the
invariant constituents and themes were not either explicitly expressed in the transcription or compatible with the experiences expressed by the participant they were deemed irrelevant to the experience and deleted (Moustakas, 1994).

From the validated invariant constituents and themes I constructed, for each participant, an individual textural description of the experience. This description captured the thoughts, feelings, struggles, situation, conditions, and relationships that accompany the experience under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). The individual textural description included verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

Imaginative Variation

Following the creation of individual textural descriptions of the experience for each participant, I constructed an individual structural description of the experience for each participant based on the individual textural description and imaginative variation. The task of imaginative variation is to discover numerous possible meanings through the use of one's imagination. By varying the frames of reference and examining the phenomenon from various perspectives, roles, or functions one can discover the structural essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The structural description of the essences of the experience presents a picture of the conditions that precede the experience and those connected with it (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) articulates the following four steps of imaginative variation:

1. Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meanings;
2. Recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon;
3. Considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon, such as the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others;

4. Searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon (p. 99).

The individual structural description provided a detailed account of the underlying dynamics of the experience. It included the qualities that accounted for how feelings and thoughts connected with the experience came to be and what conditions evoke the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This description described the conditions, situations or contexts in which the participant experienced the phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007).

The next step was to construct for each participant a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, which incorporated the invariant constituents and themes. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of the experience, I developed composite textural and structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experience, which represented all the participants as a unit. The final step was to integrate the composite textural and structural descriptions to form a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience.

Member Checking

Once the individual textural-structural and composite descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experience were constructed from the data, I asked participants to examine them and make any corrections or additions they deemed necessary to accurately
portray their individual experiences. This was one component of data validation. Creswell et al. (2007) refers to this approach to data validation as member checking.

Journaling

During the data analysis stage, in addition to the journal kept to document observations, notes and reflections on myself and the participants, an additional journal was kept. It contained all ideas developed during the data analysis process and also served to document any decisions made and the rationale for these conclusions. For example, the first time I sorted the codes into themes I found eight themes. After discussing these themes with my supervisor, and examining these themes in relation to my research question, I wondered whether these themes truly related to my research question. I returned to the data, decided to keep one theme and reorganized the data so new themes emerged.

Rigor in Qualitative Research

Sandelowski (1986) articulates four concepts which define rigor in qualitative research: credibility, fittingness, auditability, and confirmability. The following section will discuss these factors and highlight strategies I used to establish rigor in the study.

Credibility

Credibility is a measure of the authenticity of the research being conducted. "A qualitative study is credible when it presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own" (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 30). Beck (1993) provides a series of questions that can be used to evaluate the credibility of a qualitative study. These questions are:
1. Did the researcher keep in-depth field notes regarding the researcher-informant relationship?

2. Were the effects of the researcher's presence on the nature of the data collected considered?

3. Did the researchers keep filed notes of their actions, interactions, and subjective states during the investigation?

4. Did the researchers discuss their own behavior and experiences in relation to the informant's experiences?

5. Did the researchers become so involved with the informants that they "went native", that is, had difficulty separating their own experiences from the informant's?

6. Were multiple methods of data collection (triangulation) used to determine the congruence of the results among them?

7. Were the readers provided with rich excerpts from the transcripts or field notes?

8. Did the researchers validate the findings with the informants?

9. Did the researchers search for negative instances of categories or discounting evidence for tentative constructs?

10. Were data analysis procedures reviewed by a judge panel to prevent researcher bias and selective inattention?

11. Do the readers view the findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences? (Beck, 1993, p. 265).

To meet the criteria of credibility, I kept in-depth field notes, which included observations, notes and reflections on myself and the participants as well as our interactions. I also journaled in a reflective journal, using the process outlined by Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson and
Poole (2004), prior to and after each interview to maintain an openness to the participants' descriptions of their experiences and an awareness of my role in the research. This three phase process included: (1) **pre-reflection preparation**, in which I became aware of issues that might require bracketing prior to the interview; (2) **reflection**, in which I reviewed and described situations, the progression of the research as well as the extent to which bracketing was achieved; and (3) **learning**, which identified any new learning that had occurred as a result of the situation or reflection.

During pre-reflection preparation I journaled about issues such as biases, assumptions, and preconceived ideas. For example, prior to conducting the eighth interview I brought into my awareness the experiences of the previous participants. Items I journaled about included the impact of alcohol and drug use, exposure to violence in their family of origins, and previous abusive relationships on the experience of using physical aggression on intimate relationships. I wrote about these issues as a way to bring them to awareness so I could bracket them prior to the interview. During reflection I examined the interview that had just occurred. For example, during the eighth interview I noticed some previous learning coming to mind during the interview. Finally, during the learning phase I reflected on the interview and identified any new learning. An example of learning comes from my journal about the sixth interview - I noticed that I had been more successful at keeping the interview on track. Through reflection I was able to identify the comments I had used to re-direct the conversation back to the phenomenon.

Credibility is enhanced by providing the reader with rich excerpts from the transcripts. In addition, I returned to the participants to validate the findings. Two attempts were made to contact each participant. Unfortunately I was only able to locate three of the eight women to
verify the data. Of these three participants, two did not have any edits or additions to make to the findings. The third participant mentioned she was unable to relate to a theme name. Based on her input the theme name was changed and adapted to better portray the participant's experiences. My supervisor also reviewed excerpts from the third participant's interview to confirm that the participants' experience did in fact fit with the theme in question. Finally, data analysis procedures were reviewed by my supervisor to prevent researcher bias and selective inattention.

**Fittingness**

Fittingness is a measure of the relevance of the findings to others in similar situations. According to Sandelowski (1986), "A study meets the criterion of fittingness when its findings can 'fit' into contexts outside the study situation and when its audience views its findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences" (p.32). Additionally, research that is well grounded in the phenomenon being studied and reflects both characteristic and uncharacteristic elements meets the criteria for fittingness.

Beck (1993) offers a series of questions to assess the degree of fittingness in a study. These questions include:

1. Did the researchers establish the typicality of the informants and their responses?
2. Did the researchers check for the representativeness of the data as a whole?
3. Were the data made to appear more similar or congruent than they really were?
4. Did the study results fit the data from which they were generated? (p. 265).

I used these questions provided by Beck (1993) as a guide to accomplish the aim of achieving a high degree of fittingness in this study. I continually examined the data analysis process to ensure the textural and structural descriptions developed from the data were
congruent with the experiences described by the participants. I also included direct quotes from the interviews in the descriptions rendered to ensure the descriptions are congruent with the participants' experiences. Finally, the thematic descriptions were reviewed by a professional who works with female victims/perpetrators of intimate partner violence to ensure the findings were congruent with the experiences of women who use physical aggression in intimate relationships on a larger scale.

Auditability

In qualitative research, auditability is the measure of consistency. Auditability is achieved when another researcher is able to follow what is known as the decision trail and find comparable results. The decision trail is all the decisions the researcher made regarding data analysis. Beck (1993) provides researchers with a number of questions to determine the auditability of a study. These questions include:

1. Was a tape recorder or other mechanical devise used to record the interviews?
2. Was an in-depth description of the strategies used to collect and analyze the data provided to the readers?
3. Were the characteristics of the informants described and the process used to choose the informants?
4. Were low inference descriptors, informants' verbatim accounts included to substantiate the categories developed during data analysis?
5. Were the social, physical, and interpersonal contexts within which the data had been collected discussed by the researchers?
6. Did colleagues review the data to determine if they had identified the same categories and constructs as the researcher had?
7. Could another investigator clearly follow the decision train used by the researchers in the study? (Beck, 1993, p. 266).

The procedures that were used to select participants and collect and analyze the resulting data have been discussed previously in this chapter. Journals were utilized to document the context of the interviews, my own reflections, ideas and all decisions and resulting rationales. Direct quotes from the interviews are used in the thematic descriptions of the phenomenon to substantiate the findings. My supervisor reviewed the data to determine that the same sections of the transcripts were deemed irrelevant and finally, the data and decision trail was available to the supervisory committee to examine.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the measure of neutrality in qualitative research. According to Sandelowski (1986) confirmability is reached when the criteria for credibility, fittingness, and auditability have been met. Confirmability is the overall measure of trustworthiness or rigor in qualitative research. By attaining credibility, fittingness and auditability, this study meets the criteria for having confirmability.

**Ethical Considerations**

The purpose of this study was to explore young adult women's experiences of using physical aggression in intimate relationships. The intent is to provide pertinent knowledge regarding women's gender specific treatment needs in domestic violence interventions to professionals working with this population. I gained permission from the UNBC Ethical Research Committee to advertise for potential participants at the various locations previously mentioned. I informed participants that the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Time was provided for participants to ask questions
and discuss the study throughout the research process. I gave an information sheet and consent form to each participant explaining the voluntary activities involved in the research study, along with information regarding the audio-taped interview process. Included with the informed consent form was a release to allow use of the data for potential future research purposes, publication, and presentations. Participants were informed that a transcriptionist or I would transcribe audio-tapes and that their actual words may be published in written form. Participants were also informed that a summary of the results would be available to them by request.

The names and contact information of participants have been kept strictly confidential. Only I have access to this material. Pseudonyms replaced the participants' names and are used to protect their identities. These pseudonyms were used in conversations with research supervisors, other persons involved, and in the thesis document. Only I, my supervisor, and the transcriptionist had access to the tapes and transcripts. All paper materials are stored under double lock (in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's locked home office) and identifying information is stored separate from tapes and transcripts (in a separate locked filing cabinet in the researcher's locked home office). Information that is stored electronically (e.g., transcriptions) is password protected. After five years, audiocassette tapes will be deleted and after seven years all other collected information will be destroyed by either shredding of paper documents or deletion of electronic files.

A potential risk to participants that I anticipated was possible psychological distress due to the sensitive subject matter being discussed. Some participants may have felt uncomfortable discussing their use of physical aggression as research suggests most women who use physical aggression have also been victimized by their partners. I informed
participants of their option to seek counselling support through self-referral to various agencies in Prince George. Additional risks to participants included, that in the event that a participant disclosed plans to harm another individual, I was obligated to report this to the appropriate authorities and that in the case of a court order, I would be legally obligated to supply the information requested to the court. Potential participants were notified of these risks before they agreed to participate in the proposed study. Potential benefits from participating in the study may have included feelings of validation from telling their story without being judged and a sense of purpose from contributing to a research project aimed at understanding women's use of physical aggression in the context of intimate relationships.

Summary

This chapter has provided clarification of the selected methodology, including a discussion of transcendental phenomenology which serves as the conceptual framework for this study. A description of the women who participated in this study was also provided along with explanations of participant selection, research procedures, data collection and analysis, methodological rigor, and ethical considerations.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

The aim of the present study was to explore young women's experiences of using physical aggression in intimate relationships. Specifically, that includes understanding and determining the meaning of physical aggression for the eight women who participated in the study. This chapter will begin with a description of the various forms of physical aggression used by the women who participated in this study. Next I will provide the reader with a sample of the significant statements gleaned from the interviews with the participants to give the reader a sense of how the participants experience using physical aggression in intimate relationships. Then I will provide a description of the meaning units or themes that describe the experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships. This chapter will conclude with a description of the essence of the experience.

Types of Physical Aggression

All of the participants in the study reported using a wide range of physically aggressive tactics during conflicts in their intimate relationships. This information was collected from the women to ensure I was not reporting on the experience of using one specific type of physical aggression in intimate relationships, but rather a wide range of physically aggressive behaviors. As can be seen in Table 3, the women reported using a wide range of physically aggressive tactics in their intimate relationships, both on an individual basis as well as collectively. The only type of physical aggression not used by any of the women was scalding/burning and the only types of physical aggression used by all the women who responded to the questionnaire was punching or hitting their partner with an object. The frequency with which the women used each of these forms of physical aggression also varied across type of physical aggression and individual.
Table 3

*Type and Frequency of Physical Aggression*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carolyn</th>
<th>Jackie</th>
<th>Veronica</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Josephine</th>
<th>Molly</th>
<th>Sunny</th>
<th>Amber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threw something</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twisted arm/pulled hair</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushed/Shoved</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grabbed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slapped</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knife/Gun</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punched /hit with object</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choked</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slammed against wall</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beat up</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kicked</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frequency</em></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Veronica chose not to complete the physical aggression questionnaire.*
Significant Statements

Significant statements, which are verbatim statements taken from the transcript that add meaning, clarify the situation in which the experience occurs, and illuminate the thoughts and feelings associated with the experience, were gleaned from the transcripts, examples of which are provided below.

- Well he had snuck upstairs to do the drugs with him after he lied to me. Then I found out he was upstairs so I went upstairs and just flipped out. Punched him and shoved him around (Josephine, p. 1).
- You know he hit me, and I’m like I don't put up with abusive guys and I just went after him and just did it, it was a fast reaction (Veronica, p. 3).
- It's only when we are under the influence, it is not when we are sober or whatever we are so nice to each other when we are sober it is just when we are drinking. It bothers me more when those words come out, it really hurts because I am not like that (Boise, P-2).
- I grabbed him by his hair and I threw him down and I just started kicking him wherever I could and punching him (Carolyn, p. 1).
- It just hurts and you want the other person to care and feel the same things that you do like and they clearly don’t and you just like why I fought with him and so mad at him because he just didn’t care and I just wanted him to see how mad I was and how hurt I was (Amber, p. 5-6).
- .. in the face like I was seriously punching him because I was mad that he you know and it was hurting it was really, really and I never had nobody hit me as like not hit me I don't know if he meant it but he, he did it anyways and I knew it (Molly, p. 9).
- I was really jealous and we both drank a lot and I got violent a lot (Jackie, p. 5).
- But yeah in the moment or afterwards it was I don't know it always just kind of I forgot about it or I would try really hard to forget about it. I didn't want to dwell on it until the next time it came up (Sunny, p. 25).

Themes

Five themes emerged from this analysis of how young adult women experienced using physical aggression in intimate relationships: altered state, observations of self as someone else, others not seeing authentic self, moving towards ideal self, and managing connection/disconnection. Examples of each theme and the corresponding statements are provided in Appendix M.
Altered State

All of the participants in this study reported entering either an altered physical or mental state when using physical aggression. The altered physical state described by the women took different forms including: intoxication from drugs and/or alcohol, "losing it", physical pain, and an adrenaline rush. As Boise describes, "It's only when we are under the influence, it is not when we are sober or whatever, we are so nice to each other when we are sober, it is just when we are drinking" (p. 2). When Carolyn described the events leading up to an incident of physical aggression she explained, "we were arguing and drunk, as usual" (p. 12) and Jackie started off her story with the following statement: "I was using a lot of drugs...and drinking lots" (p. 1). Previous research (Magdol et al., 1997; Magdol et al., 1998; Stuart et al., 2003; White & Chen, 2002) has also found a correlation between substance use and both male and female perpetration of intimate partner violence and male and female victimization.

The majority of the participants in this study described how they "lost it" as a result of their anger. Carolyn recalls an incident in which she "lost it": "He got mad at me because I was five minutes late from school and then we started fighting and he hit me and then I just lost it" (p. 1) as does Jackie: "I just lost control and lost it and got really angry and didn't know what to do" (p. 1). Other participants such as Sunny and Amber describe similar experience but use different words to illustrate their stories: "I just kind of snapped and I was crying. I just kept pushing him and pushing him and pushing him" (Sunny, p. 2); "I was so mad, couldn't figure out where the hell he was, why he wasn't answering his phone, why wasn't he calling me back. And I was just raging inside" (Amber, p. 2). Similar to the findings of the present study, Seamans et al. (2007) also found that the majority of female
perpetrators of domestic violence in a battering intervention program reported becoming enraged and losing control of themselves.

In addition to labeling this altered physical state as "lost it", "snapping" or "raging inside," all of the women in this study were able to clearly describe the corresponding changes they observed inside their bodies. Many of the women described how their bodies shook, similar to this description provided by Josephine:

> I shake, I shake. If I get really really angry, I can, I start vibrating... I don't know. It's like, it's like. I don't know, it's just like you feel it rising in your body and all of a sudden you are like, you are just shaking...And then when I saw him, it was just like phish. I just, I don't know, lost it or something (p. 5-7).

Other women, such as Veronica, experienced their anger as a "rush...just like um burning up and getting mad right away" (p. 13) and others, such as Amber, noticed that "my stomach twists and I tend to clench my teeth so then I get really bad headaches from just being my whole body just being tense" (p. 7-8). A final quote provides a good summary of how anger resulted in these women entering an altered physical state: "Anger does something to you and there is only so much a woman can put up with" (Carolyn, p. 9).

In addition to an anger induced altered physical state, approximately one half of the women who participated in this study also experienced an altered physical state as the result of more positive emotions. Many of the participants identified the emotional state that caused this physical change as powerful and linked it to a rush of adrenaline. For Josephine,

> It was like, it was like, I had scared him, so I was stronger than him or, or, I could intimidate him, or something like that, or I was higher than him at that moment, and...plus I was on such an adrenaline rush, it was like, phish (p. 9).

When Boise started fighting back she noticed, "I feel like a strong tough rock" (Boise, p. 7). Carolyn noticed a change in her attitude: "don't give a shit attitude, and walk right to open the fight kind of thing" (p. 14) while Jackie felt as if a weight was lifted off: "[the wine
bottles] were just getting all this energy out...And fuck that I have to release" (Jackie, p. 14).

Finally, Sunny observed "it was almost a little bit of euphoric because the emotions are running so high and at that point it doesn't matter whether the emotions are negative or positive they are just so high" (Sunny, p. 7).

The final form of an altered physical state described by the women was the result of physical pain. Previous research indicates that a leading motivation for women's use of physical aggression in intimate relationships is self-defense (Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger, 1997; Hamberger et al., 1997; Saunders, 1986). In line with these findings, the women who participated in this study entered an altered physical state as the result of physical pain, which was the result of their partners' physical aggression against them. Boise endured years of physical aggression at the hands of her partner before she started fighting back:

Before he used to fight me and fight me and fight me and I just put my head down and I would cry about it later, whatever, and I said no you know, after a while, since the last year or two I just started fighting back (Boise, p. 29-30).

Carolyn recalls the physical pain she was in before she started using physical aggression against her partner:

And ah, I don't actually remember, I know I was standing in the door and he was kicking me in the face and I don't actually know that my nose was really breaking and I didn't know that it was that bad until I went to the washroom and my head was just pounding and I looked in the mirror and it was wide open and I was like, "oh my God, I can see the bone" (p. 18-19).

A final example of how physical pain led to an altered physical state is provided by Molly. Molly recalls one incident that occurred after her partner pushed her into the corner in the cab of his truck: "[I was punching him] in the face, like I was seriously punching him because I
was mad that he you know [pushed me] and it was hurting it was really, really, and I never had nobody hit me, as, like not hit me" (p. 9).

Many of the women who participated in the present study also entered an altered mental state while using physical aggression in intimate relationships. These altered mental states took the form of "black outs," flashbacks, and emotional pain. Similar to the women in the Seamans et al., (2007) study who dissociated when they became violent, approximately one third of the participants in this study experienced something quite similar. Carolyn describes it best:

When I get mad I tend to black out a little bit and next thing you know he was on the floor and his nose was bleeding and I just kept going and going and finally I had to just shake my head and just say, "What am I doing? What am I doing?" (p. 1).

Molly experienced something quite similar, stating, "and sometimes I get so mad that I just get, I black right out, I black right out" (p. 10). Finally, others experienced an altered mental state, but not quite to the same extent as Carolyn and Molly. For these participants it was simply difficult to recall exactly what transpired, however they do not indicate they dissociated or "blacked out": "Then we ended up on the stairs like I don't really remember what happened because it was such in the heat of the moment" (Amber, p. 3).

Research in the field of intimate partner violence suggests that exposure to violence in childhood, either directly or indirectly, is linked to later perpetration and victimization. Consistent with this previous research (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Kernsmith, 2005; Magdol et al., 1998; White & Chen, 2002; White & Widom, 2003) some of the women who participated in this study were exposed to violence in childhood and entered an altered mental state due to flashbacks to this time in their lives. Veronica explained how experiencing physical pain altered her mental state: "You know when you are being hurt and
that brings back memories as a child that nobody even gave a shit and even getting molested or raped by your own blood and it just gets even worse" (p. 12-13). Carolyn also experienced flashbacks to her childhood. When Carolyn was on the receiving end of physical aggression "it just made me think of my dad right away. How I was never going to be like my mom, like my dad used to beat the living daylights out of my mom all the time and she took it" (Carolyn, p. 5).

The final form of an altered mental state described by these participants was the result of emotional pain. The majority of the women who participated in the current study indicated they entered an altered mental state when using physical aggression as a response to emotional pain. Carolyn shares a story where she felt at a loss of what to do after valued possessions were destroyed:

I have a friendship bracelet that is sacred and in our tradition that is very sacred and given to me by one of my nice boyfriends and by my brother and one by my best friend, they're beaded, it's really nice. Um, ACDC sign, ah, really nice stuff, anyways, some of my best clothes, $80 jeans, he threw it into a fire and burnt it all on me...Once I found out about that I grabbed the gun, I didn't know if it was loaded or not and chased him around the house with it. I didn't really want to shoot him so I just the butt end of it and I just whacked him in the head with it, I didn't know what else to do (p. 16).

Molly also enters an altered mental state as a result of emotional pain, and this altered state seems similar to being hyper vigilant: "Well it hurts, it definitely hurts and, and every time I see him I'm always thinking, well what is he going to say now to hurt me?" (Molly, p. 21-22). Amber describes how she experiences emotional pain when her partner does not acknowledge her feelings, "I don't know, just in the back of your head the feeling that you don't count sort of thing" (p. 8) as does Jackie, "well he was talking nice and saying stuff to this other person and I just, made me think like the way he is talking to her is like, he should
be talking to me” (p. 6). Finally, Sunny explains how she came to be in an altered mental
state as the result of emotional pain:

That was my way of um, he cheated and lied and this, that, and the other. And that
was my way of um hurting him back to the degree that he had hurt me I guess. I
mean hurting him with my words was just impossible so I would try to physically
hurt him (Sunny, p. 2).

This finding is consistent with previous research. Follingstad (1991) found that a major
motivation for women's use of physical aggression in intimate relationships was in retaliation
for feeling emotionally hurt. Kernsmith (2005) reports similar findings with 42% of female
participants who had used violence in their intimate relationship indicating that they were
motivated to get back at their partner for hurting them emotionally.

Observations of Self as Someone Else

In some way or another all of the eight women who participated in this study
experienced themselves as someone else. The various ways these women experienced
themselves as someone else include: someone to be embarrassed/ashamed of, someone to
fear, someone stronger or more powerful, and someone in control.

Seven out of the eight women who participated in this study experienced themselves
as someone of whom to be embarrassed/ashamed. Many of the women appeared to struggle
to share their experiences. The majority cried and a few laughed nervously. Several women
reported finding it difficult to share their stories because they would rather not remember
what they did. When they do think about using physical aggression it is very difficult for
some of the women: "You know there are still some times that I will think back of what I did
and cry, you know like how could I, how could I treat another person like that" (Sunny, p.
10). Other participants are embarrassed that they lost control of themselves and used
physical aggression,
Cause I guess it is not appropriate to do that and in looking back on it, it was something so minor and I didn't really matter all that much but, and to have lost such control of myself. It’s embarrassing I would hope that I would have more control over my feelings (Amber, p. 11).

Some participants also experienced shame or embarrassment immediately after they used physical aggression as well as after the fact:

I felt ashamed, because he doesn't hit women, and it was sort of like I had done that because I knew he wouldn't hit me. And I took advantage of that. And then I felt like ashamed and like that's not me (Josephine, p. 7-8).

In addition to experiencing themselves as someone to be embarrassed or ashamed of, approximately one third of the women who participated experienced themselves as someone to fear. For some of the women, experiencing themselves as someone to fear was an observation of their own internal state, while for others it was the result of viewing themselves through other people's eyes. Molly is afraid of what she is capable of doing when she is angry, "That's what I mean if I get mad, if I get mad or something I am scared of who and where and what I am going to be capable of doing" (Molly, p. 12). Josephine is also afraid of what she is capable of, but for different reasons: "Because..it worries me too because once you do it and you get away with it you, it's more easy, you're more able to do it again. And that kind of like, bothers me" (Josephine, p. 10).

It is not only the women who experienced themselves as someone to fear, their partners and other people who witnessed them using physical aggression feared them as well. Through these other individual's eyes, the women also experience themselves as someone to fear. Jackie recalls her partner expressing fear of her: "he mentioned to a few of his friends that he was going to leave me because he is scared of me" (Jackie, p. 4) as does Molly,

Oh I start throwing things um, I just bust things and it is just me and he is scared of me... I can just fly him right around and I have done that before and that is what I am
scared of the next time I do something I might hurt him. You know and he is even scared of that himself (Molly, p. 4).

Half of the women who participated in the current study experienced themselves as someone stronger or more powerful as a result of using physical aggression in their intimate relationships. A description of power provided by Sunny seems to be representative of the type of power the women experienced:

To me there is lots of different types of power and this is very much power over and power over somebody that was bigger and that could hurt you. Like it was like you know like not only was he bigger, but because I had cared about him he really could hurt me and he did lots (p. 35).

Previous research has also found that some women may use physical aggression because they view themselves as tough (Dasgupta, 1999) or to feel more powerful (Stuart et al., 2006). Many of the women who participated in this study got a "high" off of using physical aggression and in this state they felt more powerful. Boise describes the physical sensation of feeling powerful as, "It's like when you are drunk or whatever like when you are really sloshed or whatever... you can do anything" (p. 8) and Josephine illustrates the cognitive processes, "Like I was, it sounds funny now (laughter), but at the time, it was like, it was like, I had scared him, so I was stronger than him or, or, I could intimidate him, or something like that" (p. 9). For many of these women, power was not a feeling they typically experienced, it was one they only felt when they used physical aggression: "Before you feel so powerless because of so many different situations this is just a situation that I felt that I you know like of course he would ah he would never hit me" (Sunny, p. 4).

Approximately one third of the women who participated in this study experienced themselves as someone in control as a result of using physical aggression. Although three participants report experiencing themselves in this manner, it was for very different reasons.
For Carolyn, using physical aggression gave her a sense of control during a time in her life when everything else felt out of control:

> Um, I guess I didn't have control over my own habits, drinking, smoking um but to me I had control of another person and it made me feel better, it made me feel like I was being in control of something I think (p. 13-14).

Molly was able to gain control over the situation, specifically over arguments with her partner:

> He knew we had to step away because there are a lot of things in the house that he doesn’t want to be broke you know he doesn’t want to be broken so he like he backs off. I threaten him that I will break whatever and he doesn’t want it broken so (p. 34).

Along similar lines as Molly, Sunny's use of physical aggression gave her control over her partner,

> I know that when I pushed him it made him feel bad about himself because I know he was considering hitting me. Like I could, I was miserable with myself and I knew that I could make him miserable with himself (Sunny, p. 4).

Gaining control has previously been implicated in the research as a motivating factor for women's use of physical aggression in intimate relationships (Dasgupta, 1999; Follingstad et al., 1991; Seamans et al., 2007).

**Others Not Seeing Authentic Self**

A major theme of women's experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships is others not seeing their authentic selves. All of the women reported their partners acted in a manner that suggests they do not view the women the same way they view themselves. Others not seeing their authentic self took the form of name calling, accusations, disrespect, controlling behavior, and physical and emotional abuse. Consistent with the current findings retaliation for prior physical or emotional abuse is a well supported
motivation for women's use of intimate partner violence (Barnett et al., 1997; Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger, 1997; Hamberger, et al., 1997; Kernsmith, 2005; Seamans et al., 2007).

For many of the participants, arguments that became physical began with their partners calling them names inconsistent with their view of self. For example, Boise would often respond aggressively when called names she dislikes: "bitch, whore, slut, you name it whatever is on the book and I don't like those words... We start going and he will start swinging and I will like start swinging back" (p. 1). Molly also responded aggressively when her partner called her names, "It is like he calls me lazy and stuff like that...because I am on so much medication I get tired really fast and he says I am lazy" (Molly, p. 3). Sunny was another women whose partner did not see her authentic self. When Sunny's partner called her a name inconsistent with the way she viewed herself she reacted aggressively,

I remember this one time I was being pretty awful to him and we were outside the school and he called me a fucking slut and I up and gave him a right on his ass. I punched him in the face (Sunny, p. 1).

A second way it was demonstrated to the women that their partners did not see their authentic selves was through accusations. Many of the women were accused of infidelity, an act they knew they had not committed. Boise recalls, "He looked at me and said you still embarrassed me, we still think you were fooling around and stuff...Nobody needs those kinds of things. Accusing you of fooling around when you didn't" (p. 13). Other women were not necessarily accused of infidelity, but of wanting to be unfaithful:

Um it didn't matter what I did I was always staring at somebody he said, um "oh how did you like staring at that guy all night", "what"? start getting smacked around again. He had a thing going like I try so hard not to look at anybody and yet he goes you were staring at that guy again. I was like what are you talking about and all of a sudden punch; I would get punched in the face. I was like, fuck off, don't you fucking yell at me you know that kind of thing (Carolyn, p. 29-30).

At other times, the women report being accused of starting the fight:
He always said it was you, you started it, you said this, you called my mom a slut. I would never call her that, his mom is adorable a gorgeous person and I, he was like you called her a slut, you know (Carolyn, p. 4).

A third manner in which it was demonstrated to the women that others did not see their authentic selves was through lies and deception. The majority of the women believed they deserved to be respected and expected their partners to be honest with them. However, for some "there was always lies, half truths and this that and the other" (Sunny, p. 3) which demonstrated to them their partners did not view them in the same manner as they viewed themselves. Many of the women responded with frustration and shock to these types of behaviors:

Well I just couldn't believe he would do that. Leave me downstairs and then, the roommate had even asked him if I was downstairs and he said no...It was more the, he knew I was downstairs waiting for him, just, patiently (laugh), believing what he had told me and it was totally false. (Josephine, p. 4).

A fourth way it was portrayed to the women that others did not see their authentic selves was through controlling behavior. This controlling behavior demonstrated to the women that their partners did not trust them nor did they want them making their own choices; however, the women believed they were trustworthy and capable of making good decisions. Molly recalls how her partner responded when she tried to have friends over or others showed her affection, "He doesn't like he doesn't want nobody in the house. He doesn't want um me talking to anybody and stuff like that" (Molly, p. 32); "But he is very jealous and very I don't think he is really all, he is not very, he is very insecure is what he is" (Molly, p. 33). Jackie's partner took action to control her actions,

We didn't really fight but we got, he tried um, he choked me a few times and um and um he would try to make me stay in my room by blocking the door and taking off with my shoes and take all the money (Jackie, p. 10).
The final way the women realized that others did not see their authentic selves was through physical abuse. All of the women believe they deserve to be respected and when their partners were physically abusive they were demonstrating in a dramatic fashion that they did not respect the women or their bodies. Some participants recall being struck and then reacting quickly in a similar fashion, "You know he hit me, and I'm like I don't put up with abusive guys and I just went after him and just did it, it was a fast reaction" (Veronica, p. 3), while others endured repeated beatings,

Well he often beat me up, he actually busted my ribs. He threw me down the stairs once. The one time I did fight back uh it was at my house and just he was extremely jealous really sick person accusing my brother and my uncle and my dad even (Carolyn, p. 28).

Regardless of how it played out, when the women were on the receiving end of physically aggressive behavior it showed them that others did not view them in the same light they viewed themselves.

Moving Towards Ideal Self

As a result of using physical aggression in their intimate relationships, all of the women who participated in this study felt like they had taken steps towards becoming the person they wanted to become; they moved towards their ideal selves. This movement took many forms including: standing up for themselves, both in protection of their bodies as well as their identities; respecting themselves; and taking a stand against their partners. Moving towards their ideal self was also a learning experience as many women learned something about themselves by using physical aggression. They learned that they did not want to be physically aggressive any more.

The majority of the women who participated in the present study used physical aggression as a way to demonstrate that they do not tolerate abuse, or as Veronica says, "I
don't put up with abusive guys" (p. 3). By standing up for themselves, the women moved towards their ideal selves. Many of the participants used physical aggression in response to their partner's physical aggression: "Anyways, he pushed me and that is when I hit him back and I just started hitting on him" (Veronica, p. 11) while others used physical aggression as a way to demonstrate they were not willing to put up with abuse any longer: "He fought me. And then he just kept on going and then I finally realized and I was like I got to do something to make him think that he can't just walk over and step over me" (Boise, p. 17). Other participants took a stand and demonstrated their unwillingness to endure any more abuse outside of an incident in which they were being victimized:

_He crawled through my window and came after me, he was going to hit me and I was like "oh you are not going to hit me this time" so I started dancing. I don't know how I did it, I got him in the corner and I just beat the shit out of him in the corner_ (Carolyn, p. 28-29).

The findings of the current study are consistent with previous research. In a study aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of women's use of violence, Dasgupta (1999) determined that one of the women's main intentions for their violent behavior was to stand up for themselves. According to Dasgupta, these women had to fight back to salvage their self-worth. Seamans et al. (2007) report similar reasoning behind women's use of domestic violence. In Seamans et al.'s (2007) sample a major reason for intimate partner violence was current relationship dynamics; the women used physical aggression in self-defense, retaliation, and as a way to refute intimate partner violence victim status.

Dasgupta (1999) also found that another of the women's main intentions for their violent behavior was to gain respect. Kernsmith (2005) also found that 48% of women in a batterer intervention program report using intimate partner violence because they did not get the respect they deserved. The majority of the women who participated in the present study
also felt that they were not receiving the respect they deserved. In an effort to gain this respect and move towards their ideal selves, some of these women took action in the form of physical aggression. For Jackie, seeing her partner being friendly with another woman was the equivalent of infidelity and demonstrated to her that her partner did not think she deserved the same level of respect she thought she deserved. When she saw this going on, Jackie recalls, "I picked up a cast iron frying pan and hit him over the head with it. I hit him with twice with the frying pan" (Jackie, p. 5). Along similar lines, Sunny often resorted to physical aggression when her partner lied to her or cheated on her as way to show him she did not tolerate this type of behavior. After the fact she remembers thinking, "you won't have to resort to this again. Now, until the next time I have to teach you a lesson for lying or cheating or yeah" (Sunny, p. 36). Finally, for Molly, the physical aggression became a way to end the verbal abuse:

You know what is he going to, how is he going to hurt me now but do I just let it, do I let it slide or do I do something to him again. You know just to tell him to, to get it through to him that I'm not going to take it anymore (Molly, p. 22).

Molly and other participants who resorted to physical aggression to stop verbal or emotional abuse, moved towards their ideal selves by standing up for themselves.

As mentioned previously, a final way the women who participated in this study moved towards their ideal selves was by learning something about their ideal self: that their ideal self is not aggressive. Some participants learned that they did not want to use physical aggression anymore because of the way they felt afterwards, "It's not a good feeling because I don't want to hit anymore" (Carolyn, p. 23-24), while others made this realization as the result of their own emotional reaction and the reaction of significant others in their lives:

So it was quite the switch from like the first relationship being, feeling powerful and then going and not feeling that power in the second one. And that's what really
encouraged me to um really encouraged me to change, plus my family, my grandma (Sunny, p. 10).

Other participants were motivated to undertake further work to become their ideal selves after using physical aggression and feeling ashamed of their actions:

Well in the long run I am really ashamed of it and I don’t know I think it has changed me in my realizing that I had no way of controlling it when I am mad and how to deal with that. It took a long time I ended up going to counselling and starting to deal with it shortly after all that had happened because I needed to learn how to control myself, which I clearly didn’t have any (Amber, p. 9).

Managing Connection/Disconnection

All of the participants in this study described a struggle to manage connection/disconnection as a component of their experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships. Managing connection/disconnection took two main forms: seeking interpersonal engagement and seeking distance. The women describe using physical aggression as a way to engage their partners when they themselves are feeling ignored, invalidated, or misunderstood. The majority of the women who participated in this study describe their use of physical aggression as a way to get their partners’ attention because they felt as if they were being avoided or ignored. The description Amber provides of how arguments were dealt with in her relationship provides a good example of how many of the women felt:

We were talking and I am like what happened like where were you, why weren't you calling? like why weren't you answering your phone? where were you? He was like well I knew I had to go to work and I knew you were going to be mad at me so what was the point in fucking calling you back? So I was just raging, so ah I picked up a shoe and threw it at him and he just kind of, like whatever like leave me alone and then I just was so mad and we were in the kitchen at his parents’ house and just throwing like stupid punches I don’t know, like not good punches but little girly punches (Amber, p. 2-3).
For the majority of the participants, attempts at conflict resolution were met with passive resistance by their partners. The women wanted to address these conflicts head on and from their perspectives their partners preferred to ignore them or pretend the problem never happened. Previous research (Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger, 1997; Hamberger et al., 1997; Kernsmith, 2005; Olson & Lloyd, 2005; Seamans et al., 2007) has consistently found that women report using physical aggression against intimate partners as a way to get their attention or in response to being ignored. For example, Olson and Lloyd (2005) report that 33.3% of their female participants indicated use of physical aggression as a way to gain attention and compliance, and Kernsmith (2005) states 30% of women report using physical aggression when their partner was not listening.

Another frequently documented finding regarding women's motivations for using physical aggression in their intimate relationships is to communicate, especially to express anger or other emotions. Hamberger (1997) found a major motivation for women's use of physical aggression was to express feelings and Kernsmith (2005) reports 29% of women indicated they used physical aggression to express anger. Stuart et al. (2006) had similar results with 39.4% of women reporting using physical aggression to show anger and 35.3% indicating using it to express feelings they could not express with words. Many of the participants in this study were at a loss as to how to communicate their experience to their partners. Words were ineffective so they tried something else - physical aggression. Jackie recalls attempting to explain to her partner that she felt hurt when he talked to other women in a flirtatious manner and having him disregard her emotions:

I said "why are you talking to her like that? and you are not talking to me like I am right here". And then I, then he started, I can't remember what he said. Anyways he said something like "um I am right here I am just talking to her like, like no big deal
and I am not even allowed to have even a conversation" and I just turned around and I saw the frying pan and I hit him with it (Jackie, p. 7-8).

Amber provides a description of her emotional reaction to a very similar experience, one in which her partner tells her that her feelings are "no big deal":

It is just frustrating, like it is just because it wasn't like it was our first fight the first time I felt that way and so it was just I just don't understand and then it's not a big deal, and the way I felt never was a big deal. It just hurts and you want the other person to care and feel the same things that you do like and they clearly don't and you just like why I fought with him and so mad at him because he just didn't care and I just wanted him to see how mad I was and how hurt I was. It just seemed like the only way for me to show him how, he don't listen so (Amber, p. 5-6).

In addition to expressing anger, other participants struggled to articulate the hurt they felt when their partners acted in certain ways. Sunny explains how she had not been able to find the words to truly demonstrate to her partner the hurt she felt when he lied or cheated so she resorted to physical aggression in order that he could experience the same emotions for himself:

And there was several times he would come to me crying saying don't put me in that position please don't put me in that please you don't know how close I am to snapping. And just trying to explain to him well when you lie and cheat and hurt me like that I am close to snapping. Again it was just trying to show him how much you know the positions you were putting me in, obviously in a different context, is what I was trying to do with him...I just really wanted him to see how much he was hurting me (p. 5).

Similarly, Amber could not quite seem to get her partner to understand her so she used physical aggression to "shake it in to him":

I think just mainly like cause after I threw the shoe he just kind of walked away and started just doing, forgetting, you know not worrying about it. And then I was just like, you know, just listen, like I wasn't saying it and I was just wanting him to feel how I was feeling you know. So I was just angry and just was like I want you to understand and like listen to me like almost like. That is why I say we were more tussling cause I just wanted to shake it in to him you know (Amber, p. 8).
The second form of managing connection/disconnection the women experienced was seeking distance. Previous research has not implicated seeking distance as a component of women's experiences of using physical aggression in intimate relationships; however, I suspect it is closely tied to the well documented finding that women's use of physical aggression is frequently motivated by the need to protect oneself (Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger et al., 1997; Saunders, 1986). As previously discussed, research indicates that women have been found to use physical aggression in the context of their own victimization (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Lewis et al., 2002; Magdol et al., 1997; Orcutt et al., 2005; Sacks et al., 1982). In their investigation of how male and female domestic violence offenders are similar and different, Seamans et al. (2007) found that 62% of female participants used physical aggression in self-defense, retaliation, or as one participant put it - to get away.

Similarly, many of the women who participated in this study described using physical aggression to get away from their partners, to obtain some distance from them, however unlike the findings of Seamans et al. (2007) the women in the present study did not use physical aggression to escape a currently physically abusive situation. For some of the participants, using physical aggression had become a way to make their partners leave them alone. For example, Josephine states, "he has just learned to let me be when I am like that because I get mad fast, but I get over it just as fast" (p. 5-6). A very similar scenario occurs in Molly's current relationship, "Like when I get mad he walks away, when I start shouting he walks away and when I start busting things he just leaves the door, like he walks out the door" (p. 8). A subsample of the women have learned that by using physical aggression they can control the situation; they can stop the argument, the verbal/emotional abuse, and they can escape from the situation by having their partner leave.
Other participants also achieve distance by using physical aggression, but in a somewhat different manner. For some of the participants, using physical aggression gives them the chance or the excuse to leave the situation they are currently in. Carolyn recalls how using physical aggression gave her the opportunity to leave an emotionally painful situation: "I think he actually passed out for awhile from the pain or something and I jumped in and I started the car, left him there" (Carolyn, p. 17).

The Essence of the Experience

According to Moustakas (1994), the final step in the phenomenological research process is the integration of the textural and structural descriptions into a single unified statement of the essences of the experience. The essence refers to the universal components of the phenomenon. It is also important to note that the textural-structural synthesis represents the essence of the experience at a specific point in time from the perspective of an individual researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

The experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships for young adult women is characterized by occupying an altered state, seeing themselves as someone else, others not seeing their authentic self, moving towards ideal self, and managing interpersonal connections and disconnections.

An aspect of the experience of using physical aggression can involve entering an altered mental and/or physical state. At times this altered state is the body's reaction to the intense emotional space the women occupy, while at other times it is in response to both emotional and physical pain. This altered physical state can be described as a "build up", "burning sensation", or "release" and is also comparable to the feeling some people get when under the influence of drugs or alcohol; as if the person is invincible. The altered mental
state women occupy can be described as a "black out", but also results from the emotional pain and anguish women experience while using physical aggression.

A second aspect of the experience of using physical aggression is observing one's self differently; the women observed themselves as someone else. These observations of self take the following forms: someone to be embarrassed/ashamed of, someone to fear, someone stronger, more powerful, and someone in control. Regarding observing one's self as someone to be embarrassed/ashamed of, the women express shame, either verbally or non-verbally via tears, over their actions. Some women feel ashamed "cause I guess it is not appropriate to do that" while others describe it as "not a good feeling because I don't want to hit anymore." Some women also feel ashamed because using physical aggression is out of the ordinary for them: "I felt ashamed, because he doesn't hit women, and it was sort of like I had done that because I knew he wouldn't hit me. And I took advantage of that. And then I felt like ashamed and like that's not me."

The experience of seeing themselves as someone to fear is twofold; women report fearing themselves and being feared by others. Some women express fear regarding the harm they could inflict by using physical aggression, while others articulate fear related to using physical aggression again because "once you do it and you get away with it you, it's more easy, you're more able to do it again." Using physical aggression pushes the boundary of acceptable behavior to include aggressive behaviors that previously would have been considered unacceptable ways to respond to conflict. The women also experience themselves as someone to fear by viewing themselves through their partners' eyes - fear is noticed through their partners' body language or explicitly stated in their partners' words.
Regarding observations of self as someone stronger and more powerful, using physical aggression can lead to women feeling capable of actions they typically feel incapable of accomplishing. One woman describes her own visualization of how she feels when she uses physical aggression and it seems to summarize well this aspect of the experience: "You know you just feel so much bigger, you are this big woman towering over this broken guy who is crying, like begging for forgiveness."

The final way women may see themselves as someone different from their true self, is as someone in control. For some women the phase of life in which they use physical aggression in their intimate relationships is typically one in which they feel out of control. As one woman states, "I guess I didn't have control over my own habits, drinking, smoking um but to me I had control of another person and I made me feel better, it made me feel like I was being in control of something I think." Other women typically feel that although they do not have control over the relationship, they can change this dynamic by using physical aggression.

For women, an additional aspect of the experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships can be that other people do not see their true selves. Other individuals not seeing the woman's true self is exemplified by name calling, insults, accusations, lies and disrespect, and misunderstanding. For example, one woman was surprised that her roommate, who witnessed her using physical aggression, looked at her like she was "messed upstairs."

For women, an aspect of using physical aggression can be an attempt to move towards their ideal self. Moving towards ideal self takes the form of actions aimed at projecting an image consistent with their ideal selves. However, the actions taken are
physically aggressive ones and being physically aggressive does not fit with their image of their ideal selves. For this reason physical aggression is an attempt to move towards the ideal self rather than achieve the ideal self. The messages conveyed through physical aggression range from standing up for themselves, protecting themselves and their identities, to proving a point or teaching their partner a lesson. A woman describes how she uses physical aggression to demonstrate she will not put up with verbal abuse:

[E]very time I see him I'm always thinking well what is he going to say now to hurt me...You know what is he going to, how is he going to hurt me now but do I just let it, do I let it slide or do I do something to him again. You know just to tell him to, to get it through to him that I'm not going to take it anymore.

The final aspect of using physical aggression in intimate relationships is an effort to manage interpersonal connection/disconnection. The two components of managing connection/disconnection are seeking interpersonal engagement and seeking distance. Women describe a desperation to communicate with their partners, to be understood by their partners, or at least acknowledged by them. For example, during the escalating conflict one woman recalls thinking, "I will try to get your attention another way, another way ultimately to make you, to see how I am feeling." As for seeking distance, some women find that by using physical aggression they can disconnect from their partners. One woman describes what happens when she gets angry and uses physical aggression: "Like when I get mad he walks away, when I start shouting he walks away, and when I start busting things he just leaves the door, like he walks out the door."

**Summary**

This chapter reported on the findings of this investigation which explored young women's experiences of using physical aggression in intimate relationships. For the eight women who participated in this study, using physical aggression in intimate relationships is
characterized by five themes: altered state, observations of self as someone else, others not seeing authentic self, moving towards ideal self, and managing interpersonal connection/disconnection. The themes were also compared to findings in the literature. The following chapter will link the findings to current theory regarding women's development.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to explore the question: what are the experiences of using physical aggression in intimate relationships for young adult women? The experience for young women can be characterized as a struggle for authenticity and connection.

This chapter links the findings of the present study to existing Relational Cultural Theory, identifies the limitations of the study, discusses implications for counselling practice, and provides some recommendations for future research.

*Relational Cultural Theory*

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) developed from the ground breaking work of Jean Baker Miller, who put forward a new understanding of women's development in her book, *Towards a New Psychology of Women* (Miller, 1976). In 1978, Miller and three other women, Judith Jordan, Irene Stiver, and Janet Surrey, began meeting informally to re-examine developmental psychology and clinical practice as it applies to women. These meetings were the beginning of a collaborative theory-building group that eventually led to the development of a new approach to understanding psychological development. A few years later this group allied with the Stone Center at Wellesley College and initiated a series of colloquia in which they and other researchers examined the complexities of women's development. The proceedings from these colloquia, as well as other presentations, became the core writings that describe the fundamental concepts of the theory which became known as Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan & Hartling, 2002).

RCT suggests that people only develop through interactions with other people. These interactions can take two forms: interactions that foster the development of both individuals
as well as the relationship, or interactions that do not. Growth fostering relationships are characterized by two concepts: mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. Mutual empathy exists when two people are engaged together in the thoughts and feelings associated with the situation. Mutual empowerment is present when the individual feels a real sense of connection with the other person, feels empowered to act in the immediate moment, has increased knowledge both of her/him self as well as of the other person, feels more worthwhile as a person, and has a stronger desire to establish additional connections. Relationships that are not growth fostering are plagued by disconnection. Disconnection occurs when the people involved in the relationship experience the pain of not being understood and of not understanding the other person. Jordan (2003) refers to these disconnections as empathic failures or misattunements. Disconnection exists in varying degrees from a minor feeling of being misunderstood to a major trauma or violation such as some form of abuse (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

According to Miller and Stiver (1997), disconnection can easily occur when power inequalities exist in relationships. These authors state, "[w]e all live in a world in which some people, or groups of people, hold power over others based on differences in age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors" (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 12). The experience of growing up and living in a society with a "power-over" framework influences all of our actions, even in our relationships where no power differential exists (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Although disconnections are inevitable in relationships, many can be repaired. Jordan (2001) describes this process as one in which the individual who experiences the disconnection represents their hurt to the other person, who in turn expresses concern and
regret over hurting their relational partner. When disconnections are not repaired a state of chronic disconnection can exist. This process occurs when the individual who experienced the disconnection represents their hurt to their relational partner but is repeatedly met with anger, rejection, denial, withdrawal, or other messages which indicate a refusal to acknowledge the hurt individual's pain. In this scenario, the individual who experienced the pain will begin to disconnect from their own experience and distort the experience to fit what is acceptable to the relational partner. The individual will begin to act inauthentically in relationships and although may feel safer, he or she will feel less real and misunderstood.

Women who use physical aggression in their intimate relationships have experienced many disconnections both in their current and past relationships. One of the ways in which a state of chronic disconnection occurs is through being abused. The majority of women who use physical aggression in their intimate relationships do so in the context of their own victimization, past or current (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988; Cate et al., 1982; Henton et al., 1983; Lewis et al., 2002; Magdol et al., 1997; Orcutt et al., 2005; Sack et al., 1982; Sorenson et al., 1996). Using physical aggression in intimate relationships has also been associated with witnessing interparental violence (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Breslin et al., 1990; Kaura & Allen, 2004) and with experiencing abuse and neglect during childhood (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Fang & Corso, 2008; Magdol et al., 1998; White & Chen, 2002; White & Widom, 2003). Not only did all of the women in the present study experience current physical, emotional, and verbal abuse and misunderstandings, many also brought with them long histories of these types of events. According to RCT, we all develop relational images, which are mental pictures describing the pattern of our experiences in relationships. These images also determine what each person expects to happen in
relationships as they develop and explain why their relationships are the way they are. We begin creating our relational images early in life; images that are based on connection allow for new images and meanings to grow, whereas images based on disconnection lead us away from connections with other people and can become quite fixed and less open to change and development (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Because the women in the present study had previously experienced chronic disconnection in important relationships, they may have developed very fixed relational images that offer few opportunities to think, feel, or act differently in relationships. Due to the fact that their relational images suggest to them they will only form relationships if they act a certain way, the women may prevent themselves from getting near a person who is warm and loving in order to avoid being attacked and/or abandoned. Miller and Stiver (1997) suggest that most people are not fully aware of their images and we all desire relationships with an emotionally giving person. If this is the case it is possible that the women felt a desperate need to connect with another person, despite their relational images, and took extreme measures, such as physical aggression, to achieve this connection. Many of the women described their intense frustration at the lack of understanding of their experiences demonstrated by their partners. Miller and Stiver (1997) suggest that when an individual feels alone, due to a lack of understanding by their relational partner, their initial reaction will be to try even harder to connect with their partner. These women had been unsuccessful in representing their experiences verbally to their partners, so driven by the desire to connect and to be understood they acted out their experiences on their partners as a final attempt to receive understanding from them. It may seem counterintuitive, however the
data suggests that the women in this study were seeking connection and understanding and used physical aggression to obtain this goal.

It is also possible to look at the women's use of physical aggression from the opposite perspective. Power dynamics in interpersonal relationship in patriarchal societies can result in situations in which it is unsafe, either physical or emotionally, for women to represent their experiences authentically. RCT refers to the strategies that women, or less powerful individuals, use to keep aspects of themselves outside the relationship as strategies of disconnection or survival (Jordan & Hartling, 2002). Therefore, it may be possible to frame the actions of the women who participated in the study as a strategy of disconnection. As mentioned previously, all of the women in the study experienced some form of disconnection or misattunement with their intimate partners. Although it may have been the first time some of the women used physical aggression in their intimate relationships, it was not the first time they felt misunderstood, taken for granted, or abused. Consistent with RCT, in order to protect themselves emotionally, the women needed to distance themselves from the relationship. At times these women found that the only way to escape was to use physical aggression as it either forced their partner to leave them alone or provided them with the opportunity to leave the situation.

Consistent with RCT, the struggle for authenticity was at the core of women's experience in the present study. The women observed themselves as someone else - this other self had many forms including someone to be embarrassed/ashamed of, someone to fear, someone in control, and someone stronger or more powerful. It is possible that these other selves women observed during their experiences were one of two people: their inauthentic self or their authentic self. From the majority of the women's stories I would
suggest these observations were of their inauthentic selves - the inauthentic person they had
learned to be in relationships in order to avoid the pain of disconnection.

In addition, the women struggled with other people's perceptions of them. They
often felt misunderstood, blamed, and accused of actions they had not committed. Physical
aggression often occurred in a context of feeling frustrated and demoralized because other
people did not recognize the women's true selves. For some women, physical aggression
seems to be a response to an authentic self shrinking and becoming almost invisible.

Women also experience a strong desire to find their ideal self - for some women this
meant a willingness to stop their physical aggression while for other women physical
aggression represented an aspect of ideal self in that through aggression they could access
feeling powerful, be successful in standing up for themselves, or effectively prove a point.
The central idea behind this theme is that by standing up for themselves, both physically and
emotionally, some women have learned something about the person they want to become, or
possibly find again. It is possible that some women find themselves engaging in their
relationships in an inauthentic manner and still do not receive the connection, empathy, and
understanding they seek. By using physical aggression as an attempt to move towards their
ideal selves, women may take a step towards representing their experience authentically to
their partners, and by doing so take a step towards achieving the type of relationship they
truly desire.

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, the women who participated in the
study were faced with struggles of various types. RCT provides a framework for
understanding these physical, verbal, and emotional inter and intra personal struggles by
relating them to the psychological impact of power imbalances in intimate relationships.
Limitations of the Study

Considering the sensitive topic explored as well as the methodology used, this study has five general limitations. First, some of the participants seemed to have difficulty providing details, perhaps interfering with the fullest development of the themes possible. As is the nature of qualitative research, a second limitation is the findings are not generalizable but may be relevant. The third limitation is that saturation, the point at which the addition of new data will not provide additional insight into the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005), was not reached. This study ended with eight participants and I expect some themes could have been more developed with an increased number of participants. The fourth limitation of this study is that the sample consisted of women of Caucasian and Aboriginal descent, thus there was no data to describe the experiences of women of other ethnicities. The final limitation is related to the very low socioeconomic status of the majority of the participants. It is possible that in this study poverty affected women’s experiences of using physical aggression in intimate relationships and their experiences could have been different if poverty was less of a factor. Additionally, because the majority of the participants reported an annual household income of less than $10,000, women of other income levels are not well represented in the present study.

Implications for Counselling Practice

Currently women who seek or are mandated to attend treatment for using physical aggression in intimate relationships receive treatment that was originally designed for men. These programs are designed around the paradigm of male-perpetrator power and control over female victims. As demonstrated in this study and in previous research, power and control is only a small component of women’s experience of using physical aggression in
intimate relationships. The findings from this study have five main implications for
counselling practice: the women’s desire to change, the impact of drug and alcohol use, the
role of previous and/or current abuse, the importance of living authentically, and the benefits
of skill development.

All of the women in this study spoke to their desire to change. Despite this
unanimous desire to change, the motivations to change reported by the women were very
different. Some women wanted to change because they were embarrassed or ashamed of the
way they acted while others wanted to change because they were afraid of themselves when
they used physical aggression. Other women had found that the consequences of using
physical aggression were not worth the momentary high they experienced so they had
decided to stop using physical aggression and were disappointed in themselves when they
again resorted to using physical aggression. This is a very important implication for
counselling practice as it demonstrates a willingness in the women to begin addressing their
use of physical aggression. The women who participated in this study had used physical
aggression quite recently, within the past 24 months. This, coupled with the desire to change
articulated by the women, suggests that women who use physical aggression in intimate
relationships may be open to interventions immediately after or even while they are still
actively using physical aggression against their intimate partners.

Many of the women in this study spoke to the link between their substance use and
using physical aggression against their intimate partners. This finding is consistent with
previous research that has demonstrated a link between intimate partner violence and alcohol
and other drug use (Seamans et al., 2007). An implication for counselling is that women
seeking treatment for using physical aggression in intimate relationships should be screened
for substance use problems and receive substance misuse counselling either prior to or at the same time as they receive treatment for using physical aggression in intimate relationships.

In addition to using physical aggression, the majority of the women in this study had been victimized by intimate partner violence at some point, be it historically or currently. The implication of this finding for counselling practice is multifaceted. A consideration when working with women who use physical aggression in their intimate relationships is to first determine their safety and if necessary engage them in safety planning. Although the focus of this research was on women’s experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships many stories were told of the assaults the women endured. Along similar lines, an additional consideration when working with women who use physical aggression may be to offer them the services typically offered to victims of intimate partner violence such as shelter services or "stopping the violence" counselling.

A unique contribution to the research relates to the existential struggle for authenticity experienced by women who are physically aggressive in their intimate relationships. The findings suggest that counsellors who work with women who are aggressive inquire into their client’s sense of living an authentic or inauthentic existence. Discussions might revolve around clients' values, how they view themselves, their perceptions of how others view them, and the type of person they want to be. Clients may benefit from exploring how to maintain their true selves even under pressure to be someone different. Finally, clients might examine whether their physically aggression moves them closer to or further away from who they want to be.

The final implication for counselling is the importance of skill development for women who use physical aggression in their intimate relationships. As is discussed in the
previous chapter, one of the components of women’s experience of using physical aggression in intimate relationships was occupying an altered state. Women may benefit from learning tools to recognize the physiological cues which indicate they are becoming upset as well as skills to ground and orient themselves to prevent them from entering an altered state. A second component of women's experiences was managing connection/disconnection. All of the women struggled to either engage their partners or obtain the distance they needed. Based on these findings women who use physical aggression in their intimate relationship may also benefit from learning effective communication skills.

*Recommendations for Future Research*

The research that still needs to be conducted in the field of intimate partner violence and specifically women’s use of violence in intimate relationships is vast. Previous research has made it very clear that women's use of physical aggression in intimate relationships is motivated by different reasons than men's use of physical aggression, yet as Seamans et al. (2007) point out "[r]egardless of history or motivation, most women batterers will be placed on probation and remanded for treatment in batterer intervention programs originally designed for male perpetrators" (p. 63). I suggest that future research focuses on the development and evaluation of gender-specific interventions for intimate partner violence.

A second recommendation for future research is continued work into the differentiation between women who are both victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence and women who are only victims of intimate partner violence. Amar (2007) has done some preliminary work in this area and found that women who use physical aggression in mutually aggressive relationships may be at increased risk of injury as compared to
women who do not use physical aggression in violent intimate relationships. Future research should focus on characteristics that distinguish these two populations of women.

A third recommendation for future research is further examination into how female and male perpetrators of intimate partner violence differ. One specific area lacking in the literature is research into the differences, if any, between the types of violence used by men and women and the differences regarding the damage that the violence causes. Being struck with an open hand does less damage than being struck with a fist and being hit in the face could have more serious implications than being hit on the arm. Research into such gender differences would further illuminate dissimilarities between male and female perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

My fourth recommendation for future research is further exploration of women who are the primary perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Although this population may be quite small in size it is important to determine how, if at all, this population differs from women who use physical aggression in mutually aggressive relationships.

Although an open recruitment procedure was used in this study, the majority of participants self-identified as being Aboriginal. A fifth recommendation is that further research on this population be conducted.

Finally, research needs to explore the phenomenon with more diverse populations because intimate partner violence occurs across ethnicities and across all income levels. To build on the present study, I recommend that research be conducted with a more diverse population, specifically one that includes participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds and income levels.
Personal Reflections on the Research Process

In the process of conducting this research I have learned many lessons. These lessons have not only been about the process of conducting research but also about my assumptions about physical aggression, the importance of connection, and both the fragility and strength of authenticity.

As I reflect back upon the assumptions and biases I held as I began this research, I realize than many of my assumptions have remained the same. For example, I still believe that the context in which women use physical aggression is very important; however, as a result of this research my understanding of context has expanded to include not only current relationship dynamics, but also past learning about intimate relationships and the phase of life occupied by the women. A second assumption of mine that remains the same at the conclusion of this research as it did at the beginning is that women who use physical aggression have gender-specific treatment needs. I continue to hold this assumption because the experiences the participants shared with me solidified the difference in my mind between men and women who use physical aggression in intimate relationships.

As a result of engaging in this research endeavor, I have found myself reflecting on the importance of connection in people's lives and I have come to the realization that connection is an essential component of growth and self discovery. This realization initially came to me during the final stages of the research process, but as I reflect back I can see the impact connection had on each step of the research process. By connecting with the participants I discovered new aspects of myself and grew both as a person and as a researcher. I believe that the participants also learned more about themselves as a result of
engaging in the research as more than one participant made comments such as "I never thought about it that way" or "I just figured that out."

The final lesson that stood out for me as a result of conducting this research is both the strength and fragility of authenticity. Based on my reflections, the fragility of authenticity comes from the fact that by engaging in a series of seemingly unimportant actions, individuals can become lost and no longer recognize the person they have become. The strength of authenticity is that despite the fact that individual may have lost their way, they still have the knowledge of who they truly are or want to be.
References


VOLUNTARY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH INTO WOMEN'S
EXPERIENCES OF BEING PHYSICALLY AGGRESSIVE IN INTIMATE
RELATIONSHIPS

Are you a young woman, between the ages of 19 and 40 years old, who is interested in participating in research at UNBC?

As a voluntary participant in this study you would take part in an in-depth interview about your experiences of being physically aggressive in intimate heterosexual relationships.

Your participation would involve approximately 2 to 5 hours.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive an honorarium.

For more information or to volunteer,
Please contact:

Kayla Adams, B.A.
School of Education, University of Northern British Columbia
(250) 552-1812 (cell)
adamsk@unbc.ca
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH INTO WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF RESPONDING TO CONFLICT IN A PHYSICAL WAY IN INTIMATE HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Are you a young woman, between the ages of 19 and 40 years old, who is interested in participating in research at UNBC?

As a voluntary participant in this study you would take part in an in-depth interview about your experiences of responding to conflict in a physical way in intimate heterosexual relationships.

Your participation would involve approximately 2 to 5 hours.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive an honorarium.

For more information or to volunteer,
Please contact:

Kayla Adams, B.A.
School of Education, University of Northern British Columbia
(250) 552-1812 (cell)
admsk@unbc.ca
Appendix C

Advertisement

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY AT UNBC! Are you a young woman between the ages of 19 and 40 years old who is interested in participating in research at the University of Northern British Columbia? As a voluntary participant in this study you would take part in in-depth interviews about your experiences of being physically aggressive in intimate heterosexual relationships. Your participation would require approximately 2 to 5 hours and in appreciation of your time, you will receive an honorarium. For more information or to volunteer please contact Kayla Adams at either adamsk@unbc.ca or (250)552-1812.
Appendix D

Participant Pre-Screening Questions

Age:

Are you currently in an intimate relationship? Y N

How long have you been in this relationship? _

Have you been involved in a relationship in the two years? Y N _

How long were you in that relationship? _

What is the gender of your current or previous partner? M F Transgendered.

In the last two years have you engaged in any of the following acts with your partner?:

Threw something at your partner that could hurt? Y N

Twisted your partner’s arm or hair? Y N

Pushed or shoved your partner? Y N

Grabbed your partner? Y N

Slapped your partner? Y N

Used a knife or gun on your partner? Y N

Punched or hit your partner with something that could hurt? Y N

Choked your partner? Y N

Slammed your partner against a wall? Y N

Beat up your partner? Y N

Burned or scalded your partner on purpose? Y N

Kicked your partner? Y N
Appendix E

Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *An Exploration of Young Adult Women's Experiences of Being Violent in Intimate Relationships: A Phenomenological Study*. The research is being conducted by Kayla Adams in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education in Counselling from the University of Northern British Columbia and is supervised by Dr. Corinne Koehn.

The purpose of this research is to explore women's experiences of using violence in intimate relationships. Intimate partner violence is a well researched topic, however the majority of counselling interventions and theories are based on the male experience of using violence. It is expected that the results of this study will be valuable in informing counsellors and researchers of women’s gender specific treatment needs.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation on your part to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and/or choose to not answer certain questions. If you choose to be a participant in the study, you will be asked in an interview a series of questions that are primarily aimed at obtaining your description of your experiences of using violence in intimate relationships. A potential risk anticipated by the researchers is that some participants may feel uncomfortable speaking about experiences using violence. Counselling support is available through the Elizabeth Fry Society (563-1113), the John Howard Society (561-7343), the Native Friendship Centre (562-4738), the Community Response Unit (565-2668), or through a referral by your family physician to a suitable mental health professional. Additional risks to participants include, that in the event that a participant discloses plans to harm another individual, the researcher will be obligated to report this to the appropriate authorities and that in the case of a court order, the researcher will be legally obligated to supply the information requested to the court. Potential benefits from participating may include feelings of validation from telling their story without being judged and a sense of purpose from contributing to a research project aimed at understanding women’s use of violence in the context of intimate relationships. The interviews are expected to take 1 to 2 hours each. Interviews will be audio tape-recorded in order that the material can later be analyzed by the researcher. You may turn off the tape recorder at any time.

Your interview will be transcribed and typed verbatim. Transcripts will be identified by code number and not your name. Transcripts and tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The transcriptions will also be filed electronically in a computerized format and will be protected by a password. Only the researcher, supervisor, and transcriptionist will have access to the tapes and transcriptions.

The names and contact information of participants will be kept strictly confidential. Only Kayla Adams will have access to names and contact information. The names and contact information will be kept in separate files from the transcripts. They will also be stored in a locked filing cabinet.
After the interviews from all the participants has been analyzed, you will be asked to help confirm the research results. This step will involve a brief in-person or telephone contact of about 30 - 60 minutes.

In acknowledgement of your time and effort, you will receive a $30 honorarium at the beginning of the first interview. If you withdraw from the study, you will still receive the full honorarium.

It is expected that your experiences will contribute to the body of knowledge related to intimate partner violence and related counselling interventions. In an effort to inform counsellors and researchers of the findings, the researchers plan to publish the results in professional journals or reports and/or present the findings at conferences. In order to illustrate the results, it is anticipated that some direct quotations from some interviews will be published. However, names of participants or other identifying information will not be revealed.

Tape recordings will be kept for five years after the study is completed and then the cassette tapes will be destroyed. Interview transcripts, names, questionnaires and contact information will be kept for seven years after the completion of the study at which time the documents will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted.

Should you choose to withdraw from the study during the initial interview, the tape recordings and any information you have provided will be immediately destroyed. If you withdraw after the first interview, the information you have provided will be kept by the researcher because it will have been analyzed and incorporated into the emerging results.

You may obtain a summary of the research results by contacting the researcher, Kayla Adams at adamsk@unbc.ca. At your request, I will mail a summary of the results to you. It is expected that the summary will be available by January 2010.

Please let the researcher know if you have any questions before proceeding with the study. If you later have questions about the study, please contact the researcher, Kayla Adams at adamsk@unbc.ca or (250) 552-1812 or the supervisor Dr. Corinne Koehn, at (250) 960-6264 or koehn@unbc.ca. Any complaints about the study can be directed to the Office of Research, UNBC at (250) 960-5820.

Thank you!

The Information Sheet must be attached to the Consent Form and a copy given to the Research Participant.
Appendix F
Research Ethics Board
Informed Consent Form

To be completed by the Research Participant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet?</td>
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<td>Do you understand that the research interviews will be recorded?</td>
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<td>Do you understand that some of your actual words may be published in a written form?</td>
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<td>Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in participating in this study?</td>
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<td>Do you know what resources you can access for counselling support?</td>
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<td>Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?</td>
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<td>Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time?</td>
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<td>Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?</td>
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<td>Do you understand who will have access to the information you provide?</td>
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This study was explained to me by:___

Print Name

I agree to take part in this study:

Signature of Research Participant

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Date:___

Signature of Investigator

The Information Sheet must be attached to this Consent Form and a copy given to the Research Participant.
Appendix G

Community Counselling Resources

Counselling support is available in Prince George from the following agencies:

- Elizabeth Fry Society (563-1113);
- John Howard Society (561-7343);
- Native Friendship Centre (562-4738);
- Community Response Unit (565-2668);
- Through a referral by your family physician to a suitable mental health professional.
Appendix H

Demographic Questionnaire

Please circle the applicable choice or answer the question on the line provided.

Age:

Gender:  Male  Female  Transgender

What is your ethnic origin? (e.g. Caucasian, Aboriginal, Hispanic, etc.):

Current Relationship Status:  Single  Co-Habiting  Married

Divorced  Widowed  Separated

Relationship(s) Length (if currently single, please report the length of the relationship(s) that occurred in the last year in which violence was used):

Relationship 1:
Years: ___________ Months;

Relationship 2:
Years: ___________ Months;

Relationship 3:
Years: ___________ Months;

Relationship 4:
Years: ___________ Months;

Relationship 5:
Years: ___________ Months;

Total Number of Relationships:
1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12+
Total Number of Relationships Involving Violence:

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<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
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<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12+</th>
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Total Number of Relationships in which both partners used violence:

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<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12+</th>
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Total Number of Relationships in which only your partner used violence:

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Total Number of Relationships in which only you used violence:

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<th>12+</th>
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Children:

<table>
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<th>Number:</th>
<th>6+</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages:</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Employment Status:**

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Unemployed
- Student
- Employed seasonly
- Permanently out of workforce due to disability
- Permanently out of workforce due to choice to be a homemaker

**Occupation:**

**Level of Education Achieved:**

- Elementary School
- Some High School
- High School
- Some University /College
- College Diploma
- Undergraduate Degree
- Graduate Degree
- Other

**Annual Household Income ($):**

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<th>5,000 - 9,999</th>
<th>10,000 - 19,999</th>
<th>20,000 - 29,999</th>
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<tr>
<td>30,000 - 39,999</td>
<td>40,000 - 49,999</td>
<td>50,000 - 59,999</td>
<td>60,000 - 69,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>70,000 - 79,999</td>
<td>80,000 - 89,000</td>
<td>90,000+</td>
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Appendix I

Physical Aggression Questionnaire

Please circle the answer the best describes your behavior:

During conflicts with your partner have you ever:

- Threw something at your partner that could hurt? Yes  No
  In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?
  1  2  3  4  5
  Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

- Twisted your partner's arm or hair? Yes  No
  In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?
  1  2  3  4  5
  Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

- Pushed or shoved your partner? Yes  No
  In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?
  1  2  3  4  5
  Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

- Grabbed your partner? Yes  No
  In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?
  1  2  3  4  5
  Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always
Slapped your partner? Yes No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1 2 3 4 5

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always

Used a knife or gun on your partner? Yes No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1 2 3 4 5

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always

Punched or hit your partner with something that could hurt? Yes No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1 2 3 4 5

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always

Choked your partner? Yes No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1 2 3 4 5

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always

Slammed your partner against a wall? Yes No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1 2 3 4 5

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always
Beat up your partner?  Yes  No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1  2  3  4  5

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

Burned or scalded your partner on purpose?  Yes  No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1  2  3  4  5

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

Kicked your partner?  Yes  No

In conflicts with your partner how frequently did you engage in this behavior?

1  2  3  4  5

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always
Appendix J
Participant Contact Form

Name:

Mailing Address:

Phone Number and/or Email Address:

  Day contact:
  
  Evening contact:

Contact comments (if applicable):
Appendix K

Interview Questions

1. Is there a particular incident in which you used violence that stands out for you? Can you describe it to me?

2. How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?

3. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?

4. What feelings were generated by the experience?

5. What thoughts stood out for you?

6. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?

7. Are there any other incidents in which you used violence that stand out for you? Can you describe it to me?

   Repeat questions #3 through #7.

8. Is there anything else you want to add?
Appendix L

Transcriber Oath of Confidentiality

As the transcriptionist hired to transcribe interviews for the research project, *An Exploration of Young Adult Women’s Experiences of Being Violent in Intimate Relationships: A Phenomenological Study*, I will treat as confidential all information learned through transcribing the interviews of research participants.

To help ensure the safety and confidentiality of data, transcriptions will be password protected. I will not print any hard copies. When transcriptions are complete, I will electronically send them to the researcher. I will then delete the file from my hard drive once the researcher indicates that the file has been successfully received.

I understand and agree that this Oath of Confidentiality will continue in force indefinitely, even after I cease being an employee on this project.

Name of transcriptionist: (print)

(signature).

Date:

Researcher's name: (print)

(signature)

Date:

Project Contact Information:
Kayla Adams, UNBC, 552-1812
Dr. Corinne Koehn, UNBC, 960-6264

Note: A copy of this Oath of Confidentiality will be given to the transcriber.
### Appendix M

**Themes and Evidence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/ Meaning Units</th>
<th>Evidence in Participants' Statements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Altered State</strong></td>
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</table>
| • Physical State      | "It's only when we are under the influence, it is not when we are sober or whatever, we are so nice to each other when we are sober, it is just when we are drinking (Boise, p.2)."
|                       | "I shake, I shake. If I get really really angry, I can, I start vibrating... I don't know. It's like, it's like. I don't know, it's just like you feel it rising in your body and all of a sudden you are like, you are just shaking... And then when I saw him, it was just like phish. I just, I don't know, lost it or something (Josephine, p. 5-6)."
| • Mental State        | "When I get mad I tend to black out a little bit and next thing you know he was on the floor and his nose was bleeding and I just kept going and going and finally I had to just shake my head and just say, "What am I doing? What am I doing?" (Carolyn, p.1)."
|                       | "You know when you are being hurt and that brings back memories as a child that nobody even gave a shit and even getting molested or raped by your own blood and it just gets even worse (Veronica, p. 12-13)."
| **Observations of Self as Someone Else** |                                       |
| • Someone to be...    | "You know there are still some times that I will think back of what I did and cry, you know like how could I, how could I treat another person like that (Sunny, p.10)."
|                       | "I felt ashamed, because he doesn't hit women, and it was sort of like I had done that because I knew he wouldn't hit me. And I took advantage of that. And then I felt like ashamed and like that's not me (Josephine, p. 7-8)."
| • Someone to fear      | "That's what I mean if I get mad, if I get mad or something I am scared of who and where and what I..."
am going to be capable of doing (Molly, p. 12)."

"Because...it worries me too because once you do it and you get away with it you, it's more easy, you're more able to do it again. And that kind of like, bothers me (Josephine, p. 10)."

"to me there is lots of different types of power and this is very much power over and power over somebody that was bigger and that could hurt you. Like it was like you know like not only was he bigger, but because I had cared about him he really could hurt me and he did lots (Sunny, p. 35)."

"It's like when you are drunk or whatever like when you are really sloshed or whatever... you can do anything (Boise, p. 8)"

"Um, I guess I didn't have control over my own habits, drinking, smoking um but to me I had control of another person and it made me feel better, it made me feel like I was being in control of something I think (Carolyn, p. 13-14)."

"He knew we had to step away because there are a lot of things in the house that he doesn't want to be broke you know he doesn't want to be broken so he like he backs off. I threaten him that I will break whatever and he doesn't want it broken so (Molly, P-34)."

"bitch, whore, slut, you name it whatever is on the book and I don't like those words... We start going and he will start swinging and I will like start swinging back (Boise, p. 1-2)."

"He looked at me and said you still embarrassed me, we still think you were fooling around and stuff...Nobody needs those kinds of things. Accusing you of fooling around when you didn't (Boise, p. 13-14)."

"He always said it was you, you started it, you said this, you called my mom a slut. I would never call her that, his mom is adorable a gorgeous person and I, he was like you called her a slut, you know..."
• "there was always lies, half truths and this that and the other (Sunny, p.3)"

• "I don’t put up with abusive guys (Veronica, p.3)."

• "He fought me. And then he just kept on going and then I finally realized and I was like I got to do something to make him think that he can’t just walk over and step over me (Boise, p. 17)."

• "he crawled through my window and came after me, he was going to hit me and I was like "oh you are not going to hit me this time" so I started dancing. I don’t know how I did it, I got him in the corner and I just beat the shit out of him in the corner (Carolyn, p.28-29)."

• "I thought he was trying to play head games with me or something. I picked up a cast iron frying pan and hit him over the head with it. I hit him with twice with the frying pan (Jackie, p.5)."

• "I said "why are you talking to her like that? and you are not talking to me like I am right here". And then I, then he started, I can’t remember what he said. Anyways he said something like "um I am right here I am just talking to her like, like no big deal and I am not even allowed to have even a conversation" and I just turned around and I saw the frying pan and I hit him with it (Jackie, p.7-8)."

• "And there was several times he would come to me crying saying don’t put me in that position please don’t put me in that please you don’t know how close I am to snapping. And just trying to explain to him well when you lie and cheat and hurt me like that I am close to snapping. Again it was just trying to show him how much you know the positions you were putting me in, obviously in a different context, is what I was trying to do with him...I just really wanted him to see how much he was hurting me (Sunny, p.5)."
• Seeking distance

  "he has just learned to let me be when I am like that because I get mad fast, but I get over it just as fast. (Josephine, p.5-6)."

  "I think he actually passed out for awhile from the pain or something and I jumped in and I started the car, left him there (Carolyn, p.17)."